

CALL FOR PAPERS

ADAPTING TO CONTESTATION: THE NEW DYNAMICS OF THE EU-WESTERN BALKANS RELATIONSHIP

We are looking for contributions to an edited volume and/or jointly authored papers, contributing to the literature laying a special focus on the contestation of the European Union and the increasing geopolitical competition in the Western Balkans and pushing the limits of existing theoretic approaches. Our project proposes an interdisciplinary comparative approach, mainly based on political science (covering different subfields), history and law.

Rationale of the Project

The global strategy of the European Union (2016) locates the EU in an ever more connected, contested, and complex world, characterized by a shift from a unipolar structure to a “more fragmented distribution of power”, leading to “growing uncertainty and rivalry”. Particularly in the Western Balkans we can discern an increasing competition for influence and thus a contestation of European offers, as players like Russia, China or Turkey enter the arena. This begs some important questions:

- First, how are the countries of the region adapting their strategies in this contestation, as their range of prospective cooperation partners increases and new alternatives for action emerge? How does this affect their approach towards European integration? Is this necessarily a constraining factor in their path towards EU membership or might the EU become the reliable partner in this competitive field?
- As regards the EU, the major questions are: What does it mean to cope with this competition in the immediate vicinity? How does it affect European policies towards the Western Balkans and the offers for association and membership?

This project aims to explore the effects of the contestation the EU is facing from different powers in the Western Balkans and to gain a better understanding of the effects of the competition and contestation arising in the region.

Call for Contributions

Recent years have seen a burgeoning literature particularly on norm contestation. Wiener (Wiener 2017; 2014) defines contestation as a range of social practices, but in a broader sense we can understand contestation as a wide variety of behavioural patterns, often with regional and local distinctions, concerning norms, but also concepts and values (Del Sarto and Tholens 2020; Ejdus and Juncos 2018; Mahr 2018) which is triggered by internal dynamics within countries, but also external influences.

ADAPT/ Adapting to Contestation: The New Dynamics in the EU-Western Balkan Relationship

Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research (OeAD), Scientific & Technological Cooperation (WTZ)

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We thus invite scholars, interested in contributing to the edited volume or jointly authored papers, to submit an abstract touching on one or several of the following topics:

- *EU norm application and implementation as reviewed and discussed in the domestic context.* This is true for EU norms as well. The focus on norm contestation provides an opportunity to move beyond a focus on the aptness of local conditions for norm adoption towards an understanding how the meaning of norms is constituted in given contexts as they resonate with local beliefs, norms, and societal demands.
- Modes of contestation, mainly applicatory and normative contestations, or discursive and behavioural (implicit) contestation.
- Effectiveness of the European Union in regime transformation and norm diffusion, and various approaches to “EU actorness” have been developed. We look at the concept of “actorness” as a tool to get a better understanding how the variables of opportunity (making meaning of the external environment), presence (the perception of the EU as resourceful actor) and capability (the availability of policy instruments) explain the EU’s capabilities in external relations. However, when applying actorness to different areas of EU external action we find that presence and capability not necessarily translate into effective actorness (effectiveness being defined as ‘goal achievement’ and ‘problem-solving’ or that it even has pathological effects of reinforcing illiberal “stabilocracies”).
- Conditionality has been theorized, differentiating at the most basic level, between positive (carrots) and negative (sticks) conditionality by providing incentives for change (rewards) and threatening with sanctions (withholding of benefits). We look at different theories trying to explain the impact of conditions on national contexts of applicant states, put emphasis either a) on the strategic calculation logic of actors involved; b) a process of socialisation (internalisation) of EU rules; or c) on the added-value of EU-rules for the solution of domestic problems. The external incentive model holds that the effectiveness of conditionality depends on the clarity, tangibility, and credibility of rewards, as political actors weigh domestic costs against potential benefits for compliance with EU rules.
- A recent debate on the contestation of different concepts of sovereignty and the question of the legitimacy of the European Union to “reign into” candidate countries when demanding far-reaching political and judicial reforms.

All abstracts should have an analytical focus on **who** (actors in contestation) contests **what** (substance of contestation) and **how** (mechanisms of contestation) in the region of the Western Balkans. We invite studies on specific countries, but also comparative approaches (also from a historical perspective).

We particularly encourage doctoral students and early-career researchers to submit paper proposals!

Time-frames

Abstracts should be sent by **November 30th, 2023** to:

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Information about the selected abstracts to be included in the project will be communicated by mid-December.

In January 2024 an online-Workshop will be hosted by the University of Tirana where the submitted and selected proposals will be presented and discussed.

A draft of the final paper has to be submitted until the **end of March 2024** and to be presented at a second workshop, which will be hosted by the University of Salzburg at the beginning of April.

The papers will then be reviewed and sent back to the authors with suggestions for revision. The revised and finalised papers have to be submitted until 15 **July 2024**.