

# Migration – a Key Concept in the EU’s Enlargement Process

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The European Union has grown rapidly over the past decades. Nevertheless, the enlargement is not by any means completed and it continues to be one of the Union’s main political priorities, in spite of the many challenges it poses. There are currently seven countries that the European Union has offered the prospect of a potential future membership: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey. As part of the enlargement process, the European Commission annually publishes the *European Commission’s Enlargement Package*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> European Union, last update: 10/4/2018, “EU Enlargement – State of play”, European Union News- room, [https://europa.eu/newsroom/highlights/special-coverage/enlargement\\_en](https://europa.eu/newsroom/highlights/special-coverage/enlargement_en), (accessed 10/4/2018).

The Commission's most recent enlargement package, published in February 2018, places migration as a central point of debate and expresses a variety of forecasts and analyses concerning migration.<sup>2</sup> The Commission maintains that any prospective enlargement will require an increased focus on migration, especially with regards to the fact that the Western Balkans and Turkey are physically embedded in the European continent and will share external borders of an enlarged Union. Border controls, the control of migration flows, visa policies and measures to combat the illegal employment of foreigners will according to the Commission require a more precise legislation and effective implementation procedures.<sup>3</sup>

It is therefore possible to conclude that there currently is a link between the ongoing enlargement process and the political developments regarding migration within the European Union. However, complex concepts, such as migration, are usually loaded with different values and associations. This raises questions about what role migration currently has and whether or not that role has changed over time within the European Commission's Enlargement Package.

Since the current candidates were offered the prospect of a potential future membership, the European Union has faced many dynamic challenges, one of the more recent and relevant being the migration crisis in 2015, which

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<sup>2</sup> European Commission, 6/2/2018, "Q&A: A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans", European Commission Press Release Database, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-18-562\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-18-562_en.htm), (accessed 12/4/2018).

<sup>3</sup> European Commission, 2018, *A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans*, Strasbourg, COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EU- ROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COM- MITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, 6.2.2018 COM (2018) 65 final, p. 1.

caused societal and political changes.<sup>4</sup> The fact that this period of time has proven to be dynamic and challenging is in itself the clearest evidence of migration undergoing conceptual changes within the enlargement packages.

The purpose of this article is to interpret and analyse the role played by *migration* in the European Commission's Enlargement Package, which requires an understanding of the changes over time associated with the ideas of migration. This study therefore employs a theoretical and methodological approach which considers concepts and their relation to history. Reinhart Koselleck, who is considered to be one of the most important historians of the twentieth century, has particularly studied the history of concepts and the transformation of political language in terms of the leading concepts deployed in such language.<sup>5</sup> This article will apply Koselleck's theoretical perspective in an analysis and discussion of what role migration plays in the past, present and potentially also the future enlargement processes within specific enlargement documents over the period of 2014-2018.

## The practice of conceptual history

The core of Koselleck's theoretical perspective is the attempt to replace the idea of a linear and homogeneous timeline with a more complex, heterogeneous, and multi-layered notion of temporality. History thereby becomes transnational, multi-lingual and filled with varieties of temporalisations. According to Koselleck, our awareness of time is generated through the tensions between *experience* and *expectation*. Koselleck defines

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<sup>4</sup> European Union, 06/2016, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger European Union, A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*, European Union, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Koselleck, Reinhart, 2004 [1985], *Futures Past, on the Semantics of Historical Time*, translated and with an introduction by Keith Tribe, Columbia University Press, New York, [Electronic resource], p. 81.

experience as being “present past” while expectations are defined as “future projected in the past”.<sup>6</sup>

To elaborate, *experience* functions to describe the temporal dimensions and further enables an analysis that illustrates how experiences due to its presence in the present orients the interpretations and actions of humans. It is first when experiences start being directed towards future actions that they turn into expectations. The horizon of *expectations* arises in the present and further on becomes reality in the future. Factors such as hope and despair, wish and will, worry and rationality etc., all contribute to shaping expectations. Conceptually, the horizon of expectations is related to possible future predictions, which in itself is derived from our experiences. The value of analysing the meaning of historical concepts therefore lies in the simple fact that the concepts we use when talking about the past have consequences for the way we understand it, both in itself and in its relation to the present and future. As Koselleck puts it: “No event can be narrated, no structure represented, no process described without the use of historical concepts which make the past conceivable.”<sup>7</sup>

However, experiences and expectations can only be grasped by also looking at the diachronic dimensions. The work of Helge Jordheim becomes crucial, as he has done extensive research on the methodological implications of Koselleck’s work. Since concepts are capable of change, a diachronic analysis helps detect the interplay of temporal dimensions. A diachronic analysis places more interest in historical events and linguistic changes and thereby fills the purpose of studying a concept’s development through time. According to Jordheim, patterns cannot be discerned without looking at a language at multiple points in time. A diachronic analysis helps placing the concept of migration into a historical context, in this case analysing the linguistic changes of the conceptual use of migration within the enlargement

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<sup>6</sup> Koselleck R., 2004 [1985], p. 196.

<sup>7</sup> Koselleck R., 2004 [1985], p. 112.

policies between the years of 2014 and 2018.<sup>8</sup> This helps to interpret whether historical events, such as the migration crisis, has had an influence on the Commission's conceptual use of migration within the enlargement process.<sup>9</sup>

## Migration, a flagship initiative

Migration has held political prominence and attention within the European enlargement processes both before and after the Western Balkans and Turkey became candidates, but appears to receive greater attention. This is mainly due to the fact that the Western Balkans and Turkey have loomed ever larger for the European Union as one of the main migration routes that contributed to triggering a crisis in 2015. The early response to the flow of migrants transiting through the Western Balkans highlighted the absence of effective channels of communication and coordination both with a region that is physically embedded in the European continent and between EU and non-EU Members more generally.<sup>10</sup>

By viewing the diachronic dimension of migration, it appears as if the migration crisis clarified that enlargement is not just a geo-political unification of countries' territories, but a deep integration process that has a social, cultural and political dimension that, like concepts, are under constant development.<sup>11</sup> Looking at the material, the 2018 strategy stands out due to

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<sup>8</sup> Göran Bergström, Kristina Boréus, 2012, (red.), *Textens mening och makt: metodbok i samhällsvetenskaplig text- och diskursanalys*, 3., [utök.] uppl., Studentlitteratur, Lund, p. 184-187.

<sup>9</sup> Helge Jordheim, 2003, *Läsningens vetenskap. Utkast till en ny filologi*, Anthropos: Göteborg, p. 188.

<sup>10</sup> European Commission, 2015, *EU Enlargement Strategy*, COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, Brussels, 10.11.2015 COM (2015) 611 final, p. 13-15.

<sup>11</sup> European Commission, 2018, *A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans*, p. 2.

the fact that it clearly expresses lessons learned and how these should be reflected when discussing fundamental past and future challenges.

Joining the EU is far more than a technical process. It is a generational choice, based on fundamental values, which each country must embrace more actively, from their foreign and regional policies right down to what children are taught at school.<sup>12</sup>

This paragraph is one of the most substantial ones as it shows that the European Union has learned its lessons from all enlargements so far, but has also comprehended what the biggest challenge is, i.e. (re)gaining fundamental values. The lack of mutual fundamental values manifested itself during the migration crisis and revealed institutional flaws, division among the Member States, and inadequate cooperation with the candidate countries. The Commission partly suggests a comprehensive and common foreign policy as a solution. The intention is thus to improve the European migration system, ranging across the entire European region. Nevertheless, this could appear as if the accession of the candidates is more demanding than it was in previous waves of enlargement. Taking all this into consideration, it clarifies why the Commission feels the need to begin the document for 2018 with expressing that the “Union must be stronger and more solid, before it can be bigger.”<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, the Commission highlights migration as one of the key-areas where much work needs to be done before the candidates could be granted membership. The Commission thereby sees the need to step up the strategic and operational cooperation with the Western Balkans on migration. As migration becomes a flagship initiative, the enlargement strategy targets migration as a specific area of interest, which concerns both the European Union and the candidate countries. Although the future is uncertain in many

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> European Commission, 2018, *A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans*, p. 2.<sup>[1]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

ways, concrete actions in the form of enhanced strategic and operational cooperation in the area of migration is predicted to happen in the future.

Although migration is mostly conveyed as a challenge throughout the documents, the Commission executes its political power to encourage an enlargement process that promotes the strategic importance of cooperation with the candidate countries in the area of migration. The candidate countries have already played an active role in the area of migration, especially during the migration crisis upon which their regional initiatives were seen as not only positive, but also needed due to the interlinkage and interdependence of the candidates and European Union.<sup>14</sup>

As an encouragement, Commissioners, such as Vice-President of the European Commission Federica Mogherini, has confirmed the European perspective of the candidate countries and its language has become more and more ambitious and clear: The Western Balkans are promised membership of the European Union, although it will not be during the mandate of the current Commission.

And I say European Union perspective – I do not say European perspective – because we have to start from the simple, self-evident truth that the Western Balkans are European already. It is Europe. It is part of Europe – historically, geographically. If you look at the borders, the Western Balkans are within the Member States of the European Union. We share one cultural heritage. We share the same interests at present. We share some of the challenges at present. And we will share a common future inside our European Union.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> European Union External Actions, 06/02/2018, Speech by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the European Parliament Plenary Session on the Western Balkan Strategy, Strasbourg, 20:23, UNIQUE ID: 180206\_36.

<sup>15</sup> European Union External Actions, 06/02/2018, Speech by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the European

## Migration, a security aspect

The Commission has undergone a securitisation in both the political practice and within its own rhetoric. In 2014, migration was mentioned in relation to the visa liberalisation policies, upon which rights-sensitive aspects were highlighted as priorities in order to not only secure, but to improve the quality of people's lives. However, considering that the enlargement strategy was published in the autumn of 2014, there is surprisingly little attention given to a situation that would soon unfold to what the Union itself would later on describe as a crisis.

In 2015, the Commission had a completely different communications approach. In the preface, it clearly states that events beyond the borders of the Union caused a high and uncontrolled influx of migrants and refugees. Substantial parts of the document are allocated towards problematising what is perceived as a crisis for the European Union. The crisis is further on conveyed as unsustainable and in need of urgent measurements.

The enlargement policy from 2016 continues to express how security should be viewed as a strategic investment. This is partly illustrated by conveying that previous investments in the area of security have resulted in a significant reduction in irregular migration flows and more broadly, the revitalisation of the EU-Turkey relation. Since it is portrayed as an achievement, the interpretation is that a stronger regulation resulting in a decrease of migrants and asylum applications is viewed as a positive thing that the Union aspired to reach. Security is mainly outlined from the perspective of what is best for the Member States and the candidates, not primarily what is best for the migrants themselves.

The culmination of migration becoming associated with security-related challenges, both for the Union and the candidates, comes in 2018. Here it

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Parliament Plenary Session on the Western Balkan Strategy, Strasbourg, 20:23, UNIQUE ID: 180206\_36.



explicitly states in association with migration that it is essential to address the “existing security and terrorism threats that affect the Union and the Western Balkan region.”<sup>16</sup> In this document, the Commission recommends addressing the security risks by deploying and implementing joint operational activities of the competent national authorities of the European Union’s member states and of the candidate countries together with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency.<sup>17</sup>

The documents in their entirety illustrate how the concepts of securitisation of political practice and securitisation of the rhetoric overlap. The securitisation of migration entails conceptual changes that indicate threats against the European Union and reinforce political responses in which migration is often easily connected to security-related problems.

## Experiences and expectations

The conceptual presence of migration has gone from constituting a mere discursive role in the enlargement process to playing a determinative one. The elements of security and crisis appear to become more and more related to the conceptual use of migration, and together these two elements produce a sense of threat that (a) functions as a “self- reproduction” of both elements and (b) legitimises policy changes. The consequences appear to be that the sense of crisis validates the security measures, even though it seems to trump the human rights of the migrants. Furthermore, if the securitisation of migration is being increasingly normalised, it develops from being a temporary measure to constitute a necessity. Considering the fact that migration becomes associated with security-issues and less with human right issues should be

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<sup>16</sup> European Commission, 2018, *A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans*, p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

viewed as problematic, especially for a community such as the European Union that wants to be portrayed as a normative superpower.<sup>18</sup>

Experiences and expectations will be the last step in discussing migration's different temporalities and how migration has undergone a conceptual development as the Commission's awareness of time has been generated through tensions between experiences and expectations. However, as these historical categories are fundamentally different, the discussion will begin with interpreting the space of experience. This is a choice made due to the fact that in our experiences, the past is gathered and eventually starts being directed towards future actions that turn into expectations.

#### **a. Space of experience**

The Commission's experience with migration during the time period of 2014-2018 has triggered them to proceed with a comprehensive self-examination of the enlargement process. The self-examination shows how the Commission's awareness of the past, present and future have enabled an elaboration of how their experiences should start being directed towards future actions. The reflections show how the willingness and capacity to implement enlargements measures is critical, yet it does remain. But this is not equivalent to a present readiness for enlargement. The willingness and capacity to carry out a strict and conditional enlargement process is therefore superior to experience a present readiness to enlarge the Union. The Commission's experiences of migration constitute a measurement for the Union's readiness to welcome new members as well as their perception of the candidate's ability to take on the obligations of a membership.

The experiences are further perceived as having revealed institutional flaws – mainly that the Union did not bear in mind that common external borders require a common protection, as well as a common foreign policy. Progressively, a more united approach to dealing with migration is emerging

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<sup>18</sup> Dawn Chatty and Philip Marfleet, 2013. "Conceptual problems in forced migration." *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 32, no. 2: p. 7.

and thus experiences start being directed towards future actions. This shows how experiences associated with migration, mainly from 2015, was not only considered to be a migrant crisis, but also an institutional crisis.<sup>19</sup> This was perceived as threatening the very existence of the Union and any future enlargement. Thus, since 2015 migration has increasingly developed into a conceptual reference that indicates crises.

### **b. Horizon of expectations**

Enlargement still remains a lively force and a relevant topic of discussion. Nevertheless, the European Commission's enlargement policy and requirements towards current and potential candidate countries have changed and so has the process of reporting on their progress. Since 2015, the European Commission has introduced several changes to their approach to enlargement, one of them being the increased emphasis on migration as part of any future enlargement processes. Migration has thus become a key-issue for the Commission, one that is likely to play an essential role in the enlargement policies in the upcoming years.

As migration has become a flagship initiative, the enlargement strategy targets migration as a specific area of interest, which concerns both the European Union and the candidate countries. Although the future is uncertain in many ways, concrete actions in the form of enhanced strategic and operational cooperation in the area of migration are foreseen to be taken in the future. Migration will therefore constitute a barrier for any future prospect of accession.

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<sup>19</sup> European Commission, 2015, *EU Enlargement Strategy*, COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, Brussels, 10.11.2015 COM (2015) 611 final, p. 3.

## Migration will play a vital role in any future enlargement

Evidently, the categories *experience* and *expectation* claim a higher degree of generality. But since Koselleck views historical time as being generated through the tensions between experience and expectation, it was never a question of “if”, but a question of “what” interpretations the space of experience and horizon of the future could bring out from the material. While being far from exhaustive, this article has through Koselleck’s concepts of temporality, in particularly through diachronic dimensions and experience and expectations, presented migration’s conceptual developments, with a particular reference to the European Union’s enlargement process over the period of 2014-2018.

Discussions regarding the candidate’s enlargement process is a dynamic and relevant topic of discussion, mainly due to the migration crisis making the interlinkage and interdependence of the region with the European Union more evident. By viewing migration through the broader framework of the European Commission’s enlargement package, there has been a continuation of the securitisation of migration as well as a normalisation of this conceptual change. The most evident conceptual changes appear when viewing the enlargement document before and after the migration crisis. The Commission’s experiences of migration have primarily shaped their expectations of a future enlargement process that values the strategic importance of cooperation in the area of migration. The Western Balkans and Turkey could still be next to join the European Union; however, migration will continue to play an essential role in their enlargement processes.

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