

NATO Enlargement and Security in the Balkans

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Abstract: This article examines the impact of NATO enlargement on security and democratization in East Central Europe in order to draw lessons for aspirants in the Western Balkans. I analyze some of the main arguments of Neo-realists and Neo-liberal Institutionalists on the role of international institutions like the EU and NATO for increasing stability and security, and for fostering cooperation among states. While neither theory wins, the article finds evidence to support some of the main propositions of both the Realist and the Institutionalism schools of thought. The theoretical analysis is then used to draw policy recommendations about the continuing enlargement of NATO and the Euro-Atlantic perspective for the Western Balkan states.

Keywords: NATO, Western Balkans, security, enlargement, conditionality, stability, democratization

Introduction

This article examines the role of NATO enlargement for improving security in the Balkans. It proposes lessons from the experience of some of the new NATO members, which are relevant for countries in the Western Balkans aspiring to join the Euro-Atlantic institutions.¹ After the end of the Cold War, a vigorous debate on the future of NATO ensued in both the academic and policy communities. Neo-realists contended that NATO's days are numbered, while Neo-liberal institutionalists maintained that the Alliance will transform itself to meet the new security challenges. Leading American policy-makers sided with the Neo-liberal institutionalists and argued that, instead of following the Warsaw Pact into the history textbooks, NATO could be the vehicle which can bring stability and enhance security in Eastern Europe.² As Liberal Institutionalists argue, the promise of NATO membership was a major incentive for the East Central European countries and helped sustain their political and economic reforms.³ It could do the same for the Western Balkans as well.

1 The term "Western Balkans" refers to the following countries: Albania, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia. Of these, Albania and Croatia are NATO members since April of 2009.

2 Clinton 1997; Albright 1997, 22; Talbott 1995.

3 Skalnes 1998, 49; Asmus, Kugler and Larrabee 1993, 28-40; Talbott 1995, 27.

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