



## In Search of the Lost European Perspective

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The European Union is in danger of losing its vision with regard to the membership perspectives of the countries of the Western Balkans. The process is marked by strict conditionalities in the context of a loss of political will and enlargement fatigue in the context of problems concerning the ratification of the Lisbon treaty. Tracing the state of play as regards the Western Balkans since the Thessaloniki summit of 2003, the suggestion is that the momentum has been lost and that the combination of technical and political hurdles makes accession too long and too difficult to be a significant factor in promoting reforms from within and realigning political commitments. The gap is growing between EU member states (Slovenia, Greece), candidate countries

(Croatia, Macedonia), potential candidate countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia), and Kosovo. The global economic and financial crisis has also brought the IMF back into the region and further contributed to a sense of abandonment by the EU. Ultimately a commitment to enlargement is framed within other commitments in terms of security, energy policy and reconstruction. Clear signals are needed to change this, including a Thessaloniki II summit under the Swedish Presidency to re-assert the commitment of the EU to the region where open bilateral issues should be negotiated, a common action plan to face the current financial crisis must be agreed and a pragmatic EU integration road map announced, giving candidate status to Albania and Montenegro, beginning accession talks with Macedonia, and accelerating the SAAs for the region. The EU has, on the one hand, to put its own house in order and, on the other, to offer a reasonable political perspective to the Balkans.

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