



EU Twinning Projects in Serbia: Analysis of Policy Areas and the Influence of Member States

Research Article

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EU Twinning Projects in Serbia: Analysis of Policy Areas and the Influence of Member States

Fotios Fitsilis* and Aleksandra Jovanović**

This article examines the developments around the application of the Twinning modality in Serbia, from 2004 to 2019, its sectoral distribution and impact, and the frequency of EU member states' participation. Besides providing an accurate state-of-play, it attempts, for the first time in the literature, to map the influence of member states in Serbia's EU accession process through their participation in Twinning projects. Findings show that, in the given period, more than half of the Twinning projects dealt with the justice and home affairs and agriculture policy areas. This is in line with the importance attributed to those sectors in EU and Serbian strategic documents. The article focuses on a macro-analysis of such projects in Serbia, revitalising their link with the wider Europeanisation process. More specifically, the identification of specific aspects of the Europeanisation process takes place through Radaelli's approach. Furthermore, political and economic relations between Serbia and EU member states, which are viewed as Europeanisation facilitating factors and goals, are also discussed, e.g. through bilateral trade and the influx of Foreign Direct Investments.

Keywords: EU accession, Twinning projects, Serbia, Europeanisation, economic relations

Introduction

Since 1991, the European Union (EU) has provided financial assistance to candidate countries and potential candidate countries through various assistance programmes. The proclaimed aim of these programmes is to provide help to beneficiary countries to conduct political and economic reforms, thus preparing them for the rights and obligations arising from EU membership, and to familiarise them with the European institutions. From 1991 till 2017, the EU committed 9.4 billion euro to the Western Balkans region through multiple aid programmes. After the launch of the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP, June 1999), the EU's policy towards the Western Balkans – namely progress towards candidate status and eventual EU membership – was gradually implemented in the region, further strengthened by taking over elements of the accession process at the Thessaloniki Summit in June 2003.¹

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¹ Uvalic, Milica. 2012. *Transition in Southeast Europe: Understanding Economic Development and Institutional Change*, in *Economies in Transition. Studies in Development Economics and Policy*, edited by Roland, Gérard. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 364–99.

Following democratic changes in 2000, Serbia was included in the SAP. Signed in 2008, the EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) entered into force in 2013. Serbia was granted the status of candidate country in March 2012. In January 2014, the EU commenced the process of accession negotiation with Serbia with an analytical examination of the EU *acquis* (screening process) that was completed in March 2015.² In December 2015, the first negotiation chapters out of a total of 35 were launched. As of December 2019, 18 negotiation chapters have been opened (two of them are temporarily closed). In Serbia's negotiation process, the focus is on Chapter 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights) and Chapter 24 (Justice, Freedom and Security), which were among the first chapters to be opened (July 2016), since the two are fundamental for the EU accession process and should be given sufficient time for harmonisation and institution building. In July 2020, Serbia accepted a new negotiation methodology proposed by EU based on a sectoral approach and the clustering of chapters.

The usage of EU funds in Serbia started in March 2001 with the CARDS (Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation) Programme. The objective of CARDS was to support the participation of its beneficiary countries in the SAP. CARDS focused on supporting the reforms and institutional building necessary for the implementation of the obligations set out in the SAA. The CARDS programme for Serbia dedicated 1.3 billion euro³ in the period 2000-2006 before being replaced by the IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession Aid) in 2007.

For the budgetary period 2007-2013 (IPA I), the total allocation was 11.5 billion euro (EC Regulation 1085/2006), 1.4 billion euro of which was allocated to Serbia. IPA II replaced IPA I for the budgetary period 2014-2020. It was created in March 2014, dedicating 11.7 billion euro for the SAP (EC Regulation 231/2014). IPA II determined 1.5 billion euro for Serbia, thus distributing the same amount per year as in IPA I (around 200 million per year). Compared to previous pre-accession instruments (CARDS), a major change introduced by IPA is the obligation for the beneficiary country to establish an institutional framework similar to that required for the usage of Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund, as well as for the implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).⁴ The significant volume of these EU interventions is also reflected in the Twinning projects, frequently to be referred to as 'Twinning', which took place in Serbia in the aforementioned periods. Twinning is an instrument for institutional cooperation between public administrations in EU member states and beneficiary or partner countries. This approach already encapsulates key notions of the Europeanisation process, such as identity building and 'ways of doing things', which will be further analysed in this article.

Another point that should be highlighted is that, although Twinning projects have been present in the EU development world for more than two decades, there

² Bratković, Aleksandar et al. 2015. *Knjiga preporuka Nacionalnog konventa o Evropskoj uniji: 2014/2015*. Belgrade: Evropski pokret u Srbiji, 40.

³ EC Regulation 2666/2000, repealing Regulation (EC) No 1628/96, amending Regulations (EEC) No 3906/89 and (EEC) No 1360/90, and Decisions 97/256/EC and 1999/311/EC.

⁴ Pejović, Andrija et al. 2011. *IPA-Instrument za pretprištopnu pomoć EU 2007-2013*. Belgrade: Evropski pokret u Srbiji.

are several aspects that have still not been fully understood,⁵ particularly in the national context. When studying Twinning, one quickly finds that major contributions to the field originate from programme reports or evaluations, thus lacking the necessary theoretical background to constitute meaningful contributions to a relevant theoretical framework. Hence, from the theory point of view, the aim of this article is twofold. First, to bridge the gap between practice and theory for the Twinning modality and, second, to more strongly link these projects to the wider Europeanisation process.

This article is dedicated to a study of Twinning during the CARDS and IPA periods, from 2004 to 2019. A wide set of project parameters, which includes the policy area (also referred to as 'sector'), budget, duration and member state partner(s), has been investigated in order to determine their sectoral distribution and the conditionality for member state participation. The resulting discussion on the influence of member states in Serbia's EU accession process through Twinning project participation is a true innovation in the relevant literature. Political and economic parameters, such as the question of Kosovo,⁶ bilateral trade volume and the amount of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), are also analysed as potential reasons for Twinning participation. The mapping of these interrelations constitutes a novel approach to the understanding of Twinning.

The next section offers a theoretical and practical framework of the Twinning modality, in Serbia and elsewhere, as presented in the relevant official sources and literature. It is followed by a presentation of the most prominent actors and the established processes for ensuring Twinning operations in Serbia. The research questions and methodology come next, followed by a structured analysis of the pertinent open data set. The final sections highlight the basic conclusions and link them with recommendations for developing the next generation of Twinning.

Evolution and theory of Twinning

Twinning is one of the European Commission's (EC) key instruments to provide peer-to-peer, on-the-ground cooperation between the public administrations of EU countries and enlargement or neighbourhood countries. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Danish Development Cooperation Agency (DANIDA) and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) define the Twinning principle as the formation of institutional pairs (twins) used for knowledge transfer and capacity building within the framework of technical assistance projects.⁷ Institutional Twinning was introduced in 1998 as a tool to strengthen the administrative and institutional capacities of partner and especially candidate countries during their EU accession process. The EU brought Twinning into life when

⁵ Cooper, Chris and Mikael Johansen. 2003. An Evaluation of Completed Twinning Projects: A Report Presented to the National Contact Points' Meeting (accessed: 25 March 2020), 3.

⁶ All references to Kosovo in this text shall be understood in full compliance with the United Nation's Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

⁷ Jensen, Marina Bergen / Hjortso, Carsten Nico / Schipperijn, Jasper / Nik, Abdul-Rahim and Kjell Nilsson. 2007. Research Capacity Building Through Twinning: Experiences from a Danish-Malaysian Twinning Project. *Public Administration and Development* 27(5), 381–92; Jones, Merrick and Peter Blunt. 1999. 'Twinning' as a Method of Sustainable Institutional Capacity Building. *Public Administration and Development* 19(4), 381–402.

administrators in Brussels were overwhelmed with requests for assistance, by bringing together policymakers from the West to work in specific areas together with their counterparts from beneficiary countries.⁸ This form of EU assistance includes policy networks of non-state experts for on-site training, and an emphasis on activating domestic and international actors to participate and invest in institution-building. Hence, institutional Twinning combines public sector expertise from member states and beneficiary countries while yielding ‘concrete operational results’ in the framework of the association agreements established with the EU.⁹

The process is unique for each candidate or partner country and triggers significant societal, governmental, financial and other changes. Governments are called to implement these changes through societal learning,¹⁰ while Saurugger argues that learning is “one of the main mechanisms of Europeanization”.¹¹ In the same vein, Europeanisation seeks common or joint results. More specifically, Europeanisation follows a different path to European integration: European integration relates to political and policy development at the supranational level, while Europeanisation relates to the results of this process.¹² This article attempts to show that Twinning resembles and incorporates elements of the Europeanisation dynamic process, especially due to the need for a diversified approach for each member state or candidate country. This is in line with Bulmer and Radaelli, who see “Europeanisation as an ongoing process that does not follow a single pattern and is based on reciprocity between Member States”.¹³ As of 1994, the impact of Europeanisation on domestic politics and institutions has been considered as:

“an incremental process reorienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that EC political and economic dynamics become part of the organisational logic of national politics and policy-making.”¹⁴

Due to this understanding and the technocratic approach in Brussels, Twinning is viewed as a facilitating factor for the candidate countries’ transition to the EU institutional environment, which in turn constitutes a significant facilitating factor for Europeanisation.

⁸ Bruszt, Laszlo and Gerald A. McDermott. 2008. *Transnational Integration Regimes as Development Programs*. Working Paper Series 67. Leiden : CES Central & Eastern Europe, 12.

⁹ Europeaid. 2019. *Evaluation of the Twinning Instrument in the Period 2010-2017* (accessed: 17 May 2020), 3.

¹⁰ Bennet, Colin J. and Michael Howlett. 1992. The Lessons of Learning: Reconciling Theories of Policy Learning and Policy Change. *Policy Sciences* 25(3), 277.

¹¹ Saurugger, Sabine. 2005. Europeanization as a Methodological Challenge: The Case of Interest Groups. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis* 7(4), 297.

¹² Violakis, Petros. 2018. *Europeanisation and the Transformation of EU Security Policy: Post-Cold War Developments in the Common Security and Defence Policy*. New York: Routledge, 18, 253.

¹³ Bulmer, Simon and Claudio M. Radaelli. 2013. *The Europeanisation of Member State Policy*, in *The Member States of the European Union*, edited by Bulmer, Simon and Christian Lequesne. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 360–62.

¹⁴ Ladrech, Robert. 1994. Europeanization of Domestic Politics and Institutions: The Case of France. *Journal of Common Market Studies* 32(1), 69.

Over the years, there have been numerous assessments of the Twinning modality. According to O'Connor and Kowalski,¹⁵ the mere naming of Twinning projects may have a positive effect on their preparation and implementation. Compared to technical assistance, the performance of the Twinning instrument showed that it is actually able to establish lasting ties between organisations in the beneficiary countries and homologue organisations in the EU and that it has the ability to change working culture.¹⁶ This is why it has been used within the PHARE Pre-Accession Fund.¹⁷ The evaluation of Twinning within PHARE was considered by Bailey and de Propriis,¹⁸ who identified issues that might limit the efficiency of the Fund: the effective capacity of candidate countries to absorb the knowledge accumulated during Twinning projects, financial constraints from the beneficiary side and the sustainability of interventions.

These findings support a note made by Papadimitriou and Phinnemore,¹⁹ who underlined the EC's decision from 2001 that Twinning in SAP countries will not be on the same scale as in applicant countries. Instead, they will be shorter and focus only on a few key priority areas, such as justice and home affairs (JHA). These observations are further strengthened by this study, which attributes the top two positions in Serbia to agriculture and JHA in terms of both volume and number of Twinning (see section 5). As with earlier research, Börzel and Buzogány concluded that participation in EU pre-accession programs, such as through Twinning, strengthens the capacities of beneficiary actors when it comes to the implementation of EU policies.²⁰ In addition, Cooper and Johansen, based on Twinning project experience and provided that institution-building is assured, noted that future generations of Twinning are expected to produce much better results.²¹

The abovementioned findings indicate that Twinning have provided a micro-institutional environment for cooperation between EU and candidate countries, which also facilitates the Europeanisation process. Furthermore, the implementation of Twinning is likely to increase the focus on specific priority areas due to smaller 'misfits'.²² The bigger the misfit, the harder the "adaptational pressures to which domestic actors respond in order to rebalance the domestic distribution of resources" at EU level.²³

¹⁵ O'Connor, Steven and Robert Kowalski. 2005. On Twinning: The Impact of Naming an EU Accession Programme on the Effective Implementation of its Projects. *Public Administration and Development* 25(5), 441.

¹⁶ Nugteren, Mart / Willemsen, Anja / Burisch, Michael / Stoicescu, Daniela and Bonka Karadjova. 2011. *Evaluation Twinning versus Technical Assistance* (accessed: 17 May 2020), 32.

¹⁷ PHARE has been set up with a view to preparing the accession of the Eastern European countries pre-2004.

¹⁸ Bailey, David and Lisa De Propriis. 2004. A Bridge Too Phare? EU Pre-Accession Aid and Capacity-Building in the Candidate Countries. *Journal of Common Market Studies* 42(1), 86–87.

¹⁹ Papadimitriou, Dimitris and David Phinnemore. 2003. Exporting Europeanisation to the Wider Europe: the Twinning Exercise and Administrative Reform in the Candidate Countries and Beyond. *Journal of South East European and Black Sea Studies* 3(2), 18.

²⁰ Börzel, Tanja A. and Aron Buzogány. 2010. Governing EU accession in Transition Countries: The Role of Non-State Actors. *Acta Politica* 45(1-2), 162.

²¹ Cooper and Johansen, *Evaluation of Competed Twinning*, 24–26.

²² According to Violakis, *Europeanisation of EU Security Policy*, 38, 'misfit' refers to the distance or diversification between EU institutions and candidate member states.

²³ Börzel, Tanja A. 1999. Towards Convergence in Europe? Institutional Adaptation to Europeanization in Germany and Spain. *Journal of Common Market Studies* 37(4), 574.

In line with earlier research, this article directly links Twinning to the *Europeanisation process*. Though first attempts were originally made almost two decades ago,²⁴ later works did not process this approach any further nor examined its dynamics and initial assumptions. Instead, most dealt with operational or structural issues of Twinning activities. As the Western Balkans and particularly Serbia have since moved closer to EU membership, this article attempts to re-link Twinning to the Europeanisation process.

The Europeanisation approach is considered as most appropriate due to the fact that it reintroduces “domestic politics into the process of European integration, without assuming that the balance of power between the state and European institutions is being tilted in one direction or another”.²⁵ Europeanisation is considered a dynamic process that undergoes constant evolution. Even in the mid-1990s, Ladrech identified the impact of the Europeanisation approach on domestic policies as a result that “introduces a ‘bottom-up’ approach to understanding the effects of Europeanisation”.²⁶ Since then, there have been several other significant contributions to the understanding and evolution of Europeanisation.²⁷ In light of the above, Twinning appear to constitute a direct Europeanisation-facilitating factor that matches Bulmer and Burch’s Europeanisation approach, which they define as:

“a set of processes through which political, social and economic dynamics of the European Union display interactions with the logics of national discourse, national identity, domestic political structures and domestic public politicians.”²⁸

In the same vein, Börzel and Panke view Europeanisation in general as the emergence of new rules and practices in the EU member states, which have to be incorporated at the domestic level.²⁹ In an analogous interpretation, this definition could be applied to candidate countries too. Given these broad definitions, it comes as rather expected that the notion of Europeanisation has

²⁴ Papadimitriou and Phinnemore, *Exporting Europeanisation*; Jonić Kapnias, Lovorka. 2013. Institutional Twinning: Undiscovered Effects of Administrative ‘Trinity’. *Hrvatska i komparativna javna uprava: časopis za teoriju i praksu javne uprave* 13(2), 433–66.

²⁵ Radaelli, Claudio M. 2004. Europeanization: Solution or problem? *European Integration online Papers* 8(16), 1–23, 3.

²⁶ Ladrech, *Europeanization of Domestic Politics*, 86.

²⁷ A detailed literature review on Europeanisation is beyond the scope of this article. However, the wider field is sufficiently covered by Ladrech, Robert. 2010. *Europeanisation and National Politics*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan; Knill, Christoph and Dirk Lehmkuhl. 1999. How Europe Matters. *European Integration Online Papers* 3(7), 1–19; Börzel, *Towards Convergence in Europe?*; Buller, Jim and Andrew Gamble. 2002. Conceptualising Europeanisation. *Public Policy and Administration* 17(2), 4–24; Radaelli, *Europeanization: Solution or Problem?*; Radaelli, Claudio M. 2008. Europeanization, Policy Learning, and New Modes of Governance. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice* 10(3), 239–54; Bulmer and Radaelli. *Europeanisation of Member State Policy*; Violakis. *Europeanisation and Transformation of EU Security Policy*; Violakis, Petros. 2019. Europeanization of National Defense and Security: The Greek Case. *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 37(1), 61–98.

²⁸ Bulmer, Simon and Martin Burch. 2001. *The ‘Europeanisation’ of Central Government*, in *The Rules of Integration: Institutional Approaches to the Study of Europe*, edited by Aspinwall, Mark and Gerald Schneider. Manchester: University Press, 25, 45, 178.

²⁹ Börzel, Tanja A. and Diana Panke. 2016. *Europeanization*, in *European Union Politics*, edited by Cini, Michelle and Nieves Pérez-Solórzano Borrágán. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 115.

evolved over time. Hence, one may classify the pertinent literature in three main phases. The first phase of institutionalisation, which includes a complex process of social learning and change in a new context, tried to understand the acceptance of the partial loss of sovereignty by EU member states.³⁰ The second phase studied the sectoral impact of Europeanisation on domestic politics, which include political/governmental change and learning, policy-makers' activity and governmental response to social changes.³¹ The final phase dealt with the impact of Europeanisation on a country's foreign policy.³²

For the purpose of this research, Radaelli's 2004 approach to Europeanisation is considered most appropriate as it successfully incorporates most of the academic contributions to the term. Thus, according to Radaelli,

“Europeanization consists of processes of a) construction, b) diffusion and c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’ and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse.”³³

Given the scope of the research presented in this article, field work and good practice from the studied Twinning projects in Serbia have shown that the implementation of Twinning includes steps that correspond to Radaelli's approach, such as member state support to develop institutionalised rules of procedure or adjust national policy paradigms and ‘ways of doing things’ to the process of harmonising national law with the *acquis communautaire*. Overall, the case of Serbia confirmed the Twinning's attempt to incorporate a combination of both top-down and bottom-up approaches to create a sustainable relationship between the beneficiary country and EU institutions.

The contribution of development programmes, such as Twinning, in the Europeanisation process is only possible within a proper institutional environment – which is also a prerequisite for Europeanisation. The EU already provides the necessary legal framework and policy implementation tools for this, as shown in the introduction. The process has an international law dimension through the signing of bilateral agreements with candidate and partner countries. When it comes to the EU accession of any given candidate country, under the prerequisite of the EU's institutional environment, five general but distinct steps towards Europeanisation can be determined:³⁴

1. Common EU decision.
2. Adjustment of national political rhetoric.
3. Drafting of an EU-conforming legal framework.
4. Development of institutional structures.
5. Introduction into everyday life.

³⁰ Violakis, *Europeanisation and Transformation of EU Security Policy*, 42.

³¹ Violakis, *Europeanisation and Transformation of EU Security Policy*, 43.

³² For the case of Turkey, see Demirtaş, Birgül. 2015. Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Balkans: A Europeanized Foreign Policy in a De-Europeanized National Context? *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 17(2), 123–40.

³³ Radaelli, *Europeanization: Solution or problem?*, 3.

³⁴ Violakis, *Europeanisation and Transformation of EU Security Policy*, 29; Violakis, *Europeanization of National Defense*, 65.

Along the way, there are multiple evaluations and progress reports and, perhaps, misfits.³⁵ Given their form and characteristics, Twinning projects are to be found between steps three (legal framework creation) and four (institutional development) and provide for the micro-institutional environment that allows changes to take place on a macro/national level.

Twinning projects in Serbia: actors and processes

In Serbia, Twinning instruments (CARDS and IPA) are used, as in other pre-accession countries, in accordance with the Copenhagen criteria for EU accession: the consolidation of the rule of law, the transposition into the domestic legal system of part of the *acquis communautaire* and the contribution towards political, financial and institutional stabilisation.³⁶ The usage of such pre-accession instruments may follow the Open Method of Coordination, an intergovernmental means of governance among member states, which identifies several levels of compliance with EU and national strategic documents.³⁷ This instrument incorporates elements of the Europeanisation process and, more specifically, elements of the institutional environment, in which candidate member states are called to adapt their ways of doing things to create “shared beliefs and norms” defined and consolidated in the EU policy process.³⁸

In the case of Serbia, the distribution of EU funding includes certain actions and documents:

1. The EU enlargement policy: This policy sets priorities for a two-year period in terms of the fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria. The Annual Progress Reports present the EC’s detailed assessment of the state of play in each candidate or potential candidate country and sets out guidelines on reform priorities for the future.
2. The National Plan for the Implementation of *Acquis* (NPI), adopted in 2009, followed by the National Plan for the Adoption of the *Acquis* (NPAA) adopted in 2013 and the third revised version of NPAA, adopted in March 2018. These multiannual strategic documents include an institution-building plan for all ministries and governmental bodies responsible for harmonising domestic law with the EU *acquis* for a defined period.³⁹
3. The multi-annual, biannual and annual national programming for the usage of donor funds (including EU programmes): The most relevant one, the National Priorities for International Assistance (NAD) 2014-2017, with projections until 2020, was adopted in January 2014.
4. The process of programming EU funds: the drafting of sectoral planning documents and formulation of annual actions takes place within sectoral working groups.
5. National strategic documents that are linked with EU strategies (e.g. the contribution to EUROPE 2020), regional strategies (e.g. the South East Europe 2020 strategy) as well as other relevant national, regional and local strategies.

³⁵ Börzel, *Towards Convergence in Europe?*

³⁶ European Council. 1993. European Council in Copenhagen, 21-22 June 1993, Conclusions of the Presidency. Brussels: European Council. SN 180/1/93 REV 1.

³⁷ Tulmets, *Open Method of Coordination*.

³⁸ Radaelli, *Europeanization: Solution or Problem?*

³⁹ According to the latest NPAA, the deadline for harmonising domestic law with the EU *acquis* is the end of 2021.

These actions and documents result from common/joint EU decisions and reflect the five steps of the Europeanisation process. Furthermore, they constitute significant signs of procedural institutionalisation for reforms to take place according to specific guidelines. This is a bidirectional process, i.e. with both a top-down and bottom-up approach, that incorporates policy change and learning processes.⁴⁰ At the same time, this bidirectional process acts as a facilitator for the common/joint result, which in this case is the transition from a national governance model to an EU-oriented governance model.

When creating a project fiche for an EU-funded project, there is a specific hierarchy of documents to which one must refer, as explained above. Furthermore, it is important to point out that there are two preconditions for the participation of Serbian entities in EU-funded programmes. The first tackles the legal basis, established by the signing of the international agreement between the EC and the Republic of Serbia for each specific EU programme. The second is a financial condition, which represents the national contribution (co-financing) for participation in each programme and is partly refunded from the IPA funds.

The Serbian European Integration Office (SEIO) supported the strengthening of domestic administrative capabilities, particularly through the initialisation of Twinning, EU TAIEX and technical assistance programs. In July 2017, SEIO, the Serbian European Integration Office, became MEI, the Ministry for European Integration. The decision to upgrade SEIO to ministry level is a clear indication of the will of the Serbian Government to institutionalise EU-related formal processes. In this regard, it should be noted that showing willingness for policy change is part of the process of socialisation and learning.⁴¹

As the European integration process matured, a novelty in fund management was implemented in March 2014, when the EC permitted the Serbian administration to handle projects already approved at the Union level. This novelty reflected the EU's trust and Serbia's 'good fit' with the Europeanisation process. As a result, a Decentralised Implementation System (DIS) was established, meaning that the responsibility for implementing the IPA programmes was transferred from the EU to Serbian government institutions. Nevertheless, the EU Delegation in Serbia still exercises oversight in the implementation of these projects.

There are several policy documents and assessments of EU-funded programmes that include or are dedicated to Serbia. First, in a strategy paper the EC strongly supported the use of Twinning in the JHA sector, describing Twinning as "key ingredients to success".⁴² Retrospectively, Huba et al. evaluated that CARDS in Serbia also suggests a stronger use of Twinning in the JHA sector.⁴³ Additionally, Nugteren et al. analysed Twinning versus technical assistance

⁴⁰ Ladrech, *Europeanization of Domestic Politics*, 86; Radaelli, *Europeanization and Governance*, 244, 248, 251.

⁴¹ Ladrech, *Europeanisation and National Politics*, 33, 36.

⁴² European Commission. 2001. *CARDS Assistance Programme to the Western Balkans: Regional Strategy Paper 2002-2006* (accessed: 17 May 2020), attachment 5.

⁴³ Huba, Martin / Balic, Elma / Sandgren, Claes / Bremmers, Tim / Tag, Sylvia and Dieter Nill. 2009. *Retrospective Evaluation of CARDS Programmes in Serbia* (accessed: 17 May 2020), 26.

programmes, coming to the conclusion that the *acquis* relevance of sectors such as JHA, Finance and Agriculture is important when selecting a funding instrument.⁴⁴ Moreover, an assessment of international assistance in the Serbian health sector between 2000 and 2010 came to the conclusion that Twinning methods have proven effective and should be considered desirable.⁴⁵ To conclude, in the case of Serbia and even beyond the abovementioned findings underline the significant impact of Twinning as a mechanism and a facilitating factor in the Europeanisation process.

Research questions and methodology

This article analyses ongoing or already implemented Twinning projects in Serbia during the CARDS and IPA periods, from 2004 to September 2019, in order to tackle a series of research questions (RQs), the investigation of which has been rather neglected during previous analyses:

- RQ1: Are there any quantitative/qualitative differences in the sectoral distribution of Twinning projects between the CARDS and IPA eras? For this, a sectoral analysis on the full dataset was conducted and compared with earlier observations.
- RQ2: Do international relations play a significant role when choosing particular EU member states as Twinning partners? Since EU accession is a long-lasting political process, the allocation of Twinning to EU MS shall be examined.
- RQ3: What are the underlying reasons for EU member state participation in Twinning projects? The Twinning partnership distribution shall be closely examined with the basic assumption being that the most active EU member states are those with the strongest bilateral economic and political ties with Serbia.
- RQ4: Based on the findings, is it possible to determine the degree of internalisation of EU values in Serbia?

In order to tackle the above questions, the authors reconstructed the entire population of the Twinning projects that were initiated in Serbia during the CARDS (2004-2006) and IPA (2010-2013) periods. Contracted, on-going and concluded projects have been taken into account. For reasons of methodological clarity, projects that are mentioned in official documents but are not in one of the above phases of implementation were ruled out from the investigation. Particular importance was given to the quality of data sources, with data coming from acknowledged European and Serbian institutions as well as from published reports. All data that was used in the evaluation was cross-checked to eliminate any possible errors and any deviations in the statements between sources are stated. In any case, when any discrepancies between different sources were detected, the data from the Serbian European Integration Office (SEIO) or the Central Finance and Contracts Unit (CFCU) in Serbia have been used for the evaluation.

⁴⁴ Nugteren et al., *Twinning versus Technical Assistance*, 33.

⁴⁵ Vanekamp, Dineke / Makarova, Tatyana and Malcolm McGreevy. 2010. Assessment of International Assistance in the Serbian Health Sector (accessed 17 May 2020), 75.

The list below contains the sources that were used to compile the dataset:

1. SEIO.⁴⁶
2. The SEIO publication “Twinning for Winning”.⁴⁷
3. Twinning projects related announcements.⁴⁸
4. IPA Twinning pipeline,⁴⁹
5. Notified results from Twinning project fiches.⁵⁰
6. Individual Twinning project websites.

Established statistical and graphical methods were used for data analysis and evaluation. Five main parameters were collected for each Twinning project: funding instrument (incl. year), project title, sector, budget and status (finished, ongoing or contracted). Consequently, data was analysed across three basic dimensions: time of implementation, allocation of sectors and origin of Twinning partners.⁵¹ The entire data matrix was placed in a permanent online repository and made available to the scientific community.⁵²

Analysis and interpretation

The first level of analysis, which corresponds to RQ1, tackles the differences between CARDS (2004-2006) and IPA I (2007-2013) funding periods. For classification and statistical reasons, each Twinning project is assigned to a specific sector according to inherent data provided by EC and the SEIO. In total, the entire population (N=72) was classified in nine sectors. A tenth sector (‘other’) sums up the remaining sectors with low occurrence, i.e. Cadastre, European Integration and Finance.

In CARDS, agriculture is the most frequent sector (five projects), representing 29% of total funding, followed by JHA (three projects), which absorbs 17.5% of the funds, while employment (two projects) accounts for 10.5% of funds.⁵³ After a break of 3 programmatic years (there were no projects between 2007 and 2009), the study of the IPA period showed that agriculture and JHA sectors still hold the top positions. JHA is up front (15 projects, 27.8% of funds), followed by agriculture (14 projects, 24.1% of funds).

Based on the findings, three basic conclusions can be reached. First, agriculture captured the top two positions in funding during both CARDS and IPA I. This is certainly in line with national economic trends, since agriculture, forestry and

⁴⁶ SEIO contributed with a validated dataset on CARDS and IPA Twinning projects.

⁴⁷ Vukašinić, Ivana. 2011. Twinning for Winning. Belgrade: Republic of Serbia Government, European Integration Office.

⁴⁸ Department for Contracting and Financing of EU Funded Programmes (accessed: 17 May 2020).

⁴⁹ The Twinning pipeline can be accessed through European Commission. Twinning (accessed: 17 May 2020). The recent timeline as well as Twinning related material, such as manuals, national contact points and activity reports can be found therein.

⁵⁰ A series of such official European Commission lists of results ranging from 2010 to 2017 were accessed and were mainly used for data validation.

⁵¹ For any given Twinning, the majority of experts originate from the contracted partners. However, Twinning manuals allow for public administration experts from other member states to take part in the implementation.

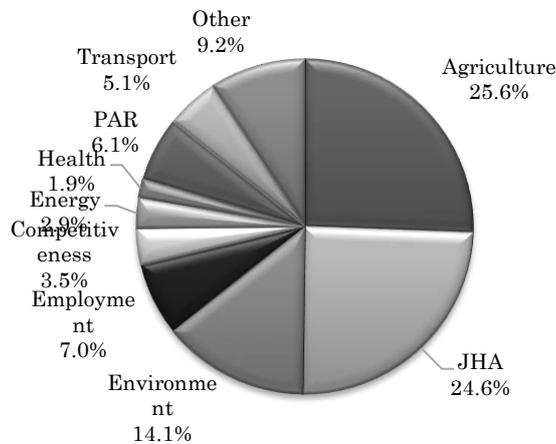
⁵² Fitisilis, Fotios / Jovanovic, Aleksandra and Dimitris Garantziotis. 2019. EU Twinning projects in Serbia data set (accessed: 10 March 2020).

⁵³ The sectoral distribution of Twinning projects during the CARDS and IPA eras is shown in Table 1 in the Appendix.

fishing make up 6.3% of the Serbian GDP.⁵⁴ One also needs to take into account that 37.8% of the total EU multiannual budget for 2014-2020 is allocated to the CAP. Thus, the high involvement of a candidate country in EU funded projects in the field of agriculture may be seen as preparation for the future use of CAP.⁵⁵ Second, the overall second best position of JHA is in line with EU membership criteria, as well as EU and national strategic documents, and shows the importance that the EU attributes to the strengthening of the Rule of Law and improvement of national capacities in this field. It may be also be interpreted as a precursor to the opening of related chapters in the EU accession negotiations.⁵⁶ Third, the environmental sector is the third highest-funded sector in Serbia, attracting 14.1% of Twinning funds. Compared to CARDS, in the IPA era Twinning projects in the environmental sector more than doubled their share regarding aggregate funding (+120%).

These results are consistent with EU and Serbian policy agendas. From the EU side, there is long-term interest in sustainable development, as manifested in multiple strategic documents such as the Sustainable Development Strategy, the EU 2020 Strategy and the Better Regulation Agenda. For Serbia, the negotiation Chapter 27 - Environment is considered to be one of the most complex ones, having in mind both the scope of the *acquis* and the necessary financial resources. The Serbian Government and line ministries estimated that 10 billion euro would be needed for compliance with relevant EU standards.⁵⁷

Diagram 1: Sectoral funding (in % of total, CARDS and IPA eras)



⁵⁴ According to Republički zavod za statistiku. 2019. *Gross Domestic product, 2018* (accessed 17 May 2020). This is the fourth-highest GDP sector share, only behind manufacturing (14.5%), trade and vehicle repair (11.5%) and real estate (7%).

⁵⁵ See Council Regulation No 1311/2013 and European Parliament resolution P7_TA(2013)0455.

⁵⁶ Chapter 23 - Fundamental rights and Chapter 24 - Justice, freedom and security were among the ones that opened first, in July 2016.

⁵⁷ Government of Serbia. 2011. *National Environmental Approximation Strategy for the Republic of Serbia* (accessed: 17 May 2020). A recent estimation even increases this figure to 15 billion euro, see Mondo.rs. *Srbija spremna - poglavlje o ekologiji ide u EU, budžet za prirodu veći*. 26 December 2019 (accessed: 17 May 2020).

Diagram 1 presents the sectoral allocation of Twinning funds (in % of the total investment) for the entire funding period covering both CARDS and IPA eras. The distribution of funds is similar to the IPA era alone, with the greatest part invested in agriculture (25.6%) and JHA (24.6%). These two sectors, which account for more than 50% of funds, are followed by environment (14.1%) and employment (7.0%), which together account for more than one fifth (21.1%) of total Twinning funds. Those figures show a clear joint EU-Serbia preference to strengthen certain sectors, a move that – as shown – directly correlates to both EU and national strategic documents. This preference indicates a strong will for reforms in the EU direction and constitutes a strong proof for the impact of Europeanisation.

In order to find out whether the above data is comparable with other pre-accession cases, the PHARE programme experience is discussed. The PHARE programme (1990-2006) was initially developed as a response to challenges faced by the countries of Central and Eastern Europe with the goal to:

“undertake a series of sweeping, systemic transformation measures to replace the inherited system of centralised and hierarchical economic and political decision-making, with a system of democracy based on a market economy, the rule of law, respect for human and minority rights, and a functional civil society”.⁵⁸

PHARE was also used to prepare candidate countries for the 2004 and 2007 EU enlargements. Support took the form of technical assistance, initially for purchasing essential equipment, and gradually developed to more sophisticated technical and administrative/institutional support. This approach did not change during the initial phases of CARDS and IPA programmes. Together with TAIEX, Twinning, as a technical assistance instrument, was designed in the context of PHARE and continued to be used as an important tool of enlargement policy. Though utilised during different periods of the EU integration policy, similar patterns emerge. In both cases, Twinning utilisation was in line with EU and national strategic documents, putting three main areas in the centre of intervention: Justice and Home Affairs, Agriculture and Environment.

PHARE data from 1174 Twinning projects for 12 accession countries (for 2004 and 2007 enlargements) show that JHA, with 22% of the projects, is the most frequent Twinning sector, a value comparable with the relevant CARDS/IPA Twinning in Serbia (25%). Similarly, environmental Twinning under PHARE occupy 11%, which is roughly in line with their frequency in the Serbian case under investigation (15%). However, two differences may be noted. First, Agriculture/Fisheries under PHARE is the third most frequent sector and amounts for 15% of the projects. This is significantly lower than the relevant top-seeded Serbian Twinning sector (26%) and underlines the policy priority of restructuring the agricultural sector. Second, 17% of projects under PHARE dealt with Public Finance/Internal Market, sectors underrepresented among

⁵⁸ Europeaid. 2015. *Evaluation of PHARE financial assistance to Bulgaria (BG), Cyprus (CY), Czech Republic (CZ), Estonia (EE), Hungary (HU), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Malta (MT), Poland (PL), Romania (RO), Slovakia (SK), Slovenia (SI)* (accessed: 12 January 2021), 22.

Serbian Twinning (8%),⁵⁹ a finding that again complies with the reform strategy.

Furthermore, the mean Twinning project budget (in euro) was studied. The average budget of a Twinning project under PHARE for all 12 candidate countries was 0.91 million euro.⁶⁰ An evaluation of more recent Twinning (2010-2017) in the enlargement countries showed an average Twinning budget of 0.75 million euro.⁶¹ In the case of Serbia, the average project budget for the CARDS period was 1.68 million euro, which dropped significantly to 1.18 million euro during the IPA period. The latter represents a decrease of nearly 30%. If the rule of thumb for 'standard' Twinning projects is that their budget is 0.5 million euro for every six months of implementation, it can be deducted that earlier Twinning projects during the PHARE era were generally shorter and lasted, on average, less than a year. Twinning projects during the CARDS era in Serbia tackled both general policy and restructuring issues, in addition to transposing specific parts of the EU *acquis* to the national legal order. Trace evidence in this regard shows that, with increasing maturity and the deepening Europeanisation of Serbian administration, more specialised, flexible – and thus shorter – Twinning projects are necessary. This explains the sharp decrease in the average project budget in the IPA period. Contracting of Twinning Light projects also contributes to this trend.⁶²

The next level of analysis takes on the Twinning partnerships.⁶³ As Twinning projects are complex multi-dimensional endeavours that penetrate several hierarchical layers, they are difficult to implement single-handedly. For instance, the deployment of high-level member state officials over large periods in the beneficiary country might weaken administrative operations in the organisation of origin. In addition, a single member state might not have the entire spectrum of the necessary expertise at its disposal. Hence, from an EU member state point of view, a partner scheme with a leading member state organisation up-front and a number of junior member state partners as supporting entities is proven to be better equipped to successfully implement Twinning projects. Twinning partner interaction with Beneficiary organisations incorporates, according to Lodge, source triggers of Europeanisation, namely: *mimetic* (civil servants' interaction resulting in best practice and national coordination networks); *professionalisation* (policy networks' transnationalisation of societal actors' spill-over) and *domestic politics* (re-orientation of domestic institutions and regulations, domestic policy, lobbying of elite groups as a driving force for domestic adjustment).⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Europeaid, *Evaluation of PHARE*, 33.

⁶⁰ Europeaid, *Evaluation of PHARE*, 33.

⁶¹ Europeaid, *Evaluation of the Twinning instrument*, 228.

⁶² Twinning Light projects constitute a more flexible low-cost alternative compared to 'standard' Twinning. They are shorter (up to six months/eight with extension), flexible and more specialised instruments that are suitable for the mature stage of the EU integration process.

⁶³ Scientific literature covering this aspect is scarce. A study in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) region (less relevant for Serbia), which also took into account the Twinning partnership dimension, has been conducted by Bouscharain, Gérard and Jean-Bernard Moreau. 2012. *Evaluation of the Institutional Twinning Instrument in the Countries Covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy* (accessed: 17 May 2020), 10–12.

⁶⁴ Lodge, Martin. 2002. Varieties of Europeanisation and the National Regulatory State. *Public Policy and Administration* 17(2), 43–67.

Overall, the Twinning projects under investigation are implemented by 119 Twinning partners from 20 member states. Only eight member states have still not participated in Twinning projects in Serbia (Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Ireland, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Malta and Portugal). Initially, this may not be seen as surprising, since Estonia, Malta and Cyprus joined the EU during the 2004 enlargement wave, with Bulgaria joining in 2007. On the other hand, the missing seniority in the Union and the resulting lack of deep ties with EU institutions is definitely not a reason for abstinence from Twinning activities, since at the same time new EU member states such as Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Hungary seem to be particularly active.

The total number of partners is higher than the total number of projects, with 25 against 17 for CARDS and 94 against 55 for IPA, indicating that there are projects with multiple Twinning partners.⁶⁵ While there is no intrinsic limit for the number of partners, the majority of projects in Serbia are implemented either by a single (35 out of 72: 48.6%) or by two member state partners (26 out of 72: 36.1%). Finally, 11 out of 72 projects (15.3%), none in the CARDS period, are implemented by three partners. To study partnerships in more detail and to obtain statistically significant results, the focus is placed on the role of the seven most represented member states, which account for 68.9% of partner slots. These are the countries that have participated in at least six projects in the examined period. It is found that the top four countries regarding Twinning participation, Austria (19), Germany (18), France (12) and Slovenia (11), fill more than half (50.4%) of the member state partner slots. These findings closely match those from the evaluation of recent Twinning (2010-2017) in enlargement countries, where the top seven (lead) partner countries participate in 68.4% of the projects, with the only notable difference being that, in the enlargement context, Slovenia is replaced by Spain.⁶⁶

To tackle RQ2, the sectoral distribution per member state is investigated.⁶⁷ At first, it is obvious that the most frequent Twinning partners participated in both sectors that receive the majority of funds, agriculture and JHA. Austria, which participates in most Twinning (19), seems to concentrate its efforts on just five distinct sectors, but with a preference for the environment, since seven out of 19 projects, or 36.8%, belong to this sector. On the other hand, Germany and particularly France do not seem to be attracted by a particular topic, with the latter participating in eight different sectors.

Slovenia is among the most active member states, since it became the fourth most frequent Twinning partner for Serbia with a clear preference for JHA (six out of 11 Twinning, that is 54.5%, are within this sector). This level of representation is not unexpected. Slovenia, as a former Yugoslav republic, shares the historical background, administrative structure and a similar language with Serbia, thus potentially having a better understanding of the challenges Serbia may face during its EU accession process. In addition, a

⁶⁵ Statistics for Twinning partners in Serbia are displayed in Table 2 in the Appendix.

⁶⁶ Europeaid, *Evaluation of the Twinning instrument*, 220.

⁶⁷ Table 3 in the Appendix shows the distribution of Twinning per member state in sectors, i.e. policy areas, for the seven countries that have implemented at least six Twinning projects.

decade-long institutional learning process, during which Slovenia implemented PHARE and CARDS projects before becoming a member state, allowed the country to accumulate knowledge and ‘know-how’ and therefore get used to operating within an EU-affine institutional environment, which is a prerequisite for Europeanisation. Last but not least, Slovenia is a relatively new member state and has recently undergone similar reforms to those Serbia has to go through.

To further explain and understand these findings, one must focus on decision-making procedures for choosing Twinning partners. Twinning rules⁶⁸ allow institutions from beneficiary countries to have a decisive vote when determining the member state institution(s) that will be their partner in project implementation.⁶⁹ Jonić Kapnias notes in this regard that the consistency of the EU policy could be undermined by the possibility of freely choosing a Twinning partner based on former bilateral cooperation.⁷⁰ Nonetheless, Tulmets does not see in Twinning a transfer of a European model in the East, but rather a competition field between different national models.⁷¹

Naturally, the existing political and economic relations between beneficiary countries and member states are expected to be important decision factors. This seems to be the case in the ENP region, with France being a dominant Twinning partner.⁷² At the same time, France’s economic ties with the Maghreb and the greater Middle East North Africa (MENA) Region are well established, not least because of the underlying francophone effect.⁷³ Thus, the final level of analysis specifically takes on bilateral economic relations and Foreign Direct Investments (FDI).

When it comes to economic relations between Serbia and EU member states, the volume of bilateral trade and FDI could be considered an index for comparison among peers. When considering FDI, the pertinent literature does not immediately correlate FDI inflows to a certain country with political ties or any sort of bilateral relations, such as ties between EU member states and candidate countries. Literature in this field shows that investors, domestic or foreign, value stable business conditions rather than state subventions (hugely used by transitional governments to attract FDI), which may also be regarded as a source of corruption. For instance, investors are sensitive to macroeconomic stability for short to medium term investments in developing countries.⁷⁴ At the same time, evidence shows that many foreign investors, regardless their origin (EU or third

⁶⁸ See Twinning Manual, 2017/2018 update.

⁶⁹ This is rather obvious when a CFCU has been established and the candidate country has assumed control over the decentralised management of EU funds. Nevertheless, it is also the case for centralised programmes, when the European Commission is the contracting authority via its Delegation in the candidate country. Serbia established a CFCU on 5 February 2009 through Government Conclusion 05, Nr. 110-1740/2008-2.

⁷⁰ Jonić Kapnias, *Institutional Twinning*, 434; 457–458.

⁷¹ Tulmets, Elsa. 2005. The Introduction of the Open Method of Coordination in the European Enlargement Policy: Analysing the Impact of the new Phare/Twinning Instrument. *European Political Economy Review* 3(1), 54–90, 83.

⁷² Bouscharain and Moreau, *Evaluation of Institutional Twinning Instrument*.

⁷³ Lavallée, Emmanuelle and Julie Lochard, J. 2019. The Empire Strikes Back: French-African trade after independence. *Review of International Economics* 27(1), 398.

⁷⁴ World Bank. 2014. *2013 World Investment and Political Risk* (accessed 12 January 2021).

party), are willing to disregard weak regulation and institutional support and suffer additional expenses caused by corruption with the possibility of receiving national subventions.

Goel and Budak examined corruption in transition countries and concluded that economic prosperity in a country reduces corruption.⁷⁵ They also point out that comprehensive reforms are needed in transitional countries for corruption to be reduced. Similarly, Budak and Reich investigated businesspeople's attitudes towards corruption in the Balkans and concluded that it constitutes an obstacle to doing business and is the most important issue governments should address.⁷⁶ On the other hand, institutional reforms that benefit the macroeconomic environment and curb corruption are initiated or can be linked with the planning and implementation of EU projects. To this end, the participation of member states in Twinning in Serbia could be cautiously attributed to a broader preparatory step towards improving the business environment and protection of investments, for the sake of developing long-term bilateral business ties.

Dražović presents an FDI ranking of member states by cumulative value (2001-2009) that includes Italy, Greece, Germany, Austria, Slovenia, France and the UK.⁷⁷ Based on data from the Development Agency of Serbia (RAS), when considering only EU countries, the top FDI ranking spots by value in Serbia are held by Italy, Austria, Greece, Germany and France,⁷⁸ followed by Belgium and Slovenia.⁷⁹ A US source, the International Trade Administration, using data from the State Department's Office of Investment Affairs, derives that the top EU countries in FDI in Serbia for 2015 were the Netherlands, Austria, Cyprus and Germany.⁸⁰

There are a few EU member states, e.g. Italy, Germany, Romania and Hungary, that are involved both in intense bilateral economic relations in trade (both on the exports and imports side) and FDI in Serbia, as well as participating in EU Twinning projects.⁸¹ The involvement of these EU member states may be an indication of their significant interest in benefiting from bilateral economic ties and securing their investments. There are similar findings in all Western Balkan candidate countries, which conduct more than 60% of their bilateral trade with up to five EU member states.⁸²

⁷⁵ Goel, Rajeev K. and Jelena Budak. 2006. Corruption in Transition Economies: Effects of Government Size, Country Size and Economic Reforms. *Journal of Economics and Finance* 30(2), 240–250.

⁷⁶ Budak, Jelena and Edo Rajh. 2013. Corruption as an Obstacle for Doing Business in the Western Balkans: A Business Sector Perspective. *International Small Business Journal* 32(2), 140–157.

⁷⁷ Dražović, Aleksandra. 2011. *EU External Economic Relations with Serbia*. Master Thesis. Thessaloniki: University of Macedonia, 57.

⁷⁸ Radenković, Ivan. 2016. *Foreign Direct Investments in Serbia*. Belgrade: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Southeast Europe, 32.

⁷⁹ According to RAS Acting Director Petrovic, Milos. [Q&A](#) (accessed: 20 March 2020).

⁸⁰ See latest Investment Climate Statement. When comparing FDI data, one needs to be aware of possible methodological differences in their calculation. This point is discussed in more detail later.

⁸¹ Republički zavod za statistiku. 2019. [30.09.2019. - External trade, August 2019](#) (accessed 25 March 2020).

⁸² Medjak, Vladimir (ed.). 2018. *Effects of Stabilisation and Association Agreements and CEFTA2006 on WB6 European Integration and Regional Cooperation: Achievements and Ways Forward*. Belgrade: European Movement in Serbia.

Hence, despite some methodological issues in the calculation of financial data (e.g. prior to 2010 data for investment economies were recorded according to the nationality of the bank that makes the transfer rather than by the nationality of the foreign investors), there is a high degree of correlation observed between FDI in Serbia and the top positioning of Twinning partners. In effect, the authors consider that a high FDI ranking is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for an EU member state to steadily participate in Twinning projects. This supports the basic assumption of RQ3, however further comparative data, such as from other candidate or partner countries, is needed to provide substantial proof.

Besides the aforementioned economic dimension, possible political reasons may have limited representation in Twinning partnerships. With regards to Serbia's EU integration, an investigation was conducted to establish whether the countries that did not recognise Kosovo as an independent state, i.e. Slovakia, Greece, Cyprus, Romania and Spain, may have had higher possibilities to be chosen as Twinning partners.⁸³ With the exception of Cyprus, these countries have participated as Twinning partners in Serbia, being mostly in the middle field of the participation rankings (see Table 2). However, without knowing their overall participation in Twinning proposals, it is not conclusive whether this specific political attribute actually affects their chances of becoming Twinning partners.

Conclusions

Studies on institutional Twinning are not a rarity. However, they often regard different regions, e.g. the ENP area,⁸⁴ cover earlier periods, e.g. the PHARE pre-accession fund,⁸⁵ or analyse the impact of projects on specific sectors, e.g. the Health sector in Serbia.⁸⁶ The Western Balkans and more specifically Serbia are rarely part of these studies. However, while the study of specific twinning cases remains useful within their own realm, macro-observations on Twinning projects offer many insights into regional/sectoral policy, the EU agenda and international relations. This contribution highlights the sectoral distribution of Twinning in Serbia during the CARDS and IPA eras. Light is shed on Twinning partnerships, while correlations with formerly distant fields, such as FDI and political relations, are also analysed. Ultimately, using Radaelli's approach, the article establishes strong links between Twinning and the wider Europeanisation process.

The most important general findings are summarised below:

- The majority of Twinning projects in Serbia focus on five areas of intervention, i.e. agriculture, JHA, environment, employment and public administration reform, with 77.8% of projects (56) attracting 77.3% of funds.
- When observing the full period (2004-2019), agriculture, as the basis of the Serbian economy and one of the most important sectors on the EU side, given that CAP budget takes up more than one third of the EU budget, is

⁸³ A detailed investigation would invoke the examination of bilateral ties with all countries.

⁸⁴ Bouscharain and Moreau, *Evaluation of Institutional Twinning Instrument*.

⁸⁵ Bailey and de Propriis, *A Bridge Too Far?*

⁸⁶ Vanekamp / Makarova and McGreevy. *Serbian Health Sector*.

the most heavily strengthened sector.⁸⁷ It attracts 26.4% of the projects and 25.6% of the Twinning funds.

- The JHA sector has a particular weight, given the sheer volume of the EU *acquis* and the specificities of national legislation. As mentioned in the enlargement strategy as well as in the Indicative Strategy Paper for Serbia, the rule of law is at the heart of the enlargement process. Hence, JHA, in terms of Twinning frequency and funding volume, is very close to the figures from agriculture, namely 25% and 24.6%, respectively.⁸⁸
- The analysis shows a non-even distribution of involvement among member states and, thus, a tendency for some to be more active than others in Serbia's EU accession process.
- The member state involvement in Twinning projects could be regarded as an additional tool to strengthen ties with the Serbian administration and/or even the ground for future investments.
- It was shown that Twinning projects may facilitate candidate countries' Europeanisation process.

Quantitative and qualitative analysis has produced evidence to respond to the four research questions. Significant differences could be determined between CARDS and IPA, particularly in the sectoral distribution of projects. Institution-building support throughout the PHARE era was provided primarily via technical assistance, including Twinning, an observation that was also confirmed for Twinning in Serbia under CARDS and IPA. Unlike its predecessors, such as CARDS, PHARE, ISPA, and SAPARD, the IPA programme is by some characteristics more advanced and by certain means similar to EU structural funds. This can be established when observing, for instance, the deadlines, the type of programming, programming period and the national structure of management institutions or accreditation system. Furthermore, with IPA, for the first time, the EC distinguishes five components/sectors to be enhanced: transition assistance and institution building, cross-border cooperation, regional development, human resources development and rural development.⁸⁹

The usage of different EU programmes in Serbia went along with the EU accession process. As a potential candidate country, Serbia was eligible for CARDS and the first two IPA components until 2012. After it was granted candidate country status in March 2012, together with the accreditation of a decentralised system for EU funds usage (DIS) in 2014 and with the introduction of IPA II in 2014, Serbia was entitled to the sectoral approach. Thus, since 2014 EU financial assistance is utilised for projects in sectors defined as priority areas by strategic documents, such as JHA, aiming at strengthening the Rule of Law and the environment. This development also appears to be supported by numerical data. Trailing back with 11.5 percentage points compared to agriculture during CARDS, JHA assumed the top-funded position in the IPA era. During IPA, the environmental sector also appears to have strengthened,

⁸⁷ The usage of IPARD (IPA for Rural Development) programme started in 2016 and can be seen as a preparation for the future involvement in CAP.

⁸⁸ The emphasis of the realised Twinning projects in JHA was placed in key areas of the rule of law, such as judicial reform, anti-corruption policy, independence of key institutions, freedom of expression, anti-discrimination policy and protection of minorities.

⁸⁹ EC Regulation, 1085/2006.

gaining 9.2% compared to CARDS. Vice versa, interventions in employment seem to be lower in IPA by 5.1%, but still sufficient for the sector to clinch a top-five position.

The selection of partners can also be viewed as a political decision that involves taking into account the inter-state relations with Twinning candidates. In the case of Serbia, there are a few obvious starting points: cooperation with neighbouring countries that become member states, cooperation with countries that do not recognise Kosovo as an independent state and cooperation with influential member states. The authors were not able to determine whether the recognition of Kosovo plays a role when choosing particular member states as Twinning partners. What seems to matter, on the other hand, is cooperation with two former Yugoslav republics that have now become member states: Slovenia, which currently occupies the fourth position from the top in Twinning participation, and Croatia. Together, these two countries contribute to a significant proportion of the Twinning projects (18.1%). France and Germany, traditionally perceived as influential players in regards to EU politics, are also frequent Twinning partners.

Member state participation in Twinning was further studied through the lens of bilateral trade volume and Foreign Direct Investments, which were intensified with the beginning of the implementation of SAA. An examination of the links between member states and Serbia reveals that those with the highest level of bilateral trade and FDI in Serbia, such as Germany and Italy, are also those that participate most in implementing Twinning projects. Finally, in the context of the Europeanisation process, the analysis suggests that in the 2004-2019 period the Twinning instrument in Serbia followed the usual adjustments made in its country status: starting as a potential candidate country, then candidate country, then the initialisation of the negotiation process. Notably, the article highlights that the Twinning instrument is used in accordance with national and EU strategic documents, while constituting a significant part and facilitating factor for Europeanisation.

Though the direct impact of Twinning in the Europeanisation process of a country is difficult to measure quantitatively, the authors have shown that they can act as facilitating factors, thus revealing a clear connection. The Europeanisation effect of Twinning has also been evident in the case of the latest EU member, Croatia. An evaluation of the instrument shows that throughout accession negotiations Twinning was “one of the most favoured instruments to help Croatia to join the EU” and proved “crucial to ensure the timely adoption of EU *acquis*”.⁹⁰ Their suitability for the work on harmonising domestic legislation with the *acquis communautaire* is a distinct feature that also makes Twinning particularly useful for other candidate countries, such as Serbia.

Recommendations and outlook

Inevitably, based on the findings, the authors, who have actively participated in Twinning at both ends of the process, i.e. member state and beneficiary institutions, have assembled a set of remarks and recommendations for the next

⁹⁰ Europeaid, *Evaluation of the Twinning instrument*, 70.

generation of Twinnings. Despite popular belief that after all these years of Twinning implementation not much can be added to the instrument itself, Twinning, particularly as a facilitating tool for the – nonetheless time-consuming – Europeanisation process, can still be considerably improved.

Twinning often result in long lists of recommendations that require political will and substantial efforts to materialise and achieve sustainable results. Without systematic review and evaluation, it remains doubtful whether evidence of recommendation uptake can be collected.⁹¹ *Ex-post* evaluation of Twinning frequently takes the form of third-party sectoral evaluation based on questionnaires and interviews with sample projects. This rather mechanical approach rarely reflects on single projects or becomes the basis of development for new actions within the investigated sector. On top of that, in limited cases, Twinning review missions are requested by EU Delegation officials and take the form of TAIEX missions. In order to avoid disrupting the potential that has been gradually achieved in beneficiary organisations after a Twinning project has concluded,⁹² the authors suggest an automatic institutional review process for all Twinning.⁹³ A successful review could be linked with a post-implementation phase, in the form of smaller, smarter and more flexible instruments.

When it comes to Europeanisation, this review could include the realisation of the aforementioned five key steps, with the final step, i.e. its introduction in everyday life, being the expected result.⁹⁴ Progress in the second and third steps, i.e. adjustment of national political rhetoric and drafting of an EU-conforming legal framework, respectively, are also important, because they reflect on legal and infrastructure reforms towards EU governance.

Macro-analyses like this one offer considerable country or regional-level insights. However, the evaluation of each single Twinning project still represents a challenge, since they must be conducted individually, timeously and in detail. Ultimately, the success of Twinning will remain the joint responsibility of member state institutions and their counterparts from the beneficiary country, as it requires commitment and engagement from both sides. Hence, with thousands of implemented Twinning and many in the development stage, a standard form of project management, e.g. using the EC's PM² project management methodology,⁹⁵ could be considered as a horizontal standard for implementation. On the beneficiary side, since Twinning have a standard baseline format, public service employees should be trained for fiche development and implementing such projects. In this regard, a strong public administration on both sides should be viewed as an asset and, in most cases, the crucial factor for successful Twinning project implementation.

Twinning rely on intense cooperation between member states and the beneficiary country's institutions and, almost exclusively, this cooperation takes

⁹¹ Europeaid, *Evaluation of the Twinning instrument*, 196.

⁹² A constraint also raised by Bailey and de Propriis, *A Bridge Too Phare?*

⁹³ This proposal is in the context of the relevant post-project planning recommendation of the PHARE evaluation; Europeaid, *Evaluation of PHARE*, 15.

⁹⁴ Violakis, *Europeanisation and Transformation of EU Security Policy*, 65.

⁹⁵ Kourounakis, Nicos and Athanassios Maraslis. 2018. *PM² Project Management Methodology: Guide 3.0*. Brussels: European Commission.

the form of physical interaction, such as meetings, workshops and roundtables, to exchange technical and institutional expertise. Disruptions likely to be caused due to parliamentary elections, political instability or other unforeseen circumstances have always been limiting factors for seamless implementation. The Twinning instrument will need to adjust, if not evolve, if the EC wants it to remain relevant for the EU accession process and its regional cooperation activities. In this regard, Twinning projects could be improved to ensure flexibility and adaptability to new challenges. Finally, almost two decades after Papadimitriou and Phinnemore wondered about the degree of internalisation of EU values, norms and procedures in the Western Balkans,⁹⁶ this question (that largely corresponds to RQ4) still remains open to a large extent. This article offers strong indications, yet a thorough and in-depth evaluation of Twinning is further necessary to pinpoint their influence on the Europeanisation Process.

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Appendix

Table 1: CARDS and IPA Twinning projects in Serbia (2004-2019)

Sector	CARDS (#)	CARDS (M €)	CARDS (M %)	IPA (#)	IPA (M €)	IPA (M %)
Agriculture	5	8.3	29.0	14	15.6	24.1
JHA	3	5	17.5	15	18.0	27.8
Environment	1	2.2	7.7	10	11.0	16.9
Employment ⁹⁷	2	3	10.5	2	3.5	5.4
PAR	1	1.4	4.9	3	4.3	6.7
Transport	1	1.5	5.2	2	3.3	5.0
Competitiveness	-	-	-	3	3.3	5.1
Energy	1	1.2	4.2	1	1,5	2.3
Health	1	1.5	5.2	1	0.3	0.4
Other	2	4.5	15.7	4	4.1	6.3
Total	17	28.6	100.0	55	64.6	100.0

⁹⁷ Employment includes human resources and social development.

Table 2: Member state statistics for Twinning projects (includes Twinning Light projects)⁹⁸

EU MS	CARDS (#)	IPA (#)	All	%
AT	3	16	19	16.0
DE	9	9	18	15.1
FR	3	9	12	10.1
SI	3	8	11	9.2
IT	1	7	8	6.7
UK	1	7	8	6.7
NL	1	5	6	5.0
CZ	-	5	5	4.2
HU	1	4	5	4.2
LT	1	4	5	4.2
DK	-	4	4	3.4
EL	-	4	4	3.4
ES	1	2	3	2.5
RO	-	2	2	1.7
SK	1	1	2	1.7
SE	-	2	2	1.7
HR	-	2	2	1.7
LV	-	1	1	0.8
PL	-	1	1	0.8
FI	-	1	1	0.8
Total	25	94	119	100.0

Table 3: Number of Twinning; country against sector; EU MS with more than six Twinning

Sectors/ EU MS	AT	DE	FR	SI	IT	UK	NL
Agriculture	5	2	2	1	5	3	3
JHA	5	5	1	6	1	4	3
Environment	7	5	2	2	-	-	-
Employment	-	2	1	-	-	-	-
PAR	-	-	2	-	1	-	-
Transport	1	1	1	-	-	-	-
Competitiveness	-	-	-	-	1	1	-
Health	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Energy	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Other	1	2	1	2	-	-	-

⁹⁸ The grey area marks the seven most-represented member states that are discussed in-text in more detail.