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**GERMAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS THE COUNTRIES OF THE WESTERN
BALKANS IN THE PERIOD FROM 2009. TO 2020.**

- Master's thesis -

Candidate

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1029 / II - PIR

Mentor

Prof.dr. Damir Kapidžić

Sarajevo, June, 2021.



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List of Abbreviations

AfD - Alternative for Germany

BiEPAG - The Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group

BiH - Bosnia and Herzegovina

BMZ - Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development

BP - The Berlin Process

CDU - The Christian Democratic Union (of Germany)

CSU - The Christian Social Union (of Germany)

CEE - Central and Eastern Europe

CEEC - Central and Eastern European countries

CSF - Civil Society Forum

EU - European Union

EULEX - The European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo

EPP - The European People's Party

FES - Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (Foundation)

FPA - Foreign policy analysis

FYROM - The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

HSS - Hanns Seidel Stiftung (Foundation)

IR - International relations

KAS - Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (Foundation)

MAP – REA - Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area

MFA - Ministry of Foreign Affairs

NGO - Non-governmental organization

SPD - The Social Democratic Party (of Germany)

WB - The Western Balkans

WBS - Western Balkans Summit

1. INTRODUCTION

As Dimitar Bechev in his 'Constructing South East Europe' states - whatever the significance of regional interdependence, cooperation among Balkan states has largely been a product of external pressure or inducement. (2009:41) Also, he notices, compared to anywhere else in post- communist Europe, it is in the Balkans that regional cooperation has been singled out, most explicitly, as a precondition for joining prestigious international clubs such as the EU and NATO. (2009:41)

Therefore, the challenges of regional cooperation and disputes resolution among the Western Balkan states can serve as a vibrant arena for examining different Western strategies and initiatives. In this work it will, however, serve rather as a mere object for understanding what stands at disposal for influencing this area in the case of the 'European-Union locomotive' and a firm and long-term supporter of the reforms in the Western Balkans – Germany.

While having the German foreign policy actors, interests and ideas in the main spotlight, this work will create three separate sections - one focusing on the power of the German EU leverage in the disputes resolution, one on the scope of the German initiative known as the Berlin Process, and an additional, third, section focusing on the special transnational actors - German political foundations and their efforts in complementing these initiatives.

Therefore, each section might seem as a story for itself, with own specific challenges, gains and obstacles. However, all together, sections will create a bigger picture on the German foreign policy towards the Western Balkan countries, especially while including rarely covered segments. So, the first section discusses, among other things, the role of the German domestic actors in the EU enlargement, the second section is provoked by the fact that Berlin Process is still relatively undocumented process and creates an overview of both, its strengths and shortcomings, and the third section is aiming to do the same in the almost completely unexplored field of the German political foundations' contributions in the challenges of the Western Balkans countries.

The aim of this work is, also, to complement the understanding of these segments with proper findings from the fields of foreign policy analysis and democratization theory.

2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 *Research topic*

The relationship between Germany and the Western Balkan countries is complex and rich, both in historical and current terms. Germany is acting as one of the most prominent players in the region, but is also a single most important actor in terms of a long-time proclaimed goal of WB countries - EU accession.

The connection of the two observed entities, the interaction of their interests and gained results must be an important subject for analysis for both sides. This becomes even more emphasized in the era of Chancellor Angela Merkel, which - even though it has witnessed numerous challenging events and crises - can still be characterized by a more proactive and diversified approach towards the Western Balkan countries.

Therefore, the general *topic* of the research is 'German foreign policy towards the countries of the Western Balkans in the period from 2009. to 2020'.

Even though this story has a rich economical component, there is a recognized need to observe more closely and precisely *political* processes, initiatives as well as tools used by Germany, by also analyzing the interplay of all the German actors involved. Even the already mentioned EU enlargement in German case gains a truly political context, and highlights the necessity of observing the political side of the story and role of different levels included.

A recognized need for a more proper overview of the facts how, when and which leaders or target groups in the Western Balkan states are approached also exists, and understanding it will be a secondary contribution of this work.

This means that, even while emphasizing the common importance of the topic and its breadth, this work will keep its primary focus on the tools and actors involved in Germany's policy formulation towards Western Balkans, rather than on their reaction.

Given the established needs, as well as the noted fact that the existing literature on German political initiatives and efforts aimed at stabilization and better political cooperation of the Western Balkan countries lacks a thread between different actions and actors, the research question is defined.

2.2. *Research question*

As already stated, research topic is broad, since German presence in the Western Balkan can be observed through so many different components of foreign policy. However, Germany is unique in one thing: it has initiated the Berlin Process - an initiative with an aim to enhance the reforms that WB6 is going through, with a specific focus on regional cooperation.

Recognizing the importance of regional cooperation and resolving bilateral disputes, as conditions important not only for the WB's accession to the EU, but also as its own sphere of interest, Germany continuously influences these issues not only through official diplomatic initiatives, but also through its own leverage in EU enlargement process, as well as through its own strong presence in the Western Balkans with political foundations.

Therefore, as could be inferred through the introductory section, the main *research question* will answer 'how German political initiatives and the work of German political foundations in the Western Balkan countries in the period of 2009-2020. have contributed to resolving bilateral disputes and enhancing regional cooperation ?'

2.3 *Research objectives*

Scientific objective, is, first of all, to create a unique thread among observed tools and actions, which current academic literature on these topics misses, and then, since every tool is different in both structure and ability to project the interest - to observe its advantages and disadvantages by leaning on the knowledge in the field of foreign policy analysis.

Doing so also enables us to reach the next objective, which is to contribute to the existing and growing fields of foreign policy analysis and democratization theory. The researched processes are recent or still on-going and creation of their precise *description*, which will then be put into a broader scientific framework is considered as highly needed.

At this point, we come also to the *social/ pragmatic objective* of the work, which is the usage of the created analysis by variety of organizations, foundations, policy centers, think tanks and similar groups concerned with the topic, as well as among students.

2.4 Hypothesis formulation

2.4.1 General hypothesis

German political initiatives and the work of German political foundations in the Western Balkan countries in the period of 2009-2020. have significantly contributed to political stabilization and regional cooperation in the Western Balkans.

2.4.2 Auxiliary hypotheses

AH1. Germany successfully uses its leverage in EU enlargement process as a foreign policy instrument to advance the resolution of bilateral disputes between the Western Balkan states.

AH2. German domestic constraints - precisely growth of Euroscepticism and the extended rights of Bundestag in EU enlargement- strongly contribute to German tendency for maximizing its EU enlargement leverage.

AH3. The overall goals for the Berlin Process set in the first Berlin Summit provided a successful boost for the regional cooperation among plethora of actors.

AH4. The interest of the Western Balkans political leaders for resolving disputes is weakened by the absence of governing structure in the Berlin Process.

AH5. The educational, networking and promotional activities of Konrad Adenauer Foundation and Friedrich Ebert Foundation successfully complement the formal state's initiatives.

2.5 Researched methods

This is a qualitative research. As such, it will be conducted by analyzing the content of relevant literature in the field - books, publications, academic articles. Furthermore, it will include official state's policy papers, the recent journal articles, as well as an insight into news content and statesmen's public addresses. In the case of the Berlin Process, a special emphasis will be paid on comparing the official Chair's conclusions with rare monitoring reports produced by

civil society organizations, while for the political foundations the content of their web archives will be overviewed.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Foreign policy analysis

This research finds its theoretical framework within the field of foreign policy analysis. As Alden and Aran define it, 'it is the study of the conduct and practice of relations between different actors, primarily states, in the international system.' (2017: 3) Importantly for this research, as we can see in their further explanation, is that FPA is necessarily concerned not only with the actors involved in the state's formal decision-making apparatus, but also with the variety of sub-national sources of influence upon state foreign policy. (2017: 3.) The breadth and complexity of this field is emphasized by other authors, too. They conclude that agents and decision-making process are in the center of this study, but in order to understand the essence of the process and the final results, all those factors that were identified to influence the process in all its phases, find their place in the study of foreign policy analysis. As Christopher Hill highlights, decision-making is a starting point in FPA. However, any analysis of decision making needs to focus first on the political dimension, then on the associated bureaucracies, which provide so much of the continuity and expertise which make action meaningful, and third on problem of rationality-or the capacity to pursue objectives in a logical manner in the particularly inchoate environment of international relations. Finally, foreign policy actions cannot be understood without an appreciation of the phase of implementation, given that outcomes are so often markedly different from original intentions. (Hill, 2015:58) When explaining the difference between FPA in contrast to IR theories, Hill emphasizes its strong focus on agency, but states that one of the biggest challenges for analyst of FP must be to understand how agency works in the context of the structures within which states and other actors are embedded. (2015:172)

As already stated, FPA literature pays a very special attention to studying leaders, and offers various strategies for that, such as the operational code and leadership trait analysis. Given the

conclusion that there are already numerous, relevant and up to date attempts to understand Angela Merkel's personality and complete background on her political moves, such an analysis will not take up much space in this research. Of course, this work recognizes the fact that the perception and perhaps even the creation of opportunities, as well as successful conduct of diplomacy depend on the foreign policy skill of individuals. (Breuning, 2007:31)

That is even one of the main reasons this work is primarily interested in the last two and a half mandates of Angela Merkel, when creation of new opportunities and a more proactive approach towards the Western Balkan countries emerges. However, the skill and experience of leaders is not always sufficient to ensure a desired outcome, because outcomes depend not only on the accurate assessment of opportunities and constraints but also on the interaction of the state's foreign policy behavior with that of other countries. (Breuning, 2007:32)

This work is led by a wish to properly describe 'how German political initiatives and the work of German political foundations in the Western Balkan countries in the period of 2009-2020. have contributed to resolving bilateral disputes and enhancing regional cooperation'. One of the main trying is to explain the factors that I believe are not deeply explained by existing literature. Then, they will be put and analyzed through proper theoretical framework. Therefore, we will look up to: influence of domestic factors and international environment on foreign policy actions; difficulties and ambiguities in implementing phase (for Berlin process, for example), as well as on transnational influence of organizations (German foundations, precisely).

In that context, foreign policy analysis, as above described field, can help us to better understand:

- Foreign policy decision making as a balancing act, or a "two-level game" (Putnam, 1988.), between interests in domestic arena and those that prevail in international scene. Numerous authors have developed approaches to foreign policy which seek to account for the complexity and interplay between the domestic and external forces, among them is also highly recognizable Putnam's work. As Alden and Aran state, even that his focus in this work was on trade issues, his attempt was seen by FPA scholars as having wider applicability (2017: 80) - since it successfully captures the dynamic attempts of decision-makers to address local constituencies

and external forces simultaneously. Robert Putnam describes how the win-set can be reached, and his main findings will be addressed in the work's conclusion.

- Other domestic sources of foreign policy, which in context of this research are also important are political parties. In many respects, political parties can be seen as the key site for number of activities attributed in FPA to domestic sources of foreign policy. They include the simultaneous role of political parties as agenda setters in foreign policy, through ideological discourses reflecting their distinctive political orientation (e.g. rightist or leftist), as agenda followers in foreign policy, and through their position as interest aggregators derived from the support they court from within domestic society. (Alden and Aran, 2017:80) What can be important for this research is that: political parties utilize their international networks in ways that complement, supplement or even contradict the formal diplomatic bilateral state apparatus.(2017:81) It will be interesting to observe how German political foundations, each connected with a particular party, use their transnational influence in achieving goals that were for Western Balkan states set by German decision makers.

- FPA will also help us understand the phase of policy implementation should be 'more than technicality'. Rather it is integral to the whole policy-making cycle and very often difficult to distinguish from its other phases. (Hill, 2015:137) Hill is also the author that offers a great discussion on instruments of foreign policy, leaning on the other authors, especially Joseph Nye, a political scientist that coined a term 'soft power'. He defined it as 'the ability of a country to persuade others to do what it wants without force or coercion', but also acknowledges its weak sides as: 'it tends to have diffuse effects on the outside world and is not easily wielded to achieve specific outcomes.' (Foreign Affairs, May 2004.) Here, it's important to come back to Hill's contribution, that was followed by the continuum of power that shows that there is no clear point where hard power stops and soft power begins. Even though that it's a well-known fact that Germany as a civilian power uses the instruments from the softer end of continuum, such as diplomacy and culture, it will be important to lean on discussions like these to create an insight on all the possibilities and weaknesses of the certain instruments in gaining particular political goal. Also, after a created insight on how Germany uses its leverage in EU enlargement process as a foreign policy instrument, it will be interesting to position it accordingly in terms of previously mentioned literature, and to create a description of effectiveness of these, in some

way, more 'coercive' measures in contrast to the pure diplomatic ones (Berlin process), and to those long-term activities by German foundations, which, according to some studies are major actors of German soft power. (Megem M., Maksimov I., Gritsaenko P., 2016)

- External environment also must be taken into the consideration, since - external environment impinges on foreign policy choices in both power and ideas. While material environment in itself does nothing, it must always be factored into decision-making. (Hill, 2017: 180) The external environment in the widest sense is therefore vital to an understanding of all foreign policy decision, (2017: 183). Importantly for observing German viewpoints in foreign policy formulation, the FPA recognizes political and economic interdependence, the importance of the international law, and informal norms. As we will see, the strong identification of German security and stability with the security of the entire continent, as well as the intertwining of their system and interests with that of the EU, is very much reflected in the creation of their policy towards the Western Balkans.

3.2 Democratization theory

The relevant literature which I engaged to analyze how German political initiatives and the work of German political foundations in the Western Balkan countries contribute to regional cooperation and disputes resolution, suggested that it would be desirable to use literature on democratization, not only to explain the approach this region needs, but rather to point out the reasons why certain initiatives or tools do not necessarily succeed despite good preparation or seemingly mutual willingness to cooperate.

This work will explore the subject under discussion by focusing less on the WB6 politics at the micro level, but more on the way they act as a 'recipients' and participants in the processes initiated by Germany. By focusing on this interaction, we will be able to observe not only previously stated interests (such as phase of policy implementation or the interconnection between German foreign policy and external structures and influences), but we'll also be able, at the end, to describe which actors in WB6 are approached and how do they transform the external efforts into results. This is seen as some kind of a secondary, non-essential contribution of this work.

Therefore, the description of the WB as offered by theorists in this chapter, will not take up much space in the work, but is here to rather serve as an explanation of an important element that will have to be taken into account when concluding.

A great starting point in understanding the transformation of external impact in the Western Balkans can be found in the work of Florian Bieber, a professor of Southeast European history and politics. This, especially is the case with his 'Patterns of competitive authoritarianism in the Western Balkans' from 2017., that, among other things, identifies lessons for the engagement of external actors in the Western Balkans. This article suggests that the current regimes in the Western Balkans can be defined by using a term 'competitive authoritarianism'- which is, in fact, an overall result of weak democratic structures, facilitated by the weakening and insufficient transformative power of external actors, first and foremost the EU, in incentivizing continued democratization.

Before continuing with explaining the external support as its defining feature, it's important to offer a precise definition of this kind of regime. Bieber, here, uses the term of competitive authoritarian systems, as defined by Levitsky and Way from 2010., which describes it as:

“civilian regimes in which formal democratic institutions exist and are widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power, but in which incumbents’ abuse of the state places them at a significant advantage vis-à-vis their opponents. Such regimes are competitive in that opposition parties use democratic institutions to contest seriously for power, but they are not democratic because the playing field is heavily skewed in favor of incumbents.”

With the current world affairs, Western Balkan states are not an exception in being such a case, of course. However, understanding the competitive authoritarianism in the context of this region is particularly important exactly because it has high levels of Western linkages and EU leverage there is particularly large.

The article identifies five central features of competitive authoritarian systems in the Western Balkans: ideology, external legitimacy, crises, control of media, and state capture. However, the aspect of competitive authoritarian regimes that is often neglected, but is essential in understanding the Western Balkans is the role of outside actors. The core argument of the article

is that the competitive authoritarian regimes that have emerged in the Western Balkans have adapted to the challenge of maintaining external support by largely Western actors, the EU, its member states and the United States, while ensuring authoritarian control domestically. In fact, the new competitive authoritarian regimes have incorporated demands for reforms and external legitimacy into classic mechanisms of control, using informality and reform discourse.

Among other things (such as integration into European institutions, or NATO) external legitimacy has mostly been expressed in terms of formal advancement in the EU accession process. The technical steps along the way – candidate status, the opening of negotiations, the opening and closing of chapters – bestows legitimacy on governments, as they (appear) to confirm EU-approval. Such external recognition is a consequence of broad voter support for EU integration and other forms of cooperation with the EU, EU members and the United States. This leverage continues to act as a considerable, yet diminishing, restraint on governments. It acts as a source of both voter demand and external pressure. Yet, the very rise of competitive authoritarian regimes highlights the weakness or limitations of this mechanism of restraint. The crisis of EU accession has reduced the restraining and transformative effects of external actors. Furthermore, by using the real and constructed crises, the autocrats of the Western Balkans are refocusing external support away from democratic consolidation to the promise of competitive authoritarian stability. In other words, a lack of strong support for democratic rule by the EU and several of its member states has facilitated the emergence of regimes that base their external legitimacy on providing stability, rather than democracy. The nexus between competitive authoritarian regime and strategic external support and the legitimacy this generates has been termed “stabilitocracy”.

With everything summarized from the cited Bieber's article from 2017., we gain some kind of a general insight into the current state of political developments and processes in the WB6 and their interaction with external influences, especially in the context of their EU accession where Germany plays one of the leading roles. This general insight will serve us greatly in assessing the overall success of foreign influence in the region.

Evidence that understanding these processes is important in valuation of external efforts to transform many elements in the Balkans, including regional cooperation and dispute resolution, can be found in the literature dealing with the German initiatives in the Balkans, too.

For example, Florent Marciacq, an expert on the enlargement policy of the European Union, the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership, in his comprehensive analysis of the results and

potentials of Berlin Process, successfully reflects the previously mentioned statements. As he states, political strongmen in the Western Balkans have been eager to develop language elements that conceal their autocratic tendencies, lure the EU in supporting their domination, and thereby consolidate their external legitimacy, while hindering reforms that would constrain their power. They have adapted their rule ingeniously to the EU's approach and benefit from slow progress, most notably in sustaining political transformation. (2017 : 36)

However, he also recognizes that if the EU's claim to be an influential actor in the Western Balkans is to be taken seriously, its inability to deliver cannot be explained simply on the grounds that WB6 domestic political contexts are unfavorable or unreceptive, because demonstrating influence is precisely about changing preferences, or at least behavior. In that sense, the democratic backsliding in the Western Balkans, while being orchestrated by local governments, is a sign that the EU has lost influence in guiding political transformations – a key pillar in its foreign policy strategy. (2017: 3)

Therefore, when describing Germany's idea and way of creating 'additional' progress in EU's enlargement for Western Balkans and different approach towards them, which Berlin process in fact is, Marciacq and peers lean strongly on colleagues from the democratization theory field, especially Danijela Dolenec. It seems that one of the main goals of their common efforts is to point on the fact that the recipe used by the EU in the Western Balkans, built around the notion of conditionality, is based on its positive experience in Central and Eastern Europe. But the conditions that apply in the region are very different, above all in terms of post-conflict transformation. In other words, what worked in Central and Eastern Europe for various reasons is not necessarily due to work in the Western Balkans.

Once again, when investigating regional stabilization and cooperation, both through the prism of Germany's influence using its EU leverage or its drive of Berlin Process, which opens up avenues for reframing the EU's approach towards the Western Balkans in a more collective way, literature that deals with post-conflict context and common economic and social vulnerabilities is often crucial in recognizing that many challenges that WB6 face have a regional dimension.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is already stated that this work's aim is to create a thread in describing different diplomatic tools used by Germany in resolving bilateral disputes and improving regional cooperation. This goal springs out from the recognition that existing literature in such topics is very rarely concerned with connecting them into a broader picture for analysis.

Just as the concept of this paper implies three separate reviews of different foreign policy mechanisms and tools before their analysis, so will the literature be reviewed in three different categories to help a reader grasp the concept of this research as smoothly as possible.

Furthermore, rather than merely presenting the state and shortages of the existing literature in the field, this review's aim is also to set some kind of a brief introduction on each section by shortly highlighting the most important contributions of the literature that will be used throughout the work.

Germany and EU enlargement leverage as a foreign policy tool

Despite the obviously strong and increasing role of EU state members in enlargement dossier, the literature concerning their individual roles and interests is still not that rich, not even for Germany which stands as the most prominent actor in this process.

However, Theresia Toeglhofer & Cornelius Adebahr are the ones that are offering great insights into German position in this matter, as well as they offer a great base for a further investigation on this topic.

Toeglhofer & Adebahr in their "Firm supporter and severe critic - Germany's two pronged approach to EU enlargement in the Western Balkans" in an interesting way discuss, among other things, the two important matters for this research. First of them is the how Germany uses enlargement conditionality as a foreign policy tool, especially in resolving disputes among the Western Balkan states. The second of them explores important domestic dimensions to Germany's insistence on a rigorous application of conditions, with additional focus on how these aspects can create the confusion among WB6 in context of resolution of certain dilemmas.

Therefore, their work is one of the most interesting attempts to describe how in its enlargement policy towards the Western Balkans, Germany is actually aspiring to achieve a very difficult

balancing act: By acting as a firm supporter of their EU rapprochement it has assumed a leadership role within the EU, while, at the same time, it is highly demanding on accession conditionality and scrutinizing (potential) accession candidates more thoroughly than other member states do. This is happening because, on the one hand, German policy-makers recognize the strategic importance of the enlargement perspective offered to the Balkan countries, especially in terms of security concerns. On the other hand, there is a growing domestic opposition to the continuation of the enlargement process together with extended rights of German Bundestag in the field of EU accession process.

Obviously, in concentrating on the domestic dimensions that affect this foreign policy tool, they observe both public and political ones. With the far-reaching amendments to the Act on Cooperation between the Federal Government and the German Bundestag in Matters concerning the European Union (Federal Act on EU Cooperation) accompanying the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the federal parliament acquired unparalleled powers over the executive's decisions at the EU level. Briefly described, these powers give not only the legislative as a whole but also individual political groups new sway over and, consequently, interest in the actual conduct of negotiations. That being so, parties have stepped up their monitoring of the accession process, with parliamentarians of all parliamentary groups visiting the region to obtain first-hand information. For each (potential) candidate country, the parliamentary groups have defined one rapporteur from their ranks in the respective Committees on Foreign and on European Affairs.

This research will lean on this study to analyze how cited developments and larger number of actors influences the German emphasis on stabilization and cooperation issues, especially Germany's insistence on putting the 'normalization' of relations between Serbia and Kosovo at the center of the two sides' EU association and accession process.

Also, it's important to mention that Toeglhofer's and Adebahr's article has been published in several different (supplemented) editions, as part of various, broader publications, which will also serve us, at least as a general guide in understanding the importance of the German approach when it comes to EU enlargement.

Its first edition became a part of 'EU member states and enlargement towards Western Balkans' publication from 2015. edited by Rosa Balfour and Corina Stratulat. It is a paper consisted of 17 case studies with a main argument that, in recent years, the enlargement dossier has become more and more under control of the member states, with a reduction in influence of the

Commission and an increase in influence of domestic political considerations. Berlin, in particular, emerges as the most influential capital. The German Bundestag in particular has taken a key role in assessing progress made in the region itself, rather than relying on opinions of the Commission or European External Action Service. Authors also highlight the fear that this can undermine the credibility of the transformative leverage of the EU.

Berlin process

When it comes to the transformative leverage that the EU accession process bears with itself, Germany tried to supplement it by creating an 'additional real progress' in the reforms that WB6 are going through, by initiating the Berlin Process. With an aim to facilitate regional cooperation, this initiative was launched by Chancellor Angela Merkel in 2014. and since then, a yearly summit attended by WB6 leaders and their colleagues from EU member states occurred. As such, it engaged plethora of actors, depended on the agenda setting by hosting countries, lacked a proper monitoring mechanism and precise continuity in priorities setting.

Because of the mentioned reasons and the fact that it is still ongoing, a comprehensive literature on all its accomplishments and weaknesses, still doesn't exist. This paper will, while trying to avoid analyzing individual achievements that can be observed from so many different fields, such as energy, economics and the like, focus rather on the essence and meaning that this process has brought in the political dimension of regional cooperation.

In the attempt to do so, I will, first of all, look at the official documents, declarations and conclusions, with an idea to create just a general insight into expectations and achievements. Second, this work is led by a recognition that the most consolidated source of information about the Berlin Process are still independent experts and think tanks, since it misses a country specific monitoring and some other monitoring reports are more concentrated on particular policy areas. Therefore, by concentrating on mentioned analysis, we will be able to gain both goals of this work: to understand what all the novelties introduced through this unique mechanism by Germany meant for bilateral disputes resolving and political regional cooperation; and to contribute to the understanding of complexity of foreign policy implementation by focusing also on all the weaknesses and obstacles.

German political foundations

Political foundations are party-affiliated organizations, each of them has close personal and ideological links with a political party. The activities of political foundations reflect the orientations of German foreign policy enhanced by the specific preferences of each political party. Therefore, they present an important and interesting piece of puzzle in our attempt to observe both - different actors' abilities and tactics to enforce the change in Western Balkans, as well as they fit well in the challenge to observe some kind of domestic influences in transnational arena.

Academic literature concerned with the role of German political foundations in the world has mainly focused in their role in assisting political parties during processes of transition to democracy - great articles are offered on the cases of Spain, Portugal, Ukraine, Tunisia and so on. For the purposes of this thesis, some elements explaining the conditions and features of foundations that enabled them to succeed will be used.

However, what poses the most needed basis for the answering our research question and what presents the case and challenge most similar to what this thesis aims to observe, can be found in the work of professor Dorota Dakowska.

Her articles "German Political Foundations: Transnational party go-betweens in the process of EU enlargement" from 2005. and "Beyond conditionality: EU enlargement, European party federations and the transnational activity of German political foundations" from 2002., both tackle the role of German foundations in EU accession process of the Central and East Europe countries.

First of all, these articles highlight precise examples of how German foundations in Central European states supported the reform process, but at the same time they developed political dialogue with the clear objective of helping stabilize the party landscape in the target countries and finding potential partners for German political parties. Their activity in Central and Eastern Europe combines the characteristics of both approaches: assistance for democratization and political cooperation.

They precisely describe the ways in which German political foundations served as arena for socialization for the Central and East Europe candidate countries' political and administrative elites. Networking here was not only the message, but also the means of the teaching process. Furthermore, they also highlight all the advantages of foundations' works for German players, such as Bundestag members, since their long-term presence and trust they gain in host country can lead a direct social dialogue and ensure information to normally flow to the bodies concerned with foreign policy issues.

It is important to note that similar literature that would approach acting of German political foundations on issues common to the WB6 does not exist. Therefore, this work will lean on existing and cited literature in order to form a basis which will then be upgraded with analysis of all the reports, activities and programs that foundations are taking in order to contribute to the political cooperation and stabilization in the Western Balkans countries.

5. BACKGROUND

5.1 Background of the country: Germany

While the context of international affairs in which Merkel was creating her foreign policies, her main challenges and initiatives will be explained later, this part's aim is to briefly tackle the political setting in which policies are set with the main emphasis on the important players and procedures in the area of foreign policy.

So, the political system of Germany is laid out in the 1949. constitution called the Grundgesetz (Basic Law), which remained in effect with minor amendments after German reunification - a process which finally ended on 3rd October 1990.

The constitution created a federal system that gives significant government powers to its constituent Länder (states), however, matters of national importance, such as, for example, foreign affairs, are reserved to the federal government (According to the Article 32).

The federal government is consisted of the Federal Chancellor and the Federal Ministers. According to the Article 65 of Basic law, The Federal Chancellor shall determine and be responsible for the general guidelines of policy. These provide a framework

for any policy emanating from the line ministries. Since one of the main tasks of this work will be to observe the leverage in EU enlargement process as a German foreign policy tool, it is important to emphasize the powers of both the foreign ministry and the Chancellor in this context at the outset.

As Toeglhofer and Adebahr explain, due to Germany's tradition of coalition governments, decision-making on EU affairs such as enlargement is widely consensus based, as representatives of both the MFA and the Chancellery stressed. Only occasionally do certain key decisions require coordination on the ministerial level. Furthermore, the years since Lisbon have amplified a subtle shift of competence from the Foreign Office to the Federal Chancellery. This is grounded in the fact that foreign ministers no longer attend the European Council meetings of the heads of state or government. However, it is also a consequence of the 'Summitization' of European economic and financial crisis management during that same period. As a consequence, German chancellor Angela Merkel is the public face of the government's efforts to stabilize the Eurozone and to respond to the migration flows, while the foreign minister handles international crises such as over Ukraine and Syria. They also add that, for the reasons stated, it should be no surprise that the 'Berlin process' which is a meeting of leaders from the EU, member states, and accession countries, originated from the Federal Chancellery, not the Foreign Office. While the former obviously cannot (and does not intend to) replace the latter, it has become clear that major policy initiatives in EU and foreign policy, including enlargement policy, need the backing of the Chancellor. (Toeglhofer and Adebahr, 2017)

In Germany's parliamentary government, the executive is split between the Federal government with the Chancellor as the head of government, and the Federal President, as the head of State. The two are of unequal political weight, though; the distribution of power favours the Chancellor. As Schmidt states, the Chancellor holds a powerful position vis-à-vis both parliament and the President, while the President's role is mainly confined to the exercise of 'dignified' ceremonial functions. It is largely for this reason that Germany's parliamentary government has been described as chancellor-dominated parliamentary government or a 'chancellor's democracy'. (Schmidt, 2015)

When it comes to the legislation, the central function on the federal level has Bundestag, which exercises much wider powers than the 69-member upper chamber, known as the Bundesrat

(Federal Council). The already mentioned Bundestag's rights for participation in EU affairs, which are becoming ever more important (Lin & Sobolewski) due to the nature of this work's topic, must gain here additional attention and explanation.

First of all, the key constitutional provision governing parliamentary participation in EU affairs is Article 23 of the Basic Law, which was inserted in the constitution in connection with the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty. It stipulates that any changes in the EU's treaty foundations and any transfer of sovereign powers require the consent of the Bundestag and Bundesrat. Before participating in legislative acts of the European Union, the Federal Government must give the Bundestag an opportunity to state its position and must take its position into account during the negotiations. The details are regulated in the laws which accompanied the Treaty of Lisbon: the Act on Cooperation between the Federal Government and the German Bundestag in Matters concerning the European Union (also known as the Cooperation Act), a revised version of which was passed in 2013, and the Act on the Exercise by the Bundestag and by the Bundesrat of their Responsibility for Integration in Matters concerning the European Union of 2009. (Lin & Sobolewski). Both laws provide for comprehensive rights to information and participatory rights, but especially important in the context of the work is the Cooperation Act, which also, before the opening of negotiations on a country's accession to the EU or on amendments to the contractual foundations of the EU, requires from the Federal Government to reach an agreement with the Bundestag; in such cases, it is not enough for it to simply seek an agreement.

With the Bundestag actively using its extended participation rights, the formulation of Germany's positions on the enlargement dossier is no longer the sole prerogative of the executive. Again, Toeglhofer and Adebahr, as the ones who offer some of the most prominent analysis on this topic state that, while this gives democratic legitimacy to the enlargement process at the domestic level and provides the Federal Government with a convenient support to underpin its position in the Council, it also multiplies the actors involved in the formulation of enlargement policy as well as voices heard. (2017)

Bundestag is consisted of at least 598 members, but due to the system of the so-called overhang and equalization seats, the number always depends. When it comes to the composition, within the observed period, the only change occurred in the last parliamentary elections in 2017. when right-wing, populist party Alternative for Germany entered the Bundestag for the first time. While this anti-immigrant, anti-euro party saw a 7.9 percentage point increase from the last

election in 2013 (the year the AfD was formed), Germany's main parties – Merkel's conservative CDU/CSU alliance and its former coalition partner, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) — both saw their votes fall dramatically. (CNBC, 25.9.2017.) This was not consistent with a long series of national elections, in which the CDU-CSU had been the strongest party, with an average vote share of 42.6 per cent in the 1949–2013 period (Schmidt)

While AfD's participation in government will remain unlikely, due to party coalition in government formation, following these trends is important, since, as Schmidt states, as in most other parliamentary democracies, Germany's parliamentary government is based on the strong role of the parties in the selection of political leaders, in policy-making and in patronage. The role of the parties is so powerful that the Federal Republic of Germany has been classified as a prime example of a 'party State' (Parteienstaat), that is, a State in which all major political decisions are shaped, if not determined, by political parties. (2015.)

On the other side, the same author identifies NATO membership, a civilian power approach to foreign policy, an open economy together with a trading state, and European integration as the central four international constraints of the political system of the Federal Republic of Germany. It is to the latter that the focus now shifts (2015.) - as we could already see through the text above.

When it comes to the political parties, another important information relevant for this research is the fact that no other country has such dynamic and global acting political foundations tied to domestic political parties. (Usacheva, 2016) They receive their financing not from parties, but mostly from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, sometimes from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, the financial support depends on each party's number of seats in the Federal Parliament (Bundestag). The most funding thus goes to the two foundations associated with the two biggest political parties: Friedrich Ebert Foundation (close to SPD) and Konrad Adenauer Foundation (close to CDU), and, therefore, this research, besides on formal initiatives also focuses on their contribution to their preparation and implementation.

5.2 German foreign policy in the period between 2009. until 2020: the main challenges and positioning of the Western Balkans

When Angela Merkel first became Chancellor back in November 2005, she did something that previous German leaders left until they had settled into the job: she plunged into foreign policy. For her part, Merkel moved quickly to improve relations with the United States, with Poland, and with the EU as a whole. (Carnegie Europe, 2018.) It's not surprising, then, that in her initial statement when she became Chancellor, her speech's 15 pages out of 18 were about foreign policy. (Açıklan, 2016.)

However, it seems that dealing with international crisis, especially with those that emerged in the period here observed, from 2009. until today - that is her second, third and fourth term, will become inherent to the Merkel's reign.

The Eurocrisis which started in Autumn 2009 with bankruptcy of Greece would become the defining characteristics of the Merkel II government. There is no doubt, the Eurocrisis with its domestic and foreign policy reflections are cornerstone in her political career. (Açıklan, 2020.)

Furthermore, her third term was, in this context, harder than her second, since it has witnessed numerous challenging issues with some of them having a continuous development, therefore becoming inherent to her fourth term, too.

As Kai Oppermann, a professor of politics at the University of Sussex, notices, the foreign policy agenda of the third Merkel government was dominated by multiple economic, political, diplomatic and military crises in Europe and the broader international environment. The ongoing Eurocrisis, the conflicts in Eastern Ukraine and Syria, the so-called refugee crisis as well as the uncertain trajectories of European integration and transatlantic relations after the British vote to leave the European Union and the election of Donald Trump as US president are the most critical cases in point. He also cites Germany's then foreign minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier's words from 2014. - "having to respond to such crises became the permanent condition of German foreign policy". (Opperman, 2018.) We also have to bear in mind that all of this was happening while British foreign policy was preoccupied with the implications of the Brexit referendum and France dealing with its own economic challenges. All this fed into a growing sense of an international leadership vacuum which German foreign policy was expected to fill.

This period is important to mention, because, on the domestic level, as a result of previously mentioned developments, the third term in office of Chancellor Merkel was marked by a significant shift in German foreign policy discourse. The most notable expression of that shift was how some leading German decision makers, including, among others, president Gauck and foreign minister Steinmeier acknowledged the increased responsibilities of Germany on the international scene. (Oppermann, 2018.). They did so by highlighting the reasons why Germany gets affected by conflicts and upheavals in its international environment in their public appearances, such as Steinmeier's words from Munich Security Conference from 2015.: 'Germany is more interconnected in and with the world than almost any other country in the world' and 'it has to rely on a rule-based international order and adherence to the regulations more than any other state'. (Federal Foreign Office, 2015). This discourse which highlighted Germany's vulnerability to international crises and the threat of international instability for its security (Oppermann) was also visible in the words of their president from that period: 'Our country is not an island. We should not cherish the illusion that we will be spared from political and economic, environmental and military conflicts if we do not contribute to solving them'. (Gauck 2013).

This shift was also complemented by comprehensive foreign policy review, initiated by foreign minister Steinmeier. The so called 'Review 2014' emerged as a result from numerous conducted discussion meetings with national and international foreign policy experts as well as citizens. The review documented a broad consensus among the participating experts for a more active German foreign policy and, in particular, a German leadership role in Europe (Federal Foreign Office 2014).

However, as Opperman states, the arguments of political elites and experts continued to be met with skepticism in German public opinion. He leans on a Körber-Stiftung's data which indicate that only 37 and 40 per cent of respondents to opinion polls in 2014 and 2015 agreed that Germany should accept more responsibilities in international crises, while 60 and 55 per cent disagreed.

The public disagreement continues to grow in fourth Merkel's term, especially in context of German dealing with refugee crisis and it also contributed to the rise of right-wing populist Alternative for Germany (AfD), as well as it contributed to different ways of mobilizing public reservations against the established foreign policy mainstream by some other parties. A good example is, Oppermann notices, the Left Party (Die Linke), that accused the government of

‘great power politics’ and demanded an end to the ‘German hegemony’ in the EU, in particular in the Eurocrisis.

Therefore, we see that, during a large part within the observed period, for the Merkel government foreign policy remained a difficult balancing act between international and domestic expectations. Before continuing with the main tasks of this research, it is important to see whether, how and why Western Balkans remained in the German focus during these intense times.

A number of the above described crises at both the EU and international level have strained resources and political attention and have pushed the Western Balkans and the EU’s enlargement policy down the list of priorities in recent years. Nevertheless, the region has kept its significance for Germany’s EU and foreign policy, especially in view of unresolved conflicts, as Toegelhofer and Adebahr state. The same authors see the previously described German determination to assume greater responsibility in Europe as some of the reasons for their renewed engagement towards Western Balkan states. This is being seen, first through the fact that many German government officials have on numerous occasions underlined the significance of the accession perspective for all the countries in the region, but have also shown their commitment to this idea through different initiatives, the most famous of which is the one known today as the 'Berlin Process'.

This is also confirmed by Chancellor's regular statements on the Western Balkans’ enlargement dossier and her frequent participation at regional summits as well as visits in the countries of the region. Furthermore, the continuation in the mentioned efforts can easily be seen. First, through the fact that Berlin Process is extended in contrast to the planned duration until 2018. Second, statements from German officials about their dedication to the progress of the Western Balkans happen frequently. Among others, that was also emphasized by the current Minister of Foreign Affairs, Heiko Maas, for example when underlined that the future of the WB states lies within the EU, that the accession talks with some of them are crucial to the EU's strategic interests, as well as that "strengthened neighborly relations and economic ties make the Western Balkans as a whole more attractive." (Deutsche Welle, 13.11.2019.)

5.3 Germany and the Western Balkan countries: why is supporting the regional cooperation and stabilization so important ?

Regional cooperation is, first, an important mechanism/process/policy which leads to reconciliation and stabilization in this post-conflict region and, second, through connecting, networking and adjusting of business environment it enhances the growth of trade and investments - particularly foreign direct investments - thus providing an important prerequisite for a faster economic growth. In addition, regional cooperation is a prerequisite for faster EU integration of the countries of the region, since the EU does not want to import conflicts and disputes from the region but to create a more attractive space for its enlargement through regional market consolidation. (Minić, 2018)

Therefore, regional cooperation gained a special emphasis from the beginning of this region's EU path (through Stabilisation and Association process that was proposed in 1999.), it is now an important part of individual WB countries' foreign policy strategies, as well as it maintains a condition for membership strongly advocated by Germany. The German federal government has made maintaining membership perspective for Western Balkans conditional on progress in three main areas: developing regional cooperation, reforming state institutions and legal systems, and carrying out economic reforms and infrastructure development. (Gibadlo, 2019) Not giving up on strict conditionality is for Germany both a way of achieving sustainable transformation in the Balkans, as well as it's a way of satisfying the growing domestic political and public opposition to further EU widening.

Germany, however, besides being the most influential actor in EU enlargement, and, obviously, one of the loudest proponents of conditionality in this process, has numerous other reasons for being interested in developing regional cooperation among WB countries. It is connected to the region by strong and diverse ties. According to BMZ, migrants from Western Balkan countries and Croatia constitute significant groups of non-EU foreigners or Germans of foreign origin. Germany also figures among the top six trade partners and biggest foreign investors in the countries of the region, and there is a strong presence of German corporate foundations in the region. Also, Bundeswehr has been involved in the NATO Kosovo Force mission since 1999 and is still present there.

The long German economic and political engagement in the Western Balkans results with a clear understanding that issues hindering progress have a regional dimension and with a

continuous emphasis that they must be dealt with in that way. Furthermore, security and stability in EU is also often perceived through the situation in its neighboring, Western Balkan countries. As Toeglhofer and Adebahr highlight, stability has become the most frequently cited reason for supporting the EU's widening towards the Balkans. Across the board, there is a shared perception among decision-makers and foreign policy experts that any new conflict situation would have clear repercussions on Germany. (Toeglhofer and Adebahr; 2017.)

Germany's ways of securing stability and regional cooperation can be observed through different means, some are continuous and still present, some were short termed, such as German-British initiative launched in 2014., aimed at overcoming the Bosnian EU integration stalemate. Those continuous efforts tackle so many different fields, such as, for example, the work of GIZ

- Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As they state: 'Since September 2010, the GIZ office in Sarajevo supports the accession process by promoting regional collaboration among the South-East European countries in the fields of foreign trade, biodiversity, energy efficiency, modernisation of municipal services, legal reform and EU integration' (GIZ Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Even though this part shortly emphasized the breadth of the German efforts towards WB regional cooperation development, this work's interest lies in observing precise foreign policy tools/initiatives and political foundations' efforts in these terms - with all their advantages and disadvantages and, therefore, it will continue in that manner.

The first part

6. GERMAN EU ENLARGEMENT LEVERAGE AS A FOREIGN POLICY INSTRUMENT : HOW EFFECTIVE IT IS IN RESOLVING BILATERAL DISPUTES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS ?

As it's already stated, in the German case, European integration is a constant, which, alongside the country's multilateral approach to international relations, has become, in a manner of speaking, a synonym for German foreign policy. (FES 2012.) On the other side, all of the

Western Balkan states, at least in official strategic documents, retain EU accession as one of their main foreign policy goals.

Good neighbourly relations have been part of the European Union's conditionality requirements from the beginning of its enlargement to the Western Balkans, since this region is characterized with numerous disputes: disputed territories, borders, even country names.

While there are other good examples of how the promise of EU accession can drive conflict settlement, such as the cases between FYROM and Greece, or Montenegro and Kosovo show - here, in order to understand the widest scope of the German willingness and ability to act through its EU enlargement leverage, we are focusing mostly on Kosovo- Serbia dispute. As Huzska states, of all the problematic bilateral relationships in the Balkans, the Serbia- Kosovo relationship is probably the hardest to solve. (Huzska, 2020) The conflict in Kosovo and between Kosovan Albanians and Serbs over the status of the province (and now a country) has been a defining feature of deep tensions in the region. While tensions remain between Serbia and Croatia and within Bosnia and Herzegovina, their international status is undisputed in the region. The emergence of Kosovo as an independent country has been incomparably more difficult and challenging than that of the other states emerging from the former Yugoslavia. (Bieber, 2015:286)

As such, this dispute remained in the center of the Germany's foreign policy engagement in the Western Balkan in the past years. (Toeglhofer and Adebahr, 2015:35)

The German dealing with this 'most difficult relationship in the Western Balkans' reveals us not only the possible ways of tackling the critical situations through EU accession framework, but also reveals the interplay of the expectations and constraints in transforming the complex issue through this framework within a single member state.

6.1 German enlargement policy mantra: a closer look

In order to understand them, as well as to set a base for further discussion on this topic, it's important to briefly summarize the most significant statements in this context, made by, as it's already pointed out - through literature review and background - Toeglhofer and Adebahr. First what should be noted in this context from their contribution to Balfour and Stratulat's study on

EU member states and enlargement towards Western Balkans from 2015. is the fact that, a 'strict but fair conditionality', coupled with the determination to prevent any aspiring country from cutting corners, have become the mantra of German enlargement policy, invoked constantly by public representatives across institutional and party cleavages. (2015:32) Therefore, as they further explain, Berlin's approach towards EU enlargement reflects the ambition to maximize the leverage of the association process by insisting on conditionality at various stages of the accession preparations. Germany has supported the "slicing" of the association process into a sequence of small units in order to create incentives that allow to "exercise pressure time and again". Policymakers have been anxious not to give away rewards such as candidate status or the opening of accession negotiations for a too low a price. Instead, they aim to increase the leverage generated through the promise of membership by asking aspiring countries to deliver on reforms, both at the domestic level with regard to good neighbourly relations. In these attempts, they conclude - Berlin is also firmly supportive of "political frontloading", which, based on the experience that domestic reforms and the resolution of bilateral conflicts need time, entails dealing with thorny issues from the early stages of the integration process. (2015: 34) It's also important to mention that, while fully endorsing the key principle of "strict but fair conditionality" stipulated in the EU's enlargement strategy, Germany has in fact defended a stricter application of conditionality than the one proposed by the European Commission, and has repeatedly disagreed with the Commission's assessments and ensuring recommendations. (2015: 34) The Commission's reviews in this field are criticized for, among other things, often painting too rosy a picture of reform progress in aspiring countries, which does not adequately reflect the reality on the ground. German policymakers, including members of the Bundestag increasingly rely on their own evaluations. (2015: 35)

While the role of Bundestag in this context will be explained later, we are now going to see how the described approach influenced the Kosovo - Serbia dispute, since the authors cited above also suggest that it is a perfect case for observing Germany's tendency for maximizing the leverage within EU enlargement process in order to transform the dispute and stabilize the region.

6. 2 Germany's influence in the Belgrade – Prishtina dialogue

So, it was in 2011. when Chancellor Merkel, at her meeting with the then Serbian president, Tadić, in Belgrade, underlined that Berlin saw the successful continuation of Belgrade-Prishtina talks as a precondition for giving its green light to the Council decision on Serbia's candidate status, and it was this moment, as Toegelhofer and Adebahr state, that was crucial in explicitly linking the accession process to Serbia - Kosovo relations, since these two were on two separate tracks hitherto. (2015: 35) This was the first visit to Serbia by German chancellor in several years, it was intended to encourage Serbia's government to maintain its pro-EU path, however, progress along the way was conditioned with her words that "if Serbia wants to achieve candidate status, it should resume the dialogue and achieve results in that dialogue, enable Eulex to work in all regions of Kosovo, and abolish parallel structures and not create new ones." (BBC news, 23.08.2011.)

As noticed by Bassuener and Weber these 2011. events on Kosovo provided the impetus for a radical shift, since, according to the words of interviewee from their 2013. publication - "the German awakening changed the dynamic". Despite being reactive, this policy was resolute, making the EU's assumption of the undisputed western leadership role in Kosovo possible. The United States curtailed its role as the dominant international player, shifting to a role centered on backing the EU agenda. Germany, with strong support from the United Kingdom, redefined the terms of the EU's engagement. The new approach was one of frankness and firm conditionality. (Bassuener and Weber, 2013:28)

The mentioned words of German Chancellor from her August 2011. visit to Belgrade also became part of EU Commission Enlargement strategy from October 2011., where the above cited Merkel's demands were presented as key priorities for Serbia in order to open negotiations for accession to the European Union - namely, further steps to normalize relations with Kosovo inline with the conditions of the Stabilisation and Association Process are key priority. (Annex I - Enlargement strategy and main challenges 2011/12) However, in the same document, the Commission recommends that the Council should grant Serbia the status of candidate country, taking into account progress achieved so far and on understanding that Serbia reengages in dialogue with Kosovo.

Even so, as Huzska notices, it was under Germany's influence that the Council postponed the decision until spring 2012. because of violent clashes on Kosovo's border with Serbia. The EU

held Serbia accountable for the incidents and it called on Serbia to remove roadblocks on the border and to allow Kosovo to participate in regional cooperation – and these became conditions for Serbia receiving candidate status. The EU's incentive worked: the pressure led to the signing of a number of so-called technical agreements, such as the deal reached in December 2011, between the Serbian and the Kosovo governments on Integrated Border Management. Under this the two governments undertook to set up joint border posts to be managed by the two sides with EULEX's assistance. Moreover, in February 2012, Belgrade and Prishtina agreed on Kosovo's representation in regional forums and institutions. Rewarding its compliant behaviour, the EU assigned candidacy to Serbia in March 2012. (Huzska, 2020)

In the next year, 2013., the First Agreement on Principles governing the normalisation of relations, better known as the Brussels Agreement, was concluded and it opened the door for both countries to proceed toward EU membership. For Serbia, this meant negotiations as a candidate, while for Kosovo it meant negotiations for a Stabilization and Association Agreement. (Bassuener and Weber, 2013:28) Here, again, Bassuener and Weber, authors that are obviously highly approval of the described German approach, state that even though this agreement was 'a not yet done deal' in the moment - it should still be seen as unprecedented development which was made possible by a re-ignition of a previously frozen conflict, reactive but consistent German leadership - with strong British and US support - as well as with political change in Serbia. (2013:27) Absent the new firmness from Berlin, they state, the agreement would never have coalesced.

Authors of the policy report on Germany's foreign policy towards Kosovo from 2014. also recognize that both, the inclusion of then First Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić and Germany's unyielding stance on the legally binding normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo as a condition for opening accession talks, likely contributed to the agreement that was negotiated on April 19th. Prior to that, some of the Serbian leading politicians expressed displeasure at this German approach. So, for example, they cite the statements from 2013., from Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Suzana Grubješić who stated that "it is clear that agreements are made in Brussels but that Berlin makes decisions" and Serbian Prime Minister Dačić who had expressed frustration that "Germany [was] imposing unnecessary conditions in addition to those that have been already placed." (The Germany's Foreign Policy towards Kosovo - A Policy Perspective, 2014: 17)

However, as they furtherly state, without an agreement, Germany would have almost undeniably led the European Commission away from recommending in the progress report that the EU opens accession negotiations with Serbia. (The Germany's Foreign Policy towards Kosovo - A Policy Perspective, 2014: 17)

When it came to the actual opening of negotiation chapters, Germany again showed a determined stance that Chapter 35 on 'Other issues' where the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo figures as first item as well as chapters 23 'Judiciary and fundamental rights' and 24 'Justice, freedom and security' be opened first in the negotiations, which was the case in December 2015 and July 2016, respectively. (Toeglhofer and Adebahr, 2017:7)

However, if we come back to the results of EU mediation in this issue, another interesting feature that contributes to German position pops out. Several agreements were achieved (on freedom of movement, civil registries, cadastre, mutual recognition of university diplomas, custom seals and integrated management of administrative crossings) before substantial progress was made in Belgrade and Prishtina in Brussels on 19th April 2013 (the already mentioned Brussels agreement) and then on 25th August 2015 (when another major implementation agreement, tackling four different areas was reached). Besides the fact that this shows us that the process resulted with some gains that could be felt 'on the ground', meaning that they easily contribute to ordinary citizens' everyday lives, it also leads us to another interesting point. In Friedrich Ebert Stiftung's publication on relations between Serbia and Germany from 2015., it is noted that issues that were previously negotiated, as well as problems that are yet to be discussed as part of the complete normalization of relations, are reminiscent of the themes that were the subject of the 1972 agreement between the two Germanys. (FES, 2015: 23)

This implies that Germany, besides being the most prominent actor in the EU enlargement and one of the loudest advocates of the conditionality in this process, to its own EU enlargement leverage adds another element - its own past. It could be seen on the Kosovo - Serbia example even in officials' statements from several occasions, for example from mentioned Merkel's 2011. visit to Serbia when she stated: "I want to emphasize that Europe is the solution. I can say that on the example of Germany. I used to not believe that Germany would unite and that happened. I believe that the problems of Serbia will also be solved. There are no borders in the single Schengen system." (Radio Slobodna Evropa, 23.08.2011.)

When we come back to the conditionality and how it affected the observed case, a great discussion is offered in Florian Bieber's 2015. publication - 'The Serbia - Kosovo Agreements - An EU success story? '

The article states that EU mediation between Kosovo and Serbia, doubtlessly, has been a success. Following the tense standoff in the aftermath of Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence, some 28 agreements concluded as of September 2015. have resolved a variety of outstanding issues - a number of which were open since 1999 - and established a format for a high-level dialogue between the parties. This cooperation would have been unthinkable without EU intervention. The EU seized the particular opportunity provided by ICJ advisory opinion and the motivation of the Serbian government to make progress toward EU membership. Without bringing EU accession into equation, the talks likely would not have led to results. (Bieber, 2015:312)

Therefore, this article argues that the success of the mediation process rested on a combination of factors, however it recognizes the EU's intervention in the process as a crucial, as it meant that the talks (and the willingness of both parties to compromise) were embedded in EU accession, as well as the strong domestic and international incentives in both Serbia and Kosovo to demonstrate their willingness toward the EU.

From the several elaborated incentives above, we saw that Germany had an enormous role in bringing the Serbia - Kosovo dispute in the center of these two countries' EU stories by maximizing its enlargement leverage.

However, transforming the disputes through conditionality of EU enlargement is highly dependent on numerous factors, and besides the above-mentioned advantages and gains in this process, it can often show as slow, uneasy, 'fragile' way of dealing with such complex issues.

Authors cited above, mainly Bassuener and Weber, and then Bieber whose texts from 2013. and 2015. discussed the potentials of EU mediated agreements, besides mentioned compliments, also warned of problematic circumstances that threatened to jeopardize the progress of the process.

If we generally try to summarize these circumstances, they would be: implementation that was highly dependent on political will and stable majorities, implementation that was patchy and often with the parties moving slowly in the fields that were not in their interest; EU ambiguity; the lack of a common position within the EU on the issue of recognizing Kosovo, which results

in the inability to offer more concrete progress; extremely varying interpretations of the agreements in Belgrade and Prishtina.

Furthermore, Marta Szpala comments on a more local dimension of these difficulties when she states that resolving the Serbian-Kosovo dispute does not serve the purposes of the authorities in Belgrade because it is their main bargaining chip in their relations with the EU, and Serbia's influence in Kosovo gives it better international standing. In exchange for a conciliatory approach towards Kosovo, the EU states and the US are tolerating undemocratic practices on the part of the Belgrade authorities. (2018). She also comments on the public will in both countries. In Serbia, there is a great deal of opposition to any agreement with Kosovo - according to the opinion polls revealing that 81% of Serbs are against recognising Kosovo's independence even if this would accelerate EU integration. On the other side, for Kosovars, the agreement would mean concessions to Belgrade, which the public opposes. The negotiations are hampered by the lack of strong political leaders ready to lend their face to the process of normalisation of relations with Serbia. (Szpala , 2018.)

Ironically, what serves as one of the greatest advantages of this process, threatens to become its key shortcoming, especially in this complex region, since, as Bieber states, implementation relies strongly on the EU and the attractiveness of membership and the accession process, and overall, the process has not been able to develop a dynamic that would suggest its durability without EU intervention and incentives. (2015:318)

Unfortunately, a mix of the shortcomings and circumstances mentioned above resulted with the fact that, since then, many of these agreements have remained unimplemented or only partially implemented.

Even though the Serbian-Kosovo negotiations have been at a standstill from 2015. (Szpala, 2018.), the whole process came completely to halt in November 2018. when the Kosovo government introduced a 100 percent import tax on Serbian and Bosnian goods, as Huzska states, by also adding that the EU appears to lack ideas for putting pressure on Kosovo. Despite a recommendation to proceed with visa liberalization issued by the European Commission, which concluded that Kosovo had met the required benchmarks, member states remain reluctant to open their borders. They are divided over whether Kosovo indeed fulfilled the visa liberalization conditionality. But all this has undermined the credibility of the EU's conditionality towards Kosovo and sends a message to the Kosovo public that the EU has little to offer, especially given that EU membership is already a very distant and uncertain prospect.

The EU now has very little ability to persuade the Kosovo government to take steps to resolve bilateral disputes with Serbia. (2020.)

However, despite the challenging international as well as domestic circumstances in the meanwhile, that were explained in the background, Germany was trying to find different means for keeping this question 'alive'. The proof for that is Franco - German initiative from April 2019. with the aim of restarting the dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo, whose relations, 20 years after the war, were at their worst at this time. This gathering of leaders of Serbia and Kosovo, with leaders of other WB states, was an additional chance for Merkel and Macron, under auspices of the European Union, to convey the historical experience of reconciliation and active cooperation between Germany and France which they find important for the historical context of the Balkans. (rs.n1info.com, 29.04.2019)

Merkel continued tackling this issue by highlighting the EU accession importance through the summits of the Berlin process, which we'll come to in the next chapter, but also by direct and active acting on preparing Kosovo and Serbia for continuation of path towards normalization, as for example when she and Macron joined Hoti and Vucic in video summit in July 2020., which was the first direct talk of these countries' leaders after 18 months. Furthermore, Germany has used its position in order to firmly oppose the idea about adjusting borders that was coming from Vucic and Thaci. A number of EU member states were led by Germany and protested strongly enough to halt the talks (Crisis Group Europe Report N°262, 2021.), due to the fear of the domino effect these actions threatened to produce within the region. Also, Merkel used the above mentioned gathering of WB states in Berlin in April 2019, to send a message to Brussels itself, that is, the EU's high representative, Federica Mogherini, who has been criticized in Germany politically not only for being tolerant, but also encouraging of the Vucic-Thaci negotiations for what, they say, she had no mandate, nor the support of all EU members. (b92, 29.4.2019.)

In concluding about the effectiveness of the processes through which we are observing German tools and ways of acting, besides looking on the WB regional constrains and those on EU level, we also have to pay attention to the circumstances in the broader, international scene. As Dimitar Bechev notices, the US lent political support to the EU-mediated talks, aiming to close the last chapter in Yugoslavia's bloody unravelling. However, this close US-EU cooperation seemingly ended with the advent of Trump. His administration bypassed the EU on Kosovo, taking matters into its own hands. To get things moving in the decade-long Balkan dispute, the

EU will still need the US. Americans carry substantial diplomatic leverage, especially in Kosovo, where frustration with Brussels led Thaci to turn to Washington. (Al Jazeera, 14.07.2020) This means that existing approach that Germany propagates - firm conditionality that is backed by various incentives - might result with better outcomes within more favourable international conditions, starting with the change that occurred in 2021.

While influences originating from different levels are mentioned above rather to clarify the reasons why some policies do not necessarily appear with expected results despite their continuity as well as to imply to the complexity of the problem, in order to satisfy the real goal of this work, we will now conclude on characteristics of enlargement leverage as a German foreign policy tool that showed up through the work so far.

So, we can say that, yes, Germany is definitely seeking to maximize its leverage in order to transform this dispute, as Toeglhofer and Adebahr state, but they also notice another feature and that's the fact that Germany chooses the cases where it believes it can have an impact with this approach. That is why, for example, Germany in the Greece- FYROM name dispute felt that in light of its continuing juxtaposition with Greece over economic and fiscal policies, it was not exactly best placed to coerce Athens on enlargement issues. Germany has however shown a pragmatic approach by focusing on areas and situations in which it could use its weight for the resolution of dilemma, they state. (2015:36)

Furthermore, Germany tries to exercise not only its own leverage, but was also attempting to increase the leverage of the whole process by trying to reach a more common position within the EU, according to some officials, since, as we could see, non-recognition of Kosovo from five member states definitely undermines the capacity for solving the problem in this framework. That's why, for example, Wolfgang Ischinger, a longtime German diplomat said after 2013. Brussels Agreement that Germany and other powerful states will continue quietly to press the EU members that still have not recognized Kosovo's independence, namely, Spain, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Cyprus. (Balkan Insight, 29.05.2013.)

Besides showing more direct pressure than other EU member states, Germany also is acting much less ambiguous than EU. As stated in Bieber's 2015. publication - the EU's position remained ambiguous regarding its demands from Serbia. While officially it could not seek Serbia's recognition of Kosovo, governments and parliaments in some EU member states, in particular Germany, made it clear that eventual EU accession would require full recognition. (2015:314)

Furthermore, besides showing continuity in a wish to deal with such issues, Germany also shows the continuous standing by the declared principles and expectations of the final outcome. Bieber's observation was confirmed in different occasions, as for example by former foreign minister, Sigmar Gabriel when he stated "if Serbia wants to move toward the European Union, the building of the rule of law is a primary condition, but naturally also the acceptance of Kosovo's independence," and "that is a central condition to take the path toward Europe." (Reuters, 14.02.2018.)

This pressure that is not necessarily and only directed towards Serbia and Kosovo, but also sometimes towards the EU institutions, that is followed by incentives and in some way 'enriched' by values that are lessons from the own past, as well as clarity about the final outcome - are yet not all the features that characterize this German foreign policy tool. There is another one that deserves to be met separately - an increased participation of German Bundestag.

6. 3 German EU enlargement leverage, its domestic actors and their influence on Kosovo - Serbia dispute

A paper on 'EU member states and enlargement towards the Balkans ', edited by Rosa Balfour and Corina Stratulat, among other things, highlights the differences among certain member states in approaching enlargement that are arising from their internal organization. So, for example, while the formulation of the French position on enlargement is largely executive driven, Italy's government plays the leading role in defining this country's position on the dossier and Spain's approach to the Balkans enlargement is being shaped by the individual leadership of specific ministers, as well as by political pragmatism in order to maintain power within EU - in the most important actor in these matters, Germany, the federal parliament acquired unparalleled powers over executive's decisions at the EU level and 'is not shy of bringing them to bear on the integration process'. (2015: 4)

Explanations of these developments were in more details met through background and literature review. Namely, these developments were enabled with the far - reaching amendments to the Act on Cooperation between the Federal Government and the German Bundestag in Matters

concerning the European Union that was also accompanied with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty.

These 2009 amendments to the Law have thus enabled the Bundestag to participate in decision - making on enlargement policy not only for the ratification of an accession treaty, but already in earlier stages of the association process - since it gained the right to be regularly informed by Federal Government but also to deliver an opinion on legislative acts and other projects of the European Union.

These developments are important since through them, we're also gaining insight in another aspect of Germany's insistence on a rigorous application of conditions, which is their domestic dimension. Rigorous conditionality is also seen as a mean to make the case for enlargement to the Balkans in front of an ever more skeptical public. Toeglhofer & Adebahr point out the data of the European Commission that in 2015, 67% of Germans are against further enlargement of the EU, which ranks Germany among the countries with fairly negative popular views on enlargement. The trend of growing opposition to enlargement is not limited to the electorate but is discernible also among policy-makers. (2017: 4)

So, how this gets reflected on the Serbia - Kosovo case ?

Well, this question was partially already answered through the part above where it was explained how Germany was postponing the Serbian progress on the EU path until more concrete results in resolving their dispute with Kosovo were reached.

This firm German position on the Kosovo - Serbia issue was highlighted even more with their Federal Parliament having the right to give opinions on one state's progress - a mechanism that quite often served for emphasizing the importance of respecting the concrete steps in dispute resolution, but sometimes also threatened to produce confusion in conflicted sides' public on precise expectations coming from a single member state. Toeglhofer and Adebahr also state that by exercising these rights, Bundestag, in a couple occasions, demonstrated the prevailing enlargement fatigue and skepticism towards aspiring countries' willingness and capacity to meet the conditions for membership. (2017: 10)

For example, the German Bundestag used its right to deliver an opinion and voted on whether to grant Serbia a date for beginning accession talks with the EU in June 2013. While the Conclusions of the European Council of 28 June 2013 stated that accession negotiations with Serbia would be opened in January 2014 at the latest, the Bundestag opinion passed three days

earlier stipulated that negotiations could be launched in January 2014 at the earliest - and only if a series of conditions with regard to Kosovo - Serbia relations would be met prior to that. (Toeglhofer and Adebahr, 2017: 10)

The Bundestag called for —total and permanent implementation of commitments. However, the Bundestag's decision here was shaped by conflicting views between parties. Andreas Schockenhoff, high representative of the Christian Democrats, one year earlier presented seven demands on which Berlin's decision would depend; —legally binding normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo was the key one. On the other side, the social democrats and opposition were strongly in support of granting a date for the opening of accession talks without the strict hurdles that the CDU was pushing for. The SPD worried that agreeing to an accession date with overly strict pre-conditions would not be rewarding Serbia for the progress that has been made and would threaten the EU's stick and carrot method moving forward. The ruling German coalition CDU-CSU led by Andreas Schockenhoff had said that they would accept the recommendation of the Bundestag to open EU accession talks with Serbia —but will insist that Chancellor Angela Merkel at the European Council conditions the exact date with the implementations of the Brussels agreement. Ultimately, the Bundestag's decision fell somewhere in the middle, approving the start of accession talks for Serbia in January but recommending approval by the EU summit again in December and calling for the total implementation of commitments before talks start in January. (Germany's foreign policy towards Kosovo - A policy perspective, 2014:18)

Even though the overlap between Bundestag's and EU's positions - an opening of accession negotiations in January 2014 - was also the actual outcome, EU colleagues felt unduly pressured by a single member state's parliament. (Toeglhofer and Adebahr, 2017: 10)

Serbian public also felt pressured and confused, first in 2012. when the above mentioned seven conditions announced by CDU-CSU created confusion about the scope of requirements coming from Berlin (Toeglhofer and Adebahr, 2015: 37) and then, again, by Bundestag's decision on their date for accession talk beginning, which was linked to the Serbia - Kosovo relationship.

Henri Bohnet, who was a director of Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Belgrade at that time, and participated in several meetings among German parliamentarians and Serbian leaders, offered clarifications in an interview from 2013. When asked why the Bundestag went further from setting a date for the start of negotiations and linked the entire negotiation process to the

relationship between Serbia and Kosovo, Bohnet answered that Germany is the only EU country whose parliament, the Bundestag, plays the same role as the government when it comes to decisions concerning the Union. "That makes those decisions much more democratic than in other countries. It is obvious that the German parliamentarians took their responsibility seriously, because they are directly responsible to their voters, who will go to the polls very soon." "Every decision of the Bundestag in an election year is under public scrutiny. The views of Germany and the Bundestag on Serbia's position and reforms and on Prishtina are very clear. From the beginning, the Bundestag insisted on working and achieving results seen on the ground, not signatures on paper." Bohnet added that the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Prishtina was at the very beginning, that it started in Brussels, but that it "must end in Mitrovica and other local communities". "For now, only the highest state officials who make decisions on both sides are involved, but in the end the people who live there, but also the societies in both countries must be involved." "Broadly speaking, I am optimistic that the importance of the Kosovo issue will diminish in both Serbia and the EU, as relations between Belgrade and Prishtina become more normal," Bohnet said.

"I think it has become much clearer in Belgrade, but also in Brussels, how powerful the German parliament is, and in relation to the German government. As a German citizen, I am happy because our deputies take the mood of citizens and strategic decisions seriously." "If they don't do that, I cannot vote for them, which would mean that they will no longer be members of parliament. That responsibility of those who make decisions towards their citizens, not only in relation to Serbia, gives me the feeling that I can influence at least a little complex decisions at the national level", Bohnet concluded. (BN TV, 8.7.2013.)

As much as the case above highlights the importance of understanding the Bundestag's scope to act in these matters, it also points out the other fact, and that is the importance of convincing every German parliamentary party on willingness and ability to progress.

Leaders from aspiring EU members states are enabled to do so through frequent contacts with them, since, consequently to the gained powers, parties have stepped up their monitoring of the accession process, with parliamentarians of all parliamentary groups frequently visiting the region to obtain first-hand information. For each (potential) candidate country, the parliamentary groups have defined one rapporteur from their ranks in the respective Committees on Foreign and on European Affairs. Apart from fact-finding and networking, regular visits to the region by members of the German Parliament also serve to convey political

messages on behalf of their parliamentary groups. Visits to the region are thus seen as an important occasion for parliamentarians to communicate their positions on priorities in the reform process – behind closed doors as well as in public appearances, and, conversely, members of the Bundestag are highly sought-after interlocutors when representatives of the EU hopefuls visit Berlin. These instances underline to which extent the Bundestag has become a player on its own. (Toeglhofer and Adebahr, 2017: 9-10)

Through the time, these occasions remained an additional chance for Germany to point out not only a durable interest, but also a durable and firm determination to stand to the declared demands for normalization of relations and importance of dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo, given that the topic imposes itself as an indispensable part of the conversations between German MP's and their Serbian and Kosovar colleagues.

Stefan Surlić from the University of Belgrade also sees this direct involvement of Bundestag in the process of EU enlargement as important for Western Balkan states, since on the one hand, it creates a realization that there is no "shortcut" and that the criteria must be met, while on the other hand it creates a multiplied line of communication. (2018: 69)

Bundestag members' interest in this topic was also highlighted by Miroslav Lajčák, EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues, who after briefing them on the situation and next steps in November 2020 emphasized their concern and support.

As Toeglhofer and Adebahr state, as far as the German Government is concerned, the support of the Bundestag is perceived more as a benefit than a burden. While the mandate from the Bundestag limits the government's room of manoeuvre and compromise, it ultimately strengthens Germany's negotiation position in the Council. At least as long as parliament and government follow the same – 'strict but fair' – approach. (2017: 10)

6.4 Resume and reflections on the first part

An auxiliary hypothesis stating that Germany successfully uses its leverage in EU enlargement process as a foreign policy instrument to advance the resolution of bilateral disputes between Western Balkan states, was confirmed in the case of the WB's most complicated bilateral

dispute. Namely, a set of evidences and opinions is presented in order to list all of the achievements and steps forward in this issue that arise from German leadership, which in this manner could be described as continuous, committed, but also shaped, in some extent, by its local actors and constraints.

While this work stands on a position that German domestic dimensions, the power of Bundestag and growth of euroskepticism, are large contributors to German tendency to maximize the leverage in EU enlargement process and therefore these items occupy a large part of the work, they also serve as a powerful example of complexity of foreign policy decision-making and, as such, irresistibly depict Robert Putnam's 1988. metaphor: two- level game. Therefore, after presenting the whole case, this part of the paper will try to make a reflection on the existing theory to clarify the second auxiliary hypothesis once again.

As Putnam states, at the national level, domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government to adopt favorable policies, and politicians seek power by constructing coalitions among those groups. At the international level, national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments. Neither of the two games can be ignored by central decision-makers, so long as their countries remain interdependent, yet sovereign. (1988: 434)

Therefore, unlike some other theories, two-level approach recognizes that central decision-makers strive to reconcile domestic and international imperatives simultaneously (1988: 460)

Putnam also defined the so called "win-set" for a given Level II constituency (domestic level) as the set of all possible Level I agreements (international level) that would "win"- that is, gain the necessary majority among the constituents-when simply voted up or down. (1988: 437)

It is important to understand what circumstances affect win-set size, he states. Three sets of factors are especially important. Besides the fact that the size of the win-set depends on the distribution of power, preferences, and possible coalitions among constituents at the domestic level and of strategies deployed by the negotiators themselves at international level, the size of the win-set depends also on the domestic political institutions - or more precisely, extent of the institutional constraint. For example, a country's constitution may require approval from parliament, the federal states or even a referendum in order to ratify a treaty. This constraint is likely to reduce the negotiator's flexibility. (Morin & Paquin, 2018 : 236)

Putnam also defines the reasons why understanding the win-set size is important. As he states, win-set size is important because the relative size of the respective Level II win-sets will affect the distribution of the joint gains from the international bargain - since, a small domestic win-set can be a bargaining advantage. (1988: 440)

Morin and Paquin also explain that the narrower the win-set is defined by national stakeholders, the more leverage a negotiator has over its foreign counterparts, but the riskier the negotiations may stumble. A narrow win-set strengthens the chief negotiator's position. This phenomenon occurs because national constraints can be transformed into international opportunities. (2018: 235)

The second part

7. BERLIN PROCESS

7. 1 Berlin process as a 'breadth of fresh air'- how was it introduced and why is it important for the transformative power of the EU accession process in the Western Balkans ?

The work, so far, has already highlighted the Germany's (and therefore also the EU's) understanding of the importance of stabilizing the WB6 and enhancing their cooperation, as well as it has highlighted the fact that - in order for the above described German approach to remain fruitful, among other things - the final outcomes of the accession process mustn't seem distant, but promising and near future.

This simply means that the German acting as a 'firm supporter and severe critic' in the WB6 enlargement path, while, therefore, influencing the transformation of the complex bilateral issues in the region, must, logically, lean and count on a strong and powerful EU transformative mechanism.

However, over the years, EU enlargement policy has gone through a process of nationalization and intricate accession negotiation technicalities, which have raised perplexities regarding the Union's genuine interest in the Western Balkans and weakened its credibility. (Madhi, 2018:1)

The existing enlargement fatigue was expressed explicitly by incoming European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker when he stated the obvious that there will be no enlargement during his mandate (BiEPAG, 2014:3) - and that was only the first of a series of mixed signals sent by the EU to the region. (Madhi, 2018:1) Also, the new Commission abolished the position of Commissioner for Enlargement. With this, the Commission has sent an untimely and wrong message to its Western Balkans partners, clearly undermining the credibility of the membership promise, which thus far served as the main impetus for its most successful transformative mechanism – conditionality. (BiEPAG, 2014: 4,5)

Not only do such signs retaliate in the various fields where reform in WB6 is needed, but different messages about Western Balkans' EU perspective, i.e. frequent indications of the need for the Union to strengthen before integrating new members, are also not encouraging for the resolution of bilateral disputes (Marović, 2019:6) - nor do they contribute to regional cooperation. As it is noted in the article 'Reconciliation in the Western Balkans' - the standstill with the enlargement process has allowed the local elites in power to raise the nationalistic rhetoric in their public speeches for short-term political gains, at the expense of the wider regional rapprochement process. (Madhi et al, 2019:1)

However, besides witnessing the above mentioned challenges, 2014. also witnessed two initiatives, both led by Germany, that can be seen as 'a breath of fresh air'. (BiEPAG, 2014:5)

One of them involved the initiation of an intergovernmental high-level meeting format that will become known as the 'Berlin Process'. As Toeglhofer and Adebahr state, the Berlin Process is, first and foremost, seen as an important means by representatives of the Federal Government and the Bundestag to inject new momentum in the EU integration of the Balkans' accession hopefuls. The 'first conference on the Western Balkans', was convened in Berlin in August 2014 and sent a contrasting message shortly after Juncker announced that there would be no new enlargement during his term – a message that was widely perceived by German officials as a discouraging signal that did not serve the transformation agenda. (Toeglhofer and Adebahr, 2017:3)

When describing the 'German design' of this initiative, a group of authors of 'Monitoring of the Berlin process' state that the German foreign policy towards the Western Balkans has been characterized of a constant commitment to region's reconstruction, stabilization, consolidation of rule of law and market economy as well as member state-building. So, when the pressure of the EU enlargement fatigue claimed for a counteracting response, they conceived an auxiliary

mechanism "to speed up coherence with the EU and to deal with conflicts where they existed." (Hackaj, Madhi & Hackaj, 2017:16)

According to the main initiator of the Berlin Process - Chancellor Merkel - the moment of its launching and its timeframe (since it was planned to last within the period of 2014-2018) were supposed to represent a symbolic association with the beginning and the end of World War One (1914-1918), with an implicit message "don't let war happen again". (Minic, 2017:6)

As we will see through the work, the Berlin Process, practically, provided a hybrid approach placing under one roof regional cooperation and connectivity in the Western Balkans, while complementing the enlargement process. (Emini & Marku, 2018:1)

So, the objectives of the Berlin Process, as set out in a Final Declaration of the first 'Conference of the Western Balkans' of 2014., consist in 'furthering endeavors to make additional real progress in the reform process, in resolving the outstanding bilateral and internal issues, and in achieving reconciliation within and between the societies in the region, (as well as in) enhancing regional economic cooperation and laying the foundations for sustainable growth.' (Marciacq, 2017:7)

As Marciacq states, this mini - lateral format and patronage of Germany around which it was built, introduced a 'change as addition' in the EU's approach towards enlargement. It was launched as an additive and complementary process, essentially anchored in the EU's normative approach to membership (EU Enlargement Strategy 2013) and regional competitive and growth strategy - SEE 2020. (Marciacq, 2017:8) This Angela Merkel's idea was also described in a similar way by HR Federica Mogherini when she stated that "the Berlin Process is meant to accompany the Balkans' path towards the European Union ...it is not a substitute, not a competitor, but on the contrary a facilitator of our common work". (Nechev et al, 2017:1)

Obviously, the Process is taking place with support of the European Commission, international financial institutions, and with a limited number of self-elected EU countries (Germany as a *primus inter pares*, Austria, France, Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, the United Kingdom, Poland) - which were about to accompany the WB6 countries in this endeavor of materialization of regional cooperation through concrete strategic projects. Another break from the previous approach to the region could be seen in the fact that one of the primary features of the Berlin Process was the single country/leader-driven feature. (Madhi, 2018:5)

The goal of the Berlin Process is to advance the EU's agenda in three dimensions: economic growth and connectivity, good neighborly relations and regional cooperation, and civil society development and people-to-people connectivity. (Marciacq, 2017: 1) While doing so, the Berlin Process introduces a novel practice in the EU's enlargement toolbox. Yearly Berlin Process Summits at the highest level were held in Berlin in 2014, Vienna in 2015, Paris in 2016, Trieste in 2017, London in 2018, Poznan in 2019, and in 2020. when the summit was chaired jointly by an EU Member State, Bulgaria, and a Western Balkan country, North Macedonia. They were complemented by a long series of lower-level meetings and a series of regional side events, the number of which grew from year to year.

So, as Marciacq noted, something that was initially limited in time and in scope, has spread and become a multifaceted process with no foreseeable ending. (2017:1)

7.2 Berlin process as an 'outside of the box' initiative - what are its main accomplishments and novelties brought to the field of regional cooperation in the Western Balkans ?

As highlighted in the previous section, the Berlin Process has grown into a complex process, with the number of topics covered growing from year to year, not only through conferences held once a year on the highest level, for seven years already, but also through numerous side events involving different sectors, bringing different impulses. What is certain is that this paper - because of the topic it focuses on, but also because of the goal of creating a description of a number of German tools in advancing this topic - will not make justice to everything that has been achieved so far within this initiative. Instead, the paper will keep its focus on achievements within the *political* and *social dimensions* of the process, with special emphasis on innovations in the fields of regional integration and cooperation, and dispute resolution. In doing so, the paper will seek to respond to its two intentions, and that is to assess the success of the initiative in its intention but also to consider all those details that make one foreign policy initiative successful, useful, different. The easiest way to do this is to create a chronological overview of events and moves that are relevant to the previous description, and complete their understanding with an overview of experts' discussions and writings on the topic.

7.2.1 The first year of the Berlin Process and Berlin Summit 2014.

In order to comply with the chronology of relevant accomplishments, we will be reminded first of all those relevant guidelines and novelties that have arisen from the Final Declaration of *German Chair in Berlin* (2014) - which focused on three areas: regional cooperation, good governance and economic growth. The area that preoccupies us the most in this work- regional cooperation - has, within this declaration, several identified sub-areas: the outstanding bilateral issues, the reinforced institutional cooperation, and cooperation at civil society level. Although all these items will be much more clearly reflected in the coming summits and years of the Berlin Process, the German Presidency has set a clear and important roadmap, so we must dwell on clarifying the importance of some items, especially of the part that clearly states: 'Regional cooperation shall also include the civil society level'.

As Hackaj states, this German move gave institutional legitimacy to the input expected from local civil society organizations. Since Berlin, civil society has been the other permanent feature of WBS Chair declarations. This opportunity opened the way for a much-needed shift from “final beneficiary” logic, towards a pro-active and more structured contribution from WB6 CSOs. It has resulted in a more intense regional cooperation amongst WB6 civil society organizations, and in the establishment of dialogue between civil society and EU or/and national decision-makers. (Hackaj, 2018:36)

Furthermore, the “institutional cooperation” mentioned in the Berlin WBS will become a transversal issue pervasive of the whole Berlin process and underpinning all the areas such as the connectivity agenda, migration, dual VET, etc. (Hackaj, 2018:34)

Even if not directly linked to the WB6 Summit in 2014., there is also a special occasion from the same year that should be mentioned, since it also indicates one of the crucial accomplishments of the process - cultivating of cooperation through intensified contacts. Arguably, WB6 Summit held in Berlin, in August 2014, has paved the way to a historic visit by an Albanian prime minister to Belgrade in November 2014, first after 68 years. There is a common understanding that it was the Berlin Process that contributed to the emergence of the cordial relationship between the Serbian and Albanian prime ministers, Aleksandar Vučić and Edi Rama (Nechev et al., 2018:13), which will, as we will later see, pave the way for establishing one of the most important regional institutions that arised within Berlin Process.

So, intensifying personal contacts among high officials from the Western Balkans and with the high officials from several EU Member States and EU institutions in an endeavor to increase political will for cooperation, regional solidarity and good neighbourly relations is an unquestionable achievement of the Berlin Process which is not praised enough. (Nechev et al., 2018:14)

7.2.2 The second year of the Berlin Process and Vienna Summit 2015.

At the second Summit Meeting on the Western Balkans in the framework of the Berlin process, held in Vienna in 2015., the Berlin process got some of its most important distinctive traits. Numerous references used suggest that certain breakthrough of the Berlin Process was achieved exactly during the Vienna Summit in 2015.

In contrast to the 3 main identified areas from the German Chair declaration, there are 13 identified areas in the Austrian Chair declaration.

However, one of the greatest additional novelties from the 2015 summit has been something that 2014 German presidency called for - the increased inclusion of civil society. Namely, on the margins of the Summit, a Civil Society Forum took place on 26 August in Vienna, aiming to provide an opportunity to civil society representatives from the Western Balkans to provide input into the high-level Summit meetings along the lines of the need to build a culture of regional cooperation, freedom of expression and the creation of jobs and prosperity. Altogether, more than 120 civil society activists, members of think tanks, and media from the Western Balkans participated in the preparation of the three topics discussed at the Vienna Civil Society Forum. (Bieber, 2015) It was for the first time ever that, in such high-level summits, they were officially invited to have their word heard over the EU integration and regional cooperation processes, and succeeded to have their view mentioned in the final declaration. (Hackaj and Madhi, 2015:17) According to the same authors, this perceived willingness of the EU and WB6 to consider the civil society as a strategic actor to be heard from the beginning of the policy-making and agenda-setting is a clear break from the past integration and regional cooperation approaches.

We already highlighted the importance of this breakthrough initiated by Germany, however, we should question ourselves why this kind of approach should matter ? Well, the importance

of this multi-dimensional nature of Berlin Process is recognized by most policy papers tackling this issue. First of all, Berlin Process goes beyond the top-down, project-based technical assistance of local NGOs, by gradually institutionalizing the involvement of civil society organizations in the Summits and the establishment and functioning of youth connectivity. These innovative components reinforce, solidify and extend the EU integration and enlargement dynamics to the whole WB6 society and break the notion that this is a project reserved for political elites and limited to the public administration. Namely, the comparative experiences strongly suggest that civil society consultations on government policies greatly enhance the chances that a specific policy will eventually be adopted and appropriately implemented. (Nicić, Nechev, Mameleđija, 2016:8) CSO involvement in BP is crucial to produce a “constructive tension” between CSO and governments and the CSO insistence has been instrumental in keeping bilateral disputes in the WBS agenda. (Hackaj, 2018:36)

Second, Nicić, Nechev and Mameleđija have dedicated a part of their 'The Berlin Process: Crystallization point for the Western Balkans' article to clarifying the importance of civil society in the areas of cooperation and issues resolution. As they state, on numerous occasions in the past, CSOs from the Western Balkans have shown its potential and capacity in the area of regional cooperation and resolution of bilateral issues. One of the lessons learnt from their engagement was that bilateral issues cannot be resolved without public support. (2016:13) Majority of their respondents in the article stated that the promotion of regional cooperation is precisely the field where the CSOs can help. Namely, in this specific area, CSOs can act in a capacity of a remedial factor, particularly in exchanging good practices and experiences, and applying mechanisms for the promotion of reconciliation and cooperation. In addition, CSOs could provide valuable input in supervising and monitoring the fulfilment of the commitments made by the governments in regards to regional cooperation, or even more, propose certain ideas which could work in the direction of resolution of bilateral issues. Finally, CSO networks can also contribute in designing the agenda for the summits by providing valuable information to the host countries about the development in the individual countries. (2016:13).

After explaining the importance of inclusion of non-governmental sector in such processes, we are coming to the next success of the Vienna Summit - the one that was characterized exactly by the strong cooperation between non-governmental and governmental sector, and that will, even years after, be described as 'the most tangible result' of the whole process. That is the

establishment of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office - RYCO, which was signed during the Vienna Summit.

RYCO's aim is to focus on youth projects in five priority areas: (i) fostering regional cooperation; (ii) enhancing mobility; (iii) supporting reconciliation; (iv) building peace and stability; and, (v) ensuring a prosperous future for young people in their respective countries. It constitutes the first initiative under the umbrella of the Berlin process, where the WB6 governments cooperate as part of one regional institution that they jointly fund and coordinate (Hackaj et al., 2017:28), as well as it represents a major step towards accelerating reconciliation efforts among citizens of the WB region. It is an organization entirely dedicated to youth cooperation, set up in a manner that can contribute towards overcoming past prejudices and nurturing an EU values-oriented mindset. In light of its noble mission, RYCO has received strong political commitment, as well as societal and community support. (Nechev et al., 2017:6) With the signing of this proposal, the Western Balkan states agreed to follow the best European practices in overcoming historical grievances. The RYCO would therefore be modelled after the Franco-German Youth Office.

What also was encouraging in the story about RYCO establishment, is the one detail mentioned in the subtitle above: its champions were Serbian and Albanian political leaders.

So, in the research paper called 'The Berlin Process: What worked and what did not work?', which identifies three important areas of the BP and describes them as 'visible success story', 'latent success story', 'and limited success story', RYCO is described with the first title. The same article helps us in understanding the four decisive elements that have contributed to its positive perception. As authors state, the first is its limited scope, clear timeline and precise implementation roadmaps. Strong political interest and articulated leadership from the Rama-Vucic duo has significantly influenced the formation of RYCO. The local ownership of the initiative has been equally shared from the very beginning by the governments, local civil society organizations and international actors involved. Finally, RYCO is a materialization of a joint effort by representatives of state and non-state actors, participating and contributing on an equal footing. The collaborative manner cherished throughout the process has contributed positively to the creation of a sustainable and credible organization. (Nechev et al., 2017:6)

Even though the next output of the Vienna Summit is, in the above mentioned research paper, described as a 'limited success story', due to the reasons that will be explained within part that deals with shortcomings of the process, the Declaration on Regional Cooperation and Solution of Bilateral Disputes, signed at the Summit, is still an important novelty in tackling this field.

The Declaration was signed by all Western Balkan 6 countries in the presence of Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia, the European Commission, and the European External Action Service. It was prepared by the Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group, in collaboration with Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Through the Declaration all six Ministers of Foreign Relations of the Western Balkan accession countries committed to the resolution of all open bilateral questions in the spirit of good neighborliness, whereas they will not block, or encourage others to block, the progress of neighbors on their respective EU paths. They also obliged themselves to report annually at the Western Balkans Summit on the progress made in regard to bilateral relations and outstanding bilateral questions, starting with the next Summit in Paris, in 2016.

However, the reporting praxis never became vivid and transparent, and in spite of having the commitment to resolving the bilateral disputes and the agreement not to block each-other, the situation in reality does not appear to be as positive. Which mechanisms this initiative lacked in order to prove out as successful is the topic for the next chapter of this work.

It should be mentioned that the Summit was also used for signing of two border agreements: 1) between Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and 2) between Montenegro and Kosovo. The former came in effect in April 2016 after it was ratified by both parliaments, whereas both parties ratified the latter in 2018.

It's also important to notice that the existing regional organizations were greatly promoted by the Berlin Process. Starting modestly with the Regional Cooperation Council and Energy Community Secretariat at the Berlin Summit, many more organizations involving Western Balkan participants, such as SEETO, CEFTA, ECS, and the RCC, were referred to at the Vienna Summit, as well as some other organizations important for the region like EUSDR, EUSAIR, CEI, and OSCE. (Kovačević et al., 2017:7) The Vienna Declaration has allocated to each of these secretariats specific roles in their respective subject matters (Hackaj and Madhi, 2015:16)- and when analyzing one foreign policy initiative, this represents an interesting detail, since it indicates that EU member states were also trying to intensify the regional ownership of the Berlin Process.

7.2.3 The third year of the Berlin Process and Paris Summit 2016.

The conference was mainly used to celebrate and extend the progress in the three key agenda items: regional cooperation, economic cooperation, and civil society. For example, the Paris Summit witnessed the finalization of the establishment of the RCYO. Moreover, the participating states progressed on implementing the proposed infrastructure and energy projects. They also agreed to list three new railway projects. In contrast to the Vienna Summit - CSOs held their own forum separately this time, and produced a set of recommendations that were submitted to the Leaders Forum. Even if not in the Summit agenda, the CSO forum was attended by Austrian and French Members of Governments, as well as by Members of the European Parliament. (Hackaj and Madhi 2017:18)

Its other feature is the fact that this Summit showed how easily the problems from the international and European scene, such as War in Syria and refugee crisis in Europe are going to influence the agenda of the Berlin Process, but also be used in furtherly emphasizing the importance of regional cooperation. So, first page of the Final Declaration of the French Chair states: 'The European continent is exposed to unprecedented security challenges, such as the large-scale terrorist attacks. The Western Balkans are encouraged to strengthen regional cooperation which remains a key element for the stability of the region and of the whole of Europe.' (2016.)

7.2.4 The fourth year of the Berlin Process and Trieste Summit 2017.

At the preparatory meeting for the Trieste Summit of the six Western Balkan prime ministers in Sarajevo, in March 2017, EU commissioner for enlargement, Johannes Hahn, praised the fact that they were meeting for the first time in one of the Western Balkan states and added that this was "exactly the symbol we need at this moment." (Nechev et al, 2018:13) Therefore, participants at the Trieste Summit welcomed the growing desire and capability of ownership of the process coming from the region, as demonstrated also by the high number of regional ministerial meetings.

Ardian and Krisela Hackaj in their publication 'The Berlin Process 2014-2018' in a part that is dedicated to the regional cooperation and its institutional outcomes, describe the period and

ways in which the scope and depth of transversal political regional cooperation becomes remarkable. As they state, during 2016. it had evolved into frequent high-level political summits (where the best illustration is Rama – Vučić dynamics), complemented by policy-making cooperation in different sectors through WB6 ministerial meetings (or Ministerials). It also included business cooperation through establishment of different B2B platforms; scientific cooperation through new scientific regional initiatives; and; cooperation amongst Balkans civil society and regional political actors through the Civil Society Summits. (2018:34)

However, they state, one year later, in 2017, in Trieste, this cooperation produced its first outcomes with the establishment of two new regional institutions: the Western Balkans Regional Chambers Investment Forum and Western Balkans Research Foundation. The shift of regional cooperation rationale from conflict resolution to regional institution building becomes visible. It is in Trieste that Regional Cooperation area, evolves towards “regional integration” and is completely focused on economy. Regional disputes are moved out of regional cooperation and “upgraded” into a new area. (2018:34)

At the Trieste Summit, the Western Balkan states independently proposed to implement deeper economic integration through the MAP-REA. Among other things, this resulted in the passing of legislation in several countries to facilitate cross-border trade. The Berlin Process was therefore once again not only successful in spreading the practice of regional cooperation but also regional ownership over these efforts.

7.2.5 The fifth year of the Berlin Process and London Summit 2018.

Before we start with achievements from the 2018. Summit in London, we have to mention something that happened earlier that year and can serve as a clear indication of the Berlin Process's valuable contribution to dedicating attention to bilateral disputes and regional cooperation. Namely, in February 2018. European Commission's new Strategy for the Western Balkans titled “A credible enlargement perspective for an enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans” came out with an aim to set out a perspective for accession of these countries. In order to support this, the Commission decided to support six Flagship Initiatives targeting transport and energy connectivity, digital agenda, socioeconomic development, rule of law, security and migration as well as reconciliation and good neighbourly relations.

From the content of the Strategy it is obvious that much of the decisions reached and actions taken within the framework of the Berlin Process contributed to the preparation of this document. (Nechev et al., 2018:15) For example, the article 'Reconciliation in the Western Balkans' also recognizes that, to a certain extent the Strategy is a follow-up to the initiatives undertaken by the Civil Society Forum (CSF) within the Berlin Process framework where reconciliation has been stressed as an area where further progress is needed. (2019:3) The contribution of Berlin Process can be seen in the solution of the disputes, too, since, as article 'Bilateral disputes conundrum' states, Strategy represents a shift from soft diplomacy that dominated the sphere of bilateral disputes in recent years, under which they were tackled only after getting highly politicized and flaring up to a point of seriously impeding relations between the two countries involved. (2018:6)

Also, it must be mentioned that 2018. has been marked by two additional significant accomplishments in the realm of bilateral issues and both were achieved by Macedonia. The country managed to resolve and upgrade its relations with Bulgaria by signing the Agreement for friendship, good neighbourly relations and cooperation, which entered into force in February 2018. The second one is the agreement between Greece and Macedonia, ending the three decades long dispute with Greece over the name issue. (Nechev et al., 2018:11) - the dispute mentioned in the 2014. Berlin Declaration as a highly important. The authors of the publication "The credible enlargement perspective for the Western Balkans through the lenses of the Berlin Process" claim that this is perceived as one of the greatest achievements of the Berlin Process, since, according to them, it managed to create a momentum for the countries to start resolving outstanding bilateral issues. (2018:12). Another proof for that can be found in the fact that the border agreement between Montenegro and Kosovo (that was signed at the Vienna Summit but the Kosovo Parliament refused to ratify it) had its breakthrough finally in February 2018. when Kosovo President Thaci and Montenegrin President Vujanović, signed an Annex to the Vienna border demarcation agreement, which was adopted by the Kosovo Government and ratified in the Parliament, opening the path to Kosovo's visa liberalization. Djolai and Nechev state that this assessment of the commitment by the WB countries and Member States to finding solutions for bilateral disputes since 2015. shows that there was enough progress made in the past four years to allow for cautious optimism. (2018:11)

Now, to get back to London Summit - a very insightful look we can gain through the text '2018 Western Balkans Summit: 3 key takeaways from London', which states that its most visible outcome is the signing of a "Joint Declaration on Regional Cooperation and Good

Neighbourly Relations.” It is positive to note that by signing this document signatories committed themselves to solve outstanding bilateral issues as a matter of urgency and to abstain from misusing bilateral disputes to block the EU path. Among the signatories is also Croatia, an EU member state, which has several bilateral disputes and refused to sign a similar document in Vienna in 2015 - so, this was considered as an important step forward.

Participants also agreed to meet in Vienna, six months after the London Summit, and in Skopje, before the 2019 Summit, to take stock of progress made. The meeting in Vienna was a success. The countries from the Western Balkans, in general, agreed upon reporting procedure and template. In addition, the participants agreed to share publicly available information regarding bilateral issues, in the spirit of transparency.

Additional success worth mentioning, besides bilateral issues, is the inclusion of civil society. Finally, after years of advocacy, the civil society forum was recognized and organized by the host country as a formal part of the Berlin Process. For the first time, all six Western Balkan ministers of foreign affairs accepted to discuss issues of interest for the Western Balkans alongside civil society representatives and activists.

Finally, London was also the last Summit of the originally envisaged 5-years long Berlin Process. From this point onwards, the whole Berlin Process has become more uncertain without a clear strategy for its continuation or future prospects.

7.2.6 The Berlin Process beyond the initial time frame: Summit in Poznan 2019. and Sofia-Skopje presidency 2020.

So, above stated authors have announced the uncertainty of the stage into which the Berlin process is entering, but they have also recognized some recent German moves as interesting and promising. As they state, the proposal made by Chancellor Merkel for Poland to host the next summit in 2019 and the invitation for Greece to take part in London reflected the direction of thinking in Berlin. The German government is not sticking only to the countries already participating in the Berlin Process. It opens the process to other interested parties. It might be an opportunity for countries in Southeast Europe to be included in the process and host future Berlin Process annual summits, increasing the number of participants, areas and forms of experimenting in this kind of ‘accession laboratory’. (Nechev et al., 2018:19)

By including Poland, Germany wisely included a firm and long-time supporter of EU enlargement. So, the Poznan Summit was, among other things, used for expressing support for the opening of accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, while strongly praising the success of N. Macedonia in regards to signing the Prespa Agreement. 'The whole region should follow the example of North Macedonia' was one of the main messages from the Summit. Since one of the key messages of the Summit was also directed to the EU leaders, who should keep their promise and reach a positive decision on the opening of accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania (EWB, 6.7.2019.) - the joint press conference between Angela Merkel and Macedonian's Prime Minister Zaev within the Summit was also used for sending a message that more certain path towards EU must exist to serve as a motivation for improving the state in the Western Balkans.

This three-day Summit in Poznan consisted of Think Tank Forum, Civil Society Forum, Business Forum, Ministerial meetings and Leaders' Summit. (EWB, 6.7.2019.) The Leaders welcomed the intensive dialogue between Ministers and representatives of Civil Society Organizations, various NGOs and think-tanks during months preceding the Poznań Summit and agreed that such consultations with citizens and representatives of third sector are making Berlin Process more relevant for the integration of the region and the perspective of the integration with the EU. Most of the Chair's conclusions were confirmations of the previous plans and visions, so, for example the leaders confirmed that the implementation of the 8 new and the 31 already approved large-scale infrastructure investments remain a key item on their Agenda - since connectivity improves competitiveness of the region and bringing the people and economies closer together within the region and with the EU it improves neighbourly relations.

The Summit in Poznan was also used for announcing the first co-presidency, the one that will be shared by a Western Balkan state and EU member state - North Macedonia and Bulgaria – since “holding the co-presidency by the Republic of North Macedonia is an important symbol of greater ownership of the process by the region”. (Western Balkans Summit Poznań. Chair's conclusions). The decision was also highly welcomed by the local politicians. Nikola Dimitrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of N. Macedonia stated that: "Holding a bilateral presidency over the Berlin Process is very important to the process itself and particularly vital to the proximity between these nations within the Western Balkans, and it provides the green light and motivation to expand the collaboration on to other platforms", while his colleague, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria Ekaterina Zakhariyeva, explained that five years ago it was

completely impossible for these two countries to fathom that their relations will be developed this intensely. (European Western Balkans, 4.7.2019.)

The jointly organized summit in Sofia, in the end, complemented the regional cooperation greatly, as, especially, can be seen through the fact that The Leaders of the WB agreed on the Declaration on Common Regional Market (EWB, 10.11.2020.), welcomed the Guidelines for the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, supported the initiative for signing a Regional Agreement for free movement with ID cards as an opportunity for a closer and better-connected region, supported the regional response to COVID-19 challenges by commending the decision of the Co-Chairs to organize for the first time in the framework of the Berlin Process a meeting of Ministers of Health, which took place in Skopje on October 22, 2020 (Chair's Conclusions Sofia 2020.) and committed themselves to duly and efficiently establish roaming-free region by 1 July 2021. (Chair's Conclusions Sofia 2020.)

However – in contrast to the previous years, the Chair's Conclusions from Sofia Summit is the first official document that does not meet an issue of bilateral disputes resolvment as a separate section, nor it contributes to it with a single novelty, or reference to the previously accomplished. Furthermore, it was only a several days after this jointly organized summit that, while Zoran Zaev was receiving a human rights award from German foreign minister, Heiko Maas, Bulgarian government announced it would veto North Macedonia's opening talks on accession to the EU. As Buldioski states, Bulgaria's veto reflects the asymmetry of power between EU member states and candidate countries. The irony is that, in this case, the imbalance has helped amplify the kind of hatred between nations that European integration was designed to end. (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2.12.2020.) As the director of KAS office in Bosnia, Sven Petke states, while bearing in mind the successes of the Berlin Process that contributed to more normal living of people in the Western Balkans, such as establishment of roaming-free zone in the region, it is the latest case with Bulgaria that must be seen as a defeat and a huge miss of this initiative.¹

The next section will observe more closely omissions which contributed to uncomplete fulfillment of its goals.

¹ Interview with director of the KAS Office in BiH, Mr. Sven Petke, was conducted for the purpose of the thesis, on 2.06.2021., in Sarajevo.

7.3 Critique of the Berlin Process

This section's aim is to, while consulting the existing literature dedicated to the Berlin Process, single out the factors that prevented this German foreign policy initiative from succeeding completely in reaching its goals in the area of disputes resolvment and regional cooperation, specifically. So far, the shortcomings of the process are:

- absence of the coherent governing architecture / structure;
- absence of the steering and monitoring mechanism or tools;
- an underdeveloped aspect of communications;
- lack of focus on the topic of reconciliation;
- as a result of the above appears: the lack of visibility, effectiveness and efficiency.

1. Absence of the coherent governing structure

"The Berlin Process is not a process that is well structured. It has no steering mechanism and no institutional framework. It is, in fact, a very loose process, which is both its strength and its weakness – a weakness because each chairmanship defines its own priorities for its yearly summit. Past priorities are sometimes included, new elements are sometimes added, others just get forgotten along the way. There is not enough continuity in terms of priority setting, I would say. For example, when Austria chaired the Berlin Process in 2015, they pushed for the adoption of a declaration on regional co-operation and good neighbourly relations. The idea was that we need to work on bilateral issues in the framework of the Berlin Process. This priority has lost ground in the past few years, and it is not among Poland's highest priorities for this year's summit." (New Eastern Europe, 2019.) These are the words of Florent Marciacq, from his 2019. interview. The same author has in his 2017. publication with focus on EU and WB relations after the Berlin Process been critical towards this aspect of the process, especially towards its limited ability to ensure continuity across its expanding portfolios, which is the result of the fact that - depending on their national interest- individual member states hosting

the summits are free to focus on one dimension or another and add or retrieve components from the agenda.

The BIEPAG experts in the publication 'The future of the Berlin Process' also state that selection of annual topics seemed rather as an ad hoc exercise than part of the carefully tailored strategy. As a consequence of vaguely defined goals of the process, WB governments were at liberty to manipulate perceptions of achieved results in communication with other stakeholders and general public. (2017:3)

Furthermore, they claim that the structure of the Berlin process needs to be modified in order to provide additional top –down pressure to the countries involved and to make it more effective. It would be important to institutionalize the process even further, setting tangible annual milestones to be achieved. In this regard it is crucial to set concrete obligations for the countries involved, beyond the adoption of declarative commitments. The implementation of agreed responsibilities should be regularly monitored throughout the year, and assessed at the Summit, with the possibility to publicly name and shame governments that are lagging behind in implementation (2017:3) - which all together requires a clearly defined structure.

Of course, this flexible structure of the Berlin Process has contributed to its numerous achievements mentioned in the previous section, and deserved to be retained in some measure, however calling out for the elements within this structure that would enable transparency in preparations, monitoring of results, and clearer distribution of responsibilities by the authors is completely justifiable. Unfortunately, years later, we are witnessing that most of them did not bear fruit.

In the continuation, the shortcomings such as absence of structured communications or monitoring mechanism could also be seen as a result of the missing architecture, however, they will be explained separately for the clarification.

2. Absence of the monitoring mechanism/ tools

As mentioned by the experts in the previous part, one of the biggest weaknesses of the Berlin Process is the fact that it is not equipped with a built-in steering and monitoring mechanism. The Member States hosting the yearly summits are expected to follow-up on the progress made by WB6 countries in respecting their commitments, but, in practice, no systematic approach is

foreseen. Therefore, in seeking to achieve “additional real progress,” the Berlin Process largely relies on the voluntarily engagement of WB6 leaders (while capitalizing on the EU’s conditionality approach). The absence of internal monitoring mechanism is barely compensated by external assessments. (Marciack, 2017:8)

CSF Policy brief concentrating on the legacy issues in the Western Balkans claims that the contribution of interested parties in resolving disputes and securing wider societal support for the suggested resolution and compromise is weakened by the lack of publicly available monitoring and reporting tools on both national and regional level. (Marović, 2018:5) The same policy brief claims that such a mechanism should exist at the ministerial level, especially if taken into consideration the already existing tendency of politicizing of conflicts. These disputes are extremely sensitive since they often dig into the very foundation of statehood and identity of the Western Balkan countries. That is why disputes are an easy target for politicizing. (Marović, 2018:4)

The decision not to establish the monitoring mechanism was to a certain extent, motivated by the fact that the process itself has an informal nature, which did not build upon the traditional structured-based cooperation and did not aim to add additional burden to WB6. Nevertheless, authors as Madhi highlighted the need to reconceptualize and invigorate the format of this process as well as to create new synergies to avoid the risk of falling short into usual lofty declarations of high ambitions and non-committal summits, as well as to avoid the pitfalls that EU enlargement policy has been suffering from: slow reactivity and little delivery on the undertaken commitments by the countries of the region. (Madhi, 2018.)

3. An underdeveloped aspect of communications

The publication 'Stocktaking of the Berlin Process' demonstrated that the communications of the Berlin Process have not been carried out in a way that would contribute to attainment and sustainability of the projected results. One of its contributors, Ana Marjanović Rudan, in a separate occasion explained why should it matter: because the way in which the various projects and initiatives within the Berlin Process are communicated has bearing on its projected results. Communications are more than occasional PR stunts – they are instruments that we can use to attain strategic goals. In a case of the Berlin Process this is of a special importance, since, as

Rudan states, its future results will depend on the existence of political and social pre-conditions. (European Western Balkans, 2017.)

The last statement sounds logical, but the author offers two examples that illustrate the specificity of the Berlin process in this context: (a) the “Europeanization” of the region, as one of the Berlin Process’s planned outcomes, will largely depend on the attitudes of regional policy influencers towards the matters that cause ambivalence in public opinion, such as neighborly relations; (b) at the level of outputs – implementation of projects from the connectivity agenda often requires “soft” measures (legislative and administrative) that cannot be put in place without the political will of policy-makers; their political will is, in turn, under influence of interest groups, civil society, media and wider public – who would all first need to understand what the highly technical projects are about, so to be able to support the “soft measures” needed for their realization. In brief, to achieve and sustain the results, the Berlin Process would benefit from carefully designed and more intensive communications. Nevertheless, in the absence of a coordinating structure of the Berlin Process, strategic planning and management of communications remain nobody’s business, and fragmented, random and inefficient outreach and visibility actions prevail. As an important tool to achieve strategic goals, by addressing and affecting those crucial for their realization – communications remain unused. (European Western Balkans, 5.7.2017.)

The 'Stocktaking of the Berlin Process' publication and its brief content analysis in the field of communications demonstrated also that the communication of the projects and initiatives stemming from the Berlin Process failed to either directly associate them with the Process (except when they were reported on within the context of the high-level meetings) or to explain the projects’ and initiatives’ relevance to the region’s Europeanization and to promotion of regional cooperation. (Rudan and Drajić, 2017) - which depends on the efforts of the implementers rather than on media interest, as proven by the example of RYCO.

Once again, the authors of the publication, while answering on the question 'have the Berlin Process events, projects and initiatives been adequately shaped, timed and targeted, so as to provide support to the overarching Process goals?' - suggest that the answer is negative. According to them, this is the case because it lacks strategically targeted, articulated and effective messages, and planned and well-positioned content. Although this assessment pertains to media-related communications, it is safe to assume that, in the absence of research and debate about the Berlin process, other communication channels (such as panel discussions, round

tables, preparation and dissemination of semi-academic and academic publications, face-to-face meetings with key policy influencers and many others) remain underused as well. (Rudan and Drajić, 2017.)

4. Lack of focus on the topic of reconciliation

Reconciliation, as a process of restoring peaceful and friendly relations, is the basis of regional security and a guarantor of the sustainability of regional cooperation - which is why it was indicated in Berlin as one of the four goals of the process. However, due to the prevailing “apoliticality” of the Berlin Process, the issue of reconciliation has not been a separate theme of top-level meetings so far. This is odd, since its significance has been highlighted each year in official documents. (Rudan, 2017:7)

That is why the group of authors joined the strengths in publishing the 'Reconciliation through the Berlin Process: The role of RECOM', which, besides proposing that this intergovernmental commission becomes established at the summit in 2018, also points out on the danger of avoiding to properly meet the topic of reconciliation within such framework. As they state, the Berlin Process has brought new energy to regional cooperation, given it a strong incentive and launched concrete initiatives. However, no progress whatsoever has taken place with reconciliation, as a consequence of which space remains for the revival of tensions that jeopardize cooperation in the region and its Europeanization. (Kandić, 2017:5)

Because of this, as they mention, prior to the Berlin Process Summit in Trieste in July 2017, 50,000 citizens of Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Pristina, Belgrade and Zagreb, supported with their signatures the proposal of the Coalition for RECOM that the Berlin Process, as politically the most important forum for regional cooperation, should be the platform within which this intergovernmental commission will be established. (Kandić, 2017:5)

Besides the precise moves that should serve as impetus for involving this question into agendas of the official summits, authors also highlight the importance of doing so, by leaning on something that this work has already tackled within its theoretical framework. As Novaković points out, the EU influence and integration prospect have helped the Europeanized elites gain influence and make some progress in reforms and stabilization in some of the countries; however, resilience is still glaringly present, primarily within nationalist circles. Since 2008 and the outbreak of the global economic crisis, the massive withdrawal of Western capital from

these countries, with the constant lack of new investment, has opened the door to poverty and the lack of prospects, and then to institutional deterioration and falling standards in almost every aspect of the functioning of these societies. The majority of the countries in the region have become “stabilitocracies”, as Professor Florian Bieber has called them - where the fundamental potential for strengthening deep and long-term “resistance” is small. And stabilitocracies feed on, among other things, prejudices towards the other, which is one of the mechanisms for the preservation of power. (Novaković, 2017:10)

Novaković furtherly suggests that the only measure that can counter this prospect is the opening of a joint political process of “reconciliation” between the “Western Balkan Six”, in which Croatia, regardless of its EU membership, should certainly participate. This process should accompany the pre-accession processes and regional initiatives such as the Berlin Process and even become an inseparable part of them. (2017:11)

Minić also highlights that establishing the facts about war crimes and human rights violations during the 1990s wars - would alleviate the danger of manipulation by the proponents of different interpretations becoming the source of new tensions. As things stand today, the lack of intergovernmental agreement on these facts remains an unspoken threat to any kind of cooperation, and it also brings into question the long-term effects of the infrastructure and other economic projects initiated within the framework of the Berlin Process. (Minić, 2017:14)

Rudan tried to highlight the similar danger by emphasizing that experts from the region and the European Union rightly warn that the attention being mainly focused on the development of infrastructure and economy (for which there are also challenges when it comes to financing) does not automatically lead to the improvement of security, the rule of law, the solution of bilateral issues and reconciliation, which represent the fundamental problems of the region, and that it was naive to expect that it would. (Rudan, 2017:7)

7.4 Resume and reflections on the second part

The third auxiliary hypothesis of this work states that the overall goals for the Berlin Process set in the first Berlin Summit provided a successful boost for the regional cooperation among plethora of actors. All the above listed ventures and achievements of the initiative confirm that

this is one comprehensive platform for the regional cooperation, whose importance and potential was furtherly confirmed by its extension beyond the planned deadline.

However, while many developments were the bright side of cooperation in the region, they did not stop regional leaders from stoking nationalist tensions and pouring fuel onto the fires of bilateral disputes, primarily for domestic political gain. This means that the Berlin Process did not manage to acknowledge or affect something that theoretical part of this work presented – the Western Balkan political leaders have adapted to the challenge of maintaining external support while benefiting from slow political transformation, and above all – they remain able to survive in power by igniting and abusing the existing disputes whenever the local conditions suggest it might be an option to escape the other issues.

In this context, the conditions produced by Berlin Process did not differentiate much from the conditions produced by EU accession process of these countries. Such a situation is, partly, caused by the fact that this process suffers from a lack of a precise governing structure, and in particular from a lack of oversight mechanisms.

Due to the above, it is difficult to shake off the impression that in fact - the implementation of this foreign policy initiative is not understood as an integral part of the whole process and that is its biggest disadvantage.

The third part

8. GERMAN POLITICAL FOUNDATIONS

" There is a consensus common to BMZ officials and to the foundations that the state alone is unable to fulfil all the tasks of development and foreign policies." (Dakowska, 2005:3)

Therefore, the German political foundations develop policy ideas and contribute to agenda-setting as well as to the implementation of foreign and development policies, and, as Mohr would describe them, are both - an integral part of German foreign policy, on the one hand, and independent actors with distinct international profiles, on the other hand. (Mohr, 2010)

Not surprisingly then - from clarifying the German role in the Kosovo – Serbia dialogue, to supporting the Berlin Process – the role of German political foundations, sometimes subtle and sometimes profound (as in case of organizing the civil society within the Berlin Process), will take a solid part of this work.

However, the political foundations are peculiar research objects in political science. (Dakowska, 2005:1) For this reason or another, the literature available on the international work of the German foundations is rather limited, while their role in the Western Balkans, despite their strong and long-term presence remains almost completely uncovered.

This work, led by that recognition, and by a wish to discuss not only formal foreign policy initiatives but also certain specific mechanisms complementing them, will offer a brief overview of the efforts of the two major German political foundations in the two above observed German aimings at enhancing cooperation and disputes resolvment. Therefore, Konrad Adenauer Foundation and Friedrich Ebert Foundation's contribution will be listed out, shortly after consulting the existing literature on the factors contributing to their productive acting. From the aspect of the foreign policy analysis, this part is also important, since by doing so, this work will also create a certain contribution on what enables these foundations to be the major actors of German soft power.

8.1 Factors enabling the transnational success of the German political foundations

Before concentrating on their endeavors in the Western Balkans, this work leans on works analyzing foundations' contributions in several different fields and different parts of the world, while attempting to single out specific factors useful in the context of our research, too.

The fact that literature tackling the way of working and means for success of German political foundations is still modest is also recognized by Adick and Giesman, authors who made a contribution on the relevance of the German political foundations for comparative educational research. Their research is helpful in the context of this work, too, since it also relies on authors concerned with foundations' success in political arena.

Therefore, they cite Bartsch's description of the German political foundations' ways of acting from 2001. as “linking the worlds of foreign policy and transnationalism”. (2015:13) As they state, this view stresses the fact that whereas governmental activities are bound to the official foreign policy and restricted to instruments of political diplomacy, these foundations complement the state’s foreign policy goals, as they have access to the state as well as the non-state actors in their international activities. (2015:13) In other words, German political foundations play the role of ‘parallel’ embassies, which are more flexible than accredited diplomats. They build networks across the world, involving political parties and their organisations, trade unions, professional associations and NGOs. Thus they may be conceptualized as ‘go-betweens’ between these different groups.

While previously said explains the foundations' advantages in contrast to the formal diplomatic representations, Adick and Giesman also lean on Loaeza's research in order to highlight supremacy of foundations compared to some other actors, such as think tanks or NGOs. As they state, her work with focus on KAS's contribution to democracy promotion in Mexico stresses – among other findings – the high potential of the broad range of activities of the political foundations such as seminars, consultations, speeches, trainings, debates, expertise, publications, special leadership programs and other means of promoting civic education stressing that leadership programs "may be their most powerful instrument of influence". In this context, they are superior when compared with other transnational NGOs, because their goal is institution-building whereas, for instance, the goal of think-tanks may be purely scholarly research and academic debate and policy-making; while human rights institutions are more interested in non-institutional ends, organizing civil society groups or mobilizations. There is also an important difference between think-tanks and human rights groups and political foundations, in that their networking with local actors targets economic, academic, and political elites; think-tanks have more restricted targets – mainly the academic community or business and governments; while human rights organizations work with the wider social groups. (2015:16)

Furthermore, the fact that they are exceptional in the amount of resources they possess is also a factor contributing to the success of their efforts and a differentiating feature in contrast to other foundations or organisations.

Complementary explanations are also offered by professor Dorota Dokowska. As she states, in some cases, foundations’ activity may be compared to a ‘second track diplomacy’. The

regular and continuous dialogue carried out by foundations allows German representatives to enter the local political stage, of which they often have a much better knowledge than professional diplomats. (2005:7) For German MPs, foundations are important platforms facilitating access to virtually the whole political scene of the partner country. In foundations' international activity, two kinds of resources serve the party directly: information and the capital of trust. Thus, as we could already see through the work so far, foundations could be considered as agents for reduction of uncertainty and divergence. (2005:11) On the other side, as Marzo (who wrote about foundations' role in providing secure platforms for political debate in Tunisia) states, the foundations are increasingly perceived as 'domestic actors' involved in national politics and sharing the real concern of domestic groups. (Marzo, 2019:6)

Since Dokowska bases her several researches on the contribution of German foundations to the enhancement the EU accession path of CEE countries, they are followed by examples of what these strengths meant in practice. As she states the Enlargement Forums organized by the KAS in Berlin are a good example of networking practice: they gather political leaders from CEEC together with EPP representatives, but also important representatives of the European Commission, and other institutions concerned with the Eastern enlargement. Thus, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung became a kind of arena for socialization for the candidate countries' political and administrative elites. (2002:289)

It may be said that in contacts with partners from CEEC in the 1990s, the German political foundations formed an essential part of the expertise and network building on behalf of the European party federations. Networking was not only the message, but also the means of the teaching process. Numerous seminars and research delegations influenced not only the know-how and professionalism but also, indirectly, the domestic legitimacy of Central European political elites. (2002:289)

Based on the above written example, Dokowska explains that German political foundations may be considered - according to the sociological-institutionalist perspective - as 'norm entrepreneurs', which persuade their partners to redefine their identities and interests by engaging in a social learning process. Thus, in the example of CEEC, German political foundations may be considered as intermediaries in the transfer of a political consultative culture between the EU parties and the CEEC ones (2002:288) – in which they would be free and able to use the argument of conditionality, also.

8.2 Konrad Adenauer Foundation and Friedrich Ebert Foundation: common efforts in complementing initiatives in the Western Balkans

"Regional cooperation shall also include the civil society level" was stated in the Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans, in Berlin, in August 2014.

It is exactly in this point that the common efforts of the major German political foundations flourished and, practically, brought to life one whole segment of the Berlin Process.

According to Krisela and Ardian Hackaj the three major German political foundations - FES, HSS and KAS - have been the biggest and most committed supporters of CSO regional cooperation efforts in the framework of Berlin Process since 2014. (2018:42) However, due to their presence in the Western Balkans directly, we will, in the coming sections, focus on FES and KAS specifically.

So, even prior to the official beginning of the Civil Society Forums, it was by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, under the strong impulsion of Austrian Presidency, that started the consultation process between the civil society actors before the end of 2014 – through the series of meeting across all WB6. After that, FES has been one of the main co-organizers of the Vienna CSO Summit, as well as in the summits of the following years.

However, one of the biggest contributions of the joint strengths of FES and KAS in this context can be seen in what their partnerships with domestic WB organizations have produced.

Namely, the best example, among others, is their support of the programs of the Cooperation and Development Institute from Albania, which resulted with the long-term programs such as Tirana Connectivity Forums and Berlin Process Series.

Tirana Connectivity Forum (TCF) is the only such event covering connectivity, reforms and enlargement in the South Eastern Europe region. Yearly TCF and the accompanying report has become the event of reference for: taking stock of the progress, challenges and next benchmarks of the connectivity initiatives in Western Balkans; bringing in and developing innovative ideas and analysis on enlargement, reforms, convergence and how they interact with Connectivity; creating a critical mass of knowledge on Berlin Process, connectivity and regional cooperation – and hold and transmit it from one Summit to the next. The event has become an annual

benchmark for experts, researchers, academicians, CSO, WB Summit coordinators and other policy-makers involved in EU Enlargement in WB6.

“Berlin Process Series” is another initiative started by CDI in November 2015, in Tirana, and is supported by Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Konrad Adenauer Foundation and Hanns Seidel Foundation. The initiative encompasses: research on the Berlin Process and its priority areas, yearly Monitoring Reports on advancement of Albania in BP agenda on issues such as youth, migration and connectivity and annual conference “Albania in the Berlin process”, followed by the conference proceedings.

It was both of these programs that provided a great amount of knowledge that was used in the creating the second part of the work, as much as it also serves as a source of informations to the regional KAS and FES offices.

8.3 Konrad Adenauer Foundation's regional offices and contributions to the initiatives

The Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the one close to the Christian Democratic Union of Germany, opened its first Western Balkans office in 1997., in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Until the end of 2000, this Representation was substantively and organizationally responsible for the activities of the Foundation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro. Since 2001, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation Representation in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been responsible exclusively for project activities in BiH and, together with numerous domestic and international partner organizations in the region, designs and coordinates its programs in accordance with the needs and requirements of the BiH public - with some of the most important goals being the country's integration into the EU and overcoming the past and reconciliation.

The office in BiH proved the capacity and importance of foundations in complementing the initiatives of the German chancellor in 2014. when, the German-British initiative (which later became the Reform Agenda) was created in order to support the reforms in BiH. Approximately one-fifth of all KAS events throughout two years since the adoption of the British-German initiative, have been events on the reform agenda (Hrvatski Medijski Servis, 18.5.2017) – as stated by the office's director from that time during one interview.

On the other side, devotion to Berlin Process is not that explicit in the activities of the KAS office in BiH. Rather – as its director, Mr. Sven Petke, emphasizes, the support to the Process is provided by a constant focus on the topics and themes that are highly needed to its success. As the insight into the web archive of the KAS office in BiH shows, the mentioned topics are regularly covered through educational and informative events. KAS's conference on the Western Balkans (2016), annual conferences on the BiH and EU integrations with special emphasis to the challenges of integration and regional cooperation, Dialogue on a common European future for young people from Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, BiH, Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo (2015), Overcoming the past in the context of EU integration (2014.), as well as participation in one publication on the outcomes of the Western Balkans Summit held within the Berlin Process in Paris in 2016. – are the most explicit contributions.

Similarly, KAS's office in North Macedonia covers the topics of the Berlin Process without much reference to the process itself. In the period from 2014. to 2020. its web archive promoted the organized seminars such as: 'The future of the European Union and the Western Balkans', the international one called 'Strengthening dialogues in South-Eastern Europe through the EU integration process, 'Building Bridges Towards a Common Future - The Western Balkans on its Path Towards the European Union' and the panel discussion on the 'Role of the civil society in EU and NATO integration processes' – attended by ministers of defence of both, Germany and Macedonia. We mustn't also forget that Macedonia was in specific focus within Berlin Process due to its bilateral dispute with Greece. KAS office in this state dedicated its efforts to the support for resolving the name issue. As it's visible in their web archive, its former director, Dr. Hans-Gert Pöttering, was stressing out the necessities set out by the German presidency during the first summit of the Western Balkans - necessity of an inclusive dialogue within society, taking into account all relevant groups of civil society and political forces in the country. Such messages were conveyed during his talks with Macedonian ministers, as well as the fact that KAS supports meetings between representatives of Macedonia and Greece on different levels.

In contrast to the previously mentioned offices in the region, the KAS office for Serbia and Montenegro, and the one for Kosovo, had a special task in focus within the observed period. This is, of course, what the first part of the paper focuses on - the contribution to resolving the

dispute between Belgrade and Prishtina in the context of EU integration, and with special reference to the role of Germany and its actors.

While in that specific part, the role of foundations, especially in Serbia, is already emphasized, whether through their explicative roles on the demands coming from the German side, or their contribution to the German's side understanding of the local situation – here we're focusing more on their promotion of own actions and events through official channels, as was the case with the offices in BiH, Macedonia and Albania.

In that manner, the KAS office for Serbia and Montenegro enabled its scholarship holders to learn about the concrete steps in the EU integration of Serbia and Berlin's vision in that context, through the talks with Gunther Krichbaum, Chairman of the EU Affairs Committee in the German Parliament and member of the CDU / CSU Faction in the German Parliament. Since the seminar was held in 2012. – a special focus was put on the expectations from the Republic of Serbia for the start of EU accession negotiations, especially regarding the needed steps in tackling the dispute with Kosovo. The similar event titled "Belgrade and Pristina: What does normalization of relations mean in practice?" was held in 2013. and again it was organized for KAS's scholarship holders. Here we should make a special reference, even though it seems it doesn't directly influence the topic of disputes resolvment and enhancement of regional cooperation, but it says a few more words about the KAS's soft power. Namely, the broad network of their scholarship holders enables them to include more 'leaders of tomorrow' as Dakowska says, into the current issues which, as we could already see, often include the challenges of EU integration for the WB states. As Petke states, that is something that differs KAS from FES and creates an additional interest for their work.

Furthermore, the office for Serbia and Montenegro also served in clarifying the requests of the Bundestag's most strict faction (in terms of dealing with Kosovo-Serbia dispute) – both in their relations with media (especially during the official visits of the CDU/CSU members) as well as through own web channels, where clarifications on the importance of Bundestag's faction regarding further EU integrations are made. This office explained the role of the Bundestag not only during official visits, but also at separate trainings, such as the one in 2012, entitled "Montenegro and the European Union - The role and tasks of parliament in the process of European integration". On this occasion, Hans-Joachim Falenski, longtime and influential advisor for foreign and security policy and European affairs in the parliamentary club of the ruling CDU / CSU coalition in the Federal Parliament of Germany, explained to the members

of the Parliament the importance of the Bundestag in the decision-making process. This, again, is not something that is necessarily directly linked to the topic of disputes resolution and enhancement of regional cooperation, but can and should serve as an additional arena for region's deepening ties with Berlin, and therefore as an additional source of pressure, or interest or knowledge about why and how to make progress in these areas. Therefore, this work stands on a position that foundations located in the region must address much greater efforts in explaining the Bundestag's role, in each country, since, besides mentioned efforts by the KAS office for Serbia and Montenegro, similar examples are not easy to find in other states.

When it comes to the Berlin Process, this office had several activities dedicated to its promotion and enhancement. Diplomatic meetings in Novi Sad (including experts from various fields) with a focus on the achievements of the Berlin Process and its challenges (organized in 2017.) and an International youth conference in Budva on the topic of the European perspective of the Western Balkans within the Berlin Process and RYCO (organized in 2018.) would be among the most important ones – especially regarding the fact that both concentrated on including the representatives from different spheres.

Also, this office, in contrast to other ones, served as a great provider of informations about the activities dedicated to Berlin Process that were organized in Berlin or elsewhere, such as Western Balkans discussion forums in Berlin organized by KAS at the level of the Berlin-based ambassadors (that in 2017. served as run-up sessions and enabled ambassadors to bring in the perspectives and expectations of their governments in the Berlin Process). Namely, these KAS conferences are held each year with an aim to offer a platform for an open and confidential dialogue between high-ranking political decision-makers from the Bundestag, the European Parliament and the federal government on the one hand, and representatives of the diplomatic corps on the other – usually on the topics related to the enlargement policy and the German role in it.

As already mentioned, KAS's office in Kosovo is another one expected to dedicate its efforts in dealing the most complicated bilateral dispute in the Western Balkans. And it did, however, in a slightly different manner than the office for Serbia and Montenegro, since it was preoccupied mostly with promoting and producing policies and studies on this issue, and we can say that the web archive of KAS's Kosovo office is an oasis for understanding different perceptions, roles and challenges in this issue. KAS started with their Kosovo Policy Briefs

from the beginning of the dialogue, and each one published in the period between 2011. and 2013. tackles, at least slightly, the role of Berlin. Importantly, Kosovo Policy Briefs continuously cover the situation –so evidently, KAS was equally dedicated to analyzing the situation when, for example, the first results of the dialogue emerged and they published their 'Brussels First Agreement -A year after' and when there wasn't much going around, as for example in 2020. when they focused on citizens' perceptions and published 'International Politics and Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue: Perceptions of Kosovo Citizens'.

On the other side, publications with focus on the Berlin Process were obviously not an imperative, even though the only one published by this office claims that Kosovo, from across the entire region, is the most interested that the process started in Berlin continues.² This publication, titled "Commitments from the Berlin Process on Rule of Law and Good Governance: Preparation for agenda Berlin Plus", however, successfully points out the most powerful chance that was given to Kosovo within the Berlin Process – and that is being equal to the other countries in the process (which, due to the fact it is still not recognized by several EU countries, is not usually a case) and calls out the new government of Kosovo for a stronger impetus in these terms.

When it comes to the KAS Office in Albania – it participates, in different ways, in the widest range of activities related to the Berlin process – in contrast to all the other states of the WB. Its web archives, also, offer the most comprehensive overview of such efforts, and it is all because of the KAS's long-term support to the Cooperation and Development Institute's programs, whose continuous contributions are already explained in the sub-section above.

8.4 Friedrich Ebert Foundation's efforts in the Western Balkans

In the case of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) - the oldest German political foundation and the one related to the work of SPD - following the contributions in complementing the state's observed initiatives in the Western Balkans gets easier. Namely, after more than two decades

² <https://www.kas.de/documents/286052/0/Policy+brief+19-12-03+Berlin+Process++ENG.pdf/9545fc63-30d8-05bd-c694-cc8ca23b37b8?version=1.0&t=1580217413728>

of engagement in southeastern Europe, the FES recognized that the challenges and problems still facing this region can best be resolved through a shared regional framework. Therefore, their commitment to advancing the common interests of the region and Germany, through the means of regional cooperation, in 2015., has become strengthened by establishing an infrastructure to coordinate the FES' regional work out of Sarajevo: the Regional Dialogue Southeast Europe (Dialogue SOE).

In these endeavors, Dialogue SOE provides analysis of shared challenges in the region and develops suitable regional programs and activities in cooperation with the respective FES offices, but also by integrating the regional work into joint initiatives with colleagues in Berlin and Brussels.

These activities, throughout the years, included the support for the Berlin Process in the most various forms.

The Western Balkans Reflection Forum initiative was launched in 2015 in order to advance a strategic, inclusive and policy-oriented reflection on the relations between the EU, its member states and the countries of the Western Balkans. It builds on an extensive network of EU and non-EU experts, academic researchers and think-tankers.

By supporting, organizing and hosting Western Balkans Reflection Forums, FES participated in creating arenas for discussing the role of the Berlin Process in several occasions and in different areas. So, for example, the forum organized in Zagreb in 2019. raised the questions about the future of the EU enlargement and the possible contributions of the BP in its newest challenges. As insight into FES SOE web archives shows, this was also an opportunity for the lively debate on how to evolve the Berlin Process.

This forum in Zagreb just a continuation of what FES was doing in earlier years, for example with Reflection Forums from 2017. called "After 2016 - Perspectives for the Balkans in the EU?" that discussed achievements of the Berlin Process until that moment, while aiming to put forward fresh ideas for the way, and the one titled "A Region in Europe – The Future of the Berlin Process and EU Integration in the Western Balkans" that provided assessment of both the Berlin Process as well as the enlargement process in an expert debate consisting of civil society representatives, policy makers, diplomats, and academics.

Similar support by FES was also directed towards Balkan Integration Forums through the years, while also promoting their conclusions (which often tackled the Berlin Process topics and provided public support for their implementation).

Probably the most important in this context is the support of FES provided to the Civil Society Forums, and while such role is already mentioned for the forums organized during the official summit days, FES Dialogue SOE has largely contributed to the organization and promotion of the interim Civil Society Forums in the Western Balkans – with the aim to analyze its strengths and weaknesses and to provide the recommendations for the future of the process.

So, for example, the Civil Society Forum organized in Tirana in 2017. saw over a hundred participants and vibrant panel discussions based on position papers on the topics of youth cooperation, rule of law, business environment and innovation, as well as bilateral issues. The aim was to jointly formulate recommendations within these subcategories to create a basis for the Western Balkans summit in July 2017, which took the place in Trieste.

Furthermore, establishing these channels of communication between civil society and leading politicians is one of the main concerns of the Dialogue SOE. Therefore, for example, the forum in Skopje in 2018. brought together high-level guests from Macedonia and the region to reflect on the regional dynamics. It was an opportunity for the genuine engagement of not only CSO-representatives from the whole region, but also Macedonian Prime Minister, Zoran Zaev, and the Foreign Minister, Nikola Dimitrov.

Besides providing the space for this type of socialization, FES Dialogue SOE, through their regular publications highlighted the necessity and importance of such approach. So, for example, their briefing on regional cooperation in the WB from 2017. , when discussing civil society forums , explains that 'a multitude of regional civil society networks foster a common culture and sense of belonging based on common goals and interests. These networks' regional cooperation initiatives ought to converge with government-led regional cooperation initiatives. The aim should not be to synergize the efforts but rather to strengthen the sustainability of regional cooperation and to ensure that the effects are felt in everyday life.' (Taleski, 2017:16)

Furthermore, in the absence of the continuous assessment of the Berlin Process, we mustn't forget that other publications by FES Dialogue SOE often served as a highly welcome contributions, especially those that integrated the BP's achievements into broader pictures, such as Marciacq's " Reviving Solidarity: A New Regional Approach to Integrating the Western Balkans into a

Stronger European Union" from 2019. (which celebrates the success of the Berlin Process in the context of evoking and emphasizing solidarity and calls out for more emphasis on them within the formal accession process) and his "The EU and the Western Balkans after the Berlin Process: Reflecting on the EU Enlargement in Times of Uncertainty from 2017. Here, we must add the regular policy briefings published by FES SOE, which, from time to time, discussed these topics, or were fully dedicated to them, such as the briefing from spring 2017. – "Political Trends & Dynamics in Southeast Europe Regional Cooperation in the Western Balkans".

Besides spreading the knowledge about it or providing the arenas for socialization and discussions on Berlin Process, FES SOE also stresses its role in supporting and furtherly developing the 'products' or outcomes of the Berlin Process. In this case, it is mostly about RYCO. As insight into their web archives shows, FES worked with RYCO on communicating together with the crucial messages and concerns and helping the youth of both Western Balkans and the more comprehensive, Southeast European region, find their voice. It's also stated that, in this process, the capacities of civil society organizations have been advanced, as have skills to organize, influence, and push political messages.

Even though the archives of FES SOE Dialogue serve as an almost comprehensive space for learning about activities taken in the context of the Berlin Process on the regional level, such content is almost completely absent from archives on their single state offices' pages. They, also should serve as platforms for greater visibility and promotion of these continuous efforts.

8.5 Resume and reflections on the third part

The auxiliary hypothesis in the context of the third part stated that the educational, promoting and networking activities of KAS and FES successfully complement Germany's initiatives towards the Western Balkans. The above listed activities allow us to confirm it as correct, as well as to conclude that while doing so, foundations lean on: their extraordinary resources, flexibility, proximity to the wide range of local actors, continuous presence, and often act as a domestic actor, while, of course, they lean on the legitimacy of the German political system. Importantly, while the two observed foundations nurture different political ideals in their core, and therefore concentrate mostly on the topics that would promote and enhance such interests

in the Western Balkans – they still, in joint efforts, successfully complement the official attitudes and plans of the German Government in this region.

As Nye states, countries need the soft power, or in other words - the ability to shape long-term attitudes and preferences of others. The soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority). (Foreign Policy, 29.4.2013.) It is also the long-term presence of these foundations in the WB countries, that while projecting the mentioned resources, enables them for being such a successful complementors of the formal initiatives.

The only slightly bigger omission made by foundations in this context is, for example, not trying to more precisely cover the shortcomings of the Berlin Process – its lack of strategic communications ('to the outside world') or lack of the monitoring tools. Even if there are efforts directed towards these issues, as we could see, offices in several countries still miss to use all the mentioned factors to enhance a wider societal recognition of the Berlin Process.

9. CONCLUSION

Since each of the three sections in the work has its own brief concluding remark, in the overall conclusion we are going to concentrate and reflect on the goals set for the work as a whole, mostly.

However, prior to that, it should be put out, once again, that the general answer to the work's research question, stating that 'German political initiatives and the work of German political foundations in the Western Balkan countries in the period of 2009-2020. have significantly contributed to political stabilization and regional cooperation in the Western Balkans' must be confirmed as correct. The accuracy of this hypothesis was first checked through the German acting in the case of the WB's most complicated dispute, the one between Kosovo and Serbia. The auxiliary hypothesis stating that Germany successfully uses its leverage in EU enlargement process as a foreign policy instrument to advance the resolution of bilateral disputes between the Western Balkan states was confirmed as correct in the observed case – but work also pointed out the factors that prevent this approach from fully bearing fruit. However,

among the factors that certainly contributed to German tendency for maximizing its EU enlargement leverage in the Kosovo-Serbia case are, as we could see, its domestic constraints – primarily the power of Bundestag in these manners. Therefore, the second auxiliary hypothesis is also accepted as correct. When it comes to the Berlin Process, auxiliary hypothesis claiming that the overall goals set for the process during the first Berlin Summit provided successful boost for the regional cooperation among plethora of actors (which is necessary for its sustainability and dispute resolution) should be accepted as correct after seeing in the overview that each year after this Merkel's initiation respected the comprehensiveness of the Process. However, the hypothesis stating that the interest of the Western Balkans political leaders for resolving disputes is weakened by the absence of governing structure in the Berlin Process should be partially accepted as correct when taking into the consideration the enormously high level of politization of the disputes in the region. Lastly, the fifth auxiliary hypothesis stating that the educational, networking and promotional activities of Konrad Adenauer Foundation and Friedrich Ebert Foundation successfully complement the formal state's initiatives has to be confirmed as correct – even though the work highlighted the spaces where the work of foundations should be even more directed towards distinct promotion of the initiative in contrast to working on topics close to it through isolated events, as is often the case.

Now, we should reflect on how the process of finding out the above stated contributed to the other specific goals of the research. One of the first goals, or even better said, ideas, for the work appeared as a perceived need to create a certain thread between the observed German initiatives and tools. Viewed in this way - they allowed us to see not only the ways in which they are interconnected, but they also provided additional insight into the diversity of actors in the Western Balkans that must be involved in the challenges of regional cooperation and dispute resolution, and each section also opened spaces for understanding factors, both external and internal, which affect domestic regional actors' willingness to work on these issues.

So, to start with the interconnectivity among the efforts – it is highly important, since it indicates some of the most important features of the German foreign policy towards the Western Balkans through the years: continuity, dedication, ability to "mobilize" plethora of actors while leaning on the plethora of own resources – from conditionality to attractiveness and strong presence on the domestic level. So, when fatigue in EU enlargement (through which Germany, as supporter and critic, played a great role in fostering reforms) started presenting a great challenge for

advancement of regional cooperation – it was Merkel who, as Hackaj calls it, by 'extreme political foresight' (2017:15) created a unique framework that would enable her both – to continue using the conditionality as a relevant tool, as well as to share the challenges of regional cooperation with several aspects of Western Balkans society. As such, the Berlin Process made the road to EU to look more attractive despite the political and social conditions within the Union at that period; provided tangible results for the citizens – all while emphasizing the potential and importance of the multi-level regional cooperation. Despite the fact that more than 70 different regional initiatives are launched in the Western Balkans – none has ever succeeded in being so comprehensive as the Berlin Process, nor carrying so much diplomatic weight. Part of, at least, technical or organizational contribution to its comprehensiveness was made by the joined efforts of KAS and FES, both during the yearly summits and in everyday activities of their Western Balkan offices, as could be seen. Since they are special transnational actors that obviously play an important and distinctive role in formal state's endeavors, this work stands on a position that they must be much more often found as subject of interest in foreign policy analysis. This, even brief and basic, overview of their contribution to the observed initiatives indicates that their long-term efforts in the Western Balkans pose a rich and vivid sphere for investigating various aspects of transnational impact.

The overview of these three interconnected sections enabled us to reach the secondary goal of this work, and that is, as already mentioned, understanding the local Western Balkan actors in their willingness to cooperate and stabilize the region. As expected, it is, through different ways and on different levels, shown that the civil society organizations can be seen as a true avant-garde of the regional cooperation. Without burden of the past - in contrast to political leaders, at the clear request of Angela Merkel, civil society organizations were ready to participate during official summits, but also showed a long-standing interest in the preparation and evaluation of the process. On the other side, their firm efforts and seemingly existing will of political officials to resolve bilateral disputes were not often replicated in the political sphere. In the case of the Berlin Process, a several cases were resolved led by the momentum created within such a comprehensive framework, while in the Kosovo – Serbia case, as the first section has showed, the German pressure and support bore fruit when the pressure from the local public was more expressed – which is highly dependent on the whole set of not only local circumstances, but also the circumstances worldwide and in the Union itself, especially.

Above all - resolving the issues considered in the paper was most often avoided due to the fact that unresolved issues still bring more political points – as successfully explained in the work

by Bieber and others. Challenges on the other side – the ones connected to the creation or implementation of the certain foreign policies are also explained by the contributors from the field of foreign policy analysis, and putting the overview that followed into a common place with those explanations could be seen as an added value of this work.

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