

ASSESSING THE ROLE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION'S ENLARGEMENT POLICY TOWARDS CANDIDATE COUNTRIES

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Abstract. This article explores the role of human rights in the process of enlargement of the European Union (EU) and its impact on candidate countries. The EU pays considerable attention to the protection and promotion of human rights, making them a fundamental aspect of its values and principles. Through the adoption of framework conditions such as the Copenhagen Criteria, the EU evaluates the acceptability of candidate countries based on their commitment to democracy, the rule of law, human rights and minority rights.

The article highlights the progress made in promoting human rights in the EU enlargement process and discusses the importance of effective monitoring and dialogue mechanisms to ensure compliance with human rights standards. The EU uses tools such as progress reports and assessments to assess the progress of candidate countries and engage in constructive dialogue to promote necessary reforms.

To analyze the impact of human rights on the EU accession process, this study focuses on three candidate countries: Albania, North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Keywords: *Human rights, EU, enlargement, Albania, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina.*

ЕУРОПАЛЫҚ ОДАҚТЫҢ КАНДИДАТ ЕЛДЕРГЕ ҚАТЫСТЫ КЕҢЕЙТУ САЯСАТЫНДАҒЫ АДАМ ҚҰҚЫҚТАРЫНЫҢ РӨЛІН БАҒАЛАУ

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Аңдатпа. Бұл мақалада Еуропалық Одақтың (ЕО) кеңею процесінде адам құқықтарының рөлі және оның кандидат елдерге әсері қарастырылады. ЕО адам құқықтарын қорғауға және көтермелеуге, оларды құндылықтар мен принциптердің негізгі аспектісіне айналдыруға көп көңіл бөледі. Копенгаген критерийлері сияқты негіздемелік шарттарды қабылдау арқылы ЕО кандидат елдердің демократияға, заңның үстемдігіне, адам құқықтарына және азшылық құқықтарына деген адалдығына негізделген жарамдылығын бағалайды.

Мақалада ЕО-ны кеңейту процесінде адам құқықтарын ілгерілетудегі жетістіктері баяндалады және адам құқықтары саласындағы стандарттардың сақталуын қамтамасыз ету үшін тиімді мониторинг пен диалог тетіктерінің маңыздылығы талқыланады. ЕО үміткер елдердің үлгерімін бағалау және қажетті реформаларды ілгерілету үшін сындарлы диалогқа қатысу үшін жұмыс барысы туралы есептер мен бағалау сияқты құралдарды пайдаланады.

Адам құқықтарының ЕО-ға кіру процесіне әсерін талдау үшін бұл зерттеу үш үміткер елге бағытталған: Албания, Македония және Босния және Герцеговина.

Түйін сөздер: Адам құқықтары, ЕО, кеңейту, Албания, Македония, Босния және Герцеговина.

ОЦЕНКА РОЛИ ПРАВ ЧЕЛОВЕКА В ПОЛИТИКЕ РАСШИРЕНИЯ ЕВРОПЕЙСКОГО СОЮЗА В ОТНОШЕНИИ СТРАН-КАНДИДАТОВ

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Аннотация. В этой статье исследуется роль прав человека в процессе расширения Европейского союза (ЕС) и его влияние на страны-кандидаты. ЕС уделяет значительное внимание защите и поощрению прав человека, делая

их фундаментальным аспектом своих ценностей и принципов. Посредством принятия рамочных условий, таких как Копенгагенские критерии, ЕС оценивает приемлемость стран-кандидатов на основе их приверженности демократии, верховенству закона, правам человека и правам меньшинств.

В статье освещается прогресс, достигнутый в продвижении прав человека в процессе расширения ЕС, и обсуждается важность эффективных механизмов мониторинга и диалога для обеспечения соблюдения стандартов в области прав человека. ЕС использует такие инструменты, как отчеты о ходе работы и оценки, для оценки прогресса стран-кандидатов и участия в конструктивном диалоге для продвижения необходимых реформ.

Чтобы проанализировать влияние прав человека на процесс вступления в ЕС, данное исследование сосредоточено на трех странах-кандидатах: Албании, Македонии и Боснии и Герцеговине.

Ключевые слова: *Права человека, ЕС, расширение, Албания, Македония, Босния и Герцеговина.*

Introduction

The European Union (EU) has been at the forefront of promoting and protecting human rights within its member states and beyond. This commitment to human rights is enshrined in various treaties and agreements, including the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (commonly known as the European Convention on Human Rights), the Lisbon Treaty, the Amsterdam Treaty, the Maastricht Treaty, and the Nice Treaty. This article delves into the significance of these legal instruments and the mechanisms they establish to ensure the protection of human rights in the EU.

There is a need to review these documents. First of all, let's try to analyze key points of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which was established in 1950 and remains one of the foundational documents for human rights protection in Europe [1]. It is an instrument of the Council of Europe and is not exclusive to EU member states but is binding on all signatory states. The Convention delineates an extensive list of civil and political rights, such as the right to life, freedom from torture, and the right to a fair trial. It establishes the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) as the judicial body responsible for adjudicating alleged violations of the Convention.

Another document – the Maastricht Treaty, effective from November 1, 1993, was a milestone in the development of the EU as a political and economic union. It introduced the concept of EU citizenship, providing individuals with certain rights and privileges, such as the right to move and reside freely within the EU. It recognized the need to protect the rights of individuals as part of the broader European project [2].

For example, the Amsterdam Treaty, in force since May 1, 1999, marked an important step in integrating human rights into the EU's core principles. It amended the EU Treaty and explicitly mentioned the importance of human rights and democracy in the preamble. This treaty laid the foundation for the development of EU human rights policy. It also established the position of a High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, who plays a crucial role in promoting the EU's values, including human rights, in its external relations [3].

The Nice Treaty, which entered into force on February 1, 2003, focused primarily on the EU's institutional reforms, preparing the Union for the next important stage of its enlargement in 2004. While it did not introduce new human rights provisions, it indirectly reinforced the importance of human rights within the EU. As the EU expanded to include more member states, the protection of human rights became even more critical to ensure the cohesion and unity of the Union [4].

The European Union (EU) is committed to upholding and promoting human rights as a fundamental pillar of its values and principles. The Lisbon Treaty, which entered into force on December 1, 2009, further solidified the EU's commitment to human rights. In this scientific article, we will examine the importance and implications of several key articles of the Lisbon Treaty concerning human rights, namely, Article 2, Article 3, Article 6, Article 21, and Article 218.

Article 2 of the Lisbon Treaty lays down the fundamental values on which the EU is founded. This article highlights the importance of human dignity, freedom, equality, and respect for human rights as core principles of the EU. It explicitly states that the EU is founded on the respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

Article 3 of the Lisbon Treaty outlines the EU's objectives, one of which is to promote its values, including human rights, both within the EU and in its external actions. This article commits the EU to uphold and foster these values when developing policies and legislation. It is essential to recognize that the EU does not solely seek to protect human rights within its borders but also actively endeavors to promote and protect these rights on a global scale.

Article 6 of the Lisbon Treaty is significant in that it officially incorporates the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union into EU primary law. This Charter is a comprehensive catalog of civil, political, economic, and social rights enjoyed by individuals within the EU. By elevating the Charter to a binding legal instrument, the Lisbon Treaty enhances the protection and enforcement of human rights across the EU, ensuring that these rights are upheld consistently by the EU's institutions and member states.

Article 21 of the Lisbon Treaty reinforces the EU's commitment to promoting human rights on the global stage. It calls for the EU to maintain a dedicated foreign policy that actively supports the universal values of democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for international law. This provision not only signals the EU's commitment to promoting human rights worldwide but also establishes a legal framework for its external actions, including diplomatic and development initiatives, that advance human rights and democracy.

Article 218 is vital for understanding the EU's role in the international arena concerning human rights. It outlines the procedures and decision-making mechanisms for concluding international agreements, including those related to human rights. This article underscores the EU's ability to negotiate and enter into agreements with third countries, international organizations, or other entities to promote and protect human rights. It is a key mechanism through which the EU can leverage its influence and resources to advance the global human rights agenda.

The Lisbon Treaty significantly strengthened the EU's commitment to human

rights by enshrining them in its fundamental values and objectives, incorporating the Charter of Fundamental Rights into primary law, and establishing a framework for external action on human rights. Articles 2, 3, 6, 21, and 218 of the Lisbon Treaty collectively provide a robust legal foundation for the EU's efforts to uphold and promote human rights both within its borders and on the international stage. As the EU continues to evolve and engage with global challenges, the principles articulated in these treaty articles remain central to its commitment to human rights [5].

The Copenhagen criteria, established in 1993, serve as a framework for assessing the eligibility of countries aspiring to join the EU [6]. One of the key criteria is the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities. This criterion aligns with the principles enshrined in the Maastricht Treaty, Amsterdam Treaty, Nice Treaty, and the ECHR, emphasizing the importance of human rights protection in the EU integration process. In summary, the Copenhagen criteria and the Maastricht Treaty, Lisbon Treaty, Amsterdam Treaty, Nice Treaty, and the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms are interconnected in their shared goal of promoting and safeguarding human rights within the EU. They collectively establish a comprehensive framework that ensures respect for human rights as a fundamental principle of the EU and its member states.

The European Union (EU) has demonstrated substantial progress in the realm of human rights protection, employing a combination of international agreements and domestic legislation. The Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, also known as the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), stands as a cornerstone instrument for the advancement and preservation of human rights within the EU. Moreover, pivotal treaties such as the Lisbon Treaty, the Amsterdam Treaty, the Maastricht Treaty, and the Nice Treaty further contribute to the promotion and safeguarding of human rights in the EU context. These legal frameworks collectively establish a comprehensive foundation, ensuring that the EU and its member states uphold the fundamental rights and freedoms of all individuals under their jurisdiction. By adhering to the principles enshrined in these treaties, the EU not only sets a prime example for its member states but also solidifies its global role as a steadfast defender of human rights in our ever-evolving world. The EU's commitment to human rights not only extends to its internal affairs but also resonates on the international stage, emphasizing its dedication to promoting and upholding human rights globally. Furthermore, these treaties assume a critical role in the accession process for new countries aspiring to join the EU. Compliance with the principles and standards outlined in these agreements serves as a pivotal criterion for membership. Recognizing the significance of human rights in this context is imperative, as it underscores the EU's commitment to ensuring that new member states adhere to the principles of human rights during the integration process.

The primary objective of this article is to underscore the importance of human rights in the context of new countries seeking accession to the EU. By highlighting the role of these treaties as criteria for membership, the article aims to emphasize the EU's commitment to upholding and promoting human rights

during the integration of new member states.

The bibliography for our research draws upon a range of authoritative sources. These include the treaties of the European Union, along with analytical reports and progress reports. In addition, we have gathered valuable insights from the scholarly works of Tatjana Sekulić and Milica Uvalić, both renowned experts in the field of EU affairs and the Western Balkan region. By incorporating these diverse sources, our study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

Materials and Methods

The scientific methods used in this analysis, based on a literature review, included several qualitative methodologies. We have reviewed relevant analytical reports, progress reports and EU treaties to gather information on the role of human rights in the accession process of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Northern Macedonia. This allowed us to create a comprehensive data set for analysis by extracting data and information from EU reports and treaties.

The next step was to categorize and classify the data. We have developed a framework for categorizing and classifying the state of affairs - progress, regression or stagnation that is observed in the efforts of each candidate country in the field of human rights.

To better address these problems, a comparative analysis was used: comparing the indicators of each candidate country with EU human rights standards and benchmarks to assess their progress.

Content analysis has helped us to systematize and analyze the content of EU reports and treaties in order to identify key topics, goals and indicators related to human rights in the accession process.

The qualitative analysis was based on the interpretation and evaluation of qualitative data, including textual analysis of reports and international treaties to identify links and relationships between the results.

Finally, the interpretation of the analyzed data allowed us to draw conclusions about the role of human rights in the accession process of candidate countries.

Research results and their discussion

The process of European Union (EU) enlargement has played a significant role in shaping the development of the Union. This process involves admitting new member states into the EU, which raises important questions about the deepening and widening of the Union.

The first step in the enlargement process is called "screening," where the European Commission (EC) identifies areas in a candidate country's legislation, institutions, or practices that need alignment with the EU [7]. Before negotiations can begin, the candidate country must submit its position and the EU must adopt a common position. The EC conducts a detailed examination of each policy field, in collaboration with the candidate country, to assess its preparedness. Based on this screening process, the Commission either recommends opening negotiations directly or requires certain conditions to be met first.

Negotiations take place between the EU Member States and each individual candidate country, and the speed of progress depends on how well the country

meets the requirements. Candidates have an incentive to implement necessary reforms quickly, some of which may involve significant and challenging transformations of their political and economic structures. It typically takes several years for a country to successfully address all these aspects. Once negotiations and accompanying reforms are completed, the country can join the EU by signing the Accession Treaty. After signing the treaty, the candidate country becomes an "Acceding State" and enjoys provisional privileges until it officially becomes an EU Member State.

To assist countries in preparing for future membership, the EU has developed a pre-accession strategy. This strategy includes agreements that outline rights and obligations, as well as special cooperation mechanisms like Accession or European Partnerships, which define specific reform goals for the candidates to achieve [8]. The first Accession Partnerships were established in 1998 to identify priority areas for further work towards EU membership, allocate financial resources to support these priorities, and specify the conditions for assistance.

Monitoring plays a crucial role in understanding how the pre-accession policy has been implemented over the past 15 years. The EC has adopted a monitoring mechanism to assess the compliance of candidate and potential candidate countries with EU requirements. The Commission regularly informs the Council and the European Parliament about the progress of candidate countries through strategy papers and individual country progress reports. It monitors the fulfillment of requirements and progress in meeting commitments. The progress reports provide valuable feedback to the countries and highlight areas that require further efforts. Since 1998, the EC has monitored the compliance of all candidate and potential candidate countries through annual progress reports, focusing on political and economic criteria for membership and the ability to assume membership obligations [9].

Overall, the enlargement process of the EU involves a series of steps, including screening, negotiations, reforms, and the signing of the Accession Treaty. Pre-accession strategies and monitoring mechanisms are in place to assist candidate countries in their preparations for membership and to ensure compliance with EU requirements.

Human rights in the enlargement process of the European Union

Human rights hold immense importance in the EU enlargement process, as they are fundamental to the Union's values and principles. The EU places a strong emphasis on the protection and promotion of human rights, both within its member states and in its external relations. Therefore, considering human rights is crucial in assessing the eligibility of candidate countries for EU membership.

The EU has established a framework of conditionality, which requires candidate countries to fulfill certain political, economic, and human rights criteria before being granted membership. The Copenhagen criteria, adopted in 1993, highlight the significance of democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and the protection of minority rights. These criteria serve as benchmarks for evaluating the progress of candidate countries in meeting EU standards.

The EU enlargement process has witnessed notable progress in promoting human rights. Candidate countries are required to align their legislation and practices with EU human rights standards, resulting in advancements in areas such as judi-

cial reform, freedom of expression, and the protection of minority rights. Additionally, the EU actively supports candidate countries in their efforts to strengthen human rights institutions and practices.

However, challenges remain in ensuring the effective implementation and enforcement of human rights standards in candidate countries. Some countries may encounter difficulties in fully embracing EU norms and values, leading to ongoing concerns regarding issues such as corruption, media freedom, and the treatment of minority groups. These challenges highlight the need for continuous monitoring, dialogue, and support from the EU to address human rights issues during the enlargement process.

Effective monitoring mechanisms are essential in the EU enlargement process to ensure the adherence to human rights standards. The EU employs various tools, such as progress reports and regular assessments, to evaluate candidate countries' progress in fulfilling human rights obligations. Through these mechanisms, the EU actively engages with candidate countries, providing feedback, recommendations, and necessary support to address human rights challenges.

Moreover, dialogue plays a crucial role in addressing human rights concerns during the enlargement process. The EU engages in constructive dialogue with candidate countries, encouraging them to adopt necessary reforms and strengthen human rights protections. This dialogue fosters mutual understanding, cooperation, and the exchange of best practices in promoting and protecting human rights.

To examine the impact of human rights on the European Union (EU) accession process, this study employed three analytical reports and ten progressive reports from three candidate countries: Albania, North Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The selection of these countries as examples is justified by the recent events that have occurred in the region, which have raised security concerns at the EU borders. The first Russian intervention in Ukraine, specifically in Crimea in 2014, and the migration crisis of 2015 have brought the Balkans back into the spotlight. These events have highlighted the need to address security issues and have prompted renewed discussions on EU accession and the establishment of additional European institutions.

The global financial crisis of 2007-09 had previously slowed down the EU accession process, and enthusiasm for further expansion or consolidation of the Union's achievements in the east had waned. However, recent initiatives such as French President Macron's proposal to create a European political community, the German-led Berlin Process, and the Slovenian-Croatian Brdo-Briuni process indicate a potential shift in the situation.

Moreover, the second aggression by Russia against Ukraine in February 2022 has further emphasized the importance of considering these countries as examples. This recent development has once again brought the security concerns in the region to the forefront and may have implications for the future of EU integration and enlargement.

Therefore, given the current circumstances and the significance of these events, selecting these countries as examples for consideration is a pertinent and valuable idea. They provide a case stage to examine the challenges and opportunities associated with EU expansion and the potential impact of external factors on the

region's security and integration processes [10].

These reports were carefully selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the human rights situation in these countries. The selected indicators for assessing the state of human rights encompassed various aspects, including the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, which reflects the extent to which individuals are allowed to hold and express their beliefs without interference. Freedom of expression, on the other hand, focuses on the ability of individuals to express their opinions and ideas freely, without censorship or fear of reprisal.

Another crucial indicator is the freedom of association and assembly, which evaluates the extent to which individuals are permitted to form and join associations, including political, social, and cultural organizations, as well as their right to peaceful assembly. Non-discrimination based on race, skin color, and ethnic origin is an essential aspect of human rights, ensuring that all individuals are treated equally and without prejudice. Gender equality is also a significant parameter, as it highlights the level of gender-based discrimination and the promotion of equal opportunities for men and women.

The study also explored the protection of children's rights, recognizing the importance of safeguarding their well-being, education, and protection from exploitation. Furthermore, the rights of persons with disabilities were examined, emphasizing the inclusion and support required to ensure their full participation in society. Lastly, the participation of minority groups was investigated, aiming to assess the extent to which these groups are granted equal rights and opportunities within the candidate countries.

By analyzing these key parameters, this study aimed to provide insights into the human rights situation in Albania, North Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, shedding light on their progress and challenges in meeting the EU's human rights standards. The findings from this investigation are presented in the table below, offering a comprehensive overview of the state of human rights in these candidate countries.

Table 1. Human rights typology: progress/stagnation/regression

	Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion	Freedom of expression	Freedom of association and assembly	Non-discrimination based on race, color, and ethnic origin	Gender equality	Children's rights	Persons with disabilities	Minority participation
Albania								
2016	Progress	Stagnation	Progress	Stagnation	Progress	Progress	Progress	Progress
2019	Progress	Progress	Progress	Progress	Progress	Progress	Progress	Progress
2023	Progress	Limited progress	Progress	Stagnation	Progress	Progress	Progress	Stagnation
Analytical report 2010	Progress	Stagnation	Progress	Progress	Stagnation	Progress	Stagnation	Regression
Bosnia and Herzegovina								
2010	Regression	Regression	Stagnation	Stagnation	Progress	Stagnation	Limited Progress	Stagnation
2016	Progress	Stagnation	Progress	Stagnation	Stagnation	Progress	Progress	Progress

2023	Regression	Regression	Regression	Stagnation	Progress	Stagnation	Stagnation	Stagnation
Analytical report 2019	Progress	Stagnation	Regression	Stagnation	Progress	Stagnation	Progress	Stagnation
FYROM / North Macedonia								
2010	Progress	Progress	Progress	Limited progress	Progress	Progress	Progress	Limited progress
2016	Progress	Regression	Progress	Stagnation	Stagnation	Stagnation	Regression	Regression
2019	Progress	Progress	Progress	Progress	Progress	Progress	Progress	Progress
2023	Progress	Progress	Progress	Progress	Progress	Stagnation	Progress	Progress
Analytical report 2005	Progress	Progress	Stagnation	Progress	Progress	Progress	Stagnation	Progress

Source: compiled by the author on [10-22].

The analysis of the data presented in the table 1 enables us to draw conclusions regarding the progress, regression, or stagnation in the realm of human rights during the EU accession process. The findings reveal that North Macedonia and Albania have demonstrated progress, as evidenced by their consistent improvement in the indicators required for EU membership. Conversely, Bosnia and Herzegovina has shown no signs of progress.

When considering the impact of EU instruments on the enhancement or deterioration of the human rights situation, several noteworthy conclusions can be drawn. In the case of North Macedonia and Albania, the positive influence of EU instruments can be attributed to their commitment to implementing recommended reforms and policies. This proactive approach has resulted in tangible improvements in their human rights indicators. Conversely, Bosnia and Herzegovina has shown no signs of progress, mainly due to the insufficient efficiency or limited utilization of EU instruments. Political polarization and disagreements within the ruling coalition have led to a stagnation in democratic institutions and reforms, necessitating more active cooperation and support from the EU [23]. It is crucial for more active cooperation and support from the EU to be provided to stimulate positive changes in the field of human rights within this country.

Critical discourse

Also, the article highlights certain challenges in compiling statistical data related to human rights indicators. In this study, reports related to the compilation of statistical data in accordance with the rules of the European Union were analyzed. The main requirements include professional independence, impartiality, reliability, transparency and confidentiality. There are also general rules regarding the methodology, preparation and dissemination of statistical information.

It is expected that all Member States will regularly provide relevant data to the common Eurostat database and participate in various European statistical tools such as the European Social Survey. Progress in this area is regularly monitored and reported by the European Commission.

Statistical monitoring of reform and transformation processes is of great importance for the consultative procedures of EU institutions. Special attention is paid to the so-called "structural indicators", which reflect trends and fluctuations in various social and economic fields.

However, during the analysis of statistical data, some problems were identified. Firstly, data sources are not always specified, which makes it difficult to verify their reliability. Secondly, some data are estimated or preliminary, but are not accompanied by an explanation of the assessment methodology or a source for verification. There

are also cases when the same data is repeated from year to year without feedback or verification. Thirdly, the use of different units of measurement can distort the comparison of data between different countries and over different time periods.

In general, it is necessary to improve the transparency and reliability of the statistical data provided in order to ensure their reliability and comparability. It is also recommended to install a feedback mechanism to verify the data and prevent unauthorized use of preliminary data. Further research may be aimed at comparing and verifying European statistical data with other reliable sources in order to confirm their accuracy and reliability [24].

Overall, the analysis findings underscore the significance and effectiveness of EU instruments in promoting progress in human rights adherence among candidate countries for EU accession. However, in order to achieve positive changes across all countries, it is imperative to allocate greater attention and resources, particularly in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This will ensure a more balanced and sustainable advancement in the realm of human rights. In addition to the impact of EU instruments, it is important to acknowledge the transformation power of the European Union in promoting human rights standards. The EU's accession process serves as a catalyst for change, as candidate countries are required to align their legislation and practices with EU norms and standards, including those related to human rights.

The prospect of EU membership creates a strong incentive for candidate countries to undertake necessary reforms and make substantial improvements in the field of human rights. The EU sets clear benchmarks and monitors the progress of these countries, providing guidance and technical assistance throughout the accession process. This transformative power of the EU not only influences the legal and institutional frameworks but also encourages a shift in societal attitudes and practices towards greater respect for human rights.

Furthermore, the EU's emphasis on human rights as a fundamental value and condition for membership sends a powerful signal to candidate countries and their societies. It fosters a culture of accountability, transparency, and respect for human rights, which becomes embedded in the national discourse and policy-making processes. As a result, the EU accession process serves as a driving force for positive change and progress in the field of human rights in candidate countries.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of the EU's transformation power. The pace and extent of change in human rights adherence can vary among candidate countries due to their unique historical, political, and socio-cultural contexts. What works in one country may not necessarily work in another, and therefore, the EU's influence may be constrained by these internal challenges.

Moreover, there may be political resistance or limited capacity for implementation within candidate countries, which can further hinder the effectiveness of the EU's efforts. It is important to consider these factors when assessing the impact of the EU's emphasis on human rights.

In this context, it is necessary to conduct a more detailed analysis of the negative aspects and identify possible causes of regression or stagnation in the countries under consideration. When studying an article by Kazakh specialists E. Juraev and N. Murataliev on cooperation between the European Union and Central Asian countries in the field of human rights, a coincidence in statements was revealed [25]. The authors discussed the negative consequences of Europeanization for the culture and national identity of Central Asian countries. Candidate countries were also mentioned, which for various reasons still cannot join the EU. These remarks served as an incentive for further analysis of the reasons, which led to the conclusion that

some aspects of EU policy arouse suspicion and rejection among participants, despite their mostly positive and friendly image. As the authors note, excessive idealization of the EU may have negative consequences for Central Asian countries and other countries under study. In particular, there is a fear of loss of national identity and culture due to imitation of the lifestyle of EU countries. It should be noted that the cultural differences between the EU countries and the Balkan countries (Central Asian countries) are significant, with the latter more committed to traditional values. Another important issue is the rights of sexual minorities, which, although protected in EU countries, face discontent in Central Asia and the Balkans.

In case North Macedonia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina are admitted to the European Union, there is a risk of encountering problems of bureaucracy, where theoretical concepts may not find practical application due to possible contradictions with traditional values. Issues related to the cultural and social heritage of these countries may create obstacles to successful integration within the EU.

For example, the traditional values and customs present in Northern Macedonia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina may not comply with the standards and principles adopted in the EU countries. This can cause conflicts and misunderstandings, as well as complicate the process of adaptation to European norms and standards.

Moreover, bureaucratic processes in the EU can be difficult and difficult to access for new members, which can lead to a slowdown in decision-making and implementation of reforms. If traditional values are incompatible with European standards, there is a risk of conflicts and obstacles to successful integration.

Thus, it is necessary to take into account potential problems with bureaucracy and contradictions in values when considering the possibility of admitting Northern Macedonia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina into the European Union, and take appropriate measures to minimize risks and ensure a successful integration process.

To enhance the reliability and accuracy of statistical data, it is recommended to improve transparency by specifying data sources and providing comprehensive methodology explanations. This would allow for better scrutiny and understanding of the data presented. Additionally, establishing a feedback mechanism for data verification would further ensure data accuracy, as it would allow for independent verification and correction of any errors.

Furthermore, it is important to consider the validity of the European statistical data by comparing and verifying it with other reliable sources. This would help confirm the accuracy and reliability of the data, adding further credibility to the findings presented in the article.

While the EU's emphasis on human rights as a fundamental value and condition for membership can have a positive impact on candidate countries, it is important to acknowledge the limitations and challenges that may arise. By addressing these limitations and ensuring transparency and accuracy in statistical data, the EU can strive for more effective and impactful human rights initiatives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the transformative power of the EU in promoting human rights standards should not be underestimated. During the accession process, the EU encourages candidate countries to carry out the necessary reforms and bring their practices in line with EU standards. This not only leads to legal and institutional changes, but also affects the attitude and practice of society. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize the complexities and limitations that may hinder the full realization of the EU's transformational human rights capabilities.

The study also highlights the importance of increasing the transparency

and reliability of statistical data, recommends clear data sources, explains the methodology and verification mechanisms. While the transformational power of the EU in advancing human rights standards is obvious, issues such as political resistance and differences in the potential of candidate countries need to be addressed in order to achieve more effective results. It is also important to be aware of the complexities and limitations that can affect the pace and scale of change, requiring individual approaches and ongoing efforts to ensure meaningful progress.

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