

## “The EU support modalities for upholding election integrity in the Western Balkans”

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Election integrity is defined as an “...election that is based on the democratic principles of universal suffrage and political equality as reflected in international standards and agreements, and is professional, impartial, and transparent in its preparation and administration throughout the electoral cycle”.<sup>1</sup> It is often used as a synonym for the paradigm of “free and fair” elections. While elections with integrity are a foundation of a democratic political system, they cannot be a synonym for democracy.

Elections with integrity are the key to preserving stability, peace and security not only at a national, but also at European level. The perspectives of the EU integration of the Western Balkans have been continuously viewed through the lens of European security and stability. The pace of EU integration of the Western Balkan countries is slow, which is especially the case of North Macedonia. The Western Balkan countries are struggling with their ability to satisfy the EU democratic criteria and assume the obligations stemming from the EU membership. Another question that arises regarding EU integration is the EU absorption capacity for the countries situated in the Western Balkans. This conditionality has been set out in the 1993 Copenhagen (accession) criteria.<sup>2</sup> From the viewpoint of election integrity, the Copenhagen criteria require that the EU has to be satisfied that the candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy and the rule of law.

In an absence of a single elections treaty, the lecture aims to explain the election standards safeguarding election integrity in view of the 1993 Copenhagen criteria and examine the EU support modalities for election integrity. The presentation unfolds with the Europe’s election heritage, and presentation of the relevant articles set out in the Charter of the Fundamental Rights of the EU, the European Convention on Human Rights and the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights, as well as the OSCE political commitments on elections. The lecture tackles the connection between election integrity and the rule of law focusing on preventing and combating election malpractices.

The lecture discusses the EU support modalities for ensuring election integrity in the Western Balkans in a form of monitoring of the countries’ progress along the EU path, election reform support programmes, election observation, facilitation and mediation of political processes. Synergies that EU creates with the regional organisations, such as OSCE/ODIHR and CoE, which are mandated with election observation and monitoring of democracy are also explored. Election integrity matters first and most for the people of the Western Balkans who do not deserve less than elections in compliance with democratic election standards, safeguarding the election processes in the EU states.

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<sup>1</sup> Global Commission on election, democracy and security, The Report of the Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security, 2012, p.6 available from <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/deepening-democracy.pdf> accessed on 18 April 2021.

<sup>2</sup> European Council in Copenhagen, 21-22 June 1993, SN 180/1/93 REV 1.

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