

In addition, the principles of conditionality and compartmentalisation which have been a fundamental feature of the EC strategy in former communist states appear to have become an obstacle to the processes of institution building and democratisation in SEE. Although the aim of the two principles was to "reward" those countries which took strong steps towards the implementation of democratic values and market economy while at the same time exclusion to become an incentive for those with bad records to engage in serious political and economic reforms, its effectiveness is rather debatable. Apart from the difficulties, which the task to aid and set political long-term goals and criteria in a transition context creates, the fulfilment of certain conditional criteria is easier in the cases of more advanced political and economic systems compare to those which are not. Hence, the application of conditionality tends to favour those in less need and to marginalise most of the countries in need of assistance. Also, not only there are cases of different interpretations by the EU and its individual member states (Germany with Croatia and Greece with FYROM) but conditionality, as an instrument upon which foreign policy aid depends, frequently annoyed the national feelings in the countries it is applied and in some cases it even produced strong feelings of resistance.

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The search for finding the best way for the "europeanization" of the SEE countries continues to be an issue that generates much heated debate both inside the EU as well as in the countries concerned. There is little doubt that whatever strategy the EU chooses to pursue in the region, sceptics will always be able to present powerful counter-arguments. The question of conditionality is a central feature of this debate. Should the EU pursue a pragmatic, 'high politics' driven strategy in the region at the expense of its conditionality principle, or should the two not be seen as mutually exclusive? Does positive engagement strengthen the prospects of reform, or is punishment and isolation the only way to overthrow repressive regimes? Is the selective application of conditionality better than no conditionality at all? None of these dilemmas have easy answers and, along with the region's complex and changing political, economic and security environment, should all be taken into consideration whenever an assessment of EU's strategy is attempted.

For both the Greek government and the people, one of the keys to a successful "europeanization" process of SEE countries has been EU's long-term and committed planning to the region. In light of the 2002 Copenhagen decision on enlargement and the progress made up to this day in the region but also its fragile nature, the Greek Presidency has pledged to keep the issue of SEE high on EU's agenda reasserting thus the governments and peoples in the area of the European Union's support for their European vocation as potential candidates for membership. The priorities, which the Greek Presidency has set, are:

- (1) To deploy all efforts for further consolidation of peace, stability, democratic development, the strengthening of human and minority rights and regional co-operation
- (2) To carry forward the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) and adapt it to the new environment after enlargement