

Pursuing domestic policy preferences under EU conditionality

Reflecting on the Europeanisation process in Serbia and North Macedonia

By

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Abstract

The European Union has become a successful global economic and normative actor, as obtaining membership to the Union has been (and remains) to be an attractive option for most European states to pursue. In the case of the Balkan enlargement round, which started with the accession of Croatia in 2013, the European Union has played a leading role in determining the future of the region. After an extended pause, it was in 2018 when the European Commission has reaffirmed the viability of the continuation of the Balkan enlargement round through its 'Western Balkan strategy'. However, as the Council meeting of October 2019 has shown, it became evident that the absence of a credible enlargement perspective for the Western Balkan states remained, presumably as a result of the creeping enlargement fatigue among the Member States of the European Union. This raised a question, namely, why would the applicant states of the Western Balkans continue to adopt (costly) EU policies, if not for the sake of becoming an EU Member State? This thesis has, therefore, focussed on the domestic EU policy adoption interests of the Western Balkan States, more specifically, Serbia and North Macedonia. Considering the role of the domestic policy interests of Serbia and North Macedonia, the following research question was formulated:

To what extent do domestic policy preferences explain how Serbia and North Macedonia have adjusted to the political conditions of the European Union's Copenhagen Criteria?

Regarding the scope of the research, this thesis aimed to explore the policy-decisions taken in Serbia and North Macedonia on their paths to EU membership from the acquirement of the 'Candidate Country' status until 2020. The initial data collection methods that would have been used were expert interviews and document analysis. However, due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, no expert interviews were conducted. As an alternative, this thesis has extensively focussed on the document analysis as the main data collection method. The researcher has, therefore, performed an extensive document analysis. To amount for the data that would otherwise be collected through the expert interviews, the researcher has analysed additional government documentation and, where needed, consulted the academic literature.

Considering the theoretical foundation of this thesis, the work of Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2005) was consulted to explain how Serbia and North Macedonia have reacted to the policy adoption requirements of the European Union. From the work of Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, this thesis has used the 'external incentives model' and the 'social-learning model' to explain the domestic accession interests of Serbia and North Macedonia.

The research findings revealed that the domestic policy adoption incentives of Serbia correspond mostly with the external incentives model, whereas the lesson-drawing model best explained why North Macedonia has adopted EU policies.

1. Introduction

1.1. The Western Balkans and its Europeanisation process

From the 1990s onward, the European Union has become a significant European, and even, a global actor considering its economic and normative power. Therefore, it has been no surprise that many European states found membership to the European Union captivating as it offers consequential advantages, e.g. the unrestricted access to the prosperous EU single market, security, and a strengthened bargaining position at the global level (Moravcsik & Vachudova, 2003; Damro, 2012; Vachudova, 2014; Ruso & Filipovic, 2019). In time, the rising number of membership applications to the European Union resulted in the gradual expansion of the European Union and, therewith, the continuous relocation of its external borders. Especially since the beginning of the 2000s, the European Union has relocated its outer borders eastward, as numerous former Warsaw Pact member states have transformed into functional democracies to fulfil the preconditions to becoming a Member State of the European Union under the EU's enlargement policy. Due to its transformative power, it is largely accepted that the enlargement policy of the European Union can be considered the European Union's most successful foreign policy (Brusis, 2008; Freyburg & Richter, 2010; Keukeleire & Delreux, 2014; Vachudova, 2014; Juncos & Borrágan, 2017; Smith, 2017; Meunier & Vachudova, 2018).

With the Central and Eastern European enlargement round concluded and the limited possibilities to go further east, the European Union sought to expand towards the Balkans. This appeared to be a natural path to follow as numerous Balkan states sought to further their EU membership aspirations. It was, therefore, for the European Union's transformative power to determine the future membership prospects of the region. The first viable 'promises' made by the European Union to enlarge towards the Western Balkans were made in 1999 through the 'Stability pact for South-Eastern Europe', which was an EU led initiative to stabilise the region and to integrate the states in the region into European and North Atlantic organisations (Pandurevic, 2001). Subsequently, as the ambitions for future expansion towards the Balkans were again prioritised on the European agenda during the European Council meetings in 2000 (Santa Maria da Feira) and 2003 (Thessaloniki), the European Union's enlargement process reached a slowdown (Heimerl & Van Meurs, 2004; Juncos & Borrágan, 2017; Smith, 2017). After the enlargement round of 2004 and 2006, the European Union appeared to have delayed further enlargement due to the prioritisation of more urgent European projects, such as the ratification of the 'Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe', the consolidation of the Eurozone, and the intensification of further economic integration (Peterson & Birdsall, 2008). Soon after, the occurrence of diverse European crises, such as the global financial crisis, the Greek/sovereign debt crisis, continuous disagreements regarding the formulation of a Common Foreign Policy, the refugee/migration crisis, the intervention of the Russian Federation in Ukraine, and the Brexit, the (full) integration of the Western Balkans was 'paused' for an unspecified period of time (Vachudova, 2014; Smith, 2017; Huszka, 2018; Meunier & Vachudova, 2018; Kovačević, 2019; Zhelyazkova et al., 2019). Nevertheless, in February 2018, the European Commission reaffirmed the viability of the continuation of the 'Balkan enlargement round', which started with the accession of Croatia in 2013, through a document called 'A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western

Balkans', or in short, the 'Strategy for the Western Balkans' (European Commission, 2018a). In this strategy, it became clear that the European Union had reclaimed its role as the 'rule setter'. For the applicant state, this meant that becoming an EU Member State required strong political commitment to an inflexible and asymmetrical 'Europeanisation' process (meaning that the European Union unilaterally sets the conditions for enlargement) that often challenges an applicant state's reform capabilities. During the Europeanisation process, applicant states are required to conform to the so-called '*Acquis Communautaire*' (shortened: the *acquis*) as part of the Copenhagen Criteria (the European Union's accession requirements), in which EU conditionality plays a prominent role (Schimmelfennig, 2014).

Still, due to the creeping enlargement fatigue and increasing public and political opposition towards further EU enlargement within the core Member States of the European Union, one could question whether the political leaders of Europe were still capable of establishing a policy window that would allow the continuation of the Balkan enlargement round. Since recently, a feasible enlargement prospect of the Western Balkans remained nihil. The Council meeting of October 2019 in Brussels, which was expected to reignite the continuation of the Balkan enlargement round as Albania and North Macedonia were expected to be given a 'green light' to commence accession negotiations with European Union, failed to be supported by all Member States. After two days of negotiations in Brussels, it was France, supported by Denmark and the Netherlands, which postponed the commencement of accession talks and repelled the positive recommendations given by the European Commission (Tidey, Chadwick & Koutsokosta, 2019). This was received with much disappointment and frustration by the political leadership in Albania and North Macedonia, as these countries were required to implement politically heavy and unpopular policy reforms. For example, the change of the constitutional name the 'Republic of Macedonia' to the 'Republic of North Macedonia' was a part of the 'good neighbourly relations' clause of the accession criteria of the European Union, with which the country has suffered immense domestic political losses without being rewarded accordingly under EU conditionality. Ultimately, this has greatly questioned the credibility of EU conditionality and has led to the presumptive political deterioration in the Western Balkans. For example, Serbia has deepened its political and economic ties with the Russian Federation as the country had signed a trade agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) shortly after the French veto on the Council enlargement decision in October 2019 (Savic & Filipovic, 2019; Vuksanovic, 2019). Therefore, the aftermath of the Council decision has played an inspiration role in the development of the research subject.

Given the examples presented above, this thesis has explored why Serbia and North Macedonia appeared to have reacted profoundly differently to the EU policy adoption requirements of the European Union. At first glance, it became apparent that Serbia and North Macedonia followed opposite Europeanisation trajectories. Where Serbia has decided to resist the policy adoption requirements of the European Union, North Macedonia decided to continue to adopt costly EU policies to conform to the European Union's reform requirements. This phenomenon raised a question. Namely, how can one explain these contrasting Europeanisation trajectories? The researcher argues that in understanding why countries would comply with the policy adoption requirements of the European Union, one should look at the domestic policy adoption interests in the applicant states. This thesis will, therefore, explore how the role of the domestic policy

interests of Serbia and North Macedonia have influenced the states' EU policies adoption incentives in line with the political requirements of the Copenhagen Criteria from their acquirement of the 'Candidate Country' status until 2020, by answering the following research question:

To what extent do domestic policy preferences explain how Serbia and North Macedonia have adjusted to the political conditions of the European Union's Copenhagen Criteria?

The research question posed in this thesis is of explanatory nature as the thesis aims to identify how Serbia and North Macedonia have responded to the policy adoption requirement of the European Union on their paths to EU membership, based on their domestic policy adoption preferences. As from 2020, both Serbia and North Macedonia have commenced accession negotiations with the European Union. Whereas Serbia opened accession negotiations already in 2014, the Council decision of October 2019 to postpone accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia was reversed in March 2020, meaning that North Macedonia and Serbia are currently at the same stage of the accession process (European Commission, 2020a). Although both states are currently in the same stage of the accession process, it remains compelling to see how the Western Balkan states are progressing differently on their path to EU membership and how these states have established different relationships with the European Union. This could explain why the Western Balkan states have complied and continue to comply with the EU policy adoption requirements, or not. In other words, the above-formulated research question seeks to examine why a state decides to adopt EU policies, by measuring the EU policy impacts on the domestic status quo. Especially during a time where enlargement is approached with caution from the European Union's side, it becomes essential to understand why countries would reverse their commitments to the European Union (as is seen in the case of Serbia) or continue their (costly) efforts to adopt EU policies with a modest possibility to become a Member State in the future (as might be noticed in the case of North Macedonia).

In addressing the questions, the thesis has analysed the domestic policy interests of Serbia and North Macedonia in accordance with the dependent variable. At first glance, the 'political conditions of the Copenhagen Criteria' appears to be the dependent variable. However, as the Copenhagen Council meeting in 1993 sought to establish a set of accession requirements, entailing both economic and political conditions, into a single policy, the adopted Copenhagen Criteria functioned as a single policy that needed to be adopted in its entirety by applicant states (Brusis, 2008; Schneider, 2009; Juncos & Borrágan, 2017). Therefore, this thesis will consider the Copenhagen Criteria as a policy that needs to be adopted by the applicant state, redefining the dependent variable to 'policy adoption'. Based on the work of Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier (2005), policy adoption refers to the institutionalisation of EU legislation into the domestic policy mix of the applicant county. Yet, as the Copenhagen Criteria does not provide specific guidelines to comply with the accession conditions, applicant countries have some leeway in complying with the standards defined by the European Union. As this thesis focusses only the political requirements of the Copenhagen Criteria, one should look at how the applicant states align their policies to the EU standard regarding the stability of

domestic institutions that can exert democratic principles and EU values, the rule of law, and the respect for human rights and minority rights (European Commission, 2016a).

By analysing the domestic public and political EU policy adoption preferences of Serbia and North Macedonia, this thesis seeks to explain how the two states have adjusted to the political conditions of the Copenhagen Criteria through domestic government reports and the Commission's progress reports. In line with the assumption that EU policy adoption is dependent on the interests of the applicant states to pursue deeper policy convergence, this thesis has consulted the work of Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier (2005) to form the theoretical foundation of this thesis, which will be further explained in chapter 2.

Furthermore, this thesis has taken into account that additional confounding factors could intervene with the analysis of the EU policy adoption motivations of Serbia and North Macedonia. Indeed, it became evident that most of the confounding factors were related to external or 'third party/country' influence that could have affected how the two Western Balkan states have formulated their domestic preferences towards EU policy adoption. The most evident confounding factor was, for example, perceived in Serbia, where third country influence is often believed to have resulted in stagnant EU policy adoption incentives and sometimes even political backsliding (Fatić, 2010; Hagemann, 2013; Stojarová, 2020) (See Appendices for more information on third party influence in the Western Balkans). Nevertheless, as these factors fall outside the scope of exploration, the confounding variables were, therefore, not included as independent variables within the analytical framework of this thesis. Instead, strong confounding variables were treated as explanatory variables to describe the otherwise unexplainable domestic EU policy adoption interests of Serbia and North Macedonia.

The remainder of this chapter will discuss why the Europeanisation of the Western Balkan states is, in theory, profoundly distinguishable from the Europeanisation process of the Central and Eastern European countries. After, the thesis will review the theoretical framework of Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier to conceptualise and operationalise the theoretical models that could explain why states seek to adopt EU policies. Before the concluding chapter of this thesis, the third chapter will discuss the research methodology, whereas the research findings will be discussed in chapter four.

1.2. The relevance of this thesis and its relationship with previous research

Researchers, such as Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, have already comprehensively explored the subject of domestic EU policy adoption incentives concerning the accession of the Central and Eastern European states. However, this thesis seeks to defend its distinctiveness through the assumption that the Western Balkans states are significantly different in their path to EU membership than earlier enlargement countries; a 'special case' so to say. For example, as the current Central and Eastern European Member States have been notorious for their 'bloc' integration into the European Union, the Western Balkans has been known for the widespread difference in speeds of Europeanisation and the 'individuality' of accession procedures among the Western Balkans states, due to the states' problematic relationship with the European Union's policy adoption regime (Freyburg & Richter, 2010; Hoh, 2017). This thesis assumes

that the distinctiveness between the accession procedures of the Central and Eastern European countries and the Western Balkan states might be explained in three regards, being the pre-liberal administrative background of the Western Balkan states in comparison to the Central and Eastern European states; the enhancement of the EU accession criteria and the corresponding policy adoption requirements of the Western Balkan states in relation to the Central and Eastern European states; the low membership credibility of the Western Balkan states. All three points will be discussed one by one below.

1.2.1. Pre-liberal administrative backgrounds

First, this thesis argues that the difference in the Europeanisation consistency of the Central and Eastern European countries and the Western Balkan states might be explained by the pre-democratic administrative regimes of these countries, or in other words, their 'pre-liberal' administrative backgrounds. In this regard, this thesis has differentiated between the Yugoslavian system of 'Titoism' (to which the Western Balkan states belonged) and the communist rule imposed from Moscow.

In 1945, with the establishment of the Republic of Yugoslavia, the Yugoslavian statesman, Josip Broz Tito, sought to distance Yugoslavia from both the Eastern and Western powers. Under the administrative system that was later labelled as 'Titoism', the Yugoslavian leader politically proclaimed the Yugoslavian republic a 'non-alignment' movement (Macridis, 1952; Neal, 1957; Hanke, 2007). In contrast to the communist regime prevailing in the Central and Eastern European countries, Yugoslavia was considered to be a 'market socialism', in which firm ownership was decentralised to the worker and not regulated by centralised state bureaucracies (Neal, 1957; Hanke, 2007). In this regard, Yugoslavia was considered to be less totalitarian than the model advocated by the Soviet Union and its satellite states in Europe, as the Yugoslavian leadership emphasised the need for decentralisation and local autonomy (Neal, 1957). The communist philosophy of the Soviet Union that was enforced upon the Central and Eastern European countries was based on resource self-sufficiency, the centralisation of state power, and the state ownership of the means of production under the Communist Party (Macridis, 1952). As the Soviet Union also indicated that the Central and Eastern European states were free to determine their own political path, the Soviet intervention in Hungary proved otherwise (Neal, 1957).

Thus, due to the form of self-governance given to the republics under Yugoslavia, one might assume that under the Yugoslav rule, the Socialist Republics of Serbia and Macedonia have started to develop their different approaches of self-determination in the region. Therefore, one might argue during this period, Serbia and North Macedonia have established their distinctiveness in national interests. In this regard, this thesis assumes that the amount of autonomy given during the Yugoslavian rule might explain why the Western Balkan states are approached in a more individualistic and merit-based manner, which has resulted in diverse Europeanisation progresses and EU policy adoption interests in the region.

1.2.2. The enhancement of the accession criteria

The second distinction made between the accession processes of the Central and Eastern European countries and the Western Balkans states concerns the accession requirements set by the European Union. Especially considering the political requirements of the Copenhagen Criteria. Due to the lessons learned during previous enlargement rounds, the European Union has systematically developed stricter EU policy adoption requirements, which has challenged (and repeatedly discouraged) the EU membership prospects of the Western Balkan states (Vachudova, 2014; Economides & Ker-Lindsay, 2015; Hoh, 2017; Juncos & Borrágan, 2017). Over time, it became notable that with the decreasing number of applicant states, the amount of accession conditions has risen (Renner & Trauner, 2009).

The strengthened policy adoption requirements for the Western Balkan states were regulated under the ‘new approach’ to enlargement by the European Commission, which further enhanced the credibility of the ‘Stabilisation and Accession Process’ (European Commission, 2020b). The new approach required the aspiring Member States of the Western Balkan to fulfil the benchmarks set under the political conditions of the Copenhagen Criteria before accession negotiations could commence (Brusis, 2008; Nozar, 2012). In comparison to the accession process of the Central and Eastern European states, the fulfilment of the political requirements was not implemented as a condition to opening accession negotiations (Freyburg & Richter, 2010; Zhelyazkova et al., 2019). Additionally, the concept of political conditionality during the accession process of the Central and Eastern European countries was mostly inherited during the late stages of EU accession, presumably as an effort to accelerate the domestic EU policy adoption incentives and accelerate the accession of these state in general (Economides & Ker-Lindsay, 2015). Eventually, one might argue that a ‘new approach’ was established as a response to the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union in 2007, which was followed by a rising uncertainty concerning the European Union’s enlargement policy. As both states failed to fully address their shortcomings in the fields of corruption and the rule of law (Falkner & Treib, 2008; Vachudova, 2014), a new policy approach needed to be adopted to prevent a future reoccurrence. The European Commission had, therefore, adopted a ‘new approach’ to enlargement which prioritised the fulfilment of the EU policy adoption requirements under ‘Chapter 23’ (judiciary and fundamental rights) and ‘Chapter 24’ (justice, freedom and security) of the *acquis* as a precondition to commencing accession negotiations with future applicant states (European Parliament, 2016). Additionally, due to the continuous developing nature of European Union’s accession requirements, another accession condition was ‘informally’ introduced, which required states to promote and maintain ‘good neighbourly relations’ (Brusis, 2008). Another evident difference between the accession procedure of the Central and Eastern European countries and the Western Balkan states is that, in the case of the latter, the contemporary EU policy adoption requirements tend to contest state sovereignty and identity (Noutcheva, 2009; Vachudova, 2014). As will be explained in chapter 4, these EU policy adoption conditions often require the political leaderships in the Western Balkans states to implement cost-intensive and unpopular domestic policy reforms.

1.2.3. Low membership credibility

As has been discussed shortly in the introductory section of this chapter, the Western Balkan states seem to have lower membership credibility than the Central and Eastern European countries. The high membership credibility and low domestic policy adoption costs for the latter group contributed significantly to a speedy accession process (Zhelyazkova et al., 2019). In contrast, the membership aspirations of the (remaining) Western Balkan states has been increasingly challenged by the rise of Euroscepticism and the creeping enlargement fatigue among the core Member States of the European Union (Juncos & Borrágan, 2017; Zhelyazkova et al., 2019), which has made further enlargement highly unpopular, supposedly as a result of previous enlargement rounds. Arguments against enlargement are often associated with uncontrollable and illegal migratory movements (mainly from the poorer to the richer EU Member States) and cross-border crime (Moravcsik & Vachudova, 2003). It is, therefore, a challenging task for the Western Balkan states to prove their belonging within the European Union to the sceptic Member States.

As this section has discussed the key distinction between the accession conditions of the Central and Eastern European countries and the Western Balkan states, one can assume that the Europeanisation of the Western Balkan countries, indeed, touches upon a distinctive strand of EU enlargement studies. Furthermore, the selection of the Western Balkan states Serbia and North Macedonia as units of analysis is not merely based on the assumption that both countries are facing similar EU policy adoption challenges on their accession process. Serbia and North Macedonia were chosen based on the assumption that both states have reacted profoundly differently to the EU policy adoption requirements of the European Union. More specifically, one could argue that these countries can be considered extreme cases following opposite accession trajectories. Consulting the work of Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2005), two theoretical models have shown to significantly facilitate the exploration of the state's accession trajectories, being the 'external incentives model' and the 'lesson-drawing model'. These models will be explained in chapter 2.

Based on the research findings presented in chapter 4, the external incentives model has shown that Serbia has often turned away from EU policy adoption, as the domestic political costs would overshadow the rewards received from the European Union in case of EU policy adoption compliance. Concerning North Macedonia, the lesson-drawing model has explained that the state has continued its Europeanisation process, due to the domestic will to depart from the status quo. In line with these findings, the researcher aims to make a valuable contribution to future Europeanisation and EU enlargement studies.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Reviewing the theoretical approach to EU enlargement and EU policy adoption

In this chapter, the thesis will explain the theoretical models of EU policy adoption as presented in the book of Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2005), ‘the Europeanization of Central and Eastern Europe’, on which the theoretical foundation of this thesis is based. However, how does one define Europeanisation? One of the earliest definitions of Europeanisation appeared to be established by Ladrech, who defined Europeanisation as an:

“incremental process reorienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that EC political and economic dynamics become part of the organisational logic of national politics and policy-making” (Ladrech, 1994, p. 69).

In other words, Europeanisation refers to a sequence of policy diffusion processes and institutionalisation mechanisms that transfer EU policies into the domestic political and administrative foundation, through domestic motivated policy adoption incentives (Graziano & Vink, 2013). As ‘Europeanisation’ is sometimes used as a synonym for ‘EU enlargement’, this thesis stresses that both terms are different and, therefore, cannot be used synonymously. Simultaneously, Europeanisation and EU enlargement can be considered complementary to each other. For example, as EU enlargement is considered the process of joining the European Union (European Council, 2020), it can instigate Europeanisation, which is the process of policy alignment for EU membership through EU policy adoption (Economides & Ker-Lindsay, 2015).

Concerning the study of the Europeanisation of the Western Balkans, exploring why the Western Balkan states, such as Serbia and North Macedonia, adopt EU policies, appear to be explained by some form of ‘persuasion’ from either the domestic level or by a foreign actor, such as the European Union. Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2005) argue that a country’s will to pursue EU accession can be explained through different directions of policy flows, which are initiated and governed from different starting points. In this regard, there is either an external incentive – EU policy adoption is pursued by an applicant state on a cost-benefit basis – or the domestic or national incentive – EU policy adoption takes place as an effort to replace or develop domestic policies. It is important to note here that in both cases, the rules of the game are still determined at the EU-level. Another, more common, way to describe the two ‘policy flows’ is through the notion that Europeanisation can follow two different ‘institutional logics’. The first institutional logic is often referred to as the ‘logic of appropriateness’, in which Europeanisation is considered an EU-driven process that follows the assumption that states adopt EU policies independently from EU conditionality, thus in accordance with domestic policy interests. The second institutional logic, the ‘logic of consequences’, is an EU-driven process that assumes that EU policies are adopted as a result of the reward-driven regime under EU conditionality, which subjects EU policy adoption to a domestic (economic) cost-benefit calculation (March & Olsen, 1998; Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005; Pawelec & Grimm, 2014; Zhelyazkova et al., 2019). Based on these institutional logics, Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2005) have differentiated between three different models of policy adoption,

being the ‘external incentives model’, the ‘social learning model’, and ‘the lesson-drawing model’, which will be discussed briefly below.

Before discussing the models, the researcher wants to note that only two of the three models will be used to analyse the Europeanisation processes of Serbia and North Macedonia, namely, the ‘external incentives model’ and the ‘lesson-drawing model’. This decision is motivated by the assumption that Serbia and North Macedonia are considered ‘extreme cases’, thus, require models that could explain the extreme boundaries of the theoretical approach discussed above. In other words, this thesis seeks to utilise the models that could either confirm that a state is Europeanising as a result of external incentives and follows the adoption of EU policies through the logic of consequences (external incentives model), or that a state is Europeanising as a result of domestic incentives and adopts EU policies as through the logic of appropriateness (lesson-drawing model). In this regard, the researcher believes that the social learning model is a combination of the two models. As the model assume that an external incentive incites Europeanisation, EU policy adoption would follow the logic of appropriateness. Therefore, the researcher believes that the social learning model would not fully serve the purpose of explaining the extreme cases explored in this thesis. Nonetheless, the theoretical framework of the social learning model will play a supplementary role in analysing the data, if applicable.

2.1.1. The external incentives model

The external incentives model focusses on a country’s Europeanisation process under the restraints of EU conditionality. Under the external incentives model, the European Union functions as a ‘rule-setter’ through internal bargaining. Thus, the ‘rules’, or in other words, the accession criteria to which applicant state have to conform, are determined through a collection of domestic policy interests of the Member States, which are integrated into a common negotiation position (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2004; Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2019). Theoretically, this part of the external incentives model seems to show some affiliation with the theoretical foundations of the ‘rational choice bargaining model’ and the ‘intergovernmental approach’ to policymaking. In both models, states are considered actors that make rational choices based on (political/economic) self-interests and careful cost-benefit calculation that, in relation to the research subject, determine how the EU policy adoption requirements should be fulfilled (Graziano & Vink, 2013; Zhelyazkova et al., 2019). Correspondingly, the Member States collectively decide when and how applicant states should be rewarded once the EU policy adoption requirements are met (Moravcsik & Vachudova, 2003; Schneider, 2009). This process of rule-setting and rewarding can be defined as EU conditionality, in which applicant states have to conform to a set of predefined accession conditions to receive rewards (Schimmelfennig & Sedelemeier, 2005; Casier, 2011; Keukeleire & Delreux, 2014). This normative transaction of EU policies is also known as the ‘carrot-and-stick’ principle, in which compliance with the European Union’s policy adoption requirements is rewarded through structural or financial benefits (and ultimately the carrot of EU membership), whereas in case of non-compliance rewards are retained (Barbé & Jonhansson-Nougés, 2008; Falkner & Treib, 2008). EU conditionality, naturally, influences the domestic status quo of the applicant countries, as it unavoidably ‘upsets’ the domestic policy

equilibrium with the introduction of EU policies in the domestic policy mix (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005). This is often explained by the inflexible or coercive nature of EU conditionality. As the EU rule-setting process offers limited bargaining power to a non-EU Member State to decide on the EU policy adoption requirements, a highly asymmetrical relationship between the European Union and the applicant country is established (Moravcsik & Vachudova, 2003; Vachudova, 2008; Casier, 2010).

When EU conditionality is connected to the rationale of Europeanisation, one can argue that the European Union seeks to institutionalise its policy interests outside its borders through the policy convergence of the domestic policy regimes of the applicant states with that of the European Union (Sjursen, 2002; Farrell, 2009; Casier, 2010; Keukeleire & Delreux, 2014). In this regard, the European Union seeks to reconstruct its immediate neighbourhood into its 'own image'. Considering the Europeanisation of the Western Balkans, the European Union has often presented the 'carrot' of EU membership to the region's applicant states to bolster regional stability. Therewith, the European Union has advanced the institutionalisation of the European (common) values and legislation in the Western Balkans (Schimmelfennig, 2001). Especially due to the continuously evolving accession criteria of the European Union, Europeanisation is taking place far before the commencement of the accession negotiations (Börzel & Risse, 2012), on which will be elaborated below.

2.1.2. The social learning model

The social learning model, which follows the logic of appropriateness, differs from the external incentives model in one key element, which relates, to some extent, to solidarity (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005). The social learning model seeks to question the appropriateness and legitimacy of the EU policy adoption requirements separately from the traditional financial and structural rewarding system under EU conditionality. In this regard, the model still implies that a form of external persuasion is required to incline the domestic political leadership to adopt EU policies. In other words, the social learning model sees the European Union as an integrated (cultural) community that possesses a 'common (European) identity' and values (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005). As the European Union advocates its values externally, one can assume that the states that aspire to become a Member State eventually should abide by this identity. It is, therefore, the 'common (European) identity' that is persuading domestic policymakers to adopt EU policies, as they are deemed appropriate and in line with the domestic identity of the applicant state (Trauner, 2009). Hence, the social learning model suggests that the adoption of EU policies depends on the appropriate implementation of the 'common European values' into the domestic administrative and political structures of the applicant country (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005). Therefore, acceding states should be able to properly adopt and endorse the common values of the European Union on their paths to EU membership.

2.1.3. The lesson-drawing model

The lesson-drawing model differs from the other models as its departure point follows the domestic EU policy adoption incentive. This model seeks to explain why states choose to adopt

EU policies with or without the direct intention to become a Member State of the European Union. Concerning the Western Balkan states, the lesson-drawing model might explain why states seek to pursue the adoption of EU policies in line with the political conditions of the Copenhagen Criteria and, therewith, explain why the states conform or not conform to EU conditionality. In this regard, the lesson-drawing model focusses less on the coercive nature of EU conditionality and seeks to question the legitimacy of EU conditionality (James & Lodge, 2003; Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005; Evans, 2006). In other words, state compliance with EU conditionality is determined by the domestic actors of applicant states, which could significantly influence how a country proceeds on its path to EU membership (Vachudova, 2019). Therefore, one might assume that under lesson-drawing model, states will perceive EU conditionality to be less coercive and the Europeanisation process to be more voluntarily, as the political leadership in the acceding state deems EU policy adoption as a necessity to ‘repair’ the domestic policy equilibrium (James & Lodge, 2003; Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005; Evans, 2006; Trauner, 2009; Zhelyazkova et al., 2019).

Another assumption under the lesson-drawing model is that domestic policymakers might seek to surmise on existing knowledge and experiences at the EU level to address domestic policy challenges as an attempt to save time and resources (Marsh & Sharman, 2009). When policy solutions appear to be effective at the EU level, domestic policymakers should be interested in initiating evaluation processes to assess the transferability and functionality of the foreign policy into the domestic social and administrative framework to avoid cost-intensive policymaking procedures (James & Lodge, 2003; Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005). Therefore, one could assume that the ‘lesson’ in the lesson-drawing model might refer to the domestic policy learning processes. In this regard, policy learning could be considered a transitional problem-solving mechanism, with which governments seek to adopt functional policy solutions (Bandelow, 2008; Farrell, 2009). Hence, if an EU policy seems to succeed abroad, it becomes likely that policy diffusion will occur, which implies an increase in the domestic interest to adopt an identical policy solution (James & Lodge, 2003; Evans, 2006).

Concerning the Western Balkan states, one should note that Europeanisation under the lesson-drawing model does not imply that states will have more freedom to determine the accession conditions. The conditions for EU policy adoption remain to be determined at the EU level, just as compliance under EU conditionality remains to be based on merit (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005). In this regard, the lesson-drawing model seeks to emphasize that the applicant state plays a key role in determining the pace of its EU accession process.

2.2. The conceptualisation of the research variables

This section of the thesis will seek to conceptualise (independent) variables that could yield a significant relationship with the domestic preferences of Serbia and North Macedonia regarding the adoption of the political conditions of the European Union’s Copenhagen Criteria. Based on the theoretical models discussed above, this thesis has conceptualised four variables related to the external incentives model (‘determinacy of conditions’, ‘size and speeds of rewards’, the ‘credibility of conditions’, and ‘adoption costs’) and three variables related to the lesson-

drawing model ('domestic policy dissatisfaction', 'transferability', and 'domestic veto players'). All variables will be discussed individually below, under their corresponding model.

2.2.1. The attributes under the External incentives model

Determinacy of conditions

Under the external incentives model, the 'determinacy of conditions' refers to both the clarity and salience of the EU policy conditions determined, which need to be adopted by the applicant state (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2004; Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2017). An evident effect of (high) determinacy is when the EU policies that are adopted by the applicant state, result in a behavioural transformation of that state (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005). Additionally, one could argue that high determinacy would minimise the possibility for an applicant state to alter or completely evade its EU policy adoption conditions.

However, some warn that the determinacy of conditions could be undermined by the continuously changing EU policy adoption requirements or the awarding of unsatisfactory rewards to the applicant states when EU policy adoption requirements are met (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005; Sovaka, 2012; Huszka, 2018; Zhelyazkova et al., 2019). In this regard, the European Union would risk losing its political leverage vis-à-vis the applicant state and undermine the credibility of EU conditionality. In analysing the determinacy of conditions concerning the EU policy adoption interests of Serbia and North Macedonia, the following hypothesis has been formulated:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): *The likelihood of EU policy adoption increases when the conditions to policy adoption are determinate.*

When this variable is compared to the European Commission's 'Western Balkan Strategy', it becomes noticeable that the European Union has further intensified the determinacy of conditions vis-à-vis the Western Balkan states, especially considering that policy compliance with the policies presented under Chapter 23 and Chapter 24 of the acquis is prioritised (Huszka, 2018; Zhelyazkova et al., 2019).

Size and speed of rewards

The size and speed of the rewards that are granted to the aspiring Member States after the fulfilment of specific policy adoption conditions, plays a prominent role in determining the credibility of EU conditionality. Therefore, potential Member States must receive more substantial and consequential rewards under EU conditionality than states that are not considered to be potential accession candidates (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005). In this regard, the European Union has established two categories of Europeanisation instruments in its foreign policy, both being subjected to EU conditionality but addressing different 'types' of states. The first one is the already mentioned 'enlargement policy' and the other is the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The EU enlargement policy seeks to facilitate the gradual

process of domestic policy alignment with the *acquis* by the applicant state, which is completed once an applicant state has fulfilled all the conditions set in the *acquis* and becomes an EU Member State (Moravcsik & Vacudova, 2003; Juncos & Borrágan, 2017). The ENP, which was established in 2004, sought to enhance stability and security at the European Union's external borders through the intensification of political and economic cooperation with the states bordering the European Union, while excluding the 'carrot' of EU membership from its compliance instrument. (Barbé & Johansson-Nougés, 2008; Sasse, 2008; Casier, 2010; Beauguitte, Richard & Guérin-Pace, 2015).

Following the definition of the European Commission (2015), the ENP is considered to be a policy instrument that seeks to support stability, security and economic development in its Eastern neighbourhood. In this regard, the European Union appears to have become faster inclined to establish deeper political and economic ties with its immediate neighbours than granting new membership prospects.

Credibility of conditionality

As the credibility of conditionality was already mentioned above, the variable itself refers to the effectiveness of the European Union's sanctioning regime, or more specifically, its ability to effectively withhold rewards from an applicant state in case of noncompliance with EU conditionality (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005; Richter, 2012; Huszka, 2018). Credibility is also determined by the European Union's capability to offer tangible and consistent membership perspectives to states that remain committed to their Europeanisation processes (Richter, 2012; Huszka, 2018). Thus, to ensure the credibility of EU conditionality, it is the European Union's task as a rule-setter to develop convincing sanctioning and awarding instruments for the accession countries (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005; Juncos & Borrágan, 2017). Contrarily, EU conditionality would not be credible if the applicant states would have a stronger bargaining power towards the European Union.

One might argue that applicant states conform to the requirements defined under EU conditionality because of policy interdependence (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005). It is true that the 'carrot' of EU membership and the Europeanisation process altogether, makes applicant states greatly dependent on the economic and political capabilities of the European Union but, at the same time, as the European Union might depend on stability in the applicant states in its immediate neighbourhood. To maintain this interdependency, the conditions set under EU conditionality should remain implementable for the applicant states (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005). However, a contemporary risk that seemed to have influenced the credibility of EU conditionality is the unjustly withholding of rewards and the inconsistent change in policy adoption requirements towards applicant states, due to the rising political and economic concerns among the European Union's Member States (Haukkala, 2008; Vacudova, 2014). In this regard, one could speak of intra-EU reluctance. Concerning the prerequisites for EU conditionality in relation to the challenges to EU conditionality presented above, this thesis has formulated a second hypothesis for analysis that tests both the 'size and speed of rewards' and the 'credibility of conditionality':

Hypothesis 2: *The likelihood of EU policy adoption increases when the credibility of EU conditionality is not undermined by intra-EU reluctance.*

Due to the politicisation of the European Union's enlargement policy, one might be questioning the credibility of EU conditionality. This notion is further explained in the appendices (see 'the nationalisation of EU enlargement').

Adoption costs

Under the external incentives model, adoption costs relate to the cost-benefit analysis according to which domestic actors determine whether the adoption EU policies is not upsetting the domestic status quo or, in other words, overshadows the domestic economic and structural gains (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005). When the costs of EU policy adoption appear to be too high among domestic actors, states often tend to turn away from the criteria determined under EU conditionality. In the Western Balkans, it is often the political leadership of the applicant state that plays a decisive role in the adoption of EU policies (Vachudova, 2014). In this regard, this thesis will pose the third hypothesis in line with the adoption costs under the external incentives model, being:

Hypothesis 3: *The likelihood of EU policy adoption increases when the benefits of the European Union's policy requirements counterbalance the costs that disturb the domestic status quo.*

Additionally, the domestic policy adoption costs might also relate to the extent to which EU policy adoption requirements threaten a government's authority. As public opinion traditionally plays an important role in political behaviours, the ruling (coalition) government is often required to act in line with the general interests of the domestic public. The loss of public trust might lead to electoral losses and, eventually, in the loss of power and governance (Pawelec & Grimm, 2014).

2.2.2. The attributes under the lesson-drawing model

Policy dissatisfaction

Policy dissatisfaction under the lesson-drawing model seeks to determine whether the functioning of domestic policies is satisfactory. When a domestic policy is dissatisfactory due to non-functionality or is non-existence, domestic policymakers might seek policy solutions elsewhere (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005). In this regard, the fourth hypothesis will be:

Hypothesis 4: *The likelihood of EU policy adoption increases when the dissatisfaction of domestic policies increases.*

Additionally, policy dissatisfaction could also be a result of changes in the political arena, for example, through a change in political leadership (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005). A

way in which policy dissatisfaction can be detected is through public opinions, as public dissatisfaction might lead to ‘domestic sanctions’. In other words, governments will be pressured to seek for ‘solutions to non-functional or non-existent policies, as adhering to the public’s demand will most likely assure electoral support (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005).

Transferability

Before a foreign policy can be adopted into the domestic policy framework of the applicant state, policymakers are required to assess the transferability of that policy. Transferability, therefore, depends on the suitability of the foreign policy in the domestic policy mix and the capacity of the domestic institutions that need to implement and monitor the new legislation (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005). In this regard, Graziano & Vink (2013) argue that the degree of EU policy ‘suitability’ can be determined by the capability of the domestic institutions to align with the policy governance standards of the EU institutions. This means that high policy suitability would result in greater EU policy alignment. In line with this assumption, this thesis has formulated the fifth hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: The likelihood of EU policy adoption increases when EU policies are more likely to be compatible with domestic institutional structures.

However, states such as Serbia and North Macedonia, which both are former Yugoslavian states, often face structural challenges concerning the transferability of EU policies, due to post-socialist legacies and informal governance structures (Cirtautas & Schimmelfennig, 2010). As has been also perceived during the accession procedures of the former communist states of Central and Eastern Europe, post-communist states often face difficulties in EU policy adoption, especially considering policies concerning the rule of law and anti-corruption measures (Cirtautas & Schimmelfennig, 2010). Therefore, considering the administrative background of Serbia and North Macedonia, it might be suitable to account for possible socialist legacies that might interfere in the Europeanisation process of the Western Balkan states.

Veto players

The successful adoption of EU legislation in the Western Balkan states often depends on the influence of the domestic veto players in the accession process. The veto players in the lesson-drawing model seek to oppose the actual domestic status quo and, therefore, see policy change as a requirement for public improvement (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005). Concerning the policy adoption requirement of the European Union, veto players under the lesson-drawing model might oppose the implementation of EU policies if these policies do not improve the overall domestic policy conditions. Therefore, the sixth and last hypothesis posed in this thesis will be:

Hypothesis 6: *The likelihood of EU policy adoption increases when domestic actors seek to depart from the domestic status quo.*

Important to note is that the veto players in the external incentives model and the veto players in the lesson-drawing model oppose a different cause. Following the external incentives model, the veto players assume that the adoption of EU policies will upset the domestic status quo and, therefore, seeks to maintain that status quo (as much as possible). Under the lesson-drawing model, the veto player sees the domestic status quo as a departure point and, therefore, favours the departure from the status quo (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005).

Nevertheless, this thesis emphasizes that under the lesson-drawing model, applicant states do not directly contribute to the establishment of the policy adoption requirements under EU conditionality. If an applicant state wishes to become an EU Member State, it is required to conform to the EU conditionality. Instead, from the state level, the pace of the accession process is determined by the domestic incentive to depart from the status quo to strengthen the domestic policy regime.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research methodology & design

This thesis studied the EU policy adoption incentives of Serbia and North Macedonia through a multiple case study. The researcher has chosen to analyse this small sample of Western Balkan accession states through the deviant case method. In theory, the deviant case method focusses on cases that yield a ‘surprising value’ in the relationship between the dependent and independent variable within a predefined understanding of theoretical model (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). As these ‘surprising values’ or ‘extreme cases’ are taken under scrutiny, the model does not seek to generalise. According to Levy (2008); Seawright (2016), the deviant case method is primarily utilised to assess or redefine existing theories by examining an extreme case within the theoretical boundaries of the theoretical model.

In terms of case selection, Serbia and North Macedonia were defined as extreme cases that will be tested within the theoretical boundaries of the external incentives model and the lesson-drawing model. The selection of cases was based on two conditions. The first conditions required the selection of two Western Balkan states that shared a common pre-accession departure point. The second conditions required the states to follow significantly different (and abnormal) Europeanisation trajectories after the point of departure. In this regard, Serbia and North Macedonia indeed share a common departure point on their paths to EU membership. In chapter 1, this assumption was supported by the fact that both states shared a common historical background under the administration of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia, which might have played an influential role in determining how both states sought to establish a relationship with the European Union. Additionally, both states are facing demanding EU reform conditions

without having a credible EU membership perspective. Furthermore, as will be seen in chapter 4, Serbia and North Macedonia followed extremely different Europeanisation trajectories, as domestic policy preferences have played an influential role in the rejection and acceptance of the European Union's policy adoption requirements.

This thesis assumed that a strong deviation in domestic accession preferences has explained the diverging accession trajectories of Serbia and North Macedonia. Therefore, one could argue that the deployment of the deviant case method has been an appropriate choice for this thesis's case selection, as the method seeks to address present theoretical irregularities to explain the 'causal pathways' between the dependent and independent variables. (Levy, 2008; Seawright & Gerring, 2008; Seawright, 2016). Additionally, as proposed by Denzin and Lincoln (2011), the deviant case method serves the purpose of accentuating the literature's limits. As a consequence, the deviant case model has allowed the researcher to understand the potential errors and irregularities in the external incentives model and the lesson-drawing model, which has resulted in the formulation of new and more suitable hypotheses (see chapter 2). However, one should take into account that the newly established hypothesis could result in the appearance of more deviant cases when applied to other Western Balkan enlargement states. As a result, this research might not completely explain the Europeanisation processes of all (normal) Western Balkan states.

The data collection methods that were used in this thesis were expert interviews and document analysis. Both methods will be discussed in the following sections.

3.1.1. Expert interviews

The collection of data through expert interviews was seen as an appropriate way to capitalise on expert knowledge, experiences and motivations. Moreover, interviews would offer a possibility to acquire detailed insights on (domestic) policy adoption decisions and motivations. The interview procedures were predetermined in interview protocols. The interview protocols included interviewer dialogues and a set of pre-composed interview questions. The interview questions would cover all areas of exploration, while simultaneously allowing the interviewer to ask follow-up questions.

Concerning the criteria implemented regarding expert interviews, one determinant criterion was to only approach policy experts working for the EU institutions and the ministries of Serbia and North Macedonia. Concerning the representatives from Serbia and North Macedonia, this thesis has carefully selected its representatives based on professional status. In this regard, this thesis has defined two types of policy experts, being policy elites (which have a significant influence over policy outcomes) and policy specialists (which have less (direct) influence over policy decisions but possess a high level of knowledge on EU policy adoption). This thesis sought to interview policy 'specialists'. Additionally, the choice to approach policy specialists came with a logistical consideration, assuming that all policy specialists would be located in one place, namely Brussels. Additionally, the researcher suspected that policy specialists would have more freedom to talk openly about domestic policy preferences.

Furthermore, the expert interviews would last between 30 to 60 minutes. The estimated amount of conducted interviews would be three, consisting of two diplomats or policy experts

from Serbia and North Macedonia and a policy expert from the European Commission's Directorate-General for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR).

Unfortunately, due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus during the data collection period, this thesis has failed to conduct any expert interview. Interviews that were planned before the outbreak were cancelled. As an alternative to a personal interview, new interview requests were sent, asking whether the (potential) respondents would be willing to participate in the research through telecommunication means. Eventually, two respondents (one from the Serbian Mission to the EU and one from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of North Macedonia) have proposed to answer my questions in a written form. Nevertheless, the Serbian respondent has not answered to the sent interview questions, despite the continuous promises given through email. Regarding the Macedonian respondent, a (irrelevant) document describing the Macedonian accession process to the European Union was sent by email as an answer to the posed the interview questions. In this regard, no (new) data was obtained by the written interviews.

DG NEAR did offer a possibility for an interview with its policy experts in late May at earliest, as the policy experts of DG NEAR were "currently busy dealing with the countries' most urgent corona-related needs". However, due to the timeframe given for exploration, the interview date proposed by DG NEAR was declined by the researcher.

3.1.2. Document analysis

Due to the inability to conduct expert interviews within the determined exploratory timeframe, the researcher has decided to focus primarily on the collection of data through an extensive document analysis. In order to close the information gaps that would, under normal circumstances, be covered by the interviews, this thesis has consulted additional official documents and academic literature. Regarding the examination of official documents, this thesis has analysed 24 country monitoring reports published by the European Commission (9 for Serbia and 15 for North Macedonia), and eight official documents (four per state).

Regarding the selection of official documents from Serbian and Macedonian government sources, this thesis initially planned to use a maximum of three documents per state. However, as a way to increase the amount of data gathered, an additional government document per state was added on points that were not sufficiently explained by the initial documents. With the selection of the three documents, this thesis sought to learn more about the domestic attitudes towards EU policy adoption from both the public and political leadership. Therefore, one document required to contain information on the domestic public opinion towards EU accession. The second document should be a government working plan/programme containing data on the EU policy adoption interests of the domestic political leadership. The third document should explain the state's strategical priorities towards EU policy adoption in line with the European Union's accession criteria. The specific documents that were used for exploration can be found in Table 1 in the appendices.

Concerning the accessibility of the document used, minor issues occurred. Most documents were easily extractable from the official websites of the European Commission and the official government websites of Serbia and North Macedonia. However, the researcher was unable to find any information on the Macedonian public opinion towards EU accession. As an

alternative, the work of Damjanovski was consulted. His work contained a broad selection of surveys mapping the development of the Macedonian public opinion towards the EU and EU integration from 2004 to 2019.

Concerning language, this thesis has performed a document analysis on documents written in three different languages (Serbian, Macedonian and English). As the progress reports of the European Union were all analysed in English, the researcher preferred that the domestic documents were written in their official domestic language. However, admitting that the researcher is less proficient in Serbian than Macedonian, two Serbian reports were extracted in English. By comparing the English-written documents to the Serbian ones, the researcher sought to learn more about the terminology used in Serbian to address the EU-related questions. In the case of North Macedonia, all official document (excluding the work of Damjanovski) were written in the Macedonian language.

By analysing documents in the domestic languages, the researcher encountered both advantages and disadvantages. The most perceived advantages were that, by writing in one's mother tongue, documents articulated more 'language-bound' or 'personalised expressions' that could not be found in the English language. Due to the researcher's proficiency in Serbian and Macedonian, such expressions could help the researcher to better understand distinct expressions relating to country-specific interests or opinions. Nevertheless, minor challenges occurred in terms of translation and coding. Often, complications occurred in terms of translating Serbian or Macedonia expressions that were not (fully) translatable into English. For example, the English words 'politics' and 'policy' share a common word in Serbian and Macedonian (*English*: politics; policy – *Serbian*: политика; политика – *Macedonian*: политика; политика). Also, as a result of the limited proficiency in Serbian, the researcher required considerable more time analysing the documents in Serbian than the ones written in Macedonian.

In general, the document analysis has successfully accounted for the data that was needed to answer the above-posed research question and hypotheses. Several advantages of using the document analysis were that was assumable better manageable than interviews, because documents are permanent, meaning that texts remain unchanged when reading it multiple times and are, therefore, not affected by the research process. Criteria connected to document analysis as data collection methods were that the academic articles should be peer-reviewed, whereas the policy and monitoring reports should be published on the official government sources of the corresponding institutions. Additionally, this research has accounted for the possibility of government framing in a few official documents. The expectation was that government documentation might be (slightly) subjective. However, in line with the posed research question, this error would increase the relevance of the documents as the domestic policy adoption preferences might be better expressed.

3.2. Coding

All government documents and Commission reports were coded following the codebook that was established by the researcher. The codebook can be found in the appendices of this thesis.

The codebook closely follows the theoretical foundation used in this thesis, as it contains an array of 'keywords' which are categorised under their corresponding 'theories' and 'variables', as presented in chapter 2. Nevertheless, during the coding process, the researcher decided to include new codes in the codebook to explain certain patterns or newly acquired information more clearly. In this regard, inductive coding played an important role in enhancing the flexibility of the codebook to accept the new codes.

Inductive coding has also significantly contributed to the coding process considering the fact that not all documentation was written in English. As some documents were written in Serbian and Macedonian, (informal) translations were used to link the foreign words to their English equivalents. Nevertheless, the translation from Serbian and Macedonian to English has been done with caution. Considering the ability to understand Serbian and Macedonian, the researcher was well aware of any potential translation issues. In this regard, the researcher made sure to code the ('untranslatable') Serbian and Macedonia words within their original context.

The Atlas.ti programme was used as the preferred coding software, as it proved to efficiently support the researcher to analyse the data in this qualitative research. Atlas.ti offered the researcher a platform in which all the documentation could be organised and coded clearly and the codes could be categorised easily.

3.3. Reliability & validity

Considering the hypotheses formulated in chapter 2, the researcher believes to have established a stable theoretical and analytical framework in which the main research question was addressed appropriately. In this regard, the researcher ensured to have sufficiently guaranteed the validity of the research conducted, assuming that the data collected has been reliable and in line with the study subject. However, considering the inability to conduct expert interviews due to the COVID-19 virus outbreak, there might be a possibility that the repetition of this research, with interviews, could yield slightly different research results. However, this liability would also apply if the interviews would be conducted regardless, as different interviewees could give different answers. This assumption can be explained by the notion that data collection under expert interviews is commonly prone to differences in formulations and interpretation. Therefore, to reduce the change of invalidity, the research would have relied on the ability to ask follow-up questions if answers would be given incompletely. Additionally, the researcher would consult additional (written) sources if the given answers would be considered unbelievable or insufficient. Nevertheless, as expert interviews were not conducted, answers were required to be given by literature.

As a response to the inability to conduct expert interviews, this thesis has widened its written database to account for the (potentially) lost data. Additional data was extracted from academic literature, the European Commission's country progress reports and additional government documentation. Having increased the volume of the literature, the researcher believed to have established a reliable database for exploration. In this regard, the role of the Commission reports increased, as these reports would ensure the validity of the information presented by the literature and government documentation.

Considering an intra-coder reliability test, the researcher has looked at the consistency of its coding across time. The coding of the documentation took place at three (main) points in time. The first coding moment commenced shortly after the collection of the government documentation and Commission reports, as at this point, coding functioned as an instrument to determine whether a document would be able to yield enough significant results and could enhance the overall quality of exploration. The second coding period took place a month later and shortly before the establishment of the interview protocols, to determine which information should be prioritised in the interview questions. Consequently, all codes were reassessed and the consistency of the codes increased. Nevertheless, the most significant improvement in intra-coder reliability was perceived during the composition of the analysis chapter of this thesis. As the researcher was coding more regularly (daily) for almost two weeks, it became clear that the codes had become more consistent and became easier to categorise into coding groups. Thus, intra-coder reliability increased due to the high consistency in coding and the shortened time ration between coding moments.

4. Research Findings

In this chapter, the thesis will analyse whether the variables posed in chapter 2 explain why Serbia and North Macedonia have pursued EU policy adoption following the external incentives model or the lesson-drawing model. Additionally, corresponding hypotheses have been formulated per independent variable to further explore on which grounds of the theoretical models Serbia and North Macedonia have adjusted to the political conditions of the European Union's Copenhagen Criteria. Both Serbia and North Macedonia will be examined in separate sections. The first subject of discussion will be Serbia.

4.1. The republic of Serbia

Serbia is a European state that, during the 1990s, suffered greatly from international isolation, as the country was commonly portrayed as the 'Key antagonist' of the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s (Economides & Ker-Lindsay, 2015). This characterisation of Serbia had, during that time, aggravated the country's relationship with the European Union. This relationship worsened in 1999, as several core Member States of the European Union had actively campaigned against Serbia under the auspices of NATO, where bombardments killed hundreds of Serbian civilians (Economides & Ker Lindsay, 2015). The NATO bombardment was eventually characterised as a 'humanitarian intervention' to stop Serbian from its efforts to 'ethnically cleanse' Kosovo (Cohn, 2002).

The relationship between Serbia and the European Union substantially improved after the former Serbian president Slobodan Milošević was sacked from its position in 2000 (Subotić, 2010). The newly appointed Serbian prime minister Zoran Đinđić, advocated the rapprochement of relations with the European Union, as he sought to build a democratic and European Serbian state, expressing the political will to Europeanise and pursue the path to EU membership (Kostovicova, 2004). However, Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić was assassinated in

2003, which halted the Europeanisation of Serbia and was followed by the reinstalment of Serbian nationalism (Pond, 2009). Eventually, this might explain the hampered path to Serbia's EU membership.

Nevertheless, During the European Council summit in Thessaloniki in 2003, the Western Balkan states were awarded the 'potential EU Member State' status (European Commission, 2019a), which was accompanied by the 'promise' that EU membership would be granted once the accession conditions are fulfilled. Serbia enacted on this promise and officially filed its membership application in 2009 (European Commission, 2019a).

The following sections will seek to explain how Serbia has progressed on its path to EU membership based on the state's domestic policy adoption preferences through the external incentives model and the lesson-drawing model.

4.1.1. Serbia and EU policy adoption: the external incentives model

Under the external incentives process, Europeanisation takes place in an environment where domestic actors seek to sustain the domestic status quo as much as possible through cost-benefit calculations. In this regard, the benefits of EU policy adoption should naturally outweigh the costs that would upset the domestic status quo. In the case of Serbia, (political) nationalism has been problematic in relation to the EU policy adoption requirements in two main regards, being Serbia's requirement to fully cooperate with the International Crime Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the requirement to normalise the relations with Kosovo, which are considered the most significant disruption factors to Serbia's domestic status quo (Brusis, 2008; Lazić & Vuletić, 2009; Subotić, 2010; Pawelec & Grimm, 2014; Economides & Ker-Lindsay, 2015; Smith, 2017; Huszka, 2018). In following paragraphs this thesis will seek to explain how these costly requirements have affected the Serbian domestic EU policy adoption interests.

Serbia's EU policy adoption conditions and rewards

One could assume that the requirements under EU conditionality play a determinant role concerning the willingness of Serbia to adopt EU policies. This thesis will, therefore, first analyse the EU policy adoption conditions, based on the guidelines presented in the European Commission's progress reports on Serbia. Taken these progress reports, when examining the political conditions of the Copenhagen Criteria, Serbia is asked to reinforce the stability of its domestic institutions to guarantee democracy, the rule of law, and respect human (including minority) rights. However, as the Balkan enlargement round differs from previous enlargement rounds, Serbia is required to adopt an 'additional' set of conditions. From the progress reports it becomes clear that, complementary to the traditional political requirements, Serbia is required to promote good neighbourly relations with both the EU Member States and other enlargement countries; Serbia is required to fully cooperate with the ICTY (European Commission, 2012a; European Commission, 2013a, European Commission, 2014a). The Copenhagen Criteria with the two added compliance clauses is specifically binding to the acceding states of the Western Balkans and is often referred to as the 'Copenhagen 'plus' Criteria (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2017).

In addition to the ‘Copenhagen plus Criteria’, the European Union has also prioritised the improvement of the democratic principles and the rule of law in Serbia under the ‘new approach’ or ‘fundamentals first approach’. The new approach has further operationalised the EU policy adoption requirements under the political conditions of the Copenhagen Criteria, giving extended attention to the opening and closing of Chapters 23 and 24 of the *acquis* (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2017). The new approach had presumably granted the European Commission extensive time to monitor EU policy adoption compliance and address eventual political backsliding, correspondingly, increased the determinacy of conditions.

Another factor that has contributed to the increase of the determinacy of conditions and, correspondingly with the credibility of the European Union’s enlargement policy, was the adoption of the Western Balkan strategy, which established a different approach towards the Western Balkans. The establishment of the Commission’s Western Balkan Strategy signified that the European Commission would not, again, commit to a bloc integration round as has been the case with the Central and Eastern European Countries. Instead, every Western Balkan state would be assessed based on solitary merit (European Commission, 2018a). In this regard, the significance and credibility of EU conditionality have increased since ‘weaker’ states that do not sufficiently conform to the accession criteria cannot cloak themselves under the progress made by neighbouring enlargement state, as has been seen during the enlargement round of 2004 (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2017). In this regard, one could argue that EU conditionality has become more stringent but, simultaneously, more determinate.

Given the progress reports provided by the European Commission, one can notice that Serbia is not directly told how its accession requirement should be met. This might allow Serbia to adopt EU policies as a formality to ‘satisfy’ the European Union, without yielding comprehensive effects. However, Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier (2019) argue that the determinacy of conditions is constantly improving through the (almost) annually published country reports of the European Commission. Thus, as the policy adoption requirements are continuously clarified, states are given a better indication to determine how domestic policies should be adjusted. In this regard, determinate EU policies often seem to appear in line with a government’s policy priorities (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2019). Therefore, one can consider that the conditions presented to Serbia are determinate.

Following the abovementioned assumptions, this thesis assumes that Hypothesis 1 (H1) is true. Therefore, confirming the assumption that the likelihood of EU policy adoption in Serbia increased due to the clearness of the EU policy adoption requirements. This assumption can be confirmed by Serbia government documentation. In 2014, for example, Serbia was preparing its domestic market for full integration into the European Union’s internal market. Corresponding to the political conditions of the Copenhagen Criteria, the Serbian government sought to increase its efforts to enhance the promotion of democratic values (Government of Serbia, 2014). In 2017, the Serbian government aimed to align all government priorities in line with requirements given for EU accession, as an attempt to strategically align with the EU standards (Government of Serbia, 2017). In 2020, the general Serbian position towards EU enlargement was to enhance its policy adoption efforts in line with EU conditionality (Government of Serbia, 2020). Additionally, as Serbia has adopted a National Programme for

the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA), multi-annual assessments are made to compare the feedback given in the Commission reports with the process of domestic EU policy harmonisation (Serbian Ministry of European Integration, n.d.). Thus, as the EU policy adoption conditions have manifested themselves among the Serbian government priorities, one can assume that Serbia's accession conditions can be considered determinate.

Nevertheless, to fully support the notion that H1 is true, one should look at the determinacy of the rewards given to EU policy compliance, which is included in the appendices. In the case of Serbia, this can be best explained examining the conditions in line with the full cooperation with the ICTY, and the question concerning the normalisation of relations with Kosovo.

The credibility of EU conditionality

As has been discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, the credibility of EU conditionality is dependent on the (superior) bargaining power held by the European Union, assuming its role as 'rule setter', and the effectiveness of the European Union's sanctioning and rewarding regime in line with the applicant state's behaviour during Europeanisation.

Concerning Serbia, EU credibility has appeared to be often neglected over security interests. As Serbia has deteriorated frequently from its European path, the European Union decided to adjust its policy adoption requirements towards Serbia. This became evident, for example, after the European Union signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with Serbia in 2013 (European Commission, 2019a). As the signing of the SAA was not necessarily based on Serbia's compliance to the conditions set under EU conditionality, it did signal the urgency of the European Union to keep Serbia on the 'European track' (Noutcheva, 2009). Therefore, one could argue that, in this regard, the European Union has failed to establish itself as a credible rule setter, as the security interests of the European Union were prioritised over the political requirements of the Copenhagen criteria. Simultaneously, this example might also explain the interdependency between the European Union and Serbia. As argued in chapter 2, Serbia might be heavily dependent on EU funding through EU policy compliance due to economic reasons, but at the same time, it appears that the European Union seeks to prioritise stability in its immediate neighbourhood over the accession conditions. In this regard, to maintain interdependency, the European Union has made the accession criteria for Serbia more 'implementable'.

Nevertheless, the softening of the SAA requirements have not improved Serbia's compliance with its EU policy adoption requirements under the 'fundamentals first' approach. This became evident considering the ineffective policy processes made in the field of fundamental rights and civil society. In this regard, the shortcoming of effective policy reforms have neglected the importance of battling violations concerning the freedom of expression and self-determination; the politicisation of the media, the judiciary, and Civil Society Organisations (European Commission, 2019a).

Another issue that has challenged EU conditionality was the question regarding Kosovo. Since Kosovo has unilaterally proclaimed its independence in 2008, not all EU Member State have recognised Kosovo's independence, namely Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia, and

Spain (Noutcheva, 2009; Economides & Ker-Lindsay, 2015). In this regard, the European Union, as an intergovernmental body, should formally be unable to effectively condition the normalisation of Kosovo as an official EU condition (Economides & Ker-Lindsay, 2015). Therefore, the credibility of the normalisation condition could be questioned, as there is no official EU-wide consensus on the status of Kosovo. In this regard, Serbia might solidify its position by aligning with the EU Member States that do not recognise Kosovo as an independent state.

The most recent incident that made Serbia question the credibility of EU conditionality was the Council decision made in October 2019, regarding the commencement of accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. This became evident after the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić publicly stated that the Western Balkans cannot rely any longer on its Western neighbours alone (Tcherneva & Varma, 2019). Despite the advice given by the previous Commission of DG NEAR, Johannes Hahn, who warned the European leaders that a failure to open accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia would annul the incentive for Serbia to continue the normalisation process with Kosovo (Nielsen, 2019), the European Council yet failed to come to an agreement. Considering that North Macedonia has adopted highly controversial reforms to further its accession process, one could assume that Serbia could have strongly questioned why it is required to pursue its costly efforts to normalise its relations with Kosovo. The presumed loss of credibility in relation with EU conditionality has shown that Serbia has grown impatient towards the European Union. In the past, this has led to the strengthening of economic and political dependency on the Russian Federation (Economides & Ker-Lindsay, 2015; Smith, 2017; Patalakh, 2018), which has complicated the condition requiring the alignment with the European Union's foreign policy. The reconciliation with the Russian Federation was again noticeable in 2019, as Serbia signed the Free Trade Agreement with the Russian led EEU. Nevertheless, as it might seem like an attempt to draw Serbia closer to the European Union again, Serbia and the European Union signed an action programme, which would give Serbia another 70.2 million euro under the framework of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (European Commission, 2020c).

Form the domestic perspective, one might assume that Serbia seeks to establish a stronger bargaining position towards the European Union, knowing that the European Union would be faster inclined to give awards as deterioration from the European path is considered a security threat. Kovačević (2019) argues that Serbia's compliance with EU conditionality is, therefore, dependent on receiving short-term economic gains. This becomes also visible in Serbia's foreign policy, where Serbia finds itself sitting in two chairs.

Overall, EU conditionality has been challenged by the fact that intra-EU interests have sometimes overshadowed the credibility of the political conditions of the Copenhagen criteria. However, despite the inability to accept H2 in its entirety, this thesis argues the Council meeting of 2019 has shown that there is no certainty in the assumption that EU credibility will guarantee a pathway to EU membership if applicant states would continue to adopt EU policies. It became evident that, in 2019, the European Union has shown that its enlargement policy has been undermined by intra-EU reluctance.

Adoption costs

When it comes to the Serbian veto players under the external incentives model, this thesis has primarily looked at how the costs of EU policy adoption have been calculated against the preservation of power of the political leadership in Serbia. This comes from the assumption that the political leadership in Serbia is seen as a strong rational domestic actor that seeks to maximize its political authority by safeguarding its electoral support (Riac, 2008). In this regard, one can assume that the Serbian government would not pursue the implementation of politically costly EU policies that could result in public disapproval and, eventually, the loss of power.

In explaining why the Serbian government has pursued certain policy requirements, this thesis will look at the examples given in the previous sections. As has been discussed above, it became evident that the changing attitude towards the European Union and Kosovo was a result of the realisation of the Serbian political leadership that the furthering the Europeanisation process would yield more benefits than maintaining its hard-line positions on Kosovo and cooperation with the ICTY (Economides & Ker-Lindsay, 2015). Nevertheless, Serbia's compliance with the EU policy adoption conditions was a result of the economic decline that Serbia was facing in 2014 (Economides & Ker-Lindsay, 2015). In this regard, it appears that the Serbian political leadership sought to further its EU membership prospect, intending to improve the domestic economic situation.

Thus, assuming that the likelihood of EU policy adoption increases when the benefits of the European Union's policy adoption requirements counterbalance the costs that disturb the domestic status quo, this thesis argues that H3 is true for Serbia.

4.1.2. Serbia and EU policy adoption: the lesson-drawing model

This section will explore whether the Serbian EU policy adoption interests can be explained by the lesson-drawing model. This model assumes that EU policy adoption occurs when there is a strong domestic incentive to depart from the status quo. This section will seek to answer hypotheses 4 to 6.

Policy dissatisfaction and transferability

This thesis has used the information presented in the Serbian government documentation to acquire data indicating evident displeasure in the functioning of domestic policies. In an introductory statement intended to be presented at the intergovernmental conference in Brussels, in 2014, it became evident that Serbia sought to address its high unemployment rates and declining economy (Government of Serbia, 2014). However, in a report of 2017, which was based on the inauguration speech of the Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabić, was shown that strong policy dissatisfaction was expressed towards the domestic education system, stressing for the need to improve the Serbian education system and encourage young Serbs to develop entrepreneurial skills (Government of Serbia, 2017). In that same document, the Serbian government stressed that more efforts should be taken to reform the public

administration by encouraging civil society to become more involved in the legislative process (Government of Serbia, 2017).

However, as limited information was available to confirm Serbia's approach to improving dissatisfactory domestic policies, this thesis was unable to fully confirm that the Serbian government had adopted viable policy solutions. Examining the Commission's monitoring reports, it becomes evident that Serbia struggles to implement policies in line with the EU policy adoption requirements, as the key government institutions of Serbia were unable to fully adopt EU policies. In cases where new government institutions were established, the European Commission often reports on their ineffectivity due to professional and budgetary shortcomings.

Although the Serbian government documentation shows the political will to find policy solutions through EU policy adoption, it is noticeable that the current Serbian leadership is often undermining its policy priorities. For example, while the government sought to reform its administrative framework to enhance the participation of civil society in the Serbian legislative process (Government of Serbia, 2014; Government of Serbia, 2017), the European Commission kept reporting on the insufficiency of the Serbian government to involve civil society in the domestic legislative and Europeanisation process (European Commission, 2014a; European Commission, 2015a; European Commission, 2016b). Therefore, this thesis argues that the limited government incentive to involve the Serbian public in the domestic policymaking seeks to preserve the authority of the political leadership. The authorial nature of Serbian politics seems to be evident in other areas as well. For example, the European Commission has often reported that the Serbian media is heavily influenced by (ruling) party politics and elections are often prone to voter intimidation (European Commission, 2014a; European Commission, 2015a; European Commission, 2016b). Also, 'independent government bodies', such as courts, the police and the national ombudsman remain to be politicised (European Commission, 2014a; European Commission, 2015a). Additionally, the operative environment for Civil Society Organisation and Human Rights Defenders appear to be hostile (European Commission, 2016b).

Thus considering the abovementioned points, limited domestic incentives have proved that H4 and H5 are true for Serbia. Concerning Hypothesis 5, limited evidence was found to assume that the likelihood of EU policy adoption in Serbia has increased due to the increase of domestic policy dissatisfaction, therefore, being unable to accept the hypothesis. Generally, the government has highlighted several policy shortcomings but, at the same time, it has not significantly acted upon the issues. As a result of public negligence, the Serbian political arena saw an increase of veto players, which, in line with the theory, demanded a departure from the domestic status quo. Since December 2018, Serbia saw the commencement of anti-government protests in Belgrade and other Serbian towns. With these protests, the Serbian citizens demanded the de-politicisation of the media and the guaranteeing of fair and transparent elections (European Commission, 2019a). As the protests have been suspended in March 2020, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, it is assumable that domestic policy dissatisfaction remains.

A similar assumption could apply for the rejection of H5, assuming that the likelihood of EU policy adoption increases when EU policies are more likely to be compatible with the

domestic institutional and administrative structures. However, assuming that the Serbian government is considerably authoritarian and EU policies might endanger the position of the Serbian leadership, the Serbian government might have not enhanced its capabilities to adopt EU policies. This can also be noted in the Commission's progress reports. Therefore, this thesis considers H5 to be incompatible in the case of Serbia.

The Serbian public opinion

Considering the Serbian public opinion, it seems that most Serbs support the Serbian path to EU membership. Comparing the theoretical foundation of the lesson-drawing model with the EU policy adoption requirements to which Serbia has to conform, this thesis has perceived that the majority of the Serbia public would support the departure from the domestic status quo if this would require Serbia to adopt EU policies. This assumption can be confirmed by the data shown in Graph 1 in the appendices, in which the Serbian public was asked the question whether they would support Serbia's accession to the European Union if a referendum for EU membership would be held tomorrow.

In general, Graph 1 shows that the public support for EU accession is rather meagre. Between 2011 and 2016, less than 50 per cent of the Serbian public would vote for the Serbian accession to the European Union. This low percentage of public support might be explained by factors or events that have occurred before or from 2009, as the graph shows a steep decline in EU membership supporters until 2011.

Concerning the factors that explain why people would not support Serbia's bid to become an EU Member State include the inability to see the benefits from EU membership, assuming that Serbia does not belong to the EU, considering that the European Union is a dictatorship, and the strict conditionality revolving the question of Kosovo (Serbian Ministry of European Integration, 2019). Concerning the question regarding Kosovo, the support for the continuation of the constructive talks remains to be supported by more than 50 per cent of the Serbian people but has been gradually declined over time (see Graph 2 in appendices). However, one should bear in mind that the percentage of support for the continuation of the constructive talks with Kosovo could imply that the public is aware of the pressure exerted on Serbia by the EU on this point.

Looking at the factors explaining why the Serbians want to pursue EU membership mostly relate to the freedom of movement and other economic gains. This assumption is based on the information presented in Table 2 in the appendices, which depicts what the European Union means to the Serbian people.

Concerning Hypothesis 6, it remains quite unclear whether the likelihood of EU policy adoption has increased due to the pressure of the Serbian public to depart from the status quo. Based on the visual representations presented in the appendices, one could assume that if the Serbian public would be able to actively take part in Serbian legislative procedure, it would be more likely that the public interest to depart from the status quo could manifest itself in government policies. However, on the other side, the public support for EU membership appears to change rapidly, as Serbian nationalism has shown to undermine the willingness to comply with the

political criteria of the European Union. In conclusion, this thesis rejects H6 due to the inability to say something about the impact of civil society on the Serbian accession process.

In the end, this thesis discovered that the lesson-drawing model did not explain how the domestic EU policy adoption interests in Serbia have influenced Serbia's path to EU membership. On the other hand, the researcher assumes that the lesson-drawing model can hardly be applied to authoritarian governance, where domestic veto players have limited power to incite Serbia's departure from the status quo. Moreover, the political leadership in Serbia appeared to pursue the incentive to not disturb the status quo for personal political gain.

4.1.3. Key findings Serbia

Serbia appeared to have been given determinate EU policy adoption requirements, which became evident by looking at the European Commission's progress reports on Serbia and the fact that the policy adoption requirements were manifested among Serbia's policy priorities.

The credibility of EU conditionality appears to be questionable in Serbia's case, as the research findings have shown that the European Union occasionally undermined its accession conditions over security interests. In this regard, the researcher argues that the European Union sought to 'sway' Serbia to continue its Europeanisation process in exchange for the loosening of the EU policy adoption requirements or substantial (economic) benefits. This became evident, for example, when Serbia signed the SAA while the accession conditions were not (completely) met. Additionally, it appeared that Serbia received additional funding to prevent the country from increasing its dependency on the Russian Federation. In this regard, the researcher argues that the Europeanisation process of Serbia is a clear result of external incentives. Thus, whereas the European Union tries to keep Serbia on the European path for security reasons, Serbia expects to be economically compensated for doing so. However, the risk is that Serbia could use its position to undermine the European Union's role as rule-setter. The examples given above seem to imply that Serbian strengthens its relations with the Russian Federation in times when economic benefits from the European Union decrease and vice versa. In this regard, Serbia appears to be sitting in two chairs.

Furthermore, the researcher argues that there is a strong indication proving that Serbia follows the logic of consequences. This assumption corresponds partly with the findings presented above. Serbia seems to adopt (costly) EU policies because of economic benefit and necessity. Regarding this necessity, the research findings have shown that Serbia has decided to drop its firm position on the full cooperation with the ICTY and the normalisation of relations with Kosovo, to receive the needed (economic) rewards under EU conditionality. This was during a time when the Serbian economy was suffering an alarming decline. Thus, considering the cost-benefit calculation, Serbia has agreed to conform to the politically costly accession conditions, as the economic benefits resulting from EU conditionality compliance would counterbalance the domestic costs.

Regarding the assumption that the Serbian Europeanisation process was incited domestically following the logic of appropriateness, this research has found limited evidence. In this regard, limited data could be extracted from government documentation that could confirm that Serbia

seeks to improve its dissatisfactory domestic policy regime. Additionally, limited data was provided to assume that the likelihood of EU policy adoption increased in Serbia as a result of a domestic incentive to replace non-functional or non-existent domestic policies with EU policies. In this regard, this thesis assumes that there is no clear domestic interest to depart from the status quo.

Nevertheless, the researcher suspects that nationalism and authoritarian governance could explain why states rather pass on the adoption of EU policies. Despite the widespread anti-government protests in Serbia in 2019/2020 demanding a departure from the status quo, it also appeared that the public support for EU accession was rather meagre among the Serbian public. This trend was explained by the evident public objection to conforming to the EU policy adoption requirements in relation to the condition to fully cooperate with the operations of the ICTY and the requirements to normalise the relations with Kosovo. However, as the Serbian civil society organisations are given limited possibilities to be involved in the domestic policymaking process, civil society is given limited power to incite the departure from the status quo. The researcher argues that, on the domestic level, most decisions reflect the interests of the political leadership.

Assuming that the Serbian Europeanisation process is a result of external incentives and that the adoption of EU policies followed the logic of consequences, this thesis argues that the external incentives model can best explain Serbia's accession process.

4.2. The republic of North Macedonia

Traditionally, North Macedonia had a less problematic relationship with the European Union in comparison to Serbia. This country, which formally known under its provisional name the 'Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' or its constitutional name, the 'Republic of Macedonia', was not actively involved in the Yugoslavian wars. This had made the country eligible to establish formal cooperative and economic agreements with the European Union quite early, which was the earliest form of EU conditionality known to the country (Papadimitriou, 2001). It was, therefore, no surprise that North Macedonia was the first Western Balkan country that had signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union in April 2001 (Renner Trauner, 2009; Gerovska Mitev, 2013). North Macedonia formally applied for EU membership in March 2004 and received its Candidate country status in December 2005 (European Commission, 2020d).

Although European Commission has continuously recommended the European Council to open accession negotiations with North Macedonia since 2009 (European Commission, 2020d), it took more than ten years to attain Council unanimity and commence accession negotiations as North Macedonia due to the Greek veto over the 'name dispute'. As the dispute was settled through the Prespa Agreement in 2018, Greece withdrew its veto, enabling North Macedonia to start accession negotiations on March 2020. Nevertheless, the process of solving the dispute was politically costly and unpopular, which is a point that will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

This section will seek to explain through the external incentives model and the lesson-drawing model how North Macedonia has progressed on its path to EU membership.

4.2.1. North Macedonia and EU policy adoption: the external incentives model

North Macedonia's EU policy adoption conditions

In determining what the EU policy adoption conditions are for North Macedonia, this thesis has consulted, again, the European Commission's progress reports. In the case of North Macedonia, the European Union has given a clear set of EU policy adoption conditions to which the state had to comply to proceed with its path toward EU membership. Since the Macedonian accession process has been longer than that of Serbia, the researcher noticed a slight change of the political conditions in the country reports from 2005 onward, including the full cooperation to cooperate with the ICTY and the requirements to promote good neighbourly relations (See appendices for the development of the accession criteria of North Macedonia).

Concerning the determinacy of conditions, the European Commission has formulated EU policy adoption conditions in its country progress report on North Macedonia. In this regard, North Macedonia has been given substantial feedback and advice on its compliance with the political requirements of the Copenhagen Criteria. Concerning the corresponding reward, the European Commission has stated that North Macedonia's compliance with the EU policy adoption requirements would grant the country a 'green light' to commence the accession negotiations (European Commission, 2020a).

When looking at national reform agendas of North Macedonia, it is visible that North Macedonia's policy agenda closely follows the feedback provided in the European Commission's progress reports. This follows the assumption presented in the work of Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2019) who argue that the adoption of EU policies in national reform agendas often indicate that the EU accession conditions are determinate. This assumption can be confirmed considering the Macedonian government programme for 2017 to 2020, in which the government had prioritised to enhance the functioning and independence of the national institutions and judiciary (Government of North Macedonia, 2017a), which is line with the feedback given in the Commission's progress report of 2016 (European Commission, 2016c).

Assuming that the likelihood of EU policy adoption increases when the conditions to policy adoption are determinate, this thesis argues that H1 is true in the case of North Macedonia. The increasing pace of the North Macedonian EU policy adoption requirements has shown that the determinacy of conditions and the significance of the accompanying rewards have provided an evident stimulus for the country to pursue its path to EU membership. This became evident in March 2019, as North Macedonia settled the bilateral dispute with Greece and significantly increased the functioning of the national institutions and the rule of law (European Commission, 2019b). As a result, the European Commission, again, recommended the commencement of accession negotiations with North Macedonia.

The 'name dispute' and Greece as the main obstacle to accession

By examining the European Commission's country report, it has become evident that the Europeanisation process of North Macedonia has been mostly influenced by the country's relationship with Greece. As was mentioned above, Greece has vetoed the commencement of accession negotiations with North Macedonia from 2009 until 2019, due to the so-called 'name dispute'. The core point of disagreement in the Macedonian name dispute with Greece concerned the constitutional name under which North Macedonia identified itself before the country agreed to change its name in 2018. Before 2018, the constitutional name of North Macedonia was the 'Republic of Macedonia', which the Greek public and politicians considered to be hinting towards (historical) revisionism (Gerovska Mitev, 2013; Armakolas & Trantafyllou, 2017). However, as the Greek position towards North Macedonia has softened over time, a possibility to establish a policy window to end the dispute and became more viable. At first, Greece completely rejected the use of the term 'Macedonia' in the country's name, however, after intensive negotiations between governments, Greece agreed to allow the inclusion of 'Macedonia' in the country's name under the condition that the country's name should include a compound name, which would be used 'erga omnes', thus, applied in external as well as internal affairs (Armakolas & Trantafyllou, 2017).

It was only until 2017, when a policy window opened, as the complex relationship between Skopje and Athens was improving (Armakolas & Trantafyllou, 2017). The new pro-EU government of North Macedonia paved the way for a fastened Europeanisation process through interregional cooperation and diplomacy, by which the country quickly won the trust of the Western countries and media, which has put Greece in a rather 'awkward' position (Armakolis & Triantafyllou, 2017). This eventually led to official speculations among government officials in the core Member States and Brussels for a fastened entry procedure for North Macedonia into NATO and the European Union (Armakois & Trantafyllou, 2017). As the dispute with Greece was getting increased international attention, Greece was pressured to support the integratory efforts on North Macedonia.

Elaborating on hypothesis 1, and in relation with the name dispute, this thesis suspected that the determinacy of conditions might have been less credible before 2018. This could be explained by the assumption that the European Union was not presenting itself as a 'fair' rule-setter towards North Macedonia. As the recommendations of the European Commission to open accession negotiations with North Macedonia were continuously undermined by the political interests of Greece, the role of rule-setter has been transferred from the European Union to Greece. In this regard, one might assume that Greece had undermined the credibility of EU conditionality, as it might have imposed additional accession conditions on North Macedonia to hinder its accession progress. However, as the Greek conditions were met after the signing of the Prespa Agreement in 2018, Greece lost its incentive to govern the accession prospects of North Macedonia, meaning that the European Union has regained control of the accession process of North Macedonia. As a result, the European Union was again able to give meaningful rewards and feedback to the country. In the appendices, this thesis elaborates on the relationship between policy determinacy and the bilateral dispute with Greece.

Credibility of EU conditionality in the case of North Macedonia

As might have been indicated in the previous section, the credibility of EU conditionality has been quite dependent on the European Union's promise to deliver the carrot once North Macedonia would comply with the EU policy adoption conditions. Despite the few months of political uncertainty in North Macedonia during the end of 2019 and beginning of 2020 as a result of the veto during the October 2019 Council meeting, the EU membership perspective of North Macedonia has remained viable.

Nevertheless, this has shown that EU conditionality remains to be prone to Member State influence. Correspondingly this meant that the recommendations of the European Commission to open the accession negotiations with North Macedonia were again undermined due to the influence of domestic politics. Evidently, this has also undermined the merit-based Europeanisation process of the Western Balkans.

In 2009, the European Commission recommended the Council, for the first time, to open the accession negotiations with North Macedonia. However, it has been Greece that undermined the role of the European Commission due to the name dispute until 2019 (Juncos & Borrágan, 2017; Smith, 2017). After the Greek veto, a process of political side-tracking commenced in North Macedonia, as the Macedonian public began to support nationalist parties and that sought to reverse the progress North Macedonia made on its path to EU membership (Vachudova, 2014). This development became also evident in the Commission's country reports. Especially in the country report published in 2010, which is the first report after the Council decision in 2009, concerns emphasised the need to ensure transparency, professionalism, and independence of public administration and the judiciary (European Commission, 2010; European Commission, 2011). In 2013, the European Commission stated that North Macedonia was breaching its EU obligations related to the fundamental freedoms, such as the freedom of the press. During this time, the Macedonian government started to close numerous media outlets, which resulted in a decrease in media pluralism and an increase in political polarisation; the Commission has reported cases of increased pressures on journalists and media outlet owners (European Commission, 2013b). In 2014, the European Commission reported that state control over the media and judiciary had further increased (European Commission, 2014b).

Some Western states saw Greece's antagonistic policy towards North Macedonia as a factor challenging the stability of the region (Armakolas & Trainfyllou, 2017). However, due to continuing increase of 'public paranoia' in Greece over the name dispute, the Greek government continued to hold a strong position against the accession process of North Macedonia (Economides, 2005). Thus, while the Greek veto fulfilled a political purpose in Greece, it simultaneously derailed the Macedonian democracy for decades (Bieber, 2018).

From 2015 onwards, the European Commission saw that North Macedonia was gradually sliding into a deep political crisis, which the European officials expected to be the most severe political crisis in the country since the conflict of 2001 (European Commission, 2015b). This political crisis concerned a widespread wiretapping scandal, in which the Macedonian government appeared to have tapped the telecommunication of opposition members and states officials. This European Commission argued that this scandal has been a serious infringement

on fundamental rights (European Commission, 2015b). In this regard, it has become evident that during most of North Macedonia's candidacy, the Macedonian government had followed the same trend as Serbia when it comes to the domestic status quo. This required the political leadership to further consolidate its political authority to secure its political leadership. Nevertheless, since 2017, the authoritarian Macedonian leadership was replaced for a pro-EU government (Meunier & Vachudova, 2018).

In the end, this thesis argues that the heavy influence of Greek politics in the European Union's enlargement policy has significantly displayed the limits of EU conditionality, as Member States pressure continued to fail to change the Greek position towards North Macedonia (Meunier & Vachudova, 2018). However, based on the data provided in the text above, one could argue that H2 should be rejected in the case of North Macedonia. As North Macedonia has seized the opportunity to establish a policy window in which the name dispute with Greece could be solved, the certainty that North Macedonia could become an EU Member State increased. Therefore, one might argue that the likelihood of EU policy adoption increased as EU conditionality could offer North Macedonia a credible accession prospect again. However, as the credibility of EU conditionality was undermined as a result of intra-EU politicisation, North Macedonia was not anymore foreseen of a credible enlargement perspective, which has heavily undermined the efforts taken by the Macedonian government.

In this regard, this thesis will also reject H3, as the political benefits of EU policy adoption in North Macedonia have not (timely) counterweighted costs to the domestic status quo.

Nevertheless, since North Macedonia has changed its constitutional name, which greatly challenged the popularity of the pro-EU wind in North Macedonia, the Council veto of 2019 has, again, ignited uncertainty in the Macedonian accession process. Despite the 'correction' of the Council to still open accession negotiations with North Macedonia in March 2020, the political polls have shown that nationalist party (which will contest the Prespa Agreement with Greece) and the Pro-EU government go neck to neck (Marusic, 2020). A wrong decision in political leadership in this regard could again trigger years of political backsliding, unless sufficient rewards are provided during the accession negotiation phase to uphold the Macedonian Europeanisation impetus.

4.2.2. North Macedonia and EU policy adoption: the lesson-drawing model

Following the hypotheses answered under the external incentives model, this section will examine whether EU policy adoption in North Macedonia has been a result of the domestic incentive to depart from the status quo to better the domestic policy environment.

Policy dissatisfaction and transferability

The last few years have been characterised by re-democratisation, transparency, and extensive public participation. After the political crisis in North Macedonia, which ended the authoritarian

rule of the previous government, the new government sought to reverse the previous government's policies. In this regard, policy dissatisfaction could be perceived mostly regarding the freedom of expression, transparency towards civil society, independence of the public administration and the independence of the judiciary. In analysing whether the political will to depart from the status quo was evident, the government priorities in the '3-6-9-plan' were compared to the monitoring reports of the European Commission in the years 2018 and 2019.

A priority given in the Macedonian reform plan was the need to restore the democratic principle by increasing transparency in the State Election Commission and electoral procedures and, corresponding, the implementation of policies restricting the use of the state budget during election campaigns by government parties (Government of North Macedonia, 2017b). the 'restoration' of the democratic principle was also prioritised regarding the state's key legislative structures, such as the parliament, in which the composition of the parliamentary working group would include opposition party members to play a contributory role in the domestic legislative procedure (Government of North Macedonia, 2017b). Within a year, the European Commission had noted that the Macedonian government had indeed improved its democratic governance, as constructive steps were taken to reverse state capture (European Commission, 2018b).

Another government priority sought to increasingly involve civil society within the legislative and policy-making structures of North Macedonia. On this point, government documentation sought to increase public involvement by enabling Civil Society Organisations to participate in the working groups of the Parliament, where these organisation would be allowed to suggest amendments to laws and voice their concerns, bringing society at the same level as the government (Government of North Macedonia, 2017b). This incentive had also been received as a good development by the European Commission as it has noted that there has been increased involvement of Civil Society Organisations in the legislative process in North Macedonia (European Commission, 2018b).

The last point in which policy dissatisfaction was quite visible was the need to enhance the freedom of the media and, correspondingly, the freedom of expression. In this regard, the Macedonian government had voiced its concerns in relation to the physical and verbal abuse and political pressure towards journalists, which needed to be combatted (Government of North Macedonia, 2017b). As significant improvements on this point have been reported in 2019, the European Commission has noted that the climate for media freedom and the freedom of expression has improved in North Macedonia, but yet, further efforts are required to guarantee professionalism in journalism and the protection of journalism from physical and verbal harassment (European Commission, 2019b).

Other policy priorities were the de-politicisation and professionalization of the public administration and judiciary (Government of North Macedonia, 2017a; Government of North Macedonia, 2017b; Government of North Macedonia, 2018). Overall, the European Commission has reported the initiation a significant amount of process to reverse the political backsliding prior years, as crucial steps have been made to restore the independence of the public administration and judiciary (European Commission, 2018b).

Both hypotheses 4 and 5 seem to be confirmed considering North Macedonia. First, it became evident that the likelihood of EU policy adoption has increased due to domestic dissatisfaction

with the policies that were implemented by the previous government. In this regard, North Macedonia had established the '3-6-9 plan' and 'Plan 18' to align the departure of the status quo in line with the EU policy adoption requirement. In this regard, one can argue that North Macedonia has found its policy solution at the European level. Assuming that in line with H5 the likelihood of EU policy adoption increases when EU policies are compatible with the domestic administrative structures, it has become evident that North Macedonia has smoothly (allowed) the implementation of EU policies. In this regard, the political and public will to depart from the status quo can be confirmed.

The Macedonian public opinion

To say something about potential veto players in the accession process in North Macedonia, this thesis sought to find answers in the public opinion surveys published by Ivan Damjanovski from 2004 to 2019.

This thesis assumes that in comparison to the Serbian Public, the Macedonian public has shown to be more supportive of their state's Europeanization process. In Graph 3 (see appendices) can be seen that the public support for EU accession has dropped slightly over the time, North Macedonia remained to be above the 60 per cent line when it comes to the willingness to become a Member State of the European Union. Presumably, this might be an indication that the Macedonian citizens would be more willing to depart from the status quo compared to the Serbian public. However, another assumption might be that the current government in North Macedonia is more supportive of the public involvement in the Europeanisation process. Because, as was seen in the case of Serbia, the will to Europeanise in Serbia is mostly determined in line with the accumulation of power by the Serbian political leadership. Nevertheless, as North Macedonia also had an authoritarian leadership before the year 2017, the will to join the European Union appears to have declined after authoritarian governance left office. Damjanovski (2020) explains that the decline in support for EU membership can be explained by the effect that the change of the constitutional name of North Macedonia had on the Macedonian public and the impact of the decision of the European Council of October 2019 to postpone accession negotiations.

The assumption of Damjanovski (2020) appears to be confirmed by Graph 4 (see appendices), which displays the reasons why those opposing EU membership would vote against the accession of North Macedonia to the EU. As becomes evident, the variables 'attempts to change the constitutional name', 'Loss of national identity', 'loss of sovereignty and independence of the country', and 'EU does not like us' have grown significantly in 2019 compared to 2014. In this regard, Freyburg and Richter (2010) agree that the conflict between national identity and the EU policy adoption requirements will eventually push an applicant state away from the European Union. Additionally, when comparing the enlargement round of the Central and Eastern European countries to the Western Balkan states, it becomes evident that the contemporary EU criteria increasingly challenge state sovereignty and identity (Noutcheva, 2009).

Regardless, the support for EU membership appears to remain significant among the Macedonia public, excluding any reason to assume that the Macedonia public could be considered a veto player at the current moment. As can be seen in Graph 5 (see appendices), the most prominent reasons for the Macedonians to pursue EU membership have been to desires to improve the standards of living, a decrease of unemployment and the improvement of security and stability in the country. However, over time, the improvement of democracy, the ability to work abroad and the belonging to the European family of countries have increased significantly as reasons to become a Member State of the European Union from 2018 to 2019. However, as historical questions between North Macedonia and EU Member State Bulgaria have reached the European Enlargement policy (Christidis, 2020), further conditions on national identity might result in a decrease of support for EU membership.

Overall, it appeared that the Europeanisation process of North Macedonia has been better explained by the lesson-drawing model, as the will to pursue EU membership is explained by the will of the political leadership and public of North Macedonia to depart from the status quo. Thus answering the last hypothesis, 6, the likelihood of EU policy adoption in North Macedonia has indeed increased due to the will of domestic actors to depart from the domestic status quo. Thus, hypothesis 6 is accepted.

4.2.3. Key findings North Macedonia

The EU policy adoption requirements in the case of North Macedonia have been determinant. The country has managed to adhere to the conditions of the European Union in the last few years and was, correspondingly, rewarded with the opening of the accession negotiations for EU membership (eventually).

In this thesis, it became evident that the Europeanisation process of North Macedonia was mostly influenced by the relationship the country had with its neighbour, Greece. Due to the state's dispute over the former constitutional name of North Macedonia, the credibility of EU conditionality was highly contested by Greece, which appeared to inherit the role as rule-setter from the European Union to govern the Europeanisation process of North Macedonia. In this regard, Greece played an influential role in determining the accession requirements for North Macedonian and determining the conditions to which needed to be adhered to solve the dispute between the two states. It became evident that Greece acquired the role of rule-setter when Greece alone had rejected the European Commission's requirements to open the accession negotiations with North Macedonia since 2009. In time, the continuous high costs of EU policy adoption had resulted in serious political backsliding in North Macedonia. It was only since 2018 when the new Macedonian government agreed to adhere to Greece's demands to solve the bilateral dispute by the signing of the Prespa Agreement, which enabled North Macedonia to continue its path to EU membership.

Given the dependency of Greece's approval to further the Europeanisation process, this thesis argues that the Europeanisation process of North Macedonia was not incited by external incentives. As the country has been withheld from its reward (the opening of accession negotiations) on several occasions, it becomes evident that the EU (as a whole) did not support the entry of North Macedonia into the European Union. This assumption can be supported by

the Council meeting of October 2019, where the Council concluded to not open the accession negotiations with the country, despite the fulfilment of all the necessary policy adoption requirements. In this regard, it was strong intra-EU reluctance (mainly politicisation of EU enlargement) that played a prominent role in undermining the credibility EU conditionality. Thus, despite full policy compliance, no credible rewards were given (in the first place). However, as North Macedonia remained committed to the accession process, there would be no reasons to believe that the EU policy adoption interests of North Macedonia would follow the logic of consequences.

Nevertheless, this thesis has shown that the motivation of North Macedonia to continue its accession process was incited by domestic incentives, as the adoption of the costly EU policies followed the logic of appropriateness. The domestic incentive to Europeanise has been incited the domestic dissatisfaction towards the policy regime that was installed by the previous government in North Macedonia. High dissatisfaction appeared to be a result of the low trust in the Macedonian democratic system, the low transparency of government operations, the lack of public involvement in the domestic policymaking process, and evident state capture. As the current government actively increased the involvement of civil society in its policymaking process, a departure from the status quo became inevitable. Overall, this thesis argues that there is a profound public interest to adopt EU policies to repair domestic policy deficiencies. This assumption was based on the progress reports of the European Commission, which stated that North Macedonia has indeed taken significant steps in aligning its domestic policies with the EU policy adoption requirements.

Concerning the Macedonian public opinion in relation to EU accession, this thesis has shown that the public support for EU accession remains above 60 per cent from 2014 to 2019. This could indicate that the Macedonian public would indeed seek to depart from the contemporary domestic status quo. However, simultaneously, it became evident that the support for EU membership has decreased over time. Causes of this decrease could be explained by the culturally salient decision to change the constitutional name of North Macedonia and the rejection of the Council of October 2019 to open the accession negotiations with North Macedonia.

Nevertheless, significant factors that have motivated the Macedonian public to pursue EU membership most recently entail the interest to improve the Macedonia democracy, the ability to work abroad, and the willingness to belong to the European family of countries.

Overall, this thesis has shown that the Europeanisation process of North Macedonia has been significantly incited by domestic incentives and that EU policy adoption mainly following the logic of appropriateness. The lesson-drawing model is, therefore, more suitable in explaining the Macedonian accession process and the state's corresponding domestic EU policy adoption interests.

5. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to answer the question: *To what extent do domestic policy preferences explain how Serbia and North Macedonia have adjusted to the political conditions of the European Union's Copenhagen Criteria?*

In answering this question, the theoretical foundation of this thesis, which was based on the work of Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2005), has provided substantial insights to the explanation why states comply with the EU policy adoption requirements. In this regard, this thesis has differentiated between the external incentives model and the lesson-drawing model. Under the external incentives model, Europeanisation takes place in an environment where domestic actors seek to sustain the domestic status quo when adopting EU policies, through cost-benefit calculations. The lesson-drawing model assumes that domestic actors want to depart from the domestic status quo due to the need to replace dysfunctional or non-existent policies.

Following the two models, the results of this thesis have shown that Serbia and North Macedonia have adjusted to the political conditions of the European Union's Copenhagen criteria in two different ways. Serbia appeared to have found more resemblances with the external incentives model, as the state's requirements to fully cooperate with the ICTY and to normalise the relations with Kosovo were proven to be problematic. In this regard, EU policy adoption has proven to occur in Serbia based on substantial rewards from the European Union's side. On the other hand, North Macedonia's Europeanisation process has shown to have strong resemblances with the lesson-drawing model. In this regard, the Macedonian government has sought to depart from the domestic status quo by effectively implementing EU policies to improve the public and governmental situation at home. Additionally, this thesis has shown that the credibility of EU conditionality has been highly challenged by the politicisation of the European Union's enlargement policies, which had hindered the European Union in giving proportional rewards to the EU policy adoption efforts made by the applicant states. The consequences of intra-EU reluctance to EU enlargement have become even more visible after the failure of the European Council of October 2019 to open accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia.

Another objective that this thesis sought to achieve was to offer a valuable contribution to future EU enlargement and Europeanisation studies. Given the empirical evidence, this research has only provided limited new data. As the initial methodological approach was based on the acquirement of policy-specific data from expert interviews, the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus has decreased the possibility to approach an expert for an expert interview within the predefined data collection timeframe. Nevertheless, to make up for the loss of new information, the researcher has performed an extensive document analysis, which, with the inclusion of additional literature, has closed the most crucial information gaps that have enabled the researcher to address the posed hypotheses and, most importantly, the research question. Some suggestions can be given for further academic research on the domestic policy adoption preferences in line with Europeanisation and EU enlargement studies. Firstly, the researcher would suggest that, when repeating this study, the inclusion of the data obtained from expert interviews would contribute significantly in terms of data enrichment and data diversification.

In this regard, triangulation could be better performed as there would be more data sources available that could be used to increase the validity of the research.

Looking at the enlargement policy of the European Union, this thesis has highlighted that the nationalisation of the enlargement policy has contributed significantly in the undermining of the will of applicant states to pursue EU membership. This became especially noticeable when discussing the credibility of EU conditionality. In this regard, Member State interference has often incited policy deterioration in the case of Serbia, which often seeks to strengthen its ties with the Russian Federation in response. Also in the case of North Macedonia, a period of horrendous political backsliding was a result of intra-EU reluctance. In this regard, this thesis advises the European Union to be more open and consistent in the enlargement promises made towards the Western Balkan states. But more essentially, The European Union should seek to reverse the nationalisation process of its enlargement policy.

In the end, the researcher believes to have contributed considerably to academic literature in the field of Europeanisation and EU enlargement studies. This thesis has tested the applicability of the external incentives model and lesson-drawing model on Serbia and North Macedonia, which is rarely done before. Additionally, as most of the academic literature extensively focussed on the external incentives model, the researcher believes to be one of the few that has applied the lesson-drawing model on a country case. Nevertheless, this thesis encourages future studies to further the exploration of the domestic EU policy adoption preferences.

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Appendices

Supplements chapter 1

Third party influence in the Western Balkans

The assumption that the Russian Federation tends to be influential in determining the EU policy adoption incentives of Western Balkan states that have a high dependency on the Russian Federation for any political, economic or security reason was considered a significant cofounding factor (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009). Other researchers like Patalahk (2018); Pavličević (2019) noted that China has been trying to increase its influence in the Western Balkans as well. Especially as the geopolitical rivalry of the European Union and the Russian Federation for influence in the ‘common neighbourhood’ and the Western Balkans has become a prominent field of research in itself (Cadier, 2014; Ademmer, 2015; Smith, 2017), it was not taken (fully) into consideration in this study.

Supplements chapter 2

The nationalisation of EU enlargement

Within the Member States of the European Union, governments have effectively enabled the public to decide on insignificant EU policy-decisions, which has heavily politicised the accession procedures of the Western Balkan states (Karp & Bowler, 2006; Renner & Trauner, 2009; Thomassen, 2009; Zhelyazkova et al., 2019). Additionally, with the solidification of nationalism and populism in European politics, the Member State have gradually strengthened their intergovernmental control over the European Union's enlargement policy, which has resulted in the decrease of transparency and credibility of the accession process (Barnes & Randerson, 2006; Juncos & Borrágan, 2017; Smith, 2017).

This phenomenon of re-nationalisation is, however, not unknown regarding the European Union's enlargement process. For example, France had ratified a constitutional amendment in 2005, which made the organisation of a popular referendum on any future enlargement binding (Espstein & Sedelmeier, 2008), unless the accession is supported by a three-fifths majority in the French parliament (Zhelyazkova et al., 2019). Consequently, this procedure has moved the state's power to decide on enlargement questions to the citizen. Notable is that this process of policy nationalisation is greatly supported by contemporary populist and nationalist political parties, which seek to exert national control over EU policies. In Germany, the right-wing party AfD (German: Alternative für Deutschland) has demanded that any future enlargement should be subjected to the German public through a popular referendum (Töglhofer & Adebahr, 2017). Other states like the Netherlands have delegated the conclusive decision-making on accession to the national parliaments (Huszka, 2017). This has eventually led to the increasing uncertainty among states such as Serbia and North Macedonia, as these states might face further (unfavourable) policy adoption requirements, due to the unwillingness of the European public to further enlarge the European Union. In a worst-case scenario, assuming that the European Union will be unable to persuade the political leadership in Serbia and North Macedonia, one might see EU conditionality fail and the applicant states in the Western Balkan deteriorate from their European paths (Richter, 2012).

Supplements chapter 3

Table 1: Overview of used government documentation

Document type	Serbia	North Macedonia
Public opinion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “European orientation of Serbian citizens – Public opinion poll (December 2019.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Analysis of public opinion on North Macedonia’s accession to the European Union” (2004-2019) (Damjanovski, 2015; 2020).
Interest political leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Keynote address by Serbian Prime Minister Designate Ana Brnabić” “план рада владе за 2020. Годину” – (Translation: <i>government working plan for 2020</i>). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Програмата за работа на Владата: 2017-2020”. (Translation: <i>government working programme: 2017-2020</i>).
Policy alignment strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Национални програм за усвајање правних тековина Европске уније (НПАА)” (2018) – (Translation: <i>National Programme for the adoption of the Acquis (NPAА)</i>). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “План 3-6-9” – (Translation: <i>Plan 3-6-9</i>). “План 18” – (Translation: <i>Plan 18</i>).

Supplements chapter 4

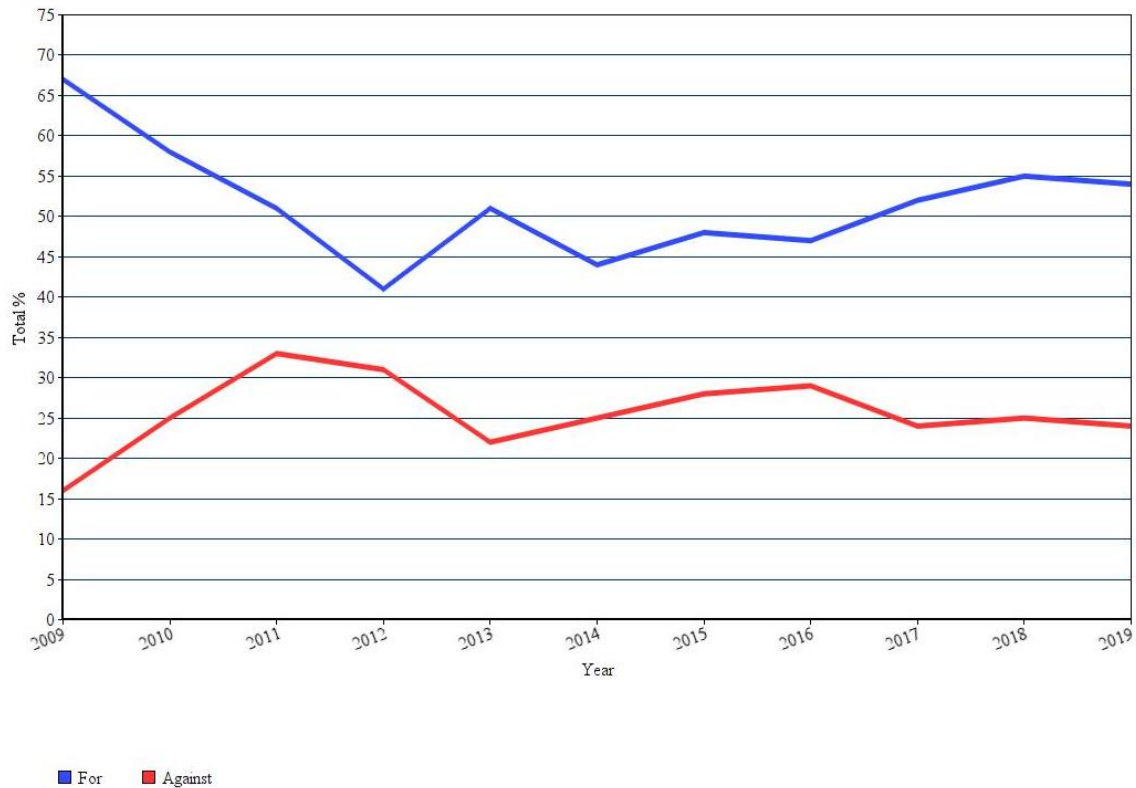
EU policy adoption requirements regarding the ICTY and Kosovo

Concerning the requirements determined under EU conditionality for Serbia, the conditions to full cooperation with the ICTY have been clear. All suspects should be arrested and transferred to the ICTY in The Hague. However, Serbia's efforts to cooperate with the ICTY has proven to be rather problematic (Pawelec & Grimm, 2014). One complication occurred in 2008, when Serbia refused to extradite Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić to the ICTY, which resulted in a rejected by the European Union to allow Serbia to proceed its path to EU membership (Brusis, 2008). However, due to the significant gains that could have been acquired by complying with the conditions, Serbia eventually decided to arrest Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić in 2011 and hand them over to the ICTY (Economides & Ker-Lindsay, 2015). Shortly after the arrests, Serbia awarded with the title of Candidate Country for EU membership.

Nevertheless, it was not only the compliance with the ICTY that has shown how determinate the conditions and rewards of the European Union were. The developments made in the normalisation of relations with Kosovo also played a prominent role in determining the credibility of EU conditions and rewards. For example, in April 2013, Serbia and Kosovo have signed the 'Brussels Agreement', which was considered the first concrete step to the normalisation of relations between the two parties. Written among the provisions of the agreement was that Kosovo would allow the establishment of Serbian institutions within the Serbian municipalities in Kosovo, whereas Serbia agreed to grant Kosovo extended local autonomy (Vachudova, 2014; Economides & Ker-Lindsey, 2015; Patalakh, 2018). As this agreement was perceived as evidently in compliance with EU conditionality, the European Council decided to open accession negotiations with Serbia in 2014 (Vachudova, 2014).

Graph 1: Public support for EU membership in Serbia

If a referendum were to be called tomorrow with the question: “Do you support our country’s membership into the European Union”, how would you vote?

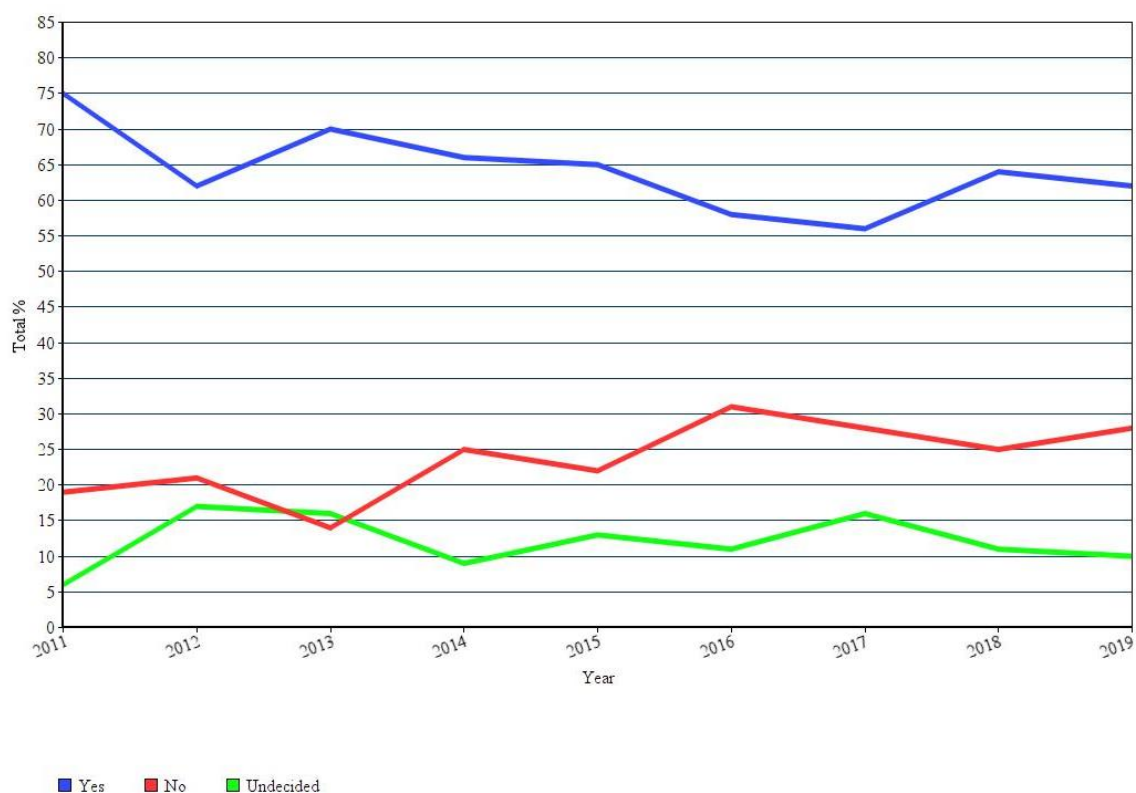


Source: Serbian Ministry of European Integration (2019).

Note: Considering the public opinion polls published by the Serbian Ministry of European Integration in 2009, there appeared to be much public attention given the EU condition that requires Serbia to fully cooperate with the ICTY. This was a point of discussion of 72 per cent of the total Serb public (Serbian Ministry of European Integration, 2009). This assumption appears to be in line with an event that occurred around the same time with the steep decline of public support, which was the condition of the European Union to extradite Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić to the ICTY. In this regard, one can assume that the Serbian public has disapproved the move, blaming EU conditionality for its happening. Assuming that the Serbs consider some of the prosecuted figures by the ICTY as war heroes, this thesis argues that Serbian nationalism has significantly contributed to the declining support from 2009 onwards.

Graph 2: Serbian opinion towards the normalisation of relations with Kosovo

Should the problem between Belgrade and Pristina be addressed regardless of being an EU condition?



Source: Serbian Ministry of European Integration (2019).

Note: One should bear in mind that this does not necessarily mean that the people answering ‘yes’ support the continuation of the constructive talks with Kosovo. In this regard, this question might still link the necessity to normalise the relations with Kosovo to further the Europeanisation of Serbia. Therefore, this question implies the presence of EU pressure and not necessarily the will of the Serbian population to pursue talks with Kosovo.

Table 2: What does the EU means to you? (Serbia)

More employment opportunities	16%
Path towards better future for the youth	16%
The possibility to travel freely within the EU	15%
Risk of losing national/cultural identity	10%
The opportunity the situation in the country	10%
Bureaucracy/ waste of financial resources	8%
Other	25%

Source: European Ministry of European Integration (2019).

The development of accession criteria North Macedonia

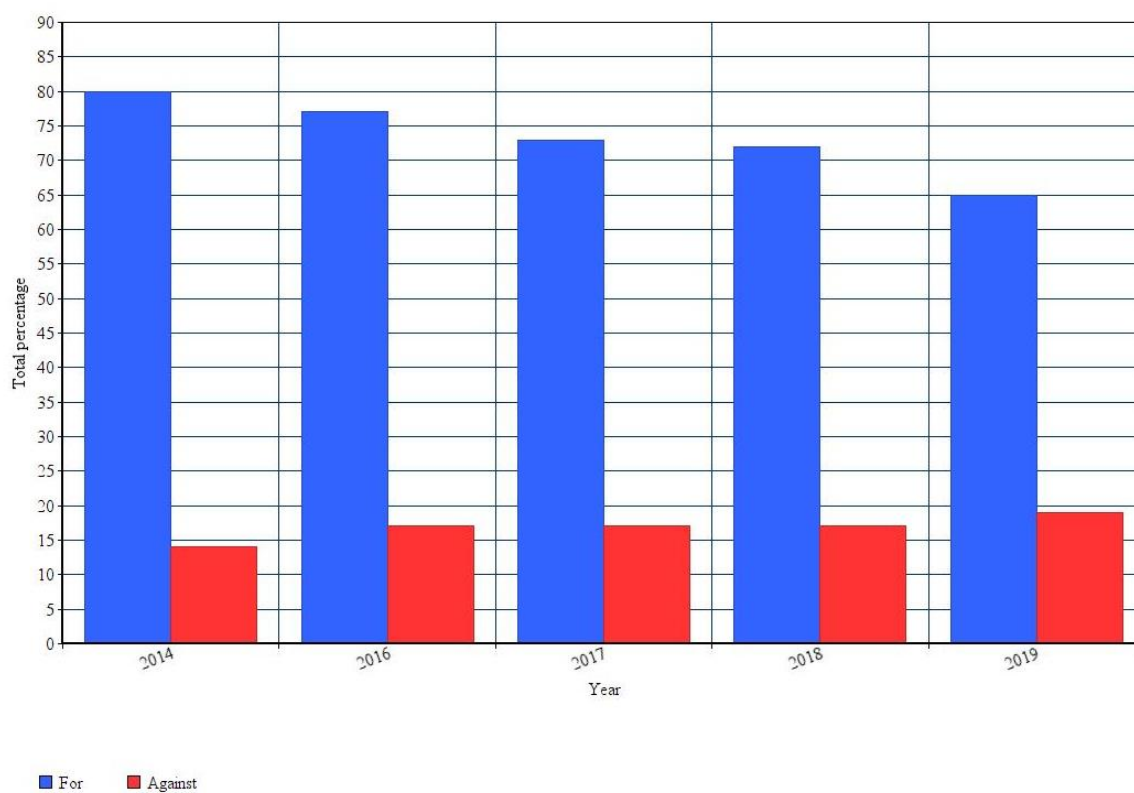
In 2005, just shortly before the acquirement of the Candidate country status, North Macedonia was asked to meet the political conditions set under the 1993 Copenhagen Criteria (which have been stated earlier in this thesis) and respect the principles laid down in Article 6(1) in the Treaty of the European Union (which became a condition after the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1999) (European Commission, 2005). A year later, when North Macedonia was monitored as a Candidate country for EU membership, additional conditions were imposed on the country, such as the requirement to promote good neighbourly relations and the requirement to respect international obligations, such as the full cooperation with the ICTY (European Commission, 2006). A few years later, a minor change was made regarding the formulation of the ‘good neighbourly relations’ clause, which became the requirement to enhance regional cooperation and promote good neighbourly relations with both the EU Member States and the enlargement countries (European Commission, 2008). Only in 2016, a country-specific condition was added due to a deep political crisis in North Macedonia, which was incited by a widespread wiretapping scandal of the previous government. Therefore, North Macedonia was required to implement the Pržino agreement and the European Union’s ‘Urgent Reform Priorities’ (European Commission, 2016c).

The determinacy of conditions and the Macedonian name dispute

Despite the determinant condition to solve the bilateral dispute with Greece, a credible reward was not given directly after. The ratification of the Prespa Agreement and, accompanying, the changing of the official country name from ‘Republic of Macedonia’ to the ‘Republic of North Macedonia’, was highly endorsed by the European Commission, which asked the European leaders to commence accession negotiations with North Macedonia in October 2019. However, a credible reward was not (timely) given due to the politicisation of the accession procedure by France, supported by the Netherlands and Denmark, which considered the domestic political over the European Union’s accession policy, resulting in vetoing the accession (Zweers, 2019). Despite the drawback of the French veto, the eventual opening of the accession negotiations with North Macedonia in March 2020 (European Commission, 2020a) have shown that the size of the rewards, being the start of accession negotiations, was significant, but the speed of the rewards given to North Macedonia was overdue. Due to the high political costs accompanying the change of the constitutional name of North Macedonia, the Prime Minister had resigned and called for a snap election shortly after the refusal of the commencement of the accession talks (Marusic, 2019), assuming to have failed to deliver on his promise to start accession negotiations with the European Union. Shortly after, as might have been noticed in the section on Serbia, EU conditionality became highly contested.

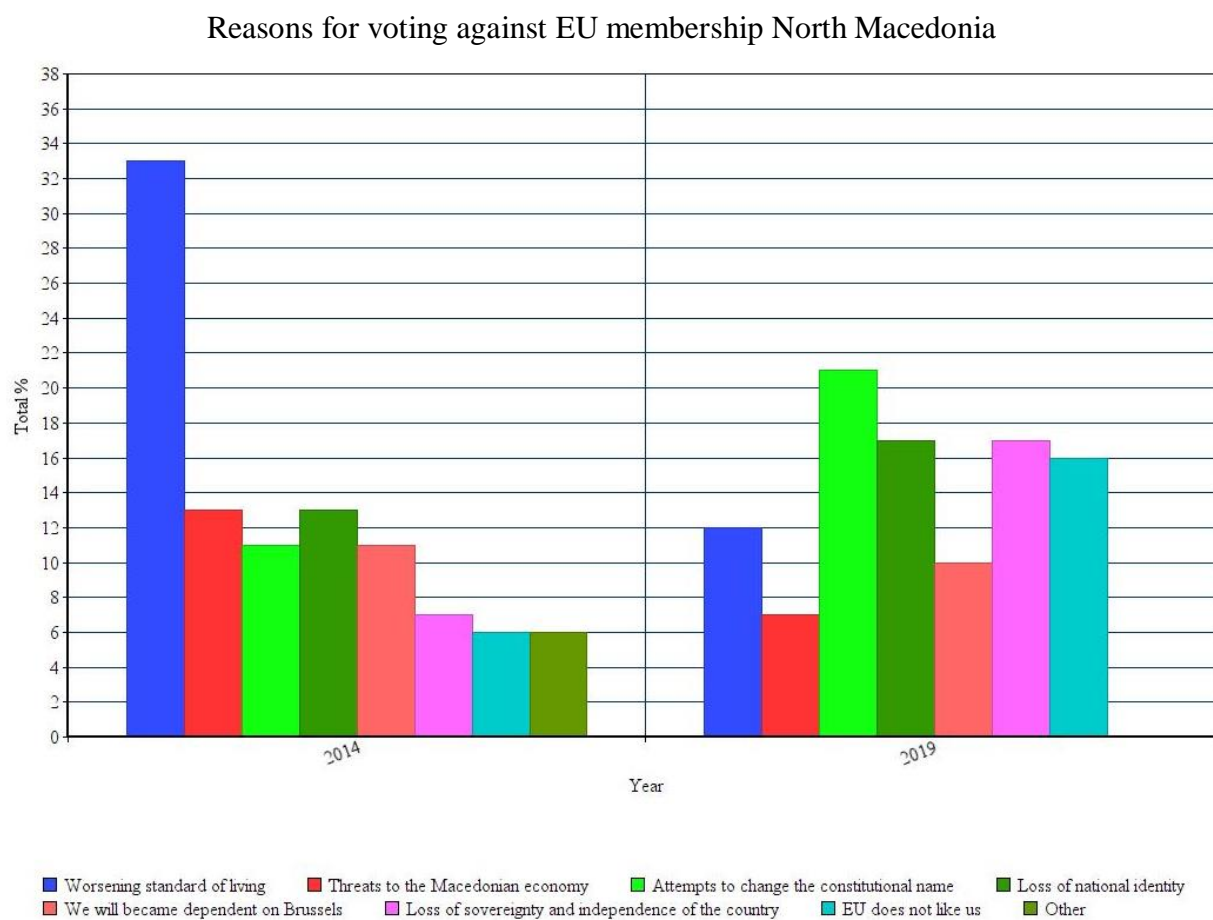
Graph 3: Support of the Macedonian public for EU membership

If a referendum on for membership of the Republic of North Macedonia to the European Union would be held next week, how would you vote?



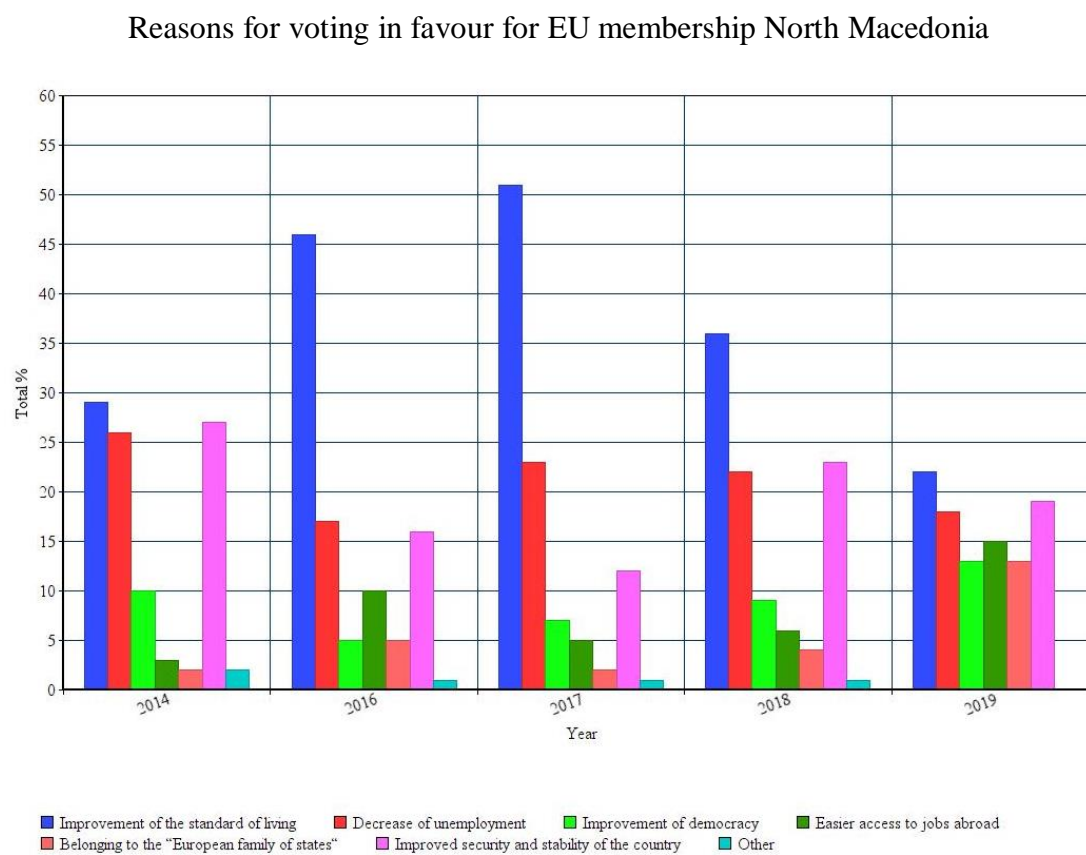
Source: Damjanovski (2020).

Graph 4: Reasons for voting against EU membership (North Macedonia)



Source: Damjanovski (2014); Damjanovski (2020).

Graph 5: Reasons to vote in favour of EU Membership (North Macedonia)



Source: Damjanovski (2014); Damjanovski (2020).

Codebook

Codebook Thesis:

Pursuing domestic policy preferences under EU conditionality
Reflecting on the Europeanisation process in Serbia and North Macedonia

Theory 1: External incentives model

- Variable: 'Determinacy of Conditions'
 - Code: 'determinant condition' (Also new policy approaches, e.g. Chapters 23 and 24).
 - Code: 'adopted EU policy'
 - Code: 'behavioural changes country'
- Variable: 'Size and speed of rewards'
 - Code: 'financial support given'
 - Code: 'structural support given'
 - Code: 'rewards are withheld'
 - Code: 'reward is linked to accession process'
- Variable: 'Credibility of conditionality'
 - Code: 'EU sanction'
 - Code: 'unjustified withheld reward'
 - Code: 'Justified withheld reward'
 - Code: 'unjustified reward given'
 - Code: 'justified reward given'
 - Code: 'rule-setter'
 - Code: 'consistency EU conditionality'
 - Code: 'tangibility EU conditionality'
 - Code: 'bargaining position'
 - Code: 'interdependency state-EU'
 - Code: 'applicability EU policy'
 - Code: 'change of conditions'
 - Code: 'MS reluctance'
 - Code: 'politicisation accession process'
 - Code: 'nationalisation accession policy'
- Variable: 'Adoption costs'
 - Code: 'high policy adoption costs'
 - Code: 'cost-benefit calculation'
 - Code: 'avoid upsetting status quo'
 - Code: 'costly EU policy'
 - Code: 'EU policy balanced' (in costs)
 - Code: 'protest domestic actor EU policy'
 - Code: 'opposition: civil society'
 - Code: 'opposition: political leadership'

- Code: 'opposition: other key figures'
- Code: 'preference: maintain status quo'
- Code: 'preference: benefit < maintain status quo'

Theory 2: Lesson-drawing model

- Variable: 'Policy dissatisfaction'
 - Code: 'dissatisfaction: functioning existing policy'
 - Code: 'dissatisfaction: non-existence policy'
 - Code: 'EU policy as alternative'
 - Code: 'change in political leadership'
 - Code: 'domestic sanctions'
- Variable: 'Transferability'
 - Code: 'domestic policy fit'
 - Code: 'institutional capacity'
 - Code: 'budgetary capacity'
 - Code: 'domestic-EU policy alignment'
 - Code: 'influence post-socialist legacies'
 - *Focus: 'rule of law'*
 - *Focus: 'corruption'*
 - *Focus: 'state capture'*
 - *Focus: 'involvement civil society in policymaking'*
- Variable: 'Veto players'
 - Code: 'departure status quo: civil society'
 - Code: 'departure status quo: political leadership'
 - Code: 'departure status quo: other key figures'
 - Code: 'public opinion EU'