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Constructing the Western Balkans

Understanding the European Commission's Regional Approach from a Constructivist Perspective

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PhD Thesis:

**CONSTRUCTING THE WESTERN BALKANS:
UNDERSTANDING THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S
REGIONAL APPROACH FROM A CONSTRUCTIVIST
PERSPECTIVE**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Bath

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August 2013

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ABSTRACT

The thesis traces the construction of the Western Balkans since the end of the armed conflict in 1995. The term *Western Balkans* has become a commonplace in international politics that refers to a recognisable region on the European map – ignoring that it does not constitute a historical formation of European and Balkan politics. Most contemporary analysis focuses on functional aspects of economic cohesiveness and security interdependence. However, this thesis argues that the concept of Western Balkans is better understood as a social construction, externally-driven. The argument is that the Western Balkans is what the European Union makes of it. By taking a macro-historical perspective, we look at the long and special ties that the EU has had from the time of Yugoslavia to the Western Balkans until the mid-2000s. What we uncover is a special and consistent involvement of the European Commission into the regional affairs. The Western Balkans starts as a small organisational department within the institutional structure of the external relations' portfolio to become a regional identity question for the local populations. Also, the thesis points to the Commission's actions as not just the outcome of micro-calculations but part of a social context of competing world-views; and, finally, this is the reason that the end-product of the Western Balkans resembles more a messy amalgam rather than a rational design.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	2
Table of Contents	3
Abbreviations	10
Acknowledgements	12
 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
1.1 Introduction	14
<i>A game of names: Balkans, Western Balkans and beyond</i>	17
<i>Focus of Thesis</i>	18
1.2 Problem Definition	20
<i>Gaps in the current literature</i>	25
1.3 Aims and Objectives	27
<i>Structures, agents and social mechanisms</i>	29
1.4 Hypothesis	31
1.4 Literature and methodology	34
<i>Research Techniques</i>	35
1.6 Thesis Outline	38
 CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	
2.1 Introduction	42
2.2 Overview of Constructivism	43
2.2.1 Mainstream approaches and their limitations	43
<i>Limitations in explaining the Western Balkans</i>	45
2.2.2. The constructivist turn	46

2.3 Constructivism as a theoretical orientation for the thesis	49
2.4 An analytical framework of Social Representations	50
2.4.1 The concept of Social Representation	52
2.4.2 Signifier	54
2.4.3 The anchoring and objectifying process	55
2.4.3.1 Anchoring process	56
<i>Identity</i>	56
<i>Norms</i>	57
<i>Practices and experiences</i>	58
2.4.3.2 Objectifying process	59
<i>Legitimation</i>	60
<i>Appropriateness</i>	61
<i>Institutionalisation</i>	62
2.5 Social Representations and the European Union	63
2.5.1 Evolving Representations and Critical Junctures	66
<i>Amorphous regional signifier</i>	67
<i>Ordained regional signifier</i>	68
2.6 Limitations	69
2.7 Conclusion	70

**CHAPTER THREE:
THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S QUEST FOR SOCIAL
REPRESENTATIONS DURING THE COLD WAR AND THE YUGOSLAV
WAR OF 1991-1995**

3.1 Introduction	71
3.2 The literature on the European Community and Yugoslavia	73
3.3 The European Commission and Yugoslavia in the 1970s and the 1980s	77

3.3.1 Yugoslavia as an affirmative ‘sui generis’ signifier	78
3.3.1.1 Anchoring Yugoslavia	80
<i>Identity</i>	80
<i>Norms</i>	83
<i>Practices and Experiences</i>	85
3.3.1.2 Objectifying Yugoslavia	86
<i>Legitimation</i>	86
<i>Appropriateness</i>	87
<i>Institutionalisation</i>	89
3.3.2 Conclusion	90
3.4 Arriving at a critical juncture: from the collapse of the Eastern Bloc to the outbreak of conflict in Yugoslavia	91
3.4.1 New realities without new thinking: The Commission’s representation of Yugoslavia in the transition period 1989-1991	94
3.4.1.1 Anchoring Yugoslavia	96
<i>Identity</i>	96
<i>Norms</i>	98
<i>Practices and Experiences</i>	100
3.4.1.2 Objectifying Yugoslavia	101
<i>Legitimation</i>	102
<i>Appropriateness</i>	103
<i>Institutionalisation</i>	105
3.4.2 Conclusion	111
3.5 The War in the Balkans (1991-1995)	111
3.5.1 Yugoslavia as a contested ‘sui generis’ signifier	113

3.5.1.1 Anchoring Yugoslavia	115
<i>Identity</i>	115
<i>Norms</i>	118
<i>Practices and Experiences</i>	119
3.5.1.2 Objectifying Yugoslavia	121
<i>Legitimation</i>	122
<i>Appropriateness</i>	123
<i>Institutionalisation</i>	125
3.4.2 Conclusion	130
3.6 Overall Conclusion	131
 CHAPTER FOUR: THE WESTERN BALKANS AS AN AMORPHOUS REGIONAL SIGNIFIER (1996-1999)	
4.1 Introduction	132
4.2 The literature on the European Union and the western Balkans	135
4.3 The European Commission and the western Balkans in the period 1996-1998	138
4.3.1 An amorphous regional signifier: The emergence of the western Balkans	142
4.3.1.1 Anchoring Yugoslavia	147
<i>Identity</i>	148
<i>Norms</i>	150
<i>Practices and Experiences</i>	153
4.3.1.2 Objectifying Yugoslavia	155
<i>Legitimation</i>	156
<i>Appropriateness</i>	159
<i>Institutionalisation</i>	161

4.3.2 Conclusion	163
4.4 The European Commission and the western Balkans in the critical juncture year of 1999	164
4.4.1 Changing minds and hearts: the amorphous Western Balkans revisited	169
4.4.1.1 Anchoring the western Balkans	170
<i>Identity</i>	171
<i>Norms</i>	174
<i>Practices and Experiences</i>	175
4.4.1.2 Objectifying the western Balkans	176
Legitimation	177
Appropriateness	178
Institutionalisation	179
4.4.2 Conclusion	181
4.5 Overall Conclusion	181

**CHAPTER FIVE:
THE WESTERN BALKANS AS AN ORDAINED SIGNIFIER: THE
EUROPEAN COMMISSION SHAPES ITS REGIONAL APPROACHES (2000-
2004)**

5.1 Introduction	183
5.2 The literature on the European Union and the Western Balkans	184
5.3 The European Commission and the Western Balkans in the period 2000-2003	190
5.3.1 An ordained regional signifier: The imposition of the Western Balkans	194
5.3.1.1 Anchoring the Western Balkans	197
<i>Identity</i>	198
<i>Norms</i>	200

<i>Practices and Experiences</i>	203
5.3.1.2 Objectifying Western Balkans	205
<i>Legitimation</i>	206
<i>Appropriateness</i>	207
<i>Institutionalisation</i>	209
5.3.2 Conclusion	211
5.4 The European Commission and the Western Balkans in the critical juncture year of 2004 and 2005	212
5.4.1 From ordaining to sharing: the transformation of the regional approach to the Western Balkans revisited	215
5.4.1.1 Anchoring the Western Balkans	218
<i>Identity</i>	218
<i>Norms</i>	220
<i>Practices and Experiences</i>	222
5.4.1.2 Objectifying the Western Balkans	224
<i>Legitimation</i>	224
<i>Appropriateness</i>	226
<i>Institutionalisation</i>	227
5.4.2 Conclusion	231
5.5 Overall Conclusion	232
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS	
6.1 Introduction	233
6.2 From Yugoslavia to the Western Balkans: a story of social representations	234
<i>Constructivist utility and empirical application</i>	234
<i>From Yugoslavia to the Western Balkans:</i>	

<i>Continuities and changes in the social representations</i>	236
6.3 Future avenues	239
<i>Global Trends</i>	239
<i>From Western to Rest-ern Balkans?</i>	240
APPENDIXES	243
BIBLIOGRAPHY	259

ABBREVIATIONS

AII	Adriatic Ionian Initiative
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CARDS	Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe / Central and East European(s)
CEFTA	Central European Free Trade Agreement
CEI	Central European Initiative
CEPS	Centre for European Policy Studies
CSCE/OSCE	Conference/Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
DG	Directorate General
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC/EU	European Community/European Union
EULEX	European Union Rule of law Mission in Kosovo
EUPM	European Union Police Mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslav
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
ISPA	Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-Accession
KFOR	Kosovo force
MPFSEE	Multinational Peace Force in South East Europe
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PHARE	Poland and Hungary Aid for Restructuring of Economies
PROXIMA	European Union Police Mission in FYROM
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
SAA	Stabilisation and Association Agreement(s)
SAP	Stabilisation and Association Process
SBDI	South Balkan Development Initiative
SECI	Southeast European Cooperation Initiative
SEDM	Southeast European Defence Ministerial
SEE	South Eastern Europe / South East European
SEE-5	The five states covered by the SAP
SEE-7	SEE-5 plus Bulgaria and Romania
SEEBRIG	South East European Brigade
SEECAP	South East European Common Assessment Paper on Regional Security Challenges and Opportunities
SEECF	South East European Cooperation Process
SEEGROUP	South East European Steering Group
SFOR	Stabilisation Force, NATO's peacekeeping mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina replacing IFOR
SP	Stability Pact

TACIS	Technical Aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States
TEU	Treaty of the European Union, aka Maastricht Treaty
UN	United Nations
UNMIK	United Nations Mission in Kosovo
US	United States
WB	Western Balkans
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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What matters in life are the people we meet...

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The European Union has been preoccupied with the South East corner of the European Continent for more than two decades now. The Balkans has always been part of Europe's history and politics. This relationship was eloquently described by Winston Churchill who famously quoted that the Balkans “*produce more history than they are able to consume*” (Grigor’ev and Severin 2007: 123-124). In historical terms, taming and changing the status quo of the region is a constant feature of the nature of involvement by external actors from the Ottoman times. Otto von Bismarck’s infamous and dismissive quote of the Balkans as not being worth “*a single bone of a Pomeranian grenadier*” does not hold validity anymore (quote cited by Ferrero-Waldner Speech 2002). Even in today’s crisis period, Europe’s backyard has been attracting the attention and the active engagement of a number of international players in the intra-Balkan landscape. It has led a number of international actors to all agree that the traditional outlook of the Balkans as Europe’s ‘powder keg’ is regarded as an inadmissible state of affairs. The fearful prospect of a continuation of notoriety in public perceptions as a ‘terra incognita of normalcy’ is a pulling factor for the European Union to lead the transformation of its periphery. More specifically, if the EU is to root the region inside the new European-EU order, the Southeast European region must not resemble and preserve practices and characteristics that belong to the distant past of Europe. Therefore, the EU policies for the region do not translate in the EU moving southeast but rather the Balkans moving west.

During the period of the Cold War, the European Union had made commitments of inclusion of all those states in the Continent that used to belong to the Soviet sphere of influence (Fierke and Wiener 2001: 122-123). These declarations of the Western Europeans did produce distinctive relations – in comparison to other states in the Eastern bloc – with Balkan countries and particularly Tito’s Yugoslavia. In fact, in the 1980s, we can trace political messages that pointed to Yugoslavia feeling that it was already ‘part of Europe’. Notably, evidence of the time shows that the economy was much more open – having adopted some hybrid ‘market-socialist’ reforms - and also Yugoslavs could travel to Western Europe without visas (Batt 2004: 17). However, in the beginning of the 1990s, both the violent breakup of the Yugoslav multi-ethnic state and the nationalist course of the leaderships of the constituent units drove a large

section of the region away from a democratic and peaceful route; in contrast to the Central and Eastern European (CEE) states which were moving towards the opposite, European path. What we were witnessing in the Balkans was that, the minute the bipolar straightjacket was removed, old rivalries and new spots of instability surfaced in all these Southeastern societies.

It needs to be made clear that this thesis does not share the view that the Balkans is condemned to fragmentation, corruption and underdevelopment because of particular cultural characteristics that are static in this particular geographic region (Minić 2009: 14). These conceptions emanate from a primordialist theory of nations that treat identity as a given and discuss issues of cultural distinctiveness while ignoring genesis, evolution and social practices of enactment in their approach (Smith 1986: 10). The hypothesis that they put forward is that regional projects and cooperation is able to flourish in culturally homogenous geopolitical spaces, *“though the concepts of culture and homogeneity are themselves problematic”* (Bechev 2005: 26). These essentialist approaches discuss the relationship between national and supranational/post-national identities in zero-sum terms and claim that identities rest firmly within the nation-state. Historically, it is true that the Balkan states were not able to establish a meaningful and durable cooperation and good-neighbourliness despite numerous attempts in the 20th century. Political will and good intentions have been present, but the variety of alliances that the small states of the region have joined throughout history – leagues, federations, pacts – all failed (Nikova 2002: 4).

The reading of Balkan history seems to have succeeded in invoking memories and traumatic experiences for EU politicians in relation to the Wars that the Continent underwent in the 20th century. The peoples of Europe were in the centre of two World Wars until they managed to find a new, peaceful way that was turning Europe from a disaggregated ensemble of states into an amalgamated security community (Deutsch 1957). According to Buzan and Wæver, on one hand, the entire EU project itself is about avoiding fragmentation and power balancing and, on the other, the fear of Europe’s future becoming like Europe’s past has *“generated securitisation, which is largely societal security, i.e., fear for (national) identity”* (2003: 352-3). In essence what occurred was that Europeans themselves rejected *“the European balance-of-power principle and the hegemonic ambitions of individual states that had emerged*

following the peace of Westphalia in 1648”, as argued by the German Foreign Minister, Joschka Fischer, in May 2000 (quoted in Kagan 2003: 56). Therefore, the thesis asserts that changing institutional and normative constellations is a much more powerful force than any stereotyped conception of transition and region-building. New identities and loyalties are “*subject to constructions and re-constructions*” (Risse 2004: 167).

These points lead the thesis to investigate closely the social processes of engagement of the European Union with the Balkans. During the violent conflicts in the ‘90s, a ‘domino effect’ discourse started to float in the academic and political discussions of the time (Lund 1999: 188-189; Newman 2005: 105; Roberts 1995: 407) that stamped even deeper the perceptions of European and other international actors of a ‘non-European’ and ‘conflict-prone’ image of the region (Bechev 2005: 71; Hansen 2000: 349-351; Wæver 1996: 122). The expansion of the European model of politics found its resistance with the eruption of the conflicts among the different entities in Southeastern European region. The events in the first half of the 1990s impacted on and altered significantly the relationship between Europe and the newly-formed Balkan states. The abandonment of ethnic stereotypes and the choice for cooperation over fragmentation in Western Europe had to become the ‘modus vivendi’ for the ‘Other’ Europeans. Once the United States succeeded to broker the Dayton Accords after five years of conflicts (1991-95), a realisation swept across Europe; it was time for the EU to understand the reasons for the bloodshed, to think quickly and creatively in policy-terms about ways to address pressing issues and overall to initiate a transformation process for the EU itself as well as for the states and societies in the Balkans.

A model based on the European Union’s fundamental values was the only accepted way for the region to tackle challenges as an integral part of a wider political framework. The thesis concurs with Couloumbis and Ramaj that “[...] *an environment of consolidated democracy, advanced and liberal economy and the promise of a common institutional roof over the whole Balkan region will act as a gradual and sure-fire remedy*” (2007: 2). The common denominator in all these cases is that the EU instituted an un-negotiable normative principle that any democratic, European state can become part of the new architecture, as designed in Brussels and expressed

through the various European treaties. In terms of the EU as the chief actor in the Continent, the process of dismantling old boundaries and making new ones is based on cooperation and a process of integration with the institutions of a 'new' Europe that are still being shaped (Rusi 2007: 190). As a Balkan specialist observes, "*the Balkans was critical in constructing the European Union's post-Cold War identity*" (Krastev 2007: 94). These assertions lead the thesis to closely study how the relationship of the EU evolved before and during the Balkan Wars of the 1990s, and in what way was the Union able to respond to the challenges posed by the South East region; a group of states there that had the most troubled transition after the end of the Cold War, namely the Western Balkans.

A game of names: Balkans, Western Balkans and beyond

While researching for the topic, it was apparent that the region had received multiple tags, as evident in the above texts. The fact that a number of different terms exist in relation to the Balkans - some indicative names are Southeastern Europe with or without the hyphens -5 and -7¹, or the, since 2005, term of 'Croatia and the Western Balkans' and many more - signifies the ominous historical legacies and the contemporary status vis-à-vis the European Union (van Meurs 2007: 81). In essence, this simple remark opens important questions about the way actors represent regions to grasp the nature of regional politics and to advance political aims. A crucial starting point for the thesis, which needs to be clarified from the outset, is that geographic labels and institutionalised calibrations of regional borders are neither value-free nor unproblematic concepts – they convey perceptions, construct identities and promote interests. Regions are labelled and identified on the basis of (socio-regional) representations.

As Maria Todorova claims, the Balkans/Balkan/Balkanization became a powerful myth, associating forever the name of the region with violence, barbarity, and backwardness (1997). The term *Balkans* is one of those labels that are open to interpretation, as its geographical borders have frequently been shifting following functional and normative differentiations of the region by various international actors. A further subdivision of this term would logically then be even more contested either

¹ Southeastern Europe with number 5 (SEE-5) corresponds to the current Western Balkans, while Southeastern Europe with number 7 (SEE-7) is Western Balkans plus Bulgaria and Romania.

from a perspective of a utilitarian necessity or from a historically-derived angle of reality. Therefore, it is necessary to track the process and the logic behind the introduction of a number of international initiatives by the USA, NATO and the EU. Their approach to the region raised questions regarding the ability to construct a new regional order and the nature of inevitable competition existing among the different projects in the aftermath of the Dayton Accords. Each externally-brokered programme by the international actors was accompanied by different calibrations of the regional status. This being the rule – rather than the exception – directed the programmes to entail three main characteristics: to halt any new conflict through direct involvement, to implement the Dayton Accords and to push for regional cooperation.

Keeping these in mind, what emerged out of the disaggregation of Yugoslavia was two sub-regions that are nowadays widely believed to constitute the area of Southeastern Europe: first, the Western Balkans (WB), which designates the territory of the former Yugoslavia minus Slovenia plus Albania, i.e. an area commonly perceived as comprising “*the most troubled countries*”, according to a report by the International Crisis Group (ICG 2001). Succinctly, the attention is focused on Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Montenegro and Serbia plus Kosovo; second, Bulgaria and Romania should be labelled as Eastern Balkans, which however is an inapt term rarely used. While the latter was acknowledged as potential members of the Euro-Atlantic zone fairly early, the integration prospect of the Western Balkans states gained real momentum only at the end of the 1990s.

Focus of thesis

This project is about investigating the process of the European Union’s involvement in the affairs of one of its proximate regions. The Western Balkans has become a reference point in the everyday jargon of international politics and it is treated as a fairly stable and recognisable part of the European map by many practitioners, scholars and the public. We need to look what propelled this need to recalibrate the Southeastern periphery and to understand the regional nature of the EU policies that construct the Western Balkans. The research treats the Western Balkans as a cornerstone choice for the EU institutions in their endeavour to engage regionally. This is not as straightforward as it seems, because the emphasis on the regional

agenda is attention-grabbing and worth investigating considering the violent events after the Cold War (Bechev 2005: 12). This is even more intriguing since all the evidence shows that South East Europe has not experienced regional cooperation at large. In other words, if bilateralism has been the norm and not regional multilateralism/regionalism, we are driven to delve into the EU's insistence on such a policy direction. It means that the attention of the thesis lies in the identification of the policy-making actors that are to account for the proliferation of cooperative institutions and schemes at the regional level since the mid-1990s. In addition to this, the process of EU 'thinking and acting' needs to be better conceptualised.

This study aims to especially understand the role of the European Commission² and the approaches it developed for the regional map of the Balkans. The links between the Commission and the region have a long historical trait which will take us from Yugoslavia to the Western Balkans. The focus of the thesis can be summed up in the following assertion: **the Western Balkans is an instance of a social representation created and evolved by the European Union**. This claim leads this study to two further directions: first, the investigation of the types of social representations that the Commission has held for the Western Balkans; and second, the research of the process of constructing representations in relation to the content of the EU's regional approach(es).

In more specific terms, the thesis aims to scrutinize the ways the European Commission has formed ideas and policies to ensure sustainable cooperation processes within those externally-circumscribed regional frames. The project of the Western Balkans conveys socio-political meanings that are useful for the understanding of the type of agency the EU and its institutions exercise in their external relations. Especially, we will focus on both pre- and post-Dayton periods, in order to place the relationship of the European Commission with (the construction of) the western part of the Balkan Peninsula in a historical context. In sum, the main question underlying this investigation is:

How, when and why was the Western Balkans devised and promoted?

² The terms 'European Commission' and 'Commission' will be used in the thesis interchangeably.

This question begs us to look into constructivist explanations to understand the history of the Western Balkans. Since we claim that its existence is attributed to the European Union, an analytical framework that centralises the role of *social representations* is in need for operationalisation. Their examination is necessitated, because we are dealing with an instance of an externally-promoted project pertaining to the construction of images and concepts by EU policy-makers. In line with this, the thesis will use the term regional *signifier*, a thick concept referring to the Western Balkans. Especially about this concept of signifier, there is a gap identified here between the signifier (Western Balkans) and the signified (what the Western Balkans represents). With this observation we can argue that the signifier is in some sense 'empty', and able to be 'filled' by varying agents and forces (Brigg and Muller 2009: 133). Signifiers are social constructions, part of international politics that are subject to social processes of anchoring and objectifying, as explained analytically in Chapter Two. The Western Balkans is a regional signifier constructed and evolved by the European Commission.

1.2 Problem Definition

In this section, we will lay out the problems identified in the theoretical and empirical approaches to the question of the emergence and continuing existence of the Western Balkans. On one side, the contemporary literature on the EU's regional approach for the Western Balkans has largely focused on rationalist and functionalist explanations; it has avoided investigating the social context and especially has not contested the *how* and *by whom* issue of the construction of the Western Balkans. Large part of the literature has sidelined the ideational aspects as of secondary importance to the construction and operationalisation of the Western Balkans' signifier. The thesis will re-insert a 'constructivist puzzle to understand the research *problematique*. On the other side, there are two problems identified from an empirical angle. The first is about the rise of the Western Balkans itself from a small bureaucratic department in the External Relations Directorate of the European Commission at the end of 1995 (as evidenced in Chapter Three and Four) to a regional signifier (i) pertinent to EU's own image and standing and (ii) adopted by local populations and policy-makers as a regional identity. Second, the European Commission is frequently thought to be a technocratic body, whose political significance and impact is rarely extended on high politics such as foreign policy matters. However, we aim to contend this notion and trace its role in the political engineering in Europe's periphery as a homogenous actor

that has consistently pursued to relate the Western Balkans with the future of the Union and its interests.

To start with, regions are territorially based subsystems of the international system and the instance of the Western Balkans, as the name itself reveals, is a geographical entity. Of course, mere cartography tells as little about regions, their origins and their developments. Territorial demarcations as defining characteristics are placed into questions by a number of scholars who deny the existence of natural regions (Hettne 2005: 544; Hurrell 1995: 38-39). Etymologically, region stems from the Latin word *regere*, which means 'to rule, to govern'. Particularly critical approaches would associate regions with different dimensions of power. Globalist approaches (Ohmae 1990) examine regional processes as driven by transnational forces that push actors to multilateral solutions in the face of globalism in trade and investment and the parallel diminishing role of states. Mainstream analysis of regions include (neo)realist and (neo)liberal explanations. The former attributes few identifiable characteristics to regions, focuses on the agency of states and tends to equate regions with alliance formations (Walt 1987). The latter stresses the common, material incentives and interests to engage into cooperative (economic) schemes and highlights the role of states and elites to examine political outcomes.

Looking more in detail the relevant literatures, certain analyses argue that regional projects are dictated by security fears. Security interconnectedness usually adopts a zero-sum thinking rather than pointing to the convergence of interests. The efforts for region-building were expected to have positive, general effects in terms of development and security in Europe (Bicchi 2007: 123). Certain - prescriptive in character - works (Bailes 1997: 27-31; Cottey 1999; Dwan 1999) have been published that treat developments in the Balkans as part of the post-Cold War European architecture and aim at providing policy guidelines for strengthening the arrangements in question (Bechev 2005: 17). These studies treat the Balkan area as a subregion of the broader European region (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 377-390) and refer to subregionalist projects by the weaker states in the global economy which are seeking cooperation in a more circumscribed space than the regional level (Hook and Kerns 1999: 5-7). Regional security conditions are believed to be clearly linked to a safer regional environment and the local actors in the region would demand that their

states engage with regional partnerships for reasons of (national) interests. A more nuanced analysis comes from the work of Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver who employ the concept of 'regional security complexes'³ (2003). Their analysis focuses specifically on security issues as the factors instigating regional formations. Regions represent international subsystems distinguished by a particular nature and intensity of their interaction with each other (Buzan 1983: 108). Buzan and Wæver observe that regions are becoming real subjects of international politics, because of a real security threat that affects the survival of proximate states.

Next to these, we find academic works that investigate the demands to organise regional economic networks. Regional policies would be translated in such analyses as the means to deliver benefits, an improved access to markets and a strive for a stronger regional economic bloc (Bicchi 2007: 123). These economic-led considerations focus on the harmonization of trade policies leading to deeper economic integration with political integration as a possible spill-over effect. In the initial period following Dayton, the regional schemes in place were mostly designed to offset (economic and security) fears of the European states regarding the many problems evident in the Southeastern area. Policy centres and think tanks like the Hellenic Observatory at the London School of Economics and Political Studies (Gligorov, Kaldor et al. 1999) and the Centre for European Policy Studies (Emerson and Gross 2000; Daskalov, Mladenov et al. 2000) in Brussels have been focusing their analysis on issues like political reconciliation, growth, trade liberalisation and reconstruction. Moreover, regional solutions are preferred over other policy-choices according to Lothar Altman who argues in favour of functional cooperation in specific issue-areas, such as the fight against organised crime (2003: 72-93).

Neoliberal approaches especially those part of the European Studies literature and on integration theories are also basing their explanatory value on material incentives and rationalist calculations. A number of approaches that are influenced by liberal intergovernmental theory explain outcomes by looking at commercial and national interests underpinning EU policies (Moravcsik 1998). Moreover, they hold that policies are the results of bargains reflecting relative power of states. In their analyses,

³ A concept that was initially explored by Barry Buzan in his 1983 book "People, states, and fear: the national security problem in international relations".

the EU is seen rather as a step to further extend national preferences without the capacity to act in its own right. Similar analyses on regional integration and interdependence closely affiliate economic-infrastructure arguments with security issues as dominant in actors' perceptions, as pointed out by Othon Anastasakis and Vesna Bojicic-Dzelilovic (2002: 41-45). Functional - economic and security - factors, as Joseph Nye and Sophia Clement argue, are conditioning mutual interdependence which becomes key in defining regions (Clement 2000: 92; Nye 1968: 858). They suggest that (regional) cooperation is a means to enhance materialist gains and to achieve integration at the regional level and EU membership (Uvalic 2001: 71-72). Essentially, the core argument that supports such approaches is that levels of interdependence generate demand for international and/or regional cooperation.

In fact, the literature that focuses on the regional level singles out the concept of regional interdependence which "*situates the states in question in the same boat*" (Bechev 2005: 22). Exhibiting a certain degree of intensity and regularity in the relations among a group of states is a sufficient condition for a regional system to exist (Thompson 1973: 101). They include an underlying demand-driven logic that the impetus of advancing regional ties is a compromise of interests among state elites and societal actors for higher gains; and they tend to look at the effects of functional linkages on the regional environment. Concomitantly, these accounts usually see a boost in cooperation and increased interaction as a result of material gains being expected by the actors involved in the process of engaging regionally. In EU studies, neofunctionalists argue that interdependence has a strong impact on integrative outcomes and understand it as an initial condition and as a process outcome which becomes a cause in its own right (Haas 1968; Sandholtz and Stone Sweet 1998).

Furthermore, Dimitar Bechev notes that "*interdependence did not point at an optimal institutional format for cooperation*" (2005: 63). The existence of local externalities linking states together does not explain how actors manage their relations. Talking about regions in terms of a geographical relationship and a degree of mutual interdependence (Nye 1968) is sidelining ideational and social processes. To a large extent, the assumption of the European Union itself was that settling some interethnic issues and functional statehood problems, as well as providing some political resources and stamina, would be sufficient for a successful transition (van Meurs

2007: 83). Actually, the policymakers, whose decisions (although *not* consciously, as theories are not drawn to serve as foreign policy guidelines) followed the rationalist paradigm failed to deliver a pattern of peaceful relations in the Balkans for a significant period after Dayton. Some analysts even go as far as saying that the initial strategy of deterrence and side-lining, attempted by a number of Euro-Atlantic actors, worsened further the conditions in the region (Kavalski 2008: 29).

We have been observing that the need for a new regional entity that would induce relevant actors to work together was absent on the ground. We were clearly discerning an unwillingness of those actors to engage with their regional counterparts and therefore make regional cooperation in the Western Balkans a standardised practice. Its fragmented political economy dates back to the Cold War and the dissolution of Yugoslavia (Petrakos and Totev 2001). There is a lack of economic cohesiveness in trade patterns and persistent nationalist sentiments of the locals (Banac 2006: 30-43). Added to these is a booming informal sector and delayed democratic transition which prohibited the actors in the region to initiate genuine integration processes. By 1998, the intra-Western Balkan trade flow accounted for just 4-5 per cent of the total turnover according to a World Bank report (see Appendix I). The functional indicators that were to drive the demand process for a regional approach produce little evidence of local dynamics being conducive. In that sense, the EU did not respond to some pressing economic, bottom-up incentive when initiating and operationalising its strategy for the region.

Finally, the thesis has argued that, initially, the Western Balkans seemed to be treated as an 'Outsider' or 'Other' in EU/Europe. The regional thinking for the Western Balkans is a relatively new condition for advancing an integration process in Europe – an element clearly missing in the Central and Eastern Europe case (Batt 2004: 10). The discussions with which the mainstream neorealist and neoliberal approaches deal with have not questioned whether regional politics as advocated by the EU is the proper strategy, or whether the notion of the Western Balkans does serve as the appropriate and legitimate construction; neither have they unpacked what motivates a supranational institution, such as the European Commission, to act in a specific manner nor have they associated our research focus with the debates about the formation and interpretation of what constitutes a European interest. These issues

about the type of relationship between the EU and the Commission and the Western Balkans have remained unclear in theoretical and empirical terms. In this part we shall indicate how the literature⁴ has explained the role of the Western Balkans and the regional approaches associated with it.

Gaps in the current literature

The effort here is to pinpoint the gaps that the thesis asserts exist in the relevant literatures when it comes to understanding the type of actorness exercised towards the Western Balkans and the regional approaches adopted. To illustrate the argument we will use a metaphor to better explain the limits of mainstream, rationalist accounts and to make a case for a different orientation of the research puzzle. If we parallel the Western Balkans with an edifice to be built by a construction company, then some interesting issues are going to be asked before deciding to send in the bulldozers and the builders: firstly, one needs to find the guiding idea upon which the building shall be designed and constructed; secondly, questions will be raised in relation to the shape and design of the interior spaces; also, the geographic spot and signification of the building for the local community are crucial matters; and finally, the suitability of the architect, his architectural ideas and preferences, as well as his past constructions, are vital ingredients for the proper execution of the plan. The construction materials and other functional aspects that any building requires only follow the initial concerns raised here. The thesis approaches the research topic in the same vein.

The source of the preferences for and the content of the applied policies for the Western Balkans are a matter of scrutiny. Once we place the Western Balkans and the regional approaches as part of the expansion of the European normative and ideational space questions open as to the role of the entrepreneurs in this process. What the Western Balkans signified for the policy entrepreneurs demarcates the context of the EU's regional approach. As most 'outside and above' initiatives come about either by countries, international institutions, or more generally elites (Tassinari 2005: 10), in this thesis it is an EU body, the European Commission, that we see as the main actor instigating the regional project. It is a new international actor that has to be studied in

⁴ The literature that we refer to includes International Relations (including Security Studies), European Studies and Economics.

its own right – in parallel to our assertions about regions being context-dependent and this context including a social-normative essence.

Based on this, the thesis highlights that the current literature has remained imprecise as to what constitutes the Western Balkans signifier. The emergence and operationalisation of social representations of the Western Balkans are a research problem in their own right. Most studies treat the Western Balkans signifier as a reference point in which functional problems and solutions are to be extended. As noted above though, there is a case to be made as to how the European Commission's thinking was informed and shaped in the first place. The fact that a regional conceptualisation of the problem was deployed points us to examine the ideational and normative interpretations of this policy choice (Anastasakis and Djelilovic 2002; Bechev 2005; Kavalski 2008). It is necessary to understand the way social representations get established, since they are responsible for characterising the discourse and practice of forming the content of the regional signifier. We need to investigate the interfacing of the European structural conditions with the establishment of the Western Balkans as an identifier for policy-makers. At the same time, the mechanisms that allow them to be exported and communicated or be cascaded (in the words of Finnemore and Sikkink 1998) need to be identified. The literature's empiricist tendency results in many theoretical assumptions to remain implicit.

In sum, the discussion of the appropriateness of region-wide policies for the Western Balkans might sound as an oxymoron due to the frequent headlines that it has made in global media predominantly for negative reasons. However, neither the quest for security nor the economic rationality provides sufficient explanations for the establishment of regional institutions and cooperation schemes within specific regional boundaries (Bechev 2005: 292). Fabrizio Tassinari encapsulates a wider trend in Europe with regard to regions being multi-level and multi-dimensional phenomena:

“These various options are, on the one hand, a testament to the increasingly post-national character of the European political arena and to the progressive ‘de-territorialisation’ of social interaction. On the other hand, they are also meant to

suggest that, as this more fluid character of political interaction in the era of globalisation eventually ‘re-territorialises’ to tackle practical questions, the regional framework, rather than the nation-state, emerges as a more suitable format of social aggregation in Europe’s political space.”

(Tassinari 2005: 10)

It naturally follows that the ‘who and how’ are becoming key in any investigation that wants to emphasise social processes in the regional constructions in the European Continent. Below, we are looking at the thesis’ ambitions for the research puzzle.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

“...[J]ust as there were no nations before elites – cultural, political and economic – came to imagine them as such, so too are there no regions until one particular vision of the region’s shape and features manages to outstrip rival definitions.”

(King 2000: 57)

The Western Balkans is an evolving, open-ended political construction driven by the imagination of entrepreneurs in the European Union. While advancing the discussion of this under-theorised EU policy area and not taking for given what the Western Balkans is and represents, a number of issues regarding the nature of the regional construction are raised that require investigation. We assert that regions are conceived and organised according to institutionalised understandings about what ‘the region’, as a political form, stands for. The European dominating representation of international conduct is expressed in *“a preference for coordinated action among actors over unilateral and a desire to avoid self-help practices in resolving international problems”* (Johansson-Nogues 2009: 6). The expansion to include larger geographic section is relating to *“a positive identification based on European-ness”* (Deimel and van Meurs 2007: 17); it is a broad concept to which the thesis ascribes the debate over a European identity, the Union’s normative and legal standards, as well as an attachment to practices and experiences in the European Continent. To re-emphasise Charles King’s quote, territorial representations are a constant feature of international politics and this truth is applicable to the Western Balkans: this particular vision of the region’s shape and features, as taken on by the Commission, managed to outstrip rival definitions and develop into frame of reference for political action.

These, somewhat abstract, aims and objectives are better examined and served via a constructivist perspective as evolved in International Relations and European Studies. Constructivism has been acknowledged to be contributing significantly to the study of the EU as an institutionalist interpretation of its functioning (Pollack 2004: 151-155). A solid, empirical application of constructivist thinking unearths the social and ideational dimensions of:

- (a) the preference formation of the agents involved,
- (b) the process of exporting the ideas, and
- (c) the content of the signifier under construction.

A constructivist framework is well-suited to highlight that material structures do not operate exogenously to the social world and that political culture, discourse and the 'social' construction of preferences matter (Risse 2004: 161). Social constructivist theory emphasises the importance of process of making a particular policy – stressing the issue of stickiness of certain norms, ideas and practices in external actions through time. The construction of regions goes hand in hand with the parallel existence of a political community. In the thesis, we show the relevance of constructivist approach in investigating the institutional decision-making machinery of the EU by inserting an analytical framework of social representations that address such issues. To do that, we are looking deeply into the pivotal role of the Commission in conceiving and organising the regional implementation strategy for the Western Balkans.

In further detail, this research investigates especially those expert groups inside the European Union. Primarily, the European Commission, as an international actor in the external relations field for the EU, became responsible for persuading, with soft or coercive means, for the necessity of regional multilateralism *“by using language that names, interprets and dramatizes them”* (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 897). The Commission was mandated by the European Council and the Council of Ministers to define and defend the Union's interests and policy preferences. The Commission officials conceived and implemented the EU's regional approaches for the Western Balkans, while deliberating with counterparts in the Council, the Parliament and member state officials. Therefore, the thesis wants to posit that the Commission is a *“strategically important and sophisticated institutional actor, possessed of the resources and scope to crucially influence the direction of EU policy-making”* (O' Brennan 2006: 74).

To achieve this, an in-depth examination of the European Commission's documents will enable the thesis to identify those social representations that underpin the Commission's undertakings in the studied policy area. As argued earlier, regions vary according to the meanings granted to them and the context in which they are used. The Commission is involved in every aspect of the regional approach and has applied a large number of regional initiatives and policies. This drive for regional solutions is broadly based on two pillars: the first one is the stabilisation aspects which entail the EU normalisation process of the lingering problems between the states that arose after the dissolution of Yugoslavia; the second pillar concerns the association/enlargement framework which points to the impact of the European Union for the transformation of its candidates into member-states. These two pillars are embedded inside the development of social representations; they are held and used by actors and contribute to habit-forming patterns, a type of "*standardization of practices*", as Federica Bicchieri frequently uses in her work (2006: 291).

Structures, agents and social mechanisms

As discussed previously, we need an analytical model that will allow this study to capture the centrality of institutionalised world-views that are constitutive of the field wherein social action takes place (Mérand 2006: 134). The task is about understanding how *the EU does it regional* and looks at the processes enabling such policy choices. In order to scrutinize the structure-agentic fabric that is in motion when conceiving and making policies, the particular framework of social representations will be utilised to help understand the research puzzle.

First we shall investigate into the European Commission's agency, as the single most important actor. The aim in the thesis is to make an argument that the Commission is (i) an actor strongly grounded in promoting 'talk and practice' that stems from the social representations it formulates about the international environment and (ii) an agenda-setter in EU foreign policy that has acted in our particular case study as a homogenous, in-concert actor towards the Western Balkans in the examined period. The social representations dominating the institutional world of policy-makers in the EU are important to our understanding of the shape and content of the regional approaches to the Western Balkans. The thesis will portray a picture where the Commission holds social representations which it brings on the 'negotiating table' in

order to be able to initiate an approach for the region; and it did so in this particular context in a much more consistent and forceful way than most pundits would cede. A majority of the task was fallen in the hands of a small group of policy experts in Brussels and the focus is to make sense of the representations dominating the mindset of the Commission across time.

What follows logically is an exploration of the ‘cogs and wheels’ that enable our understanding of a social representation. Those of the Western Balkans rest on the existence and operation of social mechanisms. They are an essential part of our analytical framework, because they are able to provide a plausible account of the reality that is aimed to become intelligible for the world. The thesis will look into the integrative social mechanisms which essentially match identities and role conceptions to particular situations (as classified by Trondal 2001: 15). Our principal actor, the European Commission, needed to relate/objectify representational images to policies; based on constructivist reading of the literature, we reach to three social mechanisms that consistently appear in the Commission’s agency: legitimation, appropriateness and institutionalisation. They assist to capture the connection between preferences and the policy end-product. Regarding our research focus, the social mechanisms allow us to trace more accurately the social content of the EU’s regional approach to establish a ‘Western Balkans’ representation. The reason is that intensive and protracted exposure to a certain socio-political project may arguably change the ‘inner self’ of signifier (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 902-903).

As stated earlier, we aim to show that this ‘imagined’ Western Balkans has received representations that were created and driven by the European Commission. However, there is an acknowledged lacuna in the EU’s regional politics and policies towards this regional signifier in that it lacks the provision of an ‘objective’ checklist of well-defined and quantifiable objectives and are rather scattered in different policy areas (Grabbe 2007: 432-434). In this sense, it also remains unclear what the vision is that the EU has on a *finalité régionale* for the Western Balkans. There are two aspects to it. First, we have a political process that tries to construct and re-construct a master representation which can be traceable in the policy documents and discursive productions of the EU; in that sense, what we aim to uncover is the particular (social) content of signification (the agents and forces attached). Second, the regional signifier

itself acquires and bears a social content that reifies social representations of the EU/Europe as well. Therefore, the representations are engineered not as an external to 'Us', but based on something that is part of 'Us' but has been excluded from our task (for example, the European integration project) until we are able to 'suitably' transform its particular properties.

Making a more overarching argument about the social processes in the European Union, the understanding of the process of linking and exporting representations for the Western Balkans as a regional signifier helps us provide insights about the way it does politics with bordering states. Unpacking the social content that informs the study, we are driven to explore how certain EU's policies (the regional approach) can more readily be explained by social-normative considerations than in terms of objective interest (Schimmelfennig 1998; Fierke and Wiener 2001: 122). In addition, the thesis values the normative context that constitutes actors in which the reputation of actors acquires meaning (Katzenstein 1997: 12-13). These aspects however are not only the result of shortcomings of the European Commission's political engineering, but also reflect the institutional and normative structures that were prevalent in different periods of time. Therefore, understanding the European project as a process, and thus breaking with rationalist assumptions, begs the questions of the nature of this change towards the constitution of a new polity (Christiansen 1998: 114) which in turn changes the nature of other units part of the same world. The missing part in the narrative is complemented by constructivism, which demonstrates how European institutions can construct, through process of (social) interactions, the identities of member states and groups within them (Checkel 2001: 52). The construction and calibration of regions as endeavoured by the EU tend to emerge as a result both of geographic proximity to the promoting agent(s) and of normative contiguity between international actors (Kavalski 2008: 5).

1.4 Hypothesis

The work in this section of the first Chapter will concentrate on utilising the analytical framework of social representations to come up with a set of hypotheses and sub-hypotheses. The thesis accepts that the endorsement of a constructivist logic is not unproblematic due to the nature of its epistemological and methodological choices. The use of a set of propositions is treated as being compatible to this research theme and

theoretical direction. In this sense, we are driven to place under scrutiny the EU's engagement with a regional construct and one main hypothesis and three sub-hypothesis are introduced (Table 1.2). The prime hypothesis put forward is that:

The Western Balkans is what the European Union makes of it.

This assertion paraphrases the famous Alexander Wendt quote and it is used to argue that the European Union is an actor that engages with tasks of political engineering of regions. For constructivists, the Western Balkan structure is determined by the European distribution of ideas, images and concepts. The hope is expressed that the transforming and stabilising effect of the EU and its proximity will bring a concordance to European standards and norms (van Meurs 2007: 87). The thesis asserts that the increasing awareness for the need of a web of institutionalised (sub-) regional schemes has been systematically promoted by the European Union in its external actions.

As mentioned, the hypothesis deploys into three sub-hypotheses. The first one states that *the European Union has had long and special historical relations with the region, either with Yugoslavia or in the form of the Western Balkans*. We have mentioned that the constructivist rationale tends to better explore international processes when studied in a long historical context. In addition to this, we assert that politics do not take place in social vacuums but in historically contingent fashion filled with political and normative forces. These foundational assumptions lead this work to look at the period prior to the emergence of the studied Western Balkans to find linkages in the relationship of the Union with Yugoslavia that might have been transferable in the first stages of the post-Dayton period. The third and fourth Chapter that deal specifically with this argument makes a case for a representation dominating which has at its core the notion of a special and unique relationship between the EU and its counterpart in the Balkan region (Yugoslavia or Western Balkans).

The second sub-hypothesis states that *the Western Balkans is an externally-driven, social construction led by the European Commission and not a reflection of local conditions and historical realities*. The Western Balkans did not emerge based on some historical reading of Balkan politics, as a claim expressed by the regional actors in Southeastern Europe or as a region with functional characteristics. In this sense, the Western Balkans relies on the (inter-) subjective interpretations of the actors that give

meaning and substance to this ‘imagined’ region. The Western Balkans representations instil and develop a particular way of thinking about the region by consolidating the significance of regional projects that offer normative stickiness and establish trust among actors. The externalisation of the regional perspective as a normative commodity suitable for the Western Balkans is indicative of the increased role of regional conceptualisations world-wide. Furthermore, the Commission was establishing an EU-level discourse with regard to the regional signifier that is palatable to other actors. Since the Dayton Accords, a number of initiatives and institutions were introduced by international actors that had a different depiction of the Balkan reality. The effort here is to create and establish the specificity of the European approach to international politics, to differentiate the project from other actors (like the US) and to strengthen European-specific approaches. The European Union itself seeks to encourage meta-regionalism by implicitly and explicitly promoting *mimétisme*⁵ (for example, ASEAN, SADC and Mercosur – see Manners and Whitman 2003: 385). In this respect, the EU is no different from other political associations in having to ask what its internal value-commitments mean for its behaviour towards the rest of the world. Therefore, the EU’s is the one that introduced the notion of a Western Balkan region, the existence of the project depends on the birth-father’s agency.

The third sub-hypothesis says that *the European Commission has held different social representations of the Western Balkans and has aimed at establishing it as a regional signifier embedded in a distinct, European approach*. The nature of the relationship of the EU with the region does not resemble a ‘rational design’ but more a messy amalgam. The concept of the Western Balkans had no particular content beyond some geographical indication in the aftermath of the Dayton Accords. Since then, the EU Commission has been central in infusing and formatting what the regional signifier is and represents. While studying this narrative, the EU has held a number of variations in its social representation of the regional signifier. Especially, the European Commission has taken a leading role in moulding a new entity in its periphery by bulking representations of the Western Balkans in relation to what constitutes European in regional terms. In our study of the Western Balkans, it has taken on the

⁵ Mimétisme can be translated for the purposes of the thesis as regional replication

leading role in driving the process of giving substance to the regional mapping of the Balkans. The Commission has systematically placed emphasis on a regional conceptualisation as part of the transformative experience that the countries of the region have to undergo to become European.

<u>Hypothesis Table</u>
<p><u>Main Hypothesis:</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Western Balkans is what the European Union makes of it</p> <p><u>A set of three sub-hypotheses:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The European Union has had long and special historical ties with the region, either with Yugoslavia or in the form of the Western Balkans • The Western Balkans is an externally-driven, social construction led by the European Commission and not a reflection of local conditions and historical realities • The European Commission has held different social representations of the Western Balkans and has aimed at establishing it as a regional signifier embedded in a distinct, European approach

Table 1.2 Outline of Hypotheses

1.5 Literature and Methodology

This thesis is a piece of qualitative analysis, which explores social meanings of norms events and experiences (Schreier 2012: 21). The project draws primarily from International Relations (IR) theory and especially from the constructivist perspectives that have enriched debates inside IR. Also, it is of relevance to the sub-discipline of European studies literature and especially on aspects of the EU as an international actor and the EU's policy-making processes. Constructivist approaches have managed the past two decades to establish themselves as a particular orientation in the debates of both the IR and the European integration and EU studies generally. The frequent concerns that are raised about social constructivism contributing to the domains of IR and EU literature are the challenges to ground empirically constructivism's propositions. This study is an attempt to answer such criticisms. Additionally, the

thesis tests constructivist propositions by contextualising its inferences in a macro-historical context covering a period from 1970s to the post-Cold War experience of the Western Balkans and aiming at applying empirically the analytical framework of social representations.

On epistemology, constructivism does not possess a strict stance in the positivist/post-positivist divide. It rather transcends such discussions by leaving the researcher free to adopt an approach that best fits with the research puzzle and by engaging deeper on ontological debates. Furthermore, constructivists prefer to allow themselves to move back and forth from the theory to empirical reality so as to determining the important focal points that create the explained social process (Lupovici 2009: 204). In this respect, the research here benefits from the close investigation of a case study, which still remains in a vexed position in the discipline of International Relations (Gerring 2004: 341; Van Evera 1997: 51). Gerring understands case-studies as instances to extract more general propositions and defines a case study as “*an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units*” (2004: 342) and Punch accentuates this point by underlining the in-depth character of the analysis of a case study (2004: 150). The construction of the Western Balkans has been chosen as the subject for two reasons. First, it allows constructivism to contribute to discussions about regional constructions and second, it provides new understandings of EU policy-making.

Research techniques

In the course of the study revolving around socio-political processes, primary sources will be used, supplemented and contextualised by secondary evidence. The methodological choice of the thesis will lead the research to centre on the institutions of the European Union with a more focused analysis on the European Commission. The Directorate Generals of the Commission that have been heavily involved in the policy-making for the Western Balkans are the Enlargement, the Economic and Financial Affairs, Trade and the External Relations. Despite the fact that political scientists are constrained in some important respects by the absence of official documentation, which are crucial to the process of historical reconstruction (O'Brennan 2006: 9), we will research all relevant available primary materials, from official legal texts to reports and communications. In more detail, we are looking at

agreements that the European Union has signed with the region, such as the Regional Approach, the Stability Pact, the Stabilisation and Association Agreements and others. Furthermore, we shall look into the Commission's communications to the Council and the Parliament, the General Reports on the Activities of the EU, the annual Bulletins, the Progress Reports of the candidate countries, the internal staff working papers, the documents related to the deployed financial instruments throughout the years as well as the EU brochures and newsletters for the public and the media. Specifically, the project conducted research in the European Commission Archives, the Library of the European Commission in the DG 'Enlargement', 'External Relations', 'Economic and Financial Affairs', 'Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth'⁶ and 'Trade', as well as the European Commission's Central Library.

In parallel, as we noted above, we searched into the inter-institutional relationships of the Commission with the Council (European Council and its Presidencies, Council of the European Union, COREPER and COWEB as well as the former Office of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy); and with the European Parliament and the Committee on Foreign Affairs in particular which has been active in articulating opinions and producing resolutions. Moreover, since the regional policy has been a task undertaken by a European 'epistemic community', significant sources of information will derive from secondary evidence, such as reports and publications by research centres, academics and media coverage. Coupled with these sources, some further evidence came from the archives and pronouncements of EU officials, memoirs of key individuals and press reports of major member states. The speeches and wider public discourses of EU policy-makers are vital as they articulate the ideas and priorities of their time that can go beyond official papers.

Finally, in consonance with these techniques, there will be limited interviews with EU officials as a complementary method to supplement the findings from the primary and secondary evidence. The interviewees are Commission staff from the relevant DGs

⁶ The Commission for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth has had a number of different titles in the past, such as Education and Culture (Prodi Commission) and Education, Training and Culture (Barroso's 1st Commission).

working particularly on the regional programmes for the Western Balkans. The interviews were semi-structured aiming mostly at the apprehension of the interviewee's version of the subject under investigation. However, they are not used organically in this thesis for two reasons. First, due to the macro-historical nature of the thesis, it would be impossible to interview all those key individuals who have worked on the case. Second, even if few of them are tracked down and interviewed, there is the danger of receiving a version of events and policies that serves their interest to re-construct the past. Therefore the choice here is to rely on published materials as the most reliable way to approach the politics and policies of the studied period.

The main methods used in the thesis will highlight the social dimensions of policy frameworks and developments related to the Western Balkans. The study of texts, documents and discourses are not just a reflection of the material constellation of the world, but they convey and express ideas and beliefs that govern relationships; they do not speak for themselves but only acquire significant meaning when situated within a context set by analytical and methodological assumptions (Bowen 2009: 33; Burnham et al 2008: 212). The study will adopt a textual-interpretative analysis that studies the language of rules and norms which starts with texts to show the existence (and possibly dominance) of particular intersubjective understandings (Klotz and Lynch 2007: 19). As a research method, document analysis is pertinent to intensive studies producing rich descriptions of a single phenomenon, event, organisation or programme (Yin 1994). That is why these tools of textual analysis of documents also help to frame the issue specifically to represent a template that identifies problems, meanings and solutions (Merriam 1988: 118). These techniques of textual/document analysis and discourses combine the concepts of 'using documents and 'asking experts'; it helps a researcher to examine periodic and final reports to "*get a clear picture of how an organisation or a programme fared over time*" (Bowen 2009: 30). To uncover the particular meanings and frames (orientations) under which certain collective position comes about, three basic questions need to be related to the vast policy documents and discursive productions that emanate from the case-study: (i)

how it is argued, (ii) what the motivations of the actors are and (iii) what the political-normative context is when actors formulate their positions and justify their actions⁷.

The investigation of a discourse is not aimed at a critical revelation of hegemonic relations or discovering the truth (Lupovici 2009: 202). It may contribute to understanding a chain of events, the context of these events, as well as the constitution of actors' identities (Hopf 2002: 13). Content and document analysis assists in looking for particular words and/or terms that express normative questions; it yields data, and is then organised into themes, categories and case examples (Labuschagne 2003). Finnemore and Sikkink argue that norms prompt justification for action and they leave an extensive trail of communication among actors that can be studied (1998: 892). In particular, it is a relevant test for examining the public discourses and statements of policy-makers (Van Evera 1997: 54) in relation to finding focal or threshold points in tracing relations. Lupovici argues that constructivists are not aiming to say that X (ie norm of sovereignty) affects Y (state system) and vice versa, but that their relations need to be interpreted and understood in a $X1 \rightarrow Y1 \rightarrow X2 \rightarrow Y2$ and so on fashion (2009: 209). Similarly, in line with constructivist thinking, Searle discusses rule-guided behaviour by writing that the form is X affecting Y in context C (1969: 35). That is why such research is relevant in constructivist studies, which are very often based on tracing a chain of events.

These research choices help the thesis twofold: first, to explore the different decision-making process of the actors involved, it helps following a sequence of various conditions and events that will reinforce the hypothesis of the work; and second, to check the ideational content as crucial in the regional context of EU's approach which will be looked carefully and studied in the 'language' and 'texts' that EU produces. Essentially, the study will cut across all relevant EU activities in the Western Balkans with reference to this concept and the subsequent policies and discourses - ascertaining the central role of the European Commission.

⁷ These questions are inspired by the work done by Gabriela-Maria Manea (2009: 29) and Glenn A. Bowen (2009: 33).

1.6 Thesis Outline

This thesis is divided into two major parts. The first part of the project is made up of two basic chapters: the first is the introductory chapter and the second is the theoretical framework. The second part of the thesis is made up of the three main empirical chapters and the final conclusion chapter. These constitute the application of the constructivist framework on the case study. The chapters have been divided on the basis of a long study on the relationship that the European Union/Community has been deploying for the region, either in relation to Yugoslavia or the Western Balkans. Three different phases are identified on that basis:

- the first empirical part will identify the type of relations that the European Community/Union and the Commission(s) had with the region, and specifically with Yugoslavia, until 1995;
- the second part will investigate the time when the Western Balkans was part of the external relations disassociated from a clear European prospect, as well as the critical juncture of 1999;
- the third empirical chapter takes a look at the Western Balkans when it acquired a clear European prospective and gradually became part of the enlargement strategy.

Outlining the structure of the thesis in detail, the introductory chapter includes a literature review, identifies the puzzle of the research, explains the aims and objectives, introduces the hypothesis and clarifies the methodology. In chapter 2, the thesis will lay its analytical framework. The study aim is to indicate the position of constructivism as a relevant approach to International Relations theory and European Studies and analyse in detail the social representation model. An overview of the main principles that bind this new orientation of international politics will be analysed; and subsequently unveil the different strands that have emerged in relation to their opposing ontological and epistemological differences. Finally, the adopted framework will be offered which will explain why it is relevant for the study of this thesis' research puzzle and how it is applied. The framework offered is crucial for understanding the EU processes in the external relations, when dealing with regional grouping in the Balkans and the existing regional cooperation mechanisms.

Chapter 3 will inquire in the questions of the EU building of a representation of inclusion towards the countries of South East Europe from the days of the Cold War which have been used by actors, as the European Commission, to be able to place a strong European attention on the Balkans. With particular reference to Yugoslavia, the thesis ascertains that it was crucial for the EC and the Commission in the period of the Cold War to establish foreign policy credentials and to verify a broad European role in the Continent. The specific social representation of Yugoslavia in the period of the 1970s until the Dayton Accords of 1995 underwent some significant changes which need to be studied. The reason is that certain features from the representations used in this long chronological period became relevant for subsequent regional approaches. In addition to this, the study here will take a close focus on the specific approaches that EU has adopted in the rapprochement and enlargement context towards the CEE countries and how this fed for the institutional understanding of the EU for the region.

Chapter 4 will interrogate into the problematic nature of the Union's initial reluctant position to engage itself with the regional problems. The initial stages of the introduction of an 'amorphous regional signifier – that of the Western Balkans – did not manage to win hearts and minds either in the European or in the international policy circles. The EU early reactive character was more focused on setting off the security and economic problems emanating from the region which undermined the construction of anything more than a regional space. The thesis will examine how this representation of the Western Balkans did not offer any policy frames to allow for a new positive regional discourse and policies to be shaped. There was an obvious disparity in the policy of identification with the regional policies it aimed to promote for the Western Balkans. The events in the Kosovo in 1999 created a new platform for the EU and its new-coming Commission to re-visit all key parts of their regional approach and question its representation.

Chapter 5 will examine the change of context that the failed approach to the Western Balkans signified for the EU. The need to overcome the amorphous signifier towards a different understanding became obvious for the European Commission. The new institutional elaboration of Western Balkans would be an 'ordained regional signifier' which prescribes a top-down understanding of the relationship. The institutional

calibration of the region driven by the EU gave a central role to the Commission in transforming the regional normative context in a hierarchical form. The membership prospect of the Western Balkans became part of the equation of this re-visited relationship, but it came at odds with parallel regional projects which did not adopt the Western Balkans as a core signifier. The social representation of the Western Balkans as a dependent construct did not contribute to a qualitative change of the regional status to more than a regional complex. However, the period between 2004-5 turned to be another critical moment, because of significant political developments in Europe. The limits of the ordained regional signifier were acknowledged by the Commission, which was the first actor to initiate a process of revising the nature of the representation. At this juncture, the first signs of a shared regional signifier are detected in the oral producing and vast written works of the Commission pushing for a differentiated institutional correlation to the Western Balkans.

Chapter 6 is a detailed overview of the main issues raised within this thesis. Has our main hypothesis been sustained in the empirical analysis? Furthermore, in what ways can constructivist insights more readily explain the relationship of EU-Western Balkans and enhance our understanding of the complexities of the Western Balkan experience for the European Commission? Also, the conclusion will try to cut across the three empirical chapters and raise issues and provide answers that have been emerging in all the different periods of the relationship we examine. On a final note, this last chapter will point to future avenues for this research project.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

A scorpion asks a turtle to carry him across a river. The turtle is afraid of being stung, but the scorpion reassures him that if it stung the turtle, the turtle would sink and the scorpion would drown as well. The turtle then agrees; nevertheless, in mid-river, the scorpion stings him, dooming the two of them. When asked why, the scorpion explains, "I'm a scorpion; it's my nature."

(a popular Aesop's fable)

This ancient Greek folklore fable aims at giving a perspective about life: living beings act not always out of personal interests and rational calculations, but because their nature dictates accordingly and because they have grown to live in a particular way in their environment; even if, at the end, they may end up harming themselves. Of course, we use this parable because we want to make a claim about broader issues of the international political life. Specifically, the fable can help us pose questions with regard to the nature of international actors and how they behave in their international interactions. Instead of focusing on utilitarian explanations, the folklore exemplum raises issues of the importance of identity of subjects and how they behave with others in their natural surroundings.

This thesis incorporates these broad assumptions about life in its theoretical constructivist viewpoint. In order to understand the social representations of the Western Balkans - as part of the increasing regional institutionalisation of politics that the European Union advocates since the end of armed conflicts in the mid-1990s - it is necessary to adopt a lens that will allow us to analytically examine and understand the social foundations of the European Commission's preference formation for the region. In other words, what actually matters in our understanding of the research puzzle are the social and relational dimensions of the construction of a region that lies within the legitimate jurisdiction of the European Union.

This second chapter of the thesis aims to make a more detailed presentation in favour of a constructivist approach to the problem presented in the introductory chapter. It will primarily lay the theoretical and analytical framework that best suits the exploration of the research hypothesis. The constructivist understanding that the thesis

builds upon aims to connect the different components that are present in construction of the Western Balkans, such as social representations, signifiers and social mechanisms. In this second chapter, a short overview of constructivism and its main strands will explain the distinct contribution that it offers in relation to rival approaches before moving to the analysis of the analytical model of social representations.

2.2 Overview of Constructivism

Constructivism is a social theory not a theory of politics (Finnemore 1996: 27) and is relevant for a number of disciplines⁸ and has mainly emerged to stress the role of the social constitution of our world. Approaching it from a philosophical angle, constructivism is a viewpoint of social reality; it refers to the way humans perceive and function within the abilities of their consciousness (Ruggie 1998: 856). A basic premise is that (social) reality is not understood as an objective fact but is relied on inter-subjective meanings. These debates about theorising about theory (Zhao 1991: 378) are not the focus of the thesis, but will be briefly discussed as they provide the link between International Relations and other disciplines (Rousseau 2006: 39). We can argue that constructivism places greater emphasis on social ontologies than neo-utilitarian approaches and on empirical analysis than post-modernist/reflexivist ones. Broadly speaking, Klotz and Lynch (2007) argue that constructivists offer complex, multi-causal, contextualised explanations. What they mean is that the constitution of our social world cannot be one-directional (as scientific explanations strive to prove), because humans are unable to capture the complexity of the social environment. The attention in constructivism is to study the complex social forces at play when dealing with human agency as part of a spatial-temporal context.

2.2.1 Mainstream approaches and their limitations

Stefano Guzzini (2003) refers to two blockages that have favoured a constructivist turn in IR; first, the narrow insights that game theory and rational choice theory offer and second, the ‘unchangeable’ and ‘circular’ argument of the world ‘as it really is’, primarily by realists, which ask for some version of scientific positivism (Brown 1992: 90). International Relations discipline had been dominated for long years by the

⁸ Constructivism has been taken on by scholars in fields such as psychology, education, management and social policy to name a few.

realism versus liberalism debate which evolved in the later years (since the 1980s) into the neorealist versus neoliberal discussions⁹. The disagreements that emerged in these debates came to be viewed as limited in scope and unfruitful (Checkel 1998: 324; Hill 2006: 12-14). On one side, there was little concern on basic philosophical and meta-theoretical issues that were common in both paradigms and on the other side, important concepts were sidelined from the main debates, such as norms, ideas and identity. Many scholars have discovered since the benefits of a constructivist turn in the field of politics; for the thesis, Constructivism appears to pose essential challenges in the field of International Relations and European studies. It has entered the studies of European Union politics since the 1990s (Aspinwall and Schneider 2000; Adler 1997; Checkel 1999; Christiansen et al 2001; Risse 2000; Rosamond 1999; Wiener 1997). Jeffrey T. Checkel who is extensively dealing with issues of European integration argues that strategic exchange adhering to strict forms of methodological individualism¹⁰ are not taking into account fundamental issues of agent identity and interests (2001: 50).

When talking about meta-theoretical considerations from a mainstream perspective, we mostly analyse the world of agents and the way they act based on a rational choice logic. In the rationalist-materialist understanding of social inquiry we assert that all social phenomena are explicable in ways that only involve individual agents and their goals and actions. They attribute the actors the capacity to be fully aware of the available knowledge and they are able to make the optimal choice out of a series of alternatives based on pre-determined interests. Rationalism favours consequentialist logics of action by actors who undertake means-ends calculations in choosing their best course of action (costs and gains or benefits are categorised into two main areas: economic and geopolitical security costs and benefits). Whatever actors want (and this is canonically to maximize utility), they choose what they believe to be the best

⁹ For an extended analysis on the issue, see Baldwin, D., ed., 1993, *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: the Contemporary Debate*, New York: Columbia University Press, and Powell, R., 1994, Anarchy in International Relations Theory: the Neorealist-Neoliberal Debate, *International Organization*, vol. 48, no. 2, pp. 313-344.

¹⁰ Methodological individualism refers to social phenomena that must be explained by showing how they result from individual actions, which in turn must be explained through reference to the intentional states that motivate the individual actors (Weber 1968). It involves, in other words, a commitment to the primacy of what Talcott Parsons would later call “the action frame of reference” (Parsons 1937: 43-51) in social-scientific explanation. It is also sometimes described as the claim that explanations of “macro” social phenomena must be supplied with “micro” foundations, ones that specify an action-theoretic mechanism (Alexander, 1987).

means available to attain it (Jupille, Caporaso and Checkel 2003: 12). Moreover, these mainstream approaches stress the issue of material objects having a direct effect on outcomes (Hurd 2008: 300). They claim that any change occurring in policies and interests is a reaction to a change in the material structures that cause domestic rebalancing and reorientation of preferences. Similarly, functionalist-utilitarian accounts claim that actors redefine their (fixed) interests as a result of external threats and/or domestic groups' demands. In sum, they seek to find which actors are relevant in a given situation, they search their capabilities and their preferences, and based on these findings they commence on their analysis (Finnemore 1996: 9-10).

Limitations in explaining the Western Balkans

There is a significant amount of work that have explained the utility of Western Balkans in functional (economic and security) terms. In the empirical analysis (Chapter Three to Five), the thesis starts each Chapter with the rationalist and materialist explanations of the period covered. Constructivism emerged as a criticism to these assumptions. Ian Hurd (2008) believes that constructivist literature is mainly opposed to materialism; unlike Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore who see rationalism as the opposite to social constructivism (1999: 702). Here, we will discuss the broad limitations that rationalism has when addressing the making of the region.

Functionalism fails to connect the processes in play before the emergence of the Western Balkans. There is evidence that Yugoslavia served as a pool of practices and knowledge for policy-makers in the Commission; that is why will observe how the anchoring process resembles similar patterns before and after 1995. The strategic consistency of preferring regional blocs is not necessarily the end-product of a rational calculation of Union mindset. It is hard to argue why resources and efforts was spent to approach the region. There was a clear indication that all local actors were seeking bilateral agreements with the EU to advance their goals; while the international community equally had no reason not to target and cooperate with national governments at large. However, the Commission acted actively to support a new regional thinking irrespective of the political backing of other European and international actors – which does raise issues of preference formation and policy frameworks.

Moreover, the Western Balkans as an important signifier for regional politics became gradually adopted by the international community and the local actors. The reasoning behind such evolution is not easily grasped by materialist and rationalist logics that do not pay attention to the significance of symbolic representations and identity constructions. Policy-making starts from the realm of ideational trajectories to infuse policies and interests with meanings – and not the other way around. The normative and socially constructed aspect of international political processes is a fundamental starting points for the study of the case-study. As Thelen and Steinmo argue:

People don't stop at every choice they make in their life and think to themselves, 'Now what will maximize my self-interest?' Instead, most of us, most of the time, follow socially defined rules, even when doing so may not be directly in our self-interest.

(1992: 8)

Building on this argument, the relevant EU policy-makers did not just think how their interactions would produce a desired outcome to maximise some benefits. While they tend to take the social context in which their actions take place for granted, they conform and reconstruct social processes. The constructivist approach to social reality centralises these meta-theoretical assumptions as dominant analytical tools in understanding the relationship between the European Commission and the Western Balkans.

2.2.2. The constructivist turn

The transition from a bipolar world system to a new era brought changes in the intellectual and academic camps as it widened the field to a variety of issues and approaches. Scholars started asking questions about security culture, identity-related concerns, ethics of intervention, and alternative conceptions of the role of norms in world politics. It is worth mentioning here that IR theorists were always preoccupied with such issues, but most times ended subjugating such concepts to power struggle and military and economic competition, like E.H. Carr (1939) and Hans Morgenthau (1948). Nevertheless, the English School and Hedley Bull (1977) was among the most prominent figures during the Cold War period to establish discussions about the role of ideas and values in the society of states. Robert Keohane was noting that *“the fact that we lack theories that would enable us to understand the effects of the end of the*

Cold War on world politics should make us humble” (1996: 463). By looking at the social-ideational structures and processes, constructivists demonstrate that non-material aspects get taken for granted while others remain unspoken or marginalized. From this angle, social constructivism is a perspective that begs for equal attention on (social) structures, as well as establishing a belief that they affect preferences in important ways (Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein 1996: 37-65).

In our understanding, rationality is not separated from any normative influence, exactly like normative contexts are able to condition episodes of rational choice (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 888). Social constructivism looks at the products of social interaction vis-à-vis culturally determined roles and social representations. Alexander Wendt argues that intersubjective structures give meaning to material ones and it is in terms of meanings that actors act (1994: 389). On one hand, human agency creates, reproduces and changes structures and culture (collectively shared systems of meanings) through daily practice – unlike structuralism. One of the starting points for constructivists is the fact that agents have intentions and purposes, and by arguing and demanding they advance their views of the world (Klotz and Lynch 2008: 45). Actors do not start *tabula rasa* when faced with problems or opportunities to act, but draw on pre-existing schemata, experiences and beliefs about the external world and deeply engrained norms about appropriate behaviour (Checkel 2000; Olsen 2000). On the other hand, it is significant to trace the fortifying or weakening of dominant meanings – expressed either as ‘facts’ or ‘reality’ – that would provide with essence and content the structure. Constructivists argue, instead – or better, moreover – that structure¹¹ affects through shared beliefs the very definition of identity, hence interests, and eventually behaviour (Guzzini 2003). Constructivists agree, in other words, that actors create meanings within structures and discourses through processes and practices (Klotz and Lynch 2006: 357; see also structuration theory, Giddens 1984). Mental maps are indicative of such structures through which agents interpret politics and political geography. Inside this process, institutions and actors can be redefined in essential ways, and not epiphenomenally as in neorealism. Unlike rational actor perceptions that perceive institutions and interests as exogenous factors,

¹¹ Constructivism sees structure as social ‘practice’, not as objective constraint. The structural level for the constructivist is ideational in two senses: first, structure itself includes an ideational component; and second, structure matters for social action through (shared) beliefs.

intersubjective approaches argue that political action, identities and institutions are mutually constitutive (Wiener 2006: 39).

Added to this, the special weight of ideational forces is neither unimportant (as in neorealist and neoliberal thinking) nor just the aggregation of beliefs of individuals, since ideas are institutionalised and intersubjective¹² (as shown below in Figure 2.1). The work of Klotz and Lynch advances the research agenda to focus on the study of the ‘intersubjective meanings’ which link the structural-agentic fabric of politics. This is where the thesis initiates its theoretical focus, on a (meso-level) analysis of social representations, which provide a way of unpacking the preferences of ‘reasonable actors’ (a good discussion on this particular topic is also offered by Frédéric Mérand 2006). Such representations may be articulated in discourse (as they often are the subject of discussion among actors) to justify actions and/or persuade others to act. Studying European politics – from a constructivist perspective - highlights the importance of representational construction of meanings (borders, regions, ‘Others’, human rights – to name a few). Within this analysis, shared ideas or norms of behaviour provide the actors with specific (dominant) understandings of what is valuable and what is legitimate means of obtaining valued goods (Finnemore 1996: 15).

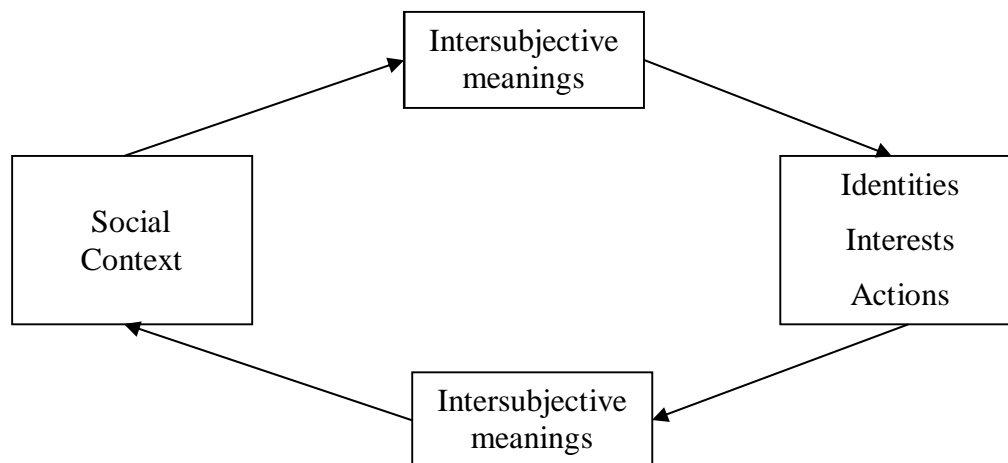


Figure 2.1 Schematic explication of the role of intersubjective meanings (source Klotz, A. and Lynch, C., 2008: 9)

¹² The former points to habitual practices, procedures and identities that are “symbolic and organisational” and can be traced in a variety of sources, such as governmental procedures, rhetoric of statecraft and collective memories (Legro 2005: 6). The latter becomes - in constructivist analysis - the dependent variable between the social context (independent variable) and the identities and actions (outcomes) as intersubjectivity refers to meanings attached to norms, concepts, mental maps and so on.

2.3 Constructivism as a theoretical orientation for the thesis

Too often social scientists [...] forget that policies, once enacted, restructure subsequent political processes.

(Theda Skocpol 1992: 58)

Skocpol's quote reminds the co-constitutive nature of agents and structures and that social process is essential for our understanding of politics. However, we have mentioned that Constructivism is not a unified approach to social and political life. Scholars have long debated whether constructivist analysis adopts and shares more with rational choice and agent-orientated approaches that aim to establish causal relationships, the positivist leaning side (Klotz and Lynch 2007: 12); or if it is closer to structural understandings that mainly try to interpret phenomena, understand the *meaning* of norms (Wiener 2006: 37) and place greater emphasis on a variety of discourse-theoretic techniques, the post-positivism side (Checkel 2004: 231). Clearly what constructivism means is interpreted differently within the field itself (Pettenger 2007: 8). Several articles have dealt with these different variants, presenting two (Fierke and Jørgensen 2001: 5; Christiansen et al 1999: 8), three (Reus-Smit 2005: 210; Zehfuss 2001: 54-75) or even four (Adler 2002: 97-98). This thesis does not deem necessary to enter these theoretical debates¹³ and will use the two broad camps: the social (also referred to as modernist or conventional) and the radical (or critical) constructivism. This thesis is grounded in the social constructivist variant.

Broadly speaking, social constructivism sees the role of norms and social ideas as independent variables and it tends to focus on the constitutive role of institutions in the identity and interest of actors. Social constructivists tend to see intersubjective understandings as stable, remaining unchanged by the perspective of the interpreter. These researchers often frame questions in terms of policy and behaviour, looking for patterns in the formation and operation of international regimes or foreign policy-making to demonstrate how norms matter (Klotz and Lynch 2006: 357). On epistemological grounds, conventional constructivists follow a non-strict positivist and bridge-building orientation that perceives reality in terms of stable meanings by

¹³ It is the author's belief that the creation of many camps within Constructivism is generating more dividing lines; it prohibits a more holistic dialogue; and it is not contributing to a better understanding of the areas that it aims to highlight.

virtue of the actors agreeing so. Methodologically, qualitative (such as process-tracing case study) methods are the frequent tool they apply in their analysis.

These approaches have been criticised on three grounds. First, while utilising norms, ideas and social processes in their analysis, they have left the role of power outside their scrutiny¹⁴. Furthermore, due to their close affinities with rational approaches, there is a problem with their meta-theoretical explication where they clearly stand in respect to ‘bordering’ theories, such as institutionalism. Finally, conventional constructivists have to explain in a stricter sense how they can combine a social ontology with a positivist-leaning epistemology. However, these ‘objections’ are not rejecting constructivist analysis; rather they seek a more nuanced study of the application of constructivist logic on aspects of international politics. In particular, this thesis is interested to open ways for social constructivism to be better embedded in IR and European studies and to make it an important part of analyses of the EU.

2.4 An analytical framework of Social Representations

In this part of the second chapter, we will go in-depth regarding the theoretical and analytical framework of the thesis. The attempt to tackle the issue of the construction of the Western Balkans leads us to a social constructivist approach. On a general note, this theoretical model enables the study as an essential part of EU’s regional approach away from functionalist explanations. Without understanding the enactment of specific social representations of the regional signifier, it is difficult to understand the content and the development of the policies for the Western Balkans.

The construction of the Western Balkans is based on collectively-held ideas articulated in the European Commission discourse; additionally, any interactions of the Commission with other internal or external actors are regulated or constituted by (stable) norms and institutionalised practices (Wiener 2004: 191). We investigate the dominant ideas as dominant structures and institutionalised practices that are stable in the course of the study here. Such a premise is based on constructivist’s assertions

¹⁴ A frequently posed question in this respect is ‘How do some norms prevail and become established over other?’. This is a point of controversy as some stress the argumentative/communicative role of social ontologies (Risse 2000; Sjursen 2002) and some the persuasive one (Barnett and Finnemore 1999 and 2004; Checkel 2003; Johnston 2001). A serious critique is deriving also from mainstream approaches, who claim that normative and liberal approaches suffer from a perennial weakness, their total neglect of power (Hyde-Price 2006: 218).

that over time close social interactions promote patterns of trust and convergence of identities (Atkinson 2006: 510). At the same time, the Commission actively builds or re-interprets meanings that include notions about desirable behaviour in its community. Therefore, the suitability of this theoretical perspective is that it (i) uncovers the dominant ideas and social processes that prevailed in the mindset of the EU actors in the light of alternative perspectives, (ii) it probes the grounds for the construction of a regional subject and (iii) it unpacks the social content of the process.

More concretely and in relation to the case study, this thesis will utilise an analytical model of social representation: understand the way the Union and the European Commission in particular have constructed a ‘Western Balkans’ representation through time. The research shall *firstly* examine which actors/entrepreneurs have actively initiated regional processes. The framework will qualitatively analyse how the Commission has come to formulate particular preferences about the Western Balkans. *Secondly*, the thesis explores the idea that the Western Balkans is a regional signifier exhibiting characteristics that the Commission attributes to represent a modern European regional-system and not only an entity structured around functionalist priorities. In addition, the social content of the Western Balkans refers to an open-ended signifier. *Thirdly*, we point to the way actors deliberately tried to ‘sell’ policy ideas to other actors (Elgström 2000: 458). In this respect, we are driven to understand the social mechanisms that help internationalise ‘political’ signifiers and objectify and fill their content inside the regional approach.

In the sections below, we will explain in more detail how we understand each concept and how it relates to the overarching theoretical framework that the thesis introduces. In the current literature, there is no specific framework that details the operationalisation of the concept, which is a void that this thesis aims to fill. Also, more concrete evidence from the empirical world will complement the analysis to justify the theoretical choice made. The Figure 2.2 below is attempting to schematically present the overall analytical framework, which is discussed in the next sections.

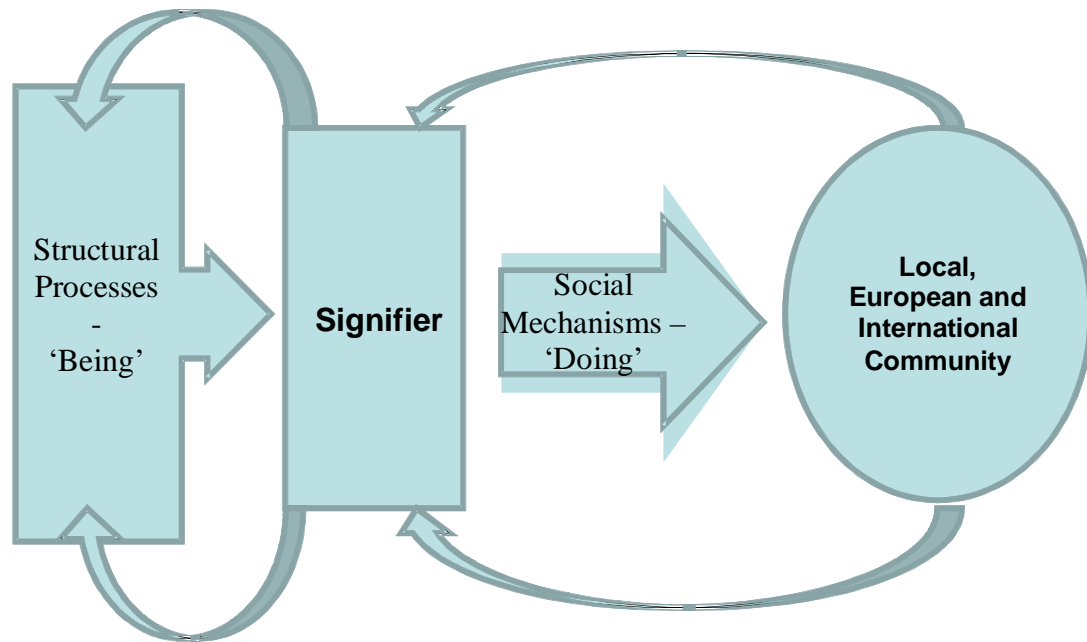


Figure 2.2

2.4.1 The concept of Social Representation

The thesis utilises the sociological concept of ‘social representation’ as it fits well with the overarching problematique: how the EU constructed the Western Balkans. To start with, social representations are defined in this thesis as *institutional elaborations of images and concepts towards political signifiers which help to organise forms of politics*. A social representation is neither static nor ever-changing because in that case it loses its essence and analytical value. It is a collective phenomenon pertaining to a community which is co-constructed by actors’ concerted talk and actions (Wagner et al 1999: 96). Representations provide motivation for action that is irreducible to rationality and, in essence, enable agents with arguments for policy-formulation; as well, they may turn certain paths of action possible (regional cooperation and integration), while other paths become unthinkable (use of threats, violation of minority rights). They are attributed to real actors, such as the European Commission, who objectify them into preferences and policies. They are simultaneously the products of actions that reconstruct the rules to condone behaviour and are influences upon actions that shift behaviour to match the rules. Institutionalised representations define the meaning of social actions and it is through

‘reciprocal interaction’ that we create and detect the relatively enduring social structures in terms of which we define identities and interests (Wendt 1992: 406). Summing up the analytical value of the social representations, we recognise it has a twofold importance: (a) it works at the meso-level between actors’ interests and the macro-focus of structural processes which usually neglect the role of actors; and (b) it refers to a process that constructs reality (Deaux and Philogène 2001: 5).

More concretely, policies of the European Union are frequently discussed in policy forums, on diplomatic tables and in the media. Using the analytical device of representations, it will allow us to understand why certain policies and preferences were initiated. The thesis will devote large parts of the analysis to establish: first, the relationship between social representations and the concept of signifier as the object under construction; and second, tracing the emergence and operationalisation of this analytical framework. These two characteristics lead us to investigate how social representations address political objects being in flux and located and constituted between agentic and structural forces. It is acknowledged that this co-constitution “*makes it difficult to build models and causality chains*” (Meyer 2011: 672). Frequently, the links between the two are acknowledged in principle, and not elaborated with theoretical or empirical details. Nevertheless, with reference to the European Union, the interest of this article lies at the synergy of its ‘being’ and ‘doing’ (Bretherton and Vogeler 1999; Hill 1996; Nicolaïdis and Howse 2002). The literature on social representation argues that two processes relate to the way we need to conceptualise this synergical relationship: the process of anchoring and the process of objectification (Sarrica and Contarello 2004: 550). These two processes are essential for this analytical framework.

The anchoring process refers to study of links being made for the signifier to established structural processes. Work from sociology asks researchers to relate previous knowledge to the new event; the purpose is to make sense of the signifier, to make a group (of people or states) understand it in terms of more familiar schemata (Bartlett 1932; cf. Moscovici and Markova 1998: 377). Within this logic, actors strategically associate – or, anchor, as is the proper term – their own substantial structures, their ‘being’, to the socially-represented signifier. What needs to be studied then is how each qualitatively relates and fills the content of the signifier. The objectification process pertains to mechanisms by which the socially represented

signifier attains a specific form and becomes intelligible for others (Wagner 1999: 99). Actors do not only form or hold representations, but equally they strive to export them; it refers to the EU's 'doing', as we highlighted previously. Thanks to this process, even abstract or hazy signifiers may be used by everyone and modified like real objects (Sarrica and Contarello 2004: 550). The Western Balkans is a case study that allows this thesis to uncover the process of formulating the European Union's representations of the investigated regional signifier. The anchoring and objectifying process will be discussed in detail below (in part 2.4.3). The Figure 2.2 below is attempting to schematically present the overall analytical framework.

2.4.2 Signifier

The initial interest in the concept of signifiers comes from the work of Ernesto Laclau who has systematically worked on this idea. In two books, *Emancipation(s)* and *On populist reason*, Laclau argues that an (empty) signifier is crucial for political actors when constituting identities and when aiming to delineate it from something 'other' than themselves. This signifier is represented by actors in such way that the signifier acquires the particularities of the dominant representation. Two characteristics of the signifier are of interest to this study here: how a signifier gets constructed and the content and meaning of the signified.

First of all, Laclau makes the argument that political communities construct signifiers not as something exogenous to their Self, but as potential Us, because of the need to transform them – which is only possible if we position the signifier in a range of proximity to our particularities (examples here can be a democratic system, a peaceful community and a free trade economy). *“The only possibility of having a true outside is not simply one more, neutral element but an excluded one, something that the totality expels from itself in order to constitute itself”* (Laclau 2005: 70). This is the way that an actor can shape/transform the signifier in order to set its preferences and ideas.

Moving beyond Laclau, and working specifically with its utility for the thesis, we assert that the signifier can never be *fully* specified and represented, because it is under negotiation by a variety of forces. Conceptualising the signifiers underscores the importance of explicitly engaging the ambiguity that accompanies its

understandings (Brigg and Muller 2009: 133). This means that ‘the world of signifiers’ is an issue of process rather than a concrete, unambiguous figure. This process of filling, or constituting, is inevitably a political process. Therefore, we come to an important inference, which is that signifiers have a dual nature and that social representations incorporate both facets of the signifier:

- (a) the signifier (Western Balkans) and its factual characteristics
- (b) the signified which refers to what it represents, meaning the process of varied agents and forces infusing the content of the signifier (amorphous, ordained, shared)

Bringing these elements in the analytical framework of the thesis, we advance the idea, that regional constructions are susceptible to social and normative challenges with regard to their meaning. Political actors are contesting or reinforcing the existence of signifiers and their content. This research also believes that the European Commission’s representation helps us acquire a better understanding of the dual processes of forming and ordering a signifier and, at the same time, the signifier itself gives a role and meaning to the political community in which it is embedded.

2.4.3 The anchoring and objectifying process

In this section, we move to the final central element of the analytical framework of social representations. The anchoring and objectifying processes are treated as a key component to study the European Union’s approach to the Western Balkans as a product of a Brussels-based mechanism. The links created between actors (entrepreneurs in Brussels) and their policy end-products are the object of study here. The anchoring bonds that are created within an institutionalised environment which tie the ‘being’ of the EU to the Western Balkans, as well as the objectifying practices which link the signifier with the ‘doing’ of the EU, are processes which need an analytical clarity and distinction. Below, both the anchoring and the objectifying process are given a detailed explication how they inform and provide content to the investigated signifier. Each process receives an analytical approach to help track the construction of the social representations of the Western Balkans.

2.4.3.1 Anchoring process

The examination of the anchoring process in the Union's documents and discourses directs us to investigate the relationship between the European Union's substantial/structural processes and the regional signifier that we focus on, the Western Balkans. The break-down of what composes these processes of the EU's 'being' are extrapolated from both the relevant constructivist literature in European studies and the actual study of the written and oral materials produced by the EU itself. In this sense, we distinguish three pillars that make up the structural processes that define the EU around:

- (a) *identity* concepts of what stands for 'European',
- (b) *norms* about the necessity of cooperation and integration in a regional context, and
- (c) *past practices and experiences* of the Commission (Figure 2.3)

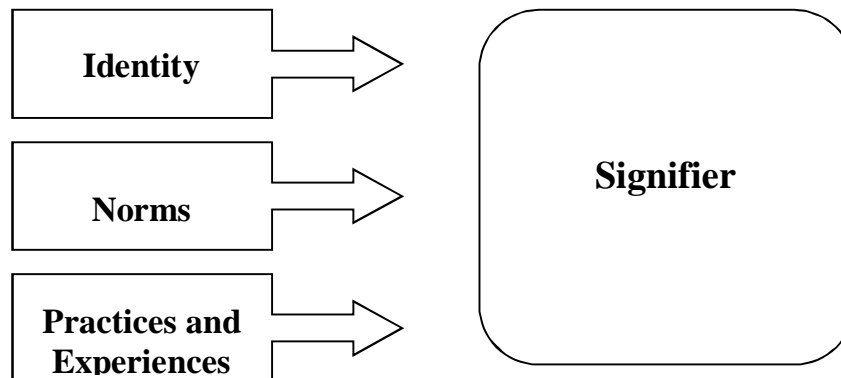


Figure 2.3

Identity

Identity is an important part since “*they tell you and others who you are and they tell you who others are*” (Hopf 1998: 175). Identity means a conception of self-organised into rules for matching action to situations (Egeberg 1999: 458). Actors do not only think and act based on the identity they attribute to others, but also based on the way they understand and reproduce their own identity through daily practice. This cognitive interplay discursively positions the boundaries of the group, i.e. who is in and who is out, based on the substance of what it means to be European (Neumann 1996). Here, we want to introduce another category, the ‘*in-between*er’ which asserts that a group can be not an ‘Other’ but neither an ‘Us’ (see Figure 2.4). When trying to understand the Commission's role in constructing the Western Balkans, we are consistent with a sociological institutionalist account that positions the Commission as

an active identity builder with views about the substance of being member of the group.

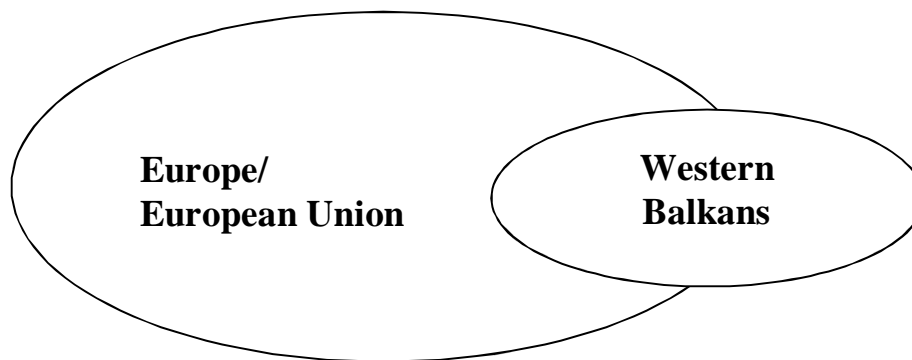


Figure 2.4 Western Balkans as an 'in-between'

The identity we try to utilise in the thesis is referring to ideas about membership in a social community and to a sense of difference with regard to other communities. Utilising identity as a structural process that is linked to signifiers, we stress (a) the constitution of the boundaries for the community and (b) the juxtaposition of EU standards of behaviours with unacceptable Balkan and past European experiences. The former is linked to the identification with the idea of 'Europe', a cultural facet of identity, which corresponds to history, civilisation and social similarities. The latter refers to the EU as a political community that constructs post-national civic identity related to political-legal characteristics, such as democratic principles, human rights and good regional relations. They are both essential parts of European identity, but are kept analytically distinct in the thesis. The argument is that the closer the membership prospect, the more the civic components of the European identity will be stressed and evoked by the European Commission.

Norms

The second structural process discusses the way the Western Balkans has been anchored by issues of norms. Norms stem because of the belief in the ideals and values embodied in them "*even though the pursuit of the norms may have no effect on their well-being*" (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 898). Norms contain the specific 'oughts' and 'ought-nots' that often flow logically from relevant discourses (Pettenger 2008: 238). Based on this, norms provide the cognitive roadmap for the suitable

response to perceived common problems. In our research focus, we will chart which identifiable set of norms were taken up by the Commission entrepreneurs to shape the regional approach for the Western Balkans.

In our case, the normative battery is derived from the Treaties and the *acquis communautaire* that forms the basis of the formation of the Commission's representation on the issue of the Western Balkans. The values and norms embodied essentially empower the Commission to pursue normative goals and demand conformity. Therefore, the driving force behind the regional approach is normative – norms associated with regional perspectives pave the way of the deployment of the EU's preference since they motivate the entrepreneurs and they provide justifications for policies. The clearer the membership prospect of the Western Balkans is, the stronger the emphasis on EU-specific norms in the regional approach. In other words, the closer the association between the EU and the Western Balkans, the more the EU-specific norms become prevalent in the Commission's social representation for the Western Balkans (for example, in relation to broader international norms).

Practices and experiences

Within the multi-perspectival polity of the EU, the European Commission is the supranational body that has the dual responsibility for policy initiation and as guardian of the treaties (Laffan 2004: 86). Initially charged with responsibility for coordinating financial aid to the transition states¹⁵, it has subsequently succeeded in greatly expanding its remit. What is though acknowledged is its extensive network of technical expertise (organisational know-how and informational reach) and its ability and willingness to act as a political entrepreneur. The necessary bureaucratic and practical expertise for a broad-ranging transformation of the external environment was lacking in national ministries and many international financial institutions – which though should not lead to the conclusion that the Commission had a specialist knowledge or any special team (most officials were trained only in aid programmes of the Third World) (Tatham 2009: 272). Nevertheless, the centrality in the Brussels-

¹⁵ At the G-24 Summit at Paris in 1989 the Commission was asked to coordinate what would evolve into the PHARE aid programme. The programme expanded to include almost all states in CEE and later would become a key 'pre-accession' instrument.

mechanism allowed the Commission to develop new (formal and informal) practices – like the one investigated in this research in relation to the Western Balkans.

The institutional structures of the EU do enable supranational actors to interpret a complex reality, to construct focal points for deliberation and, in the end, to frame a new policy agenda. The *past experiences and practices* are essential determinants of what the European Commission considers as ‘normal’ in international relations, to borrow the argument expressed by Ian Manners (Manners 2002: 240; Manners and Whitman 2003: 390). They are structures which allow the Commission to develop and evolve ideas and preferences in a policy-learning fashion. The ability of the countries of the Western Balkans to “*establish normal relationships between themselves*” (European Commission 2002: 4) is linked to the ability of the Commission to project a European model that strongly correlates with “*areas where the EU has a significant competence, weight and expertise*” (Philippart 2003: 216). In the sense, we are expecting to observe assert that the more the regional approach is modelled on European institutional experiences and practices, the closer the expectation of integration of the Western Balkans in the EU will be.

Following the explication of the anchoring process, this thesis will further aim to add to the way in which representations show the development and transmission of policies and interests. Largely, there has been little connection as to the mechanisms that international actors use to transform conceptions and ideas into real subjects of international political life. In the next section, we will analyse the social mechanisms that enable social representations of signifiers to be ‘sold’ to others.

2.4.3.1 Objectifying process

The thesis asserts that the social representation of the Western Balkans requires a process of objectification, which refers to the EU’s ‘doing’. In order to illustrate this process, the research will look at the way EU and others justify, communicate and act. The literature here takes the thesis to a nuanced analysis of social mechanisms as the optimal way of grasping the objectifying process of the signifiers. These mechanisms depict (a) the establishing patterns of trust and convergence (Finnemore 2008: 75) and (b) the logics which render understandable the social reality (Hernes 1998: 74). In particular, social mechanisms may be understood as those stable elements that provide

a plausible account of “*how I and O are linked to one another*” (Hedstrom and Swedberg 1998: 75) – how the social representations of the European Commission requires its regional signifier, the Western Balkans, to be are linked with problems and policy tools. Since we approach the research puzzle from a social constructivist viewpoint, consistent (or not) endorsement of certain justifications is significant in the objectifying process. The thesis identifies three stable social mechanisms that regularly show up in the Commission’s representation of policy preferences, as shown in Figure 2.5 below:

- (a) Legitimation
- (b) Appropriateness
- (c) Institutionalisation

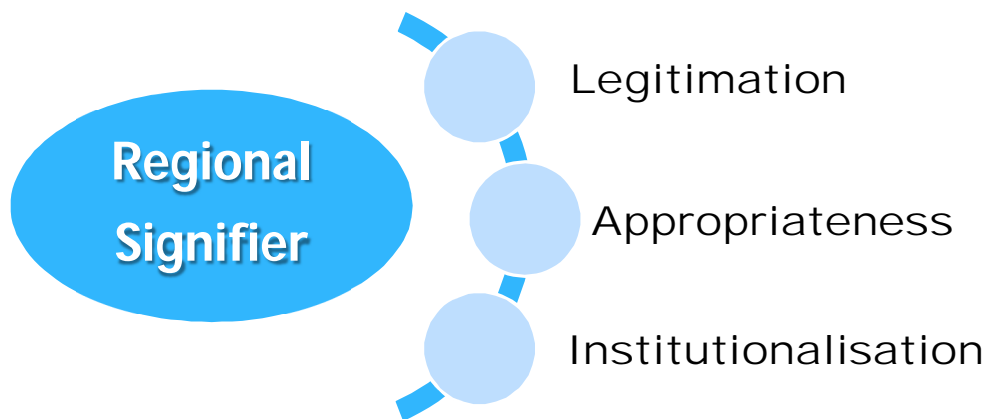


Figure 2.5

Legitimation

Specifying the mechanisms, we start with legitimation. Analytically, it refers to the degree to which a decision-making procedure can convincingly be justified by reasonable arguments (Neyer 2000: 121). Since the Commission’s goal of transforming a geographic area, on behalf of the EU, is conducted not with coercive means, but with softer tools, it requires legitimation which allows a dependency relationship to be established. The absence of the recognition of EU’s rightfulness to form a regional entity can create an undesired crisis. Successful and stable orders require the grease of some legitimation structure to persist and prosper (Finnemore 2009: 62). Organisational practices can be transferred from one group to another, because “*institutionalized elements can ‘infect’ other elements in a contagion of legitimacy*” (Zucker 1987: 446). Legitimacy therefore can relate to a shared

representation, which in some instances can be translated as “*the belief in a common destiny*” (van Ham 2010: 14). Lacking legitimacy, the routes of social representations become dead-end streets.

The European Commission, as a non-state actor, is more inclined to use non-material resources to push for its social representation to become dominant, mainstream and desirable for the local, European and international community. The EU project progresses and asserts itself via legitimation on the basis of an accepted normative character, know-how expertise and its relation to a mass European identity. The legitimation of the Western Balkans as a necessary process for the establishment of the Commission’s social representation fundamentally involves aspects of symbolic boundaries of groups (Us, Them, In-between) and on expertise employed within a clear legal (international) structure. This may help in the emergence, modification or development of a representation for a new political community in Europe.

Appropriateness

The objectifying process in the social representations framework is linked to a logic of appropriateness, next to inter-organisational procedures and legitimation discourses. Constructivist approaches in the fields of International Relations and European Integration sustain that new rules are adopted when actors are convinced of their appropriateness. To make decisions within a logic of appropriateness, decision-makers need to be able to determine what their identities are, what the situation is, and what action is appropriate for them in the situation in which they find themselves (Egeberg 1999: 458). Determining which norms and practices apply in specific situations involves sophisticated reasoning processes (Finnemore 1996: 29). The concept of appropriateness features in this conceptual framework, as a factor that empowers the regional signifier to become a dominant representation over other alternative or contradicting ones. Indicative is the following passage that encapsulates the process of introducing the logic of appropriateness in social relations:

Actors may ask themselves ‘What kind of situation is this?’ and ‘What am I supposed to do now?’ rather than ‘How do I get what I want?’. Actors often must choose between very different duties, obligations, rights, and responsibilities with huge social consequences, but understanding the choice

depends on an understanding, not of utility maximization, but of social norms and rules that structure that choice.

(Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 914)

In our case, we are looking at the EU actors that strive to implement rules and policies that are ‘the right thing to do’ which would imply a change in values and interests. The European Commission screens a problem and looks at their available toolbox of knowledge to identify which tools are more appropriate that will enable the Union to exercise a stronger influence. This implies that the representations of the Commission have taken for granted certain features of the appropriate policy-making that need to be extended irrespective of specific cues in their environment. The promotion of a regional structure in the affairs of the Western Balkans by the EU became the prevailing standard of appropriateness against which a new set of policies may emerge and compete for support.

Institutionalisation

Another social mechanism which gives ‘flesh and bone’ to the regional signifier is the rational-legal authorities such as organizations, rules and law (Finnemore 2008: 68). In international politics, this essentially means a certain degree of institutionalisation and exposure to cooperation that would eventually create a stable trusting environment for the actors’ interaction, as well as ‘common knowledge’ on what grounds they could ‘argue’ meaningfully (Manea 2009: 31). Institutionalisation refers to a pathway whereby representations become encrusted in institutions - a policy-choice that is a particular and standardised practice of the EU at large. The degree of institutionalisation is an important aspect that reflects the level and quality of interaction. We can have minimal (lack of formal basis of interaction), structured (codified procedures and some organs) and interventionist (wide spectrum of formal bodies for interaction at multiple levels) institutionalisation.

Institutionalisation as a mechanism, that make sense of the images and concepts the Commission holds, systematises not only economic and security relations, but embodies collective ideas and preferences about the state of affairs in the regional signifier. The establishment of rules and institutions allows the EU to formalise and deepen the interaction between its institutions and the local actors, be those

governments, elites or civil society. Krastev puts forward the argument that the exported EU models have “*a strong dash of technocratic thinking*” (2002: 44). In other words, we would expect the increased institutionalised nature of the regional approach to produce and consolidate visions about the Western Balkans.

In summary, the entire above analysis of section 2.4 consists of the analytical framework that we will apply in the thesis. Each empirical chapter will be structured on the basis of the theoretical approach that we detailed before; starting with the social representation that prevailed in particular historical periods, and then moving to determine the content of the signifier under construction by focusing on the two core processes of anchoring and objectifying.

2.5 Social Representations and the European Union

“I am often asked where Europe’s ultimate borders lie. My answer is that the map of Europe is defined in the mind, not just on the ground. Geography sets the frame, but fundamentally it is values that make the borders of Europe. Enlargement is a matter of extending the zone of European values, the most fundamental of which are liberty and solidarity, tolerance and human rights, democracy and the rule of law.”

(Olli Rehn, former Enlargement Commissioner, January 2005)

The quote by the former Enlargement Commissioner is indicative of an overarching conceptualising of politics conducted by the European Commission when it comes to defend Europe and the European idea: enlargement is not a one-off event, but stands for a long-term process of extending the European Union’s normative space. The analytical framework directs the thesis to study the way ‘the EU does politics’ and how the external agency of the Commission comports with ideational aspects. In addition, this close focus on aspects of EU policy-making helps to treat the Western Balkans as a signifier standing not for an economic or security need but as a representation of a model of regional politics that advances standardised European practices. The examination of these aims and claims requires a perspective of the EU that fits with the constructivist basis of the framework. Below we shall take a short overview of the EU and subsequently to position this thesis in the relevant literature.

To begin with, the relative short history of the European Union has inspired a vast number of theories and approaches that aim to understand this ‘multiperspectival polity’ (Ruggie 1993: 172) which has unique, non-traditional characteristics that are evident in both intra-European politics and in its external actions (Bretherton and Vogler 2006: 13; Smith 2003: 2; Youngs 2004: 416). It is not uncommon to say that the discussions on the EU are contrary to the unitary appearance of the state model (Diez 1997: 296). Plenty of studies have tried to manufacture the holistic nature of the EU by adding a number of adjectives that accompany the word Europe and European Union to attribute a specific property to its role, i.e. ‘civilian’ (Duchêne 1972; Nicolaidis and Howse 2002: 269), ‘ethical’ (Aggestam 2008), ‘normative’ (Manners 2002) and ‘structuring’ (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan 2008) power to name a few. Previous works have highlighted the kind of norms that are emerging from the structures of international organisations in shaping interests and policies, such as the United Nations (Barnett 1995; Finnemore 1996) and the International Labor Organisation (Strang and Chang 1993). On this note, the EU has achieved to sustain a recurring emphasis on particular issues, as highlighted in detail in Richard Whitman’s (1997; 1998) and Karen Smith’s (2003) work. Despite frequent reforms in its organisational structure in the Community Pillar and problems arising in its internal coherence and effectiveness, the EU pursues specific foreign policy objectives that are present in its international agenda: the promotion of regional cooperation, human rights, and democracy/good governance; conflict prevention and the fight against international crime (Smith 2003: 2)¹⁶. The common denominator in these attempts is to point down the highly normative dimension of EU’s external action. Basically, many of its external activities are attempts to shape conceptions of normalcy in international politics (Manners 2002: 236; Manners and Whitman 2003: 389-390). The conveyance of common normative values internationally has been routinely conceived as integrally tied to the EU’s own incipient identity (Youngs 2004: 419).

The above studies of the Union reveal a strong focus on structural characteristics in setting its agenda for external action, in institutionalising the procedures for developing relations with other actors or in articulating “*ideas about the proper*

¹⁶ Recently, the importance laid on the environment seems to become another core characteristic of the identity and nature of the EU, but is less political and security-related, as Karen Smith notes, and less concrete (Smith 2003: 13).

conduct of some aspect of global affairs” (Rosamond 2005: 466). With regard to its agency as the driving force of change, we assert that EU activity – in all domains – is highly discursive. It is aspirational, declaratory and full of positioning statements. “Across EU documents a discourse can be identified according to which the Union is constructed as a unit which defends its own interests and has an obligation to take on responsibilities in the light of international challenges” (Larsen, 2004: 67 cited in Rosamond 2005: 471). The effort here in the thesis may not provide a general proposition of the ‘nature of the beast’ but it will aim to look explicitly at a policy instance and to understand how the European Commission thinks and acts in the external environment. Specifically in the enlargement process, O’Brennan notices that the role of the Commission has been neglected by scholars (2006: 74). The Commission and its Directorate Generals (DGs) enact social representations that help them understand their world and to have a co-constitutive impact on candidate states (‘going native’ in Brussels-speak). Liesbet Hooghe notes that “*the European Commission is the steering body of the world’s most encompassing supranational regime. It has a vocation to identify and defend the European interest over and above, and if need be, against, particular national interests*” (2005: 862). This task is taken on and advocated by a collectivity of policy-makers who are most receptive to defend and export the EU model and its normative armoury; they are best placed to internalise a way of thinking “*through innumerable encounters with particular political norms or practices*” (Hooghe 2001: 15).

The evidences that are used in the research will assist to cite rhetorical shifts in the discourse and the institutional practices to make the case for the necessity of the Western Balkans which “*reflected conceptual shifts that coincide with the behaviours described*” (Finnemore 1996: 65). The discursive constructions of a sponsored reality rely on a rationally bounded interactive process. To understand why certain regional representations are more sustainable than others, we need to analyse the processes taking place (Lorenz 2009: 2). The European Union’s regional approach stumbles upon competing logics and the way it is formulated depends on how institutional elaborations are actually materialised or inscribed in techniques, rules and documents. This provides insights into constitutive aspects of interaction which address the issue: (a) how it is argued; (b) why these actors argue as they do; and, (c) what beliefs and values do they have while arguing and justifying their actions (Manea 2009: 29).

Summing up, the impact of the Union's norms and institutions on the emergence of an increased sense of (regional) community based on shared interests and identity is imperative to capture EU's agency (Hyde-Price 2001: 31). The instantiation of the regional conceptualisation for the Western Balkans is deliberated and argued in the Commission's documents and discourses for the thesis.

2.5.1 Evolving Representations and Critical Junctures

Relations between actors in the world can depend on the way in which people think about themselves and the communities they belong to (Nicolaidis and Nicolaidis 2006: 337-338). The value of engaging into regional schemes and solutions has been accompanying EU policy-making for a long time and has been a policy-area "*where the EU stands out distinctively*" (Smith 2003: 195). The application of the constructivist logic onto the European Commission will chiefly assist us to expose how a social field operates, that is, "*according to which rules, practices and world-views, and how this field generates preferences*" (Mérand 2006: 147) for international players. The EU is engaged in processes of re-shaping mental maps along with the images and meanings they convey – an exercise that Kalypso Nicolaidis calls 'modernised identity-building' (Nicolaidis and Nicolaidis 2006: 346). In our perspective, the social representations reveal those elements in the regional policy-making.

The social representations are stable features in the performance of international politics, but are not static. The complexity of the world and the changing international environment beg for a continuous re-visiting of the types of social representations held by actors. Since we have asserted that social representation works at the meso-level between structural forces and agency, they are sensitive towards changes in the international system. Therefore, crucial role in the analytical framework is attributed to the concept of 'critical junctures' which has been studied widely in similar approaches such as in the literature of Institutionalism (and esp. in historical and sociological one). Critical junctures or historical moments refer to small periods of time when external events change the socio-political environment and alternative

paths for policy-making open up¹⁷; in our case here, important processes of the social representation can undergo a re-visit to match the new realities and to shape dominant contours of social life (Pierson 2004: 18-19). What we witness is that established patterns and policy-choices come under scrutiny and new relationships emerge.

The application of the theoretical framework that has been presented in this chapter gives a good opportunity to take a deep look in a long period of the European Union's relations with Yugoslavia and the Western Balkans. On Yugoslavia, we have seen a dual representation being the dominant one: Yugoslavia was a 'sui generis' signifier and had as special position for the Union and its own development. However, this overarching sui generis elaboration had a dual nature: first it was an affirmative sui generis representation until the critical, cataclysmic events of 1989-1991 and then it was reversed into a negative sui generis representation. What is most interesting is that particular properties in the anchoring and the objectifying process managed to survive during the radical transition to the Western Balkans as the regional point of reference. Below we will present in a more detailed fashion two representations in order to highlight the basic tenets of the Western Balkans.

Amorphous regional signifier

Based on the theoretical model, in the aftermath of the Dayton Accords, the first social representation that the Commission held for the Western Balkans was of an amorphous regional signifier – which meant an undefined elaboration of the Western Balkans with absent 'agents and forces'. To start with the anchoring of the Western Balkans to the 'being' of the European Union, the entire regional approach was not associated with a path to a European future. The Western Balkans was positioned as a '*centrifugal in-between*' which has very limited attributes to be considered as an integral part of European 'Us'. This fuzzy representation of the Western Balkans highly politicised the debates about the content of the regional approach. The association that the Commission was constructing in this initial period was pointing to an alternative to membership direction – in some way similar to approaches developed in the European Neighbourhood Policy for the Eastern European countries. The images and concepts associated with the Western Balkans (open ethnic conflicts,

¹⁷ A good discussion on the role of critical junctures can be found in Sam-Sang Jo 2012 and Roland Dannreuther 2010.

unsettled state borders, unresolved statuses-protectorates, under-developed state bureaucracies) were of such a nature that lay outside the expertise field of the Commission. Furthermore, the expertise of the Commission was limited due to the fact that it was not experienced as an international actor and its external agency had primarily dealt with particular aspects in the field of foreign policy, such as trade and aid. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Commission had problems to bind its own policy approach with other policies pursued by international actors.

Moreover, there was a clear absence of any established mechanisms that would allow the Union to tie its 'doing' with the regional signifier. There was a clear lack of legitimation to the project, since the Western Balkans was a novel conceptualisation that did not correspond to either previous historical realities or contemporary political delineations. This European design had a recognition problem by the international community with identifiable characteristics. Along with this, the Commission did not manage to articulate a coherent discourse about the appropriateness of such a signifier. The whole regional approach was considered a '*sludgy amalgam*' of norms and ideas that were rudimentary institutionalised and did not offer to local stakeholders a platform for deliberation and communication.

Ordained regional signifier

The second dominant representation of the Western Balkans came about after the critical juncture year of 1999. The social representation that prevailed in the mindset of the entrepreneurs involved was of a need to ordain a new regional approach. The region had to be taught to change its cooperation paradigm if the EU is to assist cross-border exchanges for people, provide funds and policy expertise and promote cooperative projects. The first signs of an ascendant, top-down thinking of regional dimension appeared to be manufactured within two projects of the time: the Stability Pact and the Stabilisation and Association Process. The emerging representation of the Western Balkans was to anchor the regional signifier as a '*centripetal in-between*' of the European family that is in the process to be integrated into 'Us'. The social representation of the Commission reflected a pedagogic relationship and a move to de-politicise the regional approach into a more technocratic fashion. In this phase of the construction of the ordained signifier, the Commission had started working towards applying more EU-specific norms (as enshrined in the *aquis* and the

Treaties) that would make the region mimic the EU itself. The Western Balkans refers to a specific representation of reality and the task has been to re-construct the regional signifier as the excluded and backward area of Europe – indicative in Western media and policy-maker discourses – in order to comply at the behest of the European identity, norms and practices. Moreover, the Commission engaged itself in a policy of formalising the Western Balkans through institution-building in order to provide substance to the policies.

Furthermore, the projection of the ordained representation for the Western Balkans had to take place through particular objectifying processes. The political recognition and legitimacy of the existence of a Western Balkan community became the ‘cog and wheel’ that would form a basis to communicate with the region on a more stable footing. However, there was little input in the formulation of the regional approaches with regard to the role of local actors. The strong top-down nature of the EU’s approach did not manage to accommodate preferences from local actors. The decision-centre for the Western Balkans remained firmly in Brussels, the *real* capital city of the Balkans (O’Brien 2006). Also, real or symbolic regional spaces do not just serve as consumers of policies and norms, but also as the context in which they are re-interpreted and exported. This is an important focus of the analytical framework of the thesis.

2.6 Limitations

This thesis will focus on the central role that European Union has taken in sketching out the policies towards the Western Balkans, by setting the agenda, framing issues and implementing decisions. The European Commission was delegated substantial powers in undertaking the association and stabilisation task of the region and *“exercised a policy-making role far beyond that usually associated with the bureaucratic apparatus of an international organisation and ended up playing a leading role in the policy process”* (Aggestam 2008: 361). What this work is not studying systematically is the role of members-states which can provide some important conclusions about the special role of neighbouring EU states in the region. A number of EU policies, such as the decision and consensus on the enlargement and other associated preferences, were met with diverting views from certain EU capitals. Moreover, their influences on EU institutions, as well as their bilateral ties with actors

in the Balkans, are issues for a whole different analysis that could not be undertaken by this thesis.

Furthermore, this study leaves - to a certain degree aside - questions that stem specifically from the region. The choice to investigate the region-building aspect of the Western Balkans is not going to permit the thesis to look extensively into bilateral affairs of the European Union with states in the region. It is true that the enlargement and the regional approach(es) have been to a significant degree state-centric. The emphasis of the thesis is not to pay attention to EU-to-state relations and to aim at keeping the regional level analytically distinct. Additionally, the state-society relationship in the Balkans is not the object of interest. This preference should not lead to a conclusion that domestic politics are not important in a work trying to understand regional politics. We have mentioned previously that constructivist analysis accepts the premise of a blurry line between international and domestic spheres. Political regimes (ethno-nationalist governments) and leadership qualities (Serbia under Slobodan Milosevic and Croatia under Franjo Tudjman) have influenced the course of the Balkan politics and the type of international intervention in the regional politics. Nevertheless, these issues are not central in the study of our hypothesis and research puzzle.

2.7 Conclusion

The puzzle of the construction of a region and the purpose it serves has directed this study to the exploration of the role of social representations to better understand subsequent regional and other EU policies. Rationalist and materialist approaches do not adequately address issues beyond economic considerations and geopolitical and security concerns. While the received wisdom has it that the Western Balkans lacks a common identity or mature institutional structures, this has been no impediment for the European Union to treat it as a lasting social representation with which it aims to interact. In simple terms, referring to the region and the states comprising it, we are not just highlighting its cartographic location, but we point to the shared past, cultural connections, shared socio-political institutions and patterns of development and so forth (Bechev 2005: 136). The representation of the Western Balkans signifier has acquired an evolving institutional elaboration through time and has impacted the discussion and conceptualisation of the regional map.

CHAPTER THREE: THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S QUEST FOR SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS DURING THE COLD WAR AND THE YUGOSLAV WAR OF 1991-1995

3.1 Introduction

This is the first empirical chapter that the analytical framework will be applied on. The thesis takes a long historical period that covers the 1970s with the creation of the first formal foreign policy institution to the mid-1990s and the Dayton Accords which ended the outbreak of wars in former Yugoslavia. There has been an increasing engagement of the European Union and Community before to assert a more active role in the foreign policy field and to expand an area of common practices in the European Continent. This general proposition needs closer investigation in order to uncover the drivers that motivated the relevant actors in the EC/EU to critically formulate and hold institutional elaborations towards the studied political signifiers. The assertion is that EC/EU institutions have had a central and decisive role in the development of interests and preferences in Southeastern Europe even before the 1990s. In foreign policy terms, legally, the Commission was mandated only to deliver opinions – but, effectively it acted as the most important ‘conduit’ between the EC/EU and other actors influencing the shape and content of processes (O’Brennan 2006: 8). In this chapter three, we look into the period that preceded the emergence of the Western Balkans. Previous social and institutional contexts matter in order to understand subsequent developments of the Commission’s world-view for the region. The search for social representation as an important phenomenon for the understanding of policy frameworks and preference formations goes beyond conventional concepts and measurements of success or failure of policies, as referred in the previous chapters.

We focus here on the case of Yugoslavia as part of the Commission’s efforts to establish an entrepreneurship role in Europe. While the Balkans has diachronically been an important policy-testing ground for European actors, the significance of Yugoslavia in the Cold War period for the West and the Yugoslav war that violently dissolved a state ‘in the core of Europe’ (Lucarelli 2000: 1) provided ground for the Commission to assert its entrepreneurial and policy-making potential.

The study of the European Commission's social representation of Yugoslavia is understood as part of the larger construction of a European political space in which the EC/EU assumed centre stage. We argue in this chapter that before the catalytic Dayton Agreement of November 1995, the Commission held a social representation of Yugoslavia as a '*sui generis*' signifier. Yugoslavia had acquired a unique importance with special characteristics for EC policy-making in those years: it was simultaneously an insider, an intra-European issue as much as an outsider, a foreign policy object. In order to illustrate our claim about Yugoslavia as a *sui generis* signifier for Brussels, we will argue that the anchoring of Yugoslavia to the EU's 'being', to its structural processes showed a continuance throughout the whole period covered by this chapter; while at the same time the objectification process, the procedural processes of Yugoslavia's representation varied in content.

We discern two chronological periods which showcase this content as well as a critical juncture. On a general note, this chapter will look into the period from 1970 until the Dayton Accords, which managed to put a lid on the eruption of a highly conflictual and tension-fraught area. It will investigate the policy documents and statements of the European Community and especially of the European Commission focusing on Yugoslavia starting from the 1970s when regular contacts were established. The primary focus is on Yugoslavia, but references will be made to Albania too, as both later formed the Western Balkans (minus Slovenia as stated in Chapter One).

In particular terms, the current chapter is divided into three basic parts: the first focuses on the relationship between Yugoslavia and the EC up to 1989; the second on the transition period in European politics between 1989 until 1991; and the third will examine the years of the conflict in the Balkans until the Dayton Accords in 1995. The utility and analysis in this part of the thesis is shedding light on questions of social representations and processes of associating Yugoslavia as an important signifier for EC/EU politics and policy-making that is not properly covered by the existing literature. We will highlight that a number of approaches tend either to subsume the developments as a direct outcome of the superpower power rivalry of the Cold War, in which European agents are attributed with little significance or to exemplify domestic politics and national priorities of countries as the key factor in

any relationship at the time. The next section will present in detail the work that has been done on the topic and discuss the existing gaps.

3.2 The literature on the European Community and Yugoslavia

Scholarly research on the creation of the Western Balkans has focused on the post-Dayton, post-Cold War context. Although this is the focus of this thesis as well, we also stress the period that preceded the eruption of the wars in the Balkans in the 1990s which has so far remained under-explored and predominantly descriptive. From a historical perspective, it is important to analyse how the EC/EU and, more importantly, the European Commission, strategically engaged with the region. Below, we will initially review the existing literature which has adopted particular standpoints in order to describe the interaction of Brussels with Yugoslavia. Two main scholarly bodies can be identified; one that focuses on systemic explanations and one that looks at domestic reasons.

The first 'school of thought' argues that the approach to Yugoslavia in the 1970s and 1980s is directly related to the structure of the international system and has strong links to the rationalist/materialist orientation to International Relations. This literature, which relates to the realist tradition, asserts that we need to focus on the relationships between the two major powers, the USA and the USSR, and the impact of their rivalry on the international structure. This state-centred approach treats Europe as a major theatre of the expression of the (military) antagonisms of the two powers in the Cold War. The division of Europe into defence and economic alliances (NATO and EEC for the West and Warsaw Pact and COMECON for the East) was dictated by the imperatives of the bipolar system.

More specifically, the emergence of the European Community is associated with the efforts of the United States to strengthen the Western world through integration policies. Stephen Walt asserts that states' pursuit of cooperative schemes against threats posed and the 'regionalism-as-balancing' of the Western Europe is a good manifestation of such logic (1987: 5). The US favoured a strong, credible European bloc and this was expressed through the adoption of the Marshall Plan and the collective defence provisions of NATO. Essentially, this meant that the European project was considered as a component of the strategic priority of the Cold War game

for the US. Using such systemic factors and conditions in the analysis, the superpower competition represented the struggle for military dominance and the expansion of zones of influence.

This latter point fits with the writings of scholars who placed the particular interaction of the EC with Yugoslavia in this context. The US and its allies were trying to engage with communist countries in an effort to weaken the influence of and exercise pressure on the Soviet Union. The 'Alliance-Building Strategies' by powerful states are to be accounted for as the prime reasons for cooperative initiatives toward the Balkans, as supported by Radovan Vukadinović (1994a: 185-201). The geographic position of Yugoslavia made the establishment of ties a key strategic feature of containment for the West. Likewise, the initial 'concordisation' on functional issues in the 1970s and early 1980s are political outcomes dependent on the political rapprochement from superpower interference (Braun 1983). Moreover, the non-aligned inclinations of Yugoslavia's foreign policy made it suitable for a rigorous approach and a candidate for the West to communicate with such a state that typically belonged to the Eastern bloc (Woodward 1995: 25).

However, these approaches pose a number of questions. To start with, they centre on the role of states as the only units that matter in international politics. Other types of agents are not capable of acting independently or, at least, autonomously from the interests of the two superpowers. This assertion can be challenged on the basis of the increasing relevance of the EC in assuming responsibilities and powers. Legally, the laws of the EU/EC supersede national laws and this alone turns our attention to the role of its institutions, such as the European Commission which is the executive arm of the Community/Union. The discussion of an emergent post-Westphalia world fits with the central investigation of the thesis on the type of agency that a supranational body exercises in Europe. In this sense, what begs for analysis is how the Commission in particular formulated a relationship with Yugoslavia and what it meant for European politics.

Further in this thinking, it is assumed that actors act on the basis of a utility maximisation, expressed primarily in material gains, and that interests are given. What we would expect is that the relations with Yugoslavia would start from early on

in the 1950s, especially when the disagreement between Tito and Stalin became prominent. However, close relations with the West started in the 1970s, which begs the question of timing. In addition, this literature emphasises the constraints imposed by the structure of the international system on the European affairs. This thesis, however, aims to make a case for a regional level that has autonomous dynamics at work which do not fully coincide with broader systemic conditions. Essentially, the issue revolves around the question whether the policy towards Yugoslavia was part of the superpower competition or if we can detect other drivers that shaped the policies of European actors.

The second body of literature delves into domestic factors that condition policy preferences. This approach which corresponds with liberal thinking looks into the role of economic interests, national political structures and cultural specificities to explain the push for cooperation in the Cold War period. The analysis here focuses on economies of scale and on the need for modernisation that was propagated by the elites in Yugoslavia. Moreover, it examines the role of the different ethnic groups which composed the federal state. Finally, it considers the historical legacies of cooperation and cultural traits to understand the orientations of the foreign policy.

In more detail, Susan L. Woodward argues that the viability of Yugoslavia depended “*on access to foreign credits and capital markets*” (1995: 16). The economic interdependence (despite the rhetorical proclamations of an independent foreign policy with an economic autarky) made (Western) Europe vital for Yugoslavia’s survival. From the 1970s, there was an increased participation in Western markets for capital, advanced technology and spare parts in order to keep the national economy competitive. The growth of urbanisation and industrialisation contributed to a more rapid economic development as well.

Associated with these trends was the domestic political order of the federal state. Two of the five republics of Yugoslavia (Croatia and Slovenia) had more integrated European networks based on tourism, geographical proximity and their Habsburg legacy. Highlighting the internal dynamics of the Yugoslav Republic, this literature aims to explain the ambivalent stance of the state towards the two superpowers, but especially the more sceptic attitude towards the Soviet Union despite the ideological

similarity of regimes. This argument is further supported by the changes in the Constitution in 1971 which decentralised powers away from Belgrade, granting a greater degree of autonomy to the constituent republics.

Moreover, there is a literature emphasising the historical (cultural) links which broadly relate the Balkans to Europe. The argument here is that the region has an inseparable link with European history that is reproduced in different historical periods (Glenny 2000; Mazower 2001). It is explored either as an antithesis to Europe – drawing on images such as the ‘*homo balcanicus*’ (Cvijić in Todorova 1997: 181) and ‘*Europe’s Other*’ (Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992) - or as an approximate to Europe, a side of Europe’s own Self (Glenny 2000; Mazower 2001; Todorova 1997). In elaborating the latter argument, Maria Todorova’s work shows how long-standing perceptions and discourses of local and external actors have generated a common social basis for inter-related identity constructions. These dynamics regard European and Balkan relations as relatively detached from structural, systemic processes.

This second outlook onto the nature of the linkages between Europe/EC and Yugoslavia has also left some issues unaddressed. To begin with, the literature on the domestic factors assumes that economic interests, the political status within the country and the historical linkages are adequate factors to explain why the two reached substantial agreements. However, they do not explain why the EC became the appropriate international actor through which to construct stable relations since late 1960s. Also, the composition of the Federal State itself would reflect the ‘balanced’ foreign policy between East and West, but this does not help us understand why there was variation in the commitment to Europe. Finally, the historical-cultural explanations do offer some useful insights, but they end up reifying identities and fail to capture the “*shifting identities and cultural elements*” (Bechev 2005: 139), as well as the ability of agents to co-construct political processes.

In conclusion, we have seen that existing literature has advocated specific viewpoints when explaining events in the region. Unaddressed issues remain which this thesis aspires to investigate from a constructivist angle. The established accounts given about the role of European actors were primarily descriptive. The prime approach to the European Commission was to show if it had an influence in comparison with other

actors – in a zero-sum logic and in relative terms with other actors. Applying a constructivist framework to the investigation of that period will help us understand the particular formulation of preferences of the Commission for Yugoslavia in the context of the Cold War years. If we accredit the Commission a significant international role in European developments, we need to explore the particular institutional depictions of the Yugoslavia in the vast amount of documents available of the Commission (and the EC) and how these were constructed and developed.

3.3 The European Commission and Yugoslavia in the 1970s and the 1980s

In the period between 1970-1989 the West was supremely interested in taking advantage of the hostile relationship between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union which had been evident since 1948. During the second, softer phase of the Cold War rivalry, starting in the mid-1960s, it was becoming apparent that the increasing diversity within Eastern Europe encouraged a process of East-West reconciliation in favour of the West's status quo (Larrabee 1994: 204). This ushered in a phase in which a broad set of actors had the opportunity to engage more substantially with variable aspects of international politics. The assumption we make here is that the more the Yugoslavian question was becoming de-politicised/de-securitised as part of the East-West context, the greater the engagement of other actors, such as the European Commission, became. As noted before, when tracing the relevant literature on the role of the European Community towards Yugoslavia, very few references were made to systematically study the Commission, as the principal actor undertaking a crucial role. In this section, we place the Commission in the context of the Cold War period and investigate which particular representations it adopted to define itself and the external environment it engaged with. The aim is to understand the nature of its external policies and how this resonated with a strategy to create systems of governance in Europe (Flynn and Farrell 1999: 505)

With the advent of other 'hotspots', such as the Polish '*Erneuerung*', events in Afghanistan and the reformist efforts in the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia was increasingly loosing international attention. At the same time, we observe that Yugoslavia was conceived more and more as a 'European problem', which corresponded to an evolving interest by the European Commission to expand its institutional relations with Belgrade. During the Cold War, the Commission bargained

and negotiated with third partners, signed bilateral and multilateral agreements and, overall, it engaged in efforts to define and set standards domestically and internationally. Thematically, its external engagements panned out primarily in the fields of trade and aid; while geographically, the Commission was active in pursuing economic and social policies in two regions: the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) region and the Mediterranean basin. The ‘rest of Europe’ was a ‘non-business’ area for the Commission prior to the era of *glasnost* and *perestroika* – despite some scattered efforts to establish informal dialogues with certain countries in Eastern Europe. The exception to this general rule was Yugoslavia.

Yugoslavia had a special place in European politics. It was among the leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in the world since the 1960s. Tito was favouring an independent foreign policy that would allow Yugoslavia not to be placed on either side of the Cold War divide. Axel Sotirios Wallden argues that the position of Yugoslavia and Tito towards regional integration projects is dictated by the stance of the Yugoslav communists on their own national question of the foundation of their federal state. He observes that the Yugoslavian leadership interpreted national and international integrative processes as a progressive trend and finality of societies (1994: 57-58). In this respect, the first official diplomatic exchanges were solidified with the opening of Yugoslavia’s diplomatic office in Brussels in 1968. Moreover, the Council of Ministers instructed the European Commission to start negotiations with Yugoslavia for an economic agreement – which became one of the first endeavours of the Commission to establish genuine one-to-one proper relations with a non-democratic country in Europe. In this respect, focal points in this period have been the two major agreements of 1973 and 1980, as well as the Joint Declaration in Belgrade of 1976. This chapter analyses all available documents that surround and make reference to these three critical points.

3.3.1 Yugoslavia as an affirmative ‘sui generis’ signifier

The European Commission’s official role in the external relations of the EC was known to be limited in the Cold War period. This fact, however, does not render indifferent the search for the way the Commission formed its understanding of Yugoslavia. In fact, as we proposed, such an investigation is crucial to comprehend the Commission’s further development of a social representation of Yugoslavia.

Studying report, statements and speeches made by or about the Commission during the long period between 1970-1989, we infer that Yugoslavia assumed a unique signification for the European Community. The Commission actively constructed the country to represent a '*sui generis*'¹⁸ signifier – an elaboration of particular uniqueness. Yugoslavia served as a social representation which affirmed the increasingly important role of the European Community in the Continent's affairs. In addition to this, the cooperation agreements that the Community, and more particularly the Commission, devised for Yugoslavia were acknowledged by the DG External Relations to be "*in a category of its own*" (Commission 1979b: 6). This implies that cooperation agreements with this particular country appeared to the DG External Relations as being removed from 'default' scales of measurement and envisaged to require a kind of role-model status. Such endeavours to re-calibrate the European space into geographic and social groups¹⁹ were a persistent feature of the Commission's approaches to neighbouring regions. These 'mental' constructions, with which the External Relations Directorate was frequently operating, were: the Euro-Mediterranean countries, the European non-member states, Mediterranean basin countries, non-member Mediterranean countries and Northern Mediterranean (to name examples with which our case study was related in different times and forms). It is worth mentioning that these divisions mostly had little relevance to the dominant dividing fault lines of the Cold War.

Two processes were at work which support the '*sui generis*' elaboration about Yugoslavia: first, we find that Yugoslavia's autonomous status in the Cold War rivalry was affirming a trend for an autonomous presence of Europe in regional and international politics too. The social representation of Yugoslavia as a signifier relevant both to Europe and the Mediterranean resonated with a special relational status that the European Commission was interested in. This leads to the second point that refers to the Commission's increasingly expanding relations with Yugoslavia, which covered an unprecedented range of socio-economic policies. A large number of the DGs became directly involved in the policy-making process with Yugoslavia creating an advanced institutional relationship that was un-similar to any other

¹⁸ *Sui generis* means constituting a class of its own (Oxford Dictionary 2006).

¹⁹ Such common groups, with which the External Relations cabinet was dealing with, were: the Euro-Mediterranean countries, the European non-member states, Mediterranean basin countries, non-member Mediterranean countries

example in the neighbouring regions of Europe. These practices ‘stuck’ in the aftermath of the 1989 political events as a road-map for the Commission to adjust to and handle. Therefore, in this section, we will substantiate these claims by, first, investigating how the Commission anchored the signifier of Yugoslavia to the EC and, second, how the Commission talked about and defined – objectified, in the thesis words - Yugoslavia in the pre-1989 age.

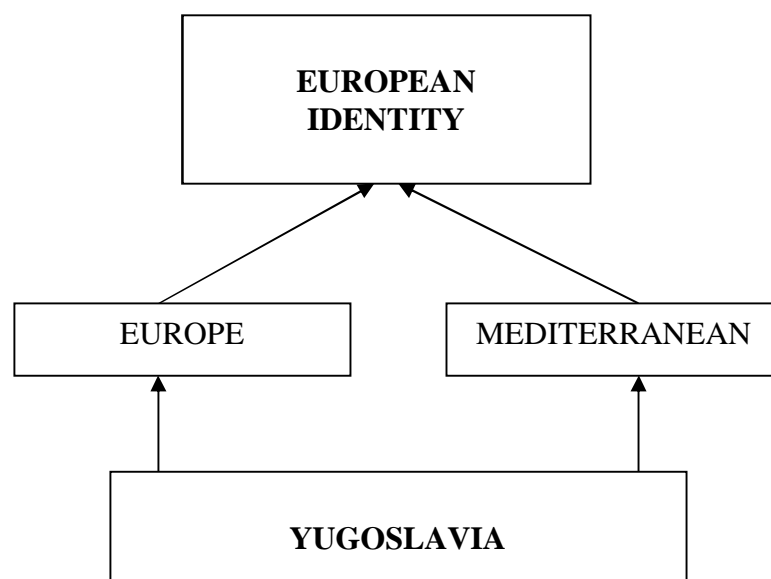
3.3.1.1 Anchoring Yugoslavia

In this part, we look at the anchoring process which refers to the correlation of Yugoslavia with the European Community’s structural processes in the 1970s and 1980s. This analytical approach to international affairs fits perfectly with Jacques Delors’ account of the European Commission programme to the European Parliament in 1985. The Commission’s President outlined the core elements that are taken into consideration when communicating with counterparts. He stated that the three elements forming the images and concepts of the European Community in international politics are an established identity, a legal basis and the contractual relationships with other partners (Commission 1985: 46). In particular, the first structural feature relates to the discussion of the (potential) membership in a European community. The reference to Yugoslavia had a particular significance as it was considered a case that matched the objective of the political integration of the Continent. Secondly, the EC had functioned on a vast legal and normative basis. The interaction with third partners needed to resonate with the net of rules and norms that the Commission was a champion of. Thirdly, the European Community had a great number of economic and social policies in place that covered large geographic and thematic territories. Such a collection of policies and experiences translated into subsequent actions and ideas towards third parties. In short, the studied ‘sui generis’ representation of Yugoslavia needed to be anchored to the structural processes of the EC’s ‘being’. Below, we investigate these anchoring processes in closer detail.

Identity

The Cold War years were characterised by an intense ‘soul-searching’ by the European Community. This becomes important, because the ability to construct representations in foreign policy is dependent upon a process of asserting the question of who you are and who others are (Hopf 1998: 175). The idea of the ‘construction of

a United Europe’ was the core driver that became directly connected with the fleshing out of a European identity (Council 1973). An important advisor to the Commission on development affairs in that period, Marc Pierini, expressed this dominant engrossment in a document on development entitled “Towards a ‘European Foreign Policy’?”, where it stated that “*in order to understand the nature of what we have called the European foreign policy*”, what is needed is to affirm “*Europe’s identity in an interdependent world*” (Pierini 1983: 16). The Commission’s search to delineate boundaries and affiliation potentials for Yugoslavia relating to political/mental maps was considered vital for the European Community. The argument is that the anchoring of the signifier of Yugoslavia to the European identity was correlated directly and organically with two fundamental components of European integration process: Europe and the Mediterranean (see diagram 3.1). The Commission fixated them to Yugoslavia’s signifier as a ‘European Mediterranean country’ (Commission 1979: 27).



3.1 Diagram: *Anchoring Yugoslavia to the European Identity*

The anchoring of Yugoslavia to the signifier of Europe was an important part of the European Commission’s approach because it symbolised a different model applicable and extendable to the Eastern Europeans. The 1976 Joint Declaration clearly states that since the 1973 Agreement, the meetings held between the two parties were including discussions on the relations with Eastern Europe (1976b: 6). Furthermore, the Commission Vice-President in 1978 stresses that without a stable, independent

Yugoslavia, the hoped-for cooperation and security in Europe would just be an illusion (Commission 1978b: 2). The European Commission includes Yugoslavia in its accounts to the European Parliament under the section discussing European developments (other parts there being Turkey, EFTA states and Eastern Europe) (Commission 1979: 47). Similarly, in the document outlining the agreements of the EC, the Commission categorises Yugoslavia under the section of ‘Trade Agreements with European countries’ in which the other countries named in the list were Western states (Commission 1976a: 3). The Treaty of Rome itself called “*upon the other peoples of Europe who share their ideal to join in their efforts,*” and accorded any European state the right to apply for membership which shared the goals of the EC (Art. 237 EEC Treaty; see also Preamble to Single European Act 1987). The ‘*construction of a United Europe*’ on the principles of representative democracy, rule of law, social justice and human rights are the foundations of Europe’s identity and mark the community boundaries. Yugoslavia was the only country from Eastern Europe which could partly resonate with it: firstly, it had a semi-open economy which allowed private enterprises to function and to cooperate with firms in the West. Secondly, in an unprecedented manner, Belgrade implemented a ‘relaxed’ policy on migration and visa restrictions allowing Yugoslav citizens to officially leave the country and work in Western European countries.

The Mediterranean signifier allowed the Commission to disentangle itself from the Cold War game by sketching out an autonomous, approach for Yugoslavia. A clear indication comes with a 1971 European Commission document on development policy which referred to the Mediterranean Basin as “*a natural extension of European integration*” (Commission 1971: 12). The construction of the Mediterranean as an integral part of Europe’s identity edifice is based on the countries’ “*identities and interests and from a multiplicity of links due to proximity and tradition*” (ibid). In a document of the Commission accounting for the exploratory talks before the Joint Declaration was signed in 1976, the text specifically mentioned that Yugoslavia was a key partner, “*particularly because of its geographical position in the Mediterranean area, where Community has special interests*” (Commission 1976b: 4). In the 1978 publication of DG RELEX, the President of the Commission, François-Xavier Ortoli, assigns the agreements with Yugoslavia as a proto-sign for the Community’s nascent Mediterranean policy – and reiterates that the planned agreement would “*break new*

ground and by taking in a number of sectors of cooperation would go considerably further than the other Mediterranean agreements”, making Yugoslavia stand as a beacon of future agreements (Commission 1979: 6). Additionally, in an internal document of the DG RELEX after the signing of the 1980 agreement, authored by Charles Caporale (Head of Unit in charge of the relations with Southern Europe), a deep satisfaction is expressed for such an agreement that is “*part of the overall Mediterranean approach*” (Commission 1980: 1). Later on, in the 1980s, Yugoslavia continues to be a ‘special case’ due to its “*role in the Mediterranean equilibrium*” which makes it a “*key player for the conduct of a new Mediterranean policy*” (Commission 1982: 8). Yugoslavia was a core country of the ‘non-member Mediterranean countries and EFTA countries’ that the Commission was “*forced to concentrate on strengthening and adapting certain links, notable with its immediate neighbours*” (Commission 1986: 38). Fundamentally, the Commission’s line of argument in either case entailed a ‘common destiny’ rationale; this social presentation of an affirmative signifier was anchored to the identity process of the EC’s ‘being’ that resonated with membership in the wider Euro-Med community.

Norms

The process of anchoring the signifier to the EC’s ‘being’ is associated with the European normative armoury and it highlights the embeddedness of Yugoslavia as a special part in Europe. It was based on two pillars: (i) the *acquis communautaire*²⁰ which determined the European Commission’s ‘foreign policy credentials’ and (ii) the Helsinki Final Act which underwrote the approach towards the communist countries of Europe. The association of Yugoslavia with particular aspects of the *acquis* anchored Yugoslavia as part a European system of norms, while the links with Helsinki Accords pointed to the international dimension of Yugoslavia place in the European system.

²⁰ The phrase ‘*acquis communautaire*’, sometimes translated as ‘the Community patrimony’, denotes the whole range of principles, policies, laws, practices, obligations and objectives that have been agreed or that have developed within the European Union/European Community. The *acquis communautaire* includes most notably the Treaties in their entirety, all the legislation enacted to date and the judgements of the Court of Justice. (See European Commission (2008) *The common agricultural policy – a glossary of terms*. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/glossary/glossary_en.pdf Accessed at 30 May 2011)

The Union's *acquis communautaire* provided a normative basis for relations with those Eastern countries that could be considered close partners, in so far as the EC/EU has defined itself as a 'widening' organization (Fierke and Wiener 1999: 722). In 1985, in a report to the European Council on foreign policy matters, the Commission acknowledged that, in the past twenty years, the European Community was short of the need to shoulder its historic responsibilities, to promote its own values and to combine and push its economic and technological dynamism. The Commission's increased involvement in relations with third partners was solely based on the adamant respect of its institutional prerogatives in external affairs (for a more focused discussion and the evolution of the Commission's sensitivity for 'constitutional impropriety', see Nuttall 1996: 143). This meant a strict focus on socio-economic aspects enshrined in the *acquis communautaire*. In this respect, the 1973 Agreement clearly stated that any bilateral agreements from an EC member-state would be superseded and replaced by the Community Agreement. Similarly, Yugoslavia sought a broadening of the commercial and economic cooperation while respecting "*the development of the Community and its policy in relation to third countries*" (Commission 1973: 7-8) – essentially placing the EC's normative frame as the guide to evolve the relationship further.

The latter issue of the Helsinki Accords of 1975 was an important component in the anchoring process as well. The British Vice-President of the Commission between 1973-1976, Sir Christopher Soames, in a speech in Romania, claimed that the signing of the Helsinki Act created 'obligations' that only the Community can fulfil and is ready and willing to do so (Soames 1976). The obligations which he refers to are a set of principles and norms which exist in order to guide the relationship between the East and the West in Europe. The two major aspects were the respect of human rights and the respect for the inviolability of borders. This is explicitly mentioned in two key documents that the Community signed with Yugoslavia in the Cold War period: the Joint Declaration of 1976 and the 1980 Cooperation Agreement. Both documents clearly state that the two parties take regard of Helsinki's Final Act – the only international agreement that is mentioned in both cases. The Helsinki Declaration set the conditions for the East-West rapprochement in Europe and an obligation for the Western Europeans to support those countries that would adhere to these principles and values.

Practices and Experiences

Experiences and practices are anchored by actors to the signifier in order to related previously acquired and systematised knowledge in new situations. The argument here is that, within the given conditions of the Cold War, the EC extended to Yugoslavia the most advanced institutional model that it was able to provide. And, in addition, the Commission became key in advancing EC practices to Yugoslavia, a clear sign of political and technical rapprochement that Yugoslavia enjoyed. These included two aspects. Firstly, there were preferential agreements (frequently tariff-free access for some exports to the EC) and aid funds that were part of a standardised policy by the European Commission policy towards third partners. On the Commission's account of the exploratory talks in 1976, the internal 'Note de Dossier' document states that the content of a possible agreement "*should be from the precedents that the Community has laid in its dealings with a number of countries*" (Commission 1976b: 7). Initially, Yugoslavia was ceding privileges that other countries already had, such as Mexico, Canada and the Maghreb countries (see Commission 1976a: 3-4), but what distinguished the Commission's approach to Yugoslavia was the country was immediately accorded the entire package, rather than being provided with these resources in a piecemeal fashion.

Secondly, while witnessing gradual transformations in Eastern Europe in the 1980s, the European Commission was declaring its intention to initiate negotiations with countries of Eastern Europe and to normalise relations with COMECON – a clearly more cautious and differentiated approach to that of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia was developing its institutional ties with the European Community relatively independent of the socio-economic and political changes in the Eastern bloc. It serves to underline this point that Commission was engaged in discussion with Yugoslav authorities at the highest political level, with the Commission President paying a visit to Belgrade in 1987 and reaffirming the importance attached to Yugoslavia as a key partner for the EC (General Report of the Commission 1987: 304). A similar visit in the following year by the Commissioner responsible for Yugoslavia included once more focused talks also on the East-West relations, but particularly the inclusion of Yugoslavia in EFTA. Moreover, it is noteworthy to add here the significant increase of 350 million ECU of the EIB loan to Yugoslavia.

3.3.1.2 Objectifying Yugoslavia

The social representation of Yugoslavia as an affirmative *sui generis* signifier involved a process of objectifying it. The effort of the European Commission to establish trust and convergence points to the study of social mechanisms that render understandable the ‘doing’ process in our case study. The three objectifying mechanisms which actors use to sell their policy ideas to the international community are legitimization, appropriateness and institutionalisation. The first mechanism shows how the Commission’s legitimization process rested on the (symbolic) representation of geographic boundaries of the European community – on which the Commission based its rightfulness as the ‘collective speaker’ of the Community. Second, the mechanism of appropriateness refers to the choice of the Commission to behave towards Yugoslavia as an equal and privileged counterpart not because it was dependent on significant material benefits, but because it resonated with a political rationale of rewarding those that associate themselves with the EC project. The third aspect refers to an institutionalisation process that, in Cold War circumstances, was to be the most advanced relationship the Commission could establish with another non-democratic country. In the following section, we will address these ‘cogs and wheels’ of the objectifying process in more detail.

Legitimation

After the peak of the Cold War at the beginning of the 1960s, there was an acknowledgement of the opportunities it would provide to open some channels of communication with countries of Eastern Europe, with the European Community being the ‘go-to’ international actor. However, what legitimised the relationship between the parties was the interfacing of identity-constructions and the dependency of each other in building a special relationship particular to the European context.

The Commissioner of Foreign Trade, Enlargement and Assistance to Developing countries, Jean-Francois Deniau, made an appeal in a speech in Washington, D.C. for the European Community not to think “*whether or not we should trade with Eastern Europe but only how trade can best be carried on in the interest of both parties*” (Deniau Speech 1968). This approach was the basis for the EC to build gradually a strong connection with Yugoslavia. As stated in a Commission document, “*politically [...] it does stipulate quite clearly the manner in which Yugoslavia wishes to be*

treated by the Community: Yugoslavia is a European, Mediterranean and developing country, and a non-aligned state” (Commission 1978b: 2). These variety of ‘manners’ in which Yugoslavia hoped to be reckoned with resonated with the EC’s interest to legitimate its policies geographically and thematically beyond the confines of the then Western Europe.

In particular, the European signifier entailed a geographical and a historical linkage. The European component legitimated and solidified a sense of common fate and history for the two parties. The Mediterranean – a heterogeneous-in-nature amalgamation of states with differing economic and political statuses - was for Yugoslavia a policy priority relating to the strong ties that Tito had build. Tito was favouring an independent foreign policy that would allow Yugoslavia not to be placed on either side. The Mediterranean was such an alternative grouping that fitted Yugoslavia’s concerns. The reference to developing relations coincided with an EU priority in the economic field to expand its trade relations with other regions in the world, and the special economic provision entailed in the agreements. Yugoslavia’s agreements with the EC in the 1970s were modelled after previous accords with regional groups, such as the ACP countries. Finally, the EC had for long years an interest in North-South relations. A Commission’s communication to the Council was endorsing the Community to “*continue to play a leading role in the follow-up of the North-South Dialogue*” (Commission 1978a: 1) and this can occur when “*the Community presents a united front and gives a lead [...]*” (Commission 1980d: 2). Yugoslavia leading role in the developing world with the Non-Aligned Movement rendered it an important signifier for the Community which aspired to such an association.

Appropriateness

Moreover, regarding the logic of appropriateness as a social mechanism, a European Commission’s publication on the EC-Yugoslavia specifically stated that “*Yugoslavia is among those countries which are given the best treatment for access in the Community market*” (Commission 1987: 7). It became the first communist state to be

given a three-year, non-preferential trade agreement²¹ and each party granted the other side the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status. Despite the hesitation of member-states for deeper relations (Artisien 1981: 32), this first agreement gave the impetus for the 1973 five-year agreement. It recognised the need for Yugoslav products to have freer access to the Community market and to close the gap of trade deficit. Yugoslavia became a frequent user of the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP)²² – an EC policy initiated in 1971 for the ACP and Med countries which granted developing countries trade privileges. The document included a clause where Yugoslavia expressed its intention to broaden “*the commercial and economic cooperation provisions, [...] in parallel with the development of the Community [...]*” (Commission 1973: 8). In 1978, the two parties decided to initiate negotiations for a new agreement that would replace the expiring 1973 one. The negotiation were led by the Commission on behalf of the EC and lasted three years. The long period of negotiations were partly attributed to the hard stance of EC member states, which the Commission managed to circumvent in favour of an agreement that the Yugoslav media called “*mutually acceptable compromise*” (Artisien 1981: 31). However, just before 1980, due to the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan, Americans and Yugoslavs did increase their pressure on reaching an agreement. The Yugoslav ambassador in Brussels, Mr Jevtic, made an appeal that a gesture from the Community towards Yugoslavia would have great significance (Commission 1980a). For Europeans however, it was matching the highly-prioritised position Yugoslavia had for the creation of a new Europe. John Pinder argues that the final outcome conceded quite a lot to Yugoslavs (1991: 18) and on 26th February 1980 the Financial Times hailed it as the most complete agreement that the Community had ever signed.

It is worth mentioning that the Commission openly expressed dissatisfaction with the Council when it witnessed a defensive attitude to Yugoslavia. It was the first

²¹ Non-preferential agreement refers to the case when each country applies its own rules, although within some regional economic unions the non-preferential rules are harmonized for all the Member States of the Union concerned, as in the case of the European Economic Community (definition provided by the World Trade Organization).

²² The EC/EU's Generalised System of Preferences is a trade arrangement through which the EC/EU provides preferential access to its market. The preferences are non reciprocal, non discriminatory and they apply to all developing countries though with some restrictions on products and volumes at times. Semi manufactured and manufactured products and a number of processed agricultural products originating in all developing countries are imported duty free into the Common Market (Commission 1976b: 4).

communist country to receive a loan from the European Investment Bank in 1976 (1977: 16), followed by two additional protocols in 1977 (1978: 41) and 1978 (1979: 38-39). Both the European Parliament and the Commission were continuously repeating that the Community needs to be more open to Yugoslavia and criticised the Council of Ministers for its refusal to subsidise the interest rates of the EIB loans. Characteristic is Commissioner Claude Cheysson's reaction, who called the Council's policy 'foolish' (Discussion in EP, 19/01/1988 cited by Wallden 1994: 69).

Institutionalisation

Finally, the institutional relationship that was formed between the two parties was the most advanced formal rapport the European Commission had with a non-democratic country. There was a clear effort to link Yugoslavia via multiple policy channels. A net of initiatives was extended which finally culminated in the creation of the Cooperation Council in 1980 – a unique body that established annual official contacts between the two parties. It also included the function of sub-groups on a number of policies, such as science and technology, research and agriculture. The important agreement of 1980, we saw a wide array of the Commission's Directorate Generals dealing with Yugoslavia in one way or another: DG Internal Market, Customs Union, Industrial Affairs, DG Agriculture-Fisheries, DG Economic and Finance, DG Development, DG Energy, Research, Science and DG External Relations. The DG RELEX was the main Directorate in the Commission dealing with Yugoslavia. Until 1985, it specifically dealt with the Belgrade government under the special division (Directory F) called 'Relations with the countries of Northern and Central Europe and with Southern Europe'. The responsibility for Yugoslavia was given to the Department 2 of Directory F which had the title 'Relations with the countries of Southern Europe and coordination with the general direction of development on the overall problem for the countries of the Mediterranean Basin: Cyprus, Malta, Turkey and Yugoslavia'. What we infer is that Yugoslavia was allocated to a department that was working on policies for developing countries in the Euro-Med area. Between 1985-1990 and under the Presidency of Jacques Delors, another DG was added which also dealt with Yugoslavia: DG Mediterranean Policy and North-South Relations under Commissioner Claude Cheysson. The Directory, however, dealing with Yugoslavia was re-named simply 'North Mediterranean' that dealt with the same group of countries as above. Additionally, until the year 1988, Yugoslavia was

continuously referred to *not* as East European, but was included in statistical categories together with European states, such as the Scandinavian countries, Switzerland and Austria (Commission 1988a: 5).

The institutional setup signified that Yugoslavia had the dual-quality of a European and Mediterranean country, next to other states that had already, or were in the process of, signing association agreements. Furthermore, Yugoslavia was handled under the Mediterranean section in the Commission (responsibility of Commissioner Claude Cheysson) and did not belong to the External Relations and Trade Directory (Commissioner Willy De Clerq) – which points to the fact that Yugoslavia was not treated as an external but as a partner in Europe. Furthermore, Yugoslavia proved a serious challenge to the Commission in its first attempts to forge a foreign policy approach. It was both a matter of foreign policy (meaning that it fell under the EPC to have the final word in ‘authorising’ any policy initiatives), while at the same time it participated in different European programmes. Yugoslavia had a special part in the Community’s policies for the Mediterranean, as the country, which was amongst the most industrialised economies in the group of developing countries, whilst designated as a model for the Eastern Europeans to follow.

3.3.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, the inclusion of Yugoslavia in the embryonic policies of the EC and the Mediterranean confirmed the sketching of Yugoslavia as a social representation of particular uniqueness, a ‘*sui generis*’ signifier that affirmed the existence and utility of the European Community in the Continent, as we proposed here. The close involvement of the Community with Yugoslavia was particularly encouraged by the Americans, who preferred Europeans to get involved with Tito rather than themselves to avoid appearing to interfere in Yugoslav affairs (Commission 1980c²³). But the particular choice of the approach and its nuances was actively stamped by the European Commission’s external entrepreneur role. It started with limited agreements in the 1970s to a preferential cooperation agreement and additional protocols in the 1980s. Yugoslavia became synonymous with the ways the relationship between the

²³ This piece of information stems from an internal document of the European Commission that has been de-classified after the 30-year rule and was accessed by the author of the thesis at the Commission’s Central Library in Brussels.

communist countries and the West were able to evolve. Still, Yugoslavia was not considered and treated as a state from the East but was built up as a unique signifier resonating with the principles and ideas of the EC. The EC tried to construct a representation of Yugoslavia by transferring it geographically (from Eastern Europe to the Mediterranean region) and thematically (from a communist state to a developing, non-aligned country). These multiple (sub-)signifiers (European, Mediterranean, developing/semi-developed, G-77/non-aligned) created a unique representation of Yugoslavia which the Commission actively constructed. The representation that the Commission developed turned Yugoslavia into an important external construction for the EC itself. The perseverance of this social representation of Yugoslavia became especially apparent once the international events in Eastern Europe started to unravel.

3.4 Arriving at a critical juncture: from the collapse of the Eastern Bloc to the outbreak of conflict in Yugoslavia

The symbolic meaning of the Fall of the Berlin Wall solidified the conviction that Europe was changing. The dramatic changes created pressures to expand the European Community at a time when it had been preparing to deepen further the integration of existing members. Faced with immense political realities at its borders, questions were raised about the changing international context and political promises needed to acquire new shape and content. The systemic impact of the dissolution of the Cold War exercised pressures on the EC to revisit its political priorities if it aspired to remain relevant in the new environment. The re-working of dominant social representations for political signifiers had to resonate with the transformations occurring in Europe which had primarily a normative character (Fierke and Wiener 1999: 729-730). Ideas were tabled from different states and leaders, such as the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's pan-European 'Magna Carta' (Financial Times 1989). The transition was well captured by the French President Mitterrand, in his speech in the European Parliament, at a time when France had the rotating Presidency of the EC in the second semester of 1989, in the midst of the events in Eastern Europe:

“[T]he existence of an ever-stronger Community [...] has provided a point of reference and a stimulus to events in the East. [...] Some credit is also due, I am

convinced of it, to that Community which today represents the only real point of attraction around which to build a structured future for this, our continent.

And then there are the values, those fine values which are so often talked about, you know the ones I mean. [...] They are our own aspirations, aspirations which we hold in common; [...] These values exist independently of fixed points, frontiers, splits and walls: we have the proof - walls are coming down, we are meeting up again, and we understand one another.

I am convinced, as I have already said that existence of a strong and structured Community is a factor for the stability and success of the whole of Europe. We should therefore affirm our identity as a Community, confirm our determination, strengthen our institutions and set the seal on our union. That in my view is the first lesson to be learned, because I can see no other alternative to the opening up of the East and the completion of the Community construct."

(François Mitterrand, EP, 22 November 1989)

The message conveyed important meanings for Europeans across the Continent. Initially, the structural foundations, the EC's 'being' which defined Europe needed to be relevant in the new era – implying a necessity to combine the changes arising from the East with the values and practices that affirmed the EC's standing in the world. A grand change in the international system was bound to open questions about type of system which would replace the old one. The particular mode of organisation of domestic and international societies under a Soviet dominion failed and the actors in the West had to take charge of the process of organising Europe. What follows naturally is the second consideration apparent in Mitterrand speech: there was a concern with regard to a necessity to recognise the EC and its institutions as the appropriate actors being beset with the responsibility to re-construct representations about the Community itself and the place of 'Others' in the new political landscape of Europe. This was a topical issue about the process of European integration itself. The groundwork for a new model of European governance was laid by the European Single Act in 1987 which paved the way for a broader institutional re-structuring. The prevailing idea was for a significant change in the Treaties to turn the Community into a Union – further translating into a strengthening of Community competences. For the

EC/EU, this was “*as much a question of adjusting the cognitive, as well as the physical map of Europe*” (O’Brennan 2006: 15). These two themes, which were so well-expressed by the French President in 1989, form the basis of the discussion of the transition period below.

The European Commission found itself both in a new reality and in a more privileged position. There was a growing perception and belief that the EC institutions would acquire greater competences and responsibilities in the new political landscape. Discussions were undergoing for a long time before the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, which would re-organise the Community, in which the Commission’s expertise and experience in every-day politics would be acknowledged by allowing it to represent the Community externally (European Parliament Report in July 1990, cited by Nuttall 1996: 144). The Commission was granted the non-exclusive right of initiative, which fortified a new institutional legitimacy that was separate from its previous Treaty powers. Yet, as Simon Nuttall argues, the Commission’s position transformed in those years due to the wider transformation in the European Continent and the events in CEE rather than as a result of intra-EC bargaining process among the institutions (ibid: 142).

What is worth mentioning at this point is that, during the Cold War, the European Commission was only partly involved in the strategy towards the CEE region. This was evident by the comparatively few people working on the ‘state-trading countries’ section in DG RELEX. Essentially, up to 1988, the Commission’s approach on Eastern Europe had a strict economic character rather than a broad political content. However, the upcoming changes that started to become visible in the end of the 1980s energised the Commission as an important entrepreneur of the new European state of affairs. In a statement on the EC-CEE relations, the External Relations Commissioner, Willy De Clerq, claims that “*the establishment of diplomatic relations is a historic event of great significance [...]. It is a step of incontestable importance for the improvement of the trade climate in Europe, and one which could have beneficial effects on the economic development of our common continent*” (Commission 1989: 6).

On that basis, the European Commission's expertise was to be recognised and extended for the first time by external actors in this transitory period. It was believed that it was best suited to coordinate and implement a coherent strategy for the former communist states in Eastern Europe. In July 1989, the Summit of the seven major industrialised nations (G-7) asked the Commission to coordinate the financial assistance from the G-24 (in essence the 24 OECD countries), known as PHARE²⁴, to Poland and Hungary originally, and extended a year later to Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Bulgaria, Romania, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. The extent of the labour involved and the symbolic meaning of acting on behalf of the international community convinced Jacques Delors that, if fluffing its lines in CEE, "*it would not get another chance to strut across the international stage*" (Economist 1990).

3.4.1 New realities without new thinking: The Commission's representations of Yugoslavia in the transition period 1989-1991

The European Commission's Vice-President, Frans Andriessen, talking about the 'European challenge' and Yugoslavia in 1991, believed that "*the Community model has a lesson - that regional economic integration provides a guarantee of political stability*" (Speech 1991b). As we argued above, Yugoslavia was represented in the pre-1989 period as the proto-type of a relationship that the European Community could develop for other partners. Yugoslavia was expected to be among the best placed countries in comparison with other former communist countries for sound macroeconomic policies and structural reforms (Pinder 1991: 55). Despite these predictions, the facts did not correspond to the expectations. On the one hand, we found arguments which claim that the failure to act and be proactive towards Yugoslavia by the EC is attributed to the poor preparation and lack of attention (Ginsberg 2001: 60). Similarly, ripping the benefits from the agreements signed in the past years was made conditional on the continuity of Yugoslavia as a single entity on the negotiating table (Woodward 1995: 160). The common ground in both cases is a rationalist approach to explain the role of the European institutions, with an emphasis on the (lack of) capabilities and effectiveness in the core, as the existing literature has claimed so far.

²⁴ PHARE, in French, means 'lighthouse' and stems from the phrase *Pologne et Hongrie: assistance à la restructuration économique*

The thesis, however, has observed that the European Commission did not lack the knowledge or the mechanisms when monitoring and assessing the political conditions or the economic indicators in the Balkans. Early worrying and warning signs of a deteriorating situation in Yugoslavia were openly discussed in the EC institutions, such as the resolution of the European Parliament in the beginning of 1990, which cautioned the Community about the violence and the violation of human and civil rights (European Parliament 1990). Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the German Foreign Minister, explains the European position as a result of a 'habit' to believe that, strategically, a united Yugoslavia was essential (Lucarelli 2000: 17-18). The Cooperation Council between the EC and Yugoslavia was recording and publishing the economic performances of the Yugoslav economy throughout the 1980s. Therefore, the thesis prefers a social constructivist viewpoint of the European reality in this transitory period and argues that the 'reasons' found in the rationalist literature are rather the outcomes of social processes and not its causes.

The thesis assumes that the European Commission's social representation of Yugoslavia did not receive any significant new content in the critical juncture of 1989 for Europe; unlike the radical changes this moment brought for the relationships between the East and the West. The study of Yugoslavia and what it represented in this transitory time reveals, *grosso modo*, a continuation of the 'sui generis' character of the signifier. This happened due to the following: first, Yugoslavia's privileged position in enjoying advanced special relations did not mobilise European forces to engage deeply with it; second, the events emerging in the Balkans were outside the scopes of the Commission which was used to ascertain Yugoslavia as the preferred and recognisable signifier; third, during the regimes changes across the European Continent, Poland and Hungary's European vocation was acquiring a concrete content and becoming associated with Europe, while Yugoslavia remained in its special, non-exclusive European identification; and fourth, Yugoslavia did continue to be represented as an indispensable partner, but did not acquire new content and it did not fully resonate with the policies applied for the newly democratic Central and Eastern European countries (CEE). These important observations inform the discussion of the anchoring and objectifying process of Yugoslavia social representation during the critical years of 1989 to 1991.

3.4.1.1 Anchoring Yugoslavia

To support these assumptions, the first part that we need to study is the anchoring process which ties together the new emerging context in Europe with structural processes. The structural foundations of the European international community are 'European identity and unity', liberal democracy, and multilateralism (Schimmelfennig 2001: 68). The European Community based its anchoring process, firstly, on a re-constitution of identities from the more cultural content of 'Uniting Europe' and on an overcoming of past experiences to include more civic aspects which were yet to be defined. Second, the Commission started to correlate the normative structures not just with socio-economic values, but with political ones as well (democracy, human rights). Thirdly, the search for 'membership practices' were not clearly extended to Yugoslavia which was still represented as a signifier not fitting exclusively into the newly-emerging European discourse. These aspects will be looked closer here.

Identity

To start with, the new era in Europe re-inserted the question of the content of European identity – 'who belongs where'. The structural transformation in Europe begged for a specification on civic grounds of the content of the European identity due to the pressures of some form of association. The tenacity of a historical rectification discourse was prevalent during the Cold War years, which partly continued in the transition years. In 1990, a European Commission's communication to the Council on the relations with the CEE stated that "*the Community as an essential partner [...] can assist them to "rejoin Europe", ending the artificial divisions of past decades*" (Commission 1990a: 1). However, those cultural arguments were retreating in favour of more civic grounds. The Commission's brochure on the relations with the Eastern neighbours in 1991 states in the introduction of the publication that "*thanks to shared traditions and background*" (cultural traits) the EC is in a position to form an economic unit that "*serves as a model for bringing market-driven economic policies*" and "*their way back to democracy*" (civic conditions) (Commission 1991h: 5). The Commission was becoming more interested in establishing an 'umbrella value-system' applicable to all - the "*commitment to the rule of law, respect for human rights, the establishment of multi-party systems, free and fair elections and economic liberalisation with a view to introducing market*

economies” (Commission 1990f: 2). Essentially, the first basic criteria for what constituted the road to a European membership had been set – well before the proper decisions of the Copenhagen European Council which finalised the specific provisions.

This process had two axes: the first one was to tie Yugoslavia in with the completion of the European political project – and in that sense anyone belonging to the CEE group needed to be politically and economically compatible with the EC/EU. The second one was to construct a new ‘imaginary’ of Europe as a whole and made up of its ‘pieces’ - an identity-construction process for post-1989 Europe.

With regard to the first issue, according to the Commission President Jacques Delors in his address to the Council of Europe in 1989, “[t]he dynamism of Community integration can amplify the dynamism of economic and political reforms in the countries of the other Europe and be a driving force in the changes between East and West” (cited by Baun 2000: 26). The European Community’s purpose was to address European problems embracing the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Reinicke 1992: 79). Based on the economic records of the six Eastern neighbours, which the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) published in 1991, Yugoslavia had one of the strongest economic indicators in relation to the other countries (see Appendix II). By 1991, along with Poland, Hungary and Romania, it was a full member of some important international financial institutions: the IMF, the IBRD and the GATT. Finally, the Commission recognised that Yugoslavia was eligible for further assistance in the form of doubling the EIB loan and to initiate talks of an association agreement – thus Yugoslavia once again being “*the first country to be offered this new type of agreement with the Community*” (Commission 1990h: 29).

With regard to the second issue, the ‘political exceptionalism’ of Yugoslavia was conceived as a special case in relation to the CEE countries – a signifier that included Romania and Bulgaria which both countries of Southeastern Europe/Balkans. The EC engaged in an effort to introduce a more concrete line in Europe. Examining written evidence in more detail, we observe a changed terminology after 1989 when the European Commission and subsequently the Community as a whole was dropping the ‘Eastern Europe’ term with the ‘Central and Eastern Europe’ expression. At a time

when the G-24 used the single frame of ‘Central and Eastern European countries’ that included Yugoslavia and Albania (RAPID 1991a), the Commission was further subdividing its neighbouring region.

To make these observations more specific, the European Council’s declaration on Central and Eastern Europe in December 1989 issued a tripartite division of Europe’s immediate priorities: to take on the common responsibility of reforming the Continent with “*the USSR and the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and with Yugoslavia*” (Strasbourg European Council December 1989). These divisions had already been adopted by the European Commission. It was not essentially an expression to re-map Europe for a better geographical designation, but a new political ‘imaginary’ of the Commission for the European Continent. It is striking that the Commission avoided referring systematically to Yugoslavia as a CEE country, because it “*treated Yugoslavia as a case apart*” (Commission 1990h: 28). Yugoslavia was habitually discussed as a special case, had a sui generis-standing for Europeans, as argued above – despite the fact that “*it is going through the same revolutionary process as the others*” (ibid: 6). Most statistical tables in the 1991 policy brochure of the Commission talk about the CEE countries without including Yugoslavia; and this despite the fact that a special committee on statistical exchanges was operating in the framework of the Cooperation Council since 1980 to guarantee credible data.

Norms

The shift from the Cold War into a new era begged for an understanding of the way the old normative context would resonate with the new political realities. Looking at the European Commission’s perspective, we discover two sources that continued to provide the normative grid for the European Community: the *acquis communautaire* and the Helsinki Act. Regarding the former, the strict emphasis on the socio-economic norms was not adequate to address the political transformation of Eastern Europe. Essentially, in this initial, transitory period, the web of norms around economic aspects (economic reforms) expanded to include political prerequisites (democracy) as the defining ‘fault-lines’ of an association. “*I believe that the first challenge which Europe has to face is [...] those in Central and Eastern Europe who have more recently begun on the difficult path of economic reform and democracy*” said the Commission’s Vice-President Frans Andriessen (Speech 1991b). In a speech in New

York at the US Council on Foreign Relations, Jacques Delors explicated how he interpreted the role of the Community: *“The aim is two fold: to support them [countries of Central and Eastern Europe] through the difficult transition from a planned to a market economy; and to anchor them firmly in a democratic and pluralistic Europe”* (Speech 1991b). He noted that the EU was not conceived for itself, but that the Schuman Declaration responded to the wishes of the entire European Continent (Delors cited by Sedelmeier 2005: 26). The Commission signalled the intention of the EC to start a new phase of close relations (blinking towards future membership), where we first find the concrete precedents of the future Copenhagen criteria being laid out. It involved political clauses (such as free multi-party system and fair elections) and economic conditions (liberalisation of trade) as well as respect of human rights (Commission 1990f: 2).

In addition, the Rhodes European Council in December 1988 reaffirmed its determination to promote Western values and principles and strived to achieve full respect for the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act and the ‘Charter of Paris for a New Europe’ which was the evolution of the original Act. Commission’s Vice-President, Frans Andriessen, held a speech in April 1990 where he declared that *“[l]ike the Community itself, the Helsinki process will be especially important [...] as a framework for the unification of Germany, and, more generally, of Europe as a whole [...] in full respect of relevant treaties and agreements and of all the principles of the Helsinki final act, in a context of dialogue and east/west cooperation, within the perspective of European integration”* (Speech 1990). Having this as the basis to develop the appropriate framework, *“we are working for the future architecture of Europe”*, as Delors proclaimed, in which the Commission *“wants to break new ground”* and *“not flinch from bold action”* (1990a: 61). The Commission was openly stating a more intrusive international role, a norm-entrepreneurship quality based on the EC Treaties and the Helsinki normative framework.

Asserting that those norms and ideals would not be an *acquis* of the 12 member-states exclusively, but applicable for all prospective partners, we take note of an ambivalence that would reify the sui generis representation of Yugoslavia. First, the core norms were embodied in the process of initiating European Agreements (EAs) in 1990 (or Association Agreements, as they were initially called). However, in the case

of Yugoslavia, the procedure of entering into an association agreement would “*take fully into account its long established links with the Community*” (Commission 1990f: 3). This was a novel element, a qualitatively different thinking about the association of the Community with Yugoslavia. If taking into account the history and the dense institutional links created especially after the 1980 agreement, the Commission was – rhetorically at least – distancing itself from the approach towards the rest CEE countries. This special consideration of Yugoslavia can explain the slow and reactive thinking towards the crisis in the Balkans.

Practices and Experiences

Furthermore, this period exemplified the reliance of the European Commission on its previous experiences and practices. The Commission at the time of transition was not given any new Community competence in fields other than the economic and social. Initial Commission policies offered Trade and Cooperation Agreements (TCAs) to the ex-communist countries. The basis of the agreements was trade liberalisation covering all products (with some exceptions which particular member states insisted on such as coal and steel, and textiles and clothing). The broad ideas that were included in the agreements with Yugoslavia and Romania in the 1980s were used as the guiding frames for the approaches to the CEE. As stated in the Commission’s communication on the development of relations with the CEE countries “*the Commission’s responsibilities and the expectations of partner countries have given it a key role in helping to create conditions for economic wellbeing, stability and confidence in Europe. The Community, drawing on its particular experience, has been able to make an important contribution [...]*” (Commission 1990a: 2). Two key ideas were transferred from the pre-1989 Yugoslav experience to the post-1989 context: the Cooperation Council and EIB.

The Cooperation Council has a particular role, as it met at a political, as well as at a technical level to carry forward a process of reflexion about EC-Yugoslav future relations. It consisted of the annual Council, along with three sub-committees, which traced the every-day aspects of the agreement. Broadly, it ensured that the agreement is attained, it found joint solutions to any problems which might arise, so that economic and trade cooperation can develop. Specifically, the existence of this institutionalised body of regular meetings and consultations has helped to achieve

progress in different sectoral policies. In science and technology, the Cooperation Council has “*led to a progressive strengthening of cooperation, involving financial support from the Community for Yugoslav research activities and regular exchanges of information on science policies*” (Commission 1988b: 6); in the industrial sector, it determined the “*special conditions governing access to the Community market for certain products considered to be particularly sensitive*” (ibid). This model was used in the case of CEE. The Commission’s proposal for the institutional frameworks of the Association Agreements suggested the creation of an Association Council (the highest political body to supervise the implementation and meeting normally at ministerial level) and an Association Committee (a forum for discussion of technical issues arising under the agreement).

Regarding the second aspect, here we have the European Investment Bank (EIB) which started originally to finance (operations outside the EC) in the Mediterranean and the ACP states. From 1990, it included the five CEE countries (Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria), but even until 1991, Yugoslavia was financed under the Mediterranean ‘theatre of operations’ (projects such as electric grids and transportation corridors). One of the initiatives of the time was to create a Bank that would finance capital projects in the CEE countries. The basic idea came from the EIB which had in the past had funded projects in Yugoslavia. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)²⁵ was created in which the Commission and EIB were the shareholders. It became an important financial instrument in the reconstructing of the economies of the CEE region.

3.4.1.2 Objectifying Yugoslavia

As the thesis asserts, political actors try to render political subjects understandable by using social mechanisms that shape our understandings and create systems of trust. The international legitimacy of the Commission gained momentum when the G-24 and the EC appointed it to be the appropriate body to act on behalf of the international community. Towards Yugoslavia, the effort to legitimise itself was based on previous identity constructions which, however, proved uneasy to accommodate them in the

²⁵ EBRD’s Article 1 states that its purpose is “*to foster the transition towards market-oriented economies and to promote private and entrepreneurial initiative in the Central and Eastern European Countries committed to and applying the principles of multiparty democracy, pluralism and market economics*” (Commission 1990f: 2-3).

new era of political order in Europe. Secondly, the logic of appropriateness worked in the case of Yugoslavia as a continuation of successful approaches that were the optimum choices for a country wishing closer ties with the Community. Finally, the institutionalisation process did not bring new institutions or ideas on the table, but only an enhanced the economic character of existing agreements.

Legitimation

Since the adopted perspective of legitimation here is the “*quality that actors ascribe to [...] an institution’s norms, rules, and principles*” (Reus-Smit 2007: 44), then legitimacy depends on decision makers being seen as acting on behalf of a community (Esty 2006: 1504). The European Commission’s legitimation of leadership is approached here as being normative – or socio-normative. This stems from two sources. Firstly, the Commission acquired a particular quality when it became the internationally mandated actor for the CEE countries. The European Community’s adherence to and embeddedness into the normative principles of the Western community bestowed a credibility and trust on the Commission driving the process of transition. In this sense, the (international) legitimacy of the Commission stemmed not only from being regarded as the guardian of the Treaties (the inward-looking feature), but also of “*the universal values that have always inspired the great moments of our history*” (the outward-looking feature) (Delors Speech 1991a). Also, the legitimation process refers to a self-designation by the Commission as representing an ‘*enlightened self-interest*’ in its relations with outsiders (Commission 1991a: 27). The Commission acts because it possesses a unique legitimacy in comparison with others international actors; it is grounded in a new kind of interest that transcends traditional cost-benefit thinking. This ‘differing’ self-interest is legitimated by incorporating the historical and geographic responsibilities (Delors Speech 1990a) as essential components of the EC’s interests. Such legitimation takes place among “*like-minded countries*”, as the Commission’s Vice-President argued, when submitting the idea of an affiliate membership as a preparatory step before accession (Andriessen Speech 1991a). He asserts that the approach is based on the acceptance of a shared political outlook on the deepening and widening of the Community.

In relation to Yugoslavia, it is known that it was conceived as part of the grand project of transforming Europe and its periphery with the EC in the centre. From the side of Belgrade, in January 1990, the Federal Yugoslav Parliament adopted a declaration that stated the wish for incorporation into the integration processes of Europe and, regarding the EC, the need for an accelerated pace that will lead to association status and free trade zones (Wallden 1994: 277). A year later, in February 1991, the Foreign Minister Budimir Lončar submitted his recommendation to the Federal Parliament that asserts that all European institutions want Yugoslavia as their partner, but only a democratic and whole Yugoslavia (ibid: 278). The Commission also kept considering Yugoslavia as a like-minded state, whose interests in Europe and the Mediterranean were coinciding with the EC. The head of the delegation to Yugoslavia reported in 1990 that Yugoslavia is eligible for a third financial protocol (after the second one in 1986) due to the existence of the rule of law and the optimistic prospects of the economy – noting, however, its reservations for the respect of human rights (ibid: 288).

Appropriateness

It was obvious that a comprehensive strategy to deal with the collapse of communism was not prepared by the Community institutions (Mayhew 1998: 11). In this ambivalent situation, the European Commission's position as a supranational actor in the midst of events compelled it to construct a reasoning process that would synthesise the interests with the political values and norms of the Community as a political collectivity – as Delors noted in his speech to the Parliament in 1989 “*in general political terms we have to show everyone that it is all to good purpose*” (Delors 1989: 60). The transition period was marked by the importance of the Commission's thinking of the optimum way to assist the new countries while preserving and occasionally dialling down pressures emanating from existing members and lobbying groups. EC governments have tried to keep control of the purse strings and the result has been a compromise between them and the Brussels executive (Commission) with respect to formulating and implementing policies towards Eastern Europe (Tsoukalis 1994: 224). In that sense, appropriateness as a social mechanism helps us to point to the fact that the Commission acted according to what it perceived to be the appropriate behaviour (based on doing the right thing) in the particular situation of post-Cold War Europe.

In relation to Yugoslavia, the logic of appropriateness worked by aiming to find the optimum way to reinforce existing identity constructions rather than re-shuffling/re-organising Yugoslavia into new representations. Re-asserting the representation of Yugoslavia as a special signifier with European, Mediterranean, post-communist and semi-developed qualities, the European Commission highlighted its interest in preserving the embeddedness of Yugoslavia in all those 'images'. The inclusion in the PHARE programme accentuated the European and post-communist character of Yugoslavia, while the second (1987) and third (1991) financial protocol was a type of agreement applicable to developing and Mediterranean countries.

Essentially, few things could be further done for Yugoslavia by the Commission, as Belgrade was already the receiver of trade, commercial, agricultural and aid privileges that were considered 'the most we can do' (Pinder 1992: 73; Wallden 1994: 289). This was a hindrance for Yugoslavia at the same time, because of the perception that Yugoslavia was closer to a 'European model' than others. While the discussions and negotiations for furthering the relationships and integration of the 'new economies' into the EC, the appropriate thing in the Yugoslav case was to slow down the process until the others reach the status granted to Belgrade. John Pinder characteristically writes that the combination of GSP and removal of quotas makes the agreements of the period seem modest with Yugoslavia's advantages through its agreement under the Community's Mediterranean policy (Pinder 1991: 32). These factors prevented the Commission from acknowledging how best to deal with a Yugoslavia that was advanced on paper, but in reality displayed a continuously worsening condition. A report from DG ECFIN in June 1991 – when the war in the Balkans was perceived inevitable both by the international community and the EP – collected expert opinions on the CEE countries. It summarises for Yugoslavia that *"the successful implementation of the January-June 1990 stabilization programme suggests that until mid-1990 increasing regional conflicts were not a serious barrier to effective realization of federal policies. [...] disintegration need not necessarily occur, as a compromise may still be possible, if economic interests prevail over nationalism, and if regional devolution is replaced by stricter control at the federal level"* (Commission 1991b: 209). Additionally, the logic of appropriateness propelled the Commission to start negotiations for a Europe Agreement on one side, but the Commissioner responsible of meeting with Yugoslav counterparts, for example in the Cooperation

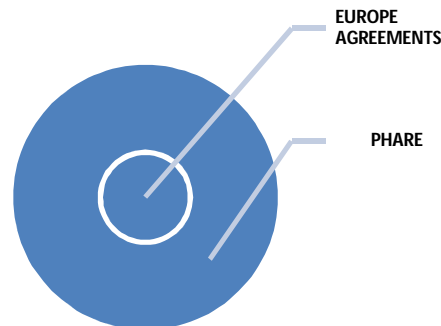
Council, was the Commissioner for North-South Relations, Mediterranean Policy and Relations with Latin America and Asia, Abel Matutes, which was raising questions of suitability.

Institutionalisation

A key mechanism to trace the social representations of the Commission is the way it aims to institutionalise its 'images and concepts'. There was a rigorous effort in the transition period to introduce ideas and models in the framework extended to the Central and Eastern Europeans. The emphasis on the institutionalised approach as the means to understand and interact with others is not only that it rationalises and formalises relations, but that it provides a social space in which identities, norms and experiences have the opportunity to (re-)produce new relationships. This particular period though was marked by institutional processes that proved to be stories of cross-cutting initiatives with common characteristics and communications which lacked uniformity and direction. On one side, there was hardly any coordination between the international actors when offering their, primarily financial, assistance, and on the other hand there was not a clear-cut message as to the purpose they were serving and the *finalité* of those schemes.

Two broad institutional approaches were instigated; one was a strict EC effort pointing towards integration prospects and one by the international community - in which the Commission had been assigned as the prime coordinator – for assistance in the transition period. The former was more focused at opening the door for convergence and potential integration with the EC in the centre. The second one was a multilaterally-based assistance to troubled economies for their integration in the international community resembling a light type of Marshall Plan for CEE region. Both approaches entailed three aspects in their provisions and justifications for an institutionalisation of their relationship: political, economic and aid. The common feature in these projects was the prioritisation of an institutionalised mode as the proper way to vest the future of a peaceful European and transatlantic area. The project of re-constituting identities, boundaries and goals would become possible via 'rational-legal' mechanisms. In the first years of the transition, however, these institutionalisations received a minimal expression, which were criticised for their

overlapping character and of their mixed messages to the recipient countries (Baun 2000; Mayhew 1998).



3.2 Diagram: The two core institutionalisation mechanisms

The first approach - exclusively directed by the EC towards the CEE countries – was the association agreements, which started as trade and cooperation in 1989 and became the Europe or Association Agreements (EAs) two years later. They were the most important breakthroughs, because they officially recognised CEE states for the first time as potential members although never explicitly stating it²⁶. The significance of these agreements with the particular symbolism of the term ‘Europe’ was evident in the title. Its impact lay in the fact that the Community was admitting that membership was not a policy to be left ‘ad calendas Graecas’, but an emerging reality for all Europeans. Such agreements were previously offered to existing or current candidates, such as Greece and Turkey respectively, which was of central importance for the East Europeans, as argued by the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Jiri Dienstbier in his article in Foreign Policy in 1991. The European Commission defined them as a legal, political and economic framework for the relationship of the signatory countries with the EU (Commission 1995a: 54). During the negotiations, Jacques Delors excoriated member states for their continued protectionist instincts vis-à-vis CEE (Financial Times 29 January 1994). The provisions contained in the Agreements were admitting the potentiality of the CEE states becoming the future jigsaws of the EC/EU’s collage.

²⁶ For a discussion on the two major interpretations of the meaning of the agreements, see Phinnemore 1999.

Additionally, they established for the first time regular political meetings next to the economic provisions and financial and aid programmes for the rebuilding of the states. They were attended primarily by Commission personnel from the majority of DGs – depending on the topic under discussion and/or negotiation. The Commission played to its own strength, as the people involved were personnel transferred from other DGs who had experience in implementing projects in the areas of development and aid with third world countries. Also, aside from the (ambivalent) level of effectiveness²⁷, the Europe Agreements acquired a minimal character due to the lack of monitoring mechanisms especially in the application of political requirements. The strong technocratic manner characterising the discussions in the association committees and council sidelined the centrality of political and security thinking in the relations with the ‘new’ countries. Furthermore, the EAs had a strict bilateral nature that included an ‘ex ante’ (positive) conditionality²⁸. The negotiations were not ‘invariably positive’ (Mayhew 1998: 23), because the Community was concerned to make sure that the economic and political identification with EC’s standards and values are not undermined by an impromptu accession. The ‘ex ante’ nature points to the caution of the Community not to make promises at a time when the construction of the CEE countries as member-states was uncertain in that period.

The second set of mechanisms that involved a broader set of actors – with the European Community still as a main shareholder - was the G24 assistance under the PHARE programme and loans primarily from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) (and less from the European Investment Bank). The Commission being “*at the centre of combined western efforts to support the economic liberalization process in Eastern Europe through the Phare programme*” (Commission 1991a: 5 Brochure) was another testament of its effort to upgrade its role as an international actor capable of formulating external relations. The rationale of the Commission was founded on the ideas that the financial assistance was conditional on “*democratic and economic development [...] commitment to the basic principles of freedom, democracy, pluralism and the rule of law*” (European Report 1991d), which strongly resembles the institutional practices followed for the Europe/Association agreements – an expected duplication since the same coordinating

²⁷ For a study on effectiveness of association policies, see Mayhew 1998; Baun 2000.

²⁸ For a detailed discussion on conditionality and its types, see Fierro 2003: 98-102.

team in the Commission was essentially responsible for the implementation of both programmes.

Despite the fact that the PHARE programme was considered as a 'technical assistance' programme (Tsoukalis 1994: 224), it was used by the European Commission as a mechanism for re-constituting the former communist states into 'European' ones. In this frame, Romania posed the first challenge as the Commission was decided that the country should be excluded from PHARE for several months on political grounds. The Vice-President of the Commission, Frans Andriessen, maintained that he had found considerable support for this move which would constitute a 'major political signal' to Romania and the other Central and East European countries (European Report 1990: 5). The Commission clearly intended to make a statement by acting in this manner. Bucharest was not 'punished' only for its poor democratisation record in that period, but was intended as a symbol of potential failure if the standards set by the Commission were not to be respected. The increased leverage of the Commission to initiate such an expulsion was indicative of the importance which rested on compliance with the conditions set.

With respect to Yugoslavia, the institutionalisation process did not exhibit any signs of fatigue in spite of the worrying political events. Two interesting arguments, however, can be made when studying this short, transition period. Firstly, the credibility of Yugoslavia in the period before 1989 and its successful inclusion in a number of programmes preserved the image of Yugoslavia as an invaluable partner for the Commission. In that sense, the Commission was the last institution to react to the events in the Balkans. Secondly, Yugoslavia received ambivalent messages as to its place in the future of the new European architecture. It was part of the construction of the 'united Europe', but was dealt within the Mediterranean Directorate of the Commission.

About this last point, in 1988, the EEC-Yugoslavia Cooperation Council was meeting on the basis of improving relations. The meeting with the Yugoslav authorities was headed by Claude Cheysson, the Commissioner of Mediterranean policy and North-South relations, and the topics discussed included issues pertaining to trade issues, encouraging joint ventures as well as cooperation in the Mediterranean (BBC 1988a).

Furthermore, during a visit in Belgrade in 1989, Commissioner Cheysson proposed that Yugoslavia's future treatment in relations with the EEC should equal that of the 'European Free Trade Agreement' (EFTA) countries, with full recognition of Yugoslavia's non-aligned policy (BBC 1988b). Also, a Commission's external relations document in 1988 on 'The EC and Yugoslavia' emphasised the joint groups working towards regional and Mediterranean problems as well as the successful tripartite cooperation EEC – Yugoslavia - Centre International des Hautes Etudes Agronomiques Mediterraneennes (CIHEAM), which was first established in 1962. In addition to this, in the Joint Statement of December 1990 following the Cooperation Council, the Commission was represented by the new Commissioner of Mediterranean and Latin American Policy, Abel Matutes. The Community boasted that no other Mediterranean country had similar results as to the diversification of exports of manufactured products. In this configuration of the relationship, the most significant aspect is the absence of any reference to Eastern Europe or the inclusion of Yugoslavia in the aid programmes of the Community.

At the end of 1989, the joint declaration on Central and Eastern Europe stated: "*The Community and its member states are fully conscious of the common responsibility which devolves on them in this decisive phase in the history of Europe. They are prepared to develop with the USSR and the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and with Yugoslavia, in so far as they are committed to this path*" (European Council 1989). The particular differentiation between Yugoslavia and CEE by the EC was an indication of the scepticism of the EC towards Yugoslavia rather than an affirmation of its successful course towards association. Such a categorisation was adopted in the Commission's communication to the Council on initiating the European Agreements in August 1990 when Yugoslavia was discussed as a separate case from Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland on one side and Bulgaria and Romania on the other. In the same vein, a Commission publication on the external role of the Community entitled 'Europe: World Partner' of 1991, again gave a dual position to Yugoslavia: it discussed it both as a part of the aid assistance programme in Europe and as a component of EC's Mediterranean policy.

In essence, only in 1990 we are able to trace the first systematic reference to Yugoslavia as a Central and Eastern European country, which was dictated by the

international community's resolution of the extension of PHARE programme to Yugoslavia. Here, the first Commission documents are the 'Communication on scientific and technological cooperation with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe' and the 'Community's relations with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe – the role of telecommunications' in June 1990 which both add Yugoslavia alongside other CEE states. What is particularly noticeable, however, is that those policies were principally instructed by the G-24 and make a specific reference to the fact that the outline of countries included under the CEE title is made for the purpose of these communications exclusively. At the opposite end, in a policy initiative of the Commission on industrial cooperation with the CEE²⁹, Yugoslavia is excluded from the group of European states which are benefitting from the programme. The purpose of the memorandum is to "*set out the practical measures already taken under the PHARE programme*" (Commission 1990e: 22). We once again observe the construction of a two-tier Continent: one that includes the core 'Europe' (namely the CEE countries) and one that consists of other, non-exclusive, in-between candidates, such as Yugoslavia.

Of special importance is the Declaration of December 1990 which was signed after the Cooperation Council by both parties at a period when key decisions needed to be made as to the countries included in the all-important new type of agreements designed by the Commission. The Joint Declaration reviewed the state of the relations and prescribed the content of the institutional model. On the one hand, we observe two are the key terms which form the institutional relationship the Community envisages in relation to the Yugoslavs: 'trust' and 'long-standing ties'. These two ideational aspects formed the basis for the deepening of the relations – essentially moving from the more generic financial assistance programmes, such as PHARE and the 3rd Financial Protocol to the negotiations for an association agreement. The positive identification of Yugoslavia as a trustworthy and historically reliable partner is the theme that convinces the Community to move ahead with and further deepen the institutional ties despite concerns raised by a number of other international actors. At a time when Romania found it difficult to be included in the first stages of the implementation of PHARE, Yugoslavia enjoyed a special treatment. On the other

²⁹ The memorandum refers to Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Bulgaria (1990: 1).

hand, the government in Belgrade was adamant about its intentions for a “*transition from co-operation to integration [...] within the European framework*”. The main claim of Budimir Lončar, Federal Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Yugoslavia, is to build together with the EC solid foundations upon which to build closer institutional links. This demand, even pressure, for an institutionalisation is regarded as the basis to achieve the sought convergence of Yugoslavia into the European mainstream.

3.4.2 Conclusion

In this section, we have demonstrated our contention that the transition period was not marked with a new thinking about Yugoslavia as regards the basics of the approach; rather we observed a continuation of the basic ideas that governed the European Community’s and especially the Commission’s stance towards Yugoslavia from the pre-1989 period. The Yugoslav model had trouble fitting the new, emerging environment in Europe primarily, because the semi-democratic, semi-liberal Yugoslavia was unable to satisfy the normative requisites set by the EC. The representation of Yugoslavia as a special partner with sui generis characteristics essentially sidetracked the European image of Belgrade as a ‘standard’ European country.

3.5 The War in the Balkans (1991-1995)

“Well, here we are in 1993. Eighty years of tremendous change in the remainder of Europe and of further internecine strife in the Balkans themselves have done little to alter the problem this geographic region presents for Europe.”

(George F. Kennan 1993: 12-13)

The events surrounding the collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has been recorded, discussed and analysed by numerous scholars and journalists. Yugoslavia’s demise has been largely attributed to its internal contradictions as a multinational state. Christopher Cviic notes that it broke up, because the nations that constituted it “*had come to reject it – either totally or just in its current form – as incompatible with their national aspirations*” (1994: 89). The largest Republic inside Yugoslavia was Serbia which was identified as the successor of the Federal state and the embodiment of a centralised power that the other constituent entities were unwilling to live with/under. In parallel, for the European Union itself, the beginning

of 1990s was a cornerstone in many respects. From the dispatch of the first EC Troika in June 1990 and the decision to bring in the United Nations in October 1991 when the Community failed to stop the conflict until the Dayton Agreement five years later, the war ignited experiences and images to most Europeans of places and moments long forgotten.

Above all, coinciding with the end of the Cold War when belief for a coming age of liberal peace was arguably at its highest, this conflict emerged as the most challenging threat to existing norms and institutions that the West faced (Woodward 1995: 2). In this traumatic and tragic period, there was a discourse which saw the region as external to Europe and a *Schimpfwort* that equated the region with barbarian and primitive reversion – the word being ‘Balkanisation’ (Todorova 1994: 453). Following this line of thinking, the Balkans need to be fenced off, decoupled and contained in order to be separated and become distinct to the rest of EC/Europe (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 377). Such thinking was indeed partly adopted by policy circles in the European and international community. The left-wing, Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek critically summarised the gist of that time by arguing that one of the clichés about the Balkans is that they *are part of Europe* haunted by the past ghosts and fighting century-old battles, while the rest of Europe is rapidly engaging into the process of globalisation (Žižek cited by Aydinli and Rosenau 2005: 164). The wars in the Balkans have helped to strengthen such a discourse, and especially the necessity and suitability of the EC/EU as the embodiment of the modern state of affairs on the Continent. The infamous ‘hour-of-Europe’ statement – irrespective of the actual events which mostly did not confirm what the Foreign Minister of Luxemburg, Jacques Poos, urged – still signified a problematic search for a new imaginary of Europe compatible with the new international political era. The core institutions of Europe became involved into the processes of making sense of the situation in the Balkans based on the experiences, values and identities they had constructed for Yugoslavia and finding ways to connect the Balkans with the European ‘life-world’.

Even today, the structural economic problems that the Eurozone is facing (member-states with debt problems, such as Greece, Ireland and Portugal) are largely attributed to the deficiencies of the original planning devised in this period (Maastricht 1992)

which refer to poor monitoring mechanisms and the exclusive emphasis on monetary rules and not on fiscal and economic governance. It was this period that enlargement was firmly on the table as a major challenge to the EU's future. On one side, the intergovernmental bodies approached the issue more defensively, as the Reflection Group³⁰ concluded that reforms are necessary in the EU “[...] *to ensure that the next enlargement does not weaken, change the nature of or actually break up the Union*” (1995: Part 2 Article 7). The member-states were reported to be hesitant towards political commitments due to internal disagreements about the nature and the pace of the enlargement process. Frank Schimmelfennig studied the behaviours of member states which he classified on the basis of their vocation and support for the widening of the European Union. He argued that there were proven diverging approaches in relation to the purpose and timing of the policy – which nevertheless were insufficient to halt the enlargement process (Schimmelfennig 2001: 72-76). “*If member-states want to play a role in Central and Eastern Europe, they must overcome rivalry*” was bluntly stated by the Commission's Vice-President, Henning Christophersen (Speech 1992). On the other side, the two supranational institutions in the EU, the Commission and the Parliament, interpreted the post-Cold War era and the possibilities offered by the Maastricht Treaty as a chance for greater engagement with external relations; more so since the enlargement field had a dual quality, what Henning Christophersen called “*a challenge both internally and externally*” (ibid.).

3.5.1 Yugoslavia as a ‘contesting and contested’ sui generis signifier

Our attention is drawn to the European Commission and its under-studied role in this period. This comes as no surprise. Many studies judge the agency of actors from an evaluative standpoint which highlight the capabilities of EU institutions and their relative inadequacies in comparison to member state and other external powerful players. It is accepted that the Commission received a secondary role in the involvement with the conflicts in the Balkans and focused more on the transition of the rest countries of Central and Eastern Europe. What is more important here is that, despite the increased responsibilities acquired from the Treaty of the European Union, the Commission lacked broadly the relevant experience and the legitimacy to deal

³⁰ The Reflection Group was established by the Corfu European Council in 1994 consisting of the Foreign Ministers of the Member States and the Commission's President to report on the necessary preparations for the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference.

directly with the full extent of problems arising from the region. However, two points need to be kept in mind. The first aspect relates to a broader approach to reality; it is vital to search into this period, as the subsequent policies that the Commission formed were informed and influenced by those social representations that emerged in the context of the events in the Balkans. The past constitutes a laboratory from which we draw examples to match and interpret current developments and events in terms of historical patterns – while also limiting our ability to predict the future (Mahant 1995: 485). The second aspect agrees with John O'Brennan's assertion that, from the institution of relations with the former Communist bloc in 1989, the Commission carved out for itself a more significant role than that ascribed in Article 49 of the TEU: the Commission became an entrepreneur that acted both in a functional-bureaucratic and in a normative-political manner (2006: 74-75). Even Andrew Moravcsik concedes that the ability to select among viable proposals grants the Commission considerable formal agenda-setting power (1993: 511-512).

In this part of the third chapter, we want to revisit the type of social representation that the European Commission had striven to construct for Yugoslavia. The thesis argues that the Yugoslavia signifier received a social representation that was contesting and contested as a signifier. This twofold meaning refers to a dual process: when the Commission was anchoring Yugoslavia to its being, Yugoslavia was anchored as a representation of a unique case for Europeans challenging and contesting the images and concepts of the European life-world and the political mission of the EU, which was 'the construction of the United Europe'. When studying the objectifying process, the content of the representation turns into a contesting *sui generis* signifier; this means that (i) the 'sui generis' status provoked the need for *sui generis* policy frameworks for the region; and (ii) what Yugoslavia was signifying up to that point *rolled over* not to its natural successor, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), but to the constituent republics in the Balkans that emerged in the 1990s – which were rejecting anything 'Yugoslav' attached to them. Therefore, despite the fairly restricted role given to the Commission during the war, we assert that it was an important preparatory period, because the Commission was "*the motor of new policies*" (Mayhew 1998: 174) with its high profile in crucial EU policies, such as the crisis in the Balkans.

3.5.1.1 Anchoring the Balkans

The strong advocacy of the European Commission of an eventual accession of the CEE countries was evident in the period. Towards (the former) Yugoslavia, the Commission realised early its limited capabilities in influencing directly outcomes. However, what we argue for this studied period is that *the Commission anchored the Yugoslavia as a signifier contesting the EU's being*. Once again, the anchoring process involves three structural processes: identity, norms and practices/experiences. In the words of the official work programme of the European Commission about the EU as a reliable partner in the international arena of 1995, the central elements are the assertion of the EU's identity in political terms, the adherence to principles (democracy, human rights, rule of law and fundamental freedoms) and the optimum use of every means available at its disposal. The contestation became an integral part of the social representation of Yugoslavia; as a sui generis signifier, it was strategically used by the Commission as a challenger to the EU. Starting with identity, Yugoslavia's signifier was infused as a contestation (i) to other potential candidates, and in particular the CEE region, and (ii) to Europe's Self in historical terms. When it comes to norms, Yugoslavia was associated as the moral challenger to the whole normative structure of the European legal civilisation system. It was a part of Europe that was withholding from the efforts to introduce a pathway for former communist countries to enter the normative mainstream as ascribed by the Union. Last, as far as anchoring Yugoslavia to practices and experiences is concerned, the contestation was about discrediting the evolution of the EU as a foreign policy entity by aggravating the deficiencies of the newly-initiated European CFSP pillar. Below are these assertions analysed in more detail.

Identity

The effort to anchor Yugoslavia to the European identity in this period took a particular shape. The European Commission elaborated an image of Europe as an inclusive club which saw Yugoslavia as part of it – albeit not a purely European one. The argument is that Yugoslavia is constitutive of the Commission's ideas of the new, enlarging Europe; it is a European representation that stands though neither fully inside nor totally outside, but it is positioned in-between. The reason is that the European identity, as approached by the Commission, entailed two dimensions, a temporal and a spatial one - “*our historical and geographical responsibility*”, as Leon

Brittan notes in a speech to the Chicago Club on Foreign Relations in April 1992 (Speech 1992a). In this way, being an ‘in-betweenner’, it permitted the Commission to strategically use it in two fashions: in geographical terms to posit Yugoslavia as an opposite signifier to the CEE region and in historical terms to construct it as the Old Europe.

To elaborate on these points, a key document that confirmed the European Commission as the most active supporter of the enlargement policy, was the publication of the ‘Europe and the challenge of enlargement’ document published in June 1992 as the preparatory basis for discussion in the Lisbon European Council. The Commission makes reference to the open project of the EU and reifies the European identity as a macro-project that goes beyond closed frontiers and is constantly shaped by ‘each succeeding generation’ (1992b: 11). On that basis, it groups together in the same paragraph (§34) the potential candidates which are all part of Europe’s future – pending the fulfilment of certain conditions. Among the potential members - besides the obvious cases of the Visegrad group, the Baltic states, Romania and Bulgaria – are Yugoslavia and Albania. The future of Europe is envisaged by the Commission in the form of a European Political Area (EPA) as the new Pan-European framework with the EU institutions at the centre. The details of the plan are less important than the Commission’s strenuous search for a comprehensive and inclusive in nature political settlement of Europe; that in essence sketches a bigger, all-encompassing picture. Jacques Delors talks of the duty of militating the ideas and values of the EU throughout the *Greater Europe* (Speech 1992a). Europe’s identity embraced a set of actors that transcends and goes beyond the ‘incidental’ and ‘(con-) temporary’ of the events in the Balkans.

Having concluded that the future shape of the EU includes Southeastern Europe, Yugoslavia became a useful construct. Firstly, two regional depictions were the centre of analysis for the European Commission at the time – Central and Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia. They were counter-positioned in order to serve a dilemmatic role for the publics in whole of Europe: Yugoslavia was the region falling back while the CEE was *en route* to integration. Delors’ address to the European Parliament on the occasion of the investiture debate of the new Commission in 1993 talked about the liberation of CEE – in antithesis to the Yugoslav shadows that cast a depression on

Europe (Speech 1993a). In a speech on the lessons of history for the new Europe, the External Relations and Enlargement Commissioner, Hans van den Broek, uses the term '*Yugoslavias*', as the appropriate reference word (Speech 1993). He does so for two reasons: on one hand he avoids stigmatising Yugoslavia as a political subject with which the EU has to ready to work with as it has done in the past once the hostilities end; and on the other hand it points to the fact that the problem is what it represents rather than what it is. In this sense, '*Yugoslavias*' serves a dual purpose: it acts as the model to be avoided by 'our neighbours in Central and Eastern Europe' and, second, as the spectre 'haunting Europe', which was primitive, less noble and unashamedly brutal.

This anchoring of Yugoslavia, as a contesting signifier, was continuously discussed in reference to time (New vs Old Europe) and space (CEE vs non-European). The reference to Europe's guilty past regarding the two World Wars, such as Commissioner Brittan's reminder that "*differences between the European powers, in a previous generation, lit the spark which ignited the WWI*" (Speech 1992), were a stable theme in the Commission's discourses. Often, the discussion on Yugoslavia was perplexed with fears of the past, such as 'the cost of appeasement is too high' (van den Broek Speech 1993). In the same vein, instead of power politics and gunboat diplomacy, Europe is a structure for peace held together by economic integration and technological interdependence, cemented by common values and principles (ibid). What we noticed is that Yugoslavia appeared in these public pronouncements simultaneously 'part of' and 'apart from' the desirable identifiers of New Europe and CEE. These qualities permitted the international actors to believe that Yugoslavia is potentially transformable if conditions are met. Commissioner João de Deus Pinheiro talked at a conference on the EC and the Balkans, where he argued that the EC model is based on the Franco-German reconciliation, as the Founding Fathers of the European Community has envisioned it, and it needs to be extended to the wider Europe and especially "*as [it] appears today in the Balkan region*" (Speech 1993). Delors explained in a speech to the EP in 1993 that "*the toughest test is to bring the Yugoslavian tragedy to an end and offer help and cooperation to the six new republics*" (Speech 1993a). This agony of grasping the emerging realities was evident in the efforts in Brussels to move beyond the rejected Yugoslavia, but also to confine

the problems to *a* Yugoslavia. This is why the documents introduced terms such as ‘former Yugoslavia’, ‘ex-Yugoslavia’ and ‘Republics formerly part of Yugoslavia’.

These markers did not acquire a consistent and stable content for the largest part of the period 1991-1995. At times, Slovenia was included in the ‘former Yugoslavia’ signifier³¹ - however, noting that in the European Commission’s report the reference to Slovenia with Yugoslavia was declining steadily; reversely, Albania in the General Reports between 1992 and 1995 was frequently attached to the Baltic States as a Central and Eastern European state in the process of negotiating European Agreements. However, in the Commission’s Work Programme for 1995, under the heading of ‘Actions Planned’ for the CEE countries and the Baltic States, we observe that Albania is not referred any more and excluded in the proposals for Europe agreements (unlike Slovenia and the Baltic states) (Commission 1995a).

Norms

The obvious discrepancy between European values and Balkan practices prompted the European policy-makers, the public and the media to revive images of ‘Europe’s Past’ entering the public debates. The nationalistic rhetoric of the leaders in the Republics in the region and the failure to abide by agreements and basic human rights brought about disenchantment with Yugoslavia. The European Commission anchored Yugoslavia in a relationship of contestation to the post-Cold War normative order of Europe.

First, Yugoslavia was challenging the moral imperative of the human rights order as it had emerged after the 1975 Helsinki Act. The insistence in the Agreement was supported strongly by the Western states and the centrality of human rights in the relations among states acquired a dynamic after the dissolution of the Cold War. The Helsinki Process and the subsequent Paris Charter of 1990 were the political reference points of the Commission in the agreements signed with the CEE countries. As the Bulletin on the EC external relations in 1992 notes “*The agreements also provide*

³¹ “*The Commission was authorized by the Council to negotiate a Cooperation Agreement with Slovenia as part of the broad policy for a speedy resumption of contractual relations with the countries emerging from the former Yugoslavia. [...] The Agreement [...] will have the same provisions as the 1983 Cooperation Agreement with Yugoslavia and make reference to the possibility of its leading in time to a Europe Agreement*” European Commission, General Report on the Activities of the European Community 1992, p. 284.

expressly the regard for democratic principles and human rights, as defined in the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris, which inspires the domestic and international policies of the parties and constitutes an essential element of the agreements” (Commission Bulletin 5 1992: 82).

Delors was clearly stating that the cornerstone of a European system would be based on the UN principles and the Helsinki Final Act (Speech 1993b) – skilfully avoiding reference to the EU’s own legal-political system. Since June 1993, the Copenhagen criteria for membership to the EU were introduced and were supplemented by a specification on issues brought to attention by the situation in the Balkans. The proposals by the French Prime-minister Édouard Balladour were entitled Pact on Stability and aimed at highlighting the importance of the minority rights and the adherence to non-military means of inter-state relations, especially to neighbouring states.

Yugoslavia performed here a role of the moral contestator to the Copenhagen criteria and the Balladour Plan. Commission’s President Jacques Delors talked about a ‘tremendous moral challenge’ and a ‘moral duty’ for the Community to secure human rights in Yugoslavia (Speech 1992a). In this sense, it pushed Europeans to re-consider the basics that have founded the realities in Europe. Yugoslavia has re-inserted questions of ‘sovereignty, self-determination and inviolability of frontiers’ (Speech 1994) that are in a need to become re-evaluated in the eye of the events unfolding in southeast Europe but also more far away (Somalia, Iraq, Liberia). Furthermore, the European Commission’s portrayal of Yugoslavia included less a discussion of a threat to physical security of the European states, and more a challenge to democracy, human rights and pluralism (ibid). Commissioner Pinheiro in July 1993 (a week after the introduction of the Copenhagen criteria) expressed very directly the relationship between what Yugoslavia and the EU stand for. In particular he said that “[s]topping the disastrous inhuman war in the Balkans is a vital European interest because the values and principles for which Europe itself stands are at stake” (Speech 1993).

Practices and Experiences

The Maastricht Treaty established the second, inter-governmental pillar of the European Union on the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) which

solidified a long process of informal relations on foreign policy matters among the EC member states. The end-result though did not satisfy some European actors, such as the European Commission, that were expecting the European Political Cooperation (the predecessor of CFSP) and the provisions of the Single European Act (SEA) to be turned into a pillar that would be based on the Community method. George Ross notes that Jacques Delors cherished goal of the European Community being an important international player, did not meet his expectations (1995: 92). The outcome of the two IGCs firmly kept the CFSP away from the supranational institutions, and only leaving the Commission a marginal part of being *associated with* the work carried out in the CFSP field (TEU Article J.9). The events of Yugoslavia became a test tube for this new institutionalised and basically intergovernmental format to see how it worked out in practice (Rees 1995: 4). In this troubled period for the Balkan region, the Commission pursued an anchoring of Yugoslavia to the EU's institutional evolution as a signifier contesting (the deficiencies of) the European project in the field of foreign policy.

Yugoslavia signified the limits and problems of the Union, according to the European Commission. Commissioner Leon Brittan foresaw in 1992 that there is a “*need for enhanced European defence and regional security capability*” following the tragedy in Yugoslavia (Speech 1992a). The degree of an active EU ready to take on international responsibilities was undermined by Yugoslavia – a challenge that Europe should not accept watching unfold by waiting the US to act first (Delors Speech 1992b). Commissioner Pinheiro further highlighted what he thought as a threefold problem: the lack of a comprehensive (from diplomatic to peace-making) strategy, the underdeveloped EU military capacity (hinting mainly though towards the limited capacity of the Western European Union/WEU) and the ineffective institutional structure of the foreign and security policies that restrict European political will (Speech 1993).

From the point of view of Jacques Delors, in two different speeches he expressed the views of the European Commission. He went a step ahead from the previous Commissioners by ‘breaking the mould’ of Europe being a civilian power in international politics by condemning the weakness of the EU to project and impose decisions made for Yugoslavia by committing troops on the ground - even with UN

endorsement (Doughty 1992). His criticism was less concerned on the role of individual member-states and diverging foreign policy interests, but he focused on a more institutional critique of the absence of a European-level, joint action. Yugoslavia exposed a European structural deficit in dealing with political and military crises primarily in EU's neighbourhood, but also in the outside world to adapt structures for cooperation and collective security. The thesis concurs with claims made by Jacques Delors himself; the fact that Yugoslavia was understood and represented by the Commission as a *sui generis* signifier that had established successful and positive relations with Europeans and the changes in the international system after 1989 turned rather complacent the reflexes of the relevant, European institutions. Delors believed that the EC miscalculated and that "*we were all preoccupied with the problems of German unification and the fate of Gorbachev and the former Soviet Union*" and understood that the past practices and experiences of Europeans to offer economic incentives to resolve disputes, were contested in practice in the case of Yugoslavia (Speech 1993b).

3.5.1.2 Objectifying the Balkans

Having asserted that the representation of Yugoslavia took the shape of a relationship of contestation, we are driven here to explore the social mechanisms that allow us to understand how EU's 'doing' shapes the studied signifier. The first such mechanism, legitimation, will shed light on the way the European Commission's standing managed to influence and shape the goal of transforming Yugoslavia and the region more broadly. In our case here, the process of legitimation rested upon the tacit conformity to the EU policies acting as the institutional embodiment of the new post-Cold War Europe. Regarding the second mechanism of appropriateness, the Commission justified the need to continue interacting with those actors in former Yugoslavia that were committed to act properly. Finally, Yugoslavia's social representation as a contested signifier was institutionalised as a transformative signifier. The policies that were introduced were essentially preparing the ground for the next stage of the state-of-affairs in the region once the political problems were solved.

Legitimation

The process of transforming Yugoslavia into new structures proved a source of legitimation for the European Union itself and the institutions carrying out the bulk of work. The EU, becoming more and more political after having achieved most of its purely pacific and economic goals (Bruter 2003: 1152), would be providing legitimation on the basis of its expertise and know-how and the attractiveness of the European model (external and internal legitimation). The Commission suitability in particular as the most legitimate to act in designated - by the international and European community – areas was clearly stated in the General Report of the EU of 1995, “*The Commission again proving itself to be crucial to the aid effort in the region*” and “*The Commission’s aim to coordinate global aid for that country and help pave the way for reconstruction whilst continuing to ensure that basic humanitarian needs were being met [...] in preventing conflicts and natural disasters*” (General Report of the Commission 1996: 263).

The know-how transfer via the PHARE programme was considered the European Commission’s legitimating mechanism to fulfil the role of changing the political and economic establishments in the CEE countries. The legitimacy of the EU and the Commission in particular in this case was accredited by the international community in the form of ever increasing responsibilities in the technical and economic fields. The budgetary commitments of the G-24 group rose by 20% every year since 1991, and the Commission was the go-to actor for the job. The review of G-24 aid to Yugoslavia included an appraisal of the Commission’s role which the Group welcomed and asked to continue working on (PR Newswire 1992). Additionally, Delors was defending the role of the Commission by highlighting that it has “*done everything in their power to release resources for humanitarian aid and to move food and medicine whenever they were needed*” (Delors Speech 1992a). In addition, the General Council of Ministers approved a proposal to grant the Commission the role of coordinating sanctions-monitoring work in former Yugoslavia (The Economist 1993). This gradual expertise-building prompted the Commissioner van den Broek to declare in 1995 that, being PHARE’s coordinator the past six years, the post-crisis responsibilities, such as humanitarian aid, rehabilitation, reconstruction and regional cooperation, make the Commission an obvious candidate for the task (Press Release, 21 September 1995).

Also, the model of the EU was based on the recognition as the institutional expression of the modern Europe. The legitimization mechanism was based on the attraction exercised by this central pole, the EU, as an economic and political model (Leon Brittan Speech 1992b). The European Commission's General Report on the activities of the EC in 1992 starts its main introductory passage on the external relations by stating "*The Community is the focus of the aspirations of most other European countries*" (General Report of the Commission 1993: 243). The main ideas of the Commission in this period are recorded in the very important preparatory document that the Communication published in anticipation of the crucial decision on enlargement criteria of the European Council of Copenhagen in 1992. Reflecting on the reasons of the EC's attractiveness, the paper states "*Non-members apply to join because the Community is attractive; the Community is attractive because it is seen to be effective; to proceed to enlargement in a way which reduces its effectiveness would be an error*" (Commission 1992b: 14). In the same document, the Commission sees this challenge as an irrefutable challenge which other countries "*are looking to us for guarantees of stability, peace and prosperity and for the opportunity to play their part with us in the integration of Europe*" (ibid: 20). The EC/EU, as the institutional expression of the Europe, is not just an organisation offering material benefits, but 'a powerful idea' and a signifier of 'fundamental values and aspirations'. This attraction power is what compels the EU to be the main humanitarian aid donor to the former Yugoslavia (Commission 1995e:1) and the main actor to fund reconstruction works (Commission 1995g: 2-3)

Appropriateness

The social mechanism of appropriateness is a vital part of the process of objectifying the contesting signifier of Yugoslavia, because it begs the question of arguing for 'the right thing to do'. The involvement of a sophisticated reasoning process embedded in a web of norms and rules that guide the policies. The Commission suitability in particular as the most appropriate actor possessed with the optimum means to reconstruct a damaged part of Europe was addressed in the General Report of the EU of 1995, "*The Commission again proving itself to be crucial to the aid effort in the region*" and "*The Commission's aim to coordinate global aid for that country and help pave the way for reconstruction whilst continuing to ensure that basic*

humanitarian needs were being met [...] in preventing conflicts and natural disasters” (General Report of the Commission 1996: 263).

The efforts of doing the right thing towards the target region followed a dual path: the European Commission promoted an approach of dual signification for Yugoslavia. The continuation of referencing Yugoslavia when addressing issues with the individual countries of the region, and naming the culprit of the tragedies in the Balkans Serbia and Montenegro, testifies to the fact that the Commission was interested to avoid turning Yugoslavia as an anti-European signifier. Yugoslavia was a special – sui generis - case for the EC/EU, it had an advanced institutional relationship with the Community and, essentially, it represented a desirable partner for Europeans. The Commission’s approach is of no surprise, as it has systematically insisted to discuss Yugoslavia within this context since the 1970s. The Commission’s external relations portfolio (External political relations, external economic affairs and development and aid) had dealt with Yugoslavia in one way or another.

However, this could not be the entire case when severe events were taking place in the Balkan region and there was a need for adaption to new norms and rules. For the first time, the European Commission followed a disassembling approach as a means of continuation of past policies. The events in the Balkans forced the Commission to contest previous contents of the signifier by injecting new forces and agents - without abandoning the original content. A constant reference by the Commission in its General Reports was to mention previous agreements with Yugoslavia being ‘extended’ (not replaced or cancelled) (Commission 1994 Bulletin: 227) to the Republics cooperating with the peace process (Croatia, Slovenia, B-H, FYROM and even Montenegro initially until withdrawn from the beneficiaries list in the end of 1992). Furthermore, it remained part of Union’s priorities in two external policies: the Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean, as confirmed by Cooperation, Development and Humanitarian Aid Commissioner, Manuel Marin (RAPID 1994). The annual General Reports on the activities of the EC/EU published annually by the Commission reported on former Yugoslavia under the sections of ‘Relations with Mediterranean and Middle East countries’ (and specifically, under the Mediterranean countries). There was a clear ambivalence by the omission to openly include Yugoslavia in the discussions of the Central and Eastern European countries – unlike

other Balkan states, which were included, such as Albania, Bulgaria and Romania were and Slovenia was included on and off.

Institutionalisation

Delors' "*reputed insistence on a united Yugoslavia*" (Woodward 1995: 159) was less evident if the European Commission is studied in the way it institutionalised Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia with its significant institutional relations with the Commission was not to be easily 'disposed' as an important partner. In 1991, when the conflict was erupting, the Commission's default position was to preserve a representation of Yugoslavia as a 'Europeanisationised' partner. That is why in the visit to Belgrade in May, the continuation of Yugoslavia was associated with several conditions (economic reforms, democratisation, political dialogue for constitutional changes, respect of human/minority rights). The problem in the region was a particular type of political ideology (nationalism) – a political relic of the past and symptom of the communist legacy in the country- that was rooted in some of the elites of the region and not the model of political organisation of the Yugoslav state, which always resembled to some extent the loose confederal EC pattern.

In the years until the final agreement of Dayton in the November-December 1995, the European Commission had two pillars in its policy for Yugoslavia. The first was a technocratic, financial assistance where the Commission was the coordinating body. The EU was the main resource provider and the rest of the international community was contributing a third to the budget. The main instrument that evolved here was the PHARE programme which became an all-embracing framework for international actors to re-build and aid the region. The PHARE programme was firmly run by the Commission and it extended to all parties in the Balkans with degrees of variation dependent on their role in the conflict. The second pillar was an EU-specific policy, meaning the instrument of association with the Community: the European Agreements. These EAs defined the level of proximity to the European institutional core. In the case of the constituent republics of Yugoslavia, the EU adopted sui generis frameworks that included only some provisions granted in the EAs of the other CEE countries.

In these two basic pillars, the European Commission had a diverse approach. In the first pillar, institutional relations were created with the different republics with a number of DGs on different sectoral policies. However, when looking at the second, pillar, there is a strategy of aiming at grouping the different states in the former Yugoslavia together. These two observations are evident when studying the Commission's organisational structure and the subsequent policies adopted between 1991 and 1995. Three Commissions were involved in the period under investigation here, two under Jacques Delors (-1992) and (1993-1994) and one under Jacques Santer (1995-).

The European Commission external relations' portfolio of the period 1989-1992 had a more simple, but clear-cut structure. Three Commissioners were involved: RELEX (Frans Andriessen), Development (Manuel Marin) and Mediterranean Policy and North South Relations (Abel Matutes). Focusing on the DG External Relations, we see that the European affairs were all part of one Directory in charge of two major tasks: (i) coordinating the G24 assistance; relations with CEE countries, former Soviet Union and CSCE³²; and multilateral issues for these countries and, (ii) PHARE programme; and EFTA and bilateral relations with the countries of northern and central Europe other than state-trading countries. The first point is that all European, non-EC member states were handled by one Directory³³. Delving into this Directory, we look into the Departments dealing with the particular countries in Europe. We find three such Departments; the first is about general issues concerning the former Soviet Union and Albania, the second on technical assistance to the former Soviet Union and the third on relations with Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Romania.

We deduct two points studying these aspects. The first point is that on sectoral policies of the European Commission, such as technical and economic aspects, four out of five republics of the former Yugoslavia (meaning all but Serbia and Montenegro) had developed particular ties and agreements. The new Republics started participating in the PHARE programme or receive provisions granted by the

³² CSCE was replaced by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) from 1 January 1995.

³³ This Directory had a large and growing number of responsibilities with issues spanning from technical aspects (such as PHARE and multilateral programmes) to enlargement discussions (Finland, Iceland, Austria and Sweden).

PHARE programme – PHARE is a policy for European states and dealt with in the ‘European’ Directory of the DG RELEX (Commission 1992 General Report: 284-285). Such PHARE policies were addressed to ‘the Republics of former Yugoslavia’, such as the agricultural aid policies and infrastructure programmes. In addition, we observe that other DGs were directly engaged with particular emergent states from former Yugoslavia: Slovenia and Croatia in DG Research and Technology (COST programme), Slovenia in DG Education, Training and Youth (Tempus programme) and DG Transport (transit issues), FYROM, Croatia, BiH and Slovenia given GSP for agricultural products (General Report 1992). The second point though that we observe is that, politically, Yugoslavia did not appear to be dealt with the ‘Europe’ Department in DG RELEX. Yugoslavia was classified in the Mediterranean Policy Directory under the North Mediterranean Department. This is further verified when reading the annual General Report of 1992, published by the Commission, where Yugoslavia is explicitly discussed with other Mediterranean countries.

The Delors’ last college (1993-1994) introduced a dual representation of the external relations of the European Commission: (i) one Directory working on the economic side under Commissioner Leon Brittan (DGI External Economic Affairs and Commercial Policy for the Western World, China, CIS and Europe, including CEE countries) and being the successor of the previous DG RELEX and (ii) one on the political side under Commissioner Hans van den Broek (DGIA External Political Affairs, CFSP and Enlargement Negotiations) which was set up from scratch³⁴. These new divisions did little to change the general approach to Yugoslavia. An Economist article in 1993 said that the squabbles between the commissioners as to the areas of responsibilities have ensured that little energy and time was devoted on issues such as GATT, Yugoslavia and economic aid to Eastern Europe (The Economist 1993). The gist was that Yugoslavia was split between the three DGs.

In particular, DGI’s Directory L was in charge of relations with countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the two Departments consisting it were (i) Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and the Baltic states and (ii) Romania, Bulgaria and Albania. What is worth noting is that Albania was grouped here with two other

³⁴ The third, external relations portfolio remained under Manuel Marin – DG Development and Humanitarian Aid.

Balkan states despite their different institutional statuses. Nevertheless, Albania was not placed with the Department on issues with the former Soviet Union as previously done and was recognised to belong to the European group. Regarding DG Development and Humanitarian Aid, Yugoslavia was dealt with in the Directory H, Department 1 on North Mediterranean³⁵ – a continuation this time of the previous policy of the second Delors Commission. Finally, the DGIA, which aspired to become a minimal diplomatic centre of the Commission after the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty, had a more political structure. It is this DG that was to acquire increasingly more important roles in the years to come due to its key priority tasks of enlargement, as well as political and security issues. The Directory B was charged of all states of Europe, as well as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and it dealt with them based on regional groupings: (i) Central and Eastern Europe, (ii) CIS, (iii) North Mediterranean, Cyprus, Turkey and Malta, and (iv) EFTA countries.

The new Commission did not alter the basic parameters of the approach to Yugoslavia. On economic, technical and aid aspects, Yugoslavia was eclipsed in the policies of the Commission, and an increase of policies was extended to the other Republics. Slovenia, in the years 1993-1994, was clearly distinguished from any other state of the former Yugoslavia with its full participation in the PHARE programme³⁶. Studying the annual General Reports published between 1992-1994, we measure a steady decline of references to former Yugoslavia, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Specifically, we find that Yugoslavia is referred 49 times in 1992 (8.8% of the total number of pages), 31 times in 1993 (5.8%) and 32 references in 1994 (5.5%). In addition to this, former Yugoslavia continues to exist in sectoral policies in 1992 in the DGs RELEX, Agriculture, Transport, ECFIN and Humanitarian Aid, when in 1994 we only trace it in the DGs RELEX and Humanitarian Aid. When looking at the political relations, the Commission obviously preferred to deal with former Yugoslavia in a more collective manner. Yugoslavia was again treated under

³⁵ This Directory H was formally placed in the DG RELEX, but it answered to Commissioner Manuel Marin of DG Development and Humanitarian Aid, who was overseeing the works of the Directory.

³⁶ PHARE programmes, in which Slovenia was a full participant and apart from policies for the former Yugoslavia, were: (i) Programme for vocational education and training reform, (ii) Programme for energy and the environment, (iii) Cross-border cooperation programme with Italy, (iv) General Technical Assistance Facility (GTAF), and (v) Public Administration (SIGMA programme). Date from the PHARE 1994 Annual Report from the European Commission, COM(94) 366 final, 20. 7. 1995.

the North Mediterranean banner – in the case of DG RELEX, it was part of the Mediterranean Policy and in the DGIA External Political Relations, it was a North Mediterranean one, but classified this time in the Directory of Europe.

Finally, when the new European Commission came in power under the former Prime-Minister of Luxemburg, Jacques Santer, he pronounced in his speech to the European Parliament in January 1995 that the effort is to introduce a strategic thinking in the External Relations portfolio and that the re-organisation of the DG RELEX will be based *“along geographical lines, so that a Member of the Commission with responsibility for a given area of the world will be responsible for all aspects of it”* (Santer Speech 17 January 1995). This was a criticism on the previous division of the Commission which had a strong thematic (political vs. economic) character. The new External Relations portfolio of the Commission was comprised of four DGs³⁷, but now only one was now in charge of all European affairs, the Directory run by Commissioner Hans van den Broek.

Based on these, the DG RELEX divided Europe in three components. Directory B dealt with countries of Central Europe (Dept. 1 on the G24 coordination of financial assistance, Dept. 2 on Poland the Baltic States, Dept. 3 on Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia and Dept. 4 on Romania and Bulgaria); Directory C was responsible for relations with the CIS and Mongolia; and Directory D was entitled ‘Relations with other European countries’. Of central interest for the thesis is the organisation of this Directory, because for the first time we observe evidence of organisation this particular region in the Balkans into a regional group that would be later called *Western Balkans*. This Directory D had four Departments: the first which was just mentioned, included ‘Albania and the countries of former Yugoslavia’; the second included Cyprus, Malta and Turkey; the third was about the EFTA countries; and the fourth on financial management other than PHARE help.

³⁷ These four particular DGs are: DG External Relations for North America, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, China, Korea, Hong-Kong, Macao and Taiwan and Commercial Policy (Sir Leon Brittan); DG External Relations for South Mediterranean, Near East, Far East, Latin America and Asia (with the exception of Japan, China, Korea, Hong-Kong, Macao and Taiwan) including issues of development (Manuel Marin); DG External Relations for Africans, Caribbean and the Pacific countries (ACP), and South Africa, including issues of development and the Lomé Convention; DG External Relations for countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), countries of former USSR, Mongolia, Turkey, Cyprus, Malta and other European countries, as well as CFSP and Human Rights and the Commission’s External Service (Hans van den Broek).

Two conclusions are drawn: first, Slovenia was cut off by the Commission with regard to anything relating to Yugoslavia. By the end of 1995, a European Agreement was initialled. Although with certain trade policies, Slovenia was included in regulations with other Republics from the former Yugoslavia³⁸, the political weight of the start of an association agreement disassociated Ljubljana completely from the rest former Yugoslav Republics. Second, Albania was drawn away from CEE and Romania/Bulgaria not on the basis of the technical aspects and financial assistance policies, but from a political standpoint. Earlier in the year, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)³⁹ published an opinion which was given to the Commission regarding Albania. The Committee considered that Albania's democratization process was under threat by the structural fragility of the economy and strategic and security issues in the Balkans. The European Union should conduct a proper policy of aid for Albania, which "*was both a Central European country and a Mediterranean non-member country*". It is one of the first references that associate Albania with such signifiers attached previously to Yugoslavia: a sui generis representation that is both an external policy situation as well as an internal, intra-European one – an in-between. The attachment of Albania to former Yugoslavia become apparent from the first, monthly Bulletins published by the Commission in 1996; Albania was discussed in the Northern Mediterranean section next to Malta, Turkey, FYROM, BiH and former Yugoslavia (Bulletin 1-2 1996: 95).

3.5.2 Conclusion

The European Commission's representation of Yugoslavia as a contesting and contested sui generis signifier was an important part to be examined, so as to

³⁸ Such EU trade relations in which Slovenia was included with other, former-Yugoslav, Republics were: (i) Council Regulation (EC) No 3355/94 on the arrangements for imports into the Community of products originating in the Republics of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Bull. 12-1994, point 1.3.59;

(ii) Council Regulation (EC) No 3356/94 opening and providing for the administration of Community tariff quotas for certain products originating in the Republics of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (1995): OJ L353, 31.12.1994;

(iii) Council Regulation (EC) No 3357/94 establishing ceilings and Community surveillance for imports of certain products originating in the Republics of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (1995): Bull. 12-1994, point 1.3.59.

³⁹ The European Economic and Social Committee is a consultative body of the European Union that gives representatives of Europe's socio-occupational interest groups, and others, a formal platform to express their points of views on EU issues. Its opinions are forwarded to the larger institutions - the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament. Committed to European integration, the EESC contributes to strengthening the democratic legitimacy and effectiveness of the EU by enabling civil society organisations from the Member States to express their views at European level.

comprehend the next stage of approaches that the Commission is going to develop in the aftermath of the Dayton Agreement. What we have shown in this 1991-1995 period is that, on one hand, Yugoslavia was a strategically important contesting representation of the need to re-construct the new Europe with its main institutional expression, the EU, at the centre. On the other hand, the objectifying process necessitated a piecemeal policy so as not to lose touch and to engage with the new actors in the region.

3.6 Overall Conclusion

The European Commission's social representation of Yugoslavia is better understood if we analyse it as a 'sui generis' signifier. In all three periods, Yugoslavia had a special interest and place in the understanding of the new political environment emerging for the European Community/European Union; and the Commission strove to deplore institutional elaborations of images and concepts of Yugoslavia in order to be able to comprehend itself and with this country. We have observed that the anchoring processes in all the different periods have shown that Yugoslavia was central to the self-identification of the EC/EU and in the process of forming a European vision of integration. The objectifying processes to Yugoslavia have showcased a greater variety in their content. The next chapter will investigate how these two processes of anchoring and objectifying that made up the particular social representation of Yugoslavia informed the construction of the Western Balkans.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WESTERN BALKANS AS AN AMORPHOUS REGIONAL SIGNIFIER (1996-1999)

4.1 Introduction

“Let me end with another remarkable quotation from Sir Winston Churchill from his famous speech to the University of Zurich in September 1946 when he pleaded, passionately, for European reconciliation. Referring to Europe, he said:

‘...This noble continent, comprising on the whole the fairest and the most cultivated regions of the earth, enjoying a temperate and equable climate, is the home of all the great parent races of the western world. It is the fountain of Christian faith and Christian ethics. It is the origin of most of the culture, arts, philosophy and science both ancient and modern times. If Europe were once united in the sharing of its common inheritance, there would be no limit to the happiness, to the prosperity and glory which its three or four hundred million people would enjoy...’

Let’s get to work, all together, and make Europe the world leader of the 21st Century.”

(Jacques Santer, London Guildhall, 4 May 1995)

The years before the turn of the century were characterised by an enthusiasm and anticipation for the growth of the European Union as an important international actor. Jacques Santer came into the office succeeding the Delors Commission which managed to push ahead the idea of deeper European integration and of a Union that has an international recognition and a substantive role. The key challenges that lay ahead for the former Luxembourgian Prime Minister were, first, to continue the institutional integration and, second, to meet the external challenges of the EU primarily in its neighbourhood. In this sense, the particular choice of picking a passage from Churchill’s speech was reflective of the latter cause. Jacques Santer used this excerpt to stress the connection between the two ‘Europes’: the post-WWII Europe with the post-Cold War one. Acknowledging the gravity of such historical moments and, in a way, moving towards ‘correcting’ the period of division of the European Continent, Santer wanted to emphasise the need for collective action to achieve prosperity for the benefit of the entire European population.

Based on this, the advent of a new era for the Balkans in the aftermath of the United States-sponsored halt of atrocities immediately presented the European Union with unprecedented tasks and challenges. The – temporary - ending of wars in the region exercised pressure to a number of European and international actors to come up with ideas and suggestions to deal with the post-Dayton realities of Southeastern Europe. Undoubtedly, the main burden and responsibility of the reconstruction and re-vamping of the Balkans fell on the EU and other European actors. Their strong commitments to the countries of the former Soviet bloc stem from core ideational sources for the Europeans: a return to the natural geographical and historical boundaries of Europe (Melescanu 1993: 13), and/or a return to democracy, after a historical detour, or a return to capitalism and to history (Jeszenszky 1992: 12-13).

We have been asserting that actors construct social representations which frame their actions. Yugoslavia was represented as a *sui generis* signifier, holding a special and partly separate standing from other CEE countries in the collective elaborations of the European Commission. After 1995, the depiction of Yugoslavia needed to make sense and become relevant in the new era of affairs for international, European and Balkan politics. The dissolution of the former Yugoslavia into a number of Republics and the strengthening of the EU institutions after the Maastricht Treaty asserted a more active entrepreneurship role for the Commission. Yugoslavia as an essential ‘signifier’ was now a *persona non grata* for the majority of the local actors.

In the aftermath of the Dayton Accords of November 1995, the region emerged in a state of emergency following the bloody conflicts. The outcome of the war sealed the end of Yugoslavia as a state entity; however, it did not constitute invalid the need for a social representation which would replace the previous social elaboration with a new understanding of the regional state of affairs. The transition to a new ‘collective-institutional elaboration’ for the area of the former Yugoslavia begged for a social representation, which has to (i) be anchored to the substantial-structural processes of the EU’s being and (ii) become objectified as the new accepted international reality for all actors. Based on these assumptions, a number of approaches emerged in order to grasp and relate to the new reality. This search for an innovative social representation found its expression in the emergence in the second half of the 1990s

of the *western Balkans*⁴⁰. This brand-new regional signifier essentially was aimed at taking over as the designated geographical and policy frame, but not in an unproblematic fashion.

We argue in this chapter that in the first years (1996-1999) after the catalytic Dayton Agreement, the European Commission held a social representation of the western Balkans as an '*amorphous*' signifier. By this, the thesis aims to highlight the high levels of contestation that dominated in the course of re-inventing the region that would replace the previous representation. These four years were marked by an intensive search for the optimum approach to the region at the European and international level. In this respect, two points are made about the formation of this social representation. First, the process of anchoring the western Balkans to the being of the European Union revealed a strong resemblance to the one detected with Yugoslavia - despite strong resistances for such linkage. Second, the process of objectifying the western Balkans to the EU's doing as the new international signifier was contested both in the way it was justified and acted upon by the Commission.

This fourth chapter will look into the period from the end of 1995 until the end of 1999, which was primarily stamped by NATO's Kosovo military campaign. The focus is to study and analyse all documents produced by the European Commission, either as policy papers, communication mediums, internal documents or as oral productions of members of the Commission in particular and the European Union overall. Additionally, the thesis will widen its scope to include reports and analyses made by media and research centres, as well as secondary literature which showcased a boom in dealing with post-Dayton Southeastern Europe.

The current chapter is divided into two parts: the first focuses on the first three years of the relationship of the European Union with the western Balkans; and the second part will look at the critical junction of 1999 when the events in the region exercised tremendous pressures to re-visit all international efforts for the region. Most part of

⁴⁰ The use of a small letter for the 'western' word is adopted on purpose, because the author wants to show the vacant and amorphous content of the social representation of the region in this period. Also, the idea has stemmed from EU documents, which have used the same word display in the studied period of this chapter, ie European Commission Bulletins of 1999 (Bulletin 12, point 1.4.64) and the General Report of the European Communities of 1999 (p. 258, 263, 367).

the literature that records this period tends to point to the failure of a credible, economic plan to revitalise the region, or to the insufficient security guarantees provided by international actors to sustain order. Below we will investigate closer the arguments found in the literature and highlight the existing gaps.

4.2 The literature on the European Union and the western Balkans

The US-brokered Dayton Accords turned most academics and analysts to centre on two issues for the Balkans. Their attention on building sustainable peace and promoting prosperity relied on rationalist and materialist explanations to initiate policies of change in the war-torn periphery. Primarily, it was a security-focused analysis that privileged the conflictual nature of politics in the region and the security externalities it produced for the wider European and Mediterranean area. Additionally, some studies were based on materially-based interdependence factors, such as economic and trade aspects. Both of them entailed two dimensions, one on intra-regional causes and one on external factors. Here, we will look closer how each of these literature have discussed the regional problem and pinpoint where the constructivist framework, as introduced by the thesis, complements such analyses.

On security-related approaches, an important part of the literature discussed the problems of the Balkans as an issue grounded on intra-regional reasons. The studies that aimed to grasp how the security constellation of the Balkans will look like after the Dayton arrangement pointed to the ethno-territorial tensions among the people of the Balkans. The fractured nature of the region coupled (such as issues of nationalism, borders and minorities) with diverging national interests of the constituents parts of former Yugoslavia created an explosive mixture in which the cease of hostilities had only a temporary character. In his study for the possibility of a security regime in Southeastern Europe in arms control, Panayotis J. Tsakonas argues that the various *“ethno-national entities perceive one another as ‘a priori’ aggressive and threatening”* (1999:4) and concludes that the deep heterogeneity in all terms *“does not augur well for its future”* (ibid.: 46). Radovan Vukadinovic makes two points in this respect: first, historical experience shows *“the Balkan countries find it difficult to build their cooperation arrangements on the basis of their own interests and needs”* (1994: 189); second, the landscape in the Balkans resembles pre-World War I Europe and may become a second Lebanon which will only result to let the Europeans

continue turning a deaf ear to former Yugoslavia (ibid.: 198). Similarly, Thanos Veremis focuses on a set of Balkan-specific factors in his written work to explain the efforts for regional cooperation – most of which failed to launch dramatically (1995; 2001).

However, the larger bulk of the relevant literature on security questions deals with the forces of interdependence that drags external actors in the security puzzle of the Balkans. The need for such new arrangements is embedding the Balkans as part of a wider, pan-European security architecture under construction in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War. Many writings that discuss the problem of post-Dayton Balkans are frequently found in edited volumes or reports that focus on European security. The terms used in this respect is the region-subregion and core-periphery (Buzan and Wæver 2003; Cottey 1999; Dwan 1999), meaning EU/Europe and Balkans, respectively. The central concern is the spill-over effects of insecurities to the neighbouring countries. They look at strategies to advance stability in Europe and have a strong prescriptive character. Furthermore, following the ‘neo-neo’ conceptual thinking (in relation to incentives, material gains and costs of compliance), the presence of a great/hegemonic power is the main factor to account of regional projects in the period 1996-1999. Above all, the US role was vital in building “*a coalition of states and institutions and securing political support in the Balkans for its policy aimed at the promotion of regional cooperation*” (Bechev 2005: 99). The strategic partnership between the EU and the US was part of the strategy of Washington to strengthen military and political ties in an effort to create a unified security order in the Continent (on security orders in the Euro-Atlantic area, see Kavalski 2005). This view looked at processes of integration of the EU and of NATO through the same lens of Western, Washington-based strategy of expanding areas of influence and off-setting security threats.

Next to this, a significant body of work was dealing with functional and economic studies to explain successes or failures of regional projects. The majority of academics and policy makers saw trade liberalisation (intra-regionally and between the region and the EU) as the crucial first step for the economic recovery and development. Once again, there are two distinct streams in such analysis: one highlighting the domestic aspects of the region and one relating the economic

transition and reconstruction as part of an international effort. Starting with the former, economic projects targeting (part of) the region as a single unit emerged in this period. Despite the fact that the region was never a homogenous economic entity (differences in internal policy and economic structure, divergence in economic growth, divergent national choices and targets), there were efforts, esp. by the Union, for a single economic policy (Kotios 2001: 236). Their argument was based on shared problems of underdevelopment and corruption, as well as the lack of infrastructure and investment. Instrumental reasoning drove Oscar Kovač to assert that Slovenia is considered a Balkan country because the Ljubljana doors (transport corridor) for the Balkans are important, as well as for the EU and the NATO (Kovač 1996: 3). The German scholar, Franz Lothar Altmann, who has worked extensively on the Balkans, makes the point that the war had devastating effects on the people of the region, because former Yugoslavia (until its dissolution) relied heavily on its inner trade (Altmann 2003: 127). The level of integration between the republics was comparable to that of the countries of the Common Market (see Appendix II). In this respect, the incentives and motivations stem from intra-regional factors who are the conducive, deciding agents to push for “*larger, integrated markets and the superiority of regional solutions in certain issue-areas*” (Bechev 2005: 16).

However, the largest numbers of articles and books dealing with this period looked at the external push factor. There were books that studied the Cold War and were concluding that despite the will for Balkan reconciliation and rapprochement, the penetration of the superpowers into the affairs of the region did not allow for genuine cooperation to flourish (Braun 1983). The American lid on the Balkan fire though showed the significance of the external actors on the regional future. The local economy and markets could only blossom under the push and institutional initiatives by actors outside the ‘regional complex’. The key idea behind most writings is the provision of incentives to the local actors to which they were expected to react rationally.

In particular, such explanations are found in the international schemes introduced to the region by Europeans, Americans and IOs (such as OSCE and IFIs). At first glance, the value of regional solutions seemed obvious, because (according to most studies) economic rationality leads to sufficient incentives for the establishment of

institutions and cooperative schemes. The intensity of 'external supply' to local demands was a striking feature: France, Italy, the United States, NATO and the EU introduced the most prominent projects with a regional character that entered the politics of Southeastern Europe between 1996-1999. The effort was to revert the trend of divergence between the rest of Europe (including the CEE countries) and the Balkan states. Petrakos and Totev note that the essence of the European idea may not tolerate a fragmented economic space of the Balkan region that forms a new expanded and much weaker European periphery (2001: i). This binary relationship between a core region and a peripheral subregion in economic terms became the central preoccupation of the literature as an external hegemonic account or as an instrumental, utility-maximising motivation of participating actors.

Bearing these points in mind, we are left with some issues being unaddressed. On one side, we are driven to understand what made a regional strategy such an important element of the Balkan political agenda. So far the arguments pointed to the fact that the local countries were interlinked with common problems and that external forces exercised pressure to the region to adopt models of cooperation, as a way to reap material benefits. To say it simply, it was partly a strategy inspired by the need to cope with economic and security problems, while at the same time there was a need to create a new understanding of the region that had a value of its own. On the other side, it is not made clear how actors came up with particular approaches and visions of the region in order to initiate policies. The impressive efforts of the international community to assist a successful transition were matched by an impressive variety of differing and/or overlapping programmes. Each international actor came up with a particular vision and solution that would match the needs on the ground. In the case of Europe of the 1990s, it needs to be stressed that the Union had few similarities as an international actor to any other historical period when examining external involvement in the Balkan affairs.

As discussed in Chapter One, if we assert that the EU and its transformative power rests on its *being* and on its *doing* (Nicolaidis and Howse 2002: 771), then the synergy of those two can be best understood by uncovering the EU's social representation as constructed and employed towards its neighbouring region. In other words, the social

representations that are employed rest on the way its *being* is anchored and how its *doing* is objectified. These are the points that we will investigate in the following part.

4.3 The European Commission and the western Balkans in the period 1996-1998

Waking up from the terror of the wars in its proximity, a central uncertainty of the time was how much of the old order and reality would disappear and what new structures and ideas would emerge. The period of rehabilitation of the region proved a very complex task. The co-existence of political, financial and security problems made the search for a reliable response by the international community a difficult undertaking to achieve. It can be argued that, in those first years, Western actors showed a stronger interest in maintaining a ‘negative peace’ (absence of armed hostilities) as the main flank of their efforts; while the enterprise of reconciliation and reform received a second-seat attention. These questions were intensified by debates among various international actors on how and by whom conditions could be shaped.

There were arguments that the Balkans were considered as outside the EU area of responsibility, in which the Union accepted to follow a ‘reverse-realist paradigm’, meaning to avoid position of leadership and responsibility (Kavalski 2005: 104). Despite the fact that those beliefs describe situations on the ground, they provide a partial picture. Firstly, they explain the lack of leadership in materialist terms (limited financial resources and undeveloped military capabilities). Secondly, they are not tracing how the EU found itself in such a position; rather they evaluate the role of the EU based on the end-result which is widely considered as disappointing. This thesis aspires to provide some answers to those gaps. First, the lack of an EU-agency in this period is better investigated when tracing the battle, in intra-EU terms, to establish a European social representation with regard to a new regional reality. Second, when passing judgements about the success or failures of policies, what is missed is how those policies and regional schemes related to previous institutional elaborations of the region.

What became clear in this period is the existence of contrasting regional projects by a number of international actors. The common ground of all these projects was the diverging regional visions. Almost every actor and every initiative came to the Balkans with a different story to tell and with a different project in mind. This

disaggregation which was eventually expressed in different institutional initiatives was discernible in the policy-making circles, as well as in academic debates. The main institutional expressions of the international community were the following:

(i) NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP), which had a strong bilateral focus, and included at the end of 1999 Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and Slovenia - next to Romania and Bulgaria (see Appendix III);

(ii) the South Balkan Development Initiative in 1995 was put forward by the US to assist the transition to market economies and included Albania, FYROM and Bulgaria (see Appendix IV);

(iii) the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI) in 1996, another US idea, had a cross-border outlook to tackle transnational crime, as well as environmental and economic problems through private funding from IFIs. The membership in this organisation acquired a different form once again: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Moldova, Romania, FYROM and Turkey, while Serbia (as Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), Croatia and Slovenia had unique stories in relation to their participation in this American scheme⁴¹ (see Appendix V);

(iv) the Royaumont Process, a French idea in December 1996 after the signing of the Paris component of Dayton Agreement, was an effort to balance out the American presence in the South-east region. It focused on good neighbourliness, cross-border cooperation and the advocacy of civil society. At the time of its initiation, it was the only regional project that included FRY in its framework⁴². The Declaration on a Stability Process and Good Neighbourliness that established it was signed by all Dayton signatories and neighbouring and other European states, namely Albania, BiH, Bulgaria, Croatia FYR Macedonia, FRY, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, Turkey, the EU, the Council of Europe and the OSCE (see Appendix VI);

⁴¹ Both Croatia and Slovenia declined originally out of fear that SECI was indirectly re-creating Yugoslavia. Croatia joined as full member in 2000 only after the death of the notorious Franjo Tudjman. Previously it had an observer status. Slovenia declined originally, and joined only after the US pressures and after Hungary formally became member. SFRY originally received an invitation to join SECI, but was left out in autumn of 1996 when Slobodan Milošević annulled the municipal elections to the detriment of his political opponent.

⁴² SFRY's membership was frozen in 1998 due to the increased violence in Kosovo which were attributed to the government in Belgrade.

(v) the Regional Approach (RA) in 1997 was the effort of the EU and the Commission in particular to come up with a response to those countries which had been left without an institutional relationship with the EU – despite the fact that they were considered European countries. The membership of the Regional Approach was Albania, BiH, Croatia, FYROM and FRY – a group that consisted of the soon-to-be-called western Balkans. The Regional Approach endured until 1999 and the Kosovo crisis (see Appendix VII);

(vi) the second, EU initiative was OBNOVA⁴³ which was a Commission's idea in 1996 as an immediate response to the war-torn areas of the Balkan conflicts. It was a complementary funding source to the PHARE programme relying exclusively on EU funds and being set-up to assist the countries of the former Yugoslavia that were not part of PHARE or were only eligible for limited programmes under PHARE. Four countries were included for OBNOVA funding: BiH, Croatia, FRY and FYROM (see Appendix VIII).

It is noteworthy to mention here that, besides these official institutional initiatives, the relevant academic literature was also rich in either proposing or predicting the emergence of new regional groups replacing the 'old order'. A striking suggestion influenced by geopolitical considerations came from the editors of the Italian review 'LIMES'. In their article they propose the creation of 'The Euroslavia Project' which includes the entire South-east Europe (minus Greece and Turkey) as a way to "*transform trench boundaries into European borders*" (Caracciolo and Korinman 1996: 17). Similarly, other scholars tried to interpret regional groupings emergence on the basis of ethnicity (Pan-Slavism) or religion (Islamic and Orthodox axes) (Petković 1996: 2).

Investigating closely the institutional projects, and in a comparative fashion, we can extract four common aspects - independent of the final impact these international projects actually had and the subsequent assessment anyone can make about their utility and effectiveness. Firstly, they all included some form of regional clauses in their objectives and/or conditions for disbursing their resources. Secondly, all these projects came up with different regional borders and regional representations; in

⁴³ OBNOVA means restoration or renewal in Serbian and Croatian language.

essence, every project envisioned a distinct region in the South-eastern periphery and subsequently had a unique list of members. Thirdly, all had an understanding of the purpose of the projects being an end in itself and claiming not to be designed for leading to integrations/accessions into broader groups and organisations⁴⁴. Lastly, they all entailed an outside-in perspective of the type and function of this region in the Balkans; the initiatives relied on external funding and the decision-making centres were all located outside the targeted region. All of these common aspects help us understand how divergent the preferences of the actors were. The cognitive materials which made up those international projects for South-eastern Europe were of an uncoordinated nature, lacked links between them and had contrasting regional delineations.

In the following part of this chapter, the central concern of the thesis is on the EU projects of the time, and especially the fifth and sixth initiative mentioned previously (Regional Approach and OBNOVA). We will look how the social representation of Yugoslavia as a contested *sui generis* signifier informed the thinking of Brussels-based policy-makers to engage with the new reality in Europe's south-east periphery.

4.3.1 An amorphous regional signifier: the emergence of the western Balkans

“The Peace Agreement which has just been reached in Dayton, Ohio, is very good news indeed. [...] We must now turn to the future. The reconstruction of the countries of Ex-Yugoslavia requires a major international effort. The European Union and its Member States will contribute in a substantial way and in the same spirit as they have carried out their peace keeping and humanitarian operations up to now. The Commission and the World Bank are now in contact in order to organise a pledging conference for all potential donor countries which should take place as soon as possible. Moreover, the European Union is ready to play an important part in the civil implementation of the whole peace process”

(Santer and Van den Broek Statement 1995)

The joint statement by the Commission's President, Jaques Santer, and the Commissioner for External Relations, Hans van den Broek, after the signing of the

⁴⁴ A partial exception here can be regarded to be NATO's PfP.

Dayton Agreement intended to give a 'boost of moral' to the Europeans with the ceasing of the armed conflicts. The encouraging, US-stamped, development was accompanied by an initial rhetorical determination to see the European Union become more pro-active with its backyard problem. The European Commission boasted that it was the right timing to head the efforts to "*provide a rapid response to the urgency of the situation arising after the Dayton Agreement*" (statement included in a report in the Court of Auditors 1998: 53). It was a period of significant institutional changes in the common foreign and security policy. The EU's external relations were entering a new phase with the Treaty of Amsterdam and the Saint Malo Franco-British summit on European defence. These events turned the focus on the establishment of an EU Foreign Affairs instrument as an important part of the European edifice in need of visibility and effectiveness⁴⁵.

In this context, the European Commission was eager to establish a voice and a role in the growing field of external relations. In May 1996, Hans Van den Broek tabled the idea of a European-commanded peacekeeping force to succeed IFOR - the International Forces coordinated by NATO in Bosnia after December of that year. Commissioner van den Broek claimed that everyone was aware of "*the risk of a political and military void after IFOR's withdrawal, and Europe must be ready to take special responsibility*" (European Report 1996). His proposal was immediately condemned by Paris and Bonn⁴⁶ as irresponsible and premature. However, it was indicative of the wish of the Commission to introduce a more active, European approach to international problems.

Regarding the Balkans, the message for the European Commission was that the hour of Europe had arrived – albeit with a five year delay. The major foreign policy challenge was a European-led revamp of war-torn Southeast Europe. This challenge

⁴⁵ In EU's external relations, the Treaty of Amsterdam introduced a High Representative for EU Foreign Policy (Javier Solana) who together with the Presidents of the Council and the European Commission gives a 'name and a face' to EU policy in its dealings with the outside world. Although the Treaty did not provide for a common defence, it did increase the EU's responsibilities for peacekeeping and humanitarian work, in particular by forging closer links with the Western European Union (WEU). The St Malo Summit was the initiative that confirmed the pressing need for a European defence strategy supported by "*credible military forces, the means to decide to use them and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises*" (St Malo Declaration 4 December 1998).

⁴⁶ In 1990, Berlin became the capital of the Federal Republic of Germany, but Bonn remained the seat of government until 1999.

referred to the EU's institutional ability to transfer its social representation of Yugoslavia into a new comprehensible and acceptable reality for the post-Dayton era. We have ascertained that Yugoslavia was a key representation for the Commission's policy to comprehend its neighbourhood. It was achieved by representing Yugoslavia as a contesting signifier to (i) the EU itself as the historic embodiment of post-World War II institution of peace, stability and prosperity and (ii) the Central and Eastern European countries as the opposite trend in the case of failure to converge to the European mainstream. The contesting representation of Yugoslavia impacted on the new approaches that the Commission initiated in the studied period. The Commission had to re-invent a social representation that would preserve the European anchoring bonds while creating a sellable product that would not make reference to the resuscitation of 'contesting and contested' Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia was being abandoned as a signifier, but important tenets of the anchoring and objectifying process managed to survive in the discourses and practices of the Commission.

The period of 1996-1999 was marked by the first European responses in the frame of re-inventing South-East Europe. The transformation from Yugoslavia to the western Balkans began, as we noticed in the previous chapter, since the mid-1995 and was systematically discussed in the publications of the Commission from 1996 onwards; succeedingly, the European Parliament took on board the adoption of a regionally based approach for the four countries of former Yugoslavia and Albania (EP Report 1997a: 6); until finally becoming officially referenced for the first time by the European Council in the Vienna Declaration of 1998. The de-construction of Yugoslavia and its transformation into a regional formation allowed the Commission in particular to implement a regional thinking in its policies - what Karen E. Smith describes as the export goal of the EU and a model of multilateral, inter-state relations (2003: 144). The encouragement of regional cooperative domains has been thought to define the Union itself as well as other regional groups affiliated to the EU (ACP, Mediterranean). In this sense, the transition from a fragmented Yugoslavia into a functioning region has been thought to be a political imprint of the EU. However, the idea was met with challenges both in the anchoring and the objectifying process.

This thesis adopts the view that the European Commission's social representation of the western Balkans was of an '*amorphous regional signifier*'. The Commission's

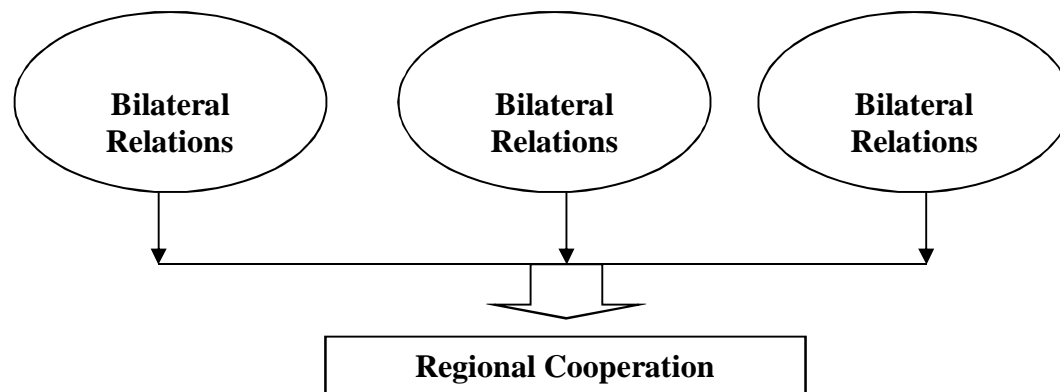
effort to establish a common denominator for the European and international community proved a difficult task to achieve. What we claim is that the Commission was neither able to attach substantive qualities to the western Balkans signifier nor to render the utility of a Western Balkans' regional re-imagination understandable. The sui generis and contesting content of the previous social representations retained their relevance to the new state of affairs and to the subsequent policies of the period. These assertions are based on the fact that two aspects hindered the development of the western Balkans in the period 1996-1998.

The first refers to the divergent approaches between the two EU institutions in the external affairs: the Council and the Commission. The basic understanding that the Commission sponsored was to push for regional cooperation as an enabling framework along with the bilateral agreements (Sketch 1). Regional cooperation was introduced as the main idea of the Commission for the region to overcome its war legacies. The western Balkan needed to be based on the co-construction of both such types of political relations. Regional dynamics are an autonomous force of their own that can co-create a new environment for Southeastern Europe beside the classic foreign policy depictions of one-to-one relations. The idea is that regional and bilateral aspects will feed each other in stabilising and opening new opportunities for local stakeholders. It needs to be noted here that the European Parliament largely advocated such an approach to the regional cooperation, as highlighted in its report of April 1997, stating that *“the concept of the regionally based approach is regarded as a stimulus to political stability and the stability of the rule of law and a means of fostering cultural and economic development and cooperation amongst the countries concerned, between them and their neighbours and with the European Union, cooperation being one of the fundamental prerequisites for any peace initiative”* (EP 1997a: 5).



Sketch 1: Relationship of regional and bilateral policies as understood by the European Commission

The Council, on the other hand, did not adopt the same understanding of the role of regional structures for the western Balkans. The Council showed an interest to promote relations with each state in the region and to establish relationships with their political personnel. The regional component in the Council's narrative was based upon the implementation of bilateral agreements. The Council believed that the states themselves have the task and the obligation to run their regional affairs and the bilateral basis is the domain conditioning such a prospect. In this period, the Council neither collectively met with the Balkan leaders nor did they take part in the meetings of the only local initiative, the South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP), since 1996.



Sketch 2: Relationship of regional and bilateral policies as understood by the Council.

The second aspect refers to the western Balkans not being shared by the international community as an accepted, common signifier. Regional cooperation was used as a medium and a goal in most international endeavours to bring peace and stability to the region, but the differences lay in the shape and content of the regional order. Defining the region was a point of controversy between the policy-makers. The multiplicity of regional schemes revealed diverging representations by the actors involved in the rehabilitation of the Balkans. There were dividing lines about the role of regions and regional projects in post-conflict situations, as well as questions of (externally) ordering them. On one side the European Commission aimed at (i) containing the focus of its policies to a small number of states, (ii) taking an inclusive approach, and (iii) elevating regional policies as equally important to national/bilateral aspects. Most other international projects aimed at (i) expanding the membership of their project to

include a wide range of actors, (ii) adopted a selective policy approach, and (iii) downplayed regional clauses and devoted little to argue for regional solutions.

In the following section, we will look closer at the ways the European Commission managed to construct its social representation of the western Balkans.

4.3.1.1 Anchoring the western Balkans

The western Balkans entered the political discussions as the successor of a turbulent state of affairs in need for transformation. The dominant representation of Yugoslavia as a ‘contesting and contested’ signifier reached its limits when the Dayton Accords were signed and a new reflection and relationship was needed in the Continent. The construction of a new social representation is a vital part for policy-makers to understand the content and shape of the regional signifier, the western Balkans. Instead of focusing on the effective delivery of the Commission’s programmes or the lack of resources and political will in implementing them, the anchoring process of a social representation looks at the way the European space is linking identities, norms and practices/experiences to the western Balkans signifier and how it then generates preferences for all the actors involved.

The western Balkans, the successor of Yugoslavia, was not absolved by the contesting content that the European Commission attributed to it. The western Balkans in this period was a transform-able regional construction that had a distance to cover so as to be considered a proper insider to the EU. Hans van den Broek writes in an article for the European Business Journal that the Union needs to adapt institutionally in anticipation of enlargement that might see “*an increase from 15 to perhaps 25 or even 30 member states*” (1996: 9). He essentially hints to the prospect that not only the CEE countries are soon-to-be members (twenty-five EU member states as of 2004) but he includes the rest of the western Balkans in his calculations (talking about thirty member states) – albeit with an undertone of scepticism. Keeping these in mind, we observe that the western Balkans was strongly associated with the European identity in cultural terms. Furthermore, the norms of regional cooperation and integration were introduced next to the standard norms included in the Copenhagen criteria for the first time for an affiliated to the EU state/region. The anchoring process was dependent here on inaction on behalf of the Commission to define the terms and conditions of

the norms for the regional signifier. Finally, there was an identifiable effort to use regional policies from other regions to the Balkans – a practice which was raising questions since such policies were transposed from cases addressing non-European regions.

Identity

We have asserted in previous parts of the thesis that the western Balkans were inserted in European politics neither as an external object nor as an integral part of Europe; it can be best understood if approached as an in-betweenener. This means that it is a construct that serves a dual purpose: being an insider and an outsider simultaneously. In this particular period that we deal with here, the thesis takes the view that it was represented as a centrifugal in-betweenener; a regional signifier that diverges from the European Self. This assertion coincides with a temporal and spatial identification with Europe. The temporal positioning of western Balkans was not just with Europe's past as we witnessed in the previous chapter, but Europe's past was earmarked with Yugoslavia as a system of meanings contesting 'modern Europe'. This feature of the anchoring process to the European identity entailed strong cultural connotations in the Commission's discourse. Regarding the spatial dimension, the western Balkans continued to be referenced in relation to the Central and Eastern Europe; however, the CEE was already granted membership prospects and what we observed was the CEE being anchored on civic/political grounds and the western Balkans was kept at a 'cultural' distance from the candidate states.

Regarding the first aspect, the landmark of Dayton was critical, because it did aim to close the door to the enmities of the past and pave a new way for the region. However, it was evident from the beginning that the western Balkans would not immediately escape the cognitive legacy of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia as Europe's past was the identity against which to anchor the western Balkans' representation. Hans van den Broek stated that *"EU's policy towards the Dayton countries must be clear and transparent in order to be effective. Our partners must know exactly what they stand to gain from compliance with the criteria and what they stand to lose if their efforts are not up to standards"* (PR Newswire 15 April 1998). The dilemma for the western Balkans is not whether they are Europe but what type of Europe: Europe of the past as exemplified by Yugoslavia's image in the 1990s or as a transformative

regional signifier converging with Europe's modernity. In this frame, the first important report by the Commission on the situation in Southeast Europe in 1996 stated that the aim of the EU is twofold: first the intervention of the EU is to foster an all-round regional cooperation, as the most suitable solution and second to avoid re-creating "*new frontiers or a new Balkan alliance*" (Commission 1996a: 2) or "*recreate structures of the former Yugoslavia*" (Commission 1996d). This was contrasted with opinions expressed from the Parliament which referred in its 1996 report that it favours a "*Yugoslav Economic Area which might form part of a Balkan-wide economic and security area*" (EP 1996: point 13). It meant that the Commission's effort was not to avoid region-building endeavours, but to find a new social representation away from the ideas and concepts of the past. Therefore, the first part of the anchoring process was to detach the new construction from its past.

Regarding the second aspect, the former Yugoslavia attracted the attention and involvement of many international interests. The involvement of a variety of external actors in the Balkan affairs made it difficult for the European Commission to assume a distinct leadership role. The bundle of actors and interests in the regional affairs did not contribute to the discovery of a clear European understanding of the role of the western Balkans in the European political landscape. At the same time, Central Europe (with the second geographic designation – Eastern - being steadily dropped in the references) was portrayed as an ever-closing group to Europe. Most had signed Europe Agreements and had some type of negotiations with Brussels under way. What we had was a two-tier Europe in the EU's external environment. The first were portrayed as recognisably Europeans, while the western Balkans entailed a different quality. Jacques Santer talked about the effort to establish a visible foreign policy for the EU in order to contain the crisis in oriental Europe (Santer Speech 1998: 5). Added to this, the representations of different regional groups inescapably create mental divisions and added to the fuzzy representation of the western Balkans as a European regional project. Van den Broek tried to make a case that the whole idea of "east-west" needs to be a distant memory for the people of Europe. He paraphrased Theodore Roosevelt's quote by claiming that there should be no room in this continent for hyphenated-Europeans (west-Europeans, central-Europeans, east-Europeans), but only for Europeans, sharing the same rights and obligations, free to pursue their own vision, their own destiny (van den Broek Speech 1995). Despite this

wishful expression of an avoidance of mental divisions, there was an inescapable identity-calibration in place for the two regional groups in the EU's approach.

Norms

The anchoring process of the regional cooperation norm as a vital ingredient in the relationship among the regional countries and between the region and the European Union was promoted by the European Commission (in concordance with the European Parliament as well) – and not by the Council. In the conclusions of the General Affairs Council in October 1995 regarding the former Yugoslavia, the document refers that (i) the long-term policy towards the region is dependent, among other conditions, on regional *economic* cooperation, and (ii) future agreements need to be based on the *willingness* of the concerned states to engage in regional cooperation (Council 1995). In 1996, the Commission had to start drawing its policies for the Balkans on a type of regional outlook that the Council advocated, but underspecified. Its directives to establish friendly, good neighbourly relations among the local actors were based on economic reconstruction, bilaterally binding agreements with the EU and wishful thinking. In the end of 1996, the Council Conclusions on Yugoslavia “*emphasized that the regional approach should be utilized as an important instrument in the overall peace process*” (EU Bulletin No. 10 1996), making the point that regional cooperation is more of a jigsaw in the bigger puzzle for stability and progress of the region and not synonymous to and integral part of the goal of peace itself. This approach became clearer when the General Affairs Council of April 1997 highlighted in its ‘Conditionality Strategy’ that the EU intends to enhance bilateral relations to achieve greater cooperation between the former Yugoslavia countries. Added to this, the Council avoided specifying regional cooperation as a compliance criterion for its graduated approach to the region and did not include it in its ‘*operational, verifiable elements*’ for closer contractual relations with the EU⁴⁷. However, in the two conditionality reports/assessments of the countries performance, regional cooperation was considered a criterion – albeit attracting very short attention of a generic fashion.

⁴⁷ The GA Council of April 1997 outlined four compliance criteria: (i) democratic principles, (ii) human rights and rule of law, (iii) respect for and protection of minorities, and (iv) market economy reform.

The European Commission worked intensively to introduce a regional rationale in the new relationship after Dayton as a vital link to further the western Balkans integration in the EU. Anchoring the norm of regional cooperation for the western Balkans was retained through a symbolic manifestation of its value. The approach of the Commission was to elevate the norm of regional cooperation from a complementary and voluntary action to an indispensable, core principle for the establishment of viable relations among the local partners. It is a normative prescription applied both for the Balkans and for Europe. Commission's President talking about International Relations in Paris argued that the EU, as a 'remarkably integrated regional unit', brings better results jointly than the sum of what each member-state could do individually (Santer Speech 1996a). Using the Balkans as a testing ground, he makes the case that the cooperative spirit of the Stability and Growth Pact is apparent in the Royaumont Process "*aimed at encouraging the countries of south-east Europe to cooperate amongst themselves in a region deeply scarred by the Yugoslav conflict*" (ibid.).

Whereas the Council saw regional cooperation as a special approach that needed to be attached because of the special conditions of the Balkans, the European Commission and the Parliament argued about its vitality on the basis that regional cooperation is one of the constituent elements of European integration itself (Commission 1996c: 7; EP 1997a: 4). Both institutions advocated a more rigorous approach that would base the construction of a new representation on regional cooperation norm. The May 1996 report of the Parliament criticised the piecemeal approach to the former Yugoslavia. It favoured a regional approach, because the criteria laid down in 1991 and the opinions of the Badinter Committee were not satisfactory, according to the conclusions of the report. In sum, it argued that "*rather than encouraging the fragmentation of the former Yugoslavia, the European Union should aim in the long term, once the prospects for peace have been firmly established [...]. The European Union should then help by means of negotiation to reintegrate this region into Europe as a whole: it has after all sufficient financial and other instruments at its disposal to make such a policy attractive*" (EP 1996 point 13). Additionally, either at a sub-European level or at an international level, regional types of organising relations comprises the future outline of world order, according to Jacques Santer. He positions Europe as a privileged player due to its nature which gives it the advantage to have "*a special*

relationship with the regions that represent over 80% of the world in the XXI century” (Santer Speech 1996b).

However, it should not escape our minds that the importance attached to regional frames was problem-free. The effort to introduce regional cooperation to functional needs on the ground, as well as a normative value raised question. With reference to the former, the European Commission’s push for functional solutions in real, structural problems was not consistently followed through. Indicative is the energy field where the European Commission announced in late September of 1996 the creation of a task force that will try to boost energy cooperation in the Balkan region. The ‘Balkans Energy Interconnections Task Force’, presided by the Energy Commissioner, had the responsibility to coordinate investment projects to link gas, electricity and oil networks coming from the Black Sea Region (Financial Times 1996). *“Because of the crucial location of the Balkans in terms of international energy links, they are of special importance to the European Union”*, the Commission said in a statement (Commission 1996b). The aim of the Balkan Task Force was to endeavour the financing and implementation of energy networks in the Balkans and their interconnection with trans-European energy networks. The membership of this special group by November 1997 was Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, FYROM, Greece, Romania and Turkey – a mixture of countries belonging to the wider Balkan area, but did not correspond to the ‘regional’ representation of the western Balkans from ‘functionalist’ angles.

With reference to the latter, we detect a highly varied content when looking into the system of meaning attached to regional cooperation in this period. The second report on economic relations of the western Balkans countries in 1998 interpreted regional cooperation as an important element of *“the readiness of these countries to engage in cross-border cooperation within the region”* (1998a:1). Next to the cross-border approach, regional projects are also about joint ventures among willing partners who find it useful for a discussion of matters of common interest (Commission 1997d: 5). The European Commission in its report on regionally cooperative schemes around Europe referred to its wishes to see regional cooperation being undertaken by participants committed to be actively involved in common undertakings (ibid: 2). Moreover, we observe that regional cooperation (and integration) was only partly

subsidised, as stated in a report of the Commission asking the Union (in essence, the Council) to “ *earmark a given part of the funding for economic cooperation for operations fostering regional cooperation*” (1996a: 4). Taking these into account, the Commission’s report on the compliance to the conditions laid to the countries without an association agreement equated the ‘compliance to regional cooperation’ as the normalisation – or, sometimes, de-securitisation - of bilateral relations (1998b)⁴⁸. Regional cooperation did not receive a regional character, because there was not a regional structure against which to assess regional cooperation efforts. Instead, we noticed that regional cooperation was essentially downgraded as a matter of dyadic relationships in an un-specified regional context. In sum, we can infer that the norm of regional cooperation was only minimally attached to EU ‘being’ in the Regional Approach.

Practices and Experiences

The link with the western Balkans became possible when the European Commission engaged with a regional outlook of the western Balkans as a standardised policy for all its external partners. The anchoring of the western Balkans was not so much based on the experience and practices lend from the Central and Eastern European case, but more from the ones implemented for Yugoslavia – meaning an insistence on sui generis forms of interlinkages. As referred earlier, the western Balkans was measured and represented in relation to its Yugoslav legacy, rather than the contemporary political developments in the rest of Europe. First of all, this process was bluntly expressed in the Commission’s first communication to the Council and the Parliament in February 1996 when it stressed about a future agreement with the states in this region that there is no need to speculate about “*what they will be like or what they will be called*” (Commission 1996a: 3). Any bilateral or regional agreement would be devised from scratch and would be tailored to the unique circumstances of the region, in the form of ‘sui generis’ approach(es).

⁴⁸ Reading carefully the reports on the conditionality compliance of ‘regional cooperation’ of the western Balkans countries a number of questionable assertions and ill-structured paragraphs are revealed. When addressing Albania, the Report talks about economic cooperation with neighbouring countries, such as FYROM and Bulgaria (1998: 26). Bulgaria, of course, is neither a geographic neighbour nor part of the western Balkans. Also, discussing FRY’s regional cooperation compliance on trade and economic cooperation with neighbours, the Report looks at its relations with Albania by talking about the Albanian rejection of the request to raise relations to ambassadorial level and the lack of dialogue in Kosovo (ibid: 18).

Further to this, the cooperating countries of former Yugoslavia, as the Council statement of the 29-30 April 1997 includes, will be granted economic concessions, such as duty-free access and elimination of quantitative restrictions on industrial and agricultural products. These autonomous preferential measures link the western Balkans to past agreements entered with Yugoslavia. The General Affairs Council specifically mentioned that these measures are largely similar to those accorded by the 1980 EEC Yugoslavia cooperation agreement (Council 1997a: 13). In addition, and on a similar note, the Council Ministers decided to follow up a proposal by the European Commission aimed at drawing new ties between the EU and Albania. *“This objective could be achieved by the conclusion of a new sui generis Agreement slightly less ambitious than the agreements with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, but more attractive than the current Cooperation Agreement”* referred the announcement (European Report 1996a: 3). The discussions on a new relationship will be in line with certain countries in South-Eastern Europe that *“the European Community has not adopted directives for the negotiation of association agreements”* (Commission 1996c: 1) and will include the issue of the former Yugoslavia (European Report 1996a: 3) and the possibilities offered by the 1992 Trade and Cooperation Agreement in the eve of unrests in the country⁴⁹ (Council 1997b). It is indicative that the first official ‘regional visit’ of the President of the Commission and the Italian Foreign Minister, Lamberto Dini⁵⁰, had in the top of its agenda the Commission’s regional approach which involved the four, former Yugoslavia republics minus Ljubljana plus Tirana (European Report 1996c: 1-2).

In sum, the initiation of the western Balkans representation was strongly anchored by the European Commission to its past, to Yugoslavia’s legacy. The need to come up with a European answer to the fragility of the Balkans pushed the Commission to create a new regional construction, which would contain in the mind of Europeans the South-eastern problem. The western Balkans needed to battle primarily with its past Self. This was the way the Commission represented the situation to the local actors and internationally. The anchoring process between the western Balkans and the EU

⁴⁹ In the first months of 1997, civil disorder in the aftermath of democratic discontent emerged and the collapse of pyramid investment schemes created massive protests and riots in the streets of the major towns, especially in Southern Albania. For further information, see Jarvis 1999; Kola 2003: 321-327.

⁵⁰ Italy was holding the rotating Presidency of the EU in the first semester of 1996.

linked the regional signifier to Europe culturally, as a historic battle between the Balkans past and present, and not as much as a fight of and for the EU/Europe.

4.2.1.2 Objectifying the western Balkans

The hardest task of the European Commission was to give flesh and blood to the western Balkans, and to ‘sell’ its product to the European and international community. A Croatian Professor of International Relations, Nada Švob-Đokić, supported the idea that regional cooperation can only be small, short-term and dispersed. She based her conclusion on the fact that, in the period up to the end of the Balkan wars in the 1990s, “*a polymorphous structure of the Balkans explains the absence of a hegemonic state or a hegemonic regional project. [...] The outer regional cooperation in the Balkans has never developed institutional frameworks, although a number of multilateral and bilateral agreements have been signed. [...] Regional cooperation among the Balkan states thus remains a rather abstract idea*” (1998: 194). Similarly, Tamàs Novák argues that, in spite of geographic proximity, these countries have not relied upon each other historically (more so on external powers) and therefore ‘organic’ cooperation was not present with neighbouring countries, but with those outside the region (1998: 247). Therefore, the stake was to come up with an ‘EU regional-structural assistance’ to create a Balkan framework to plan and administer any promised assistance (Jackson 2001: 58).

To make these possible, the European Commission’s representation for the newly emerging western Balkans needed to become intelligible. However, it was met with obstacles in all three social mechanisms that we investigate in two aspects: first, with regards to the position of the western Balkans as a group towards the EU which constantly had a secondary status of importance; and, second, in relation to the specific composition of the group which was treated as a two-group region: the Dayton Agreement countries and the countries not involved in the war. In order to showcase these points, we will look at the objectifying efforts of the Commission. The first mechanism of legitimation was met with challenges as to the western Balkans membership. The decision-making procedure was justified by arguments of (i) dealing with the problems and the requirements arising from the Dayton Agreement and (ii) prohibiting the re-creation of Yugoslavia. The second procedural mechanism, the appropriateness, refers to the Commission effort to determine what

ought to be done for the western Balkans. The process of empowering regional cooperation as a '*tour de force*' next to bilateral initiatives was questioned by the EU's own inconsistencies and by the international community's discord. Finally, the Commission chose to strive for minimal institutionalisation due to its own lack of experiences in acting in neighbouring regions in need for rehabilitation and stability. This first period of institutionalising the western Balkans involved the establishment of formal political links, but did not go further than that. The Commission's representation was exported as an amorphous signifier to the world.

Legitimation

Since we accept that the European Commission, as a non-state/supranational actor, is inclined to use non-material resources to push for its representations to become accepted as good and desirable. It started as an exercise in legitimation attracting the interest and involvement of others as the major foreign policy challenge of its time. A number of states, such as members of the EU, regional (Turkey, Russia) and external (USA), as well as international organisations (OSCE, Council of Europe, NATO), were claiming to have the right to endeavour to (re-)construct the post-Dayton environment. The EU became the most active actor in engaging with a variety of policies in declaring to implement a comprehensive approach to the problem in the form of its Regional Approach. The Commission especially tried to take the regional leading role by pushing for a new regional representation.

In this respect, the legitimation referred to the process of regional construction that would gain the maximum legitimacy. This task of assembling the fragmented southeast Europe was not just to divide the region between those with a clear EU future from the ambivalent ones, as discussed in the literature (Bechev 2005; Blockmans 2007); it was more to re-build regional relations without reconstituting the official shape of Yugoslavia. The EU membership prospect was not granted to any of the Regional Approach countries, but bilaterally the EU evolved its relations with two countries - the states not bound by the Dayton provisions - by holding two Trade and Cooperation agreements with Albania and FYROM by 1997. The central planning in Brussels of the new (western) Balkan arrangement included Albania and not Slovenia. Some authors have focused on the role of EU member-states, such as Austria and Italy, to push Ljubljana outside the Balkan rim. What is more crucial though in the

effort to legitimise the western Balkans were two aspects: on one side, the western Balkans would avoid comparisons with Yugoslavia; and on the other side, to use Slovenia as the anchor for the rest countries – as we witnessed with Yugoslavia being used by the Europeans as a model for Central and Eastern Europe. A European Parliament resolution commenting on the Commission's communication on humanitarian aid to former Yugoslavia referred that *"the European Union should not a priori exclude any of these new states from the successive agreements from which the countries of Central and Eastern Europe have benefitted. Slovenia, which was fortunate enough to get out of the war very early, shows the way the others can take"* (EP 1996a).

However, there were two issues surrounding the legitimation process that support the representation of the western Balkans as an amorphous regional signifier. The European Commission's endeavours suffered from difficulties both at the political and technical level, as well as locally and internationally⁵¹. Regarding the former, the EU policies were sending a particular message to the region: firstly, legal provisions need to be established and, secondly, cooperation in the region needs to take off. The first aspect was not easily implementable because it presumes stable institutions in the region ready to take on responsibilities which they were not capable of shouldering; and the second aspect directly implied that cooperation among the regional actors is the prioritised commodity of the EU for the Balkans. In the first document on the development of relations with the region published by the Commission after the Paris Act of December 1995, there was no reference to associating the region with integration in the EU. Instead, cooperation in the western Balkans was conceived as the 'golden fleece' needed to be fetched, so that European aid and support could be disbursed. It is a striking indicator that the word 'cooperation' was included thirty-two times in this document that consisted of five pages. Moreover, on the technical aspects, the Commission was given ECU 1.000 Mio for the period 1996-99 for reconstruction and humanitarian aid amounted to ECU 315 Mio between 1996 and 1997. At the end of '97, the mobilisation and disbursement rate of aid and reconstruction programme from the EU was slower than other donors – 29% EU and 52% others (see Appendix IX). The Court of Auditors attributed the lack of

⁵¹ The 1998 report by the Court of Auditors touches upon such issues.

implementing efficient policies to the region to “*the Commission’s inability to deploy sufficient human resources, as well as the poor quality of the cooperation between Commission departments*” (1998: 31)⁵². The result was to have a large amount of initiatives at hand to deal with and run, such as ECHO, PHARE, CAFAO, EAP and OBNOVA - each of which had a different regional focus and funding source instead of being funded by the EU (ibid.).

The problematic legitimization process met difficulties at the local and the international level too, as stated above. Local actors stood fiercely against the regional approach, because of the political decision not to include the western Balkans in the enlargement context, but as an external relations topic; a matter of ‘External Issues’, as framed in the Vienna conclusions, which make reference to adopted common strategies on Russia, Ukraine, the Mediterranean region (Barcelona Process and Middle East peace process) and the western Balkans (Euro-East 1998: 3; European Council 1998). The oral report of Jacques Santer and Lamberto Dini to the General Affairs Council in Luxemburg of June 1996 was that the approach, agreed by the Council in February 1996, “*has been unanimously rebuffed [...] and all four states insisted their futures lay in closer association with the EU rather than with their neighbours*” (Bates 1996). Internationally, the western Balkans was an unidentified term for policy-makers and no policy document by international organisations or states (EU or non-European) mentioned it as a designated regional representation shared by other than the EU Commission. Two indicative cases highlight the issue: first in the collaboration of the European Commission with the World Bank to address stability and prosperity in South Eastern Europe, the western Balkans was not discussed as a framework worth focusing and working on jointly. In reference to regional cooperation, there was a fairly reduced attention to regional or cross-border aspects. In the second case, the Council avoided a substantial emphasis on the western Balkans and focused to implement bilateral policies. In its 20 December 1996 decision, it extended autonomous preferential arrangements to imports of products originating in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Council 1996c) excluding FRY and without mentioning the prospects of a region-wide cover of a trade and cooperation policy.

⁵² In addition to these intra-EU factors, the problematic environment in former Yugoslavia is also to be blamed for, according to the report.

Appropriateness

This initial period after Dayton involved a series of actions to delineate and establish an appropriate regional vision. This social mechanism of appropriateness is important because it propels the thesis to investigate the extent to which the European Commission was convinced that the western Balkans framework was the appropriate regional signifier. The problem in this respect emerged when the Commission was unable to empower the representation of the western Balkans as the *region appropriat  * for the post-Dayton Balkan reality over other, rival approaches implemented by either international organisations or states. The centrality of its role in the Balkan affairs was faced with two issues: (i) the problematic role of European leadership in sustaining itself as the appropriate leader for the western Balkans and (ii) the inability to sustain a regional outlook for the western Balkans as the appropriate reference point.

Starting with the former point, the European Union recognised from an early stage that it needed to become the main initiator of aid, reconstruction funds and leadership for the war-torn countries in Southeastern Europe. The European Parliament was urging the EU to engage with the region from a leadership position by mentioning in its report that “*the Union is irretrievably committed to becoming a Balkan power with specific responsibilities and interests. This must colour European attitudes to the flashpoints in former Yugoslavia and Albania*” (EP 1998a: 10). Since 1995, the Commission was highlighting that the EU was the principal financial backer of humanitarian aid to the peoples of the former Yugoslavia. EU aid, including existing bilateral aid, amounted to ECU 1.800 million, with the ECHO programme contributing ECU 1.180 million. Humanitarian aid by the European Union represented 65% of the total aid provided by the international Community since the beginning of the conflict (Commission 1995h: 1). However, this picture does not show whether the EU actively pursued a leading role or if it was a reactive and anaemic response to the pressures by the local actors and the international community. The criticism to the EU trailing in the leadership role is the fact that the Balkans being a legitimate area of responsibility was not matched by an equitable and appropriate political response. Michael Smith described EU’s efforts of the period as being “*a method of diplomatic coordination, explicitly intergovernmental and reliant on words rather than the deployment of the softest common instruments*” (2003: 561).

The issue was not that the Balkans was constructed as an outsider to the EU's legitimate 'business area', as Kavalski claims (2005: 104), but that the EU avoided to match its leadership claims with the sustainable regional representation for its neighbourhood. The restraint to become the appropriate regional leader, a 'reverse-realist paradigm', as Simon Duke calls the EU's foreign policy (1994), is indicative in the Commission's response to a question by an MEP about the Balkans. The answer was that the development of relations depends on the way the states in the region themselves decide to work towards a settlement of their differences (cited in Kavalski 2005: 104). At a time when the institutional responsibilities for the CEE countries was growing, the western Balkans needed to showcase their willing of solving problems intra-regionally and with their immediate neighbours.

Regarding the mechanism of appropriateness in this period, the evidence shows a distancing trait from the European Commission in arguing convincingly of the utility and appropriateness of a western Balkan signifier. The fact that it was a purely intra-EU construction with no international linkages was evident in the collaborative works of the Commission with other partners. To start with, the joint work of the World Bank with the Commission is a good example to inspect the extent to which the Commission enacted its own understanding of the regional condition in this particular venture. The 'Regional Strategy Paper', which looked at the prospects to stability and prosperity in South Eastern Europe, was in response to the mandate given to the World Bank and the European Commission by the Stability Pact to coordinate a regional approach. This report takes into account Southeastern Europe, meaning the five western Balkans countries plus Bulgaria and Romania. It makes the assumption that these countries in the region have declining economic indicators and deteriorating living standards (2000: 1) – a point that does not fit with the EU's view that Bulgaria and Romania have been improving in the 1990s on a slow but steady footing. The western Balkans as a regional focus or as the target of a joint product is completely missing. Even in the two conditionality reports of 1998, the term western Balkans is not mentioned at all leaving the term 'regional' vague and open to any interpretations. In particular, the last conditionality report of October 1998 referred that the regional countries were sub-divided into PIC (Peace Implementation Countries, meaning BiH, Croatia and FRY)) and non-PIC (Albania and FYROM) groups – a further indication

of the problematic search for the single and comprehensive appropriate regional signifier.

Institutionalisation

Focusing on the European Commission, we observe that the institutionalisation process of objectifying the western Balkans signifier had not succeeded to institutionally solidify both this new regional group as part of the EU's core and the makeup of the group itself. Starting with the first point made, the Commission did not promise any concrete accession plan to the countries of the western Balkans. However, its institutional set up did begin sewing a European cloak for the region since the beginning of 1996 – albeit in a patchy manner. Two groups only were recognised as 'European' in the External Relations Directorate of the Commission: Dir. B dealing with 'Relations with Central *European* countries' and Dir. D on 'Relations with other *European* countries' (emphasis added). The latter in particular was divided into three Departments and was responsible for three groups of states respectively, all of which currently are either member-states or potential ones: (i) Albania and ex-Yugoslavia states, (ii) Cyprus, Malta and Turkey and (iii) EFTA countries. What is inferred is that the Commission was dealing with the western Balkans as a regional group immediately after Dayton and that the western Balkans was granted the European credential from the very start of its existence. The formal basis of the Commission's approach was set, but the picture is less clear once looking closer at the institutional initiatives employed in this period.

When reading the annual General Reports published by the European Commission to report to the European Parliament as obliged to do annually⁵³, we find how previous processes of objectification hold value in this first transition period of the western Balkans. Despite the fact that the western Balkans was a European, external relations topic, the General Reports on the activities of the EU of 1996, 1997 and 1998 represented the 'European' group under a different light: it kept the pre-accession, Central European group intact, while pushing the second group as a Northern Mediterranean topic. The confused status over the western Balkans can further be

⁵³ The General Reports on the Activities of the European Union are required to be published by the European Commission under the Article 156 of the EC Treaty, Article 17 of the ECSC Treaty and Article 125 of the EAEC Treaty on an annual basis.

argued by paying attention to the fact that within the Northern Med label, the western Balkans were described as 'South-eastern Europe' – which though did not include Bulgaria, Romania or Turkey. Moreover, the Council officially adopted the existence of the western Balkans as the EU's approach only at the end of November 1997 when it agreed on two important changes to its workings. Firstly, it peeled off Albania from 'The Working Party on Southeast Europe' and attached it to the 'Ad Hoc Working Party on the former Yugoslavia'. Secondly, this latter group advising the Council on the region was renamed the 'Working Party on the West Balkans Region' (Council 1997c). This was the first time the regional signifier of the western Balkans became outspokenly used by all three major EU institutions.

However, it is worth noting the continuing incoherencies among the different approaches of the EU institutions. This was partly manifested in the continuing existence of the Council's Working Party on Southeast Europe which neither involved the western Balkans nor Bulgaria and Romania but consisted of a diverse mix of states such as Cyprus, Turkey, Malta, Andorra and San Marino (ibid). In addition, even in the cases of collaboration of the European Commission with other EU institutions, they never essentially adopted the western Balkans as their signifier for conducting its policies with the region. The European Investment Bank signed contracts with governments from four international regional groups: CEE, the Mediterranean, ACP/OCT and the Latin America/Asia. The first two groups were the recipients of the largest investments funds, and the states in the western Balkans were included in the Med group (General Report 1996: 49-50). It is significant to add here that only the southern flank (Albania and FYROM) were given finance contracts until the end of 1998 (see Appendix X). Similarly, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development had a 'Balkan Region Special Fund' at its disposal to finance projects, which though included up to 1999 Albania, BiH, Bulgaria, Croatia, FYROM and Romania. Added to this, EBRD had several offices such as the Central Europe office (part of it were Croatia and Slovenia) and a Southern and Eastern Europe one (including Albania, FYROM, BiH, Romania, Bulgaria) (see Appendix XI).

On the point about the ambivalence of the western Balkans group with regard to the membership of the group, we detect a problematic institutionalisation process. First, the PHARE programme was increasing its budget roughly 5% annually and, by 1998,

it had initiated a wide range of policies. On one side, PHARE was directing its resources away from the aid programmes towards institution-building and investment projects - but only for the candidate CEE countries. This re-focusing though recognised a 'conceptual distinction' with programmes for Albania and former Yugoslavia who will continue to function under the old guidelines of PHARE (European Report 1998). However, this distinction is further complicated when one looks at the national programmes of PHARE. Only Albania was a participant here from the western Balkans (receiving a significant amount of ECU 30.5 million), while the other four former Yugoslavia states were grouped together under the 'Rehabilitation of former Yugoslavia' programme (which received ECU 150 million) (General Report 1998: 284). Next to this, one can study the strong resistance of the local actors to establish relations with the EU through a Balkan route. The exemplar case here is Croatia which tried to participate in every official meeting and organisation that was either Central European or Mediterranean. The Croatian President of the time, Franjo Tudjman, said that "*Croatia is part of Central Europe and the Mediterranean and wants to join CEFTA Central European Free Trade Agreement and other Central European regional institutions [...] The Republic of Croatia cannot agree with a Balkan regional approach*" (BBC 1996). The effort of the Croatian leadership is to engage with bilateral or regional projects that promoted European integration outside any 'Balkan initiative'. We observed Croatia participating at the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conferences in those years. Additionally, in the conditionality assessment report on the regional cooperation of the Commission of March 1998, the stated foreign policy aims of Croatia are CEFTA and WTO membership, access to PHARE programme and opening negotiations on a Cooperation Agreement (Commission 1998b: 9) – all of which are targets that do not relate to any regional-Balkan priorities.

4.3.2 Conclusion

We have seen here how empty and amorphous in its social representation the signifier of the western Balkans was. Neither geographically nor policy-wise did the European Commission manage to strategically establish it as a dominant regional signifier for the local, European or international players. In this next part, we will observe how an external to the EU event managed to energise the European Commission to re-visit crucial components of its social representation of the western Balkans.

4.4 The European Commission and the western Balkans in the critical juncture year of 1999

“Almost ten year after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Kosovo crisis has been a bloody reminder of what, in another context, we used to call ‘the cost of non-Europe’. For the current member states of the European Union, the integration process that began in the early 1950s has brought both remarkable political stability and a spectacular increase in economic well being. Conversely, the disintegration in South Eastern Europe during the past decade has exacerbated poverty and inter-ethnic hatred, and cost the lives of many thousands of innocent civilians. The comparison of these two polar cases may not constitute a very rigorous scientific demonstration, but it does provide a prima facie argument in favour of regional cooperation and progressive integration”

(Hans van den Broek 1999: 99)

For the second time in the same decade, Europe found itself in the midst of events it could not prevent or handle. Van den Broek’s quote places at the centre of attention the type of representation that Europe wants to construct for the sake of all its stakeholders in the European Continent. Kosovo came to haunt the foundations of Europe and the prospects of a peaceful transition of the EU neighbours. The events confirmed that responses to the crisis after the Dayton Accords had not been sufficient enough to provide a comprehensive resolve to problems in the region. The EU’s effort to engage more actively in the field of external relations with the adoption of common positions and strategies were challenged by the course of events in the Balkans – giving credit to Stanley Hoffman’s axiom that “*international affairs have been the nemesis of liberalism*” (1987: 396). The need to call in for a second time the Americans and NATO to safeguard European security and stability was a blow in the efforts of the EU institutions to prove that they had the strategy, the credibility and the capacities to deal with major foreign policy challenges in a collective and effective manner.

In March 1999, the Kosovo conflict began when Yugoslav security forces launched an offensive against the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) after peace talks in Rambouillet broke down. Against the background of a refugee crisis, where 65,000 individuals were displaced in one month, and 25,000 in the week after the

Rambouillet talks failed, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) launched its bombing campaign against Serbian forces on 24 March (for a more detailed recording of the events during the first six months of 1999, see Appendix XII). The refugees initially fled to the neighbouring countries of Albania and FYROM and, in turn, threatened their social and economic stability. Although the EU supported NATO actions, many European governments faced serious political difficulties in maintaining public support for military action, particularly as it did not have a UN mandate. Moreover, NATO's operation Allied Force caused significant damages to *"the already poor economic conditions by damaging infrastructure, adversely affecting cross border transport and trade and deterring foreign investors"* (Bechev 2005: 110). The Kumanovo Agreement of June 1999 established a new protectorate after Bosnia in the region, as well as increasing peacekeeping and aid commitments. The UN Resolution 1244 established the legal basis for the UN administration in charge of the Kosovo province albeit under nominal Yugoslav sovereignty. This explosion of the ethnic conflict (with its sustainable effects in the years to come) revealed the sensitive relationships in the region and the easiness of drawing in other regional states in the spiral. The EU's Special Co-ordinator of the newly-introduced Stability Pact, Bodo Hombach, noted that *"the europeanisation of the region is fundamentally in our own interest. If we fail, we will again be threatened by the balkanisation of European politics"* (Hombach Speech 2000).

At the same time and at the EU level in 1999, the European Council appointed a High Representative of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), initiated its European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and recognised Turkey as a potential candidate country during the Finnish rotating Presidency. In parallel, the European Commission found itself entangled in serious allegations for mismanaging budgets and obstructing auditors to conduct properly their jobs. The European Parliament took a leading role in exercising pressure to the Commission to explain the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control at the end of 1998 and the report of the ad hoc Committee of Independent Experts produced on 15 March 1999. The accusation against members of the Commission and the threat to withdraw support from the Commission by political parties in the Parliament (of which the largest party at the time was the European Socialist Party – PES) led to the resignation of the Santer Commission on the night of 15 March. The Commission as the driver of European

integration under Delors took a vast blow and a massive loss of face as an institution entrusted with promoting the European idea, as a survey among Commission civil servants revealed (Topan 2002). The appointment of the Prodi Commission was in need to restore a sense of credibility.

With regard to our case study, the thesis sees that (i) it gave an impetus to re-visit policies from an institutional-strategic perspective which is evident in the two, Commission-led initiatives; (ii) while Kosovo energised politico-security considerations expressed by the motion of the Council - *“a political solution [...] must be embedded in a determined effort geared towards stabilising the region as a whole”* (Council 1999) and creating a culture of crisis-prevention mechanism (European Parliament 2000: 3). The international projects of this critical turning point were:

(i) the Stability Pact for South East Europe (SP) in 1999 was introduced by the European Union as an urgent reply to the Kosovo crisis and was mainly driven by the European Council and particular member-states (Germany, Austria). Participant states were all South-eastern European beneficiaries⁵⁴ plus Hungary, Slovenia and Turkey – essentially addressing the wider Balkan region. The structure of the SP reflected the works of the OSCE with a regional roundtable coordinating the different issue-based groups. The function of the SP had a bilateral and extra-regional character rather than a regional (and multilateral) nature. The membership of the SP stumbled upon institutional relationships with other organisations which prevented the original, declared objectives⁵⁵ to be achieved (see Appendix XIII);

(ii) the Stabilisation and Association process (SAp) came as the second initiative that the EU supported mainly led by the European Commission. It came about at the same time of the SP, when the Commission submitted its proposals on 26 May 1999. It targeted specifically the western Balkan countries (Albania, BiH, Croatia, FRY and FYROM) connecting for the first time the prospects of the region with EU association prosepcts – albeit in a vague manner. The SAp was the

⁵⁴ FRY joined the Stability Pact after the regime change in Belgrade in October 2000.

⁵⁵ The list of goals include aspects such as: prevention of crises through multilateral and bilateral agreements, creating peaceful and good-neighbourly relations through observance of the principles of the Helsinki Final Act, fostering economic cooperation in the region and between it and the rest of Europe and the world and promoting unimpeded contacts among citizens.

Commission's initiative to replace the crawling Regional Approach and to signal the will for inclusion of the entire Southeastern part (see Appendix XIV);

(iii) the European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR) was a smaller scale initiative that the European Council first conceived as the European independent body that would act as an immediate response mechanism to assist reconstruction and recovery needs during the final days of the Kosovo crisis in June 1999. The task to set up such an agency was bestowed on the Commission. During the preparation period, the urgent needs in the region made the Commission to set up on 1st July 1999 a temporary body, the European Commission Task Force for the reconstruction of Kosovo (EC TAFKO)⁵⁶, based in Pristina, to handle the first phase of the financial aid and other programmes⁵⁷ until the establishment of EAR in February 2000. The EAR was originally responsible for Kosovo, but soon expanded to include Serbia, Montenegro and FYROM; its headquarters were moved to Thessaloniki, Greece, which was the outcome of negotiations among European member-states and the Greek city proved to be a middle-ground solution with respect to Brussels and the western Balkans (see Appendix XV);

(iv) the South East Europe Initiative (SEEI) was an American-led NATO project that was launched at the significant Washington meeting in April 1999 during the air-campaign against Serbia. The general goal was to assist countries of the region to integrate into the politico-military structures of the Euro-Atlantic community and, more specifically, to support and complement the ongoing activities of NATO and other external actors (EU, OSCE) to stabilise the Balkans. The membership of SEEI included all Balkan countries although the immediate funds were allocated for Croatia, BiH and FRY⁵⁸ (see Appendix XVI).

Looking across these European institutional projects, four remarks can be made. Firstly, the Cologne European Council hailed the instigation of the SP as the key

⁵⁶ The creation of a Commission's ad hoc Task Force seems to be a more systematic practise on behalf of the EU. Currently, we are witnessing the operation of Task Force for Greece whose aim is to assist Greek bureaucracy to set up from its basis key public institutions, such as the Greek Tax Collection Agency.

⁵⁷ The priorities identified by EC TAFKO in agreement with the UNMIK in August 1999 were: damage assessment; de-mining; procuring of wood, tiles and glass for rehabilitation of houses; support for public services; village employment programmes; and re-establishing the customs service.

⁵⁸ As Papahadjopoulos writes, BiH and Serbia-Montenegro have not yet been deemed capable of joining the frameworks that operate under the SEEI programme and this has obstructed the success of military cooperation over the entire Balkan peninsula (2004: 111).

policy medium to change the fate of the region. It asked the Council's working group on the western Balkans, COWEB, to draw the details of the scheme. Interestingly, the basic ideas behind the SP was taken from another European, inter-governmental initiative, the Royaumont process, including that of establishing good neighbourly relations (Friis and Murphy 2000: 772). Originally, the SP was to become the wide institutional umbrella in which other projects, such as the SAp (Commission 1999d: 1) and SEEI (Pop 2003: 137) should have been components of. Secondly, only one of these projects made reference to the prospect of a future accession – the SAp. In that sense, the Stability Pact suffered from two ills in relation to the SAp: it did not include membership conditionality and it entailed a contradiction between its aspirations and the relatively small resources at its disposal (Kavalski 2005: 114). Thirdly, and similar to the point highlighted in the previous examination of regional projects in the period 1996-98, the western Balkans differed among the regional schemes of this 'critical juncture' year. The SAp was focusing on the western Balkans, while the SP was dealing with the wider Balkan region and the EAR only with a limited number of the WB countries. Even internationally, there was no coinciding of approaches. At a meeting of donors in Brussels in November 1999, the event was co-chaired by two officials: Fabrizio Barbaso, Director for the Western Balkans of the European Commission and Christiaan Poortman, Regional Co-ordinator for South East Europe of the World Bank. The EC/World Bank reconstruction programme reflected again the problematic 'marriage' of working on mixed regional representations. Fourthly, all three schemes highlighted a key aspect, which is the role of the Commission not just as the 'expertise' arm of the EU, but as an important political actor with political-normative convictions about the shape of EU/Europe. As it stated in a press release in 1998, *"the only alternative to long transitional periods is a major investment effort by the applicant countries to adapt to Community norms and standards and to develop their infrastructure"* (Commission 27 March 1998 cited in Kavalski 2005: 60) – the only problem being that the western Balkans were up to that point not a proper part of this intra-European collectivity.

The thesis looks into this period as a landmark year which on one side highlighted how an amorphous representation of the western Balkans blurred the European Commission to become a more positive force for the stability and progress of Europe and on the other side how it prepared the ground for the Commission to abandon its

previous approach in favour of a new understanding. The period will focus on the European Commission's approach in this period of change and the policy responses it initiated as a result of the events in this landmark year through the analytical prism of social representations.

4.4.1 Changing hearts and minds: the amorphous western Balkans revisited

Crisis can be used sometimes as *“turning points in history, serving as eye-openers that stimulate a fundamental reversal of behaviour”* (Biermann 1999: 3). The Greek language attaches two meanings to this word: the first is similar to the English and means a time of difficulty, trouble or danger, and the second refers to the word to mean judgement and decision-making. In addition, the Chinese language has created a symbol of the ideogram for ‘crisis’: two characters compose it which separately mean ‘danger’ and ‘opportunity’. Such a moment became Kosovo. It was a level-changer factor for the EU's external relations and enlargement context. *“The changed wider political context necessitates a development of existing policy”* states the all-important European Commission document (1999c: 2) – in the midst of the military operation against the Milosevic regime. The European Parliament concurred with the Commission that *“only with the Kosovo conflict was there a change in direction with regard to EU conflict management and integrationist capabilities”* (2000: 2).

As the Balkan analyst, Vladimir Gligorov, has said, the year 1999 of the war in Kosovo was for the Balkans the equivalent of 1989 for Eastern Europe (2004: 3). Kosovo became a critical juncture and created inescapable commitments for the European Union pushing it to engage with the region with a renewed interest. *“The Commission intends to propose that the Council adopt a new legal basis for assistance to the Western Balkans”* was a statement expressed in the Commission communication on Community Assistance for certain countries of South-East Europe (1999g: 4). 1999 was not just an *‘annus mirabilis’* for the Balkan region, but a vigorous period for the Commission too. The construction of a new regional framework was an important component of the policy approach. However, what remained neglected was a more stable and consistent social representation of the regional build-up of the western Balkans. It continued to fail to be fleshed out in explicit, institutional terms in this period largely due to the fuzzy approaches that dominated in the previously-examined period of 1996-98.

It was a period when the EU was playing an endless ‘tug of war’ game with the western Balkans and pulling the string from both sides. In one case, it was the Stability Pact which was “*promoting stability through regional cooperation*” (Rehn 2010: 13) as a core characteristic but unable to provide a concrete regional framework or bind stakeholders to the project. The (European) Council envisioned a grand, political project that would provide solution to the entire Southeast corner of Europe – in the same way the Royaumont Process covered the Balkans. At the same time, the European Commission though had a less ambitious and all-embracing perspective and focused on the particular areas that were excluded from its enlargement package. The Stabilisation and Association process did focus on the western Balkans but was primarily about bilateral relations functioning as a pre-pre-accession strategy. In both cases, there is an effort to re-designate the ideas and efforts of the EU into a new direction due to the seriousness of the events forcing international and European actors to re-visit their policies for the Balkans.

This meant that the region was treated as a ‘*poor and distant cousin*’ (CEPS 1999: 32), as a clear EU representation was once again missing. This critical juncture mobilised the need for a progression of a stalemate social representations especially under the light of two issues: the external relations/enlargement challenges for the EU and the domestic shake-up of the European Commission’s resignation of March 1999. About the former, the Commission was already struggling by that year to manage an existing membership queue of thirteen states, when it decided to alter its approach to the western Balkans countries and ‘rhetorically explicit’ to initiate the membership perspective to all five regional countries. About the latter, the disillusionment with the Santer Commission (after the presidency of Delors) reinstated a need to revisit its entrepreneurship role and activism in major policy areas, such as enlargement, neighbourhood and external affairs. These themes will be explored here.

4.4.1.1 Anchoring the western Balkans

Critical junctures are significant because they request actors to re-visit their previous understandings and parallel to initiate new ways of engaging. Re-visiting the problematic regional construction of western Balkans was being acknowledged that it lacked the important linkages to tie it with EU’s ‘being’. It needed to be anchored on a new basis if this regional project was to acquire any meaning for Europe. In order to

achieve this, the Kosovo crisis was represented as an existential threat by European policy-makers endangering the European edifice. It became a representation of an alternative historical route that Europe would have been onto if the EU was not in place. The RELEX Commissioner, Hans van den Broek, spoke to the Foreign Ministers in June 1999 saying “*the crisis in Kosovo has prompted us to revise and strengthen the European Union's commitment to the region as a whole. For the five countries of the Western Balkans we have proposed the development of a substantial political and economic relationship, opening up the perspective of full integration into European Union's structures when conditions are met*” (speech 1999). Also, the period was marked by a more concretely expressed will to represent the western Balkans as part of the Western politico-military structures. Kosovo was signified as an integral European crisis and the failure to prevent it had ‘European origins’.

Kosovo was strategically used by the EU institutions to re-visit their own approaches to the region; irrespective of the actual – limited - repercussions it managed to cause and despite the predictions of serious spillover effects that never materialised. To begin with, the western Balkans began to be re-considered from a region of a wider Europe to a region part of the inner-European structures with a dynamic to enter in the core of European integration process within a reasonable timeframe. In this sense, 1999 evoked bilateral and regional ‘stipulations’ if it is to properly integrate. Also, the new policy approaches started to be based on EU/European needs and values and not on some generic post-conflict reconstruction aims. Nevertheless, the different multi-lateral frameworks in place and the ones that entered this crucial year continued to cause significant rhetorical drifts which weakened the impact of the projects themselves. Moreover, we detect renewed attempts from the Commission to relate (i) regional politics in the western Balkans with Europe’s experiences to reconstruct itself in the aftermath of World War II and (ii) to re-energise the regional politics of the previous schemes.

Identity

The significance here is that the western Balkans were considered from a region part of a wider circle of Europe, mostly in cultural terms, and certainly not its modern, civic expression in the form of the European Union. One of the turning points of Kosovo is that it opened the question of the type of wholesome Europe that is going to

emerge once the enlargements rounds begin. The realisation of this challenge was evident from the impact that the Kosovo crisis had on European policy entrepreneurs, because both this 'local' crisis and the subsequent solutions were considered "*the critical missing piece in the puzzle of a Europe whole and free*", according to what the US State Secretary, Madeleine Albright, believed (1999: 7). The task was bestowed on European shoulders due to the proximity and the historical relations that have bonded them together. "*Either Europe exports stability to the Balkans – or the Balkans will export instability to the rest of Europe*" was stressed by Chris Patten, the new Commissioner for External Relations in 1999, in an effort to place everyone in front of their responsibilities for the future of the whole European Continent (Chris Patten cited in Petrakos and Totev 2001: 260). This clear-cut quote reinstated the crucial aspect of which identity process (Europeanisation or Balkanisation) shall prevail in both areas.

On one side, the European Councils and the General Affairs Council highlighted more the effects of the crisis on the region of Southeastern Europe itself rather than the instability it would create to the EU. These Councils refrained from explicitly opening accession possibilities and had a strong bilateral language in their statements, such as the use of the carrot of 'opening contractual negotiations' with countries in the region as a means of stabilising it (Albania and FYROM). However, it would be an omission not to refer that the summary of the Informal Meeting of the European Council in Brussels in mid-April 1999 did state that "*the Stability Pact will give countries in the Balkans region a concrete perspective of stability and integration into Euro-Atlantic structures*" (Krieger 2001: 477). Of course, it pointed to broader responsibilities on the shoulder of the Western powers and institutions to act in the Balkans and not to concrete commitments on the EU side. This was clearly portrayed in the efforts of the European governments when they drew the Stability Pact which was addressing the countries of the region: Albania, FYROM, BiH, Bulgaria, Croatia, FRY, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia and Turkey; and it invited almost the entire international community to be part of the Pact. The Declaration of the SP in Cologne (10 June 1999) stressed that it is now the moment that the EU provides "*a firm European anchorage to the region*" and that "*it will consider the achievement of the objectives of the Stability Pact, in particular progress in developing regional cooperation, among the important elements in evaluating the merits of such a*

perspective”. In sum, we understand that overall the focus of the EU member states and the European Council was (i) to instigate a pan-European and international effort to transform the whole Balkans and (ii) to examine the situation on a case-by-case the prospects for furthering institutional ties.

On the other side, the European Commission immersed with a different tone and attitude towards the crisis and what it represented for the Europeans. The Commission re-affirmed, in line with the Council, in early May 1999 that a full perspective of membership was not planned (Biermann 1999: 16). However, the Commission realised that the Europe Agreements of the early 1990s as the symbol of a new contractual relations between the East and the West in the Continent had to transform now to adapt to the post-Kosovo age. The two novelties that were inserted in the agreements that were drafted by the Commission were: (i) a more concrete language with regard to accession and (ii) ‘regional cooperation’ as a new counterbalance to the opening of the accession prospects. Oli Rehn, the former Commissioner for Enlargement, in his account of the events of 1999, said that “*good neighbourly relations are what the EU is fundamentally about*” (2010: 14). That is why the EU “*is confronted with geopolitical challenges requiring the development of new policies and instruments, towards a group of countries*” (Commission 1999c: 1). The European Parliament in the same vein asserted that the EU is the only actor which “*is actually capable of influencing the formation of structures in the region*” (EP 2000: 3).

This effort to draw regional lines and to allocate amounts based regional representations was evident in the European Commission proposals for EIB funds to third countries. In the Commission’s proposals, the sum of €4725 millions was allocated to the ‘Central and Eastern Europe/Western Balkans’ group – the only ‘European’ group of the list; the others being Mediterranean, Asia and Latin America and South Africa (Council 1999g: 1). Nevertheless, the EIB 1999 budget, which was finalised at its Board meeting consisting of the Foreign Affairs ministers of the EU member states, separated the ‘Accession states’ loans from the ones to the ‘western Balkans’ with a ratio of almost 40:1 on a regional basis (General Report of 1999: 367).

Norms

The admission of a problematic application of a regional approach in the past was stated indirectly in the European Commission's paper to establish the SAp, when it admitted that the inextricably regional nature of problems in this zone [western Balkans] "*reinforces the need for a regional approach to the problems*" (1999c: 1). The predecessor (Regional Approach) had political and economic conditionalities, which focused strongly at the national level and did not include regional objectives, as seen in the previous section of this chapter. The Commission did want to turn regional cooperation into not just a rhetoric device, but into "*a regional perspective, encouraging and requiring the countries concerned to work together [...] to avoid the risks of concentrating solely on a policy of selective bilateralism to the detriment of a truly regional strategy*" (ibid.: 3). It juxtaposed the key need for the development of relations with neighbours in the region against and above "*national(ist) interests*" (Commission 1999c: 13) – a topic (regional vs national/nationalist) that was posed in such explicit fashion for the first time by the Commission. The assessment in 1999 was that progress in regional cooperation in the western Balkans was not achieved in the three years of the Regional Approach

The SAp introduced incentives and more demanding conditions, all of which were largely similar to the contractual relations signed between the EU and the CEE candidates in the 1990s: individual assessment of progress towards fulfilling the necessary criteria; further development of economic and trade relations; intensification of economic and financial assistance; assistance towards institution-building, democratisation and civil society; and negotiations for cooperation in the field of home and justice affairs. However, one element was introduced which was not highlighted previously as a precondition for the CEE region, but was named necessary: the emphasis on the need for regional cooperation and the development of political dialogue at regional level. The European Parliament did spot the problematic symbiosis of integration into Euro-Atlantic structures and support for regional cooperation calling for the EU institutions to promote these goals "*not as alternatives but as a reciprocally enriching enlargement*" (EP 2000: 11). Nevertheless, the focus in this period continued to be on the promotion of regional *cooperation* and no regard was given on regional integration or region building

Practices and Experiences

The western Balkans in this critical period acquired a substantial new anchor: instead of linking and comparing it with ‘Yugoslav privileges and legacies’, it is now being associated with practices and experiences that (i) prevailed in the aftermath of the WWII among western European states and, more crucially, (ii) that was extended the model for the Central and Eastern European countries since the beginning of the 1990s. Both these ‘examples’ become tied up in a more direct and organic manner to the discussion about the western Balkans. The Commission recognises the dynamics that norms such as democratisation, multi-ethnicity and reform can play in providing a healthy ‘example of the progress that can be made’ and ‘in the building of practical interdependence’ (Commission 1999c: 1).

Regarding the first anchoring aspect, the economic and financial assistance was related to the EU’s past. The European Commission argued that the EU is a model ‘for overcoming conflict and promoting reconciliation’ and that those aspiring to establish close relations with the EU ‘should behave in a similar manner’ (Commission 1999c: 6). As van den Broek reminds, “*the mere development of the European Union demonstrates the need for such co-operation*” (speech 1999). The Commission cannot intervene in military affairs, but in all other ‘soft areas’, it is determined that “*this is where we can make a difference. This is where we can draw on our instruments, and on our own experience. If we fail in our task at this level, then it may well fall on us, as a Union [...]*” (Patten speech 1999: 7).

The relation of the western Balkans with developments in the Central and Eastern Europe continues to be a vital point that informed policy choices for the European Commission. In the same way that both history and geopolitics became strong push factors for the integration of the countries of CEE, the same argument is being deployed in the Commission communication for the Balkans. The geographic criterion of the western Balkans seems to be discussed again in our case, because the Commission argues that the future enlargement towards the CEE countries will inescapably create a ‘border’ reality for the EU. The mental map of a Europe in which the western Balkans border the Union enforces a dynamic of integration “*to which [the western Balkans] will ultimately belong*” (Commission 1999c: 1). The

Commission's wording is that relations with the western Balkans have to follow the same basic logic that governed the EU to develop the concept of sui generis categories of contractual relations for CEE, the Europe Agreements; it therefore proposes "*a new category of Agreements – Stabilisation and Association Agreements*" (ibid.: 4), which would form a new class of agreements, one step lower than the ones offered to the CEE. Similarly, the Commission pledges to assist the IFIs and their financial programmes to draft agreements "*similar to that for the candidate countries*" for membership to the EU (Commission 1999g: 7). The relationship between the western Balkans and the CEE though had a reverse affect too. As a Commission spokesman put it on 28 May 1999, "*the situation in South-East Europe provides reasons for moving as fast as possible towards the enlargement in Central and Eastern Europe*" (European Report 1999a: 1). In sum, we observe again here that international actors, such as the European Commission, always look at practices and experiences that informed their action in previous instances to act towards situations, especially in periods of intense moments and deliberations.

4.4.1.2 Objectifying the western Balkans

The European Commission realised that any new project arising out of this intense period of deliberations - as a follow-up of the previous institutional endeavours - needed a new combination of the regional calibration with regional policies. Understanding the western Balkans as a regional system of meanings in need for shape and form, we observe that the European Commission engaged with a policy of re-connecting the regional signifier (western Balkans) with a regional policy as a reflection of a European answer to address a crisis. The critical juncture provoked the Commission to abandon its reactive stance and pro-actively engage by revisiting its 'doing'.

To begin with, the legitimization of the need to re-assess the regional signifier was founded on the recognition of the Kosovo crisis as being a European affair. The Commission associated the regional crisis with a regional make-over driven by the EU as the key institutional representative of Europe. Furthermore, the need to revisit the western Balkans turned questions to the suitability of regional solutions. All the EU institutions actively engage with discussion on the need for the insertion of 'regional benchmarks'. We detect the first signs of regional conditions being not a

cultural characteristic of Europe historically, but an institutional reality that binds EU member states together. Moreover, a new mechanism of institutionalisation was needed to solidify the changing of ‘minds and hearts’ towards the western Balkans’ project. The Commission set to institutionalise the social representation of the western Balkan via formal organs and procedures that would take on the task of formalising a loose regional concept into an identifiable international signifier.

Legitimation

If we accept that the crisis was deeply European, then the subsequent initiation of policies need to have a European character. “*A new approach to peace and stability in the wider region, involving both the countries of the region and the European Union, is urgently needed*” (Commission 1999c: 1) is a statement highlighting not just that Kosovo could create instability – as was unilaterally thought after the 1991-95 events – but also that the plans to design and rebuild involve both sides equally. The European Commission refers to 1999 as a “*historic-turning point in their relations with the Community*” (1999g: 2) which will strengthen links between countries, as fundamental to stability in the region (ibid.: 3). The Commission’s new President, Romano Prodi, made it clear that the western Balkans are part of the ultimate macro-plan of the EU of ‘the construction of Europe’. In his speech to the European Parliament in October 1999, he clarified it by explaining that in order for Albania and the countries of the former Yugoslavia to become ‘members of the European family of nations’, what is needed is to “*set up a regional organisation, in which the Commission would be associated*” (Prodi 1999). The plans were to be based on a legitimation mechanism which stems from the need to outsource ‘the European Union’ to the region.

This concept of outsourcing ideas and identities had a mixed content when looking at the particular role of the Council and specifically the COREPER body. In its reference to the ‘countries of South Eastern Europe without association agreements’ as part of its response to the Commission’s SAp proposals, it looks briefly at the regional level through an exclusive economic lens (Council 1999e: 2). The main conclusions that the COWEB and subsequently COREPER drew (before submitting its final recommendations to the Council) are all national necessities and none was based on regional considerations. Furthermore, in the COREPER’s draft to the Council on

setting up the EAR in July, it chooses to make reference to ‘Albania, BiH, Croatia, FRY and FYROM’ rather than grouping them together as western Balkans (Council 1999i: 15). Even at the end of 1999, the COREPER report to the GAC⁵⁹ continued to assess progress in the western Balkans via a national lens without making any reference to regional developments and necessities (Council 1999l).

Appropriateness

The new approaches were part of the challenges the European Union faced to “*play an important proactive role in the region*” (Commission 1999c: 1). Chris Patten, the Commissioner for External Relations (including the western Balkans), reiterated this point by adding that “*when we do not play an effective proactive role in world affairs, there can be huge costs [...]*” (Patten 1999: 3). There was a gradual recognition that the appropriate response to the western Balkans was to make a qualitative leap from reactive to proactive, to base its new approaches on a ‘progressive’ understanding (ibid.); in essence, to develop the regional Approach into a Stabilisation and Association process which will become the future EU Common Strategy. This is a significant part of the evolution of the western Balkans, since the EU plans, as expressed via the SAp came to collide with the (Pan-)European efforts of the Stability Pact. The Commission argued in favour of its own scheme as the appropriate EU framework for relations with the region and it will be the longer term perspective within which the proposed closer relations *should be seen* (emphasis added). Added to this is the plea of the Commission for a new regulatory (financial) framework to accompany the SAp to save the tarnished image of the EU in the region - “*appropriate mechanisms must be set up [...] that is both rapid and flexible*” (Commission 1999g: 4).

However, it found resistance from the Council, which was not enthusiastic about regional outlooks. The internal memo from the General Secretariat of the Council to the COREPER and Council noted that - on the question of EIB lending to third countries - “*all delegations can accept in principle the breakdown between the regional mandates as proposed by the Commission*” (Council 1999g: 3). It also states that some delegations of the EU member states “*favour separate mandate for the*

⁵⁹ The General Affairs Council is consisted by Foreign Affairs Ministers of the EU member-states.

Western Balkans” (ibid.). On the other hand, the Commission adopted a European Parliament’s recommendation which requested that the Commission extends the EAR’s mandate to the whole of the western Balkans and not just focus on Kosovo (Commission 1999f: 2). So, once again we detect a basic diverging approach with regard to the value of an appropriate regional representation in the form of the western Balkans here.

Institutionalisation

The critical events of 1999 revealed though that the mechanism of institutionalisation was met with problems as regards to the appropriate organisational response on behalf of the European Union. The expansion of activities and responsibilities that the UE had to shoulder in a rather unexpected fashion was reflected in the cautionary approach of the Commission. The success of the projects was linked with the implementation of measures that would strengthen the DGs dealing with the new tasks. The ambitious programmes needed to be accompanied by mechanisms and means “*to enable the flexible, well-coordinated, and efficient use of all Community assistance instruments*” (Commission 1999c: 6). Expanding a relationship of institutionalisation was bound at the time by the insufficient manpower of the Commission, particularly in the field, as noted by COWEB (Council 1999a: 2). The problematic status of the Commission in actively intervening on behalf of the EU found a clear expression in the ‘Santer/Prodi letter’ which was a report from the outgoing Commission President to the Council on the shortcomings of the entire Balkan endeavour. In short, it reified what was stated above, meaning the dangers of additional bureaucracy imposed to the region and of the number of special envoys deployed to the region, as well as “*the need to preserve the EU’s decision-making autonomy*” (Council 1991: 5; European Report 1999b: 2). The last point was in essence a plea to strengthen the SAp as the actual EU policy too, as they were foreseeing that the Stability Pact would be a very slow and even inefficient mechanism to help re-organise the entire region.

Nevertheless, the main financial instrument that the European Commission had at its disposal towards the CEE countries was only partly used for the western Balkans as a region, because regional cooperation was “*presently not feasible due to the fact that not all potential partners are eligible for the underlying PHARE programme*”

(Commission 1999c: 6). The combined OBNOVA and PHARE funding were planned in February of 1999 to be disbursed to individual countries without any vision for a regional allocation of funds (Council 1999a: 5). The EU was obviously not fully ready at the beginning of that year to re-direct its institutional means to establish a recognisable and legitimate region. Furthermore, studying the outlines of the EU's General Budget on external action of 1999 and 2000 (as drafted by the Commission), we observe that in 1999, the amount was designated for '*the Republics formerly part of Yugoslavia*' (section B7 - 54) – a 4.5% share of the overall external action budget, while the pre-accession budget of CEE was roughly 20%. In the preliminary draft of the 2000 budget, the allocated funds would go to '*the Balkan countries*' and had an increase to 8.7% - almost double the amount from the previous year and a logical consequence of the commitments made. However, even in the budget, the western Balkans was not specifically targeted in the economic programming of external action budget. It ceded the fact that the concept of regional interdependence had not been succeeded despite the assistance. In addition, when looking at the numbers of EC support throughout the 1990s, we find that the funds committed for regional projects in the SAP region represent only 4% of the overall budget. In terms of comparing the allocation of funds in two periods, 1990-1995 and 1996-2000, the national programmes saw an increase of 232% while the regional funding grew at a mere 30% - a large disparity indicative of the problematic nature of regional construction efforts of the Western Balkans region (Commission 2001g: 17). In sum, the institutionalisation of a regional prerequisite as form of conditionality continued to function in minimal manner, as it was more a political wishful thinking than a concretely institutionalised initiative.

By December of that year and following the observations and critiques made in the months following the end of the conflict in Kosovo, the European Commission and its RELEX Commissioner, Chris Patten, decided to streamline the different financial assistances on one side and to direct it exclusively to the western Balkans on the other side. The Memorandum that set out this new initiative reflects the Commission's "*own experience and comments made by the Parliament and the Court of Auditors*" – while the Council is left out of any reference in the text as a contributor to this policy (Commission 1999g: 1). PHARE and OBNOVA programmes would merge into the new 'Community Association and Reconstruction Assistance' (CARA) Programme

which would fall under the SAp framework and would last for the period 2000-2006. It was a new tool intending to send a 'political' signal that despite the difficulties to draw a "*duly substantiated financial statement*" for the western Balkans, the sum of €5.5bn serves as a "*'political' financial reference point*", as precisely stated in the Commission's press release (1999h). The emphasis on the 'political' dimension is important, because it was this exact reason that Chris Patten highlighted as the basis of the failure of the EU in the region, saying that "*early EU efforts to stem conflict in former Yugoslavia failed, again largely because we lacked the political will to take the bold and resolute action*" (Patten speech 1999: 3).

4.4.2 Conclusion

In the critical juncture of 1999, there were undoubtedly efforts by the European Commission (and the European Parliament) to re-visit a previously failing understanding of the western Balkans as a regional signifier for the EU. The amorphous regional signifier was given a new attention so that the geographic dimension of the western Balkans would match the policy dimension in the social representations of the Commission. On the one hand, the Kosovo crisis provided the anchoring link to start turning the western Balkans from an empty concept into a crucial European signifier. On the other hand, the objectifying process revealed a fragmented picture in relation to the acceptance of a stable regional outlook. The linking to the doing of the Commission's social representation continued to be problematic in elevating the vacant content of the western Balkans out of its empty predicament.

4.5 Overall Conclusion

The construction of a new regional signifier was necessitated by the events of the 1990s and the wars in the Balkans. The actor that engaged most actively in the need for a regional representation was the European Union. In particular, the European Commission acted immediately with an outlook to calibrate into a new regional group the Balkan area. However, the introduction of the western Balkans, as the new regional signifier, was met with difficulties. The social representation of the western Balkans was of an amorphous regional signifier which helped little to establish an organic relationship with the EU. The anchoring process did not supersede a distant cultural affinity between the western Balkans and the EU's being; and its objectifying

process showcased a remarkable disparity of EU and international initiatives towards the region.

The critical juncture though of 1999, energised the European Commission's actorness to infuse the western Balkans' project with a new attention. It brought the regional focus as a priority and expressed the need for policy streamlining for the particular social representation it had advocated since 1996. In this context, the Commission re-drafted the EU's budget in 1999 four times in order to more accurately reflect the needs for more staffing and for the western Balkans for the long period of 2000 to 2006 (Commission 1999g: 8; General Report 1999: 328; 331). The Commission report in December 1999 recognises that it is still unable to be "*yet absolutely clear on their real needs*" – referring to the western Balkans (Commission 1999g: 7). Therefore, what is being devised is a top-down assessment of the objectives it pursues in the region. This strategic outlook will form the social representation dominating the Commission's approach to the Western Balkans in the next period.

**CHAPTER FIVE: THE WESTERN BALKANS AS AN ORDAINED
SIGNIFIER: THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION SHAPES ITS REGIONAL
APPROACHES (2000-2004)**

5.1 Introduction

“And suddenly I realized that I should have to shoot the elephant after all. The people expected it of me and I had to do it. To come all that way, rifle in hand, with two thousand people marching at my heels, and then to trail feebly away, having done nothing – no, that was impossible. The crowd would laugh at me. And my whole life, every white man’s life in the East, was one long struggle not to be laughed at”

(George Orwell 1936 in ‘Shooting an Elephant’)

George Orwell’s work encapsulates the vexed position of the narrator in the above excerpt. It is the story of the white man who finds himself in unfamiliar territories, while trying to perform his duties. Orwell portrays the white man squeezed between an internal and an external fight. The former conflict is about the hunter being compelled to act, because of the build-up of the critical moment and the pressures to be credible at this historical juncture; it is a struggle with conscience and self-image. The latter, external battle that the narrator faces is about the role of the British Empire in afar places (Burma in this particular instance) and crucially with the Burmese people who saw and mocked him as a representative of a foreign force. These two conflicts complicate his ability to make objective, clear-headed decisions.

Why is this passage relevant to this study? There are plenty of parallels we can make on the basis of the assumptions and philosophical underpinnings of Orwell’s work. Once we equate the white man as the EU and the Burmese with the Balkans, we are in position to find some commonalities. The troubled position of the Union being in the middle of pressures coming from outside and from the locals resembles the conflicts of the white man. In this thesis, we advocate that the final act of shooting equals the outcome of a series of social processes. The *annus mirabilis* of 1999 did evoke images and sentiments of an alternate Europe that would be the ‘laughing stock’ of the international community, as the great English novelist described. The end of the 1990s brought decisions about the need to revisit and strengthen the foreign affairs and security credentials of the Union. In the early 2000s, when discussing the New Europe, Romano Prodi, the new President of the European Commission, endorsed a

search for a new European governance, because “*the challenge is to radically rethink the way we do Europe*” (Prodi 2000a: 4). The first years of the new millennium had to focus on the phase of articulating and setting in action those ideas and needs.

In the case of the Western Balkans, the initial construction period received a disjoint and content-less clout; what this thesis understands as an amorphous regional signifier. The change of direction, that the 1999 professed, begs the interest to investigate the type of representation that the European Commission would adopt in order to establish new credibility for the regional project. This chapter uncovers the social representations that dominated the Commission and will argue that the Western Balkans was first socially represented as an ordained regional signifier in the first phase of 2000-2003; and then, at the critical moment of 2004-2005, we saw the initial signs of transition of the representation to a shared regional signifier. In addition to the core findings, the thesis will also focus on the clashing representations of the Commission’s regional preference of the Western Balkans, as expressed via the Stabilisation and Association Process and the CARDS programme on one side and the greater Southeastern Europe approach which was backed by the broader international community (mainly via the Stability Pact). The chapter will cover the period between 2000 and 2005.

To be more analytical, the current chapter is divided into two parts: the first part will cover the period 2000-2003 when the Western Balkans became a clear reference point for EU institutions as an external, regional affair in need for downloading EU-content; and the second part will cover the critical juncture of 2004 when the Western Balkans became a more clear case of enlargement politics and policy for the European Commission. This time-period rendered even more the European Union as the prime actor burdened with the task of transforming the status of the region.

5.2 The literature on the European Union and the Western Balkans

“Let us remember that geography is a fact, not a destiny. We can’t change geography. But we can – and must – shape destiny”

(Christopher Patten 2000a: 7)

“My answer is that the map of Europe is defined in the mind, not just on the ground. Geography sets the frame, but fundamentally it is values that make the borders of Europe”

(Olli Rehn 2005b: 2).

The new age of the relationship of the European Union with the Western Balkans included increased responsibilities for the EU institutions. In this era, a new dynamic was evident from the changes at the local level. The year 2000 brought regime changes in Croatia and Serbia; the death of Franjo Tuđman in December 1999 opened prospects of a new, more reform-minded leadership in Croatia and the end of the Milošević regime led to a new optimism for a democratic spring in Belgrade. In this context, the first observation is that the notion of the Western Balkans became gradually accepted and incorporated more systematically as a ‘real’ focal point for analyses in the policy-making and academic world. A second point is that a multiplicity of reports, academic papers and policy discussions produced at the time immersed in associating closely the development of the EU’s foreign policy with the events in the Balkans. Finally, a third parameter is that the attention started to focus also on aspects of impact, functionality and effectiveness of the regional policies of the EU. The Union was acknowledged to be the actor able to define social processes and standards for its geographic periphery, as well as *“to bundle states outside its borders in regional and subregional groupings through its institutional practices which bears on the identity politics and symbolic geography of the Balkans”* (Bechev 2005: 163).

With regard to the first two points, a plethora of publications from research centres and scholars followed the trend to elevate the Western Balkans not only as a security challenge but also a case of institution- and region- building endeavour aiming at exporting the *acquis communautaire* (without opening negotiations on membership). The new direction of EU policies that would push the countries to work jointly to

instil growth and development would be detriment to the political stabilisation and regional integration. Research centres, such as the European Stability Initiative, the LSE European Institute, the Centre for European Policy Studies, the Bertelsmann Stiftung Centre and the European Policy Centre, published important work on the successes and failures of the policies of the EU towards Southeast Europe. The majority of works that focused on the Western Balkans in particular adopted a utilitarian perspective in their approach.

Rationalist IR accounts emphasise cooperation on grounds of common interests, emphasising low politics issues and cooperative ventures, such as energy, transport, science, communications and environment (Lopandić 2001: 53-55). Steven Blockmans critically assesses the assumptions of the international community that economic development reduces the pressing need to solve remaining status issues (2007: 309). It is evident in this period that the European Union too advocated functional cooperation as a preparatory step for the road towards the goal of the 'Europeanisation' of the region. From a local perspective, the reactions of the stakeholders were mixed. At high level aspects, the governments preferred not to enthusiastically engage with regional cooperative schemes; the diplomatic forums of the time, such as the ones in the SEECP and SP, talked about regional cooperation in a normative and wishful manner. Functionalist explanations aimed to prove that this resistance towards regional integration was based on a calculation of the costs it would have on their individual chances for EU accession. Dimitar Bechev notes that *"economic integration at the regional level was counterproductive and threatening the prospective Western Balkan bloc with isolation"* (2005: 185). The preference to prioritise domestic needs instead of grand, regional schemes was justified on the grounds of limited resources at the disposal of the countries in the region. Publications from the Hellenic Observatory (Gligorov, Kaldor and Tsoukalis 1999) and the CEPS advocated trade liberalisation, energy market promotion and inclusion of the Balkan states into the existing CEFTA; the Western Balkan context was downplayed as a desirable yet difficult to operationalise context. Similarly, in aspects of transport and energy, the regionalisation of the agenda for Western Balkans was desired both internally and externally in the Balkans. Discussions in the SEECP favoured regional trade and energy networks but only via bilateral agreements and based on an intergovernmental mode, and away from resurrecting regional structures.

Rationalist-materialist accounts that looked at high politics (security) questions emphasised more densely the role of external pressures to introduce regional bodies to deal with (soft) security problems, such as arms controls, corruption and organised crime. The Stability Pact became in the first years the framework to discuss such concerns and to establish initiatives, such as the SPOC (on organised crime) and SPAI (on anti-corruption) schemes, which focused on the seven member-states in South East Europe. However, this external push via the Stability Pact proved inadequate to convince local actors to engage into regional structures. Mainstream explanations hinted towards lack of material incentives for local actors due to problems of funding and duplication (Pop 2003: 113). Limited efforts were undertaken by the governments in the region. Within the SEECP, bilateral treaties were signed that based their content on the Palermo Convention against Transnational Organised Crime of December 2000. None of these took the shape of regional bodies and they relied on external funding and support (for example, by the Council of Europe's Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters). The outcome in this studied period is that Bulgaria and Romania imposed visa restrictions on Western Balkan citizens to combat illegal migration flows. The local actors preferred more intensely to join pre-accession programmes of NATO (such as SEDM⁶⁰ and PfP) and not to loose resources to regional tasks. We need to keep into our mind that 'interdependence explanations' usually pay little attention on regional security regimes, as these would only exist and function parallel to established institutions.

This chapter will go beyond these explanations and identify the gaps in understanding the regional approach(es) for the Western Balkans. Bundling the Western Balkans did not reflect any bottom-up idea pushed for by local actors; there is no evidence that populations in the region self-identified with this EU-promoted project. Similarly, it was more frequently used in scholarly and some policy circles, but as a geographic designation rather than as a core identifier of regionally-organised political affairs. The fact that the European Commission turned the Western Balkans in its strategic vision and territorial scope of its Balkan entanglement has not only a functional dimension. The organisational division in the Commission and the initial project of the Regional Approach set the Western Balkans as a focal social representation for

⁶⁰ SEDM is the South East European Defence Ministerial that was advocated by NATO and the USA.

subsequent EU policies. This pursue of the Western Balkans relied less on an analysis of material needs, as seen above. The construction and operationalisation of the Western Balkans had significant roots in ideational terms; it needed to be approached against socio- political processes and not just utilitarian ones.

The policy studies and reports of the time aimed at explaining the function of region-wide schemes which the EU pushed and imposed. But, *was there ever a particular regional representation that would guide the interests of local and international actors for a regional approach?* We know that intra-regional demands for region-wide policies were not a favourable choice (as well-argued by Anastasakis and Bojicic-Dzelilovic 2002). Many rationalist explanations of the – partly - successful efforts to instil cooperative mentality of a regional nature have to be complemented by constructivist interpretations of the equally problematic nature of social representations of the regional landscape. The fact that states of the region at times rejected membership in regional schemes or simply retained an observer status⁶¹ was not only because of lack of benefits or insufficient external incentives, but it reflected a clear political direction and preference about the nature of regional affairs. Different social representations were tabled for the EU-promoted regional approach culminating in diverging regional policy choices.

At the EU level, the European Commission engaged with two basic regional representations, the Stability Pact's 'SEE-7 plus'⁶² and the SAP's SEE-5 or, simply, Western Balkans. In the studied years of this chapter, the EU aimed at being the leading bridgehead to the region and to take the 'regional matters' in its hands; the institutional actor with the leading role was solidified to be the Commission. The thesis investigates the previously-posted question in a theoretically-informed manner about the process of systematically (or not) construction of the Western Balkans. We have been asserting that the representation was almost exclusively fed by the EU as a viable regional project, and that utilitarian grounds cannot solely provide adequate answers as to the processes of constructing a regional understanding. The literature has not been able to fully understand why the Commission kept constructing the

⁶¹ The example here is Croatia and Slovenia's observer status in the SEDM.

⁶² Usually, regional schemes that included the seven Balkan countries involved other regional states too, such as Moldova, Greece and Turkey.

Western Balkans as a vital social representation despite the fact that, on functional merits, it was rarely the original or default choice.

This fundamental understanding of the regional state of affairs is traceable in the study of several cases. Firstly, the countries in the region showed an intense interest to join CEFTA rather than create a Western Balkan regional free-trade area. In rationalist terms, the Balkan countries would gain less from a possible CEFTA membership, but this was not their consideration. It symbolised a springboard to the EU which was more important even if there was no guarantee or direct link between EU accession and CEFTA membership. Secondly, in the case of trade liberalisation, the European Commission was originally open to all seven countries of Southeast Europe (the SEE-7) – meaning Bulgaria and Romania too; despite their objection to cluster accession and SAP countries together (Bechev 2005: 188). Trade liberalisation was kicked off with the Brussels Memorandum of Understanding on Trade (June 2001), which was signed in the Stability Pact's offices and not in the Commission's. The implementation of the goals of the MoU remained cumbersome and slow, according to Edward Christie (2004: 11), and bilateral FTAs with all Western Balkan countries were finally signed by the end of 2003 when Bulgaria and Romania had acquired a special and separate accession status from them. Similarly, on transport issues, when similar initial conditions were formed (Stability Pact transport policies for SEE-7), the Commission decided to take a leadership role and instigate a Memorandum of Understanding on Transport and Energy in 2003, which was specifically addressed for the Western Balkans (but open to other interested states of the South East region). These observations are indicative of the importance of social activities in international politics that rationalist explanations do not always grasp.

To conclude, all these issues help us to identify that life in international politics consists of social meanings that have the ability to shape policies. The Western Balkans was not in dire need to prove its functionality to the Europeans. Their construction and need for operationalisation in the 2000s related more with concerns of compatibility to standards of EU/European political conduct. This energised the European Commission to engage in a frontal manner and to 'instil and install' a European logic of regional business similar to Europe's own experiences and practices. This was related to what Ole Wæver has been arguing – that the

enlargement of the EU turns the past (and not geography) into Europe's Other (1998: 69-118). To say it differently and paraphrasing Steven Blockmans (2007: 9), the Western Balkans were caught between history, geography and international policies. These topics will be analysed in the forthcoming analysis in Chapter Five.

5.3 The European Commission and the Western Balkans in the period 2000-2003

The new phase in the relations of the Western Balkans with the European Union was interestingly reflecting the situation of the status between Brussels and the Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s. The regional process designed for the Western Balkans clearly aimed at including not just bilateral relations – which was the standardised thinking of the EU – but also a regional dimension which was a fairly innovative step with regard to the enlargement potentials for the Balkans. The broad message was clear: the Western Balkans will eventually join the EU, they are not just potential members, but have a full membership prospective, as recognised, in 2000, by the European Council in Santa Maria in June and at the Zagreb Summit in November and in 2003 by the European Council in Thessaloniki. The relative unclear aspect was the process of achieving it. The lack of providing any content and direction in the previous period alerted the Commission in particular to adopt a more top-down perspective, a tell-and-do thinking for the Western Balkans. *The Commission became the leading actor, which was strategically placed to construct the Western Balkans as an identifiable regional signifier.*

The blurred approach of the standing of the regional approach was evident from the start. The Commission was in favour of normatively establishing a regional pillar in every interaction with its counterparts in the region, but the *how* was in a limbo. The Commission functions within social processes that it has used in the past, and as Woodward and Petersen observe, it acts instinctively by falling back on existing approaches even when they are not appropriate anymore (Woodward 1995: 396; Peterson 1999: 13). Keeping these assumptions in mind, the regional funding conference would now insert a 'regional dimension' in the overall focus of helping the Western Balkans (Patten 2000b: 4). The choice of the word 'dimension' is indicative of both the low starting point of the policy efforts and the indistinct regional representation of the Western Balkans. In addition, the Zagreb meeting of the year 2000, when the set of objectives and conditions was agreed between the Heads of

State or Government of the EU member states and the Western Balkans, produced further confusion of the regional status of the Western Balkans in relation to its EU accession progress. The agenda of the meeting was separated into two parts: regional cooperation and rapprochement of the region to the EU. The report of the European Commission describes them as parallel processes due to the fact that the regional runs alongside the ‘individualised’ approach (Bulletin 11, Commission 2000: 87-88). This means that the bilateral approach would supersede any new idea of regional construction and prioritisation of policies – the novice hallmark of the approach to the Western Balkans.

The multiplicity of policies introduced in this period was aimed at promoting the cause of further integrating the Western Balkans into the EU. However, it is accepted that the international involvement in the region was poorly organised, with ad hoc structures (Office of High Representative, UNMIK, Stability Pact), regional missions (OSCE, Council of Europe, NATO) and the EU projects – all of which worked, in essence, independent from each other (Blockmans 2007: 310). Chris Patten, the RELEX Commissioner, remarked that there will be soon an initiative for a free zone and that “*there has been a real problem of balkanising assistance to the Balkans*” (House of Lords 2002: 16). Looking that the EU specifically, the projects of the period, which we study in this section of the Chapter, were five plus one:

- (i) The ‘innovation’ of this period comes with the long-prepared Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) which replaced the Regional Approach (RA). It consisted in this period of three main components: the all-important Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAAs), the CARDS funding programme (see below) and the Autonomous Trade Measures (ATMs). It was a *sui generis* approach, treating the region under special arrangements. It did include a *finalité integration* clause but under an increased number of conditions – if compared to the CEE provisions. It was a policy for the Western Balkans exclusively and it was tasked to the DG RELEX.
- (ii) A key initiative of the time became the CARDS programme which was introduced in December 2000 to replace OBNOVA and PHARE funding programmes for the Western Balkans under one umbrella and

in the framework of the SAP. CARDS had two components, the core national programme and the regional approach.

- (iii) The European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) to assist countries of the region on refugee issues. The last projects before it stopped existing (end of 2003) were targeted to help displaced persons in the aftermath of the violence of 2001 in FYROM between the Albanian minority and the local authorities;
- (iv) The European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR), the descendant of the European Commission Task Force for the reconstruction of Kosovo (EC TAFKO) of 1999, was originally responsible for Kosovo, but soon expanded to include Serbia, Montenegro and FYROM. The idea was to have an on-hands organisation that could report back to Brussels short- and medium- term needs in cooperation with local population;
- (v) The introduction of the Twinning programme (designed to help national administrations to work more effectively with European officials) and the TAIEX Office (to help transpose legislation and technical aspects into domestic law) in 2003 (after the Thessaloniki Summit) was taken from the CEE experience and extended to the Western Balkans.

The plus one characteristic refers to the ambitious and pompously-announced Stability Pact, which cannot be treated as an integral EU project. It was based on the model of the OSCE, and was in essence replacing the crippling Royaumont Process in trying to connect together large territorial pieces of the South-eastern periphery. Despite the fact that European leaders were initially highly enthusiastic of the scheme and saw it as the main policy instrument for the region, it was made gradually clear how difficult it was to operationalize such an international initiative that included *“more than forty participating and facilitating states, international organisations and regional initiatives, which [...] is geared towards [...] improving the coordination and efficiency of all actors in the region”* (Blockmans 2007: 248-249) – meaning the entire Balkans⁶³. The EU was actively participating in the workings of the Pact with the European Commission being the EU institution sitting in most working table

⁶³ For more specialised discussion on the Stability Pact, see Cremona 2007; Papadimitriou 2001; van Meurs 2002; and the Special Issue of Südosteuropa Mitteilungen 2004.

groups. The Commission had the responsibility to appoint jointly with the OSCE the SP's Special Coordinator⁶⁴ - without any consultation with the interested regional countries. The complementing relationship of the SAP and the SP is described clearly in the May 2003 report of the Special Co-ordinator of the SP, Erhard Busek⁶⁵: "*The Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) – the policy framework of the European Union - and the Stability Pact (SP) – a key partner complementing this process particularly regarding regional cooperation – support South Eastern Europe (SEE) on its path towards stabilisation and integration into European institutions*" (Busek and Kühne 2010: 473). Summing up the nature of the relationship, we argue that, towards the end of 2003, the SP was (i) a supportive mechanism of the main policy instrument of the SAP, (ii) it focused more on inter-state developments, (iii) targeted the entire South-eastern region and (iv) its added-value is said to be its political message to the local actors of 'regional problems requiring regional solutions' rather than its functional contributions to effectively solve problems.

However, looking at all the approaches of the time, we find further common characteristics with regard to our research focus. From 2000 onwards, the European Union starts to clearly position itself as the agency filling the unspecified content of the build-up of the Western Balkans from a war-torn and fragmented landscape into an Europeanisation-able regional structure. First, an insistence on a regional dimension was a part of all these initiatives. Regional clauses have been inserted in all these projects with a strong normative rhetoric for regional cooperation. Second, the EU became the stakeholder and initiator of all important and major programmes, as well as the main financial benefactor. A Commission insider involved in the EU guidelines on the Balkans described the EU's efforts "*as a litmus test of the Union's worldwide credentials*" (Agence France Presse 2000). At the same time, all the conditions and stipulations applied on the Western Balkans were designed and defined one-sidedly - Brussels. Here, the words of Bodo Hombach are intriguing when saying during the first donor conference in 2000 that "*My Balkan is Brussels*". Third, they all contained normative clauses of 'essential elements' that needed to be

⁶⁴ The first Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact was Bodo Hombach. For Tom Gallagher, he was personally responsible for the SP's failure to become the main instrument for the galvanisation of donors and social and economic recovery (2005: 169-170).

⁶⁵ Erhard Busek replaced in January 2002 the first Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, Bodo Hombach, after mixed reactions for his effectiveness in the post.

respected by the countries in the region, such as human rights, democratic principles and market economy. Fourth, and very crucially, in applying these ideas, the EU and the Commission relied upon an implicit assumption - that the regional representation of the Western Balkans was a legitimate, appropriate and workable signifier. The adopted approach though rather focused on inserting regional policies without paying attention to the strategic social representation of the chosen regional framework – that of the Western Balkans.

In the following part of the fifth chapter, we will study the process of constructing a social representation that dominated the understanding of the European Commission for the Western Balkans. The thesis understands that, in this particular period, the Western Balkans was an instance of an *ordained regional signifier*. The recognisable change in the regional approach was realised, because the Commission needed to take charge of the process and start providing form and substance to its regional project. In other words, the Commission was conscious of the task of pushing the level of *regionness* of the Western Balkans from a geographical unit with loose relations among its units to a status of organised-institutionalised cooperation resembling some form of a ‘regional society’. Here we will examine the discrepancies of the regional scheme and the process of constructing the particular social representation.

5.3.1 An ordained regional signifier: the imposition of the Western Balkans

“The EU is in itself a peace project and a supremely successful one...Through the process of enlargement, through the Common Foreign and Security Policy, through its development co-operation and its external assistance programmes the EU now seeks to project stability also beyond its own borders.”

(European Commission 2001a: 5)

“By making a success of integration we [the Europeans] are demonstrating to the world that it is possible to create a method of peace”

(Romano Prodi 2001a: 6)

The significant institutional restructuring of the 1990s helped the European Commission to acquire a more assertive position in the foreign policy field. The above quotes have been chosen exactly to represent the prevalent spirit of the time

inside the Commission. There was a strong interest to apply methods and patterns in the regional areas it had immersed itself the past years. One of Romano Prodi's first speeches on foreign policy called for the Balkan countries to "*set up a regional cooperation organisation, in which the Commission would be associated. Within the structure they must pursue a programme of regional economic integration by creating a free trade zone leading to a customs union*" (Prodi Speech 1999). But what became very obvious in this period was that (i) the region itself was not in a position to engage with regional projects without the external push and (ii) the Council showed a reservation in leading efforts and rested on local actors to drive the regional process.

The European Commission conceded that the most obvious problem is the lack of regional strategies for solving regional problems (Commission 2001g: 15) – in which it felt the duty to tap in to provide the answers to the 'external push' puzzle. The remarks of the RELEX Commissioner of the time that "*sharing our experience of regional integration is therefore perhaps one of the most important international contributions that Europe can make*" (Patten speech 2001a: 3) is indicative of the self-perception of the Commission to look for stamps in its external identity; while, at the same time recognising that up to that point, "*the need to equip Europe with the necessary tools [has] taken a while, but we're getting there*" (ibid.: 5). The main testing ground for expanding the circle of peace and prosperity were the Balkans where the European peace project had to be imposed as the tested policy road of success, according to the Commission's communication on conflict prevention (2001a). The Council too recognised that someone had to "*ensure co-ordination between these initiatives*", such as possibly (i) the Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum, (ii) the High Level Working Group on Asylum and Migration, (iii) the Budapest Group process, (iv) the Stability Pact, (v) the Ancona declaration, (vi) the Ljubljana recommendation and many more (Council 2001a: 1). However, the Council positioned itself in a much more cautionary position with regard to the extent of the leadership needed to be exercised by the Union towards the Western Balkans. Looking closely at the conclusions of the General Affairs Councils of the period⁶⁶, regional cooperation sections are not discussed with

reference to the EU agency, but are looked upon as tasks that are about commitment and responsibility that local states and actors need to engage with and carry through.

Based on these important observations, the Western Balkans was imposed and dissected at the same time: on one side, the prospect of European integration was developed through the Stabilisation and Association process in a bilateral manner, on a case-by-case basis, the so-called 'regatta principle'. The SAP did focus on the Western Balkans and published reports on the regional status, as well as establishing a funding programme (CARDS) with a regional dimension (albeit a very weak and underfunded one). On the other hand, the international community, with the EU (and the European Commission) as the main stakeholder, supported the Stability Pact and established a wide variety of policies pushing for regional cooperation as the focal point of the initiative (this assertion can even be found in the report by the Commission together with the High Representative of the CFSP: Commission 2000e: 3). However, the spatial target of the SP was very broad and open and was covering the entire Southeastern Europe. A clear disparity was witnessed in the construction of a viable region under the foretold regional approaches. The Western Balkan became entangled between a geographic (regional cooperation/integration) and a policy (EU accession) representation for the European Commission. It created fundamental problems to the operationalization of a Western Balkan model (as requested by the Europeans and the international community).

The European Commission understood early on that it needed to be in charge of a process of ordaining the regional framework if it is to produce any political or economic developments. Such perspective is found in many policy documents and statements of the Commission. For instance, it 'encouraged' the founding of the regional school on public administration⁶⁷, it 'initiated' benchmarks for progress in the justice and home affairs field, it 'endeavoured' to forward proposals for a regional energy market and 'led' concrete discussions on the visa regime and migration policy (2003c: 4-6). Also, Christopher Patten's statement to the ICG included the need to 'install' democratic and institutional software and to 'inject' stability and the rule of law (2001c: 5-6). In addition to this, the rhetoric insistence of a regional approach for

⁶⁷ The Regional School for Public Administration in the Western Balkans is located in Danilovgrad, Montenegro and became fully operational in 2011.

the SAp countries was not matched with the policy objectives and expected outcomes of the programmes supported by the Commission, as indicated by the secondary literature (see Bechev 2006; Delevic 2007; Trauner 2009a). For the thesis, the interest lies in the construction of an ordained regional signifier as the Commission's dominant representation – as the starting point for unravelling the political puzzle – but without, the EU having developed the necessary overall 'master plan', as Romano Prodi acknowledged (Speech 2000a: 4).

In a more analytical way, the social representation of the Western Balkans as an ordained regional signifier refers to the dual efforts of the European Commission (a) to lead the international undertakings and (b) to impose particular meaning and substance to this signifier. These two political trends became evident when the European Commissioner of RELEX along with the foreign and security policy supremo were tasked “*with day-to-day coordination of the Union's involvement in the region*” in March 2000 (Irish Times 2000). The European Parliament bestowed its confidence on the Commission because it was the actor able to be ‘an animator and coordinator’ with its financial resources and its management potential – unlike the Stability Pact (EP 2000: 5). The Commission's policy-making processes was then highlighting two - contrasting most times – aspects: (i) to instil the necessary pre-conditions for regional integration, a revival of a mini Europe in the south-eastern corner as the optimum way to achieve regional reconciliation and development; and (ii) to guarantee the path to integrating the Western Balkan countries in the aftermath of the CEE accession. They were understood simultaneously as a process and a goal inside the Commission's work (Commission 2000e: 4), and the thesis claims here that they derived from the dominant social representation of an ordained signifier entailed in the regional approach, as analysed below.

5.3.1.1 Anchoring the Western Balkans

The anchoring process of the Western Balkans as an ordained regional signifier is studied in the documents and statements of the time. The European Commission recognised that for the policies to work the necessary pre-condition was that “*everyone knows exactly who is in charge [...] which requires a full range of political and administrative authority*” (Commission 2000a: 4). The anchoring process was based on an authoritative presence of the EU in relation to the Western Balkans. It

was a relationship of instructing and defining the ‘how’ of the regional formation. We observe in this period that the EU defines itself as the best positioned actor to take on the role for directing the Western Balkans. With regard to norms, the Western Balkans was an external relations’ object being subject to EU/European norms and standards. Moreover, the Commission anchored the Western Balkans to the practices and experiences from three angles; to the post-World War II Europe, to the Central and Eastern Europe and to the historical linkages of the EU to the region.

Identity

Studying texts that the European Commission has published on the role of the EU in the world, we detect a strong ambition to enmesh Europe as the legitimate actor to address international problems. “*The world looks to Europe for principled leadership and [...] action guided by our shared values and that strengthens our essential European identity*” (Commission 2000a: 3). There is an effort to build links between Europe’s position in the world and its duty to address ‘cross-cutting issues’ due to the demands for international cooperation and multilateral action of a new order (Commission 2001a: 5-6). Christopher Patten, talking about the role of the Commission in the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), believed that “*with the Balkan crisis we have begun to engage directly in conflict prevention and crisis management*” (Speech 1999). The interesting element in the 2001 report on conflict prevention by the Commission is that it used the Western Balkans as a model of successful EU policy in prescribing regional management of instability to other regions; indicative is that almost every sub-section of the report makes a reference to the (Western) Balkans and the EU’s role in handling the regional crisis.

In this particular period, this section here argues that the social representation of the Balkans was anchored to the EU’s identity not as a centrifugal in-betweener as we witnessed in the previous period; the EU was the international actor taking the upper hand in reversing the centrifugal trend and driving the construction of a new identification process of the EU with the Western Balkans. The anchoring process to the European identity seemed to rely less on a ‘Europe’ discourse in a cultural sense and more of a political Europe with objectives in its foreign policy and with institutions tasked to complete the Union project – “*the unification of Europe will not be complete until these countries [aka the Western Balkans countries] join the*

European Union” (Commission 2003d: 2). The success of the EU in the Balkans will be measured more specifically in relation to the credibility of the common foreign and security policy (Patten Speech 2000c: 2). In a Prodi’s speech to the College of Europe on ‘Europe as a global player’, the reference to the Balkans does neither takes place in his enlargement section or in the EU’s international role; the Western Balkans are connected in Prodi’ analysis with the institutional weakness of the EU project to speak with a single voice and the importance of the Balkans to stimulate the EU to improve its ‘long-term strategy’ (Prodi 2001c: 9-10).

Europe’s identity resides in its own political history of recovery after catastrophic wars, and that is why Chris Patten highlights that “*if they are to have a chance to replicate western Europe’s renaissance after the Second World War, they must build strong institutions, create the conditions for genuine private enterprise, fight corruption, create free media and respect human rights*” (Commission 2000n: 3). The identity anchoring process of the ordained social representation of the Western Balkans can be understood when the Commission states that in the meetings of the Union and their Balkan counterparts that the EU experts “*will explain best EU practice and offer ideas on how to best make progress in the integration and alignment process*” (2002b: 8). Regional integration is the end-product of a regional cooperative scheme in which the EU is involved. Christopher Patten used this particular perspective continually on what the EU is doing in its external relations in his speeches. He was arguing that “*the EU’s ambition must be to reflect abroad what is best about our own model*” – the patent of regional integration (Speech 2000d: 10-11; Speech 2001a: 3). In the eyes of the Commission, the SAP represents a replicable model which contains the foundations upon which the EU is built and that is in need to be applied between the five countries of the region (2002b: 11).

For the first time in the European Commission’s policy reports, we observe the need for the regional countries to familiarise themselves with the *acquis communautaire* as a means to build capacities of, and cooperation between, state institutions. On environmental infrastructure and sustainable development section, the Commission anchors the Western Balkans by arguing that “*the environmental civil society does not yet function as in the European Union*” (2001g: 15). Furthermore, the Institution Building Facility (IBF) for the Western Balkans was “*modelled on the PHARE*

*TAIEX*⁶⁸ programme” (ibid.: 52). The Commission originally designed and applied on the Central and Eastern European group and it can now provide “*interesting pointers for the design of the IBF for the SAp*” (ibid.: 52) as it is “*suited to the needs of the countries of the Western Balkans*” (2003c: 4). Moreover, on infrastructure and transport, the Transport Infrastructure Needs Assessment (TINA) programme was “*undertaken in the central European countries*” and “*shall be used as a model for future CARDS support in transport as well as environment and energy*” (2001g.: 54).

Summing up, the European Commission believed that the EU can become a region-builder actor, as long as it can dictate the method of achieving it. Therefore, the identity of the EU, as expressed in the Commission’s works, was anchored to the Western Balkans in two ways: first, to the applicability of the EU model of regional integration being in a position to be transferred to the Western Balkans; and second, to initiate an identification process that would verify EU’s ability and credibility as an international actor to re-construct its periphery. The EU did not seem to be talking about an internationally-acknowledged and identifiable region that would hold a particular identity. The regional approach for the Western Balkans would help create an identification link that serves as a testament of the EU as the regional-political embodiment of the Europe in the 21st Century.

Norms

The linkages between norms and the regional signifier of the Western Balkans becomes a question embodied in the conditionality rhetoric of the European Commission. There was a clear fact in the mindset of Brussels policy-making that regional cooperation was not able to inspire political elites in the Western Balkans in the same way it did to political elites in Europe after the WWII. The definition of what regional cooperation means for the Commission in relation to the conditionality approach is the readiness of the future members to demonstrate that they are willing and able to interact with their neighbours as EU Member States do (Commission 2002b: 11). In the two major policies of the time (the SAp and SP), the European Commission evidently pushed stronger for a regional re-conceptualisation, but used

⁶⁸ TAEIX is the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument of the European Union that helps partner countries become acquainted with, apply and enforce EU law and monitor their progress in doing so. It was first introduced in 1994 for the Central and Eastern European countries.

the norm of regional cooperation for the Western Balkans in different ways. In the words of Romano Prodi, regional cooperation shall be promoted bilaterally and within the Stability Pact (Prodi Speech 2000). In the SAp context, the Commission pushed for regional cooperation more as a political question, a normative pursuit; in the case of the SP, regional cooperation acquired a more functional meaning, it became a medium for achieving progress and prosperity. It is needless to say that in both schemes, both the central decisions were taken in capitals outside of the region and the HQ of the main regional projects did not lie there.

In relation to the EU's SAp policy, its strategic position as the one actor capable of exercising such transformative influence is stated in the important report of Commission with Xavier Solana to the Lisbon European Council in March 2000. *"The EU is the only institution capable of comprehensive action"*, as stated in the document, which also includes a list of normative goals – from military security to human rights – which the Commission considers universal values in need to be shared by all (current and prospective) EU member-states (Commission 2000e: 2). The advancement achieved here is that regional cooperation became a legally-binding instrument, unlike many other efforts in the past in Europe, such as the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1975 Helsinki Act and the 1990 Charter of Paris for a new Europe (for a discussion on international law and its importance to the shaping of post-Cold War Europe by the EU see Christian Pippan 2002). The EU reserved the right to revoke agreements if a pre-condition is not met – no matter how vaguely defined the conditions were.

Furthermore, when looking at the EU-specific priorities for the region, there was a strong bias for an economic-trade focus to the regional jigsaw (while less attention is paid on institution building, establishment of law and order and fight against corruption and organised crime). Patten believed that the EU and the Commission need to find *"ways to use strategically our immense economic influence so as to prevent new fires from starting"* (Speech 1999). The introduction of the Consultative Task Force for each Western Balkan state - in the document setting the areas of

activity of this body⁶⁹ - refers that *“it will primarily focus on legal reform and economic matters, as well as the formulation and implementation of a foreign trade policy”* (Council 2000a: 6).

In Section 2 of the first report of the SAP for South East Europe, the ‘highly fragmented’ Western Balkan is assessed against the economic picture of the region. Taking the case of trade as an example, regional cooperation was linked to the establishment of a free trade area in line with relevant GATT/WTO standards (Commission 2000i: 7). The EU seems to direct the Western Balkans to follow the principles of internationally-accepted rules in creating a free trade regional group on the basis of the introduction of SAAs for all countries – a more long-term process. Nevertheless, the functional (economic) needs, as expressed by the Commission, seem to be part of an effort to secure the political support of the states in the region for the project. The World Bank-European Commission regional strategy paper of 1999 made clear that intra-regional integration of trade is stimulating growth far less than any approximation with the EU. In this sense, the goal of regional cooperation in trade is actually embedded in the prime need to ordain a political signal.

This task was more so problematic due to the preference of the Western Balkan states for bilateral agreements rather through a regional instrument, as proposed by the Commission in 1999 (see World Bank 2000: 61). Based on this latter point, the Commission was interested to create - via the Stability Pact context - a regional institution which would take on the labour of a Balkan free trade zone. Advocating Autonomous Trade Measures (ATMs)⁷⁰, Commission representatives argued in the Stability Pact’s ‘Working Table on Economic Reconstruction, Cooperation and Development’ in favour of the SAP countries to dismantle tariffs amongst themselves and of the activation of the trade workgroup within the SP (Bechev 2005: 186). Also, this preference was similarly fed by the Commission in the TEMPUS programme on University cooperation. In the effort to build new relations between EU universities and third countries, the TEMPUS III project created bilateral links with ‘countries in the western Balkans’ by introducing courses and training centres and improving

⁶⁹ The Consultative Task Force will include the Presidency of the Council of the EU, the European Commission, assisted as appropriate by member-states, as well as an adequate representation from the country of the region.

⁷⁰ ATMs require a World Trade Organisation waiver before becoming valid.

university management; the programme states in its aims as a potential future contribution that it will help to development of regional cooperation in higher education (Commission 2002c). The Commission decided that education be dealt and funded via CARDS national programmes and not the regional strategy (2001g: 21).

Practices and Experiences

In this period after 2000, the European Commission made sure that it studied past mistakes and incorporated lessons in order to design its future policies, as explicitly stated in its regional strategy paper for the Western Balkans (2001g: attachment 5). When looking at establishing a model of European integration for its Southeastern periphery, the Commission seems to fall back on three basic experiences. The first two anchoring processes are included in the report 'On the way to build a brighter future for Southeastern Europe': "*on the one hand, on the model used to rebuild Western Europe after the Second World War, and on the other hand on policies adopted by the then European Community towards the countries of central and eastern Europe following the collapse of communism there in 1989*" (Commission 2000n: 8). The third anchoring - referred by the Commission - was the historical relationship of the Union with the region – meaning, the continuation of special relationships build in the course of the past years. "*The European Union has a unique relationship with the Western Balkans*", as stated in a Commission's report (2000e: 2).

Regarding the first aspect, the EU makes frequent parallels between the transition of the Balkan states in the 1990s and the Western Europe after World War II. The sense of pride and achievement undercuts the majority of the documents of the time. The First Annual Report of the progress of the Stabilisation and Association process refers that "*the EU's own experience of the benefits of regional cooperation lead it to believe that the Western Balkans will benefit significantly from closer co-operation*" and that "*the countries of the region [are permitted] to draw on EU practice and experience to decide how they should [...] promote sustainable growth*" (2002: 6-7). Similarly, Chris Patten noted the enormous challenge ahead for both the EU and the Western Balkans, such as shattered infrastructure, displaced persons, ruined industrial base and legacy of ethnic suspicion which he paralleled with "*our experience in*

Europe after 1945 that shows that change is possible. Reconstruction of a new Europe was made possible after the Second World War [...]” (2000e: 13).

When it comes to the second point, the European Commission preferred to abandon the prospect of Cooperation Agreements which did not include adequate provisions to push for the necessary reforms and turned to the CEE model to draw the SAAs. The first annual report of the SAP in April 2002 admitted that the agreements with the Western Balkan countries would “*draw heavily on the Europe Agreements with the candidate countries, and the experience of the enlargement process*” (Commission 2002b: 4). The economic growth of the CEE would spill over to the Western Balkans, since both groups share centripetal forces to the EU core (Commission 2003c: 5). A significant section of Patten’s speech to the ICG in 2001 was entitled ‘The regional dimension and plugging the Balkans back into the wider European construction’ in which the Commissioner rejects treating the region as ‘an isolation ward’ and advocates a wider strategy of a united and interconnected continent (Speech 2001c). The Commission would replicate the patterns used before, such as feasibility study and opening of negotiations on a chapter-by-chapter basis. Similarly, on security concerns of the pressing matter of organised crime, the European Commission simply used the action plan of the ‘Pre-Accession pact on Organised Crime between the member states of the European Union and the Applicant countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Cyprus’ of 28 May 1998 and transpose it in the framework of the SAP and the SP. Even more so, in the twinning policy, the Commission was asking experts from Central and Eastern Europe to contribute to the Western Balkans “*in the light of their own successful transition process and preparations for EU membership [...] and by sharing their expertise with their neighbours they can make a significant contribution to their development*” (2003c: 4).

The question that arises from these developments is what was the need to call the agreements and provisions for the Western Balkans differently and to create a set of policies and departments parallel to the ones used for the CEE? Two aspects set the Western Balkans’ approach apart from the CEE: the first is the inclusion of regional clauses; there is an obscure effort to create a regional group with functional characteristics. The second aspect is the fact that the Western Balkans was labelled as a prospective candidate, meaning it was balancing as an in-between of the external

relations portfolio and of an inner-European member. Only in the critical year of 2004 was this dual centrifugal-centripetal representation permanently solved in favour of the latter, as seen below in the second part of the fifth chapter.

With regard to the third aspect, the SAAs would contain additional elements which were part of previous agreements between the EU and the WB, such as the condition for regional cooperation of the Regional Approach. Also, the correlation of Yugoslavia with the Western Balkans successor was still evident policy choices of the Commission. On the trade regime, the EU executive body was ready to assign *“preferences similar in nature and substance to those in the 1980 Co-operation Agreement between the European Economic Community and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia”* (Commission 2000i: 2). Furthermore, the particular arrangements for the Western Balkans region have a unique character, as they were designed specifically for the Western Balkans. As stated by the Commission, *“the measures will not be proposed for other regions and will not constitute precedent for the EC trade policy with other third countries”* (ibid.: 4).

5.3.1.2 Objectifying the Western Balkans

“The European Union needs to make a serious effort to sell more effectively what it is doing for the region” (Commission 2000e: 8) and *“to promote the visibility of its contribution”* (Agence France Presse 2000). These admissions seem to become a key aspect of the integration process to the Western Balkans. The objectification process is about using mechanisms that will allow our perceptions and preferences to become intelligible, as the EU admits in the case of the Western Balkans. Conceding that this key ingredient of EU policy-making has not been done *“in a co-ordinated mode”* (ibid.: 7), we look how legitimization, appropriateness and institutionalisation objectified the ordained regional signifier of the Western Balkans. RELEX Commissioner, Chris Patten, emphasised after the Thessaloniki Summit that *“the process Western Balkans is undergoing is exactly the same as the Europe Agreements that led to the wave of ten countries set to join the EU in May next year [2004]”* (EUObserver.com 2003; European Report 2003). It was this time that such a realisation was evident in the EU, as the European Parliament report showed too – *“the region’s problems could not be addressed in isolation from each other or separately from those of the rest of Europe”* (2000: 2). The justification and

communication of the regional approach in the EU's policies differed between the Commission and the Council. The former emphasised leadership element in the dialogue with the international and European community as the key component to support the regionalisation project; the latter emphasised the local agency as the key variable to push for regional cooperation and integration. These important observations are shown below through the study of the particular social mechanisms.

Legitimation

The first source of legitimacy was based on the Commission's credibility of delivering promises and meeting expectations (Commission 2000g). It had realised, short after Kosovo exploded, that *"for its part, has lacked the means or the internal machinery to play an effective role [in the Balkans]"* (Patten 1999). A report produced in 2000, in anticipation of changes in the Commission and reviewing the aid policies for third partners, described their management as slow and unresponsive delivery, poor quality and excessively centralised and rigid procedures (European Report 2000a). RELEX Commissioner warned that 'Brussels' is blamed if the EU is not able to ensure the protection of basic human values near the heart of Europe (meaning the Balkans) (Patten 1999). The EU priorities for South-Eastern Europe were, according to Chris Patten, stated in the document produced with the Development Commissioner, Poul Nielson: to protect the stability around the EU borders and to exercise leadership of the campaign for multilateralism (European Report 2000b).

The European Parliament was very open to declare that *"for only the EU [...] is actually capable of influencing the formation of structures in the region"* (2000: 3) since the people in the Balkans *"recognise the EU as probably the most successful conflict prevention and resolution mechanism in history [...] This gives the EU enormous leverage"* (Patten speech 2001b). However, the expertise legitimacy of the European Commission was put into test in this period. It had to secure the best possible implementation of its policies and therefore a top-down model needed ordaining. Since 'performance' of EU policies came to be priority, the Commission was 'leading' the reconstruction effort in the region (Patten 2001b: 4) via *"tight control by Commission management"* was exercised to secure effectiveness of the activities of the different programmes (Commission 2001g: 52). The EU devised itself a driver position in the talks with the countries of the Western Balkans. With regard to

the Consultative Task Force, “*the Commission will propose the agenda of the meeting*”, “*will formulate recommendations for action which will be communicated to the Croatian authorities at high level*”⁷¹ and “*will retain the capacity to make unilateral recommendations*” (Council 2000a: 7).

Also, the European Commission was aware that the EU was the most important trading partner for the region and it was interested to establish even closer economic ties. The EU’s share at the start of 2000 was running from 55% with Croatia to 90% with Albania; at least 80% of all exports from those countries to the EU were processed with a free of customs duty (EP 2000: 6). The promotion of trade liberalisation was a legitimate goal, because the size of the Western Balkans’ economy is ‘small and weak’ and it is unlikely to cause any negative impact on the EU (Commission 2000i: 2). Patten remarked that “*the total exports from the Balkans to the EU represent about 0.6% of our total imports and for agricultural products the figure is about 0.16%*” (Speech 2000c: 2).

Appropriateness

Three policies became the pinnacles for the integration process of the Western Balkans into the EU being both a goal and a process at the same time, as referred in the Commission/High Representative document of 2000: (i) the SAP, (ii) the SP, and (iii) regional cooperation (Commission 2000e). With respect to the first two instruments, the SAP would be the spearhead of the integration efforts with its regatta approach to accession and the SP, as the international embodiment of the interest in the region, would be the ‘honest broker’ in assisting regional problems. The third though policy instrument of the EU, regional cooperation, was elevated at an equal status to the SAP and the SP which is worth understanding, as it does not in itself make an institution or a concrete set of rules. The regional cooperation was decided to be the appropriate medium undercutting SAP and SP as a core element for the path of the final accession in the EU. Regional cooperation, and to some (vague) extent, integration or, in other words, regionalisation⁷² were to be the process and the

⁷¹ The same wording was used in the document on the EU/FRY Consultative Task Force (Council 2001b: 3).

⁷² A good discussion on the levels of regionalisation and regionness can be found at Bojinovic 2007; Hettne 2005; and Söderbaum 2003. The five levels of regionness are: (i) regional space, (ii) regional complex, (iii) regional society, (iv) regional community, and (v) regional institutionalised polity.

outcome. The difference being that it was not subject to benchmark and road-map approaches that are accompanied by clear and predictable measures as in the case of Stabilisation and Association process (2003c: 6).

In line with this, the broader strategy of the time seems to be on behalf of the European Commission (i) to marry normative with functional priorities and (ii) to match an appropriate state of the region with policies that give flesh and bone to it. The first point is what Christopher Patten argued in a speech to the ICG, that the policy for the Balkans is to create good neighbours by making them “*being dependable*” (Speech 2001c). To highlight these matters, the evidence from the discursive and written productions of the Commission reveal that the procedural framework was to strike the appropriate balance between common rules and norms for all while tailoring programmes and conditions to each state in the Western Balkans. In the 2002 Annual Report, the Commission states that “*taking due account of the specific conditions in each country, the same criteria are applied across all of them*” (2002: 5). If the Western Balkans are to overcome the “*complex political and economic mix*” (ibid.), it has to be ordained accordingly by the EU, as to the mix of the prescribed policies.

Studying the prescribed policies, the tone and justification show the underlining assumptions of the Commission with regard to the regional status of the Western Balkans. The fluidity surrounding the necessary characteristics of the type of regionness necessary for the fulfilment of conditionality criteria pointed to anything more than a regional complex (balance of power, coercive regionalisation process, little shared trust) and to something ideally reaching a regional society (governance of common rules with an increasing interdependence and multiple interactions among state and non-state actors). Even in 2003, the Commission’s second annual report of the SAp declared that the region needs to go beyond reconstruction and basic infrastructure questions to political and economic approximation of European legislation (2003c: 3). The Commission seemed to strive for this realisation by dictating particular courses of action appropriate for such a transition. In its regional strategy documents and pronouncements, the policy outcomes pointed to the following results: ‘enabling’ local actors to create or upgrade national bodies (such as Integrated Border Administrations, new Customs bodies, State Border Services,

Prosecutor's Offices, Interpol Offices, Statistical Institutes); 'enhancing' cooperation and coordination of national agencies, of customs and migration control, of national strategies on border management, of police authorities, of judiciary, of civil society groups, of businesses; 'harmonising' trade rules, civil service administrative procedures, national legislative frameworks and institutional capacities, environmental standards and national statistical systems. These efforts should foster *"mutual trust amongst the participant and eventually lead to regional institutions [...]"* (Commission 2003k), because the Commission needs to *"translate our economic weight into political clout"* (Patten Speech 1999).

Institutionalisation

The need to adapt to the changing strategic environment in Europe in the start of the new millennium had a strong symbolic meaning. The new policies had to offer to the Western Balkans a *"firm symbolic, practical and operational foothold in the EU"* (Commission 2003j: 2). The European Commission itself was interested to review and reform its structure, *"to put its own house in order, and this process will be followed relentlessly"* (Commission 2000a: 4). The new instruments to institutionalise the relationship had to be furnished *"with more 'enlargement'-style elements"* (European Report 2003). The thesis has been asserting that the institutional elaborations of images and concepts of signifiers are institutionalised via organisational structures and the point here is that the mechanism of institutionalisation was representing the ordained fashion of the Commission's approach to the Western Balkans.

The changes that we witness in this period are all pointing to this need to ordain a regional group according to the priorities set by the European Union. Two issues became prominent in this respect; the first revolved around the organisational structures of the Commission and the second to the relations of the Commission with other actors when drawing the particular policies. Starting with the first issue, the re-organisation of the Prodi Commission split the external relations portfolio into two structures: the External Relations (Christopher Patten) and Enlargement (Günther Verheugen) splitting up the European Continent into two large groupings. The accession candidate countries were included in the latter Directorate General, while the Western Balkans remained as an external affair. The changes in this period between 2000-2003 pointed to the fact that the Commission was much interested to

engage with the region more substantially and in a direct manner. At the start of 2000, the Western Balkans was shifted to the Directorate D of RELEX which included the Western Balkans as a separate group in its title next to EFTA, the EEA and other European countries. Previously, the Directorate dealing with the Western Balkans was simply entitled 'Other European countries' without using the particular notion of Western Balkans, but outlining the states one by one. Comparing this with the DG Enlargement, we observe that Verheugen had Departments dealing with individual states (such as the Poland team, the Latvia team, etc.), while the Department in DG RELEX was called 'Albania, FYROM, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and FRY – Regional approach'. Furthermore, the interest of the Commission was expressed with the creation of the 'Common Service for External Relations' which intended to supersede the division between the DGs. Here, the focus becomes less geographic and more thematic, being based on the promise of Romano Prodi to adopt a combination of geography and strategy in the organisational structure (Commission 2000g). The Directorate A was dealing with 'European projects and CFSP' – which is of special interest, since the Departments comprising it were PHARE (structural policies), PHARE (sectoral policies), TACIS, CFSP, Nuclear Safety and *the Western Balkans*. The Western Balkans was uniquely used as a thematic focus and as an European project for the Commission. Finally, the Western Balkans was also dealt with by DG ECFIN, which shifted it to the Directorate D (International Questions) in Dept. 4 'Economic affairs within Mediterranean and Western Balkan non-member countries. Development policy'. It is striking that ECFIN dealt with the Western Balkans as a development project in the same category as Mediterranean countries – a packaging which we have witnessed in the past (see Chapter 3).

By 2001, with the need to re-organise the financial coordination of the Commission and the more rigorous approach to assessing the progress towards the EU, the external relations portfolio of the Prodi Commission underwent some changes that reflected more clearly the need to work directly with the region. A major change became the fact that the Western Balkans was classified as a distinct Directorate D for which a Director (Reinhard Priebe) was exclusively responsible for. The regional dimension of the Commission's policy was allocated to Department A called 'Horizontal Issues'. It is worth noting that in the DG Enlargement, such a Directorate or Department did not exist for the under-accession countries. These organisational aspects provided the

necessary push for a streamlining and exact focus on the Western Balkans with the upcoming national and regional CARDS strategy. The press was reporting that Christopher Patten was under pressure to structure CARDS after the Commission revamped its Directorates (European Report 2000c).

With regard to the institutionalisation of policy schemes, the ‘Common Strategies’ idea of the Amsterdam Treaty was taken up by Commissioner Patten who recognised that much needed to be done between the European Union and the member-states in finding a common line to act towards third partners. In situations of crisis, “*we still have a long way to go to achieve real convergence in substance between the perceptions of national and European interests*” (Patten 1999). The Commission met resistance from the Council with reports pointing to an intra-institutional problematic symbiosis between the two bodies. In the negotiations with member-states, the European Commission’s proposals for a fund of €5.5 billion for a period of seven years found resistance by countries such as Spain, France and Portugal who did not want Balkan aid to eat into a similar size EU aid program for Mediterranean nations (Associated Press Worldstream 2000). The Commission ended up cutting a billion in order to reach an agreement (€4.65 billion).

5.3.2 Conclusion

The period that we examine in this section of the fifth chapter established firmly the Western Balkans as a region belonging in the EU’s political strategy for an enlarged Union. The European Commission found plenty of space to exercise its external credentials to achieve an important foreign policy goal of the Union: the transformation of the Western Balkans. A significant pillar in this endeavour was the regional approach acquiring characteristics of a legally binding instrument, but without substantial political and social roots among the local actors. The ordained representation of the regional signifier seemed at the end of 2003 to be challenging the notion of the Western Balkans as an end product. The Commission’s interest in to re-constructing the zone of peace, stability and progress in the region showed clear signs of regional leadership being exercised to direct policies. At the same time, these efforts received a special character, a one-sided downloading of policies and decision-making which had problems due to the multiplicity of international initiatives. At the

end of 2003, this particular social representation of the Western Balkans came under scrutiny as we will examine in the next part of the Chapter.

5.4 The European Commission and the Western Balkans in the critical juncture of 2004 and 2005

“The Union's action on the international scene shall be guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation, development and enlargement, and which it seeks to advance in the wider world”

(Title V ‘The Union’s External Action’, Chapter 1 Article III-292,
EU Constitution 2004: 137)

The advent of 2004 and 2005 brought significant events in a span of twelve months (May 2004 to May/June 2005) that is worth examining as a critical juncture for both the European Union and the Western Balkans. It was a period that, on one hand, solidified a long process of formalising relations and, on the other hand, begged for a re-visiting of the regional status in relation to the EU. Despite the rejected Constitutional draft, the perception about the position of the Union in the world was largely shared among member-states and institutions. As shown by the above quote, the insistence on promoting principles that have been part of EU’s history and edifice shows that there is an on-going process of building a connection between a representation of Us and Others that would serve to advance the Union in the world.

Trying to record the external conditions that qualitatively impressed upon the social representation of the European Commission for the Western Balkans, we can discern three categories: an external fact, a policy differentiation and an institutional change:

(i) The first pointer is about the referenda rejecting the EU Constitution. After three years of an intense preparation for a constitutional map for Europe, the ratification process was an unsuccessful one in France and the Netherlands (29 May and 1 June 2005 respectively). It achieved to shed a clout of doubt and disappointment in the EU institutions over the direction of EU and its policies. It brought an uncomfortable realisation that the Union has potentially disillusioned European citizens – part of which could be attributed to the accession of a large number of new states that analysts called the ‘enlargement fatigue’. In the words of a Commissioner *“Our challenge is, on the one hand, to pursue the historic mission of enlargement whilst, on*

the other hand, taking into account our citizen's concern" (Rehn 2006a: 2). The failed referenda of May-June 2005 re-introduced in the discussions of enlargement the absorption capacity clause of the Union.

(ii) 2004 was the year the big-bang enlargement took place with ten states joining the EU as full members. The enlargement portfolio managed to assess positively ten out of thirteen states that were part of the accession group. Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey were the three left aside for another round of accession. The new enlargement created a different political map in Europe and left space for re-shaping the particular policy after the experience gained with the Central and Eastern European group. This enlargement round produced a revamped European map and subsequently a new (foreign) policy approach: the European Neighbourhood Policy⁷³.

(iii) Lastly, in 2004, we saw a change of Commission. Romano Prodi remained President of the Commission for one term only – due to his decision to run for Prime-Minister in the Italian general elections. In autumn, Jose Manuel Barroso – previously Prime-Minister of Portugal - took the office and re-structured significant parts of the external portfolio in response to the new realities created by the successful enlargement round. The person responsible for the Western Balkans would change from Christopher Patten (DG RELEX) to Olli Rehn, the new Commissioner for Enlargement, who replaced Günther Verheugen.

All three 'external' events contributed for a re-visit of the relationship of the EU with the Western Balkans. The 2004-2005 period became a critical juncture after the last one of 1999. We assert that this critical juncture established further the European Commission as the main actor promoting a sustained responsibility towards the goal of transforming the Western Balkans as a regional focal point for EU policies. As we studied previously, the ordained fashion of EU's representation for the Western Balkans' signifier enabled the Commission to frame its 'normative' expectations of its regional approach as part of the enlargement conditionality. However, the question that emerged during this critical juncture was whether the 'ordained representation' was still matching the changes occurring at the EU level or whether a differentiated understanding of the regional approach was in motion for the Western Balkans.

⁷³ The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is a framework for relations with the EU's new eastern and southern neighbours in the post-2004 enlargement phase and included states that did not have the prospective of membership of the EU at that stage. Based on this, the Western Balkans did not belong to the ENP since they have been granted membership potential.

The juncture of 2004-2005 gave an impetus to look again at the process and content of the social representation of the Western Balkans based on the experience gained with the ten new member-states. Under the weight of events mentioned before, the European Commission produced a document in 2004 outlining its action and strategies in relation to the allocation of the multiannual budget of the European Union. It became clear that the focus was towards a less centralised system while simplifying and unifying “*complex decision-making powers and policy instruments*” (2004a: 30). Especially in the area of external relation, the Commission’s proposals for its regional neighbourhood was to establish new choices: besides the traditional and direct management of policies, it should be ready to outsource actions to independent bodies and/or manage the policies in a decentralised way in partnership with regions (ibid.: 32).

In relation to our case-study, the events of this period led member-states in particular to argue in favour of a more introvert EU as far as enlargement is concerned and a downplay of the dynamics of integrating more countries in the Union in the immediate future. Especially the disappointment that the two failed referenda brought to the advocates of a ‘larger and deeper’ EU seemed to create a scepticism in national capitals as to the utility of keeping the doors open to Southeast European candidates. A collective inclusion of the Western Balkans, a regional accession, was at odds with the political priorities set by the member-states; one at a time and only if strict conditions are met. In addition, the relationship between enlargement/conditionality and the EU itself seemed to be at stake (Pridham 2007: 450 and 464). It was this period that demands for a renewed attention and insistence of the ‘absorption capacity’⁷⁴ of the EU were made since its initial inception in the early 1990s as an additional condition of the Copenhagen criteria (EurActiv 2006). The demand for a stricter application of this rule actually delegated further political weight and responsibility on the hands of the Commission as the body in a strategic position to make such an assessment vis-a-vis the ability of the Union to integrate more candidate states. The Commission was given the authority to engage stronger with the

⁷⁴ This was in fact the fourth Copenhagen criterion of the European Council of 1993 which stated that the Union’s capacity to absorb new members, while maintaining the momentum of European integration, is also an important consideration in the general interest of both the Union and the candidate countries, following the political and economic conditions and candidate countries’ ability to take on the obligation of membership.

enlargement decision-making process. As we have discussed earlier, the Commission was the institution with a strong sense of responsibility towards pushing the political goal of enlargement without the ankylosis produced by member-states.

5.4.1 *From ordaining to sharing: the transformation of the regional approach to the Western Balkans*

In the ‘Wisdom of the Sands’, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry says about the future that *“the task is not to foresee it, but to enable it”* (1950: 155). In a similar vein, a 2004 document of the European Commission outlining its proposals for the multiannual financial framework of the EU entitled *‘Building our common Future’*, cites this quote by the French writer and refers in its first verse that the EU stands in front of its ‘greatest achievement’: the historic unification of the continent (2004a: 3). This idea of leading and transforming seems to be a central and consistent driver in the discourse of the EU when talking about the need to (re-) energise its ‘regional leadership’ (ibid.: 5 and 23). *“As a writer once said, history is only stretching geography over time [...]. This is indeed our TASK: to enlarge the zone of peace and democracy, to the benefit of Europe and the prospective Member States”* are the words of Olli Rehn in his hearing to the European Parliament (2004a: 4).

The leadership ambition came to fill the political void that this critical juncture created with the developments in European politics. The European Commission’s increasing ambitions for European political affairs found a new terrain in exercising this role. It realised that the EU was heading towards a crisis moment impacting on EU politics and policies. *“You may have heard and read of the crisis the EU is undergoing after the ‘nos’ to the new treaty in France and the Netherlands. [...] Some politicians have been quick to call for a slowdown or even a stop to the enlargement process of the EU”* (Rehn 2005i: 4). The words of the Commissioner were pointing the finger to member-states for exercising pressure on the Commission to halt the process, while he was *“re-assuring the Western Balkans of their European vocation”* (Rehn 2005j: 2). It was a belief in the Commission that if it succumbed to the pressures of retracting from the promise of extending membership, *“the credibility of the whole process would collapse”* (Patten 2004). The delicate balance of sustaining enlargement as an EU priority - while adding the ‘absorption capacity’ as an equal criterion to the other Copenhagen criteria - became an integral part of the

Commission's approach. Rehn was arguing that "*we have to be cautious about taking on any new commitments, but at the same time we must stand by the commitments we have made*" (Rehn 2005l: 2).

It is particularly interesting, because the fears for the ability to cope with the widening of EU membership - and thus reference to the specific Copenhagen clause - was largely ignored for the big bang enlargement round of 2004 (and similarly for the 2007 enlargement of Bulgaria and Romania). This is surprising if we look closely and compare specific parameters of the 2004 and after enlargements. The accession of twelve new members in 2004 increased the EU population and area by a quarter (26%) and the GDP by 11%⁷⁵. The added value of the Western Balkans collectively would be 3.2% in population increase, 6.1% in new area and 1.3% in GDP for the EU. In short, from these analyses, the 'absorption' requirement does not seem to be much related to the 'capacity' difficulties of the Union; rather, it entailed self-referential characteristics for the EU and its member-states in dealing with their domestic audiences. The insistence on the ability to integrate the Western Balkans in the EU became an important political question which impacted on the Commission's entanglement with the region in this studied period.

In the summer of 2004, an EU document stated that the Western Balkans will only become members as soon as they are ready, and that the EU can confirm *its readiness* to welcome them (Commission 2004j: 3). This statement was in line with the depiction that the Commission held for itself: the EU running the programmes for the Western Balkans (ibid.: 4) and accession being dependent exclusively on their performance. From that moment onwards, the discourse at the EU level would take a turn towards a more sceptical stance from the side of the member-states to uphold this prospect unless serious changes take place in the EU's institutional structure. In this context, the European Commission came to re-visit its social representation of the Western Balkans. The Commission did not want to portray itself as heavy-handing the accession process of the countries of the Western Balkans, but at the same time enlargement could not be downgraded as a secondary priority in the Commission's external relations. The 'regional leadership' question begged for a differentiated

⁷⁵ For more statistics about the enlargement, do check the following website: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/policy/from-6-to-27-members/index_en.htm

content. The analysis here will show that *a shift in the social representation from an ordained understanding to the region took place to an approach favouring the sharing of obligations, responsibilities and policies.*

The analysis of this shift takes us to identify three large transition streams with respect to content of the social representation. Firstly, it is a move from top-down designing of policies to local ownership; the new direction from the Commission is that *“further concrete initiatives have to come from the countries of the region themselves”* (Commission 2005h: 5). This perspective would be solidified for the years to come, as expressed in 2006 when the Commission acknowledged that *“the time has now come to move towards full local ownership of regional cooperation”* (2006a: 13). Secondly, the Commission seemed to make a distinction between regional and bilateral: it advocated ‘regional politics’ without a clear geographic stigma combined with ‘bilateral policies’ for the Western Balkan states. The regional political game had to be owned by the local actors, as the bilateral model did not solve core problems in the region. Thirdly, this period cemented a turn of policy approach of the EU from reconstruction to pre-accession focus. *“The focus of the EU action in the Western Balkans should continue to progressively shift from reconstruction to pre-accession support”*, as stated in a Commission document (2006e: 3). It was time to look beyond the security-stability nexus towards policies of ‘member state-building’. Olli Rehn was proclaiming that the EU and the Western Balkans were *“at a watershed”* (Rehn 2005f: 3), in which *“clear conditionality is the basis of the EU’s soft power of transformation that turns potential candidates to ripe member states over the years”* (Rehn 2005j: 2). This turn favoured decisively a one-to-one approach, as it was based on previous experiences pursued by the Commission with European candidate states.

Taking all these points into consideration, we find that the documents of the time start to reflect a revised perspective that integrates the need for a regional approach associated with local realities. It was eloquently put by the Enlargement Commissioner when he was saying that *“it is also time to move from the era of Dayton to the era of Sarajevo”* (Rehn 2005i: 4). In another speech he was more concrete in proposing regional cooperation to reflect the changing reality on the ground and to the region’s growing integrating with the EU. Olli Rehn was arguing that *“in addition to the role of the SEECP as a regional political forum, it could*

improve its administrative capacity to coordinate and streamline regional activities in a European perspective and to liaise with the Commission” (2005f: 2). It is obvious that the new Enlargement Commissioner – a ‘functionalist’ politician, according to his own words – believed in advocating common interests and needs. These mutual endeavours needed to stem from a shared approach by the actors in the region in a process of integration, especially in the field of economy for the Western Balkans which is the key to the success by rebuilding confidence at political level in the Western Balkans (Rehn 2006a: 3). He was eager to introduce a regional approach that would base the representation of the Western Balkans as a shared regional signifier. The hope was to reinforce the relationship between the EU and the region by promoting and upgrading the status of the EU-Western Balkans Forum, as an important political instrument (Rehn 2005m: 3).

5.4.1.1 Anchoring the Western Balkans

The transition from an ordained signifier to a new regional representation, as gerrymandered by the new political realities in Europe, had to resonate with the core structural foundations in order to sustain the accession process. The transitory process of anchoring the shared regional signifier can be traced in the empirical evidence of the written work and oral productions of the European Commission – which also include a number of controversies in the process. The anchoring of this changing representation to the identity core of the EU relied both on ‘traditional’ characteristics of past times, as well as a new diffuse logic of permitting local and regional identities. With regard to norms, regional cooperation became ‘shared’ as a political value owned by the EU and as a functional principle undertaken by the local actors of the region. Finally, past practices and experiences became anchored in this transition period by contesting the membership of the Western Balkans and by resorting to policies from other enlargement rounds.

Identity

It is always a challenge for international actors to accommodate and make sense of signifiers that are under transformation. The anchoring process of the changing social representation of the Western Balkans had to relate to previous identity construction, as well as adapt to a new political situation in the EU. On one side, EU’s identity is inextricably linked and incorporates the Western Balkans and on the other the

Western Balkans needs to re-vamp itself to be able to identify with the EU's 'image and substance'.

Undoubtedly, the European Commission believed in the EU model as exportable for other regional groups. Romano Prodi was arguing early on in 2004 that *"our success shows we have found a model that works. A model to draw on in managing relations between states in our neighbourhood and even beyond. [...] Nowadays we might call that sharing the same basic values"* (Prodi 2004b: 2 and 4). Its Commissioner for Enlargement was declaring similar sentiments when talking in Sarajevo to local politicians that *"the EU, as the greatest peace and reconciliation project ever, can testify to that and serve as an example of what can be achieved"* (Rehn 2005i: 2). The historical course of the EU was applicable for the story of the Western Balkans. *"Regional cooperation, or regional integration, is not something new – it is the founding principle of the EU. [...] The economies of Europe at that time were also rather small, like the economies of this region"* (Rehn 2005b: 4). Olli Rehn was making clear that there is a well-grounded historic commitment in the Commission's pursue of policies (Rehn 2004a: 2). The continuous reference to the founding fathers was serving a purpose of continuity of policies: *"Jean Monnet called it 'la solidarite de faits' – the solidarity of facts on the ground. That kind of solidarity – which starts off as physical but becomes mental and intellectual – is what I want the EU to help you to build in this region, and in this country"* (Rehn 2005e: 3). The EU model would trickle down *"to create an efficient and stimulating system"* in a number of policy arenas, such as science, education and sports (Commission 2004l). In this first instance, the EU model was the one that had to be applied to another region.

In line with this belief, the Western Balkans would serve as a model and testament of EU's transformative power as a global actor. The European Commission was claiming that assistance to the Western Balkans *"is a good illustration of the EU's role in the world"* (2004j: 1). The EU was anchoring the region to itself by attaching qualities that was advocating a representation of a successful regional model. *"The Western Balkans became a laboratory to implement the EU's foreign and security policy"* (Rehn 2006d: 4) and was treated as a 'testing ground' that went well; as Olli Rehn claimed in his hearing to the EP to become Commissioner that *"Enlargements*

have been a key tool in enhancing the European model and meeting objectives of our foreign and security policy” (Rehn 2004a: 2).

However, in this critical juncture period, there was another process in action. The anchoring process of the EU identity needed to find ground with a more locally-owned Western Balkans signifier. The effort to convince that EU means also to ‘share the burden’ of advancing a mutual identification of values and interests is expressed by the Commission. When sharing, there is a necessity for permitting and encouraging the development of new forces, such as new identities to be associated with the notion of Europe. Prodi made it clear that the considerations of engaging anew with the region *“lead the EU to develop positive policies designed to maintain and even promote national and regional identities and cultures”* (Prodi 2004c: 3). To be able to view positively the flourishing of ‘identity politics’ in the Balkans after the catastrophic years of the 1990s is not a self-evident approach; that is why Prodi’s words ring interesting when he stresses that *“these are not seen as something to be simply accepted as a constraint while pursuing integration, but rather as an essential ingredient in the European model”* (ibid.). The different representation of the requirements of the EU is also evident when Prodi says that ‘a melting-pot’ approach is not desirable, and the EU is interested to adopt new identity constructions in the Balkans at a regional, national or ethnic level (ibid.: 2). In addition to Prodi, Olli Rehn saw an opportunity with the Barroso Commission to set the new rules that would dominate in the coming years. *“The transfer of responsibility for the Western Balkans to the Enlargement Commissioner gives the clear political signal that these countries will become EU members, once they are ready to do so. It shows that the Barroso Commission will do all it can to support their effort”* (Rehn 2004a: 2).

Norms

We have seen that the EU attributes a high praise to itself for persevering to support norms in its external dealings. In Prodi’s words, *“the Union has succeeded in putting the highest ideals into practice: peace; norms (democracy, human rights, rule of law); economic prosperity; solidarity towards the least-favoured regions and groups”* (2004c: 2). This latter reference to regions and groups and their need to become anchored to norms and principles is a standardised point in the European Commission’s thinking. There is a consistent rhetorical work to associate the double

task of regional cooperation with the European integration process. The Commission has observed that it has helped the region's peoples to understand the need to take on their shoulders the reform process, as the *"the crises that have arisen [...] have been overcome in the name of a European ideal of peace, stability, security and prosperity"* (Prodi 2004a: 4).

In this period of revision of the overall relationship, the model of a plethora of initiatives - each dealing with regional cooperation from their own angle - was not productive. In this context, the new Commission took a different view with regard to the value of a regional approach for the Western Balkans. The Enlargement Commissioner said in 2005 that good-neighbourly relations (political aspect) and regional economic cooperation (economic aspect) are the very essence of the EU (Rehn 2005d: 4). However, these two vital ingredients of the regional approach were kept separated. On one side, the Commission uses regional cooperation as its political mission to send signals to the EU and to the world about the necessity for EU norms to be exported to the Western Balkans (as enshrined especially in the policies that the Thessaloniki Agenda promoted). Olli Rehn was stating that *"enlargement is one of the EU's most powerful policy tools: it exemplifies the essence of the EU's soft power, or the power of transformation, which has helped to transform countries to stable democracies"* (Rehn 2005l: 2). Specifically on trade matters, the Commission was making a plea by urging the countries of the region to establish free trade as a norm both in their internal relations and as part of the international efforts to expand free trade world-wide (Commission 2004b: 11 and 15).

On the other side, the functional needs of the region seem to be tasked to the local actors while the European Commission was exercising a clearer third party/outsider role in the process. To start with, the year 2004 marked a break with previous approaches, when the Commission admitted that *"now, attention has moved towards developing government institutions and legislation, and harmonisation with EU norms"* (2004j: 7). This new, herculean work reflected the perspective that the SAP would be the preeminent umbrella, under which regional cooperation would reside. The economic growth via increased functional cooperation in areas, such as energy and trade, was to be 'outsourced' to the countries of the region and their vocation to work together. Olli Rehn's line of argument revolved around sending a critical

message that the Commission would not be anymore in a position to push for projects unless the local actors themselves would ignite them. *“An essential part of the SAP is regional cooperation. The economies of the Western Balkans are small, so regional cooperation is essential for economic development. [...] Regional cooperation is vital to attract foreign investment. The creation of common energy networks, for example, would boost economic development”* (Rehn 2005b: 2). Essentially, the Commission would be waiting for the Western Balkans’ states to create and initiate the normative grounds for new regional policies, on which the Commission would then act to support initiatives.

Practices and Experiences

The representation of the Western Balkans as a functional regional formation was always a contested notion in the European Commission and in the region. We have consistently seen in the past periods that there never was a clear-cut representation of the Western Balkans – its content rather fluctuated depending on external events and political agency in Europe. In this critical moment that we study here, the Western Balkans membership is once again challenged due to the acceptance of the Stabilisation and Association Process as the dividing and assessing line. The regional process succumbs resolutely to the bilateral SAP priority by being outsourced as a commodity to be undertaken by the local regional actors. In previous parts of the thesis, we have shown that the SAP policy has never included a regional plan for the Western Balkans nor has it ever offered a regional vision for the local actors to own; the political evolutions have now rendered it a task set aside by the Commission for the ‘other side’ to be responsible for.

This observation is apparent when looking at the Commission’s prime tool of analysing the region: the candidacy criterion. In a speech to the EP in 2005, Commissioner Rehn makes an explicit commitment about membership to the EU only for one country in the Western Balkans: *“Croatia’s future is in the European Union”* (Rehn 2005d: 3) – while in the evaluation of others, such an unambiguous statement is not made. From the regional group, only Croatia becomes eligible for three financial instruments: PHARE, ISPA and SAPARD (Commission 2004e: 5). The dissection of the Western Balkans is also evident in a hearing at the EP in 2004, when Rehn states that *“[t]his is a clear signal that the designate Barroso Commission*

considers that in addition to the current candidate countries (Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Turkey), the countries of the Western Balkans have a vocation to become members of the EU regardless of the time it would take to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria” (Rehn 2004b: 7 and 9).

Furthermore, the effort to revise the relationship with the Western Balkans was again anchored on a set of past practices. The Stabilisation and Association Agreement signed with Croatia (the first such agreement with a Western Balkan state) would now include a model that was not new, but based on the same format of the EC and Yugoslavia, as well as other enlargement rounds. The agreement between the EU and Croatia establishes a Stabilisation and Association Council (political instrument), a Committee (head office on ‘functional’ deliberations) and a number of sub-committees devoted on different policy areas. It is noteworthy that the use of experiences and practices by previous enlargement rounds is a sign of the lack of concentrated focus on the regional status of the Western Balkans. The 2004 big bang enlargement did not pay attention to any regional provisions – partly of course because of the absence of a geographic dimension of the candidate group.

Moreover, in relation to the policy meetings between Commission officials and their Western Balkans counterparts, the research cooperation agenda makes a clear reference to the “*strong EC-Yugoslav Science and Technology cooperation during 1986-1991*” (Commission 2004l: 5). The same document, on ‘concrete community actions’ for the Western Balkans countries, dedicates an important chapter on (the need for) a ‘Shared Vision’ in the research field. Also, the Commission’s reliance on its past practices and experiences is reflected in the reiteration of a policy jargon that pinpoints to a logic of policy transfer and repetition. The transitive Commissioner of Enlargement (between March and October 2004) Janez Potočnik exemplified the Commission’s behaviour by arguing the following: “*The new EU member states have experienced such dynamics in the past, and they are willing – as was their followers. Now we have to build on what we have learned. We have to transfer our knowledge and experience to the potential candidate countries of the Western Balkans*” (Potočnik 2004b: 2). Similarly, the RELEX Commissioner, Chris Patten, highlighted the policy transfer rationale by stating that “*with the adoption and implementation of*

the Stabilisation and Association Process, we are successfully repeating the approach we adopted towards the countries of Central and Eastern Europe” (2004: 2).

5.4.1.2 Objectifying the Western Balkans

Moving to the second segment of the social representation model, we investigate here how this critical juncture impacted on a re-conceptualisation of the regional signifier. The process of abandoning an ordained understanding of the Western Balkans towards a shared regional signifier became apparent in this period of 2004-5. The Western Balkans signifier was objectified as a medium, an end-goal and a framework – never receiving a clear-cut approach by the European Commission. First, the Western Balkans was legitimated as an end-goal, because it was resonating with the political priorities of the EU and the need for local actors to co-decide on policies. In relation to appropriateness, the Western Balkans needed to become the medium for achieving a peaceful and prosperous regional state of affairs. Finally, the institutionalisation process used the Western Balkans as framework of analysis, but it was undermined by the organisational structure of the Commission and the lack of support for policies targeting the region.

Legitimation

Legitimation is one of the social mechanisms that the European Commission uses to objectify its evolving representation of the Western Balkans signifier. This task to format a new understanding of the region became legitimatised through the insertion and advocacy of local ownership as a necessary component to the need for a regional approach for the Western Balkans. In this sense, the legitimation process was objectifying the signifier as an end-goal. The thesis observes that two processes made this possible: first, the EU legitimacy stemming from a broad political responsibility to attach a new meaning to the regional process; and second, and most importantly in this period, by calling on local actors to share the task of operationalizing the regional approach.

Regarding the first process, the mechanism of legitimating the regional approach for the Western Balkans by the Commission was based on a political argumentation. *“The unification of Europe will not be complete until it includes the Western Balkans”* (Commission 2004j: 1) was a straightforward statement in the document laying out

the model of working together. The belief was that the EU was offering the political ground to make the Western Balkans countries be and behave as a regional group. In a speech about addressing the fears of retreating political commitments, Olli Rehn said in Brussels that *“as Paddy Ashdown said last week, the European perspective is the glue holding peace together in the Western Balkans”* (Rehn 2005g: 2). The legitimacy was strengthened by taking the countries of the Balkans from the external relations commission to the enlargement one: *“The move of the Western Balkans to DG Enlargement is a strong signal to the countries concerned that you are part of the process of European integration”* (Rehn 2004c: 2). The EU strategy for the Western Balkans *“is a political strategy”*, as confirmed by RELEX Commissioner Chris Patten (2004: 6). In his speech though, the political approach does not include any link to a ‘regional strategy’, but only outlines an essentially bilateral, state-to-state approach; the only reference to a region-wide policy being the extension of autonomous trade measures.

However, it was the time that legitimacy of the Western Balkans had to pass through the active involvement of the local actors. Olli Rehn ceded that the legitimacy of a regional approach for the Western Balkans has to be in pace with *“the changing reality in Southeast Europe, and to the region’s growing integration with the EU”* if it is not to wither away (Rehn 2005f: 2). Moreover, a document on the pre-accession instruments makes a concrete reference by arguing that *“the legitimacy of the SAP also lies in the fact that it has taken very seriously the principle of regional ownership”* (Commission 2005h: 5). Changing the representation of the Western Balkans lies on the hands of the regional actors, who need to stop producing history and to start consuming it (Rehn 2004a: 4). Furthermore, references to the South-East European Process (SEEC) as the new legitimate instrument carrying the task of implementing functional priorities in the region begun to emerge. Rehn speeches want to symbolise the important link between entry to the EU and regional integration. *“The Commission has supported and participated in a variety of regional activities in SEE, including trade liberalisation, establishing a regional energy market, and developing an integrated regional transport strategy, as well as activities in the areas of combating organised crime, and border management”* (Rehn 2005f: 2).

Appropriateness

The thesis has argued that the thrust in looking at appropriateness as a mechanism for representing the shared nature of the signifier lies on a reasoning process of ideas and preferences as the optimum choices in a policy moment. The European Commission was claiming that its regional approach mattered because it was a political antidote for overcoming past conflicts; at the same time, it was directly and heavily engaged in bilateral dealings. In this sense, the social mechanism of appropriateness objectified the Western Balkans signifier as a medium to achieve a transformed region. The evolution in the Commission's thinking from the previous period was shown in the way it approach the regionalisation of the Western Balkans. We observe that the Commission was arguing in favour of regionalisation as an outcome (political symbolism), but the process lay in the hands of the local actors.

The case for streamlining policies to focus on outcomes was evident in the justification used. The emphasis on regional cooperative politics is to 'monitor' them, while, at the same time, the bilateral policies are about being 'evaluated' and 'summarised' (Commission 2004b: 4). The marrying of normative principles with functional necessities seems to be tilting in favour of the former in the regional approach of this transition period. *"On differentiation, I want to underline that our overall policy framework and instruments are the same for all countries in the region"* (Rehn 2004b: 4). The local institutions were now the appropriate level to transform the region into a functional subject that would resemble a regional society, as the ideal state of affairs. This trend is recognised by Olli Rehn who admits that *"we gladly observe that the accession process to the Union includes political leaders to think increasingly in regional, rather than purely national, terms"* (Rehn 2006c: 2).

In addition, for the first time the prime administrative role would be acknowledged to lie with the SEECP. The Commission was making sure that the regional affairs would gradually be passed on accepting *"the SEECP as a regional political forum"* which would be take on the *"administrative capacity to coordinate and streamline regional activities in a European perspective and to liaise with the Commission"* (Rehn 2006c: 5). Next to the SEECP as the new regional institutional instrument, the Commission seems to work towards transposing the regional economic integration model of the Central and Eastern Europe to the Western Balkans. Being a staunch support of a

regional free trade area, the Commission was stating “*the need to advance regional cooperation, pointing out that this is an integral part of the European integration process, not a substitute for it. All supported the idea of a regional Free Trade Agreement, although the Croatian leaders would prefer it to be under the CEFTA name*” (Rehn 2005c). The acceptance of solutions that local actors would advance was in line with a new relationship between the Union and the region. In a 2006 speech by Olli Rehn, he said that “*I think the idea of exploiting CEFTA is worth exploring. In this case the CEFTA agreement should be amended, so as to allow participation of all countries of the Western Balkans*” (Rehn 2006c: 5). The regional approach of adopting CEFTA was more close to the local realities, because Croatia – with each reservations of being entrapped in a Western Balkan’ straightjacket etiquette – was able to accept the Commission’s wish for a free trade region via the CEFTA expansion in the region.

Institutionalisation

Studying the social mechanism of institutionalisation in this critical juncture, the thesis argues that the European Commission objectified the regional signifier as a political framework that received mixed policy approaches. The re-visiting of the institutionalisation process was able to be traced in two dimensions of EU policy-making: (i) the organisational changes in the Commission and (ii) the policy developments for the Western Balkans.

The first, major institutional move in the critical moment came with the Commission’s re-shuffling due to the newly elected/appointed President in office Jose Manuel Barroso. The accession of ten member-states created a need for the DG Enlargement to add new states into its operational framework. “*The move of the Western Balkans to DG Enlargement is a strong signal to the countries concerned that you are part of the process of European integration*” was argued by the new Commissioner for Enlargement during the EU-Western Balkans Forum in Brussels (Rehn 2004c: 2). Three DGs were involved in a direct way with the Western Balkans: DG ECFIN, DG TRADE and DG ELAR. With attention to the first two, the Departments dealing with them in the previous Commission (under Prodi) remained

the same⁷⁶. But there was a difference: in DG Trade, the Western Balkans is classed with the European Neighbourhood countries and the CIS group; however, in DG ECFIN, the Commission clusters the Western Balkans with the candidate countries (part of enlargement).

With regard to DG Enlargement, the whole package of the Western Balkans was now removed from the DG RELEX – which meant that the accession road was set. However, if we look closer at the way the Commission was dealing with the region, the picture becomes more mixed. It creates a Directorate B dealing with Turkey and Croatia – the candidate countries – and another Directorate C under the name ‘Other (countries of the) Western Balkans’⁷⁷. This distinction makes it clear that the default line is the process of accession not attached to any regional prioritisation. Furthermore, in the Directorate C, Department 1 is appointed to deal with ‘Regional Cooperation’. It is interesting that regional cooperation is now attributed to Western Balkans minus Croatia. Also, in the Directorate D on ‘Financial Instruments’, we find that a Department that deals with ‘Western Balkans programmes’. It becomes obvious that the institutionalisation of the Western Balkans received a mixed status in the Commission’s organisational structure.

We assert that the institutionalisation process of the Western Balkans as a shared signifier acquired the form of a loose framework of guiding and assessing. At the start of the transition period, it was apparent that regional cooperation was moving ahead in a slow and weak manner. The European Commission was aware that progress was considered uneven in all key functional areas, such as combating organised crime and corruption, administrative-judicial reforms, and implementation of EU legislation (Commission 2004b: 12). Based on these remarks, regional cooperative policies (as a top-down EU policy tool) were admitted to be were largely under-defined; there was a need for an institutional re-orientation to allow the content and shape to be provided

⁷⁶ For DG ECFIN, the Western Balkans was part of Directorate D, in the Department 1 ‘International Economic and Financial Affairs’, which also deals with candidate countries (ie Croatia) and the Western Balkans. As for DG Trade, the Directorate D ‘Development and Management of Trade Relations with Neighbourhood countries and with South East Asia’ had Department 1 looking at trade aspects with the Balkans.

⁷⁷ Depending on the language, one can translate the name of the Directorate from the French as ‘Other countries of the Western Balkans’ (Autres Pays des Balkans Occidentaux), or from the English as ‘Other Western Balkans’.

by local actors. In the statement of the EU-WB Forum, the EU measurement of a successful implementation of regional cooperation is the “*mutually acceptable solution and concluding agreements on outstanding issues with neighbouring countries*” (EU and Western Balkans Forum 2004). In more specific terms, this dominant social representation was expressed by Olli Rehn himself who argued that “*the creation of a free-trade zone in the Western Balkans is in the hands of the countries of the region. The European Commission can provide technical assistance and advice*” (Rehn 2006c: 4). In the same vein, the Commission shows preference to upgrade its ties with the Western Balkans and give more clout to local actors, by convening the ministerial meetings between the EU and ministers of the countries. Within the EU-Western Balkans Forum, the first bi-regional meeting on Science and Technology is convened in Thessaloniki (Commission 2004 l).

Moreover, the reliance on a shared regional signifier produced a mixed understanding of the type of institutionalisation needed for the Western Balkans. The European Commission had set three goals for the Western Balkans as the evaluating basis for its institutionalising efforts: (1) re-building functioning institutions, (2) facilitating economic and social development, and (3) rationalising and streamlining initiatives in the region (Rehn 2004b: 3-4). The important thing is that all these priorities lacked a stable representation of a geographic/regional focus. There was a noticeable disparity between geographic and thematic instruments, which was acknowledged by the Commission (Commission 2004n). To sum up, studying each regional project from a thematic and geographic perspective, we come up with the following observations:

- On infrastructure, the target of the Infrastructure Steering Group (ISG) for the direction of the regional infrastructure programme was the entire Southeastern Europe, and only very little progress was made in the period.
- On transport, the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) of 2004 set the foundation for the development of the South East Europe Core Regional transport Network which addresses the five Western Balkan countries, but is designed to expand to the entire Balkans (Commission 2004m).
- On energy, the MoU in this sector aimed to create the regional energy market of Southeast Europe in a similar vein to the above transport plans.

- On trade, the picture is less clear, as the policies seem to be divided. At the meeting in Sofia in June 2005, Southeastern Europe trade ministers began a process to integrate the existing network of bilateral free trade agreements into a single regional FTA (Commission 2006a: 12). This is important because in 2005 we have a realisation in the Commission that the regional approach will bring more benefits than bilateral agreements whose implementation “*has not been satisfactory*” (ibid.: 6).
- On justice, home and police affairs, we can finally find a regional policy with a specific Western Balkans approach. The regional policy initiatives of the Commission, such as the TAIEX, GRECO⁷⁸ and the Regional School for Higher Education and Public Administration are EU tools that included all the countries of the region, but only the latter policy targeted exclusively the Western Balkans (Commission 2005j: 12-13).

On a final note, we can comfortably argue that – with one exception – the regional policies of the European Commission did not pursue the Western Balkans as a collective systematically. Characteristic is the case-study of the efforts to tackle organised crime networks in Europe: the Commission’s documents of the time (Commission 2005c; Commission 2005d) make a persistent reference to the need to organise efforts to deal with the problem through three levels: bilateral, regional and international. From a purely rhetorical perspective, the Commission equates all three levels as equally important to the success of countering OC groups. An analysis of those official papers shows that an explicit mentioning of bilateral and regional approaches for the Western Balkans is made, as the appropriate institutional responses; it reiterates the dual policy approach attached to the region. However, it remains a fact when studying the documents that the least institutionalised level of cooperation is the regional of the Western Balkans. The regional level is attached to some funding sources being identified for future prospects, while the documents are much more analytical in prescribing bilateral agreements (ie with Russia) or pushing for international negotiations within the UN framework.

⁷⁸ GRECO refers to a group of states against corruption initiative.

5.4.2 Conclusion

The period between 2004 and 2005 can be marked as a critical juncture for the relationship between the European Commission and the Western Balkans. The representation in this period moved from being an ordained regional signifier to a shared one. This transition occurred by the changing external conditions which posed questions with regard to the validity of an ordained social representation. Being the actor located at the heart of the policy process for the Western Balkans, the regional leadership became a key theme begging for a differentiated content. What we recorded was the Commission's preference to accommodate both the reservations of the Council and the need to keep on track the enlargement commitments.

On one side, the regional approach had to be linked to a sense of ownership and not to rely on imposed and fixated commands. The regional approach had to be associated with a common identification of the shared need for common history and regional model – some hybrid of a regional society. Also, the norms connected with the European integration process were politically un-negotiable, but their application across the regional spectrum had to be based on a local responsibility to uphold and promote these principles. In addition, past practices and experiences showed us that the Commission would prefer to stick to the standardised case-by-case/bilateral model; the regional approach was easier to be delegated in the will of local elites.

On the other side, the process of objectifying the Western Balkans in this transition period acquired an unclear figure. The regional signifier could be legitimised only if local institutions were to upgrade their own institutions to the scope of the Western Balkans. Furthermore, in order to use funds from the European Union, the regional actors had to use the Western Balkans as their chosen regional medium to advance the causes of reconstruction and prosperity, such as creating a free trade area. Moreover, the effort to institutionalise the regional signifier had a blurred picture. In terms of organisational structure, the Commission decided against working with the Western Balkans as a single group, and preferred to use the accession progress as the decider for policy initiatives. In terms of regional policies, the vast majority of programmes paid little attention to institutionalise the Western Balkans as a policy framework for growth and security.

5.5 Overall Conclusion

In this Chapter, the thesis has looked at a crucial period that cemented the nature of the relationship between the European Union and the Western Balkans. We have shown that the investigation of the social process in the EU's regional approach helps us to better understand about the creation of regional groups externally designated and organised. We have argued that the social representation was evolving from an ordained signifier until 2003 and moving towards a shared signifier during the critical period of May 2004 - June 2005.

The European Commission has shown the strongest and most active interest among a large number of (local and international) actors to uphold the Western Balkans as a workable representation. However, this does not mean that we witnessed a consistent regional approach. There was a significant fluctuation both in the anchoring and the objectification processes in both chronological periods. Since we have realised that the Western Balkans comports with political concerns to transpose a European model of regional affairs, it was dependent on political conditions prevailing in the EU.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Introduction

From the start of the thesis, the goal has been to revisit the literature and the relevant narratives that associate the European Commission with Yugoslavia/Western Balkans. Undoubtedly the story of the region is a turbulent one and its relationship with Europe has frequently produced mixed results. From Chapter One, this study has made clear that we deal with a subject that goes at the heart of the identification and essence of Europe and its main institutional expression, the EU. The synergy of its 'being and doing' has repercussions on the 'way of thinking' about the Western Balkans. Therefore, we have strongly advocated a constructivist analysis that suits well this particular research investigation. The choice of prioritising ideational processes taking place at the European level and, subsequently, the introduction of an analytical framework of social representations has been precious in uncovering how preferences and policy frameworks develop in the EU.

Delving more in our case-study, there has not been a proper macro-historical study looking how the European Commission thought and acted when engaged in the process of regional calibration and transition in this proximate geographic area. Both Yugoslavia and the Western Balkans had a special significance for European politics and they have been strategically important for the European Union. More specifically, we have highlighted that the Commission held a more sustained and consistent relationship which we explore in the 'image and shape' of the construction of the Western Balkans.

In this final chapter, we will revisit the main hypotheses of the thesis and provide the justifications and remarks that support their claim. We will be looking at the way the theoretical and analytical claims resonated with the empirical evidence found. This study will further explore whether its remarks can have a more generalizable nature in understanding EU institutions and their external role, as well as the place of regional groups in Europe. Finally, we will look for future avenues that the theoretical and empirical remarks offer and the potentials that open.

6.2 From Yugoslavia to the Western Balkans: a story of social representations

In this part of the conclusions, the thesis will look back at the original assumptions made in Chapter One, as well as the theoretical implications of the framework, as analysed in Chapter Two. The chronological period covers a long set of years and the progression in the narrative from Yugoslavia to the Western Balkans which has not always been made apparent by the academic works. The work on re-constructing a 'narrative' does not equate with an 'undisciplined or ad hoc storytelling' (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007: 357); political and social sciences have engaged with it in adequately terms via explicit theoretical models. The study of social representations assists us to understand the developments of policy frameworks by the European Commission

Constructivist utility and empirical application

It has become clear that the study has chosen to build an analytical framework that supports an approach to international reality as a complex system of relational strategies of institutional actors. The complexity thesis has been indirectly addressed theoretically and empirically here. With regard to the former, we have insisted from the start that in order to depict the relationship, we need to rely from a broad set of ideas that exist beyond International Relations. As Barry Buzan recently argued in a speech in Tartu on new approaches to international studies, IR should aim to become the intellectual space where debate across the social sciences will be synthesised. Based on such assumptions, the work here basis itself primarily on social constructivism as explored in IR, but incorporates concepts from neighbouring disciplines, such as Sociology, New Regionalism and European studies. The belief in working in an inter-disciplinary manner helps to grasp processes that are not always clear-cut when examined from a single prism. With regard to the latter (empirical approach), actors, such as the European Commission, are aware of the cognitive challenges and the need for continuous adaptation prompted by the changes in international life. It is the acknowledgement and intensification of regional and global linkages and 'nexus of relevant events' (a term explored by Smith and Jenks 2006) that require a systematised, institutional awareness of the world (Ruggie 1975: 129). In that sense, institutional perceptions and interpretations of the complexity of international politics have a central role in the academic analysis and our research puzzle which expands beyond mainstream, rationalist approaches.

The utility of this constructivist piece of work becomes important so as to stress processes of continuity and change in the development of policies. Institutionally elaborated representations are located at the intersection of agency and structure where institutionalised practices impact on world-views. If patterns and events constitute a laboratory from which we draw from to understand current developments, then a framework favouring representations of reality is important to analyse political processes. These constructivist assertions about social reality are tested in this thesis via the empirical demonstration of social representations on the policy-making process of the European Commission.

We have applied it here in the field of external relations to explore the relational processes among international actors. They are not just the outcome of micro-calculations but part of a social context of competing world-views. In our case, the institutions of the European Union were actively constructing another collectivity in Europe. The regional collectivity is grasped as a signifier whose signified content is subject to forces and agents defining it and/or contesting it. The centrality of the anchoring and objectifying process in the analytical model serves exactly this purpose; to unearth how social representations are able to provide a perspective on EU policy-making.

We have been arguing that the analytical approach of the social representation fits well for the exploration of the European Commission's agency in the transition process from Yugoslavia to the Western Balkans. We have shown that the relationship of re-calibrating involves questions that are not only about functionality or security in a narrow (rationalist) sense. The search for making sense of your world has to do with institutional representations of images and concepts that are part of the world we inhabit and which we want to impact. This aim has been served not just by using secondary sources, but also the case study has rested on a content analysis of the discursive and policy productions of EU institutions: working and policy papers, public speeches, newspaper interviews, as well as some quantitative (statistical) evidences. Qualitative assessment of institutionalised ways of thinking has highlighted how policies emerge and develop with a special emphasis on regional re-drawing in the Balkans. Below we recapture the way the EU developed and harnessed the power of imagined constructs in their policy-making process.

From Yugoslavia to the Western Balkans:

Continuities and changes in the social representations

Working across the chapters that showcase the different social representations that dominated the thinking of the European Commission, we are in a position to draw some conclusions. Despite the fact that we cover two different signifiers and a broad historical period, the framework of social representations gives us the opportunity to identify large trends and strategies of policy-making that have been a persistent feature in the external relations of the Union.

The long term, historical engagement of the EU unveils that geographic re-packaging of groups in the European space is a consistent feature in the approach to the proximate environment. The effort to place Yugoslavia into mental boxes that suited the foreign policy needs of the European Community was pursued until the beginning of the war in the Balkans in 1992. Thereafter, the Commission showed a higher degree of initiative in re-mapping the worn-torn area. A key point is that this regional re-calibration of a geographic group has shown that it was related with a dynamic deployed at the European level; they were far from an inside-out model, as Iver Neumann has argued about the role of regional groups (Neumann 1992 and 1994) and from systemic pressures emanating at the international level. The shape and image of the Western Balkans resembled realities matching the developments of European policies in the Continent.

This last point takes us to the next finding which has been that the Western Balkans makes sense only in relation to the EU model of governance in the Continent. The assertion made at the beginning that the Western Balkans is what the EU makes of it is founded on the thesis analysis. From the beginning of the depiction of a Western Balkans region, the European institutions have represented the signifier as inextricably linked to the destiny of the EU itself. It has been a European Commission approach serving a European strategy of re-inventing the European Continent along EU priority lines. The Western Balkans was invented at a time that the Union was evolving its enlargement policy for the CEE. The notion of the Western Balkans emanated from a small organisational department in the external relations' portfolio of the Commission before becoming an identity puzzle for contemporary analysts.

In this context, the European Commission asserts an entrepreneurship role in the external relations of the EU, as never before. Enlargement provided the opportunity and the credentials to the Commission to exercise an active role and be positioned as the key institution to have a direct effect on the region. The thesis has been showing its growing actorness in the Balkans by tracing the stages of engagement; and pointing out that in relation to our case-study, it has been portrayed as a homogenous actor when talking and acting towards the Western Balkans. In the period up to 1989, the Commission had a part that was limited to socio-economic policies, but Yugoslavia was a case where it showed its greatest involvement in comparison to other former communist countries. In the period until 1995, it assumed a coordinator role of European and international activities but without dealing with any aspect of the conflict. In the period until the Kosovo crisis, the Commission was searching for policies to match the new calibration of the region. It instigated some initiatives which had a reactive character to the need for reconstruction and reconciliation in the aftermath of the wars. After 1999, there was a widespread sense that the EU had to change the pattern of the region. The Commission affirmed a central role in designing and managing regional affairs. Being a regional leader culminated in advocating an increased role for regional bodies becoming part of the Western Balkans game.

The next point refers to the critical junctures which form an important part in this thesis' narrative. Social representations may alter when they are met with moments of change that affect the whole system and thus its constituent parts. In the study, we have identified such critical points, because they constitute a situation that is qualitatively different from the 'normal' (political and/or historical) development of the institutional setting of interest (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007: 348). In 1989, the European Community was at a crossroad with regard to the regime-changes in Eastern Europe and the opening of doors to those countries. However, while it was a critical juncture for a new era in Europe with democratic governments and new political relations leading to a type of unification, the Commission's approach to Yugoslavia did not produce an alternative institutional path. Yugoslavia remained trapped and immobile in its social representation as a special signifier not in need for a radical re-conceptualisation. It was the outbreak of violent conflicts in the region that drew in the attention of the Commission and the Dayton Accords ending the atrocities provided the opportunities for a re-visit of organisational and policy approaches. The

next critical juncture is 1999, when the events in Kosovo and the subsequent military campaign of NATO proved how fragile and inadequate the international efforts were at the time to produce a viable regional state of affairs. It was this moment when the EU saw itself as the only international actor able to change the course of history for the region. The European Commission showed an active interest to lead the efforts of the European and the international community. Finally, in 2004, with the big bang enlargement and the failed referenda, it became clear that Western Balkans is now next in the row for membership, and the Commission would be the regional leader on directing regional policy priorities and funds – while advocating the sharing of responsibilities with regional bodies.

Bearing all these conclusions in mind, in these remarks we will revisit the dominant social representations that the European Commission harnessed from the 1970s until the mid-2000s. Studying the representations, we discover that the *sui generis* character of the approach seems to run throughout the entire period for both Yugoslavia and the Western Balkans. The Commission has persistently constructed an elaboration that was a special reference point for the EU requiring special approaches. There were distinct ties built early from the times of Yugoslavia which kept on as a *sui generis* representation even when we entered the Western Balkans period after 1995. It is particularly interest that the regional approaches for the Western Balkans corresponded to *sui generis* policy frameworks designed especially for the region. Furthermore, we have ascertained that the Western Balkans relates to a social construction which is more relevant to questions of symbolic representation and state of affairs in Europe rather than in terms of a functional economic or security system. The difficulties of operationalising the regional context into cooperative schemes were evident in the antithesis of local actors towards forms of regionalism – and other studies have also argued that the Southeastern states have not been more effective in initiating regional cooperation guided by cost-benefit calculations (Bechev 2005: 299). In that sense, the transformation of the Western Balkans not into a problem-solving regional construct, but as a new regional representation of the metamorphosis of the regional signifier moving west and signifying the overcoming of past European characteristics and illiberal practices. This is why we have asserted that the Western Balkans is externally driven and conditioned by the European quest for cooperation and integration in Europe.

In sum, the Western Balkans did not acquire an institutional substance in the sense of regional formation with its own dynamics. It was more a representational framework directed by European mindsets and forces in re-directing the necessary 'images and concepts' that would become an acceptable European social representation. Looking into the analytical framework that highlights processes of anchoring the EU's political essence, its 'being' to the Western Balkans, as well as the processes of objectifying the regional signifier via the EU's external action, its 'doing', we can infer about the Union's model and agency working alongside towards regional partners. These are exactly the points that lead to disparities of subsequent policies, such as particularly the frequent disparities in matching a geographic construct with a policy priority. We have been arguing that external actions are not just the outcome of a series of micro-calculations, but belong to a social (European) context of worldviews. This is why the end-product ends up standing more as a messy amalgam rather a 'rational design'.

6.3 Future avenues

Since the constructivist breakthrough in the 1990s, there has been a constant debate about the possibilities of applying its logic on the empirical, policy-making world. The increased awareness of studying not only materially-based explanations conditioning action, but also perceptions and institutionalised understandings fits very well with a world consisting of multiple power poles. The study of relational dynamics and strategies among a large set of actors operating from the local to the global level can be grasped when competing worldviews are taken into account. This is where our approach to social representations is providing answers to questions of preference formation and policy frameworks.

Global trends

The choice of literatures used in this thesis, such as regionalism and social institutionalism in the European studies, is indicative of the trends in international politics that the author sees: regionalisation and institutionalisation. On one side, after the end of the Cold War, opportunities arose for a larger number of states to become more influential in international politics. But it was obvious that superpower status was not attainable for long for the US and for any other state in the world. In that sense, what has been expected and is observable are regional powers emerging in a multipolar world system and in a context of globalisation. The limitations of powerful

states to stretch globally and 'order the new world order' means that there will be more efforts to strengthen regional arrangements which are bound to have an impact on forms of global governance. The structures of a multiregional world order are defined against the Westphalian logic and at the same time, they are superseding it; the current order moves towards institutionalised multilateral relations among autonomously based regional powers and/or bodies. With such a spread of actors and international bodies around the globe, it is all more crucial to study (i) how all these actors cognitively and representationally associate themselves with each other and (ii) how different social-regional contexts produce interests and policies. Therefore, our analytical and theoretical model has a lot of potential to be used on works of the new regionalism.

Besides regionalisation, as a process of structuring relations in an era of globalisation, we also witness the increase of institutionalisation of regional, international and global politics. The complexity and diversity of issues travelling across borders and having an impact from the local to the global level require more wide-spread cooperative schemes to analyse and deal with them. The limitations of purely intergovernmental solutions have seen an increase of institutional projects world-wide even in conflict-prone areas. The most prominent example of a high degree of institutionalisation in international politics remains the EU, but other institutionalised relationships have emerged at regional levels, each with their own *niveau* of integration and set of goals. Moreover, there is a clear trend to promote some minimum institutional arrangements at the level of global governance via the G8/G20 (next to the existing UN framework). The added value of constructivism is that it attributes a central role for institutions in its analysis. Institutions encapsulate a process of international politics where interests and ideas are constituted and negotiated.

From Western to Rest-ern Balkans?

Searching for more particular, future avenues in relation to the thesis' focus, the research can inform up-coming works on investigating how the external agency of the European Union relates to the state of affairs of the Western Balkans. The international realm of late 20th and now 21st Century has to do less with alliances and old-style diplomacy and more with multilevel interactions, technocratic institutions

and a large host of rules on all levels of governance. We have asserted that our understanding of the Western Balkans has been shifting depending on the meaning attribute to it by the Union with its vast clout, ranging from symbolic power to membership conditionality, security and economic policies and instruments. However, we are aware that the interplay of geography and policy, as advocated by the EU, does not necessarily overlap (Grabbe and Sedelmeier 2010: 375); nevertheless, their interaction informs different types of social representations that we witnessed within the integration and enlargement policies of the EU. The evolution of the EU and its core policies are bound to impact on the dominant social representation of the Western Balkans, as well as the signifier's content (the signified).

More analytically, the presence of the Western Balkans as a regional signifier would make sense and relate to a new regional reality as long as the EU dictates so, while at the same time people in the region adopting a self-characterisation as Western Balkans' citizens. However, with the formal accession of Croatia on 1st July 2013, there is a need to re-think the value and status of the Western Balkans. *Hrvatska*, as an EU member-state, is inescapably going to re-posit the regional approach. The first sign is an expectation that the Western Balkans will be required even less as a regional bearer of symbolic reconciliation and regional reference point. Both the importance of the geographic representation and the policy focus are questioning the validity of the Western Balkans construct. Since Slovenia and Croatia are now more EU than Balkans, is there a need for a 'Northern Balkans' approach to grasp the new regional realities? And in that sense, does Croatia's full integration to the EU invalidate to a certain extent the regional signifier of Western Balkans? Are we in the age of the *Rest-ern Balkans*, where regional cooperation has lost its symbolic power?

These questions are reifying the analytical approach of social representations as central in the understanding of the on-going political developments of integration both at the EU and regional level. Since regional denominations convey meanings and concepts, it is essential to keep tracing the regional policy-making and the (new?) signifiers that might emerge in this context. We can already observe some provisional trends in that the Western Balkans is either going to be soon contested as a regional signifier or it will gradually fade away as a social representation in need of content. The EU process is bound to absorb and eclipse the need for an institutionalised

regional framework, once the enlargement process reaches its end for the states in the region.

APPENDIX I

DIRECTION OF TRADE FLOWS OF THE WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES, BY MAJOR PARTNERS, 1998 IN %						
	ALBANIA	BiH	CROATIA	FRY	FYROM	WESTERN BALKANS
<u>IMPORTS</u>						
INDUSTRIAL COUNTRIES	81.9	44.8	71.1	78.9	57.7	66.9
WESTERN BALKANS	0.65	7.13	6.68	1.2	3.7	3.87

DIRECTION OF TRADE FLOWS OF THE WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES, BY MAJOR PARTNERS, 1998 IN %						
	ALBANIA	BiH	CROATIA	FRY	FYROM	WESTERN BALKANS
<u>EXPORTS</u>						
INDUSTRIAL COUNTRIES	94	54	53.4	74.1	65.9	68.3
WESTERN BALKANS	0.55	7.2	4.05	4.53	3.98	4.06

Data taken from: World Bank (2000) *The road to stability and prosperity in South Eastern Europe: a regional strategy paper*. Washington DC, World Bank, pp. 54-55.

Appendix II

REGIONAL TRADE BY DESTINATION OF THE YUGOSLAV REPUBLICS 1987			
<u>Republics of former Yugoslavia</u>	<u>Deliveries to the local market</u>	<u>Deliveries to markets of other republics</u>	<u>Deliveries abroad (exports)</u>
BiH	56.1	24.2	19.8
Croatia	67	18.7	14.3
FYROM	60.8	21.4	17.8
Montenegro	57.5	25	17.5
Serbia	69	13.4	17.6
Kosovo	64.6	24	11.4
Vojvodina	58.1	28.8	13.1
Slovenia	57.5	20.3	22.2

Table 1. Figures are per cent of gross material product (GMP)

Source: Uvalic 2001: 58

Appendix III



NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) in the period 1996-1999:

Orange colour are the members of the PfP in the Balkans: Albania, Bulgaria, FYROM, Romania and Slovenia.

Blue colour are the permanent NATO members: Greece, Italy and Turkey.

NB Serbia and Montenegro were a single state under the name of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (it can be found in the literature as SFRY or FRY). Kosovo continued to be recognised as an autonomous entity within the state boundaries of SFRY.

Appendix IV



South Balkan Development Initiative (SBDI) in the period 1996-1999:

Orange colour are the members of the SBDI programme in the Balkans

NB Serbia and Montenegro were a single state under the name of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (it can be found in the literature as SFRY or FRY). Kosovo continued to be recognised as an autonomous entity within the state boundaries of SFRY.

Appendix V



Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI) in the period 1996-1999:

Orange colour are the members of the SECI initiative in the Balkans, meaning Albania, BiH, Bulgaria, FYROM, Greece, Romania Slovenia and Turkey plus Hungary and Moldova.

Green colour are the two countries in the region that were not full members in SECI. Croatia retained an observer status until 2000 and SFRY was suspended in 1996 (and re-joined as full member in 2003)

NB Serbia and Montenegro were a single state under the name of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (it can be found in the literature as SFRY or FRY). Kosovo continued to be recognised as an autonomous entity within the state boundaries of SFRY.

Appendix VI



Royaumont Process (or the Declaration on a Stability Process and Good Neighbourliness) in the period 1996-1999:

Orange colour are the members of the Royaumont Process, and specifically those are Albania, BiH, Bulgaria, Croatia, FYROM, Romania, SFRY, Slovenia, Turkey plus Hungary.

Brown colour is SFRY because it was a full member until 1998 when it was suspended due to its involvement in the outbreak of conflicts in Kosovo.

NB Serbia and Montenegro were a single state under the name of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (it can be found in the literature as SFRY or FRY). Kosovo continued to be recognised as an autonomous entity within the state boundaries of SFRY.

Appendix VII



Regional Approach (RA) in the period 1997-1999:

Orange colour are the members of the RA: Albania, BiH, Croatia, FYROM and SFRY.

NB Serbia and Montenegro were a single state under the name of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (it can be found in the literature as SFRY or FRY). Kosovo continued to be recognised as an autonomous entity within the state boundaries of SFRY.

Appendix VIII



OBNOVA programme in the period 1996-1999:

Orange colour are the members of OBNOVA: BiH, Croatia, FYROM and SFRY.

NB Serbia and Montenegro were a single state under the name of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (it can be found in the literature as SFRY or FRY). Kosovo continued to be recognised as an autonomous entity within the state boundaries of SFRY.

Appendix IX

DONOR	COMMITMENTS		PAYMENTS	
	Amount	%	Amount	%
European Commission	505	18	193	38
Others (Member States, USA, Japan, World Bank, Other European countries, Arab countries, EBRD, Other countries)	2 235	82	1 173	52
Total	2 740	100	1 366	50

Aid mobilised by the international community at 31 August 1997

Source: World Bank and European Commission November 1997 in Court of Auditors 1998: 14.

Appendix X

Countries	From 1996 to 1998 (€)
Albania	34,000,000.00
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.00
Croatia	0.00
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	70,000,000.00
Iceland	89,165,194.35
Montenegro	0.00
Serbia	0.00
Turkey	373,000,000.00
Total Amount	566,165,194.35

Finance Contracts signed between the EIB and non-EU member states/Enlargement countries in the period 1996-1998.

Source: European Investment Bank 2011. Available from:
<http://www.eib.org/index.htm> [Accessed at 28 November 2011]

Appendix XI

EBRD OFFICES	
<u>CENTRAL EUROPE</u>	
Business Director	Alain Pilloux
Baltic countries	George Krivicky
Poland	Irene Grzybowski
Czech and Slovak Republic	Alexander Auboeck
Croatia, Hungary and Slovenia	Hans Peter Achermann
<u>SOUTHERN AND EASTERN EUROPE AND THE CAUCASUS</u>	
Business Group Director	Olivier Descamps
Ukraine	Andrew Seton
Albania, FYROM, BiH	Henry Russell
Romania	Salvatore Candido
Bulgaria	Jean-Marc Peterschmitt
Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia and Moldova	Hildegard Gacek

Offices of the EBRD in parts of Europe

Source: European Bank for Reconstruction and Development 2000: 105

Appendix XII

A chronology of events in Kosovo in 1999:

- **January** -- 45 ethnic Albanians slain outside Racak, spurring international efforts for a peace settlement. Western allies demand warring sides attend Kosovo peace conference or face NATO airstrikes.
- **6-17 February** -- First, inconclusive round of talks between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs in Rambouillet, France.
- **February-March** -- Yugoslav forces sweep through FYROM border region, digging in across from where thousands of NATO forces gathering for a possible peacekeeping mission, and bombard KLA positions in the north.
- **18 March** -- Kosovo Albanians unilaterally sign peace deal calling for a broad interim autonomy and 28,000 NATO troops to implement it. Serb delegation refuses and talks suspended.
- **19 March** -- The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe decided to withdraw the Kosovo Verification Mission from Kosovo.
- **20 March** -- International peace monitors evacuate Kosovo, as Yugoslav forces build-up and launch offensives against rebels.
- **22 March** -- U.S. special envoy Richard Holbrooke visits Belgrade to warn Milosevic of airstrikes unless he signs peace agreement. Milosevic refuses to allow NATO troops in Yugoslavia.
- **23 March** -- Holbrooke declares the talks have failed. With no concessions from Yugoslavia, NATO Secretary General Solana directed General Clark, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe, to initiate air operations. Yugoslavia declares state of emergency -- its first since World War II.
- **24 March** -- The NATO alliance air strikes, known as Operation Allied Force, began. NATO forces shot down three Yugoslavian fighter aircraft.
- **26 March** -- Massive group of refugees fled to Albania.
- **30 March** -- Strikes commenced against targets throughout FRY.
- **3 April** -- First NATO force strike on Belgrade --Yugoslavian and Serbian interior ministries destroyed.
- **13 April** -- NATO alliance requested 300 additional U.S. aircraft. At NATO's North Atlantic Council Ministerial meeting, the alliance defined the five requirements for the end of the air campaign.
- **23 April** -- NATO 50th Anniversary Summit began in Washington, D.C. -- alliance members stated the conditions that would bring an end to the air campaign and announced that the air campaign will intensify.
- **7 May** -- NATO alliance planes accidentally hit Chinese Embassy in Belgrade.
- **27 May** -- President Milosevic and other Yugoslavian leaders were indicted by the United Nations War Crimes Tribunal for crimes against humanity.
- **3 June** -- Yugoslavian President Milosevic agreed to the NATO alliance's conditions to end air campaign.
- **9-10 June** -- A military technical agreement was signed between the NATO alliance and Yugoslavian representatives. NATO Secretary General Solana called for a suspension of NATO force air strikes.
- **20 June** -- Yugoslavian forces completely withdrew from Kosovo, leading NATO Secretary General Solana to officially end the NATO alliance's air campaign in Yugoslavia.

Appendix XIII



Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (SP) in the period 1999-2008:

Orange colours are the members of the SP in the Balkans: Albania, BiH, Bulgaria, FYROM, FRY, Romania, Slovenia and Turkey.

Blue colours are the member of the SP which are also EU member-states: Austria, Greece and Italy.

NB Serbia and Montenegro were a single state under the name of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (it can be found in the literature as SFRY or FRY). Kosovo continued to be recognised as an autonomous entity within the state boundaries of SFRY.

Appendix XIV



Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) in the period 1999-today:

Orange colours are the members of the SAP in the Balkans: Albania, BiH, Croatia, FRY and FYROM.

NB Serbia and Montenegro were a single state under the name of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (it can be found in the literature as SFRY or FRY). Kosovo continued to be recognised as an autonomous entity within the state boundaries of SFRY.

Appendix XV



The European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR) in the period 1999-2008:

Orange colours are the members of the SAP in the Balkans: FRY, FYROM and Kosovo.

NB Serbia and Montenegro were a single state under the name of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (it can be found in the literature as SFRY or FRY). Kosovo continued to be recognised as an autonomous entity within the state boundaries of SFRY.

Appendix XVI



South East Europe Initiative (SEEI) in the period 1999-today:

Orange colours are the members of SEEI and are essentially the entire Balkans: Albania, BiH, Bulgaria, Croatia, FYROM, Hungary, Romania, SFRY and Slovenia.

NB Serbia and Montenegro were a single state under the name of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (it can be found in the literature as SFRY or FRY). Kosovo continued to be recognised as an autonomous entity within the state boundaries of SFRY.

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