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MASTER THESIS | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

Time as a Political Weapon: Dependency and Sovereignty in the Western
Balkans

verfasst von | submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Advanced International Studies (M.A.I.S.)

Wien | Vienna, 2026

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt | UA 992 940
Degree programme code as it
appears on the student record
sheet:

Universitätslehrgang lt. Studienblatt | Internationale Studien | International Studies
| Degree programme as it appears
on the student record sheet:

Betreut von | Supervisor: Dr. Bernd Christoph Ströhm, BA MA M.A.I.S.



diplomatische
akademie wien

Vienna School of International Studies
École des Hautes Études Internationales de Vienne

Acknowledgements

This work is the direct result of months of research, ambition, planning, doubts, edits and redaction. However, it would not have achieved its objectives without the support and wisdom of a few individuals who deserve recognition and thanks.

Firstly, I would like to thank my two parents, Nour El Houda Marrakchi and Ahmed Hajoub, for the unconditional support, encouragement, and drive they have provided from the beginning of my higher education journey. I could not ask for better role models to motivate me to give my best work at all times.

I would also like to extend a heartfelt thank you to both my siblings, Aïda and Mehdi Hajoub, who gave their time and effort to uplift and inspire me during the long process this thesis and overall degree required.

Finally, I would like to thank my professor and supervisor, Dr Bernd Christoph Ströhm, for the generous and valuable guidance he provided my colleagues and me throughout not only this thesis but also the entire duration of my Master of Advanced International Studies at the Diplomatische Akademie Wien.

It is with deep gratitude that I reflect on the past two years spent within an institution whose extent of opportunity and teachings has exceeded anything I might have ever envisioned.

Abstract

As is widely known, the 1990s represented a tragically pivotal period for the Western Balkans. This period was marked by the catastrophic breakup wars of Yugoslavia, rampant economic crisis, political discord, strained peace, and laborious state-building efforts. While Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia, the Western Balkans Six (WB6), are now at peace, they all remain in a state of so-called transition as they manage EU accession processes, peace-building attempts, democratisation procedures and economic growth efforts (Dabrowski and Moffat 2025). This places the Western Balkans in the midst of a constantly elongating state of transition while its Western neighbours develop and grow at a drastically faster pace. The general literature on any WB6 country makes use of a lexical field focusing on a temporal dimension that seems to be characteristic of the region, with terms such as ‘delay’, ‘exhaustion’, ‘pending’, ‘fatigue’, ‘process’, and ‘future’. This persistent state of *waiting* can be argued to serve the interests of specific figures of power at both internal and external levels. In this regard, this thesis will address the question of how the manipulation of time as a political tool can reinforce dependency and affect sovereignty in the Western Balkans. This study was conducted through the analysis of emerging literature on chronopolitics, temporal governance and dependency theory in a political context. It identified three different chronopolitical patterns across the Western Balkans: stagnation, compression and elasticity. This thesis found that to maintain leverage over the Western Balkans, powerful actors both inside and outside the region have methodically weaponised these three patterns, which consequently exacerbate dependency trends while gradually eroding the states' senses of sovereignty and the democratic legitimacy of their institutions.

German Abstract

Wie allgemein bekannt ist, stellten die 1990er Jahre eine tragisch entscheidende Zeit für den Westbalkan dar. Diese Zeit war geprägt von den katastrophalen Zerfallskriegen Jugoslawiens, der grassierenden Wirtschaftskrise, politischer Zwietracht, angespanntem Frieden und mühsamen Bemühungen zum Staatsaufbau. Während in Albanien, Bosnien und Herzegowina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Nordmazedonien und Serbien, den Sechs Westbalkanstaaten (WB6), inzwischen Frieden herrscht, befinden sie sich alle noch immer in einem Zustand des sogenannten Übergangs, während sie EU-Beitrittsprozesse, Friedensbemühungen, Demokratisierungsverfahren und Bemühungen um Wirtschaftswachstum bewältigen (Dabrowski und Moffat 2025). Damit befindet sich der Westbalkan mitten in einem sich ständig verlängernden Übergangszustand, während sich seine westlichen Nachbarn drastisch schneller entwickeln und wachsen. Die allgemeine Literatur zu jedem WB6-Land verwendet ein lexikalisches Feld, das sich auf eine zeitliche Dimension konzentriert, die für die Region charakteristisch zu sein scheint, mit Begriffen wie 'Verzögerung', 'Erschöpfung', 'ausstehend', 'Müdigkeit', 'Prozess' und 'Zukunft'. Man kann argumentieren, dass dieser anhaltende Zustand des Wartens den Interessen bestimmter Machtfiguren sowohl auf interner als auch auf externer Ebene dient. In diesem Zusammenhang wird sich diese Arbeit mit der Frage befassen, wie die Manipulation der Zeit als politisches Instrument die Abhängigkeit verstärken und die Souveränität im Westbalkan beeinträchtigen kann. Diese Studie wurde durch die Analyse neuer Literatur zu Chronopolitik, zeitlicher Governance und Dependenztheorie im politischen Kontext durchgeführt. Dabei wurden drei verschiedene chronopolitische Muster im gesamten Westbalkan identifiziert: Stagnation, Kompression und Elastizität. Diese Arbeit kam zu dem Ergebnis, dass mächtige Akteure innerhalb und außerhalb der Region diese drei Muster systematisch als Waffe eingesetzt haben, um ihren Einfluss auf den Westbalkan aufrechtzuerhalten. Dies verschärft in der Folge die Abhängigkeitstendenzen und untergräbt gleichzeitig allmählich das Souveränitätsgefühl der Staaten und die demokratische Legitimität ihrer Institutionen.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The 21st of June 2003 marked a defining moment for the Western Balkans region. The heads of states and governments of the European Union (EU), Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro met in Thessaloniki, Greece, within the EU-Western Balkans Summit. The primary outcome was an array of promises and conclusions that were codified as the ‘Thessaloniki Declaration’. It asserted: “The future of the Balkans is within the European Union” (EU-Western Balkans Summit 2003, 178).

Twenty-three years later, Croatia is the only country within the region to have joined the union. As is widely known, before the first EU-Western Balkans summit, the Western Balkans was permanently wounded by the devastating breakup wars of Yugoslavia, grief, economic crises, political discord, strained peace, and state-building processes...

While the six countries in the region, commonly referred to as the Western Balkans Six (WB6): Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Serbia, are now at peace, they all remain in a state of so-called transition as they manage EU accession processes, peace-building attempts, democratisation procedures, and economic growth and development efforts (Dabrowski and Moffat 2025). This places the WB6 in the midst of a constantly elongating state of transition while its surroundings evolve and grow at a drastically faster pace. The region constitutes an evident arena for both external and internal power dynamics associated with a wide range of interests (Rrustemi et al. 2019).

This phenomenon is particularly evident when looking at the period from the late 1990s, which marked the end of the wars in the region, to the present day. Indeed, in literature on the WB6, it is often a matter of waiting for EU accession processes that repeatedly get delayed and stalled, waiting for democratic reform, economic growth, labour market security, effective rule of law, final statehood resolution (in the case of Kosovo), effective long-lasting conflict resolution, etc. (Kmezić 2015) Upon reflection, it becomes evident that a specific lexical field predominates the

discourse around the WB6, fostering a consistent transitional state for the countries concerned. Terms such as ‘delay’, ‘exhaustion’, ‘pending’, ‘fatigue’, ‘process’, and ‘future’ collectively represent a temporal dimension that seems to be characteristic of descriptions of the Western Balkans (Bieber 2019). This persistent state of ‘waiting’ can be argued to serve specific power holders on a local as well as an external level.

1.2 The State of the Art: The Gap?

Existing literature on the Western Balkans and its relations with the EU underscores a slow pace of accession processes due to divided opinions on enlargement within the EU, weakened EU credibility, and ambiguity in EU foreign policies, deterring WB6 political leaders from further engagement in discussions (Oudejans 2022). Others assess the role of time in EU enlargement, meaning its effect on certain outcomes, namely economic (Breuss 2005). Current literature seems to be at an impasse, with the question of who is to blame for this slow pace still open: it is debated whether it is a matter of enlargement fatigue or an issue of inefficient reform (Manchin 2011). This complex interaction between local political leaders and the EU can be viewed as a persistent stalemate, giving parties equal leverage in the weaponisation of time. Neither side can acquire ‘victory’, and the interplay seems endless (Vaduchova 2025). It is widely understood in academic works on the functioning of the union that joining member states commit to a certain trade-off. Per Articles 3 and 4 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, member states are compelled to cede power to the Union in five areas and, in certain circumstances, to share it, ultimately ceding sovereignty to this supranational governing body (TFEU 2012, art 3-4). This is done in the absence of fixed timelines, making the relevant domestic political institutions less compelled to function autonomously (Džankić et al. 2019). Without finality in accession processes, the states’ sovereignty progressively declines. By maintaining the WB6 in a perpetual ‘waiting room’, states are continuously prompted to prioritise new objectives to fulfil for EU accession rather than building sustainable domestic democratic institutions, which is often denounced by local populations, as seen in recent trends indicating a potential ‘Balkan Spring’ (Stonayov 2025).

1.3 Research Question and Basic Thesis Statement

This research seeks to fill a gap in the current literature by providing an in-depth study of time as a weaponised tool of power, as it not only serves as a landmark but can also be fashioned to serve certain interests. It is a matter of proving that delays and ambiguous policies making use of time allocation can be traced back to intentional actions that are taken to create or further dependency and influence, beyond being simple consequences of slow actions. Within this research, time represents an active. This work aims to relieve debates from the binary perspective by highlighting the intertwined structure of time governance that promotes stagnation and delays.

In this regard, this thesis will address the following question: In what ways does the manipulation of time as a political tool reinforce dependency and affect sovereignty in the Western Balkans? The overarching objective of this research will be to dissect the temporal governance mechanisms used by internal and external figures of power in the Western Balkans, investigating the general impact this phenomenon has on the sense of sovereignty in the region, as well as its contribution to reinforcing the dependency of the WB6 on external actors.

1.4 Significance

This research finds relevance in various aspects. On an academic level, the application of the concept of chronopolitics to analyse power dynamics in the Western Balkans is a novel approach. While the depiction of time as a political weapon is not unprecedented in International Relations theory, it has seldom been implemented systematically to analyse post-conflict regions in the midst of transition processes overseen by external actors.

On a political level, this study is conducted at a crucial time. The Western Balkans are located (literally and figuratively) at the crossroads between European security, transatlantic ties, and the competition of the great powers (Rrustemi et al. 2019, 8). In this setting, grasping how time can be instrumentalised as a weapon has immediate implications for the EU's enlargement strategy and local policy regarding development and dependency. This thesis also addresses critical ongoing disputes on democratic legitimacy, institutional development, and the erosion of public trust amidst the current overall situation of the region. At a time when the credibility of the

European Union is increasingly under scrutiny and questioning, this analysis attempts to provide the conceptual tools necessary to understand why commitments made as early as 2003 remain unsuccessful in 2026.

1.5 Chapter Overview

The first section will provide a detailed description of the methods and data used in this research, as well as the reasons behind these choices. The following chapter will aim to organise the general and relevant literature, classifying it and identifying potential linkages among categories. It will also pay special attention to primary sources and the evolution of the information they provided. The next section will lay out the theoretical elements used in this thesis, such as the theory that time can be used as a political weapon by great powers, concepts such as chronopolitics, temporal governance, temporal erosion, dependency, sovereignty, legitimacy, and more. Following this, this study will conduct a historical overview of the weaponisation of time within the Western Balkans, beginning with the breakup wars of Yugoslavia and continuing through the present day. Next, as empirical evidence, the thesis will provide an analysis of chronopolitical practices in each of the six Western Balkan countries and their implication for senses of sovereignty and dependency within the region. To ensure all relevant case studies are thoroughly analysed while maintaining an appropriate scope for a master's thesis, this research will adopt a typological approach in its empirical section by compartmentalising cases based on their common chronopolitical patterns. The next chapter will consist of comparing the different cases of weaponisation of time identified in the previous chapter in an effort to generalise the research's findings; it aims to help the understanding of whether the chronopolitical behaviour found in the Western Balkans can be observed at a broader scale, as well as whether it poses broader challenges. In the final analysis, this thesis will summarise its findings synthetically and articulate a clear answer to the original research question.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Epistemological and disciplinary positioning

In the first instance, it is imperative to stress that this research takes an interpretivist approach to the instrumentalisation of time. Rather than measuring or quantifying this behaviour, this thesis aims to interpret structural institutional designs, their temporal language, and the impact of the political agency of time on sovereignty and dependency. This approach differs from that of positivist approaches to EU enlargement. They usually focus on measurable variables such as compliance rates, institutional indicators, and reform progress, but do not consider the chronopolitical logic underlying the surface of stagnation and bureaucratic failure (Vachudova 2005). This work also implements elements from constructivist International Relations (IR) traditions, as its core argument goes from the principle that the instrumentalisation of time is socially constructed, given the current dynamics of the world order, rather than being born objectively. Additionally, this thesis asserts that time cannot be considered as a neutral or a passive variable, as it is a coercive tool of power.

Moreover, to analyse how powerful geopolitical actors may use time as a weapon and affect both sovereignty and dependency in the WB6, a thorough interdisciplinary approach is necessary. This research aspires to combine ideas and concepts from European studies, development studies, political theory, and international relations theory. European studies offer insight into the organisational context of European integration; IR allows us to frame geopolitical contentions and their consequences on sovereignty; political theory lays out the theoretical and conceptual framework necessary to grasp the depth of time, and development studies shed light on the structural flaws that temporal governance instrumentalises and reinforces, as seen with trends of dependency.

In sum, this thesis's epistemological and disciplinary positioning considers time as a politically established and controllable variable that benefits from an interdisciplinary, interpretivist, and constructivist approach to fully understand the mechanisms and implications of temporal governance in the Western Balkans.

2.2 Case selection and comparative design

This thesis makes use of six cases as empirical evidence of the phenomenon it analyses: Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Albania. The examination of chronopolitics in these cases is done through a Most Similar System Design (MSSD), which consists of comparing highly similar cases that differ in their dependent variable (Steinmetz 2019). Within this study, the Western Balkans Six's shared independent variable is the indefinite stalling of EU accession processes, slow reform progress and a shared history of war and conflict in the 1990s, with tensions that persist to date. However, given the scope of a master's thesis, the case study section adopts a categorical approach to maintain conciseness and completeness simultaneously. The cases are, therefore, compartmentalised in three groups according to the chronopolitical patterns (the dependent variable) they have in common.

BiH and Kosovo differ from the other countries in their internal structures. Both countries' constitutions were the fruit of international intervention after a devastating war that required urgent methods of direct, negative peace (Dayton Agreement Annex IV in BiH and the Ahtisaari Plan in Kosovo). Therefore, the two countries experience different patterns of externally built temporal mechanisms that both external and internal elites can manipulate, which often results in political deadlock. Next, Serbia and Montenegro vary from the other WB6 countries in the fact that local political elites have managed to exploit the blurry EU accession timelines to feed the strengthening of their power, as highlighted by the long-lasting mandates of their presidents and other political figures. In both countries, the local elites have strategically merged both compliance with EU requirements and the delay of concrete reform. The final group can be qualified as the EU's waiting room. North Macedonia was granted candidate status in December 2005, and Albania got it in June 2014, but repeated blocks and vetoes from EU Member States, despite reform progress, have considerably stalled accession processes. In contrast with other WB6 countries, Albania and North Macedonia are currently experiencing fatigue in the amount of reforms they have implemented since the start of their EU accession efforts without tangible advancement towards membership and ever-increasing benchmarks.

2.3 Process tracing

One of the main objectives of this research is to establish a causal link between temporal governance practices and the different political outcomes across the WB6. Accordingly, process tracing will be the primary method of qualitative analysis of this thesis to assess in detail the events connecting both ends. This method consists of investigating in-depth each step and sequence of events that account for a causal nexus (Bennett and Elman 2006). Within this thesis, process tracing will be performed as follows, according to Ricks and Liu's framework (2018, 846-848):

Firstly, this research starts by establishing the main hypotheses, which are that specific time allocations performed by figures of power can be traced back to intentional actions that are taken to create or further dependency and influence, beyond being simple consequences of slow actions. In taking the case of the WB6 and its foreign influences, this thesis theorises that the vagueness of EU accession timelines is deliberate and creates measurable consequences on the notions of dependency and sovereignty in the region in a manner that is both externally and internally engineered. Secondly, process tracing requires one to establish a detailed timeline to determine the moments the phenomenon one is analysing can be traced back to, as well as to what specific factors. In this case, this master's thesis includes a thorough chapter tracing the origins of temporal governance in the Western Balkans to the death of the leader of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito, and the severe consequences of his passing (amongst other structural issues) on the rest of the region. This historical chapter extends its analysis to the present, as temporal governance in the WB6 remains a current occurrence with recent developments and perhaps soon-to-come developments. For instance, the next EU-Western Balkans Summit is scheduled to take place in the near future, in June 2026, in Montenegro (Goranov 2026). Next, this thesis also uses a causal graph that maps out the causal nexus argued to exist as a hypothesis. In this case, this is included within the theoretical framework chapter, and it visually lays out the links between external actors, temporal governance, local elite and societal response, temporal erosion, weakened sovereignty, higher dependency, and the overall vicious cycle the WB6 can be trapped in. To test the causal links established in this research, two methods will be applied: the hoop test and the smoking gun test (Ricks and Liu 2018, 845). The hoop test will ask whether practices of temporal governance

precede a domestic response in each case, whereas the smoking gun test will question whether there is direct evidence that actors have so far substantiated their actions due to delays and time spent waiting.

2.4 Discourse analysis

Moreover, the methodology of this research is also based on discourse analysis. More specifically, it implements methods of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which looks at how power dynamics in a given context are ‘reproduced, reinforced, or challenged through the varieties of discourse (such as speech, text, or graphics)’ (Groff 2023). This thesis makes use of CDA to assess how the practices of temporal governance are entrenched and normalised within narratives surrounding the Western Balkans Six. Indeed, it was previously established that the majority of the lexical field surrounding the WB6 is not accidental or innate but rather exposes the patterns furthering dependency and the loss of sovereignty.

In this regard, a wide range of primary sources is used, with particular attention to the phrasing and vocabulary that are chosen. Namely, EU Annual Progress reports on each of the six countries since 2003, as they represent official and the most reliable data available to analyse the EU’s stances and approaches to the WB6. Next, we will also look at declarations and reports from the European Commission on the EU’s enlargement strategy to understand the official motives for certain decisions and policies. Finally, it will also be a matter of examining public addresses from EU officials, political leaders from the Western Balkans and personalities that represent the external influence which plays a significant role in temporal governance. The latter category is particularly beneficial to our study, as it is usually carried out through different methods of expression, where, sometimes, spontaneity can significantly alter the course of events.

2.5 Potential shortcomings

While this thesis aspires to combine several methods of analysis to provide research that is as comprehensive and accurate as possible, a few shortcomings could be expected. Namely, CDA is an interpretative method of discourse analysis. This implies that its findings can be diminished by the subjective nature of interpretation, especially through the use of a wide and careful

selection of literary sources, with a clear aim to analyse specific patterns of language. Furthermore, the region of focus (which comprises six countries with, albeit, partly shared history) includes six different foreign and internal policies, with different aspirations, goals, political narratives, and cultures, despite similarities. As the scope of this work would not allow for in-depth investigation for each case, this study was compelled to surrender a certain level of depth and specifics to remain concise and be able to conduct a comparative analysis. Finally, one of the main challenges this methodology faces is that of proving a certain and absolute intentionality behind EU delays and other instances of time allocation. Despite this, each methodological decision was deliberate and based on careful consideration.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Chronopolitics & Temporal Governance

Questions on the political nature of time are not novel. The earlier pioneers of the study of political time, like George G. Wallis (1970, 102) or Paul Virilio (1977), initially approached the matter from a sociological, philosophical and theoretical standpoint. What this thesis calls 'chronopolitics', Virilio originally called 'dromology': the philosophical logic and impact of speed. In his later works, Virilio (1991) defined chronopolitics as the management of time, as a replacement of the traditional geopolitical configuration of space (93). The nexus between chronopolitics as a broader theoretical concept that encompasses temporal governance is introduced in Kirtsoglou and Simpson's work (2021). It uses the term 'chronocracy' rather than 'temporal governance' to refer to 'the discursive and practical ways in which temporal regimes are used in order to deny coevalness and thereby create deeply asymmetrical relationships of exclusion and domination either between humans (in diverse contexts) or between humans and other organisms and our ecologies'(3). The work of Gonçalves et al. (2025) establishes the premise that time can be used as a governable resource rather than a constraint, while other literature looks at the different political dimensions within which time is interwoven (Becker and Esposito 2023, 15-19).

The majority of the existing literature mostly theorises chronopolitics and temporal governance at macro-political, philosophical or civilisational levels, but it does not seem to trace the exact mechanisms through which institutions of power entrench these dynamics into the political and social fabric of a given territory. Additionally, none of the current academic contributions on chronopolitics uses this lens to analyse post-conflict states supervised by externally imposed bodies. This is the gap that this thesis aims to fill by providing an in-depth examination by applying the conceptual frameworks of chronopolitics and the authors who studied it offer to a region that has served as a temporal governance ground for so long that its dynamics became an integral part of political life.

3.2 Dependency and Sovereignty

On the topics of dependency and sovereignty, a wide variety of thinkers, authors, and scholars have extensively made contributions to both fields, often independently. Firstly, sovereignty has predominantly been approached as a foundational IR theory concept that seeks to evaluate who holds supreme power over a given state and what factors can affect or transfer this authority (Hinsley 1986). Dependency, on the other hand, has mostly been covered within development studies as a causal mechanism for economic inequality between low- and higher-income countries, as seen with dependency theory (Smith 1981). Given the wide range of work that has been done to define and reevaluate both terms' frameworks, this thesis seeks to consider them as mutually reinforcing outcomes of one shared political phenomenon and apply this logic to a post-conflict South European context. The ambition of this research is not to investigate the theoretical foundations of sovereignty and dependency, as their definitions will be covered in the following theoretical framework chapter, but rather to draw a nexus where eroded sovereignty is intrinsically linked to higher dependency rates, as the Western Balkans framework shows. The closest academics have come to these specific concerns were Levitsky and Way (2010) in their study of international dimensions of democratisation and sources of international influence and David Chandler's (2000) work on the impact of the Dayton Peace Agreement on Bosnia's sovereignty. Despite proximity, none of these pieces has framed the sovereignty and dependency nexus as a result of temporal governance.

3.3 EU enlargement and fatigue

Concerning EU enlargement, the literary resource inventory is large. Scholars have long drawn their attention to the slowing pace of accession processes by approaching it through various angles, questioning whether it stemmed from poor reform progress (Vaduchova 2005), from a decreasing will to expand within the union itself (Economides 2020), or a combination of both resulting in a rigid controversy where neither party admits accountability (Oudejans 2023). There has also been work on the role of time in EU enlargement and its impact in economic terms by Fritz Breuss (2000), where the idea of the 'earlier the better' enlargement through the Central and Eastern European countries was challenged with an economic lens. Within this wide array of literature that expands far beyond the past few citations, a gap appears in that none (or at

least few) consider that the slowdown of accession processes for the WB6 can be explained beyond reform performance or enlargement fatigue, though both factors remain valid explanations, but also stems from the intentional manipulation of time through deferrals, time allocation, ambiguous timelines, and extended benchmarks. This thesis aspires to fill that gap by proving that stagnation in EU enlargement to the WB6 is not a repercussion of bureaucratic failure but a result of well-thought-out political manoeuvres at both the internal and external levels.

3.4 The Western Balkans Six and their Internal Politics

A substantial amount of work on the Western Balkans Six has tackled the matter of internal politics within each country, as domestic events often reach large media attention within Europe as a whole. The works of Vaduchova (2019) and Lemstra (2020) both highlight the ways in which the EU's principle of conditionality has (ironically) allowed some of the local elites to sustain their power in domestic politics by *performing* compliance with reforms and values without actually delivering their genuine content and tangible results, directly affecting the very establishments conditionality intended to improve. This phenomenon is exacerbated by a visibly increasing discord between the political elites of the WB6 and their population. As Manchin et al. (2011) underline, data on public opinion showed a rapidly declining interest in EU accession among citizens amidst the slowdown as early as 2011. In recent times, the work of Zweers and de Vet (2026) looked at the way Serbia has managed to strategically balance between the Eastern and Western blocs, while other academics looked at the nature of identity turmoil North Macedonia faces currently due to revendications out of the people's control (Bechev and Marusic 2020). Nonetheless, this large literary body does not directly address the political weaponisation of time as the structural condition enabling and encouraging state capture, ambiguity, and civic withdrawal.

3.5 Foreign Influence in the Western Balkans

Finally, let us look at the state of the art on the topic of foreign influence in the WB6 beyond the EU. The latter subject has gathered considerable academic attention in recent years, in proportion to the levels of foreign presence in the region. Rrustemi et al. (2019) offer a

thorough examination of the geopolitical rivalry playing out in the region where Eastern and Western factions compete for leverage and alignment. One of the key external actors in the region is Russia, and its presence has been described as a strategic advantage to foster alignment and political dependency of Serbia and Republika Srpska, representing a threat to Western interests in the region (Secrieru 2019). Broader literature establishes that the WB6 is caught within the rivalry of EU and Eastern actors, such as China, due to foreign stakeholders offering (mostly economic) benefits without the burden of conditionality, which local elites, growing more frustrated as time stalls, may find more appealing (Shopov 2021). However, the overall literature on foreign influence in the WB6 does not directly establish that the use of the WB6 as an arena of East-West competition is structurally facilitated by the vacuums created by temporal governance.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework

4.1 Chronopolitics and temporal governance

Time as a concept is a debated notion. Whether it is in the disciplines of history, political science, philosophy, mathematics or anthropology, humans have long struggled to set out a clear, straightforward definition of this term, despite most individuals somewhat knowing what it refers to. Within this research, we will consider the notion of time with the concepts of chronopolitics and temporal governance. These two terms are closely related but differ in terms of scope. Chronopolitics is a broad political theory concept which draws a critical analysis of the way time is structured within institutions of power, establishing a clear nexus between politics and time (Wallis 1970). It is an analysis of the architectures of power built around time and temporality. Scholars Becker and Esposito (2019) established three dimensions. Firstly, the time of politics, which designates the internal temporal structures within political systems, such as institutional deadlines (election periods, presidential mandates, etc.), decision-making pace, and the rhythms of governance (15). Secondly, chronopolitics encompasses the politics of time in its analysis. This refers to the external allocation and regulation of time by political entities, which treat it as a resource that can be granted or withheld, as seen in the standardisation of Greenwich Mean Time as a global point of reference for time, for instance (16). Finally, Becker and Esposito (2019) identify a third dimension: politicised time. This dimension of chronopolitics refers to the use of time to legitimise political narrative as a “weapon of politics” (15). This can be notably observed with political labels such as ‘progressive’ or ‘conservative’, which indirectly place those identifying with these categories in the future or in the past (19). Overall, chronopolitics is the analysis of how political power can be structured around time. It broadly focuses on power, conflict and ideology, examining those who control time and those who are marginalised by it. Chronopolitics can be used to depict time as a weapon to achieve political ends, such as hegemony, exclusion, or resistance.

While this thesis intends to define and analyse a wide range of political and IR theoretical concepts throughout its research, it is relevant to examine the mechanisms by which time can be tailored to fit a certain agenda. Consequently, this thesis will also consider temporal governance mechanisms through which power is asserted via the management of time. Temporal governance is defined as 'the idea that planning time is not merely a constraint but a governable resource' (Gonçalves et al. 2025, 1). This idea considers the planning and allocation of time as a strategic variable that institutions can directly exploit and manipulate to specific ends (2). The key difference between the two terms we have so far introduced is that chronopolitics argues that time is political, while temporal governance exposes how this politicised nature manifests through the use of time. Gonçalves et al. (2025) point to two kinds of delays within temporal governance. Firstly, they present pathological delays as forms of malfunction that ultimately impede trust and responsiveness. They usually stem from bureaucratic slowness, conflict or discord within an institution. Secondly, the scholars present productive delays as intentional actions that are used to achieve a specific goal of governance. Therefore, the framework laid out by Gonçalves et al. (2025) suggests that the intention behind the governance of time must be determined to consider acts of delay as temporal governance.

4.2 Temporal erosion

Directly linked to the concept of temporal governance, one of its key negative and internal consequences is temporal erosion. This phenomenon can be defined as the progressive deterioration of an institution's legitimacy, public trust, and capacity (Asas 2026). Here, temporal erosion should be understood as the causal mechanism linking temporal governance practices to the loss of sovereignty and higher dependency rates. This erosion can occur when figures of power abuse their control over time and treat it as a commodity. As a consequence, a 'quest for time control' occurs, pushing political leaders to 'conquer' the future, rather than prioritising the natural pace of current socio-political environments and the cultures surrounding them (Adam 2004).

Dr Naim Asas (2026) draws a comprehensive description of temporal erosion and considers institutions to be fundamentally temporal structures (2.3). By that, it is understood that they perform a range of tasks that relate to time: turning past experiences into shared norms and set

rules, using the latter to shape present policies, and justifying the present difficulties by guaranteeing future benefits. As such, building on Pierson's work (2004), he underlines that institutions allocate constraints and benefits unequally across time, which renders it an active rather than a passive variable in the work of institutions. Moreover, he observes that institutions operate with a somewhat expected outcome in mind. However, when an institution's work of integration is disrupted, this future becomes unpredictable. Rather than failing, institutions continue to operate without direction and follow procedures rather than reevaluate strategies.

This phenomenon is observable in various intertwined dimensions. At an institutional level, it can be argued that governments lose the ability to plan for the future and commit when confronted with repeatedly extended timelines, conditionality resets, and other signals that promises do not guarantee certain outcomes. Asas (2026) identifies a 'temporal desynchronisation' that spreads throughout the political structures: governments follow externally imposed requirements without the internal cohesiveness needed for these reforms to be viable.

Consequently, temporal erosion also manifests at a local level amongst the political elite. After sustained periods of reforms that do not bring about the expected positive outcomes, local political figures experience a progressive loss of credibility among the local population. The Western promises of positive outcomes in exchange for reforms were a rational trade-off at first. However, over time, the short-term costs of reform begin to grow proportionally, making the trade-off less attractive. Levitsky and Way (2010) underline that the power of Western leverage relies greatly on the perception of credibility and proximity of the reward they promise (29). This can lead elites to develop an ambiguous foreign policy where they maintain a public narrative that shows alignment with the Western reforms while discreetly cultivating relationships with other patrons that are willing to offer financial aid or investment without the constraint of reforms and extended timelines. This symptom of temporal erosion poses a particular danger for societies, as it may be challenging to identify before changes are irreversible.

Finally, temporal erosion occurs at a civic level and affects public trust. As aforementioned, the loss of credibility and legitimacy of politicians and institutions has dire consequences on the relationship between the people and their governing structure. Norris (2011) points to the fact

that citizens progressively become less engaged in political participation as they cease to observe responses to their demands, which leads to a decline in institutional trust. This sets the scene for an increasingly unstable political climate where discord grows while political representation decreases.

These symptomatic dimensions of temporal erosion can exacerbate each other in a vicious cycle. Temporal desynchronisation makes the elite incentive more challenging to govern; this unpredictable elite moves further away from the will to sustainably reform, while this leads to a consequential loss in public political engagement, as voters feel less heard or served by their government. The latter is weakened but remains in charge. As a result, countries are nominally sovereign but rely more and more on external patrons and lose the ability to make independent decisions that reflect the will of the people.

4.3 Dependency and Sovereignty

Here, sovereignty and dependency should be considered as mutually reinforcing consequences of the same political phenomenon (temporal governance) rather than separate categories of analysis. Sovereignty is understood as the capacity of a country to have autonomous decision-making. Based on Haass's (2003) definition, it has four principal characteristics: supreme political authority; control of its borders; ability to make foreign policy choices freely; and recognition by other governments (Ulum 2022, 27). The third and fourth characteristics will be of significant use within this investigation, as these two aspects of sovereignty have been the most visibly challenged by temporal governance in the WB6.

Dependency, on the other hand, will refer to the circumstances in which a government cannot pursue completely independent political decision-making because it relies on the resources, approval, or even supervision of external actors who ultimately dictate the next course of action. This understanding borrows from the logic of dependency theory, which contends that the underdevelopment of the poor is necessary for the development of the wealthy (Smith 1981), but does not adopt its economic logic; rather, it applies its broader logic to political dynamics.

The analysis of the political weaponisation of time makes the two concepts have a causal and circular relationship where states become more reliant on external parties to carry out the tasks their institutions are no longer able to complete, faced with eroded sovereignty. External powers can therefore maintain leverage and make states more susceptible to temporal governance, given that they cannot afford to withdraw from the processes supposed to drive their development. The two have a reinforcing dynamic, which makes the visibility of change in the WB6 blurrier.

4.5 Causality mechanisms

The overall phenomenon this study presents operates through a causal mechanism with reinforcing links connecting chronopolitical actors to the gradual erosion of sovereignty and strengthening of dependency (see Fig. 1). The first level looks at external chronopolitical actors like the European Union, Russia, China, the United States... Their engagement and presence in the WB6 manifest in the shape of temporal governance practices through which time is granted, blocked, or manipulated, like vetoes, deferrals, absent timelines, conditionality shifts, enlargement freezes and more. This may generate two responses at a time. The domestic political elite can respond by taking advantage of the ambiguities created by temporal governance to pursue certain agendas like regime survival, economic growth, or ideology consolidation. On the other hand, there can also be a societal response after a long-term exposure to stalling and unrewarded concessions like reform fatigue, frustration, social discord, civic unrest, and distrust towards public institutions. A direct result of both responses is temporal erosion, which refers to the progressive deterioration of democratic institutions through their legitimacy and credibility. In turn, temporal erosion generates two outcomes that are interconnected: the erosion of sovereignty as states slowly lose the ability to build sustainable, autonomous and democratic institutions; and worsened dependency levels as countries come to rely on external supervision and aid to remain standing. Unfortunately, this is not a closed-end circle, as an eroded sovereignty and high dependency only make the WB6 more vulnerable for further chronopolitical interplay in the region. Once again, this mechanism is self-reinforcing.

4.6 Limitations of the framework

The theoretical framework put forth here has limitations worth recognising. Namely, this framework asserts that temporal governance practices are intentional rather than coincidental because they serve the pursuit of particular political agendas. Although the process tracing and discourse analysis used in the empirical chapters offer ample support for this statement, it is still methodologically laborious to establish an *absolute intentionality* behind institutional delays and ambiguous timelines. There is a possibility that some of the examples of temporal governance outlined in this study may be the outcome of bureaucratic dysfunction or specific circumstances, rather than pure strategic calculation. Moreover, the scope of this research focuses on the Western Balkans and its particular post-conflict context. This means that the exact findings of this study may not apply beyond the region due to its interpretative nature. It would require further empirical verification to be considered a general occurrence.

Chapter 5: History of Temporal Governance in the Western Balkans

5.1 Tito's Death and The Dissolution of Yugoslavia (1989-1995)

As he neared his passing, Josip Broz Tito, president of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) from 1953 to 1980, dreaded the threat of nationalism that was dawning upon the nation. He believed it could weaken the relations between the republics and the provinces, and the force of the army would be necessary to maintain state unity (Pirjevec 2018, 442). As his health declined, tensions increased, a fact Marshal Tito was acutely aware of and concerned with. In a conversation with an old comrade, he confided his apprehensions about the future of Yugoslavia and admitted he believed that the latter and the party essentially no longer existed (451). Tito's death in May 1980 is often pinpointed as 'the beginning of the end' and unanimously framed as the end of an era. Indeed, the head of state was a figure of unity among Yugoslavia's many ethnic groups through his charisma, authority, and strategic foreign policy. His rule was associated with higher living standards, modernisation and overall economic prosperity. However, scholars attributed this significant welfare to foreign aid and loans: by 1980, Yugoslavia was indebted by 21 billion dollars and was compelled to adopt strict measures imposed by the IMF, redirecting an important portion of its GNP towards repayment of this debt, leaving 6.5% of the population jobless, and ultimately leading to the first wave of brain drain in the region (453).

In the following years, while Yugoslavia was grappling with the rampant economic crisis, Tito's apprehensions increasingly became more evident. The new rotating leadership of the country proved unable to uphold their predecessor's achievements as they failed to express a distinct ideological direction and could not stay in power long enough to build an authority as powerful as that of Tito (Lampe 1996, 333). Furthermore, the ruling party itself, the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (Savez Komunista Jugoslavije), had been progressively losing cohesion and credibility, perhaps before Tito's passing, according to him (Pirjevec 2018, 451). Consequently, a power vacuum was born from this institutional crisis, paving the way for new and controversial political figures to take on the Yugoslav political scene, namely, Slobodan

Milošević in Serbia, who ultimately exacerbated ethnic fragmentation in the country and drove the situation toward a fatal turn of events.

Amidst an endless cycle of competitive victimhood narratives across the republics, one incident stands out as the crucial trigger to the dissolution and wars of Yugoslavia. On the 24th April 1987, Ivan Stambolić, the president at the time, sent his protégé, Slobodan Milošević, to Kosovo Polje to address and appease the concerns of the Serb and Montenegrin minority residing in Kosovo. When he arrived there, the crowd of fifteen thousand local Serb activists surrounded his car, calling for freedom. In shock and overwhelmed to hear locals recount the brutality of Albanian police forces against them and witnessing it at the rally, Milošević declared, ‘No one should dare beat you’ (Lampe 1996, 347). He carried on later that day in an improvised public speech where he asserted, ‘This is your country; your homes, fields, and memories are here (...) Yugoslavia cannot exist without Kosovo. Yugoslavia and Serbia will not give up Kosovo’ (Sell 2002, 3). In doing so, Milošević broke a long tradition of ethnic neutrality upheld by Tito during his rule, as he publicly supported the grievances of one ethnic group and embraced their portrayal as victims of institutional injustice. This spontaneous act was unprecedented for a Yugoslav leader and marked a turning point in the narratives that political elites allowed themselves to relay publicly, especially regarding ethnic identity.

Regrettably, Slobodan Milošević was not the only figure of nationalist sentiments in Yugoslavia. Simultaneously, the SFRY saw the rise of Franjo Tuđman in Croatia, Milan Kučan in Slovenia, Alija Izetbegović in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kiro Gligorov in Macedonia, and more. Each of these personalities mobilised unique senses of national identity that may not always be comparable to one another. However, their main common ground lay in the fact that their legitimacy and support came from the citizens of each republic rather than from a united Yugoslav nation. It is precisely this division of political power and narratives among republics that further fragmented the federation (Lampe 1996, 345).

At the peak of tensions between the republics, violence broke out in Slovenia following its declaration of independence on the 25th June 1991. The Yugoslav National Army (JNA) engaged in military intervention against Slovenian resistance forces that had secretly organised and gathered 21 000 men led by Milan Kučan. The war in Slovenia lasted ten days and left the JNA defeated. Simultaneously, Croatia had declared its independence on the same day as Slovenia, but followed a much bloodier path along with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Violent confrontations had started in Croatia in March that same year and later led to the catastrophic confrontations in Vukovar, Dubrovnik and more. The utterly shocking images relayed in international media might have gathered the attention of a wide audience, but international intervention had yet to manifest. It was only in January 1992 that the European Community negotiated a ceasefire between Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tuđman and deployed UN peacekeepers to monitor Serb-dominated areas in Croatia (the Krajina and Eastern Slavonia) without addressing the territorial disputes (372). The UN troops' mandate was restricted to monitoring rather than enforcement, meaning they could not stop brutality (376). Following years of cruel bloodshed on all sides of the war, violence terminated following Operations Flash and Storm launched by the Croatian military forces in May and August 1995 to regain the Serb-dominated territories, expelling and displacing the Serb population there. The remaining territory of Eastern Slavonia was later peacefully regained by Croatia through the Erdut Agreement in November 1995 under the UN and the United States' administration. Finally, concerning the Bosnian War, it is worth noting that Bosnia and Herzegovina was home to 31.4% Serbs, 43.7% Bosniaks and 17.3% Croats in 1991 before the war (337). Of all the Break-Up Wars of Yugoslavia, the Bosnian one shed the most blood. After the Republic had declared its independence in March 1992, the Bosnian Serb political representatives, led by Radovan Karadžić, backed by Milošević and armed by the JNA, opposed the independence, as they refused to live in Bosnia as a minority, fearing dominance from the Muslim Bosniak majority. Therefore, they had organised and sought to proclaim a 'Republic of the Serb People of Bosnia and Herzegovina'. When independence was proclaimed, the opponents mobilised forces and started seizing a great part of Bosnia. The 5th of April 1992 marked the beginning of the Siege of Sarajevo, the longest siege of a capital in modern warfare history, lasting 1425 days, destroying 65% of the city, and leaving up to 18,888 dead, according to an expert report prepared for the case of Milošević at the ICTY (Tabeau et al. 2003, 2). While the Bosnian War was the deadliest, the international community's response seemed hesitant throughout the years. UN peacekeepers had been deployed there as well under the same monitoring mandate, which made their presence relatively obsolete, while Western great powers continuously discussed intervention during the three years the war lasted and monstrosities multiplied. This was the case in July 1995 in Srebrenica, where approximately 7000 Bosniak men and boys had been massacred despite being in a UN 'safe zone'. This was a clear act of genocide overseen by the

Serb General Ratko Mladić, where the UNPROFOR peacekeeping mission failed to intervene. This ultimately prompted Operation Deliberate Force, an air strike campaign carried out by NATO and UNPROFOR to weaken the military capacity of Serb forces.

This conflict, along with the other confrontations of the Break-Up Wars of Yugoslavia, formally concluded with the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement, signed in Paris on the 14th of December 1995 by the leaders of the three warring parties: Slobodan Milošević (Serbia), Franjo Tuđman (Croatia), and Alija Izetbegović (Bosnia and Herzegovina); and witnessed by members of the international community such as Bill Clinton (USA), Jacques Chirac (France), Helmut Kohl (Germany), John Major (UK), and Viktor Chernomyrdin (Russia).

5.2 The Dayton Time Capsule (1995 to 2000)

The exact context in which the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) was signed holds significant meaning for the current political climate in Bosnia and Herzegovina and its surroundings. After four years of catastrophic bloodshed and a delayed military response from the international community, the focus was on halting violence rather than building sustainable and just peace. Additionally, it is worth considering that five peace initiatives had been proposed before the DPA, as early as 1992, but all had been rejected or failed (Korkut and Mulalić 2012, 109-110). Beyond ending violent confrontations, the DPA created unprecedented governance structures for Bosnia and Herzegovina while maintaining it as a single state. The agreement provided for two entities: Republika Srpska, covering 49% of the territory, Serb-governed; and the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, covering 51% of the territory, controlled by Bosniaks and Croats (110). The central government, ruling over these two entities, was granted limited power, while extensive power over government institutions was granted to individuals outside of Bosnia appointed by the international community (Hudson 2003, 121). The DPA provided Bosnia and Herzegovina with a new constitution in Annex 4 (Office of the High Representative 1995). As part of a democratisation process, the DPA also placed the country under the international supervision of the Office of the High Representative (OHR) in Annex 10 (currently under Christian Schmidt) for an undetermined period, as there are no exit clauses or defined ending (Korkut and Mulalić 2012, 110).

The ambiguity of DPA's timeframe remains a topic of debate to date. It is widely argued by scholars and politicians that its framework was supposed to be temporary and subject to reform.

American diplomat Richard Holbrooke, who participated in drafting the DPA, namely described the agreement as an 'imperfect peace', as it did not represent a permanent, viable and sustainable solution for peace in the country but rather a form of ceasefire that froze tensions in the constitution (Cilic and Baumgartner 2019). Three decades later, the DPA and the constitution remain unchanged, despite several attempts such as the April Package of 2006, the Prud Process of 2008, and the Butmir Package of 2009. All were unsuccessful due to the ethnic vetoes granted by the DPA, which paved the way for continuous political deadlock (Korkut and Mulalić 2012, 115).

Furthermore, beyond implementing a complex system of consociational internal politics, Dayton formalised a ground of sustained international intervention from external actors like the OHR, the United States, the EU, the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) and more (114). In addition, the grant of Bonn Powers to the OHR in 1997 gave it the power to impose and void laws, as well as to remove public officials if it considered them to hinder the peace process (Banning 2014, 261). This gave the OHR full and unilateral authority to categorise any legally binding measure as 'other measures to ensure implementation' as per the PIC's 1997 Bonn Conclusion (§ XI para. 2). Overall, as early as 1995, the Dayton Peace Agreement represented a form of temporal governance before it started to be evident to local and external observers of the Western Balkans. The mere fact that no defined timeline was provided for the DPA's reform or for international oversight continuously delays ownership and sovereignty for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Time serves as a tool of control. Sovereignty is withheld, dependency grows, and citizens stand by.

5.3 The Stabilisation and Association Process and the first promises (1999 to 2003)

Further south in the Western Balkans, violence continued in Kosovo when a war broke out in 1998. The conflict opposed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and the Kosovo Liberation Army, more specifically, ethnic Serbs to ethnic Albanians, due to age-old tensions over territorial, cultural and political matters exacerbated by nationalist narratives in all parts of Yugoslavia (Troebst 1999). After over a year of warfare, NATO engaged in Operation Allied Force, an airstrike campaign that lasted seventy-eight days against the FRY, targeting the Serbian forces led by Milošević across both Kosovo and Serbia, on account of the ethnic cleansing and

war crimes committed under his leadership against the Albanian Kosovar population. Once the When the Serbian parliament accepted the peace plan proposed by NATO, the Kumanovo Agreement, the bombings ceased, marking the end of the Kosovo War in June 1999, the fourth war in the region within a decade (Steinke 2015).

This catastrophic turn of events exposed to the European Union that its previous regional approach, which had been established with the DPA, was ineffective in addressing security and peace concerns in the Western Balkans, as tensions remained. As an alternative, the EU launched a new approach to sustainable, long-term regional strategy to prevent conflict and oversee post-conflict transitions: the Stabilisation and Association Process (Pippan 2004, 219). This programme is based on the principle of conditionality. It operates by tying the completion of an increasing number of political and economic requirements to each phase of the regions' progress toward the EU. These requirements are layered, meaning that the country must fulfil more conditions as it moves along closer to joining the EU (222). This structure makes the countries' objectives undetermined and free-ranging, as the EU has not made legally binding commitments on the timeline or even the guarantee of eventual membership. The process is uncertain and requires patience from the WB6 (243). It is also worth noting that soon after the launch of the SAP, the Albanian National Liberation Army (NLA) insurrected against Macedonian security forces in early 2001 but was rapidly neutralised through the Ohrid Agreement negotiated by the international community. The SAP eventually culminated in the Thessaloniki promises of 2003 at the annual EU-Western Balkans Summit, where the representatives of the EU asserted, "The EU reiterates its unequivocal support to the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries. The future of the Balkans is within the European Union. (...) The speed of movement ahead lies in the hands of the countries of the region." (EU-Western Balkans Summit 2003, para. 2). While this declaration reaffirmed the efficiency of the SAP as a facilitator of accession, the phrasing of the latter sentence also suggests that the EU strays from holding responsibility for the pace of accession processes for the WB6.

5.4 The lost decade (2003 to 2012)

The decade following the Thessaloniki Agenda and its promises represents one of the most chronopolitically charged periods for the WB6 since the 1990s, namely due to its

‘uneventful’ nature. After two EU-Western Balkans summits in Zagreb (2000) and Thessaloniki (2003), no summits were held for 15 years between 2003 and 2018, despite the commitment to meet periodically (EU-Western Balkans Summit 2003, 3), and no country in the region had joined the EU until Croatia’s accession in 2013. This marks a clear gap between the promises and commitments made in the agenda, both by EU representatives and the heads of state of the WB6, and the tangible achievements that were not completed in this timeframe.

However, within this decade, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia joined the union in May 2004, while Bulgaria and Romania joined in January 2007. From then on, the term ‘enlargement fatigue’ started to appear in political narratives as politicians began to second-guess the union’s ability to function properly after enlargement (Economides 2020, 3). Indeed, there were concerns about the EU’s capacity to create and implement common policies, manage the externalities of economic redistribution, and safeguard Brussels’ institutional and decision-making procedures as well as its integrity (Börzel et al. 2017).

Within the Western Balkans itself, several evolutions occurred affecting the post-conflict transition. Firstly, following a referendum, Montenegro declared independence from Serbia in 2006, making it a new entity to add to the list of candidates for European integration in the Balkans (Parliamentary Assembly 2006). Two years later, Kosovo unilaterally declared its independence. Serbia has vehemently opposed this, and it continues to be the source of severe tensions between the two countries and other members of the international community, as well as within the EU, with vetoes on the accession path from Spain, Cyprus, Greece, Slovakia, and Romania, which do not recognise Kosovo’s independence (Borgen 2008). This dispute over Kosovo’s statehood remains an issue to date for both Serbia and Kosovo’s accession paths (Kobešćak Smodiš 2025).

Simultaneously, the Western Balkans started to attract the attention of foreign investors. Indeed, in 2008, Gazprom Neft, a Russian oil producer, acquired a 51% stake in the Serbian national oil company NIS. In 2009, China integrated the Western Balkans into its ‘going out’ strategy, which encourages Chinese companies to invest in foreign businesses (European Parliament 2022). Briefings and analyses by the European Parliament assert that the Western Balkans serve as a strategic corridor paving the way to the European market (European Parliament 2022).

5-5 Different acceleration and the emergence of rivals (2012 to 2018)

When talking about the Western Balkans Six and their accession processes to the EU, it would be misguided to assume that the paces are the same across the region. The period between 2012 and 2018 was a crucial evolution in the region, namely with Croatia being the first and only country to fulfil the Thessaloniki promise and join the EU, while the six other countries in the region remained in the waiting room at different stages of a process that was already challenging their patience. Moreover, Montenegro had started accession negotiations in 2012, while Serbia followed in 2014. At this point, other countries in the region were either addressing bilateral disputes and domestic reforms (Albania and North Macedonia) or were not considered ready for formal discussions (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo). At the same time, while the EU integration momentum appeared to stall, foreign influence started to manifest in the region beyond economic investment.

Similar to the EU, the WB6 was experiencing fatigue itself in the numerous reforms that had to be made persistently as per the SAP. Consequently, this period of time saw a gradual decline in the credibility of the EU notion of conditionality among local populations, while various local political elites grew more frustrated and resentful of the EU promise, which seemed to get further away as countries progressed (Rrustemi 2019). This has created a sort of vacuum, where external powers such as China, Russia, Türkiye, or the UAE could expand their influence without requiring the same benchmarks the EU demands for integration. Additionally, many of the WB6 countries were still experiencing high levels of corruption, poverty, and political deadlocks, which made elites have a more pragmatic approach. As aforementioned, foreign presence began in the form of economic investments, which reshaped political elites' approach as more transactional and accepted certain business opportunities even if they came at odds with EU integration criteria (Lami 2021). This is advantageous for countries such as Russia that may benefit from the region straying from the EU and Transatlantic sphere of influence to foster political destabilisation and maintain leverage. Russia entertains particular ties with Serbia, for instance, in terms of common religious and cultural identity through Orthodoxy and Pan-Slavism and has provided extensive support for Serbia's political grievances. While multiple instances of strategic foreign influence in the Western Balkans, to list them, would fall outside of the scope of this analysis. This period of time embodied a significant instance of temporal governance led by different actors. By offering more attractive financial and political benefits with fewer inconvenient reforms, foreign influence can pursue its own temporal agenda, as it instrumentalises the time spent waiting in the Western Balkans to its advantage.

5.6 The Juncker freeze (2014 to 2019)

In parallel, the European Union itself was undergoing policy shifts that directly affected the Western Balkans. Jean-Claude Juncker, who was previously the prime minister of Luxembourg, became president of the European Commission on the 1st of November 2014 until 2019. Shortly after his election, Juncker gave an address stating that the past years were particularly challenging for Europe due to the worst economic crisis since the Second World War, and the continent was progressively restabilising. However, this crisis led to the loss of employment for over six million people and alarmingly low levels of investment across the union. As such, Juncker delineated in his speech an ‘Agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change’ targeting ten policy areas, namely, foreign policy as his ninth priority. He declared:

“When it comes to enlargement, I fully recognise that this has been an historic success that brought peace and stability to our continent. However, the Union and our citizens now need to digest the addition of 13 Member States in the past ten years. The EU needs to take a break from enlargement so that we can consolidate what has been achieved among the 28. This is why, under my Presidency of the Commission, ongoing negotiations will continue, and notably the Western Balkans will need to keep a European perspective, but no further enlargement will take place over the next five years.” (Juncker 2014, 12)

In a later address to the European Parliament, he qualified EU accession for new members as ‘totally unfeasible’ as long as the damages of the economic crisis, namely in terms of unemployment, remained:

“In the next five years, no new members will be joining us in the European Union. As things now stand, it is inconceivable that any of the candidate countries with whom we are now negotiating will be able to meet all the membership criteria down to every detail by 2019. However, the negotiations will be continued and other European nations and European countries need a credible and honest European perspective. This applies especially to the Western Balkans. This tragic European region needs a European perspective. Otherwise the old demons of the past will reawaken.” (21)

The phrasing of these two declarations suggested that Juncker's presidency of the Commission would merely impose a pause on EU accession by the WB6 but not on negotiations. Juncker emphasised that, beyond the internal economic state of the union, which made it difficult for it to welcome yet another state, it was also unlikely for any of the WB6 to achieve all membership criteria by 2019. The five-year official freeze on accession further fostered foreign influence in the WB6. In an interview, Milorad Dodik, the former president of Republika Srpska, had declared that cooperation with China and Russia was more advantageous and attractive, as they offered economic solutions without political interference. He explained that it was only natural for him to engage where he was 'welcome' rather than where 'pressure' was applied (Koponen 2018). This exposed the slow decline of the EU's image as an attractive collaborator amongst political leaders in the WB6. Nevertheless, Dodik's perception and resentment of the European Union were not a unanimous sentiment across the region, but it remains a memorable instance of trends shifting amongst politicians.

5.7 The Russian Invasion and Shifts in Trends (2019 to 2022)

At the 2019 EU Summit, French President Emmanuel Macron had used a controversial veto against North Macedonia (and Albania, but it was not as criticised) moving forward with their membership bids (Fouéré 2019). Jean-Claude Juncker referred to this as a 'historic mistake' (Cvetanoska, 2019). This was particularly criticised by other EU member states, as this veto occurred despite positive recommendations from the Commission and the Parliament. Moreover, North Macedonia had achieved a significant milestone through its alignment with the Prespa Agreement, which compelled the country to be officially renamed the Republic of North Macedonia to settle a decade-long dispute with Greece (Brzozowski and Gotev 2019). Despite this, President Macron supported France's decision by calling on the Commission to reform its enlargement process, asserting that the accession of further countries could undermine cohesion within the union, and he reiterated that Albania had to implement further reform against corruption and organised crime (Varma 2019).

Consequently, following the end of Jean-Claude Juncker's mandate as president of the Commission and Ursula von der Leyen's election in 2019, the European Union began reevaluating its enlargement approach. The new methodology was built on four pillars:

credibility, stronger political steer, a more dynamic process, and predictability for both sides. Rather than changing its enlargement policy, the EU aimed for improvements in accession processes and making them more comprehensive, but it stressed that candidate countries still needed to “have stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities; a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competition and market forces in the EU; the ability to take on and implement effectively the obligations of membership” as per the criteria established by the European Council in 1993 (Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations 2020).

Nevertheless, the 24th February 2022 marked a turning point in the EU’s overall attitude towards enlargement. On that date, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine and permanently reshaped Europe’s security strategy. This had indirect but tangible consequences on the Western Balkans and its accession path. The enlargement approach went from being normative and based on reforms to focusing on security strategy. Indeed, the WB6’s geopolitical position as a ‘strategic corridor’ between Europe, Russia and other great powers has made it an important buffer zone between the factions (Hlačinová 2026). Moreover, with Russia’s rapprochement with Serbia or Bosnia’s Republika Srpska, it became increasingly urgent for the EU to integrate the WB6 rapidly in order to prevent further advancement from Russia and fragmentation. However, within months of the invasions, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia applied for EU membership and were granted candidate status at an extraordinary pace as early as June 2022 and December 2023 for Georgia. This raised particular concerns as the advancement of WB6 in integration processes had stagnated for a sustained period, challenging, once again, the EU’s credibility and consistency in its promises (Hlačinová 2026). While the urgency of the war in Ukraine might have led to increased integration of the WB6 through the 2023 Growth Plan, it did not establish a clear timeline concerning accession.

5.8 The 2023 Growth Plan (2022 to the present day)

The EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans was launched in 2023 as a new strategy to accelerate the integration of the WB6 into the EU through the exchange of financial assistance for specific reforms. The plan aimed to boost economic growth in the WB6, promote democracy and the rule of law, and to maintain the integration momentum given by the security crisis in

Ukraine. This plan is set to be renewed and perhaps reassessed by 2028 (Zeneli et al. 2025). The Directorate-General for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood (2025) declared that 85% of the reform benchmarks were met. All six countries of the Western Balkans approved the plan's Reform Agendas by December 2025, meaning its implementation is currently taking place (EWB 2025). Building on this historical overview of the patterns of temporal governance in the WB6, the next chapter will focus on the current states of internal and foreign policies, the divergence in routes taken by countries across the region, and their impact on sovereignty and dependency.

Chapter 6: Country-specific analyses

This research has an imperative to be comprehensive. Consequently, it is important to consider various perspectives, namely the fact that empirical data from the six Western Balkan countries all present different experiences of temporal governance by external and internal actors. To ensure all relevant case studies are thoroughly analysed while maintaining an appropriate scope for a master's thesis, this research will adopt a typological approach in its empirical section by compartmentalising cases based on their common chronopolitical patterns. Bosnia and Kosovo were bundled together as they share a common ground in that both states possess an externally imposed constitution. Serbia and Montenegro were the next grouping due to both countries experiencing domestic political elite benefitting from and instrumentalising the stretch of time. Albania and North Macedonia were grouped because both states faced external obstacles in their EU accession path due to reasons that were mostly out of their hands and suspended any progress. This section will offer a detailed analysis of temporal governance mechanisms in each case.

6.1 Stagnation & Deadlock: The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina & Kosovo

6.1.1 Bosnia and Herzegovina

a) Dayton as Temporal Compression

Peter Galbraith, the US ambassador to Croatia who played a crucial role in the road to peace in the former Yugoslavia, recalls that the negotiations that culminated in the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) lasted twenty-one days (National Defense University 1995). The historical section of this study pointed out, however, that the DPA was not the first attempt at peace amidst the Bosnian War. As early as 1992 until 1994, four different peace plans were proposed, and each failed for various reasons: the Carrington-Cutileiro Plan in 1992, the Vance-Owen Peace Plan and the Owen-Stoltenberg Plan in 1993, and the Contact Group Plan in 1994 (Bureau of Public Affairs 1995). In November 1995, this umpteenth attempt at peace brought together in Dayton, Ohio, the presidents of Croatia, Bosnia, and Serbia: Franjo Tuđman, Alija Izetbegović, and

Slobodan Milošević, respectively. The talks were marked by intense American pressure with the facilitation of the European Community (see appendix, fig. G.1). At this point, the death toll from the Bosnian War was estimated at around 100 000 people (Duggal 2022).

Evidently, the main factor compelling the negotiations to conclude promptly was urgency. The bloodshed and war crimes resulting from this conflict were reaching disastrous proportions, and a halt had to be imposed fast. However, this very swiftness of twenty-one days of talks also meant that other important considerations of sustainable peacebuilding practices had to be overlooked. For instance, the DPA's Annex 4, which became Bosnia's Constitution, was implemented as an attachment to the treaty with the signature of the concerned actors ('Annex 4: Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina' 1995). This implies that it was implemented without ever being subject to a local referendum or ratified by a domestic political body. Serbia and Croatia's presidents had signed the DPA on behalf of the ethnic Serb and Croat ethnicities in Bosnia, meaning that this peacebuilding process overlooked local ownership (Bonifati 2023, 235). Moreover, the DPA produced in practice a system of fixed consociationalism with rigid territorial divisions and a deeply divided regional judiciary. This arrangement permanently froze the 1995 wartime ethnic discord into hard law, routinely preventing a transition towards democratic progress and rule of law, as peacebuilding processes usually do (240).

The form of temporal governance that can be observed in the case of the DPA lies in the compression of an otherwise lengthy process into twenty-one days, freezing discord into its legal basis, and turning the latter into a permanent constitution. The actors of temporal governance in this case are the external mediators from the international community, as well as the political elite in the region from the three warring parties, who all opted for containment over long-term conflict resolution. In sum, the DPA is the basis on which Bosnia and Herzegovina constantly finds itself in political deadlock, as it sacrificed a long-term democratic bottom-up solution to put an immediate stop to bloodshed and safeguard the territorial and political benefits ethno-nationalist elites had gained at the time of its drafting.

b) The Office of the High Representative and the 5+2 Agenda

Beyond providing Bosnia and Herzegovina with its constitution, the DPA also appointed the Office of the High Representative (OHR), a peacebuilding institution representing all signatory parties of the DPA, including PIC members who also elect the High Representative (Annex 10 – Office of the High Representative 1995). Through the 1997 Bonn Powers that were granted to the OHR, the latter was able to amend the national criminal code to criminalise the denial of war crimes and genocide and also secure permanent institutional funding for the Central Election Commission. Since their creation, the Bonn Powers have been used in periods of high amounts of imposition and more restrained eras (International Crisis Group 2022, 8). The institution of the OHR and its subsequent legal powers over governance in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been the topic of active criticism since its creation. This is mainly due to the fact that it enables foreign and non-elected (by the local populations) diplomats to bypass domestic sovereignty to impose legislation unilaterally. Critics argue that the persistent presence of the OHR violates the democratic principle of separation of powers and increases hostile narratives from one ethnic faction to another (Banning 2014).

Miro Lazovic, one of the Bosnian Serb Dayton negotiators, recalled Richard Holbrooke telling him and others who were concerned with the viability of the agreement to ‘live with it for ten years, and the time to change it will come’. He admitted never to have expected that the constitution would remain for three decades. (Kurtic 2025). However, the issue of the DPA representing a wartime capsule that traps the country in persistent political deadlock has been widely acknowledged, and a few significant changes have been made.

Namely, in 2008, the PIC created the 5+2 Agenda, a checklist of requirements Bosnia should achieve to close the OHR. This name refers to five tasks and two general conditions that should be reached before the OHR can exit the political landscape. They were determined as follows:

- *“Acceptable and Sustainable Resolution of the Issue of Apportionment of Property between State and other levels of government;*
- *Acceptable and Sustainable Resolution of Defence Property;*
- *Completion of the Brcko Final Award;*

- *Fiscal Sustainability (promoted through an Agreement on a Permanent ITA Co-efficient methodology and establishment of a National Fiscal Council);*
- *and Entrenchment of the Rule of Law (demonstrated through Adoption of National War Crimes Strategy, passage of Law on Aliens and Asylum, and adoption of National Justice Sector Reform Strategy).*

In addition to these objectives, the PIC SB agreed that two conditions need to be fulfilled prior to OHR closure;

- *Signing of the SAA; and*
- *a positive assessment of the situation in BiH by the PIC SB based on full compliance with the Dayton Peace Agreement.” (Agenda 5+2 – Office of the High Representative, 2008)*

This is the first formalised attempt at drawing a timeline for the post-war political system in Bosnia and Herzegovina, based on conditionality. However, the agenda poses a significant issue in the phrasing of the last condition it requires for an OHR closure. The requirement for a positive assessment of the situation in Bosnia to be performed by the PIC Steering Board implies that a subjective rather than quantitative judgement will be passed. Indeed, there are no official agreements regarding specific procedures in place to direct the Steering Board’s decisions (Security Council Report 2021). This means that the international community retains ownership regarding this aspect: domestic political bodies could operate 'normally', but international governance bodies reserve the right to deem the political situation not ‘ready’ yet. Moreover, the 5+2 Agenda, despite being an advancement in terms of timeline visibility for this internationally imposed constitutionalism, requires the solution of deeply challenging matters that are bound to divide political factions, such as state property. By using their vetoes repeatedly on these pivotal questions, the country’s struggle against dependency inadvertently fell into the hands of the ethnonationalist political elite. Lidia Bonifati (2023) claims, 'The consociational model imposed by Dayton, as it was designed, proved extremely resistant to reform. Indeed, despite the relative accessibility of the procedure to amend the Constitution, the experience of the 2006 April package shows that the success of constitutional reforms entirely depends on the political will of ethno-nationalist parties’ (245). In a recent address to the UN Security Council, the current High

Representative, Christian Schmidt, reported that general progress on the 5+2 Agenda still stalls due to political deadlock on the state property matter, despite some technical improvements to establish the required legal and budgetary conditions for the upcoming October 2026 elections (Office of the High Representative 2026)

c) Recent developments

Amid the fragile environment of temporal governance already in place in Bosnia and Herzegovina, an unexpected event recently occurred. On the 11th of May 2026, Christian Schmidt, who had been in office since 2021, announced his resignation from the OHR and stressed that he would fulfil his functions until a new High Representative had been appointed and that his departure was a personal decision. However, in an interview for the German newspaper *Augsburger Allgemeine*, he underlined that his resignation was prompted by ‘enormous and surprising pressure from the US’, and that he chose to leave at this moment (earlier than planned) to avoid further damage that could be done to the High Representative institution by refusing or discussing this inquiry (Wais 2026). This sudden statement was received with mixed reactions across Bosnia, but more vocally by Republika Srpska leaders, who celebrated it, given their longstanding opposition to Schmidt’s mandate, which they deemed illegitimate and advocated removing.

At the end of his exchange with the newspaper, Schmidt was asked whether the country even had a future in the EU, and while his reply was short, it was not clear. He declared that assessing Bosnia’s EU membership should be done in stages. If one were to look at the ‘big picture’, meaning full membership, the latter would take a long time. He stressed that the Bosnian youth does not have the patience to look that far and that they do not want to lose their connection with Europe. He concluded by suggesting that Chancellor Merz’s initiative for an associate membership of Ukraine to the EU could also work for Bosnia (Wais 2026)

As this happened just lately, long-term tangible consequences have not yet fully transpired. What can be said with certitude, however, is that this represents a crucial disruption in the country ahead of the elections set to take place in October 2026. These elections are especially important,

as they are the first ones to take place under the new biometric scanners and anti-fraud measures that were imposed through the Bonn Powers by Christian Schmidt in 2024.

Chronopolitically, this event holds significance. The alleged pressure from the Trump administration from behind the scenes allowed an extremist personality such as Milorad Dodik to weaponise Schmidt's resignation as a personal victory, as he had long portrayed the OHR as an illegitimate body in Bosnia. At an international level, finding a new High Representative might trigger a dangerous standoff between great powers. Russia and China, which are permanent members of the UN Security Council, refuse to recognise the OHR's legitimacy, while the Trump administration currently pushes for a more transactional approach to their presence in Bosnia. This has the potential to leave Bosnia without international oversight at its most sensitive electoral period. This poses a great risk of a power vacuum where disruptive leaders like Dodik will be able to further disrupt the political climate without the usual arbitration Schmidt has shown against this throughout his mandate (Giebel and Petrić 2026).

In sum, while it is challenging to predict the future consequences of Christian Schmidt's sudden resignation, this event currently represents suspended time, as the near future of Bosnia and Herzegovina is uncertain at a time when its calendar requires the most clarity.

d) Sejdić and Finci

The Sejdić-Finci case is probably one of the most notable testimonies of the chronopolitical pattern present in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 2006, as they attempted to run for Bosnia's presidency and parliament, Dervo Sejdić and Jakob Finci, who are respectively Roma and Jewish, were informed by the Central Election Commission that they were not eligible to stand for office. While BiH citizens are free to declare themselves as Croats, Bosniaks or Serbs, Sejdić deemed that being forced to define himself as an ethnicity he is not was a blatant violation of his human rights (European Parliament 2015). The two began a struggle for eligibility for the presidency and parliament, a right reserved by the Dayton Constitution for members of the three aforementioned ethnicities. In 2009, this case was brought to the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights. The Court found that this was, in fact, a violation of Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which strictly prohibits discrimination, as well

as Article 3 of Protocol No. 1, which provides the right to free elections (*Sejdić and Finci v. Bosnia and Herzegovina* 2009). Most importantly, the Court explicitly called for BiH to form its electoral and constitutional framework, yet seventeen years and four electoral cycles later, no changes have been made (Payot 2025).

This absence of (or belated) response was foreseeable given the chronopolitical patterns we have so far identified in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this case, the local political elite (Bosniak, Croat and Serb) have weaponised their own long-term passivity faced with legal pressure and EU conditionality to preserve the ethnic power-sharing structure of the Dayton Constitution that can guarantee their survival on the political scene, despite discontent. As a result, BiH faces yet another impasse, with a binding court ruling left neglected, consequently halting EU accession progress and the vision of a potential constitution reform moving further away from the Bosnian citizens' eyes.

6.1.2 Kosovo

a) The long burden of an unresolved status

The question of Kosovo's statehood predates the declaration of independence in 2008. While it would be challenging to determine the exact starting point of tensions, researchers often trace it back to the decline of the Ottoman Empire during the 19th century and the Great Crisis of 1875. The Great Powers began to direct their attention to the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire, triggering Serbian forces to expand their territory. This led to the mass expulsion of the Albanian population from the Sanjak of Nish region (today's southern Serbia), pushing them to flee southward into Kosovo following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877 (see Appendix, map 1). As a direct result, the League of Prizren, the first organised Albanian movement of political resistance, was born (Ukshini 2021, 244-247).

Fast forward to the first and second Yugoslav periods from 1912 to 1992 (kingdom and republic), which comprised Kosovo; the struggle for Albanian identity (along with all other ethnicities under Tito's rule) was suppressed. While Tito's policy of brotherhood and unity aimed to rid the SFRY of ethnic tensions, the territorial and identitarian contentions within the region of Kosovo

were contained but not eliminated. This logic ultimately worked as a delayed-action bomb. Following the war of 1998-99, Kosovo was placed under international military (KFOR) and civilian (NMIK) administration per the UNSC Resolution 1244. Kosovo was *de facto* independent, but the matter of its status remained unresolved (265). The following years were marked by deliberate ambiguity, largely due to a lack of consensus among members of Kosovo's international oversight bodies (265).

In 2005, Martti Ahtisaari, the Finnish president who was a UN special envoy for Kosovo, was asked to lead the negotiations with Serbia on Kosovo's status process. This work was conducted in close conjunction with the Kosovo Contact Group, which was composed of France, Germany, Italy, the Russian Federation, the UK, and the US (Ahtisaari 2008, 183). Ahtisaari had advocated for independence and sent his settlement proposal to the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, who endorsed and forwarded it to the UNSC. The latter mostly supported it, except for Russia, which blocked the passing of a new resolution that would grant independence to Kosovo (186).

On the 17th of February 2008, Kosovo unilaterally declared its independence, outside of the UN framework, and based it on the Ahtisaari plan (Kosovo Assembly, 2008). Following this, the Serbian government announced its intention to ask the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to rule on whether Kosovo's declaration of secession was lawful (Ukshini 2021, 267). After two years of legal battles, the ICJ concluded that Kosovo's Declaration of Independence did not breach international law, resolution 1244, or the constitutional framework imposed by the UNMIK (270). Today, approximately 110 UN member states recognised Kosovo's independence, although the exact number of states is a debated metric. To further complicate matters, a few states have withdrawn their recognition of Kosovo, but the exact number of countries is disputed between Belgrade and Pristina (Vreme 2025).

While Kosovo's declaration of independence was largely supported through the works of the international community and the Ahtisaari plan, it was fundamentally insufficient to produce full sovereignty. Furthermore, the fact that Serbia got support from Russia and China in not recognising Kosovo's statehood meant that the two great powers vetoed its UN membership. Moreover, five EU member states, to date, do not recognise Kosovo's statehood (Spain,

Slovakia, Romania, Cyprus and Greece), which makes EU accession inherently impossible due to the unanimity criterion.

Overall, the 2008 declaration itself could be argued to be an act of temporal governance by the Assembly of Kosovo. After a decade of frozen or deferred status under the UNMIK governance and the Ahtisaari process, this was meant to close off a question that had been left open since Resolution 1244 in 1999. Since then, Kosovo's path has been marked by acts of temporal governance by the international community and local political actors who accelerated the status process by declaring independence while simultaneously doing so unilaterally and outside the UN framework, a known hindrance to sustainability. The declaration did not suffice to provide Kosovo with independence, as it remains reliant on the external actors who designed it.

b) EULEX as a transitional framework

Soon after Kosovo declared independence, the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy deployed the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX). This civilian mission was launched to oversee, guide and counsel the country's judiciary, police and customs bodies, and it was given special executive authority to interfere in legal cases (Chivvis 2010, 33). As this set of duties was implemented very shortly after Kosovo declared independence, it can be argued that EULEX was meant to be a structure of support in times of transition, meaning that it was designed for a temporary timeframe. Initially, EULEX had a set mandate of two years, which got extended in 2010 for another two years along with restructuring of the mission (Consilium 2025). This operation was reiterated approximately every two years, and EULEX remains to date. The latest extension was approved in June 2025 for June 2027 with a budget of over 170 million euros and led by Giovanni Pietro Barbano (Consilium 2025).

The EULEX presents a model of temporal governance in which the EU is the main architect, as it transformed an initially temporary structure aimed at supporting a transitional process into an ever-renewed mission with no visible endpoint. While each renewal is justified by technical or situational needs rather than by a political agenda, the more they happen, the more the situation is 'normalised'. It becomes an integral part of the Kosovar political system without question. Beneath the surface-level justification of this prolonged EU presence in Kosovo to support the

judiciary, police and customs institutions in this transitional state, the EULEX also serves as a strategic instrument of leverage for the union in one of the most sensitive and unstable areas of Europe.

Predictably, this practice is not accidental, nor is it unprecedented. De Carvalho et al. (2019) argue that international missions of governance in post-conflict societies tend to function according to a logic of conditional sovereignty. In this framework, statehood is seen as something that must be gradually acquired through external supervision rather than as an innate right. Thus, sovereignty is not inalienable anymore. The conditions for a full ‘handover’ of power remain perpetually altered and postponed by the overseeing actors themselves (180). This logic is embodied in the EULEX context, which turned a short-term solution to support a political *transition* into a long-term characteristic of Kosovo's political landscape. Its presence today exposes the institutionalisation of the state of transition into the country’s political structure.

c) The Belgrade-Pristina Dialogues

At a diplomatic level, a similar governance logic to that of EULEX can be identified through the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue facilitated by the EU’s External Action Service. The talks were launched in 2011 with an initial primary focus on three objectives: improving the overall life of people in Kosovo (all ethnicities), enhancing cooperation in the Balkans, and promoting European integration in the region (B92 2011). The dialogues resulted in a multitude of agreements between Kosovo and Serbia, namely the fourteen-point 2013 Brussels Agreement for normalisation, which established an Association of Serb Majority Municipalities in Kosovo and integrated the Serbian police and courts into the structures of governance (Economides and Ker-Lindsay 2015, 1028). More recently, these talks led to the 2023 Ohrid Agreement, which achieved *de facto* recognition without compelling Serbia to give *de jure* recognition of Kosovo’s independence. While these two are widely considered to be diplomatic milestones, neither of them has been completely implemented (Vulović 2023, 2).

Indeed, both countries have been stuck in a deadlock: Serbia refuses to advance towards Kosovo's international sovereignty without first ensuring autonomy for Kosovo Serbs, and

Kosovo refuses to grant that autonomy without first obtaining tangible guarantees of sovereignty and recognition. This discrepancy between agreements and implementation is a direct result of temporal governance, as it concurrently benefits and hinders the goals of the three main political actors in this matter: the EU, Serbia and Kosovo. Within this analysis, the Brussels dialogue must be understood as a temporal governance tool rather than a mere conflict resolution procedure, as it exposes a productive stagnation where a stalemate is more beneficial for certain actors than the actual resolution of the conflict.

From the EU's perspective, the Brussels Agreements serve as a practical excuse to keep leverage over one of the most crucial unresolved international conflicts in Europe. This umpteenth impasse allows the EU to prove its own role as a productive mediator and avoid an internal crisis that could occur if Serbia and Kosovo do resolve their conflict. It must be noted that five EU member states still do not recognise Kosovo's statehood, and normalisation could bring this issue forward and create tension within the union. In sum, the EU benefits from talks to stagnate as it 'buys them time': the EU can sustain legitimacy for its mediating role without having to produce tangible positive outcomes.

For the Serbian political elite, these talks allow them to perform diplomacy and therefore demonstrate goodwill without ever conceding recognition. The participation of Serbia in EU-mediated dialogues portrays the country as a cooperative partner, which enhances (or at least does not undermine) its progression on the EU accession path. Fortunately for Serbia, dialogues cannot impose a final decision, meaning that a formal recognition of Kosovo does not have to be granted in practice. In essence, this stalemate allows Serbia to pursue its interests towards EU integration while safeguarding its stance against Kosovo's statehood.

Finally, for the political elite in Kosovo, this dialogue is an imperative to prove its institutional competence to the EU. Its stagnation, however, traps Kosovo in the position of a victim of temporal governance. Kosovo finds itself continually performing the duties required to join an organisation that cannot structurally accommodate it due to this unresolved dispute with Serbia. This cycle acts as a real dilemma, as no genuine benefits have so far transpired for Kosovo's EU accession path or conflict resolution with Serbia, but it cannot afford to withdraw from the

dialogues, as it would run the risk of being blamed for obstruction of conflict resolution processes and further impede its path towards EU membership.

Overall, the Belgrade-Pristina dialogues, like other processes of development and peacebuilding in Kosovo, have shown to function through repeated deferral, with temporary breakthroughs quickly reverting to stagnation. The dialogues have yet to concretely resolve the age-old 'Kosovo question' and ultimately maintain the existence of tensions. This directly impacts Kosovo's dependence on external powerful bodies, namely the EU, and increasingly alienates its sense of sovereignty.

6.2 Sovereignty and the Stretch of Time: The case of Serbia & Montenegro

6.2.1 Serbia

a) The fall of Milošević and its aftermath

To understand the dissonance of Serbia's path to European integration, it is imperative to look at the transition the country faced following the end of Slobodan Milošević's rule. The 1999 NATO bombing of Serbia lasted seventy-eight days and left an estimated 755 dead, though that number is highly contested (Stojanovic 2024). The aftermath of this military campaign is where one can trace back the start of Serbia's EU path. After leading the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia through four different wars within a decade of rule, isolating the country from the international community, weakening its economy, and reportedly rigging the 2000 elections in his favour, Slobodan Milošević was accused of abuse of power and fraud and was arrested on the 1st of April 2001, leaving his position as president (Rennebohm 2011).

The overthrow of Milošević marked the beginning of a transition for the FRY. The newly elected democratic opposition government, with Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić, was welcomed by the European community, which lifted all sanctions, provided reconstruction help, aid packages and signed trade agreements. The prime minister showed eagerness to start the European integration and democratisation process by addressing the Kosovo question as soon as possible (Radeljić 2014, 285). However, Đinđić was tragically stopped in his tracks when he was shot in March 2003 by Zvezdan Jovanović, a member of the Special Operations Unit, which was linked to the

organised criminal group, the Zemun clan (Stojanovic 2023). This loss made time stand still. Europeanisation and democratisation were halted. Vojislav Koštunica, the former president, became prime minister, and he was known to disagree with Đinđić's approach regarding the urgency of the Kosovo question and to be reluctant to cooperate with the Hague tribunal taking place at the time.

b) EU accession and strategic ambiguity

The same year, at the Thessaloniki Summit, European officials declared, "The future of the Balkans is within the European Union" (EU-Western Balkans Summit 2003, 178). Shortly after, Serbia starts the negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA), but the process is rapidly suspended in 2006 due to a lack of cooperation and resumes when Boris Tadić wins the 2007 parliamentary elections (Radeljić 2014, 286). In April 2008, the SAA is signed, and its implementation is conditional on cooperation by Serbia with the Hague tribunals. In 2009, Serbia submitted its application for EU membership and was granted candidate status in March 2012 (European Commission 2026).

Serbia opened negotiation talks in 2014, and by 2021, 22 out of 35 chapters were open, 2 of which were provisionally closed. So far, the country's accession path has displayed a structural peculiarity: the overall process seems to create enough momentum to be maintained diplomatically but does not produce sufficient reform to achieve meaningful progress.

Indeed, Boris Tadić, who took office as president of Serbia in 2004 with the Democratic Party, was said to follow the course of late prime minister Zoran Đinđić (Matic 2004).

Correspondingly, Tadić led a policy that aimed at breaking the shackles imposed by the Milošević rule and positioning Serbia as returning to its European identity (Kostovicova 2004, 23). Throughout his mandate, significant milestones were achieved, such as the creation of the Serbian Integration Office (SEIO) in 2004, the cooperation with the ICTY, visa liberalisation, and the candidate status. Specialists of the SEIO estimated that the most convincing argument in favour of improving on the EU path was the fact that the process of association and membership would foster economic and general social development (Gavrilis 2014, 5). This was the

dominating sentiment until the end of Tadić's mandate in 2012; EU accession was used as an aspirational tool to drive development and democratisation, as well as international integration.

Things took a different turn when Aleksandar Vučić was elected as president of Serbia in 2017.

Vučić's approach marked a great gap from that of Tadić. The president, who remains in power today, transformed the legacy left behind by Tadić into a strategic ambiguity towards the EU and foreign actors like Russia and China. Vučić came from the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), which was the opposition to the Democratic Party until 2012. It served as a split from the Serbian Radical Party (SRP) due to conflicting views regarding the EU and the SAA. The SRP was strictly anti-Western and ultranationalist, whereas the SNS considered that European integration would bring about economic growth, as well as popularity among voters (B92 2008). This double measure predates Vučić; since 2012, Serbia has been avoiding committing to definitive political alignment with any bloc while sustaining decent relationships with both Eastern and Western actors. This strategy ultimately consisted of circumventing actions that would shut out other actors (Lazić 2026, 80). This practice was able to be sustained through 'hedging', which refers to the diversification of partnerships and cooperations across regions to prevent dependence on a single actor (Kuik 2008). Serbia does this by balancing the promotion of its relations with the EU and the USA while cooperating both politically and economically with Russia and China. This is particularly beneficial for Serbia, as the EU is its main trading partner and source of financial aid; China invests in the country's infrastructure without reform conditionality; and Russia has provided strong support regarding the Kosovo question and is a key energy partner (Lazić 2026, 81).

This ambiguity is also explained by a decline in alignment with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) as it went from 99% in 2012 to 62% in 2014, namely when Serbia did not align with EU measures regarding the annexation of Crimea. Alignment dropped to an all-time low in 2022, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine, at 45%, but rose to 65% in 2025, while sanctions against Russia were never implemented (82). This has attracted the concern of Western officials who considered that Serbia had to decide whether it was staying on the path to European integration (88).

Scholar Ana Jović-Lazić (2026) pointed out, "In concrete terms, Serbia has sought to extend the timeline of its ambiguity, hoping for a more favorable external environment. This strategic temporizing is itself a hallmark of hedging, attempting to survive until circumstances, perhaps a period of multipolar détente, allow ambiguity to remain viable" (89). This phrasing makes the temporal governance practices of Serbia all the more evident. In the case of Serbia, the political elite itself, particularly Aleksandar Vučić, weaponises time by deferring its accession process as far as possible. Indeed, Belgrade kept its candidate status, opened many negotiation chapters, and committed to CSFP just enough not to jeopardise its other strategic partnerships. In this sense, Serbia's apparent commitment to the EU is mainly performative: it serves as a legitimating tool for the Vučić regime, especially in recent years.

To contextualise recent developments, since 2024, the largest protests Serbia has ever known have dominated the media and the country's internal affairs. The Serbian youth initiated this movement after the Novi Sad tragedy of 2024, where a railway station canopy that had just been renovated through a Chinese consortium collapsed onto passers-by, killing 16 people (De Launey 2025). The *Student Blockade* movement resulted from this and took to the streets to demand more transparency and the end of corruption but was met with extreme police brutality (Zoric and Andric 2025). Faced with this, Vučić kept using the apparent commitment to the EU reform and accession process as a legitimisation tool while allowing a blatant breach of the rule of law and democracy to take place in Serbia, free of accountability.

c) The Kosovo question as a deferral mechanism

Following Montenegro's secession in June 2006, Serbia adopted a new constitution in September of that year. The preamble of this legal text, which was last amended in 2022, reads:

"Considering the state tradition of the Serbian people and equality of all citizens and ethnic communities in Serbia, Considering also that the Province of Kosovo and Metohija is an integral part of the territory of Serbia, that it has the status of a substantial autonomy within the sovereign state of Serbia and that from such status of the Province of Kosovo and Metohija follow constitutional obligations of all state bodies to uphold and protect the state interests of Serbia in

Kosovo and Metohija in all internal and foreign political relations, the citizens of Serbia adopt” (‘Constitution of the Republic of Serbia’ 2006)

This formulation officially defined Kosovo as an integral and inalienable part of the Serbian territory. This entails that any move towards formal recognition of its statehood would be unlawful or require the amendment of the constitution. This dispute has, however, been a major obstacle in Serbia’s EU accession path, but its enshrinement in the constitution has made it structurally impossible for matters to progress forward. This created a legal temporal trap where the accession and normalisation clocks are at a complete stop. As the previous case study chapter already laid out the broad context of the Kosovo question, this section will focus on the instrumentalisation of this matter as a temporal governance mechanism.

With the 2013 Brussels Agreement and the Belgrade-Pristina dialogues, Serbia had officially committed to engaging in normalising its relations with Kosovo. The negotiation chapter 35 ‘Other issues. Item 1: Normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo’ was opened in December 2015. In 2020, Kosovo and Serbia signed an economic normalisation agreement, and in 2023, Kosovo signed the Ohrid agreement, while Serbia verbally agreed (Stojanovic 2023). To date (May 2026), none of these agreements have been implemented by either party (Stanicek 2025, 9).

In this case, the main engineers of temporal governance are the political framework created by the 2006 constitution and the governmental elite who have consistently maintained it. These two have forced the entire country for two decades (and perhaps more in the future) to remain emotionally and legally caught up in a constitutional stalemate. The preamble set an indefinite ceiling on the democratisation of Serbia that can only be lifted depending on the willingness of a political elite who can only benefit from deferring the matter. Beyond deferring Serbia’s EU accession path, which benefits actors like Vučić, as aforementioned, the Kosovo question has had a backfiring effect on Serbia’s societal sovereignty. The state, outside the political elite, is incapable of determining its own path: citizens cannot vote for a future where the question is resolved, parliaments cannot enact legislation for it, and government cannot call for resolution.

6.2.2 Montenegro

a) Đukanović and the accession clock as a political shield

Montenegro proclaimed its independence from Serbia on the 3rd June 2006. After 55.5% of citizens voted for independence, this officially marked the complete dissolution of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Montenegro's independence was peaceful, as the EU institutions were involved in the preparation of this event from the start, namely mediating between the government and the opposition (Radulović et al. 2011, 79). Scholars consider the peaceful secession of Montenegro from Serbia to be symptomatic of an overall stabilisation of the entire Western Balkans region (80). During the period leading up to this pivotal referendum, the political elite were already advocating for European integration as an overarching goal of independence. Immediately after this was achieved, EU-Montenegro diplomatic relations were established, and it became a UN member state, followed by the OSCE, the World Bank, the IMF, the Council of Europe, and Partnership for Peace membership (80). Montenegro received its EU membership candidate status in December 2010 after a positive evaluation of its preparedness, marking a tremendous advancement towards membership under Milo Đukanović's presidency (81).

Đukanović has long been present on the Montenegrin political scene, as his presidential mandate that started in May 2018 was his second mandate, the first one dating from 1998 to 2002. He left the office in May 2023 after losing the elections to the current president, Jakov Milatović, from the Europe Now! party. He has since resigned as the head of the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) and has withdrawn from active daily politics (Šćepanović 2025). Throughout his overpowering presence in the country's politics, Đukanović adopted a strategic dual approach where he openly welcomed EU conditionality while implementing few concessions and seeking to have as much adaptation time to new political developments. Scholar Radulović (2011) points out:

“All of this created a dual perception: one from outside, where the tempo, quality and results of reforms were regarded as relatively adequate and another internal impression, from the

perspective of citizens and civil society actors, where the speed, quality and results of reforms were far from satisfactory.”(84)

In essence, it is argued that Đukanović was purposely delaying the execution of certain reform plans in ways that did not result in consequences noticeable from an external perspective, while simultaneously buying time to adapt to the new circumstances. This move could be explained by a will to avoid losing leverage over the recently reformed sectors and keeping credibility as a leader at an international level (84).

This dual approach is a clear example of how temporal governance can subtly disable a country’s sense of sovereignty. Currently, Montenegro is considered to be the ‘runner-up’ in the quest for EU accession in the Western Balkans. However, this timeline resides mainly in the predictable hands of the EU through the rhythm of conditionality cycles, progress reports and benchmarks. The Đukanović strategy in that regard was to give a performance of goodwill, shifting his legitimacy objective from Montenegrin citizens to Brussels. Citizens of the country cease to be the priority. The state, therefore, follows an externally imposed schedule rather than an inwardly produced one. In a system where accountability is indefinitely deferred, EU conditionality is structurally useful. Overall, Đukanović’s temporal governance was a key instrument in the survival of his presidency and legitimacy at the expense of Montenegro’s sovereign institutions and the hopes of citizens.

b) The 2020 rupture

The legislative elections of August 2020 were a pivotal moment in Montenegro’s modern history. For the first time since the country’s independence, the opposition won by a majority, which put an end to the three-decade-long reign of the DPS. This loss is partly explained by the controversial law on religious property that had been passed by the DPS government the year before. The law required religious communities to prove that the ownership of their estate predates 1918, the year Montenegro joined the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and lost its independence. Should they fail to do so, the estate would be transferred to the government or the Montenegrin Orthodox Church (MOC). This raised controversy in the country. The largest religious body, the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC), called the Serbs of Montenegro to protest

this decision, which they viewed as a disguised attempt to reduce the SOC's influence in the country to the advantage of the MOC. Moreover, the SOC also perceived this law to be a way for the government to overstep in the clergy's affairs, making it a violation of its independence, financial autonomy, and status in the country. Montenegrin Serbs make up approximately 30% of the total population; the protests took a colossal scale beyond the borders of Montenegro (Simanović 2020). This controversy rapidly fuelled the opposition against Đukanović. In the parliamentary elections, the opposition, comprising *For the Future of Montenegro*, *Peace is Our Nation*, and *In Black and White*, won a total of 41 seats and formed a coalition, while the DPS had only 30. This essentially reversed the balance, as the DPS became the opposition (IPU Parline: Global Data on National Parliaments 2020).

This rupture in the country's political tradition revealed a few underlying truths. Despite a few successes at the start of their rule, such as amending the religion law and implementing economic reforms, the coalition's functioning did not last long: it collapsed after 14 months. While the coalition had a common adversary, the DPS, the parties within it had no other common ground. In fact, it was deeply divided between pro-Serbian/Russian and pro-EU/transatlantic aspirations. By the end of 2021, the technocrat government was in complete deadlock (The Guardian 2022). Furthermore, at this time, Montenegro had opened 33 out of 35 negotiating chapters for EU accession. However, a 2021 report by the European Commission on the state of affairs in Montenegro claimed the following:

“The lack of constructive engagement of all parliamentary actors prevented a meaningful political dialogue, further polarising the political landscape. (...) The change of the ruling coalition transformed the dynamics between the executive and legislative powers. The Parliament enhanced transparency of its work, communicating with the public and stepped up its legislative and oversight role overall. However, the ruling parliamentary majority frequently initiated or passed legislation through fast-track procedure, without public consultations and without duly taking into account EU accession requirements, which hindered EU-related reform progress, risking reversing earlier achievements. The parliament is yet to demonstrate in practice its commitment to Montenegro's EU reform agenda and engage in constructive coordination with the government on related legislative initiatives” (European Commission 2021, 10).

The language used by the EU in this report sheds light on a particular symptom of temporal governance: instead of viewing governmental collapse as proof that the accession process had replaced performance with true institutionalisation, the report focuses on instability almost entirely as a disruption to the reform schedule requiring accelerated engagement. The report did not evaluate the impact of a decade of conditionality and whether it had resulted in an autonomous sovereign state. Without Đukanović in power to feign progress, the EU perceived this change as a failure and responded by re-establishing temporal regulation at the exact moment when the effects of the DPS performances were most apparent.

Overall, the case of Montenegro is an accurate illustration of the weaponisation of time as a political weapon on two levels. At the domestic level, Đukanović instrumentalised the accession timeline as an endless political shield and delayed accountability long enough, based on the deferral logic of conditionality, to weaken the sovereign institutions that should have managed to function after he left. This was also made possible at the international level by the EU's own temporal architecture. When the compliance performance eventually collapsed in 2020, the EU tried to reassert the only framework it was familiar with. This split showed that Montenegro had built a sense of sovereignty that had never been significantly solidified. The EU negotiation chapters got delayed, governments collapsed, and Brussels used further benchmark delays to diffuse the situation.

6.3 The EU's Waiting Room: The Case of North Macedonia & Albania

6.3.1 Albania

a) Reform delivery without recognition

For most of its EU membership path, Albania was bundled with North Macedonia until late 2024. Albania applied for membership in 2009, was granted candidate status five years later in June 2014, and only had its negotiation talks opened in 2020 ('Albania - Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood - European Commission' 2026). The reason behind this long waiting period between the candidate status and the opening of talks lies in the EU's internal situation

during that time span, in combination with the complications North Macedonia had been experiencing in its disputes with Greece and Bulgaria.

The historical section of this research established that during the year 2019, the EU was experiencing an internal crisis linked with enlargement fatigue. The 2019 EU Commission's report on Albania's progress on its membership path pointed out positive progress on its EU reform agenda, namely regarding good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation, fundamental rights, public administration... The report also mentioned that the European Commission recommended opening Albania's accession negotiations (European Commission 2019, 3). However, in October of the same year, France (supported by the Netherlands and Denmark) vetoed the start of discussions for Albania and North Macedonia, despite approval from the majority of EU member states, based on a variety of arguments. Most importantly, Emmanuel Macron called for the EU to reform and deepen the European integration process before accepting any new members (Fouéré 2019). He also argued that the two countries had not made enough progress towards the Copenhagen criteria. This decision came as a surprise given Albania's progress on the reform agenda. Both the Commission and the Parliament had given their recommendations for Albania to move forward. Further progress was still impending in a few key areas, such as corruption, money laundering, organised crime, and media freedom. Reports found that while Albania had managed to pass laws, their enforcement was lacking. Notwithstanding, opening talks with Albania and North Macedonia did not signify accession, far from it.

Albania was the fourth country with the most asylum applications in France, with approximately 5,599 in 2019 (FrC 2019). This raised concerns that if Albania were to join the EU, countries like France would have to manage a surge of immigration from Albania. This could fuel the right-wing extremist anti-migration narratives that were threatening Macron's position as runner-up candidate ahead of the presidential elections of 2022. Additionally, by freezing out Albania and North Macedonia from advancing on their EU membership path, Macron compelled the rest of the EU to review and reform its enlargement approach to make it more credible and politically driven. This was formally done in 2020, the same year that Albania and North Macedonia's talks were opened (European Commission 2020).

In this case, France was the main manipulator of temporal governance: Emmanuel Macron used the unanimity requirement to indefinitely suspend Albania's accession timeline to delay the potential domestic response from right-wing parties that would result from this and weaken his position for the upcoming presidential elections. This move was also explained by a will to reform conditionality and presented France as an EU guardian; the consequences were the same: the burden of French internal political concerns (rise of xenophobic narratives) was shifted onto Albania's sovereign development, and it revealed that, despite progress and meeting requirements, recognition is not guaranteed. Something that many, surprisingly, including Jean-Claude Juncker, considered to be a 'grave historic mistake'. He added that if the EU wanted to be respected, it had to keep its promises (POLITICO 2019).

b) The Rama government's response

The Albanian government's response, through Prime Minister Edi Rama, was immediate and showed that, in this case, temporal governance was completely out of his and the government's hands. Firstly, let us look at the diplomatic dimension of the reaction. Soon after the news of the French veto, Edi Rama told the press that Macron's argument for blocking discussions was 'legitimate for internal politics', and that he understood that the EU was experiencing a crisis from within, needed to deepen its reforms, and that Albania was 'somehow collateral damage' (Tidey et al. 2019). He also stressed that reforming the accession process should make it more predictable, credible and fairer to all candidate countries. He did contrast his reaction by adding that Albania had done everything a 'country like them could do to open the accession talks', that the process had become increasingly demanding and was held hostage by the member states' internal politics and agendas. The Prime Minister also addressed the concerns that some country representatives had regarding corruption and crime, and argued that this should not have been factored into the decision to open or block negotiations, as Albania needs accession talks in order to make the exact reforms required, explaining that this was only the start of the process, which does not signify accession. Despite this, Rama reaffirmed Albania's commitment to continue working towards improvement, stating that 'the journey is much more beneficial to the country than the date of arrival' (Wemer 2020).

Edi Rama's diplomatic response to the 2019 veto revealed a key aspect of Albania's dependency on the externally imposed clock: it is internalised into the political scene. This is mainly visible in the fact that the Prime Minister does not seem to articulate any framework outside of the EU, despite this disappointing and unexpected result, which he understood to be outside of Albania's hands.

Instead of passively waiting, Edi Rama shifted attention away from the EU accession timeline that had been suddenly frozen and created his own 'clock' by launching the Open Balkan initiative in October 2019, together with President Vučić of Serbia and President Zaev of North Macedonia (Wemer 2020). This could be argued to be an attempt to break free from the externally imposed 'clock' that kept Albania and North Macedonia in the EU's waiting room. The Open Balkan initiative consisted of creating a common market in the region to promote the free movement of goods, services, people and capital. This was nicknamed a 'Mini-Schengen' as it only comprised three countries. This initiative sought to create an alternative way for the countries to demonstrate and develop their ability to foster cooperation in the region, portraying Albania as a proactive actor.

The project, however, ultimately failed due to a lack of participation by Western Balkan countries, namely Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Montenegro. These three countries, which were crucial for this cooperation, perceived the initiative as a disguised attempt at promoting Serbian hegemony in the region. Additionally, with EU membership as a main goal for all of these countries, the initiative seemed to be more of a consolation prize rather than progress on the accession path (Mirković 2024).

Nonetheless, Edi Rama's actions in this initiative were an act of instrumentalisation of the time the EU had held hostage. The initiative served as an alternative timeline for countries in the same situation to generate political momentum, legitimacy and sovereignty independently of the EU's conditionality cycles, while simultaneously appealing to them.

6.3.2 North Macedonia

a) The name dispute

Unlike most of its former Yugoslav counterparts, North Macedonia peacefully gained independence as early as September 1991. However, the country's path to sovereignty and development was almost instantly halted as it announced its new name, the Republic of Macedonia, which was immediately contested by Greece. Indeed, the northern region of Greece was already called Macedonia (see Map 3), which could pose two principal problems for Greece. Firstly, in terms of identity, Greece believed that Northern Greece was (the only) Macedonia. The country viewed 'Macedonianism as a conceptual unity that could not be shared' (Nimetz 2020, 210). Secondly, this represented a security threat for Greek political leaders, given that Greek Macedonia was only incorporated into the country during the 1912-13 Balkan Wars, and there had already been worries of detachment in the years that followed. This newly formed state constituted the potential threat of aspiring to reunify the historic region of Macedonia (207). Consequently, Greece was able to bring this issue to the UN Security Council, presenting it as a security threat, and North Macedonia was able to enter UN membership under the provisional name: Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (fYROM). This took an originally bilateral name dispute to international dimensions (207). The newly formed state then submitted its application to join the EU in 2004 and was granted candidate status in 2005. However, as long as the dispute between the two countries persisted, Greece was imposing a veto against the fYROM's bids to join both the EU and NATO (*Macedonia and Greece* 2018). The name dispute lasted 27 years; it was officially solved with the 2018 Prespa Agreement.

This data is particularly relevant to our analysis, as it is one of the most apparent showcases of the impacts of temporal governance on both sovereignty and dependency. Here, the main engineer of temporal governance is Greece, which was able to weaponise the EU and NATO unanimity requirements and suspend any sort of integration of the fYROM into the international community based on an initially bilateral dispute. Additionally, the fact that Greece raised the quarrel at the UNSC level allowed it to enlarge the space within which the fYROM's time was at a standstill. Greece's end goal was to create an international environment that would be hostile enough towards fYROM to compel it to change its name.

This predictably had a great impact on North Macedonia's sense of sovereignty. Based on Richard N. Haass's (2003) definition, sovereignty has four principal characteristics: supreme political authority and monopoly over the legitimate use of force within its territory; ability to regulate movements across its borders; ability to make foreign policy choices freely; and recognition by other governments as an independent entity entitled to freedom from external intervention (Ulum 2022, 27). The name dispute and the subsequent standstill North Macedonia experienced were powerful enough to impact all four characteristics simultaneously. With its EU and NATO bids blocked, North Macedonia could not freely exercise foreign policy nor secure international recognition under its original chosen name. Its supreme political authority and the freedom from external intervention were hindered by the fact that a neighbouring country was able to have the final say on the country's international identity with such ease. Correspondingly, and ironically, North Macedonia became dependent on the will of Greece to access the very institutions that would have helped it strengthen its independence. The only possible solution was for North Macedonia to concede to the Greek demands.

b) The Prespa Agreement and an absent reward

27 years of dispute later, the Prespa Agreement was signed between the prime ministers of North Macedonia (Alexis Tsipras) and Greece (Zoran Zaev) in June 2018 (effective in February 2019) and required the country to change its constitutional name from the Republic of Macedonia to the Republic of North Macedonia and officially distance historical and cultural heritages from one another, in exchange for Greece to lift its vetoes on accession bids to NATO and the EU (*Prespa Agreement* 2018). The signing of this agreement remains, to this day, one of the most remarkable sovereignty concessions in modern European history, especially given the strain the dispute had placed on North Macedonia's accession paths to both NATO and the EU. In the early 2000s, the country was one of the frontrunners on its way to membership. Still, as the dispute dragged on, it witnessed most of its Western Balkans neighbours overtake it (namely Montenegro and Serbia), while North Macedonia was in a paralysed state (Bechev and Marusic 2020, 3).

As the Prespa agreement symbolised the only exit from this paralysis, the French veto imposed on Albania and North Macedonia not only came as a surprise but also revealed that the

envisioned timeline of European integration associated with the solution to this age-old dispute was an illusion, in essence. The consequences of this veto were different from those of Albania. The Prespa agreement required highly structural and costly changes in North Macedonia: a constitutional name change, the revision of historical and cultural heritage, and the decoupling from ancient Hellenic identity. At a domestic level, the Prespa agreement was highly controversial. When the Macedonian citizens were called to vote in a consultative referendum on the Prespa agreement, they were asked the following question: “*Do you support EU and NATO membership by accepting the agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Greece?*” (Gligorov 2018). While 94% of voters voted ‘yes’, the overall voter turnout reached approximately 37%, which is less than the 50% required threshold for the results to be valid. This low participation was linked with a widespread call to boycott the referendum by political figures, namely the president, Gjorge Ivanov, who called the deal a ‘historical suicide’ (BBC 2018). Faced with the failure of the 2019 veto, Prime Minister Zoran Zaev was soon forced to resign from his position and call for early elections as his domestic credibility practically vanished (EWB 2021). On the positive side, the Prespa Agreement allowed North Macedonia to enter NATO almost immediately as soon as the Prespa Agreement came into force (North Atlantic Treaty Organization 2019).

In sum, the 2019 veto was a temporal governance instrument used by France not only for internal political motives but also to compel the EU to reform its enlargement approach. This had a direct impact on fracturing North Macedonia’s political stability and eroding public trust in domestic political institutions and in the European integration process.

c) The Bulgarian veto

The reform of the EU’s accession policy did not mark the end of stalling for the country. Indeed, tensions were building up with Bulgaria due to historical disputes over the North Macedonian identity and language, which Bulgaria claims to have Bulgarian foundations, while North Macedonia considers them to be distinct (Bechev and Marusic 2020, 11). Therefore, after the French veto came the Bulgarian veto. This opposition stems from the claim that North Macedonia failed to implement the Treaty on Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation, which was signed in 2017 by the former prime ministers of Bulgaria and North

Macedonia: Zoran Zaev and Boyko Borissov (Nowinowski 2026, 2). In the agreement, the two parties agreed to combat propaganda directed at each other, refrain from interfering in each other's domestic affairs, and implement a joint expert commission on history and education (2). In August 2020, Bulgaria sent an explanatory memorandum to other EU member states arguing that the Macedonian language was a Bulgarian dialect and that Macedonian identity was an artificially engineered one through Yugoslavia. Amongst other requests, the memorandum demanded that the negotiation frameworks specifically express this idea (Pieńkowski and Żornaczuk 2020). The first Bulgarian veto was imposed in November 2020 on the EU's decision to open accession negotiations (Gjorgjioska 2021, 1). Thus, the North Macedonian path to EU integration was further held back and remained completely still until 2022. At this point, the French EU presidency proposed a framework of compromise designed to lift the veto, and it required North Macedonia to amend its constitution by officially recognising the ethnic Bulgarian minority in the country, numbering approximately 3504 people in 2021 (*Census Results*, 2022). Both governments approved the proposal, Bulgaria lifted its veto, and the EU finally opened accession negotiations with North Macedonia in July 2022. A screening process followed, lasting until December 2023, and North Macedonia began receiving funds under the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans (Directorate-General for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood 2025, 2). Today, the North Macedonian parliament has still not implemented the constitutional amendments it accepted through the French proposal due to domestic opposition. Therefore, no negotiating chapters have been opened so far, as this amendment was a prerequisite to open negotiating clusters. North Macedonia remains at a standstill (Zweers 2024, 7).

On the whole, the veto on the accession path served as a tool for Bulgaria to compel North Macedonia to concede (yet again) to its demands and make permanent constitutional changes. Bulgaria's use of the veto further suspended North Macedonia's time, keeping the country in the anteroom for another two years, and the damages of it remain today, as North Macedonia is still unable to concretely implement the proposal. More than ever, North Macedonia's sovereignty is compromised, as none of the amendments it was asked to make, be it for Greece or Bulgaria, came from an internal sovereign decision but rather from the externally imposed ultimatums. The country's constitution, an element that should inherently be subject to one country's own

authority, was used as a negotiation tool by external powers to fit their own political agendas. North Macedonians currently find themselves in an endless state of dependency on domestic political actors and their willingness to agree (or not) on amending the constitution. Even then, Skopje has been blindsided by the promise of progress through concession; the future is uncertain and unpredictable.

6.4 Comparative Analysis

The compartmentalised empirical analyses of the Western Balkans Six allowed for three different patterns of temporal governance to be identified: stagnation, stretch of time and suspension. In each pattern, different actors of temporal governance come into play through different acts, objectives, and consequences. All cases shared the following independent variables: an indefinite stalling of EU accession processes, slow reform progress and a shared post-conflict history. However, our examination has shown that cases diverge in three dimensions of temporal governance, including the engineer of that practice, their acts and objectives, and the outcomes they produce.

Let us begin our comparative analysis by looking at the first dimension, which asks who manipulates time. In the first case, Bosnia and Kosovo, the main actors of temporal governance were external to the country, as they are members of the international community (the UN, EU, and the USA) who imposed constitutional frameworks designed for an urgent transitional period, but not long-term nation-building. The second case, Serbia and Montenegro, has as primary actors the domestic political elite who have been exploiting the vacuum caused by EU accession ambiguity to consolidate their legitimacy abroad and internally. In the third case, Albania and North Macedonia, the main actors of temporal governance were EU member states (hence, external) using their veto power to keep the two countries waiting to pursue their own interests. This divergence exposes that temporal governance is an instrument rather than an isolated incident and can therefore be manifested through diverse entities.

The second dimension concerns acts and objectives, or the mechanisms of temporal governance. It can be observed that temporal governance mechanisms typically appear to be legal and constitutional where the actors are external, as seen with Bosnia and Kosovo. In comparison,

Serbia and Montenegro, where actors are domestic, display a mechanism of performative compliance enabled by the stretch of time they also fuel. In the last case, Albania and North Macedonia, the external actors made use of the unanimity requirement to suspend time and pose an ultimatum, meaning the mechanism was more procedural. Out of the abovementioned three empirical cases, the legal mechanism of temporal governance seems to pose the most challenging situation to exit from, as it eliminates the possibility of change without the willingness of the actors that benefit from stalemates.

Finally, the third dimension looks at the consequences and outcomes temporal governance produces. Across all empirical cases, the erosion of sovereignty and the exacerbation of dependency were measured. It is, however, the first case where the levels of dependency were at their worst, as neither of the two countries has the autonomy to govern without external supervision. In the second case, Serbia and Montenegro are formally sovereign and have functional institutions, but the sense of sovereignty has been drained out by years of performative politics that prioritised the elite's survival rather than actual democratisation and development processes. The final case, Albania and North Macedonia, revealed a severe erosion of sovereignty in the two states, as the logic of conditionality lost all credibility when both states made reform progress but never collected its benefits, leading to a weaker civic trust in public institutions.

Overall, these three cases demonstrated that the level of dependency and sovereignty erosion in the WB6 corresponds with the extent to which imposed timelines and accountability mechanisms are present in the temporal framework within which these states work. This has implications beyond the region, as it teaches that any externally imposed and supervised transition process that lacks a defined timeline and binding obligations creates the structural conditions for chronopolitics to take place by the hands of all actors involved.

Conclusion

As the concluding chapter of this study is being written, the next EU Western Balkans summit is set to take place in Tivat, in Montenegro, on the 5th of June, 2026. The upcoming summit's theme is 'Shared prosperity and stability of the EU and the Western Balkans'. The participants will be expected to evaluate the progress the WB6 have made towards EU integration and how to foster it further, particularly regarding the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans. They are also scheduled to address cooperation on foreign, security and defence policy questions (Consilium 2026). More than two decades after the Thessaloniki declaration, which had promised the Western Balkans a future within Europe, the same questions dominate the political arena in the region, challenging the peoples' patience and resilience, the EU conditionality and its legitimacy, and the credibility of a democratic future in the WB6.

This thesis' overarching questioning asked in what ways the manipulation of time as a political tool reinforces dependency and affects sovereignty in the Western Balkans. The overall existing literature on the Western Balkans and its rapport with the European Union underscores a slow pace of accession processes due to divided opinions on enlargement within the EU, weakened EU credibility, and ambiguity in EU foreign policies, deterring WB6 political leaders from further engagement in discussions (Oudejans 2022). Other literature assesses the role of time in EU enlargement, meaning its effect on certain outcomes, namely economic (Breuss 2005). It is within this context that our study seeks to inscribe itself. It fills the research gap by drawing causality between the allocation of time and political agenda and the eroding consequences on the dependency and sovereignty of the Western Balkans region.

Temporal governance, the management of time for specific political purposes, is not a novel concept in the WB6. Upon review of the region's shared history, it has become clear that this practice did not result from the 2003 Thessaloniki Agenda but came to be in its current form as a structural legacy of the political dynamics between, within and outside the six countries. This is observable in a wide variety of cases from 1989 to the present day. For instance, Tito's rule

merely deferred ethnic tensions until his passing, or the fact that the Dayton Peace Agreement was drafted, signed and implemented under an extraordinarily compressed timeline and froze ethnic tensions into Bosnia and Herzegovina's constitution. The examples are multiple and demonstrate a longstanding history of chronopolitics in the region led by external and internal actors to the detriment of local populations. The repetitive nature of prediction, freezes, deferrals, and conditionality created a cyclical path towards EU integration rather than a linear one, as benchmarks and conditions are constantly renewed or expanded rather than achieved. It is this very dynamic that allowed several members of the WB6 domestic political elite and external actors from Russia or China to exploit the erosion this vague timeline progressively produced to fit specific political agendas, free of accountability. Indeed, in recent years, dynamics might have changed, but chronopolitics were sustained. Starting from the contemporary era, three different patterns of temporal governance can be identified in the Western Balkans.

The cases of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo and their externally imposed constitutionalism expose a pattern of stagnation and deadlock. Here, the systems imposed by the international community and the EU, paired with a lack of reform, were enshrined in the legal system before domestic actors could take ownership and engage in bottom-up state and peacebuilding in a sustainable way. The domestic responses were different but fundamentally comparable. In Bosnia, the Dayton ethnic power-sharing structure allowed its privileged elite to induce deadlock through vetoes and rendered reform unappealing, as seen with the passivity of the government regarding the Sejdić-Finci, the disruption of progress on the 5+2 Agenda, the hostility towards and instrumentalisation of the OHR institution... In Kosovo, the political elite had no sustainable alternative besides dependency on external actors. and carried on fulfilling the requirements of processes that conveyed international legitimacy (the Brussels dialogues, the EULEX governance) but brought them further away from genuine sovereignty through self-governance.

Furthermore, the cases of Serbia and Montenegro demonstrate a temporal governance model based on the stretch of time through deferrals as a tool to build legitimacy and credibility. Throughout his 2018-2023 mandate, the former Montenegrin president Đukanović led a dual strategy of feigning compliance and alignment with EU conditionality while persistently postponing concrete reforms that would benefit citizens. When he left office, rather than reassessing its approach to Montenegro's European integration, the EU reaffirmed its

conditionality strategy and treated the 2020 rupture as a disruption to the accession timeline rather than as a failure of the system that allowed performance to prevail over results. In Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić's strategy was somewhat more elaborate. Still currently in power, the president has managed to balance between two fundamentally opposed blocs, a strategy called 'hedging', where Serbia actively avoids commitment to a faction that would eliminate opportunities with the other. He leads an ambiguous foreign policy by entertaining good diplomatic relations with the EU by using its accession path as a legitimisation instrument, while CFSP alignment has significantly dropped recently, and civic protests combined with extreme police brutality continue to occur in the country. Simultaneously, Vučić has sought and built strong political and economic cooperation with Russia and China without the burden of imposed reforms, giving it leverage in both blocs (though, recently, indignation has begun to rise from Western officials, calling Serbia to 'decide'). Combined, Serbia and Montenegro display a system of temporal governance manipulated from within, where the accession clock serves as an instrument of legitimacy for the political elite, and development is mostly transactional rather than socio-political. Consequently, Serbia and Montenegro's sovereignty is present in terms of structure but hollowed out by the power plays of presidents and political agendas.

Finally, the cases of Albania and North Macedonia display a form of temporal governance from above rather than within, as the future of both countries within the European Union were rhythmised by the will of other EU member states pursuing their own agenda: France, Bulgaria, Greece... Despite remarkable reform progress and costly concessions, the two countries saw their efforts rendered vain, based on conditions beyond their control. The member states used their veto and the unanimity requirement for reasons pertaining to internal politics or individual foreign policy aspirations. Albania and North Macedonia not only had their timelines bundled but also suspended, and the impact on their sovereignty was dire. For Albania, temporal governance mostly impacted domestic institutional credibility, as the Rama government had invested so much in the EU accession process that when the rug was pulled from under its feet, no alternative that came from within (like the Open Balkans initiative) could replace the ambitions of the EU accession path. In North Macedonia, the constitution was weaponised as a negotiation instrument twice within two decades, leading to amendments that did not come from an internal necessity but rather compulsion in an ultimatum situation. The two countries have

shown that efforts and reform do not necessarily guarantee a reward or the end of the waiting period, when chronopolitical actors still have interests to pursue to the detriment of the Western Balkans. These three patterns also point to the following conclusion: the political weaponisation of time in the WB6 reinforces dependency on external actors and erodes sovereignty as it shifts political development, legitimacy, and the overall future of the six countries into the hands of the allocated temporal frameworks rather than into those of the countries themselves, more specifically, for the will of local populations.

Chronopolitics and temporal governance are not unique to the Western Balkans. However, this region is exceptionally significant for the analysis of the political weaponisation of time, as it displays with clarity what mechanisms of temporal manipulation can be used by all sorts of actors in pursuit of specific political objectives. The conceptual framework of temporal governance, erosion and multifaceted chronopolitical pattern that was laid out within this study was articulated based on this region, but its rationale can be extended far beyond this territory. Every place where externally imposed conditionality and domestic political stakes collide can lead to a situation where timelines are left without accountability and open-ended. This is where the analysis of politically weaponised time finds its relevance, as it explains that power is not only exercised through institutions, legislation, or resources but also through the strategic political decision to wait, defer, or leave uncertain.

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Appendix

Chronology

- 1991-1995: Break-Up wars of Yugoslavia
- 1995: Dayton Peace Agreement
- 1998-1999: War in Kosovo with NATO bombing of the FRY and establishment of UNMIK
- 2000:
 - Fall of Slobodan Milosević
 - Launch of the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP)
- 2001: Insurgency in North Macedonia, leading to the Ohrid Agreement
- 2003: Thessaloniki Agenda at the EU-Western Balkans Summit
- 2006: Montenegro gains independence from Serbia
- 2008:
 - Kosovo declares independence
 - Gazprom Neft acquires a majority stake from Naftna Industrija Srbije (NIS)
- 2009: China includes WB6 in its 'going out' strategy
- early 2010s:
 - EU accession processes start to stall across the Western Balkan regions due to 'slow progression', delays, vetoes, and shifting policies
 - Gulf investments in Albania and BiH in tourism and agriculture
- 2013: Etihad Airways (UAE) acquires a 49% stake in Air Serbia
- 2014:
 - Jean-Claude Juncker declares that there will be no EU enlargement during the commission's mandate (until 2019)
 - Launch of UAE-backed real-estate project Belgrade Waterfront
 - Start of significant Chinese infrastructure projects in Serbia
 - Launch of the Berlin Process by Germany
- 2015: China funds the building of the Bar-Boljara highway in Montenegro
- 2018: resolution to the name dispute with the Prespa Agreement, marking progress for North Macedonia with NATO and EU discussions

- 2019: France blocks the opening of accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania
- 2020:
 - Start of large-scale civic protests across the WB6 demanding rule of law, transparency, accountability, democratic and institutional reforms.
 - Talks formally approved for North Macedonia and Albania
- 2020-2022: Bulgaria (repeatedly) blocks North Macedonia's EU accession process
- 2023: Bosnia and Herzegovina is granted EU candidate status

Dramatis Personae

- **Jean-Claude Juncker:** Luxembourgish former president of the European Commission from 2014 to 2019, who oversaw a period of no enlargement during his mandate
- **Ursula von der Leyen:** current German president of the European Commission who publicly supported the need to facilitate and accelerate enlargement talks following the start of the war in Ukraine (Tassinari 2025).
- **Oliver Várhelyi:** EU Commissioner in charge of managing the timeline and conditionality within the WB6's accession processes.
- **Emmanuel Macron:** current French president who became the symbol of "EU fatigue", using France's veto to block Albania and North Macedonia's EU accession talks despite calling for an "ever-closer union of European nations" (Fouéré 2019).
- **Olaf Scholz:** current Chancellor of Germany, who, following the start of the war in Ukraine in 2022, called on the EU to shift toward accelerating accession processes that were largely affected by temporal erosion (Balkan Web 2022).
- **Angela Merkel:** Chancellor of Germany from 2008 to 2021 and main designer of the Berlin Process of 2014 (Musliu 2021).
- **Josip Broz Tito:** political leader of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia who had managed to consolidate a multiethnic country rid of ethnic tensions through the framework of brotherhood and unity, "bratstvo jedinstvo" (Ströhm 2019).
- **Slobodan Milošević:** Serb nationalist political leader who is deemed to have accelerated the dissolution of Yugoslavia through his ambitions of a 'Greater Serbia' (Lampe 1996)
- **Franjo Tudman:** First President of Croatia from 1990 until he died in 1999, he advocated for the Croatian Spring movement, seeking self-determination from SFRY as

he became a dissident (Ströhm 2019). He sought to distance Croatia from the Balkans and align with more Western European political agendas.

- **Milan Kučan:** the first Slovenian president from 1991 to 2002, who led the country's exit from Yugoslavia and the short armed conflict that ensued (Lampe 1996).
- **Alija Izetbegović:** the first president of Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1996. He was a known dissident of the communist regime in SFRY since the end of WWII (Lampe 1996).
- **Martti Ahtisaari:** Finnish president and UN special envoy for Kosovo, who was asked to lead the negotiations with Serbia on Kosovo's status process in close conjunction with the Kosovo Contact Group (Ahtisaari 2008, 183),
- **Giovanni Pietro Barbano:** Major General of the Italian Carabinieri and Head of Mission of EULEX ('Head of Mission - EULEX - European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo', n.d.)
- **Aleksandar Vučić:** the current president of Serbia, who prioritises the promise of the EU to legitimise his rule despite civic political protests, receives funds while implementing minimal genuine reform, benefiting directly from temporal governance and erosion (Dowell 2024).
- **Milorad Dodik:** Bosnian Serb president of Republika Srpska until his recent removal. He presented a significant opposition to the EU, due mainly to the union's lack of response and slow processes, which indirectly legitimised his anti-state views (Moratti 2023)
- **Zoran Zaev:** former North Macedonian Prime Minister who carried out the Prespa Agreement requirements in anticipation of progress until France imposed its veto against accession talks for North Macedonia and Albania (Fouéré 2019)
- **Edi Rama:** current prime minister of Albania who has put forward initiatives such as the Open Balkans and led a politics of strong commitment to EU conditionality.
- **Milo Đukanović:** the previous Montenegrin president for three decades, and shifted political narratives in Montenegro from nationalism and EU scepticism to pro-Western EU and NATO narratives as a way to stay in power.
- **Jakov Milatović:** current Montenegrin president who prioritises a more technocratic approach to EU accession, namely through the 'Europe Now!' movement, which seeks to

move narratives away from an identity focus and boost economic reform (Šćepanović 2025).

Glossary

- **Chronopolitics:** a broad political theory concept which draws a critical analysis of the way time is structured in institutions of power, establishing a clear nexus between politics and time (Wallis 1970)
- **Conditionality:** Practice of international organisations or states granting loans, aid or favourable trade status on the condition that the recipient state meets certain conditions (IMF, n.d.).
- **Coercive diplomacy:** a diplomatic strategy where powerful actors use the threat of force to make a recipient state comply with certain demands without ever resorting to force or full-scale war (Coercive Diplomacy - Diplo, n.d.).
- **Temporal Governance:** the deliberate manipulation of individuals or a group of people's time through regulation, synchronisation and allocation as a means to a specific end (Adam 2004).
- **Temporal Erosion:** refers to the progressive decline or erosion of political policies, projects, institutions or legitimacy resulting from a prolonged period of time marked by repeated delays, obstruction and growing frustration (Hacker 2015).
- **Acquis Communautaire:** a set of rights, duties, norms and principles linking EU member states together.
- **Enlargement Fatigue:** declining political support from EU member states towards enlarging the union to new members due to the concern that it may cause institutional and economic strain on the EU.
- **Sovereignty:** a country's independent authority and the right to govern itself without external interference (Britannica Dictionary).
- **Legitimacy:** a measure of the general positive feelings of a population toward its government, allowing it to exercise its rule (EBSCO, n.d.).
- **Dependency Theory:** a development studies theory which suggests that the way high-income countries take advantage of the resources of lower-income "periphery"

countries is what causes global economic inequality, making the case that the underdevelopment of the poor is necessary for the development of the wealthy (Smith 1981).

- **Normalisation:** a diplomatic process of reinstating regular and official relations between states that were previously in conflict or had cut diplomatic ties.
- **Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP):** EU policy launched in 2000, aiming at fostering and encouraging political, social and economic reform in the Western Balkans to facilitate their EU accession.
- **Berlin Process:** a diplomatic initiative designed by German Chancellor Angela Merkel that serves as a multilateral platform for dialogue between the Western Balkans Six and other EU member states. Its main goals are to achieve regional connectivity, economic integration, reconciliation between communities (RYCO), and cooperation for security.
- **Peace Implementation Council:** fifty five states and agencies that support the peace process in Bosnia through financial assistance, military assistance for EUFOR or directly leading operations in the country (OHR, n.d.)

Causal graph

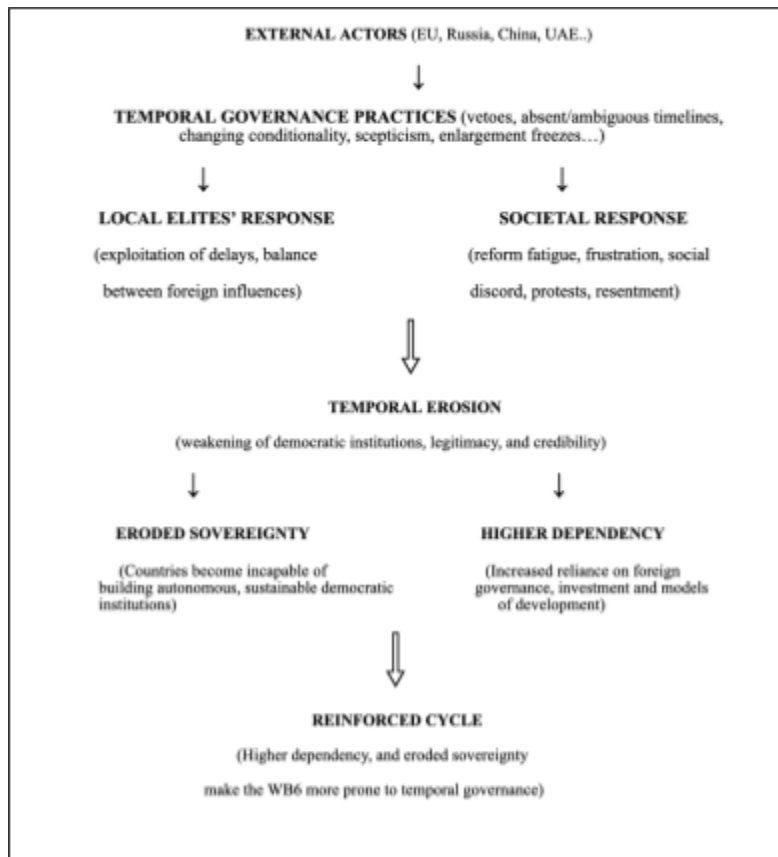


Figure 1: The causal links of temporal governance in the WB6. Author's own.

Maps



Map 1: The Expulsion of Albanians from the Sanjak of Niš into Kosovo, 1877–78. Adapted from Wikimedia Commons, "File:Municipalities of Serbia.png," last modified March 15, 2020, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Municipalities_of_Serbia.png&ol did=491523898. The arrow indicates the direction of Albanian refugee displacement from the Sanjak of Niš.



Map 2: Kosovo and its neighbouring countries. "Kosovo." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Accessed May 21, 2026. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kosovo>.



Map 3: The Greek region of Macedonia. Pitichinaccio, "Greek-Macedonia-map," Wikimedia Commons, August 23, 2010, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Greek-Macedonia-map.png>.

Images



Figure F.1: The ceremonial signing of the Dayton Agreement in Paris, France, December 14, 1995. NATO, "Signing the Dayton Agreement," Flickr, accessed May 2026, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/nato/23796608646/in/photostream/>.

Pledge of honesty:

*On my honour as a student of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien, I submit this work in good faith
and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorised assistance on it.*