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The Western Balkans and the EU in Multilateral Organisations: Foreign Policy Coordination and Declaratory Alignment in the OSCE

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Abstract: This paper sheds light on the Europeanisation of Western Balkan states' multilateral diplomacy in the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). More specifically, it enquires into the politics of declaratory alignment of six Western Balkan states. It analyses the frequency at which those states have aligned themselves with the statements of the European Union (EU) between 2004 and 2011, and researches qualitatively the motives of their alignment. The paper finds that the declaratory behaviour of most Western Balkan states in the OSCE has become distinctively convergent with EU positions. Although conditionality certainly fosters alignment, the paper shows that socialisation is a more powerful mechanism of diffusion for most Western Balkan states; that emulation should not be neglected amongst small-sized countries; and that coercion and, interestingly, persuasion do not play a significant role.

Keywords: Europeanisation, Western Balkans, European Union, alignment, foreign policy convergence

Introduction

With the gradual consolidation of EU structures of external governance and the intensification, in foreign and security policy matters, of the EU's relations with its closest neighbours, Europeanisation has become a pregnant reality for all Western Balkan states. Located at an ever-shrinking institutional distance from the EU, these states now experience Europeanisation in policy fields that were once presumed impervious to exogenous pressures. The foreign policy of multilateral organisations is increasingly exposed to Europe's "transformative power",¹ and the institutional process underpinning their gradual rapprochement often translates into *convergent* changes.

1 Börzel and Risse 2009.

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This paper, conducted under the auspices of Europeanisation research, investigates how sustained interactions with the EU and its member states in multilateral *fora* have affected the foreign policy of Western Balkan states, and why it is so. Its contribution is empirical, descriptive as well as explicative. The paper begins by discussing specific aspects of Europeanisation research and presenting the conceptual and analytical framework on which it relies. Then, it analyses quantitatively the foreign policy behaviour in the OSCE of six Western Balkan states between 2004 and 2011, or more specifically the frequency at which those non-EU states have aligned themselves with EU statements. It also assesses the level of regional cohesion of Western Balkan states' foreign policy behaviour in the OSCE. Based on interviews, the paper finally explores the motives underpinning the Western Balkan states' collective alignment with EU statements, and assesses the relevance of five mechanisms in this respect: coercion, manipulation of utility calculations (conditionality), socialisation, persuasion and emulation.

The Europeanisation Puzzle: Concept and Definitions

Despite an ever growing number of scholarly contributions, Europeanisation research remains an unconsolidated field of inquiry, approached by a variety of conceptual definitions, each shedding light on particular aspects of the phenomenon. Many of the conceptual issues that have tormented Europeanisation researchers for almost two decades have not been solved, and Europeanisation is mostly “what political actors make of it”.² Scholars first defined Europeanisation as a bottom-up process ensuing through “the emergence and development at the European level of distinct structures of governance”.³ It could have, for instance, something to do with the formation of the so-called European foreign policy, i.e. with “aspects of foreign policy being ‘taken out’ of the exclusively national conduct of foreign policy and elevated to EU policy-making”.⁴ Such conceptions of Europeanisation raise interesting questions, but their conceptual field proves poorly differentiated from neighbouring concepts' such as European integration. Meanwhile, new approaches to Europeanisation have been advanced which suggest inquiring into the “the domestic impact of European integration” in general,⁵ and the “domestic impact of EU foreign policy co-operation”⁶ in particular. Some studies accordingly define Europeanisation as “the growing influence of European treaties, directives and case law on the substance of domestic legal systems”,⁷ while others, relying on a wider ontology, examined all kinds of “pressures emanating [...] indirectly from EU membership”.⁸

2 Radaelli and Pasquier 2007, 35.

3 Risse et al. 2001, 3.

4 Jørgensen 2004, 49.

5 Börzel and Risse 2000, see also Green Cowles et al. 2001.

6 Smith 2000.

7 Smits 2004, 229.

8 Featherstone 2003, 7.

Europeanisation research now even crosses the borders of the European Union⁹ and, for instance, examines how non-EU states' diplomacy changes over time as the EU asserts its international presence.¹⁰ Moreover, rather than being held captive by the European integration research agenda, Europeanisation increasingly builds conceptual ties with an overarching field of inquiry, the diffusion of ideas and policies, the domestic effect which it seeks to explore.¹¹

Europeanisation researchers are yet reluctant to investigate what Europeanisation entails in terms of outcome. Often, they assume that Europeanisation has no proper phenomenological manifestation of its own (other than "change"), which they could generalise as definitional trait. Their conclusions on the nature of Europeanisation typically remain specific to their study. This scholarly caution sometimes appears as indecisiveness, as one can hardly research Europeanisation without knowing what it looks like.¹² This paper, by contrast, defines Europeanisation as convergent changes in the states' behaviour resulting from the adoption of ideas or practices which have been diffused by the EU. Its intent is, first, to assess the level of Europeanisation of Western Balkan states' multilateral diplomacy in the OSCE, and second, to explore the motives underpinning their convergent behaviour. The paper thus researches Europeanisation both in terms of outcome (looking for convergent changes) and process (examining how diffusion has operated).

Operationally, it boils down, first, to documenting the occurrences of policy convergence, defined as "growing similarity of policies over time",¹³ and second, to assessing which mechanisms of diffusion may therein be involved.¹⁴ As regards the first point (convergence), the paper distinguishes between σ -convergence, i.e. the regional-scaled "decrease in variation of policies"¹⁵ and δ -convergence, which is operationalised "by comparing countries' distance changes to an exemplary model".¹⁶ Whereas σ -convergence is merely a measure of change in regional cohesion, δ -convergence indicates how individual Western Balkan states have come closer to the EU's preferences, which it considers as pivots. As regards the second point (mechanisms of diffusion explaining convergence), the paper briefly examines the relevance of the following mechanisms: coercion, manipulation of utility calculations, socialisation, persuasion and emulation.¹⁷ The analysis then relies on

9 Schimmelfennig 2009.

10 Marciacq 2012.

11 Börzel and Risse 2009.

12 Buller and Gamble 2002, 4.

13 Holzinger and Knill 2005, 776.

14 Following Börzel and Risse 2009, 9–12.

15 Knill 2005, 769.

16 Ibid.

17 Börzel and Risse 2009.

the qualitative analysis of a large set of EU enlargement documents¹⁸ and a dozen semi-structured interviews conducted between March and October 2011 with diplomats from the EU and the Western Balkans.¹⁹

Although Europeanisation has become a mushrooming field of inquiry, very little attention has been paid to it with regards to Western Balkans' foreign policy. This paper contends that lessons can be learnt in this respect from the systematic examination of Western Balkan states' multilateral diplomacy in the OSCE.

Measuring Europeanisation in Multilateral Organisations

Declaratory Politics in the OSCE and the Alignment Mechanism

Born in Helsinki as a Conference (in 1973), the OSCE has become an intergovernmental organisation in which intense diplomatic activities are deployed in the pursuit of security-oriented goals in Europe. A Vienna-based organisation, the OSCE counts a membership of 56 participating states, including EU actual and prospective member states. At the strategic level, the OSCE is aimed at promoting, through diplomatic means, a comprehensive approach to European security in three dimensions of security: politico-military, economic and environmental, and human. Its scope of activities is broad enough to be representative of states' key foreign policy interests in both EU and non-EU Europe. Therein, states are free to express their views by issuing their own declarations or aligning themselves with others'. Endowed with substantive, rather than procedural powers, their declaratory might is used as an instrument of their foreign policy and can thus be coordinated. Amongst the various modes of coordination, declaratory alignment plays a peculiar role, not least because it has been extensively supported by the EU in its external relations. Not all OSCE participating states have the possibility to align themselves with the EU – in 2005, alignment was offered to two non-EU states (Croatia and Turkey) plus Bulgaria and Romania; in 2011, it was offered to 17 non-EU states, including all Western Balkan states.²⁰ Since the EU cannot voice its positions in the OSCE (it is not a participating state), it is the Presidency, speaking on behalf of the EU, that reads out EU statements. The list of non-EU states that align themselves with the statement is then added at the bottom end of the EU statement.

18 Depending on the Western Balkan state concerned and its progress towards the EU between 2004 and 2011, the following documents were reviewed: EU-Western Balkan states' joint declarations on political dialogue, European partnerships, stabilisation and association agreements, Opinions of the Commission on the application for membership, Progress reports.

19 The set of interviewees include 1) OSCE diplomats posted in Vienna from Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia; 2) high officials responsible for multilateral diplomacy in Serbia and Macedonia's foreign ministries; 3) diplomats from the EU delegation to the OSCE in Vienna; 4) officials and diplomats from the delegations of EU member states that recently held the Council's Presidency.

20 Marciacq 2011.

The mechanism of EU alignment in the OSCE has been routinised in Vienna.²¹ The Permanent Council (PC) is the primary locus of declaratory politics in the OSCE, and its regular meetings take place every Thursday. Intense consultations precede these meetings, first to coordinate the positions of EU member states internally, and then to manage alignment with non-EU states externally. The decision, by the EU, to make a statement at a PC meeting is usually taken on Mondays during the internal coordination meeting. A draft statement is elaborated by the Presidency on Tuesdays, and circulated for approval amongst EU member states. On Wednesday afternoon, a meeting is held at the deputy-ambassadorial level to pre-finalise the negotiations, and consensus is finalised at the latest at the ambassadorial level on Thursday morning, shortly before the PC meeting. Western Balkan states do not participate in this process of internal coordination, nor are they allowed, when they are offered to align themselves with EU statements, to formulate suggestions or amendments. What they ultimately face is a “take it or leave it choice”.²² Informal briefing meetings with candidate states are nonetheless held every Tuesday. However, the proposition to align comes only *after* a consensus has been reached amongst EU members, i.e. at the earliest on Wednesday afternoon.

Until 2009, alignment was perceived as normative compatibility with EU positions. It did not prevent the states from issuing their own statements, in their national capacity, in addition to aligning, although this possibility was rarely used in practice.²³ Western Balkan states could therewith clarify their view or express nuances whilst acknowledging the correctness of EU statements. Alignment thus preserved, at least conceptually, the separateness of two modes of declaration – individual and collective. With the Lisbon Treaty, however, this interpretation shifted to the more exclusive understanding of alignment. The new (informal) norm, introduced during the Spanish Presidency, provides indeed that states that align may no longer speak in their national capacity.²⁴ Although the EU delegation has kept some latitude in implementing it, this new practice of alignment places Western Balkan states in the face of severed choices, since their alignment automatically implies their individual behaviour being fused into collective action.

Data and Method

This paper assesses the Europeanisation of Western Balkan states’ multilateral diplomacy based on the (changing) frequency at which these states chose to align themselves with EU statements in the OSCE. It measures δ -convergence by comparing Western Balkan states’ declaratory behaviour in the OSCE with an exemplary model (EU member states’

21 EU diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 1 August 2011); Official from the delegation of the member state holding the Presidency of the Council (personal interview in Vienna, 1 August 2011).

22 Macedonian diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 7 July 2011).

23 Diplomat from the delegation of a member state that held the Presidency of the Council in 2010 (personal interview in Vienna, 26 April 2011).

24 Official from the delegation of the member state holding the Presidency of the Council (personal interview in Vienna, 1 August 2011).

internally coordinated positions, aggregated as EU positions) and it gauges σ -convergence by evaluating Western Balkan's regional cohesion. The temporal scope of the study starts after the 2004 enlargement wave, and ends with the end of the Hungarian Presidency in 2011. The dataset consists of 1188 statements issued, mainly at PC meetings, by the EU in the OSCE. For each statement, a quantitative study examines the positions towards alignment of six Western Balkan states participating in the OSCE (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia). Alignment only occurs when the alignee expressly communicates to the EU its desire to align itself with a given statement. The analysis computes these occurrences to evidence possible patterns of declaratory convergence over time.

How Convergent is the Western Balkan states' Declaratory Behaviour in the OSCE?

Western Balkan states, overall, align themselves with EU statements at a remarkably high frequency. Over the past 6–7 years, their alignment rate has generally been higher than 90 per cent, except for Serbia which constitutes a striking exception (see Table 1). Certain Western Balkan states (e.g. Croatia, Albania) have adopted a relatively stable declaratory behaviour characterised by quasi systematic alignment with EU statements for the entire period under consideration. Little variation in the frequency of their alignment with the EU can be observed, unlike in other countries (e.g. Montenegro, Macedonia) where a positive progression was noted, culminating with close-to-100 per cent alignment. For these states, δ -convergence towards EU positions has thus been slightly more marked, not least because they started at lower levels of alignment (Figure 1). For others (above all Serbia), speaking of δ -convergent behaviour in the OSCE may be questionable. Between 2006 and 2009, Serbia's rate of alignment with EU statements fell from 91 to 56 per cent, never reaching the 90 per cent threshold again despite a fragile recovery in 2009–2010. In winter 2010–2011, Serbia's alignment rate fell again.

At the regional level, Western Balkan states' cohesion in alignment with the EU is also relatively high (between 88.4 and 95.8 per cent), which shows that Western Balkan states often more willingly align themselves as a group, in a cohesive manner, rather than heterogeneously (Table 1). However, Serbia's dis-alignment between 2006 and 2009 and 2010–2011 has negatively affected the region's σ -convergence and weakened its cohesive alignment.

Year/semester/ Presidency	δ -convergence %						δ -convergence (regional cohesion) %
	CRO	MAC	ALB	BOS	MNG	SRB	
2004/2-NTH	98						
2005/1-LU	99						
2005/2-UK	97	84	91			67	84.0
2006/1-AT	99	97	94	95		91	95.2
2006/2-FIN	99	94	97	94	78	88	93.9
2007/1-DE	98	96	97	98	88	85	93.5
2007/2-PT	90	98	96	96	94	78	91.8
2008/1-SLV	98	92	96	90	99	72	91.2
2008/2-FR	98	92	86	91	94	68	88.4
2009/1-CZ	97	96	96	99	97	56	90.3
2009/2-SUE	97	96	99	99	99	72	93.5
2010/1-SP	98	97	95	91	94	84	93.3
2010/2-BEL	98	99	96	98	98	85	95.8
2011/1-HU	98	98	93	86	94	77	91.1

Table 1: Degree of convergence towards EU positions

Source: OSCE primary data retrieved and compiled by the author

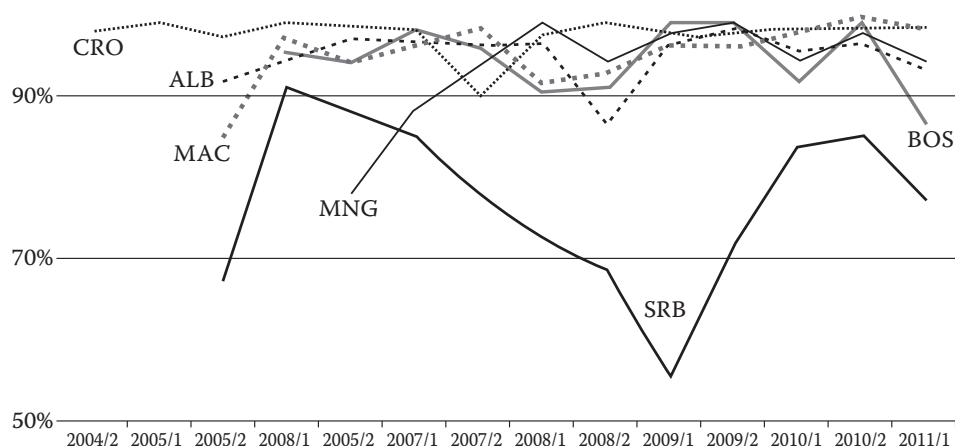


Figure 1: δ -convergence of Western Balkan states' declaratory behaviour in the OSCE

Source: This graph is a rendition of Table 1

Explaining the Western Balkan states' Declaratory Alignment in the OSCE

Since the EU communicates its position and offers alignment to Western Balkan states before the statements are read in the OSCE, convergence may be understood as resulting from the external diffusion of the EU's ideas on a series of security-related issues. In order to understand the motives underpinning alignment, the following section assesses the relevance of the five mechanisms of diffusion proposed by Börzel and Risse (2009). It also attempts to explain why Europeanisation has been less successful in this respect in Serbia than in other states.

Coercion

A possible explanation for Western Balkan states' systematic alignment is coercion, i.e. convergence "forced by the threat or the actual use of physical violence".²⁵ This mechanism would imply that the EU could forcibly undermine Western Balkan states' external sovereignty, e.g. by exercising supreme authority over national prerogatives. Although the EU continues to assume key functions in the Western Balkans (especially through its Special Representatives), it does not (and cannot) impose its preference for alignment in the region. EU representatives in the Western Balkans do not, indeed, hold executive powers in this respect which they could exert to enforce foreign policy convergence. Even the softer form of coercion, i.e. through the exercise of the EU's jurisdictional supremacy, bears inconclusive results. EU law lacks specificity in this matter, and EU supra-national bodies (especially the European Court of Justice) have virtually no legal jurisdiction to enforce obligations pertaining to foreign policy coordination.²⁶ In a word, the Western Balkan states' alignment with EU statements in the OSCE is not triggered by coercion.

Manipulation of utility calculations – conditionality

More than elsewhere, the EU has woven in the Western Balkans a series of contractual relations which extend the realm of its governance beyond its institutional borders. These relations promote a strategy of "reinforcement through reward"²⁷, offering incentives to Western Balkan states in exchange for their adoption of EU norms. Starting from the 1996 Regional Approach, its conditionality-based approach has been developed over the years so as to encompass the EU's *acquis communautaire*, including in CFSP matters. Their conditionality regime now comprises rules and norms pertaining to foreign policy coordination in multilateral *fora* like the OSCE. Compliance with them is fostered by the "European perspective" promised to Western Balkan states at the Thessaloniki summit in 2003. These in fact convey two kinds of "soft" obligations, usually enshrined in a relatively

25 Börzel and Risse 2009, 9.

26 Foreign policy coordination with the EU falls under the CFSP pillar, which is out of the ECJ's jurisdiction.

27 Börzel and Risse 2009, 10.

uniform wording as part of EU's political dialogue with Western Balkan states (see Table 2 for the legal references). One is an *obligation de moyens* regarding foreign policy coordination in international organisations; and the other is an *obligation de résultat* regarding foreign policy convergence.

The *obligation de moyens* provides in substance that political dialogue with the EU shall “tak[e] full advantage of diplomatic channels between the Parties, including appropriate contacts in the bilateral as well as the multilateral field, such as the United Nations, OSCE meetings and elsewhere”.²⁸ Cooperation should furthermore ensue through “providing mutual information on foreign policy decisions” or “inform[ing] and consult[ing] one another on important matters of common interest”.²⁹ The *obligation de résultat*, which applies to Western Balkan states, finally provides that these should ensure an “increasing convergence of positions on international issues, and in particular on those matters likely to have substantial effects on one or the other party”.³⁰ The Commission is responsible for assessing the states' compliance with this obligation, e.g. in its pre-accession Questionnaire. Can compliance with any of these rules account for the distinctively high levels of Western Balkan states' declaratory alignment in the OSCE?

	Obligation to coordinate	Obligation to converge	Legal basis
<i>Croatia</i>	2001	2001	Joint Declaration on Political Dialogue (13344/01, Annex) Thessalonica agenda (doc. 10369/03) SAA (OJ L 26, 28/01/2005)
<i>Macedonia</i>	1997	1997	Joint Declaration on Political Dialogue (20/04/1997, Annex) Thessalonica agenda (doc. 10369/03) SAA (OJ L 84, 20/03/2004)
<i>Albania</i>	1992	1992	Joint Declaration on Political Dialogue (6166/92, Annex) Thessalonica agenda (doc. 10369/03) SAA (doc. 8164/06)
<i>Bosnia</i>	2003	2003	Joint Declaration on Political Dialogue (OJ C 240, 07/10/2003) Thessalonica agenda (doc. 10369/03)
<i>Montenegro</i>	2007	2007	Joint Declaration on Political Dialogue (doc. 11575/06) SAA (doc. 11566/1/07)
<i>Serbia</i>	2003	2003	Joint Declaration on Political Dialogue (OJ C 240, 07/10/2003) Thessalonica agenda (doc. 10369/03) SAA (16005/07)

Table 2: *Western Balkans states' obligations with regards to foreign policy coordination*

28 See for instance the EU-Serbia Joint declaration on political dialogue of 17 September 2003 (doc. 12616/03).

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

Interviews with EU and Western Balkan diplomats indicate that the importance of compliance as a motive for alignment should not be overestimated. The interviewees (Western Balkan states' diplomats and EU officials) all testify to the absence of direct pressures for alignment from the side of the EU, and concur in dismissing the view that the EU *demand*s alignment on contractual grounds. As explained by a diplomat from Bosnia-Herzegovina: "we are free to express dissenting opinions if we have them – which we mostly do not".³¹ Although many acknowledge that "there is a rule that we must align",³² alignment, in the Western Balkans, is not perceived through the logic of consequentiality as being a *sine qua non* condition for reaping the benefits of European integration. It is not even presented as such by the EU, which prefers to focus on political dialogue (the multifaceted process) rather than alignment (the specific outcome). As explained by an EU diplomat, "alignment is a signal; it is not so much an instrument, unlike political dialogue that is pursued per se [...]. So, we do not focus very much on alignment. For us, it is a routine we carry out and a minor part of our business".³³ If alignment is not directly driven by EU incentives, non-alignment is still avoided among Western Balkan states for fear of hypothetical sanctions. It is indeed assumed amongst most Western Balkan states that "every non-alignment is recorded by Brussels";³⁴ "analysed by the EU"³⁵ and that, at some point, these should be accounted for.³⁶ This perception is especially strong in Serbia's diplomacy, where it is also seen more critically: "there is usually a person in Brussels or in Belgrade that is putting a plus and a minus when we align and when we do not".³⁷ This idea of being subject to conditional sanctions for non-alignment is, however, largely ungrounded. First, in case of non-alignment, EU diplomats may at best ask "out of curiosity"³⁸ for reasons that prevented alignment. These reasons are usually known in advance, and non-alignment thence does not cause turmoil. Second, alignment rates are not scrutinised in the EU delegation or in Brussels on a regular basis.³⁹ Third, even though a list of statements with which EU applicants have not aligned is to be provided to the EU in response to the Commission's questionnaire, it is highly doubtful that some occurrences of non-alignment would bluntly disqualify the applicants.

Even though concerns over alignment may occasionally be formulated by Western Balkan states' diplomats in terms of compliance, they in fact pertain to a more elusive will to

31 Bosnian diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 2 May 2011).

32 Montenegrin diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 21 April 2011); quoted in a similar vein by a Macedonian, Serbian and Albanian diplomats.

33 EU diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 1 August 2011).

34 Croatian diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 28 April 2011).

35 Bosnian diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 2 May 2011).

36 Montenegrin diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 21 April 2011).

37 Serbian diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 17 October 2011).

38 Official from the delegation of the member state holding the Presidency of the Council (personal interview in Vienna, 1 August 2011).

39 EU diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 1 August 2011).

“demonstrate one’s ability and willingness to adopt the CFSP *acquis*” altogether.⁴⁰ Rather than stirring up fears of hypothetical sanctions for breaching EU obligations, the act of non-aligning goes hand in hand with the apprehension of being seen by the EU as lagging behind or lacking political will. Only in this sense do some candidate states concede that “non-alignment *should* be the exception.”⁴¹ This assessment is valid for nearly all Western Balkan states, the strategic utility of which is closely linked to the EU. Serbia, by contrast, has a larger propensity for supporting third countries the approaches of which sometimes conflict with EU preferences. Its strategic partnership with Russia, its active participation in the Non-Aligned Movement and its special relations with Iran or Belarus may occasionally cause it to face difficult choices. In exchange for third partners’ support against the declaration of independence of Kosovo in 2008, Serbia accordingly chose not to align with some of the statements issued, for instance, by the EU against Russia.⁴² As explained by a top-level diplomat in Belgrade, Serbia’s “relations with many countries are directly linked with Kosovo. If the EU speaks about countries that did not recognise Kosovo, then we are very careful.”⁴³ The decrease in Serbia’s alignment rates should thus partly be understood as the need to reciprocate non-EU partners’ support, the value of which at times exceeds the value of the incentive promised by the EU.

Socialisation

Unlike conditionality, which is driven by the logic of consequentiality, socialisation follows the logic of appropriateness and appeals to normative rather than instrumental rationality.⁴⁴ This mechanism may lead to alignment, provided that the states no longer align because they benefit from it in terms of utility calculations, but because it is what is most appropriate in a given context, having internalised the markers of the normative community to which they belong. Socialisation then implies that states’ national interests come to be redefined in collective rather than individualistic terms – a trait that characterises Western Balkan states to a large extent, despite the fact that they do not belong to the EU (yet).

Most Western Balkan states characteristically define the national interest they pursue in the OSCE as primarily collective and consubstantially linked to EU accession. Unlike other non-EU states, which tend to insulate their national priorities from the EU’s, and with the exception of Serbia, for which national approaches remain prevalent on some issues, Western Balkan states usually do not seek to upload their national priorities in the

40 Croatian diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 28 April 2011).

41 Macedonian diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 7 July 2011).

42 For instance, in 2008 alone: PC.DEL/46/08, PC.DEL/66/08, PC.DEL/181/08, PC.DEL/209/08, PC.DEL/324/08, PC.DEL/348/08, FSC-PC.DEL/29/08, PC.DEL/605/08, PC.DEL/620/08, PC.DEL/712/08, PC.DEL/722/08/Rev.1, FSC.DEL/170/08, PC.DEL/918/08, PC.DEL/1057/08, PC.DEL/1081/08.

43 Serbian official (personal interview in Belgrade, 12 September 2011).

44 Börzel and Risse 2009.

OSCE. Macedonia, for instance, does not prioritise the pursuit of its naming issue policy in the OSCE, although the issue is central to its foreign policy.⁴⁵ Like others, its diplomats declare that what primarily counts is that it “shares the same values, the same objectives and principles”⁴⁶ as the EU, fully adheres to EU collective approaches and therefore aligns itself with EU statements: “alignment is a means to demonstrate our European way of thinking and cooperating.”⁴⁷ More than the expression of an individualistic position towards a particular statement by the EU, alignment is thus given a collective teleology: its intent is to demonstratively participate in European foreign policy. Although Western Balkan states cannot contribute to European foreign policymaking on an equal-footing as EU member states, they can nevertheless increase the EU’s international presence by joining EU statements, including on issues in which they “would otherwise not have been interested.”⁴⁸ This certainly requires a certain level of socialisation, for them (non-EU states) to claim (and gain) social acceptance from the EU.

In order to foster this process of diffusion, the EU exerts normative pressures on Western Balkan states regarding the appropriateness of alignment. Rather than negotiating alignment (e.g. allowing amendments to the planned statement), EU diplomats, for instance, assert that “we have an EU standard. And in an optimal world, we would like to see this standards shared [by others], but we do not want to negotiate the EU standard [...]. [Western Balkan states] are welcome to share it, which means that they come onboard, but it is an EU position.”⁴⁹ The normative precedence of EU approaches over national positions in the OSCE has been internalised by most Western Balkan states to a very large extent. Many view alignment as a norm, i.e. a position that is applied “by default”⁵⁰ as the most appropriate behaviour in the OSCE. The cognitive process leading to alignment is not the one of comparing EU statements with national positions on an equal-footing. It is a “bureaucratic approach”⁵¹ that presupposes the correctness of the transmission, and consequently, the appropriateness of alignment. As expressed by a diplomat, “we do not read EU statements wondering whether we have the same position, because we assume that we do”⁵²; alternatively “we read it as we were going to align”⁵³, or “we have *ex ante* the same position.”⁵⁴ Diplomats thus approach the text transmitted by the EU with highly positive

45 Macedonia could for instance be more reluctant to join statement criticising states (like Russia), which recognised it under its constitutional name. But it is not, since alignment is primarily viewed as a collective instrument. Macedonian diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 7 July 2011).

46 Serbian diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 17 October 2011).

47 Bosnian diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 2 May 2011).

48 Croatian diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 28 April 2011); Montenegrin diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 21 April 2011).

49 EU diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 1 August 2011).

50 Macedonian diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 7 July 2011).

51 Ibid.

52 Montenegrin diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 21 April 2011).

53 Serbian diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 17 October 2011).

54 Albanian diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 29 April 2011).

assumptions regarding its content, and typically find it hard to conceive any instance of non-alignment, even though their actual positions, expressed in official discourses, go slightly further than those of the EU (e.g. on Kosovo for Albania), or admit substantive nuances (e.g. on Kosovo for Bosnia Herzegovina). While considering alignment, what they wonder, then, is rather: “is there any why I should not align?”⁵⁵ Besides, Western Balkan states’ delegates in the OSCE often rely on an informal mandate from their capital, stating that alignment should ensue whenever “there is no dispute within the EU”, “topic is not that important”, or “topic has been discussed earlier”.⁵⁶ This informal mandate shows how effective the normative pressures exerted by the in EU in terms of alignment have been in the Western Balkans.

In the *praxis*, socialisation in the OSCE is fostered by the intensity of contacts between the EU and Western Balkan states’ delegations. Croatia, Macedonia and Montenegro (i.e. EU candidates until 2011) meet the EU delegation and the Presidency every week in an EU candidate group format and exchange information on relevant issues. These informal meetings present opportunities for non-EU states to “speak out concerns without renouncing alignment”.⁵⁷ They increase the likelihood of alignment by improving communication, and they are viewed by all as “very important” and “very useful”. The states that are deprived of such meetings (because they are/were not EU candidates), openly regret their being “really neglected in this respect”⁵⁸, or seek compensation by exchanging more intensively with particular EU member states (e.g. Slovenia or Italy).⁵⁹ Western Balkan states, finally, meet informally in an ex-Yugoslavia format every month. In this context of regular encounters, socialisation is also encouraged by the fact that decisions are taken by most Western Balkan states’ delegations in Vienna rather than in the capitals. This finding echoes other researchers’ claim on the unprecedented decentralisation of foreign policy making as a result of intense interactions on the spot, in Vienna, with the EU. Because they often face very tight deadlines for replying to EU’s alignment proposals, most delegates from the Western Balkans take decisions locally i.e. in an environment that is very prone to socialisation, rather than requesting instructions from their capitals.

The analysis of the role of socialisation as the driving force of Western Balkan states’ alignment may finally shed some light on Serbia’s peculiar behaviour in the OSCE. First, Serbia is committed to two different sets of priorities in the OSCE: one is European integration (like other Western Balkan states) and the other is defending Serbia’s stance against Kosovo independence.⁶⁰ Whereas the former facilitates the redefinition of national interests in collective rather than individualistic terms, the latter, turning individual

55 Montenegrin diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 21 April 2011).

56 Bosnian diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 2 May 2011); Montenegrin diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 21 April 2011).

57 Croatian diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 28 April .2011).

58 Serbian diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 17 October 2011).

59 Albanian diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 29 April 2011).

60 Serbian official (personal interview in Belgrade, 13 September 2011).

interests into sanctuary, rather acts as a factor that is constraining Europeanisation. Second, given the salience of the Kosovo issue for Belgrade and despite the internalisation of alignment as a norm, Serbian diplomats are more prone to switching back to utility calculations than those of other Western Balkan states. Keywords in EU statements evoking the Kosovo issue or states that oppose recognition trigger the cognitive switch of rationality, although these do not automatically lead to non-alignment. Finally, the lesser frequency of Serbia's meetings with the EU, the feeling that it is not sufficiently informed on EU approaches, and the necessity for Serbian diplomats to seek instructions from the capital on most statements undermine the depth of Serbia's socialisation.

Persuasion

Persuasion enables the diffusion of ideas based on communicative rationality. Ideas are accordingly promoted through reason-giving until a reasoned consensus is reached.⁶¹ This may occur if the EU, challenging the normative claims initially held by Western Balkan states, succeeded in presenting its own norms as more legitimate, which would command alignment. There is, interestingly, little evidence of this mechanism of persuasion in the OSCE *gremium* as far as Western Balkan states are concerned. Amongst EU member states, coming to terms regarding a common statement certainly ensues through negotiations. It supposes arguing and persuading. But since Western Balkan states are excluded from internal coordination meetings and the elaboration of EU statements, there is no reciprocal exchange of arguments, no reason-giving, and therefore, no persuasion. Rather than political dialogue *primus inter pares*, the alignment mechanism as it is operated (especially after the Lisbon Treaty) fosters a monolog. Most of the Western Balkan states deplore that they cannot substantively contribute to European foreign policymaking, especially in cases when they do have the proper expertise (e.g. on regional or post-conflict issues). In Macedonia, for instance, one regrets that "the EU has a general lack of interest towards Macedonia's positions" in the OSCE⁶²; in Croatia, that the EU promotes "a certain type of dialogue where we cannot make important contributions"⁶³; and in Montenegro, that "small countries cannot influence the policy process"⁶⁴ EU diplomats are well aware of the communicative pitfalls of the alignment mechanism. But they argue that alignment is not the *alpha* and *omega* of political dialogue; that it only reflects a "definite way" of communicating; and that most of the communication with Western Balkan diplomats takes place regardless of alignment in an "informal, discursive way at the bilateral or trilateral levels" and "behind the scene"⁶⁵ Persuasion, thus, may not be relevant as a mechanism of diffusion in explaining alignment in the OSCE, but it arguably plays an important role in traditional diplomacy.

61 Börzel and Risse 2009, 11.

62 Macedonian diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 7 July 2011).

63 Croatian diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 28 April 2011).

64 Montenegrin diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 21 April 2011).

65 EU diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 1 August 2011).

Emulation

Emulation is a mechanism of diffusion that “does not require an active promoter of ideas, but relies on indirect influence”.⁶⁶ Borrowing from normative rationality, it is expressed through mimicry, or behavioural imitation. The motives of Western Balkan states’ alignment with EU statements in the OSCE are not completely devoid of mimicry. Some diplomats do occasionally express a sheer desire for conformity with the EU, arguing for instance that “the EU is a perfect forum that has brought democracy, prosperity and stability to Europe” whilst the region has only experienced despotism, war, instability⁶⁷. Alternatively, they state that the EU “represents for us the highest standard of democracy” (which is odd considering the democratic deficit from which it suffers).⁶⁸ For these diplomats, alignment, then, is the logical consequence of their commitment to their idealised picture of the EU: by aligning, they seek to become more like the EU. Yet, the salience of mimicry as a mechanism of Europeanisation should not be overestimated. Few diplomats gave signs of mimicry, and the majority of the interviewees had a deeper understanding of the alignment mechanism. The normative rationality upon which they legitimised alignment bore more hallmarks of socialisation than sheer imitation.

Emulation can also borrow from instrumental rationality, in which case it ensues through lesson-drawing, i.e. the search for more effective policy solutions. And indeed, for small-sized countries from the Western Balkans, alignment with EU statement should be understood in a context of structural shortages in diplomatic resources. International expertise is often the critically missing element that is needed in order to allow for informed decisions. Drawing from the EU’s extensive resources sometimes emerges as a rational response to the considerable limitations faced by most Western Balkan states. As expressed by a diplomat, “in terms of first-hand information, our relationship to the EU is highly asymmetrical”.⁶⁹ Alignment therefore appears as a valuable opportunity to get informed about the world affairs at minimal cost, to extend one’s foreign policy scope of action, and to gain in international visibility. More generally, alignment can be analysed as a very pragmatic response to critical restrictions in the smallest delegations regarding human resources. In delegations like Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania, which only comprise five diplomats in charge of all multilateral affairs in Vienna (i.e. UN, OSCE, IAEA, CTBTO...), human resources are very scarce and cannot handle extensive OSCE politics. Under such conditions, alignment represents an economy of time and labour, and can critically help small-sized delegations, e.g. by sparing them the redundancy of drafting national statements that convey the same message as the EU. Of course, in this case, lesson-drawing is more relevant for Montenegro or Macedonia than for Serbia which can rely on a vast diplomatic network worldwide, has inherited a solid

66 Börzel and Risse 2009, 12.

67 Albanian diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 29 April 2011).

68 Montenegrin diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 21 April 2011).

69 Montenegrin diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 21 April 2011).

diplomatic tradition and has access to alternative sources of information (through its non-EU partners).

Conclusions

As Western Balkan states are drawing closer to the EU, so is their foreign policy behaviour in international *fora*. In the OSCE, most of them already act as if they were EU member states – they join EU statements systematically, as if they were theirs. Their alignment pattern certainly testifies to their readiness to actively engage in European foreign policy and enter the Union as dedicated member states. Only Serbia displays a lesser degree, and a more unsteady pattern, of declaratory convergence. Its wavering behaviour reveals the ambiguity its foreign policy is imbued with, torn between two priorities: Kosovo and the EU.

Whereas Europeanisation in the East is often found to be driven by conditionality, in foreign policy matters, the motives for Western Balkan states seem more diverse. Conditionality certainly plays a certain role therein. It provides a framework for political dialogue with the EU, commands foreign policy convergence, and above all, conditions the progress made by would-be member states on their road towards the EU. But in practice, this institutional setting, this formal obligation and this prosperous incentive do not drive the states' decision to align. They are, at best, passively acknowledged, or substituted by the (partly ungrounded and certainly self-magnified) fear of being seen as lagging behind and of being sanctioned in case of non-alignment. It is in this light that Serbia's peculiar behaviour in the OSCE can be understood. Non-alignment, at times, enables Serbia to reciprocate the non-EU partners' support of its Kosovo policy. The fear of being pilloried by the EU does not always exceed the fear of losing others' support. However, conditionality, with its limitations, does not explain the whole picture. Other mechanisms are also at play – especially socialisation. Most Western Balkan states define the national interest they pursue in the OSCE not in individualistic but in collective terms. They rarely seek to project their own priorities in this *forum*, rather settling for joining the EU in the conduct of its European foreign policy. In so doing, they favourably respond to the EU's normative pressure for alignment, and adopt the EU's preference because they deem these appropriate. This process of socialisation is fostered by the environment in Vienna in which EU and non-EU diplomats are immersed. Europeanisation also ensues through emulation, although this mode of diffusion rather affects only the smallest-sized countries of the Western Balkans. Coercion and persuasion do not seem to play a significant role – because of the jurisdictional limitations of supranational bodies in foreign policy matters in case of the former, and owing to the lack of communicative rationality embraced by the EU in case of the latter.

The success of the EU's alignment policy in the Western Balkans certainly shines on the EU's international actorness in world politics. By speaking on behalf of non-EU states and acting in the region as a rallying point on European security-related issues, the

EU demonstrates its capacity for leadership. This, however, comes at a price. First, the EU's alignment mechanism is a one-size-fits-all device. It is offered to all without the opportunity to participate in the debates preceding the elaboration of the EU's statement, although the EU (and European security) could arguably gain even more from non-EU states' insights and experience. Second, it is operated under time constraints in Vienna and in conditions that do not foster the exchange of ideas. Some alignments therefore occur despite informational deficits, fuelling the risk of shallow Europeanisation. Finally, it is operated so as to deter the states that are willing to align from speaking in their national capacity. This restriction meets some resistance amongst the Western Balkan states and barely conceals the EU's uncertainties regarding its new status: the EU "urges us to see regional affairs in black and white terms, an approach that is not always very much adapted. The EU is not confident enough as it fears that letting states speak may lead to contradictions."⁷⁰

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70 Macedonian diplomat (personal interview in Vienna, 7 July 2011).

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