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Centre for International & European Law

Call for papers on

“A legal assessment of (EU) integration in the Western Balkans”

Workshop co-organized by Europa Institute (Leiden University) and TMC Asser Institute

Date and location: 31 October 2025, TMC Asser Institute, The Hague

The fall of the Berlin wall and the end of ethnic wars in the territory of former Yugoslavia were followed by the European Union’s (EU) initiatives in the Western Balkans (WB) such as, for instance, the 1999 Stability Pact which aimed at fostering peace, democracy, respect for human rights and economic prosperity among the countries in the region. In the same year, the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) was launched and Stabilization and Association Agreements (SAAs) between the EU and each of the countries in the region followed. The SAP opened for the first time the perspective of accession to the EU for the region, based on the fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria. This perspective was confirmed by the 2003 Thessaloniki Declaration.

Multiple crises have marked the region and the EU since then. Specifically, the rule of law crisis within the EU showed the need for consolidation of democratic standards before any further enlargement of the EU takes place. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 then dramatically changed the geopolitical situation on the European continent. The EU’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell at the time, called the war in Ukraine an “awakening moment for Europe” and declared that it was “high time to reinvigorate the enlargement process and integrate the Western Balkans in an irreversible manner into the EU.”

In parallel to the ups and downs of the EU’s enlargement approach in the region, we have witnessed the emergence of burgeoning political and economic integration initiatives among the countries in the region such as the Central European Free Trade Agreement, the Berlin Process, the defunct ‘Open Balkans’ initiative, and the Common Regional Market. The 2024 Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans was introduced as a financial instrument aimed at acceleration of fundamental reforms as well as at boosting regional integration through the Common Regional Market. All these political and economic integration initiatives take place against the promise of EU membership. On the one hand, pre-accession conditionality aims at bringing these countries closer to the standards of the EU. On the other hand, regional initiatives often shaped after the EU single market, have as their objective boosting transnational cooperation among the countries in the region and ultimately securing lasting peace and welfare. Seeing the flourishing of these regional economic initiatives in parallel to the accession path, Leiden University and the Asser Institute have joined forces to organize a workshop with the aim of exploring in a comprehensive manner the different regional integration processes in the Western Balkans, including their potential overlaps, complementarities and/or tensions and to reflect on whether participation in multiple initiatives facilitates or obstructs achieving the various integration objectives, including the overall objective of EU accession to the EU.



We particularly invite paper proposals by academics on the following three themes:

1. **Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAAs) and enlargement.** How do SAAs operate? Are they still useful instruments to achieve the objectives they set? How has EU conditionality in the context of enlargement evolved over the decades? Is it still an effective tool? Is the overall legal and policy framework on enlargement fit for purpose? Which aspects need to be reformed and how? Are there feasible alternatives to EU membership? If so, what (legal) form could they take?
2. **The legal dimension of (economic) cooperation in the region.** What is the legal nature of the various cooperation initiatives (regional common market, CEFTA membership, Berlin process, Regional Cooperation Council)? How are they enforced and what are potential legal issues/ overlaps/ tensions/ synergies deriving from the co-existence of these multiple forms of regional integration initiatives? What is the added value in political, legal and economic terms of these multiple initiatives? Have they been effective and what results have been achieved? What is their effect on the accession path?
3. **A view from the Western Balkan countries.** What have been fundamental reforms in the context of the rule of law? Do these reforms respond to membership requirements? Is there space in the enlargement policy for homegrown reforms and initiatives? Is there space in the Western Balkans legal frameworks for reforms and initiatives coming from within? What is the response of the EU institutions (especially the EU Commission) to such reforms and initiatives?

Please submit your application in the form of a short CV and an abstract of no more than 600 words where you state your research question and how you want to explore it. Abstracts should be submitted to d.piqani@law.leidenuniv.nl and n.idriz@asser.nl before 1 May 2025 by mentioning "A legal assessment of (EU) integration in the Western Balkans" in the title of the email.

Decisions on accepted abstracts will be communicated by 16 May 2025. Authors of selected abstracts will be expected to develop and submit full papers by 1 October 2025. Papers will be presented and discussed in an authors' workshop that will take place at the Asser Institute, in the Hague on 31 October 2025. Prof. Adam Lazowski ([Professor at the Westminster Law School](#) and [European Neighbourhood Chair Coordinator & Visiting Professor at the College of Europe \(Natolin\)](#)) will deliver the keynote address. The purpose of the workshop is to set the basis for a publication either as an edited volume or as a special issue in a renowned academic journal that deals with issues of legal and economic integration.

Due to financial constraints, organizers will be able to cover only part of the travel and accommodation costs for certain participants. In your application, please do include a short motivation explaining the need for financial support.