

COLLEGE OF EUROPE, NATOLIN (WARSAW) CAMPUS
EUROPEAN INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

**Building Member States? The EU's Instrument for Pre-Accession
Assistance for the Western Balkan Countries**

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Summary

The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) is the EU's financial tool for pre-accession adjustment for the 2007-2013 period, aimed at fostering development, improving governance and strengthening administrative capacities in the candidate countries. The mid-term accomplishments of such an instrument should be analysed to check its appropriateness and effectiveness to cope with the challenges of "member-state building" in the Western Balkans.

The literature on the EU assistance towards the Western Balkan countries shows a gap in the lack of complete and in-depth evaluation of its effectiveness. A first literature strand focus on the characteristics of the Western Balkans, as opposed to Central and Eastern Europe, and how they impact on the pre-accession strategy. A second strand refers to the theory of Europeanisation and conditionality, identifying the factors of success of rule transfer. Finally, a third strand refers the empirical results and to the constraints faced during the implementation period of IPA and of the previous financial instruments in the region. The aim of the research is to bridge between the different strands, in order to build up a comprehensive picture of the conditions, mechanisms and results of pre-accession assistance in the Western Balkans.

The first chapter of the present research includes the analysis of the historical, economical, cultural and political elements that distinguish the Western Balkans from other European regions. After a brief description of the increasing involvement of the European Union in the region, the previous EU financial instruments are presented and assessed in their features and accomplishments. Finally, the method of elaboration of an EU pre-accession strategy for the Western Balkans is considered. The second chapter deals with the theoretical bases upon which the IPA is constructed. Starting from Europeanisation theory, it proceeds to analyse the success factors of rule transfer and conditionality, underlining the role of credibility and of domestic costs. The last section elaborates on the peculiar conditions for conditionality compliance in post-conflict situation, with the role of memory resources in raising adoption costs. The third chapter considers the quantitative data of the IPA. The IPA is analysed in its allocations, the levels of absorption in target countries, and the progress in management decentralisation.

The aim of the research is to provide a comprehensive analysis of how the EU pre-accession funds operate in the Western Balkan region, in order to be able to answer to the question “which factors influence the performance of the IPA in the Western Balkans region?” The findings point to a mixed performance of the IPA in relation to the expected results (funds absorption and management decentralisation), correlated with the fit between the IPA structure and the domestic conditions. Progresses have been faster in territories subject to moderate rather than to high or low adaptational pressure, thus confirming the hypotheses of Radaelli and of Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier on the curvilinear relation between change and institutional fit. The results of the empirical analysis are thus in line with the theoretical framework recalled. The IPA acts under the same conditions highlighted by the studies on Europeanisation and conditionality.