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## Re-examination of EU normative power in light of the revised enlargement methodology towards the Western Balkans\*

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**Abstract:** The aim of this article is to re-examine the concept of “EU normative power” in the revised EU approach to enlargement policy announced in 2020. Drawing on conceptualisation of power in Foreign Policy Analysis the article applies the reading of the EU’s soft and hard power – both as capability and as influence – to EU normative power. The empirical part thus identifies above four elements within the EU’s promotion of its particular norms and within the EU’s strife for international normality via enlargement policy. The results show that the new enlargement methodology does offer change of EU normative power. The EU could more effectively condition the respect of its particular norms by an exemplary domestic practice assuring its own domestic and foreign policy legitimacy and in turn by developing and applying the needed capabilities for achieving attractiveness. Even though a plan of positive conditionality and better-defined conditions in direct negotiations carries such potential, a risk exists that the biggest novelty – the ‘phasing-in’ paradigm – would only explore EU’s norm-related hard market power capabilities by keeping the Western Balkans countries as candidates forever, thus undermining EU’s legitimacy and hard power influence of negative conditionality. To promote international normality, however, the EU needs to activate other elements of soft power influence, namely agenda setting and persuasion.

**Keywords:** European Union, normative power, hard and soft power, Western Balkans, revised enlargement methodology

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## Introduction

The European Union's (EU) power towards the Western Balkans countries has evidently changed during the last 20 years. After the EU ceased the immense opportunity in the post-conflict region and offered the Western Balkans states membership perspective in 2003, it established itself towards the region as the hegemon. At the time, other world powers were either uninterested or too weak to act towards the region in the context of their interest sphere. Elements of the EU's legitimate leadership were predominantly based on the EU's normative power. Since Manners' (2002) conceptualisation, many authors have evaluated the effects of EU's capability to be perceived as positive and morally good and to establish what is normal in international relations. Additionally, the particular persuasion and discourse-based method of EU's normative influence on prospective member countries was especially interesting for students of EU enlargement policy; either as conditionality via the golden carrot, either via norm transfer in the Europeanization process or even in terms of effect of positive presence of a peaceful, democratic, free and prosperous market and political community. The Croatian EU membership in 2013 was a significant achievement in demonstration of EU's power to transfer "EU normality" to the Western Balkans.

However, the two Brussels Agreements in 2013 and 2015 on normalisation of relations pertaining to official Belgrade and Pristina and Bosnian membership application in early 2016 seem to have been the last concrete positive outcomes of the EU's normative power in the Western Balkans. EU member states' challenges to effective free market and monetary union, undemocratic practices and disrespect of the rule of law and human rights, political radicalisation and a loss of a nearly 70-million EU citizens – nationals of the UK, caused the enlargement fatigue – whereby the model of liberal democracy and supranationality was being challenged from within. On the side of the Western Balkans countries accession fatigue emerged. The slow intra-state political and economic transition, a stalemate and severe backsliding in accession progress of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (named North Macedonia since February 2019) and re-emerging regional instability showed that the EU's strategy to prioritize and condition stabilization and post-conflict reconciliation as accession condition was ineffective *per se* and detrimental to democratization (Kmezić and Bieber 2017). Finally, challenges external to both the EU and the aspiring members in the form of several subsequent global crises additionally challenged the implementation of EU enlargement policy as they weakened the EU's normative power as such and additionally indirectly as they enabled an

establishment of a political market of world powers interested in Western Balkans region (Keil and Stahl 2022).

The European Commission has recognized above challenges to the EU enlargement policy and in February 2020 informed EU institutions of a document “Enhancing the accession process – A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkan” (EC COM(2020) 57final). This Communication aims to increase the “effectiveness of the accession negotiation process” (EC COM(2020) 57final, 1). It introduces three priority goals to reinvigorate the accession processes of Western Balkans states, namely “more credibility, a stronger political steer, more dynamic process and predictability, and positive and negative conditionality” (ibid.). The biggest novelty of the proposal is a possibility to include Western Balkans states into specific EU policies without them having met all membership conditions – a so called phasing-in (EC COM(2020) 57final, 5) or “accelerated sectoral alignment and integration” (EC COM(2020) 57final, 6). Yet, there are also negative sanctions provisioned, such as negotiations put on hold or suspended (ibid.) or negotiation chapters reopened if needed – this is named reversibility (EC COM(2020) 57final, 1). This “revised enlargement methodology” has not yet been implemented. This is due partially to COVID-19 recovery and mostly to a completely new challenge that preoccupies the EU, namely Russian aggression on Ukraine since February 2022. This severe threat to European peace and security has also apparently expanded the geographical focus of EU enlargement policy to Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia as indicated by European Council Conclusion (2022, Title III), but also furthered revised enlargement methodology for Western Balkans enlargement (European Council Conclusion 2022, Title IV, point 16).

The aim of this article is to re-examine the nature of EU normative power in light of above-mentioned revised EU approach to enlargement policy announced in 2020. It seems highly relevant to verify if EU’s move away from demanding strict attainability of conditions to offer high rewards (access to its policies) and its increased intention of negative sanctions and reversibility in case of a candidate’s backsliding would negatively affect EU’s normative power. Consequently, this will enable an ex-ante assessment of the effect that such a potentially changed EU normative power might have for Western Balkans countries’ EU accession. The structure of the article first entails a conceptualisation of power based on theoretical approach of Foreign Policy Analysis, which reads power in resource and in relational terms (Holsti 1995; Nye 2011). This binary understanding is then applied to EU’s normative power. The operationalization results in two conceptions of power, namely power as capability and power as influence. As in practice, both two definitions of power

can be utilized via two extreme applications, namely soft and hard power; the effect of this dichotomy on normative power Europe will also be explored. The third section then applies conceptual establishments to EU enlargement policy. It analyses European Commission designed revised enlargement methodology from the perspective of EU normative power in a two-step manner. First, it searches for soft and hard power capabilities and second it identifies type of (soft or hard power) normative influence the EU plans to use in the Western Balkans enlargement policy. In the Conclusion, the article answers the research question: What is the identified nature of EU normative power in the revised enlargement methodology? The answer to this question enables a concluding assessment of a potential effect that a changed EU normative power might have for Western Balkans countries' EU accession.

### **Conceptualisation of EU's normative power as capability and as influence**

In this section, we first present a short understanding of the now classical reading of EU's normative power. Then, we define power as capability and as influence, based on conceptions of power attached to states' behaviour in international politics. Afterwards, we apply this conceptualisation to the EU as a foreign policy subject and determine the particular understanding to its normative power through the capability-influence prism.

#### ***Classical reading of EU's normative power***

The particular initial lack of military capability and the use of predominantly economic instruments of external relations drove Duchêne in 1972 to define the EU as 'civilian power'. Yet in the 1990s, despite the evaluation of EU's capability being far away from expectations (Hill 1993), scholars estimated that the EU's identity could no longer be defined as civilian power, but that it has developed into a hybrid actor, which is torn between civilian and military power (Smith 2005, 73–74). Nevertheless, the most specific mark the EU has made in the world in the last 50 years has been its move away from the traditional notion of power in international politics. The EU has developed an alternative approach to power politics by shifting towards international law, rules, transnational cooperation and integration (Björkdahl 2004, 3), which Manners (2001; 2002) coined as Normative Power Europe. The EU "represents neither a civilian power

of an intergovernmental nature utilising economic tools and international diplomacy, nor a military power of a supranational nature using armed force and international intervention, but a normative power of an ideational nature characterised by common principles and a willingness to disregard notions of 'state' or 'international' (Manners 2001, 7). The precondition for such normative action is the EU's normative basis or image – what EU is in world politics, namely EU's normative identity. Manners (2001; 2002) identified five key norms that were institutionalized during the process of European integration, namely: peace, liberty, democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights. Both normative identity and normative power to act must be understood as the ability to shape or change behaviour to the point that something is accepted as 'normal' in international relations (Manners 2001, 10). With the idea of normative action, the author proposes that the EU is not merely formed on a normative basis, but that the definition dictates its action on the basis of norms in international relations. EU normative power thus means that the EU is conceptualised as a changer of norms in the international system; the EU acts to change norms and it also should act to extend its norms into that system (Manners 2002, 252). This translates into EU redefining international norms in its own image with absence of obvious material gain from its interventions and even facing opposition from otherwise like-natured countries (ibid.). Above norms have become integrated into enlargement policy and make up an integral part of the criteria for EU membership (Del Sarto 2015). Enlargement linked to common values is a true manifestation of the EU's normative identity in international relations, aimed primarily at the democratization and Europeanisation of candidate countries. EU's normative identity is thus key to the debate on the EU's normative influence beyond its borders (Del Sarto 2015, 5). Critical evaluations of EU's enlargement policy have shown that it is precisely the normative justification of EU policies in the region that has triggered so called shallow Europeanization on the side of Western Balkans states (Noutcheva 2009, 165).

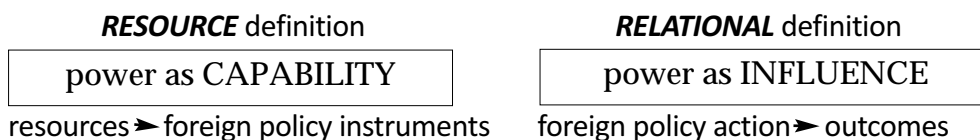
### ***Conceptualisation of power as capability and as influence***

Re-reading normative power Europe from the perspective of power in Foreign Policy Analysis first demands to accept a position that normative power Europe directly contradicts, namely, state-centrism. Foreign policy subjects have been countries therefore the EU external relations and foreign policy studies have developed particular approaches to understanding and analysing EU action in international scene, e.g. EU actorness (Sjöstedt 1974; Ginsberg 1989; Bretherton and Vogler 2006). Yet with practically 65-year practice of what Lisbon

Treaty now calls external action, one can estimate that an intellectual exercise of applying understanding of power reserved to foreign policy of states also to the EU as a foreign policy subject. This has recently been recognized also by the most established students of EU's action in international politics, who re-establish the need to understand not only 'actor capability', but also 'actor behaviour' via a new concept of 'actor performance' (Rhinard and Sjöstedt 2019). We will refer also to this innovation in our reading of power as capability and influence.

This paper is not a rereading or critical evaluation of the concept of power in political science, European Studies or in IR. We thus concentrate on the application of the classical state-international behaviour related concept onto the EU's international behaviour. Nye (2011, 11) defines state's power as "the ability to affect others to produce preferred outcomes". Holsti (1995) has already recognized that power has a somewhat static element of 'capability' (i. e. ability to affect by Nye) and a relational element which is exercised via behaviour, called 'influence' (production of outcomes by Nye). This has been taken as a convention by other researchers and teachers as well (e.g. Hill 2016; Brighi and Hill 2012) and is also our departure. Power as capability refers to resources operationalized into foreign policy instruments available to be used. This is a resource definition of power (Nye 2011, 12). "Getting from resources to behavioural outcomes is a crucial intervening variable," estimates Nye (ibid.) and calls this 'power conversion'. Therefore the second aspect of power is no longer static possession of resources and instruments to act but rather the very application of these instruments in relations to other actors in international politics – power as influence.

*Picture 1: Reading of power in foreign policy*



Source: Adapted from Holsti (1995) and Nye (2011).

Most importantly, the definition of power as capability refers to the perspective from within the foreign policy actor; ontologically an actor-specific theory perspective of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) (Hudson 2007). Conversely, power as influence refers to type of the actor's behaviour but also to its

outcomes in international politics, thus possibly applying a more actor-general (ibid.) International Relations (IR) structural view of power distribution in the international system (e.g. Barnett and Duval 2005; Berenskoetter 2007). Our focus is on the first, actor-specific view as we analyse EU's normative power.

Further concepts applied to power as capability and as influence refer to the type of capabilities possessed and developed by a foreign policy actor and types of influence the actor uses in the international community. Resources are classified into material, semi-material and human resources (Hill 2003) and foreign policy instruments into diplomacy, culture economic and military instruments (Brighi and Hill 2012; Hill 2016). This is not a universal classification, but despite several differences in naming foreign policy tools, they have been quite consistently classified as soft power and hard power instruments. This binary conception somehow follows international business studies of companies having tangible (hard) and intangible (soft) resources at their availability.<sup>3</sup> Foreign policy resources can thus be hard, such as natural resources like minerals, wood, water or oil, particularities of territory like wind power, island position, biodiversity, arable land. Soft resources are somehow on the opposite end of continuum, deriving primarily of human activity, such as scientific knowledge and excellence, type of political system, societal values, quality or openness of civil society, education and skills of diplomats, high arts and popular culture products. Somewhere in between are interpretations of history, productivity and competitiveness, ownership of world media. One therefore sees that classical positioning of military instruments as hard power capability is correct but in combination with technological development and scientific knowledge, it does include soft power capability as well. Similarly, a brand “made in EU” reflects hard power market capability of the EU but also a soft power capability of marketing the positive image of the EU. We refer more concretely to this in the following section, as this particular element of power that is problematic for the EU in the Western Balkans.

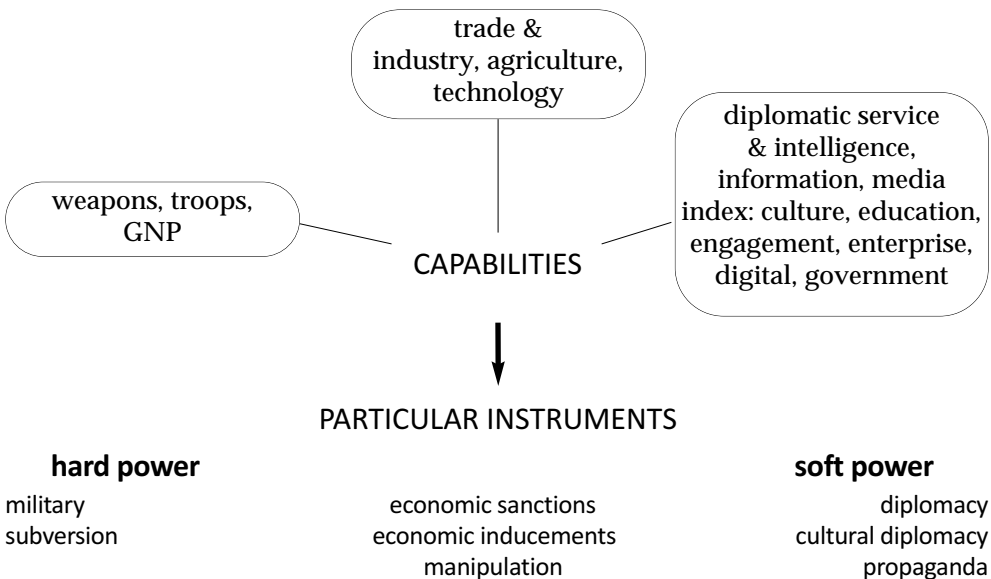
Specific measurement of soft power capabilities was developed, since soft power seemed to be prevalent in absence of a major international war after the end of the Cold War. Index of Soft power (McClory 2019) consists of “objective

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<sup>3</sup> Some of the original studies in international business and marketing are theory of the firm (Coase 1937; Penrose 1959), theory of the competitiveness of nation (Porter 1980) and resource based theory, (Barney 1991). Coase, R. H. 1937. “The Nature of the Firm”. *Economica* 4 (16): 386–405. Penrose, Edith T. 1959. *The Theory of the Growth of the Firm*. New York: John Wiley and Sons. Porter, Michael E. 1980. *Competitive strategy: Techniques for analyzing industries and competitors*. New York: Free Press. Barney, Jay. 1991. “Firm Resources and Sustained Competitive Advantage”. *Journal of Management* 17 (1): 99–120.

data” in the form of six sub-indices, namely culture, enterprise, digital, government, education and engagement (McClory 2019, 28). The Culture subindex for example employs metrics that capture “high” culture like visual arts and “pop” culture like music and film, the annual number of international tourist arrivals, music industry exports, and international sporting success (McClory 2019, 27). The Education sub-index measures the number of international students in a country, the relative quality of its universities, and the academic output of higher education institutions. The Engagement sub-index measures includes the number of embassies/high commissions a country has abroad, membership of multilateral organisations, and overseas development aid contributions. The Enterprise sub-index relates to relative attractiveness of a country’s economic model, measuring attributes like ease of doing business, corruption levels, and capacity for innovation (McClory 2019, 28). “The Digital subindex aims to capture the extent to which countries have embraced technology, how well they are connected to the digital world, and their use of digital diplomacy through social media platforms” (ibid.). The Government sub-index assess a state’s political values, public institutions, and major public policy outcomes via metrics on individual freedoms, human rights, human development, violence in society, and government effectiveness (ibid.).

Picture 2: Hard and soft power capabilities



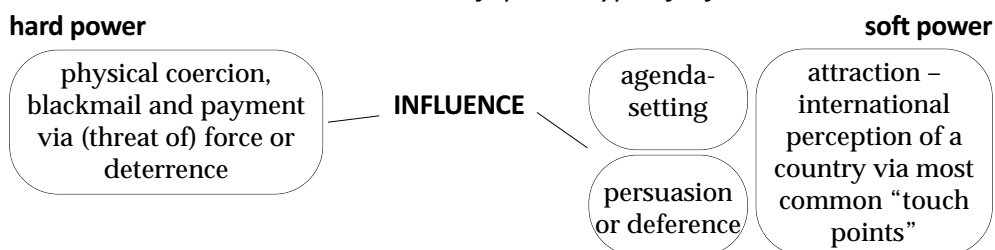
Source: Adapted from Hill (2016, 143–147) and McClory (2019).



Nye as the founder of the concept of soft power in FPA in 1990 has replied to critiques that his original work simply assumed that the nature of capability directly prescribes nature of its application. As this is untrue in practice, he improved the definition of power as described above. Power as influence is thus also understood as soft and hard, but this continuum relates to type of strategy used in state behaviour in the international community. Hard power is “the ability to get preferred outcomes through coercion and payment” and soft power means “the ability to get preferred outcomes through the co-optive means of agenda-setting, persuasion and attraction” (Nye 2011, 16). Hill (2016, 147) presents the two ends of the continuum as hard power as the ability to compel other actors by force and deterrence and soft power as the ability to sway other’s decisions and persuasion and deference.

To summarize, one sees that power as influence comes in two extreme types, one being coercion and the other persuasion or attraction. Yet, it should be noted that soft power therefore comes in two faces. On the one side, in direct relations of agenda setting in international institutions and persuasion (or deference) in international negotiations. On the other side, soft power also means non-action by the analysed foreign policy actor as it exists on the side of other actors: “/.../ since attraction depends upon the minds of the perceiver, the subject’s perceptions play a significant role in whether given resources produce hard or soft power behaviour” (Nye 2011, 19). McClory’s index of Soft power captures this aspect via “subjective” data which measures “international perceptions of countries assessed according to the most common “touch points” through which people interface with foreign countries” via perception of cuisine, tech products, friendliness of a country, culture, luxury goods, foreign policy and liveability (McClory 2019, 28). This element is very relevant for the EU’s foreign policy as ‘presence’ is a particular element of EU’s actorness (Bretherton and Vogler 2006).

*Picture 3: Hard and soft power type of influence*



Source: Adapted from Hill (2016, 143–147) and Nye (2011).

### ***Conceptualising EU normative power as capability and as influence***

Now we apply above conceptualisation of power to the EU and particularly to the understanding of the EU's normative power. The term normative power and EU as a normative power (or normative power Europe) have both been referred to in the Introduction. The short literature review exposed that EU's normative power has two basic presuppositions (Požgan 2017). First, the EU is a unique international political entity in normative sense (*a sui generis* case) because in its foreign policy, it stands not only for its own particular interests but promotes universal norms and principles (listed above). Second, normative power as an approach to EU's foreign policy action assumes that the EU is capable of defining and changing what type of behaviour in international politics is understood as "normal" (Požgan 2017, 109–111).

In terms of power as capability, one usually presumes that normative power originates from intangible resources and is delivered via soft power capabilities, such as diplomatic service intelligence, information and media. Yet, up to the changes that Lisbon Treaty introduced to the Treaty on EU in force since 2009, these resources had been reserved only for EU member states. The European Economic Community developed mostly semi-material tangible capabilities, such as trade, industry, agriculture and technology. Additionally, the EU has operationalized these capabilities for external relations via instruments for economic sanctions and inducements in the form of trade agreements. The latter are definitely not military capabilities or instrument, yet they are closer to hard power capabilities and do not follow a conception of soft power. Additionally, in terms of power as influence, researchers established that "EU market power" in the form of trade agreements equally applies strategy of persuasion as well as strategy of force or manipulation (Damro 2012).

The application of above capability by the EU has not been called manipulation but rather conditionality. One therefore acknowledges that the EU's primary capability is positioned in between soft and hard power and its type of influence is both – soft and hard power. From the perspective of normative power, this seems a side note, but its relevance is in the normative conception of both liberal market – regional integration capability and international liberalism type of influence (international negotiations). The nature of EU's predominant capability (liberal market) and the nature of EU's strategy to apply influence based on this capability (conditioning performance of EU values to get access to EU market) are both normative. Therefore, it is not the ideational aspect of a norm that the EU has been initially exporting into international politics, but rather a material aspect of a norm called liberal market and economic cooperation via negotiations. The EU was also very successful in

achieving that this norm became a normality in international relations because third countries and regional organizations wanted to either become members of this market or have access to it via trade agreements.

It was only after the EU was founded and legally consolidated as a political community based on EU values that one can add the elements of liberal democracy as the political system, human rights observation, good governance, equality, social solidarity and sustainable development to EU's soft power capability. These EU values have had a double influence in world politics. On the one side, these norms bear influence via attraction – without EU's particular action. This type of soft power as influence has been specifically ascribed to the EU as presence. On the other side, the EU has managed to become a liberal hegemon, putting these norms on the international agenda in various multilateral forums where it can be/is present, thus defining its own norms as international and achieving even international consensus on their normality. The most obvious evidence of that is the G-7 decision in autumn 1989 to confer on the European Economic Community the responsibility for coordination of international financial aid by Group of 24 Western donors to Central and East European Countries (Bretherton and Vogler 2006, 135).

Predominant instrument of norms-based soft power is of course diplomacy but it is not only applied via soft power influence (promotion and persuasion), but also via hard power influence in the form of above-mentioned negative conditionality. Another important conceptual finding is also that a crucial precondition for the EU to achieve preferred outcomes in international politics is not only to apply norms via an appropriately measured combination of conditionality (soft or hard power influence) but equally so to sustain the quality of norms on its own in order to condition them to third countries. Finally, EU also needs to sustain a generally positive international image which is an element of attractiveness as soft power influence. This can be achieved in several aspects of its domestic policies and politics, not necessarily directly related to EU's normative principles, objectives and institutions.

Recently, Rhinard and Sjöstedt (2019) have proposed an updated model of EU actorhood focusing more on the behaviour aspect not only on the capability. They introduce 'actor performance', "terms of how the EU carries out a transaction – *vis-à-vis* external parties in the international system" (Rhinard and Sjöstedt 2019, 15). Performance is defined as "kinds and quality of transactions originating from the EU system carrying a potential to shape addressees in the external environment" and is shaped by both internal conditions and external factors (*ibid.*). Most importantly, the authors note that "a transaction can take various forms, and is not limited to economic exchange (such as the sale of a weapons system or the offer of development aid) but could include the transfer of scientific knowledge,

agenda setting efforts, the promise of military assistance, or threats to sanction a third country on civil rights grounds” (Rhinar and Sjöstedt 2019, 15–16). Authors conceptualise as the actor the EU system which is a useful perception of the EU as a foreign policy subject to our discussion; EU system includes action of the EU commission in the name of the EU, action of a coalition of EU companies or individual EU member states. EU performance does not focus on the “mechanics” of carrying out transactions but rather on the performance effectiveness – “the extent to which a particular performance had an impact externally” (Rhinar and Sjöstedt 2019, 17). In this view, the concept is complementary to this article as in this study we do concentrate on the mechanics of EU’s foreign policy actions.

The below Table 1 offers a summary of application of the above typology of soft and hard power to EU’s norms-related capabilities and type of influence.

Following this, we establish that the EU can more effectively condition respect of norms in two aspects. The EU needs to practice its particular (*sui generis*) norms exemplarily within the EU political system, including towards its member states, to assure legitimacy in foreign policy. Yet, it can further strengthen this legitimacy by attractiveness via normative and non-normative (material) EU-integration specific achievements. The former are peaceful post-conflict reconciliation, liberal democracy, respect of human rights, effective governance and low corruption. The later are for example luxury goods, popular culture, student exchange, scientific cooperation and desire of non-EU nationals to visit, to live, work or study in the EU, EU’s economic model, innovation potential, cuisine, civilian power and trust in EU’s approach to international politics. Such soft power elements work “on their own” and raise EU’s legitimacy for positive and negative conditionality of EU-particular norms. Additionally, negative conditionality in this case can thus be much more legitimately used and more effective.

As for effectiveness of conditioning norms that EU wants to promote as a general normality in international relations, the EU cannot count only on its own legitimacy and attractiveness, but needs to activate other aspects of its soft power, namely agenda setting and persuasion. The latter should be first oriented towards like-minded states – other norm entrepreneurs, to achieve international legitimacy of the norm. Only afterwards, the EU can address third countries – recipients with this international norm as normality. In this case, EU’s hard power (negative conditionality) does not seem as an effective choice of influence. Rather, linking the international norm to EU’s domestic and foreign policy attractive material achievements related to this norm, seems like a better choice of influence. To achieve such attractiveness (soft power influence), the EU needs to develop capabilities of public diplomacy and propaganda to raise its own international visibility (presence) and thus “leave for” social, economic and political globalisation flows to raise EU’s positive international perception.

Table 1: EU normative power in terms of capabilities and influence

	PROMOTION OF EU PARTICULAR NORMS		PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL NORMS (INTERNATIONAL NORMALITY)	
	<i>Soft power</i>	<i>Hard power</i>	<i>Soft power</i>	<i>Hard power</i>
<b><i>Power as capability</i></b>	EU external action service, enabling access of third countries to particular EU policies and membership	prosperous regional economic integration – trade, agriculture, industry, technology, specific development aid programmes	EU external action service, education exchange and scientific cooperation programmes, EU memberships in multilateral organisations and participation in international conferences Necessary instrument: propaganda and public diplomacy	prosperous regional economic integration – trade, agriculture, industry, technology, development aid contributions, strength of Euro
<b><i>Power as influence</i></b>	/	negative conditionality – threat via negative economic and political sanctions in case of disrespect of EU values Necessary condition: legitimacy	agenda setting in international fora with like-minded countries on EU norms and normative objectives	/
	positive conditionality – persuasion on EU values in international negotiations via economic inducements		positive conditionality – persuasion on EU values in international negotiations via economic inducements	
	attractiveness of EU integration normative and material achievements		attractiveness of EU integration normative and material achievements	

Source: authors' findings.

## **EU normative power in revised enlargement methodology**

In this section, we apply above findings from the conceptual part, synthesized in Table 1, directly to EU's enlargement policy towards the Western Balkans countries by analysing EU's revised enlargement methodology. We seek to identify intended use of EU's normative power as capability and as influence and consequently estimate the expected effect for EU-Western Balkans relations.

### ***EU normative power in relation to the Western Balkan states regarding specific EU norms***

In EU enlargement policy, the EU needs to transfer its particular normative and material achievements onto new member states and assure their effective continuation. Treaty on EU (Art. 49) clearly states this in membership conditions, namely that future member states need to respect and promote EU values and achieve capacity determined by European Council via political, economic, legal and administrative criteria. Therefore, candidate countries need to achieve not only effective recognition but also de facto enactment of EU norms. This process has proven to be long and demanding for countries in which transition to liberal democracy and market needs not only proper inducements but mostly time to be acknowledged, practiced and potentially internalized. This is not only ideationally demanding but also materially challenging due to parallel processes based on the need for post-conflict reconstruction and economic development. On the other hand, the EU itself has not been legitimate in sustaining its own achievements with several troubles of monetary union, free flow of people, and non-observation of human rights and democracy in some member states.

We have established that the EU's strongest norm-related hard power capabilities stem from the regulation of its particular nature and achievements of economic integration. In the renewed enlargement methodology European Commission (EC COM(2020) 57final, 3) recognized the need to transform

*the Western Balkans into functioning market economies able to integrate fully into the EU's single market, to create jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities, to improve the business and investment climate, to promote the rule of law and to stop the brain drain from the region. These reforms are essential to boost the economies of the Balkans and to anchor them to the EU markets by accelerating the necessary convergence with the EU. The Commission will particularly consider how to bring forward investment, socio-economic integration, and the rule of law, enhance access to the EU single*

*market, strengthen connectivity as well as embrace the opportunities of the green economy.*

Capabilities newly designed to achieve this is enhanced forms of development aid specifically designed for candidate countries. This includes a possibility of accelerated alignment and integration in all EU policy areas (phasing-in) as mentioned above. Accelerated integration could be a significant soft power capability the EU can use to motivate aspiring countries for accepting EU norms (after having achieved progress as co-participating in EU policies). It is also important that aspiring countries are the ones who decide on the individual programmes they wish to integrate into earlier, for example, internal market and sustainable connectivity, which have rather low sensitivity for demanding political system or foreign policy reforms might be the first on many Western Balkans countries. The EU also recognizes a need to influence Western Balkans countries in terms of raising awareness of its achievements (specifically the material value of its norms) – the document calls this “strategic communication which will be instrumental” (EC COM(2020) 57final, 2). The EU needs to be careful how it will implement such communication, because soft power influence in terms of promoting its own model is more effective via attractiveness, meaning non-active EU engagement. Here, promotion of EU norms can be carried out legitimately by civic and market actors of the EU system (as noted by Rhinard and Sjöstedt via performance). In this regard, the document well plans to increase communication and information activities within EU member states (EC COM(2020) 57final, 7) and to invite member states’ to contribute more directly and actively via their experts (EC COM(2020) 57final, 4). The EU could pay attention specifically to individuals pertaining to a large diaspora of Western Balkans states who live in EU member states and use this soft power capability as well, yet, this is not planned in the document.

Since the EU cannot legitimately achieve attractiveness via propaganda by the EU external action service or the European Commission, these two institutions should focus on positive conditionality in direct negotiations. This is planned in the renewed enlargement methodology promising clear and better defined conditions for candidate countries from the outset (EC COM(2020) 57final, 6). As rewards for reforms in terms of positive conditionality, the EU plans closer integration mentioned above and increased funding investments and particularly by “clear and tangible incentives of direct interest to citizens” (ibid.). Another new soft power influence that EU plans via persuasion is for membership aspiring countries to “participate as observers in key EU meetings on matters of substantial importance to them” (EC COM(2020) 57final, 4). “A real political dialogue” to happen, also requires top politics representatives to

meet directly, thus Inter-Governmental Conferences (IGCs) are planned to “provide for stronger political steering of the accession negotiations process” (ibid.) and “country-specific IGCs should take place after publication of the Commission’s annual package” (EC COM(2020) 57final, 5). These new settings will enable the EU to deliver to Western Balkans countries either positive or negative conditionality more credibly.

Besides positive conditionality, the European Commission specifically updated possibilities to use hard power influence – the negative conditionality (EC COM(2020) 57final, 7):

*1) Member States could decide that negotiations can be put on hold in certain areas, or in the most serious cases, suspended overall. Already closed chapters could be re-opened or reset if issues need to be reassessed. 2) The scope and intensity of EU funding could be adjusted downward, with the exception of support to civil society. 3) Benefits of closer integration, e.g. access to EU programmes, unilateral concessions for market access could be paused or withdrawn.*

Negative conditions have up to now not worked too well, mainly because the EU was not applying them legitimately or with one voice. Most audible case is of course a more than 10-year stalemate in FRYOM/North Macedonia start of accession negotiations due to a single member state individual conditionality, unrelated to EU norms. This is a direct engagement of EU’s normative power in terms of influence because it moves away from the axiom of normative goals and actions without direct material benefit. Now, European Commission plans for the EU to become a more credible negotiator by speaking with one voice, building trust and enhancing credibility of the EU itself by enabling progress of aspiring countries after they have met demanded criteria (EC COM(2020) 57final, 2). Building trust with aspiring countries should increase EU’s legitimacy (specifically in case of negative conditionality) and increase commitment of the Western Balkans states (EC COM(2020) 57final, 3).

### ***EU normative power in relation to the Western Balkan states regarding international norms/normality***

This aspect of EU’s normative power is less directly relevant for enlargement policy. Mostly, it refers to EU’s demands for future member countries to align their foreign policies with EU foreign policy values, which are very much based on international law. Should the EU want to achieve observation of such norms which are yet to be established in the international community as normal it has



capability to achieve this via export of its technological, industrial and agricultural products and via the use of development aid. Such norms, particularly relevant for Western Balkans countries are for example climate change mitigation, green transition, sustainable connectivity, universality of human rights, freedom of religion, gender equality and social inclusiveness. For example, the EU's export of its Green Deal normative-based goals would be beneficial also for its attractiveness and would raise its positive international perception. Such a strategy is actually not so new, as the EU had been gradually phasing-in Western Balkans states into its education exchange and scientific research programmes. It is however highly relevant that the EU keeps its diplomatic representations in the countries of the region extremely apt, effective and professional. A corruption scandal among EU diplomatic staff in official Pristina in 2014 created more damage than EU's image of just and meritocracy-based market could have compensate for. Soft power capabilities to promote these norms are diplomacy, EU's educational and scientific cooperation programmes (already including several Western Balkans countries), and for example COVID-19 recovery cooperation/donations. For these capabilities to be effective, the EU needs to develop and strategically apply instruments of public diplomacy and propaganda.

EU can achieve influence on Western Balkans countries regarding promotion of international norms also via soft power. First, persuasion in international fora is very relevant, especially in case of norms which the EU cannot directly credibly condition due to lack of hard power capabilities. Such norms are for example respect of sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-intervention in internal affairs. In light of Russian aggression on Ukraine, this is extremely relevant for Western Balkans countries. The EU could make use of its representation in Council of Europe and individual member states in NATO and in Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to show to aspiring members its power of agenda setting and strengthen legitimacy by its alignment with like-minded countries. Yet, in this regard, the EU needs to stay on the "universal good" side, not primarily seeking material interests for itself. Should the EU achieve prioritization of Western Balkans states' interests in international agenda setting, that would exert even stronger power on these countries.

Second, positive conditionality by the EU is crucial in promotion of universal values because negative conditionality is not recommended to achieve internalisation of newly establishing international norms. For respecting universal values, the EU could offer to Western Balkans states higher economic rewards compared to other EU's international partners. Additionally, these rewards need to be directly compared to other international donors interested in paying Western Balkans states with carrots. Not only as material costs and benefits to these

countries should be revealed but particularly effects of international donations on EU-integration specific norms and achievements need to be scrutinised and effectively communicated. In this regard, Western Balkans countries would gain ownership of and co-responsibility to safeguard EU norms even if “only” as candidate countries. Such developments directly refer to the competition of Russia, China, UK, USA and Turkey with the EU in Western Balkans countries which has increasingly intensified during the COVID-19 crisis (Požgan et al. 2021).

Third, it is equally important for the EU to sustain positive international image and achieve attractiveness for soft power influence regarding promotion of international norms. The EU needs to be perceived as a legitimate implementer of such norms. This includes cases when for example particular member state potentially do not follow international norms and the EU institutions have competence or other member states manifest common interest to regulate such a deviation from an international norm. Such action would show the effective functioning of the regional political community concerning the norm rather than try to achieve ultimate non-breaches of such norms. In regard, the EU needs to be careful not to set as membership conditions to Western Balkans countries effective observation of those international norms that the EU member states themselves are not capable of observing. A clear example of this is the conditioning of settlement of bilateral disputes originating from the dissolution of Yugoslavia. We estimate that as long as Slovenia and Croatia as EU member countries do not implement the legally binding settlement to their own border-related dispute from 2017, the EU is not only non-credible negotiator towards Western Balkans states but also loses attractiveness as the world’s most peaceful region of friendly, international law respecting countries.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this article was to re-examine the nature of EU normative power in light of revised EU approach to enlargement policy announced in 2020. The latter is at the forefront of the article due to its potential for the recontextualization of the nature of the relationship between the EU and the Western Balkans countries. This is possible because the revised EU approach to enlargement policy presumes – via high rewards and increased intention of negative sanctions and reversibility – moving away from demanding strict attainability. Such recontextualization (could) negatively affect EU’s normative power, one of the most important aspects of the EU’s legitimate leadership, which

facilitates the possibility of understanding the EU as a positive and morally good international actor with capabilities to establish what is normal in international relations. In doing so, the article explores the question regarding the identified nature of EU normative power in the revised enlargement methodology by making ex-ante assessment of the effect of the (potentially) changed EU normative power might have for Western Balkans countries' EU accession.

The analysis showed that the EU can more effectively condition respect of norms in at least two aspects. The first one is the practice of its particular norms exemplarily within the EU political system, including towards its members states, to assure legitimacy in foreign policy. Such strengthening can be done via normative and non-normative EU-integration achievements, such as peaceful post-conflict reconciliation, liberal democracy, respect of human rights, effective governance and low corruption. The second aspect is the effectiveness of conditioning norms that the EU wants to promote as a general normality in international relations. Here, the article showed that the EU cannot count only on its own legitimacy and attractiveness, but needs to activate other aspects of its soft power, namely agenda setting and persuasion. In order to achieve such attractiveness, the EU should develop capabilities of public diplomacy and propaganda to raise its own international visibility (presence). New enlargement methodology is designed in such way as it is focusing on positive conditionality in direct negotiations and on promise of clear and better-defined conditions for candidate countries from the outset.

In this respect, the biggest novelty (and potential) of the new enlargement methodology lies in the possibility to include Western Balkans states into specific EU policies without them having met all membership conditions. The so-called phasing-in or "accelerated sector alignment and integration" could – as the analysis showed – serve as an element of strengthening EU's credibility by focusing on positive conditionality paradigm. This in turn – even though it could further explore the norm-related hard power capabilities of the EU that stem from the economic integration aspect amidst the domestic-driven (economic) agendas such as the Open Balkans Initiative – inherently possesses certain risks. One of the most imminent ones being that the phasing-in process could pave the way towards 'Turkish scenario', meaning that it could become an instrument of keeping the Western Balkan countries as candidates forever by offering certain profits only in certain EU policies, such as the economic ones (e.g., customs union). In order to avoid such development, the EU should – via positive conditionality – put credibility in the forefront of all future actions within enlargement policy to (re)assure its status as normative power, both in the Western Balkans and international fora as such.

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#### PREISPITIVANJE NORMATIVNE MOĆI EVROPSKE UNIJE U SVETLU REVIDIRANE METODOLOGIJE POLITIKE PROŠIRENJA SPRAM ZAPADNOG BALKANA

**Apstrakt:** Cilj ovog članka ogleda se u preispitivanju koncepta normativne moći Evropske unije u kontekstu revidiranog pristupa politike proširenja iz 2020. godine. Polazeći od koncepta moći u okviru spoljnopolitičko-analitičkog pristupa, u ovom članku se tumači meka i tvrda moć Evropske unije (u formi sposobnosti, kao i uticaja) prema normativnoj moći EU. U empirijskom delu identifikuju se četiri elementa povezana sa promocijom određenih normi EU, kao i sa nastojanjem za "međunarodnom normalnošću" kroz politiku proširenja. Rezultati pokazuju da revidirana metodologija omogućava promene normativne moći Evropske unije. EU bi mogla da efikasnije uslovljava poštovanje svojih normi kroz unapređivanje sopstvene prakse, poput svog unutrašnjeg i spoljnopolitičkog legitimiteta i razvoja i primene neophodnih sposobnosti za postizanje veće privlačne snage. S jedne strane, agenda pozitivnog uslovljavanja i adekvatnije definisanih uslova kroz direktne pregovore sadrži takav potencijal. Međutim, postoji i rizik da najveća novina – paradigma „postepenog pristupanja” bude ograničena samo na tržišni deo normativne moći Evropske unije kroz trajno zadržavanje zapadnobalkanskih zemalja u svojstvu kandidata, što bi podrilo legitimitet i uticaj tvrde moći kao deo negativnog uslovljavanja. U cilju promovisanja "međunarodne normalnosti" Evropska unija bi kroz pristupe poput dnevnog reda i ubeđivanja mogla da aktivira i druge elemente uticaja u okviru meke moći.

**Ključne reči:** Evropska unija, normativna moć, čvrsta i meka moć, Zapadni Balkan, revidirana metodologija politike proširenja.