

A marathon to nowhere

Conceptualisation of the integrations of the Western Balkans into the EU through the ACCESSION IS A RACE metaphor

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The paper examines the ACCESSION IS A RACE metaphor in the online news articles published in three Western Balkans' countries (Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Hercegovina), in the context of their accession to the EU. Through the methodological lens of the conceptual metaphor theory and critical metaphor analysis, our study shows that the conceptualisation of the accession as a race might purport different, even mutually conflicted political stances, i.e. it can have a laudatory function praising those at the forefront of the "race", while at the same time calling for patience invoking the picture of the race as a marathon, long and exhausting, demanding in both time and stamina. Without delving further into the political reasons, concerns and vested interests of the stakeholders involved, what can be said with much certainty is that both the EU and the regional officials have made some creative excuses for the excessive duration of the EU integration process for the WB's countries, and these have been analysed in the present study. The analysis has shown that the "finish line" of the race (the accession itself), long or short, is far less important in the regional news discourse than reaching further out than your co-runners, i.e. your immediate neighbours and competitors.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, critical metaphor analysis, WB, EU, sport metaphors

1. Introduction

The accession process of the Western Balkans' (WB) countries has turned out to be rather long and their membership still fairly uncertain. This is very different from the accession processes of the countries which joined the EU at the turn of

the millennium, and this new political situation has engendered new accession metaphors, among which sport conceptual metaphors, and, in particular, *rac*ing metaphors, stand prominent. Thus, although the EU accession process does not entail any real competition between the candidate countries, the accession of the WB countries is frequently conceptualised as a race in the regional political and media discourse, with the candidates being rivals, some of them even self-proclaimed race leaders, all dashing towards what seems to be an elusive finish line.

In this paper we present the ACCESSION IS A RACE conceptual metaphor, as realised in the online news articles in three Western Balkans countries – Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Hercegovina, in the period between January 2018 and August 2019. The three countries were selected bearing in mind linguistic and socio-political reasons – on the one hand, the three countries share the common core language and, on the other hand, they were all part of ex-Yugoslavia. The time framework chosen for the analysis is of special significance for the EU accession process itself. Namely, after the EU first committed to opening its doors to the countries of the Western Balkan at the Thessaloniki summit in 2003, it took 15 years for the second such summit to take place and for the EU to re-commit to this strategy – at the Sofia summit in May 2018. Thus, the time framework analysed encompasses the months anticipating this significant political event, as well as the ensuing period (up to the moment of writing this paper (fall 2019)).

We first provide a brief review of the socio-political background, and then proceed with the theoretical section of the paper.

2. Socio-political background

After the accession of its last three members, all of them from the Balkans (Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia), the European Union's officials have continued to talk of the EU's expansion and continually referred to the future of the Balkans in the EU. There are currently five official candidates for the EU's membership: Turkey, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania and Serbia. Additionally, Kosovo, which is not recognised as independent by five EU members, and Bosnia and Hercegovina have been recognised as potential candidates. While the Turkish negotiations have been at a standstill for a long time, the talks with Montenegro, Serbia and Albania have, technically, been progressing for years now. Still, no accession date has been set, the negotiations are continually being prolonged and the prospects of these countries actually joining the EU are fairly uncertain at the moment.

The term *Western Balkans* has entered politics as of late, to encompass the following countries: Bosnia and Hercegovina, Serbia with Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Albania. Although Slovenia and Croatia are also situated in the Balkans and are geographically more western, they are not assumed under this term. As Petrović (2009, 30) argues, the Western Balkans are not defined by what they are, but by what they are not – “they are not the EU”. Hence, it is an ideologically-burdened political term, which pervades today’s public discourse. On the other hand, the term European Union (the EU) is often simply equated with Europe, indirectly assuming that what is not the EU is not Europe. The Balkan is the “cultural Other” of Europe, which is perhaps the “internal” Other or “semi-Other”, traditionally seen as a periphery and as a “European non-Europe”, Petrović adds (2009, 21). It is “neither here nor there, but in two places at the same time” (Bijelić 2002, 6), and its characteristics are defined by its position “on the fault line” (Goldsworthy 2002, 26).

Another important factor is the complicated and turbulent history of the region, which the president of the European Council himself, Donald Tusk, has depicted as more dramatic than the *Game of Thrones*, “even if there are no dragons in it.”¹ This specific political and socio-historical situation has imprinted itself on how the WB and the EU are conceptualised in the public discourse of the region and beyond.

3. Theoretical background

In the theoretical section we present a brief introduction to conceptual metaphor, with special emphasis on critical metaphor analysis as an approach to studying conceptual metaphor in the social world and sport metaphors in politics, and proceed with a review of the literature on the metaphors of the EU integration processes of the former and present candidates.

3.1 Conceptual metaphor theory and critical metaphor analysis

Metaphor was traditionally regarded as a property of language, i.e. words, “rather than thought or action”, but, in fact, it permeates our entire conceptual system and structures our perceptions, the way we think and, consequently, what we do – this is how Lakoff and Johnson start their seminal book *Metaphors we live by* (1980, 3–4). Let us see how this may be possible by considering a few linguistic

1. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/01/11/speech-by-president-donald-tusk-at-the-opening-ceremony-of-the-bulgarian-presidency/>

expressions: *to radiate joy, glow with happiness, shine with happiness, brighten up, light up*. The common thread is that they all refer to the state of being *happy* and that they use words which have to do with *light* in some way. In the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), established by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), *light* would, in this case, be the *source domain* (SD), which is *mapped* onto the *target domain* (TD), *happiness*. In other words, all these expressions are reflective of the fact that we think of happiness in terms of light, and that we find a parallel between the warmth and colour of light and what we feel and how we look when we are happy. Thus, we understand one conceptual domain in terms of another, which is the definition of conceptual metaphor – HAPPINESS IS LIGHT, in this particular case. This mental mapping is reflected in the English language and can produce many different metaphorical expressions from the same conceptual metaphor (we named five realisations of one metaphor, but there could be many more).

By analysing metaphorical expressions, we can extrapolate the underlying conceptual metaphors and deconstruct the way in which speakers think. It is not just a matter of finding out what metaphorical expressions are reflections of – metaphors can be more powerful than that. Those exposed to them, if uncritical, do not just adopt the metaphorical expressions but also the way of thinking which triggered them, which is why conceptual metaphor is a very important topic to study in the discourse of politics. Lakoff (1991), for instance, demonstrates this in his paper entitled “Metaphor and war: The metaphor system used to justify war in the Gulf”, which starts with a short yet stark remark: “Metaphors can kill.” Conceptual metaphor is pervasive and inescapable, particularly in complex affairs as foreign policy, he adds, and shows how a fairy tale metaphorical scenario, involving the US as the hero, Iraq as the villain and Kuwait as the victim, in the crime of kidnap and rape, had justified an entire war to the US public, media and Congress.

Thus, metaphor may have a special role in generating “politically influential representations” in social cognition, as Charteris-Black argues (2006, 580), aside from the fact that the choice of metaphor may be reflective of certain ideologies (Charteris-Black 2004). Both these situations call for Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA), Charteris-Black (2004) suggests, which is an approach to the study of metaphor in the social world resting on the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, but also drawing its methodology from several other strands of research. The first is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which studies how social power abuse, inequality and dominance are “enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (Van Dijk 2001, 352). The second is pragmatics, as the context in which a conceptual metaphor is linguistically realised must be accounted for in the interpretation of that metaphor, as the differences are not

“discernible at the systemic level and can only be gleaned from ... sociopragmatic context” (Musolff 2004, 9). Lastly, critical metaphor analysts typically use authentic corpora to critically interpret metaphors – corpus linguistics thus also plays an important part in its methodology.

Applying critical strands of research, researchers have pointed to the interconnection and interplay between metaphor and social world (Charteris-Black 2004, 2011; Hart 2008; Semino 2008; Musolff 2012, 2016; Gatti and Catalano 2015, etc.). The language of politics has particularly been in the focus of this research, and one of the many metaphors found to pervade it and be used to manipulative purposes is the metaphor *POLITICS IS SPORT*.

3.2 Conceptual metaphor *POLITICS IS SPORT*

Political power is often seen as physical force and many of its aspects can be understood through source domains such as games and sport, business, and war (Kövecses 2010, 24–25). Sports are usually a productive source domain for metaphors as they play an important part in a nation’s popular culture and so sport metaphors are an ideal ground for the interplay of language, culture, history and national identity (Callies 2009), which explains their popularity in political discourse. Sport metaphors represent politics as a competition which is bounded by rules, typically between two opponents, argues Howe (1988). They impose order of sporting events on unpredictable and chaotic political processes, promising their peaceful resolution, Howe adds.

Typical mappings of the *POLITICS IS SPORT* metaphor include some of the following: political parties are teams, politicians are sport players, democratic rules are sport rules, elections are games/matches, a political issue is a ball, voters are fans, obtaining majority of votes is winning the match, etc. The choice of sport typically depends on the popularity of a sport in a certain country but also on the character of the political affair being metaphorically represented, i.e. how much conflict is involved, whether the accent is on the confrontation between individuals or political parties, etc. Thus, Yu (1998) finds that the US politics frequently draws metaphors from the source domain of baseball, American football and boxing, whereas Chinese politicians refer to volleyball, soccer and pingpong, which are more popular in the East. Further, Radić-Bojanić and Silaški (2008) find soccer as the major source of metaphors in Serbian political discourse, the same as Hellín-García (2014) in Spain, commenting that this sport particularly inspires a strong sense of national unity. Howe (1988) also confirms American football and boxing as major source domains for the metaphors of the US politics, along with the general sport metaphor of *TEAM*, which creates a bond between the people and the politician and promotes loyalty, on the one hand, but also exaggerates

the differences between politicians and their supporters, who are mere observers of the “game”. Howe finds that *FOOTBALL* metaphors underline physical conflict and politics as a violent exercise with clear winners and losers, which is accentuated even further in the *BOXING* metaphors, projecting the image of toughness and typically describing a conflict between major, *heavyweight* politicians.

POLITICS IS A RACE metaphor is particularly common in an election time and the mappings it typically includes are the following: politicians/parties are runners, those leading in a campaign are race leaders/forerunners, whereas winning elections is seen as crossing the finish line first. Thus, Linkiviciute (2018) studies Trump’s presidential discourse and finds that it involves emphasising fierce competition, the importance of victory, as well as a strong binary opposition between the race leader and losers. Racing metaphors are also commonly applied to global politics, and so the world superpowers are seen as being in a race against each other. As opposed to these scenarios, the race metaphors we intend to study in this paper come from a highly specific context, i.e. the accession to the EU of a number of regional neighbours, which, technically, does not assume competitive elements but is rendered very competitive in the political and media discourse of the region.

Sport metaphors camouflage the complexity of affairs, and a conscious simplification of politics can be very manipulative (Radić-Bojanić and Silaški 2008). More particularly, sport metaphors in politics have been found to exclude, to an extent, those not into sports – Radić-Bojanić and Silaški (2012) demonstrate that, on average, women need to invest a greater processing effort to understand football metaphors in politics than men. Sport metaphors, as all metaphors, regardless of their political motivation, “inevitably highlight some aspects of reality and hide others” (Semino and Masci 1996, 267), which is why critically interpreting them is important.

3.3 Conceptualisation of the EU

Much research has been done on how the EU is conceptualised since its very beginnings. For instance, in the *EUROMETA* pilot corpus containing over 2,000 texts from German and British newspapers published between 1989 and 2001, the following source domains were most frequent for depicting the EU: *WAY-MOVEMENT-SPEED*, *GEOMETRY-GEOGRAPHY*, *TECHNOLOGY-BUILDING*, *GROUP-CLUB-CLASS*, *SCHOOL-DISCIPLINE*, *LOVE-MARRIAGE-FAMILY*, *LIFE-HEALTH-STRENGTH*, *GAME-SPORTS*, *WAR-FORTRESS-BATTLE*, *PERFORMANCE-SHOW*, *NATURE-WEATHER* (Musolff 2004). Thus, in the *HOUSE* scenario, for instance, the EU is thought of as a house which is built and renovated, which has a roof, fundament, doors, and is sometimes, in some disaster circumstances, even conceptualised as a house with-

out exit doors (Musolff 2000); in the FAMILY scenario, the euro currency is shown as a child, the EU member states as parents who are married or engaged etc. (Musolff 2004). A more recent Musolff's study (2017) shows how the EU's political affairs are conceptualised as travelling along a road, with the transport imagery involved, e.g. ships, ports, trains, etc., which are traditional metaphors but reveal the new problem which is outwardly hidden – that of uneven positions of and hierarchies between the members.

Particularly interesting and relevant to this study is the research on the EU-related metaphors coming from the former candidates who last joined the EU and the current membership candidates. Horolets (2003) analyses Polish press and finds that the EU is represented as having a dominant position, although this position is also questioned, with the alternatives suggested. Aside from the standard metaphors, such as the EU AS A CLUB and the PATH metaphors, she notes some novel and culturally-specific metaphors as well – for instance, the EU is negatively represented as the BABEL TOWER, an exceedingly-ambitious plan of humans which provokes the wrath of God; the apocalyptic NEW BEAST; and a DEBTOR with an unpayable debt to Poland, *inter alia*.

Drulák and Kőnigová (2007) interviewed Czech civil servants on how they perceived the EU in the frames of the standard metaphors with the source domains of CONTAINER, MOTION and EQUILIBRIUM. Their results show that the duration of their contacts with the EU impacts how they see it. Thus, their findings reveal that officials lose their original beliefs of the EU being a CONTAINER through contacts with the EU.

Petraškaite-Pabst (2010) compares metaphors in Lithuanian and German discourse and finds that they use similar metaphors, commonly involving the source domains of HOUSE, TRANSPORT, FAMILY and DISEASE. She points out that Lithuanian discourse did not develop on its own, as a new discourse, but that it was “naturally picked up and continued” on the pre-existing EU's political discourse, with an adaptation to Lithuanian political circumstances.

Similarly, in their study on how the EU is conceptualised in Croatia, Werkmann and Buljan (2013) found that the metaphors drew on the pre-existing ones, with notable changes over a 12-year period as different domains came to prominence, depending on the political circumstances. Thus, the early stages were dominated by the RACE and MOVEMENT metaphors, for instance, whereas the later stages were marked by the more divisive metaphors – the SCHOOL/DISCIPLINE and PHYSICAL CONFLICT metaphors.

In the same vein, Đurović and Silaški (2014) find that the same metaphors are used in Serbian as in English – those with the source domains of FAMILY, CLUB, CONTAINER, BUILDING, JOURNEY, among others. However, in Serbian discourse, they often had distinct evaluative content, they add. The authors particularly

focused on the teacher-student metaphor for representing the relations between the EU and Serbia, and pointed to a division of positions and powers conveyed by this metaphor. In another study, Silaški and Đurović (2014) analyse the STEP and TRAFFIC LIGHT metaphors and find that the use of these may be somewhat responsible for the people of Serbia being “overwhelmed with the feeling” that the accession is now still as implausible as it was a decade ago.

It seems that, while the discourses of different countries largely share the same source domains for the depiction of the EU, these metaphors are typically adapted to the domestic political situation and subject to change over time. The metaphors studied in this paper have one of the frequent source domains in politics – that of RACE, which is also frequently used in the EU-related discourse, as evidenced by the data from the EUROMETA corpus, for instance. However, we expect that this metaphor will largely be adapted to the political situation of a highly-specific EU-integration process, which is different from all previous ones, and the new historical moment – the candidates realising that the accession is not likely to happen any time soon.

4. Research aim and questions

The aim of this article is to inspect the saliency and critically analyse the use of the ACCESSION IS A RACE metaphor in the online news articles recently published on the topic of the EU integrations in Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. More concretely, we will seek to answer the following three research questions:

1. How often is the ACCESSION IS A RACE metaphor used in the online news articles published in Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina?
2. How is the ACCESSION IS A RACE metaphor linguistically realised in the online news articles published in Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina?
3. How is the ACCESSION IS A RACE metaphor strategically exploited to political purposes the online news articles published in Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina?

To answer these three questions, we will use the corpus and the methodology detailed below.

5. Corpus and methodology

Any corpus-based research into metaphor must first start by answering the questions of how to find metaphors and how to identify them (Musolff 2004, 8).

We first searched for the news articles published on the topic of the EU integrations between January 2018 and August 2019, in Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Hercegovina. To do this, we used two search engines: *Naslovi.net*, a regional news articles search engine, and the *Google* search engine. We applied the search criteria: “the EU” and “Balkan”, and considered only the articles containing both these terms. The date of the articles and the country of origin was checked manually, so as to include only those posted within the set timeframe. The search via the engine *Naslovi.net* yielded 268 such articles, while additional 211 articles were found using the *Google* search engine. The vast majority of the news articles came from online media, while some of them were also picked up from the government news portals. The 479 articles were read to find potential instances of the RACE metaphor.

To check whether the instances found were really metaphorical, we applied the MIP procedure (Pragglejaz Group, 2007), which meant to first determine lexical units and then establish their meanings in the specific context they were found. The basic meaning of the lexical units was then compared to its meaning in the corpus. If there was a contrast between the two, the instances were marked as metaphorical.

Next, the instances identified as metaphorical needed to be categorised as race-related or not. In some cases, the decision was straightforward as some racing terminology could be easily spotted (for instance, *marathon*, *sprint*, *runner*, etc.). In other cases, the decision was made based on the context – for example, *step* was considered a racing metaphor instantiation in the sentence: *Maraton ima prvi korak*, which translates to *Marathon has a first step*, where, obviously, *step* was considered part of marathon-running.

This procedure yielded a corpus containing 149 excerpts from 92 news articles: 63 of the excerpts are from Montenegrin online news articles, 58 excerpts are from Serbia, 23 excerpts came from Bosnia and Hercegovina, while 5 excerpts were published by the regional outlets of the international media networks (*Voice of America*, *Deutsche Welle* and *Balkans Aljazeera*). It must be noted that sometimes the same articles were published by different media in different countries – in those cases we counted the article in question only once, marking its source country as the one where we first found the article, as we could not always determine the original source of the article with confidence.

6. Analysis

In our analysis, we will try to answer the three research questions posed in this study. Accordingly, this section is subdivided into three parts.

6.1 How frequently is the ACCESSION IS A RACE metaphor used in the online news articles published in Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Hercegovina?

As explained earlier, out of 479 news articles published on the topic of the EU integrations in Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Hercegovina, 92 articles (19.2%) were found to contain instances of the ACCESSION IS A RACE metaphor. According to this count, on average, the said metaphor is encountered in every fifth text on the EU integrations from the region, which is why we would say that it is rather salient in this discourse.

Even though there are some methodological concerns regarding the impossibility of determining the source country of some of the articles (as stated above), we believe that our results are sufficient to point to at least some approximate saliency of the metaphor ACCESSION IS A RACE in the three countries. Given the size of Montenegro (the smallest of the three countries), the metaphor proved to be the most salient in the online media discourse of this country. Montenegro is, technically, the most advanced of the three countries when it comes to the number of the opened negotiation chapters, and it is logical that its political elites often relied on and pointed out this fact to their advantage. On the other hand, the fact that the process of the EU accession was technically the least advanced in Bosnia and Hercegovina explains why this country is represented by the smallest number of excerpts in the corpus. We must note, however, that the progress achieved in the negotiation process of the three countries can be graded only in the technical sense, i.e. based on the number of the opened chapters, while there are scarcely any differences in their real progress, as none of them have a realistic prospect of joining the EU any time soon.

Despite the relative differences in its frequency across the region, the metaphor ACCESSION IS A RACE was definitely an established metaphor in all three countries encompassed in the corpus. As our analysis showed that it was used in a similar manner across the three countries and given the said methodological concerns regarding the per-country statistics expressed above, our corpus analysis is presented as a whole rather than per the individual countries in the two following subsections of the paper.

6.2 How is the ACCESSION IS A RACE metaphor linguistically realised in the online news articles published in Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Hercegovina?

Having implemented the procedures detailed in Section 5, we obtained quantitative data on the presence of various realisations of RACE metaphors in the online news articles posted in Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Hercegovina. The results are presented in Table 1:

Table 1. Instantiations of the metaphor ACCESSION IS A RACE

Metaphor	Instantiations and frequencies
ACCESSION	regata (70), predvodnik (52), trka (42), lider (35), maraton (16), korak (13),
IS A RACE	sprint (10), štafeta (7), predvoditi (7), cilj (5), startna pozicija (5), ciljna linija (2),
(total	maratonski (2), trikač (2), leaderska uloga (2), utrka (1), štafetna palica (1), palica
instances:	(1), gubiti dah (1), izjednačiti se (1), kretati se brže (1), sustići (1), prestići (1),
282)	vjetar u leđa (1), leaderski (1), predvodnica (1), leaderski status (1)
	[TRANSLATION: regatta (70), front-runner _{male gender} (52), race (42), leader
	(35), marathon _{noun} (16), step (13), sprint (10), relay race (7), to lead (7), goal (5),
	starting position (5), finish line (2), marathon _{adjective} (2), runner (2), leader role
	(1), race (1), relay baton (1), baton (1), lose breath (1), even out (1), move faster
	(1), catch up (1), outpace (1), wind in the sails (1), leaderly (1), front-
	runner _{female gender} (1), leader status (1)]

6.3 How is the ACCESSION IS A RACE metaphor strategically exploited to political purposes the online news articles published in Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Hercegovina?

In the race scenario, the racers are the individual membership candidates, who are running towards the common finish line – the EU, and are seen as competing against each other or, much more rarely, against the existing EU members.

The narrower metaphor which is most commonly used within the more general ACCESSION IS A RACE metaphor is the metaphor ACCESSION IS A BOAT RACE, which is realised through just two, but fairly repetitive realisations, that of the “regatta principle” and the “regatta approach” (70 instantiations in the corpus). These are political terms, introduced in the late 1990’s by the EU’s politicians with reference to the accession rules for the members to be – namely, the principle says that candidates are to be assessed on their individual merits and enter the EU in their own time, rather than *en bloc*. Although the principle implies that countries are to be evaluated independently from each other, what lies at the heart of the *regatta* metaphor is basically a race scenario, in which, typically, the achievements

of the individual racers can only be assessed relative to the other racers and where crossing the finish line first is an important goal. The race scenario foregrounds competition, as well as leading, winning and losing sides, on the one hand, and puts other elements of the accession process, those which are contents-wise much more important, into the background.

Let us consider some excerpts in which the *regatta* metaphor was used:

- (1) Premijer Duško Marković i komesar Johannes Han: EU zadržala princip **regate**, a Crna Gora ulogu **lidera** (gov.me 9/2/2018)
[Prime Minister Marković, Commissioner Hahn: EU maintains the *regatta* principle and Montenegro its leadership position]
- (2) Evropska unija ne bi trebalo zemlje Zapadnog Balkana da prima u paketu, već da usvoji “**regata**” pristup, budući da bi konkurencija u trci za pristupanje mogla da podstakne reforme u tim zemljama... (EurActiv.rs, 27/7/2011)
[The European Union should adopt the “*regatta*” approach to membership hopefuls in the Western Balkans as a competitive race for accession should spur reforms in the countries concerned...]

In Excerpt 1, which is a headline, the phrase “the regatta principle” is coupled with the word *leader*, whereas in Excerpt 2 “the regatta approach” is used together with “competition” and “race”. Thus, the accession process, which itself, technically, does not imply competition between the candidates, is conceptualised as such, and its competitive aspects are actually foregrounded. In many excerpts, the focus is on the current ranking of the racers, with little reference to how much distance has been covered, i.e. how many reforms have been implemented and how efficient they have been and, finally, how far the finish line is, i.e. when the membership may be expected. With little to offer in that respect, the regional politicians typically turn the focus to what is much less relevant – how much they have done relative to their neighbours, making thus the race an aim in itself, which serves other purposes than that of the EU accession. Let us examine the following:

- (3) Članstvo u EU je prioritet Crne Gore. To nije nikakva **trka** sa vremenom, već želja da Crna Gora bude dio tog sistema vrijednosti, poručio je predsjednik Crne Gore Milo Đukanović, komentarišući Izvještaj Evropske komisije o napretku Crne Gore. Đukanović je poručio da je Crna Gora napravila veliki **iskorak** i zemlja smo **lider** u procesu pregovora. (Portal Analitika, 29/5/2019)
[EU membership is Montenegro’s priority. It is, by no means, a *race* against time, but a wish for Montenegro to be part of that value system instead, said Montenegrin President Milo Đukanović, commenting on the European Commission’s Progress Report on Montenegro. Đukanović said that Montenegro has made a huge step forward and that we are the leading country in the negotiation process.]

In Excerpt 3, the president of Montenegro first points out that the accession process is not a race, but in the very next sentence goes on to say that Montenegro is the leader of the negotiation process, which basically confirms the existence of a race. The message is that negotiations are not a race *against time*, as no accession date has been set or is likely to be set in the upcoming period, but that it is still a race *against the neighbours*, which Montenegro has outrun, according to its president. The refusal of the EU to set an accession date has coerced the Balkan politicians to downplay the time factor, which we can trace in a number of excerpts:

- (4) Crna Gora će biti članica EU, a reforme koje će je dovesti do toga da funkcioniše kao članica EU svakako su prioritet, i moramo biti fokusirani na njihovo kvalitetno sprovođenje, a ne na trku za rokovima. (gov.me 5/1/2019)
[Montenegro will be/come] an EU member state, and the reforms that will make it function as an EU member state are certainly a priority, and we must focus on their quality implementation, not on a race to meet deadlines.]

- (5) Upitan da prokomentariše pomiješane poruke sa samita u kojima jedan evropski zvaničnik tvrdi da je 2025. nerealan rok za ulazak Crne Gore, a drugi da je to moguće postići, Marković kaže da EU integracije nijesu trka.

(Portal Analitika, 18/5/2018)

[When asked to comment on mixed messages sent from the summit in which one European official claimed that the year 2025 was an unrealistic deadline for Montenegro's accession and another that it would be possible to meet the deadline, Marković said the EU integration was not a race.]

Bearing in mind Lakoff's argument that negating frames nevertheless evokes them (2004), the fact that, in Excerpts 4 and 5, politicians are denying the existence of a race does not subtract from the metaphor ACCESSION IS A RACE, which is evoked anyway. Denying the race scenario comes as an excuse for not having a faster and more successful integration process; however, as we have seen in Excerpt 3, the politicians are not ready to give up all the elements of this scenario – not those which are used to their advantage, such as the leadership position, for instance.

Other elements of the race scenario frequently include overtaking, speeding up and slowing down:

- (6) Jednostavno je ta razlika između recimo Kosova, koje i dalje nije priznato kao suverena država od strane pet članica EU-a, i Crne Gore, koja se formalno kreće puno brže ka cilju, ogromna. Ako ustraju u današnjoj posvećenosti, Makedonija bi mogla relativno brzo napredovati u pristupnom dijalogu i vrlo brzo sustići i prestići neke države koje se smatraju „liderima u procesu“.

(balkans.aljazeera.net, 21/1/2018)

[Simply, this difference between, say, Kosovo, which is still not recognised as a sovereign state by five EU member states, and Montenegro, which is formally moving towards the goal much faster, is huge. If they persist in today's commitment, Macedonia could progress relatively quickly in the accession dialogue and very quickly catch up with and outrun some of the states that are considered "leaders in the process."]

- (7) Crna Gora i Srbija "usporeni" lideri evrointegracija...
BiH dobro kaska za većinom ostalih zemalja u regiji.

(Eureaktiv.rs, 13/1/2017)

[Montenegro and Serbia "slow" leaders in European integration...
Bosnia and Hercegovina is trailing behind most other countries in the region]

In both the excerpts above, there are leaders that might be caught up with, as they are currently slowed down (7), relative to which other regional candidates are either trailing behind (as Bosnia and Hercegovina in (7)) or attempting to overtake them (as North Macedonia in (6)). Rather than on the target of the process, i.e. the finish line, the whole discourse seems to be predominantly focused on the current ranking of the race participants. Pointing out to the differences in the current positions, some countries are constantly advocating for the *regatta* principle, to preserve the advantage achieved thus far:

- (8) "Itekako insistiramo na principu regate – da oni koji su uspješniji idu brže", poručio je Darmanović. (B92.net 2/6/2019)
[We strongly insist on the regatta principle – the more successful ones should go faster, Darmanović said.]

- (9) Crnogorski premijer Duško Marković i šef srpske diplomatije Ivica Dačić saglasili su se danas u Podgorici da je jedini ispravan pristup procesu integracije u EU takozvani princip regate. (Telegraf.rs, 17/1/2018)
[Montenegrin Prime Minister Duško Marković and Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić agreed today in Podgorica that the only correct approach to the EU integration process is the so-called regatta principle.]

In (8) and (9), Montenegrin and Serbian politicians strongly call for the *regatta* principle to be applied, by using a presupposition that these two countries have gained some distinct lead in the boat race and also refusing to be "dragged down" by their failing neighbours. Thus, they insist on disassociating themselves from the region and being somehow "better" than them.

The state of the race to the EU has changed over time, bearing in mind that the process has already taken quite a long time. This is why both the EU and the Montenegrin officials started to deem it fitting to liken the long accession process to a marathon, as the longest and most exhausting of racing events, rather than to

a simple race, let alone sprint. The EU procrastination and reluctance to embrace the racers as well as the racers' possible sluggishness are by both sides ignored and conveniently accounted for by the distance of the road taken. This is why the race is repeatedly referred to as a marathon, the longest and the most demanding of all.

- (10) Džekson: Prvi ste u **maratonu**, prestanite da gledate nazad
(Portal CDM, 7/7/2019)
[*Jackson: You are the first in the **marathon**, stop looking back.*]
- (11) Ona je za televiziju N1 kazala da su evropske integracije **maraton**, a ne **sprint**.
(novimagazin.rs, 18/5/2018)
[*For TV N1 she said that the European integrations are a **marathon** rather than a **sprint**.*]
- (12) "Proces pristupanja nije kratak, ali i **maraton** ima prvi korak..." kazala je Šarčević.
(cro.tel, 28/6/2019)
[*"The accession process is not a short one, but even a **marathon** begins with a first step..." Šarčević said.*]

In Excerpt 10, an EU official sends the message to Montenegro that it is the lead runner in the marathon and that it should stop looking over its shoulders to see where the other runners are. This might be read as a reaction to Montenegro's constant comparing itself with other regional candidates, rather than focusing on the race itself, since the image of one's "co-runners" drudging, "exasperated", behind can be used as an excuse for one's own slowing down. The marathon scenario foregrounds the length of the race, i.e. of the accession process, as well as its exhausting nature. Some words of mixed comfort are sent by a former regatta co-racer, Croatia, in Excerpt 12, as after decades of the process, the message to other racers is that they have yet to take or are just taking their *first step* in the marathon. These two excerpts also show that the race metaphor is not only used by the Balkan politicians, but also by the EU politicians, to a similar effect.

In some excerpts, the scenario of a long-distance running event is elaborated into further details:

- (13) Iako u izvještaju piše (uglavnom) sve ono na šta smo ukazivali i mi iz NVO i o čemu pišu nezavisni mediji, političke poruke izrečene povodom tog izvještaja su i dalje nesretan rezultat jednog skrivenog očekivanja, ali i stare potrebe da se u trci na duge evropske staze jednom trkaču da uloga onog koji prve etape trči iznad svojih realnih mogućnosti, tako da daje brži ritam cijeloj trci. Za očekivati je da će ta trka, nakon što Albanija i Makedonija počnu da trče, omogućiti zdraviju konkurenciju i objektivniju uporednu sliku.
(Institut alternativa, 10/5/2018)

[*Although the report (generally) contains everything that we from NGOs have been pointing out and what independent media write about, the political messages sent as regards the report are still an unfortunate result of a vested expectation, but also of an old need to assign one participant with a role of that runner who runs through the first stages of a long-distance race towards the EU beyond their real capabilities thus setting a faster pace to the entire race. It is to be expected that, once Albania and Macedonia begin to run, this race will allow for a healthier competition and a more objective comparative picture.*]

In Excerpt 13, reference is made to so-called *pacemakers*, who are to make the race faster, but typically drop out before finishing it, as they are running above their capabilities. Thus, what some countries refer to as *race leaders*, others would regard as just *pace-makers*, who are not even real runners.

Apart from focusing on the exhaustive length of the process, another aspect of the accession race which is frequently put forward is that accession is a difficult race in which many obstacles need to be overcome. Therefore, the accession race becomes a hurdle race:

- (14) "Taj proces će više ličiti na trku sa preponama nego na auto-put. Ali puna integracija ostaje naša zajednička sudbina", rekao je Tusk.... (rts.rs, 24/4/2018)
[*"The process will be more like a hurdle race than a highway. But full integration remains our common destiny," Tusk said...*]

Another type of race, already referred to in Excerpt 11, is *sprint*, which contrasts the two mentioned above – the marathon and the hurdle race. *Sprint* is always used in a negative context in the corpus, both by EU and Montenegrin officials, to explain that the accession will certainly not be a short distance running event:

- (15) Evropske integracije su **maraton** – nisu **sprint** – i svakako **marathon** u kom imate boljih dana i lošijih dana, ali je važno da znate zašto idete tim smerom i šta treba da uradite na tom putu", istakla je Brnabić. (rs.N1info, 18/5/2018)
[*"European integration is a **marathon** – not a **sprint** – and certainly a **marathon** where you have better days and worse days, but it is important to know why you are going in that direction and what you need to do along the way," said Brnabić.*]
- (16) Mi trčimo **maraton**, ne **sprint**, i iz tog ugla mislim da ovaj pristup daje rezultate koje svi očekujemo. (Nezavisne novine, 9/5/2019)
[*We're **running a marathon**, not a **sprint**, and from that perspective, I think this approach produces the results we all expect.*]

As can be seen, *sprint* is used in direct opposition to *marathon*, with a view to justifying the excessive duration of the process. Despite the time-consuming race and

the hurdles to overcome, what turns out to be the greatest problem yet is that the finish line to be reached is elusive:

- (17) Tako da bi moglo da se ispostavi da je trka ka EU zapravo trka sa pokretnom ciljnom linijom, zaključuje DW. (Blic.rs, 2/5/2018)
 [Therefore, it might turn out that the race to the EU is actually a race with a moving finish line, DW concludes.]

Having a *moveable finish line* renders the entire race virtually unfinishable and the use of this metaphors best echoes the current uncertainty of the outcome of the accession negotiations. In much the same vein are the race metaphor instantiations which depict the race as *dead*:

- (18) Jedna od glavnih tema koja ovih dana "muči Srbiju" je "evropska mrtva trka" i neizvesnost oko otvaranja novih poglavlja, piše "Blic". (Blic, B92 6/6/2019)
 [One of the main topics "plaguing Serbia" these days is "a dead race to Europe" as well as the uncertainty about opening new chapters, Blic reports.]
- (19) Proširenje je kao obezglavljeno pile. Još se koprc a trči, ali je u stvari mrtvo. (DW, 19/9/2019)
 [Accession is like a decapitated chicken. It's still wiggling and running around, but it's actually dead.]

In Excerpt 18, the race to Europe is *dead*, which implies that such a race cannot move forward, to the *torment* of Serbia, a membership candidate. In (19), the metaphor used is *ACCESSION IS A RUNNING ANIMAL*, in which the animal and race metaphors are blended together. This is a creative and vivid metaphor, which evokes strong, unpleasant images, and sends a clear message that the accession will not happen. The metaphor was used by a German daily and quoted as such in the WB's media – understandably, it is not to the advantage of the regional leading politicians to estimate the state of the accession process in this manner.

In the excerpts above, the membership candidates are competing against each other; however, in a series of metaphors, they are competing against the EU countries as well, with a presupposition of their having a distinct lead:

- (20) Treba uhvatiti korak sa EU (rts.rs, 10/2/2018)
 [We need to catch up with the EU]
- (21) Trka za evropskim prosekom, potrebno više investicija (rts.rs, 10/2/2018)
 [Race towards the European [GDP] average, more investment needed.]

The two headlines above bring the focus back on the true nature of the race – not that amongst the regional countries, which can be hardly justified, but the race to catch up with the more developed ones, in order to actually earn the membership. However, such realisations of the race metaphor are far fewer than the former –

they were used only 7 times in the corpus. The explanation likely lies in the fact that by using such metaphors, the politicians have to presuppose that the countries they represent are in reality trailing behind the more developed world, which is not something a politician can boast about; on the other hand, such a race is difficult to win, much more so than the one with the regional countries, which are in the more or less same position currently and can be realistically outrun, at least at some stage of the race or in some aspects. In that way, politicians can boast some successes and present the entire accession endeavour as more efficient than it really is.

7. Conclusion

The metaphor *ACCESSION IS A RACE* has proved to be very rewarding for analysis as not only does it underpin some interesting aspects of the perception and understanding of the accession process but also reveals how the conceptualisation of the accession as a race could be (and is) strategically exploited to political purposes, which could only be determined by gleaning into its socio-pragmatic context, whose role in metaphor analysis has been emphasised by Musolf (2004, 9).

Although the politicians do understand the accession as a type of race, they most vocally repudiate any possibility of it being run much faster than they do. This is why one particular type of race – a *sprint*, is used mostly in negative context, as an unrealistic and even preposterous goal. In order to accentuate their own and their countries' administration efforts towards the "finish line" and undermine the fact that the line is still nowhere in sight, the regional officials (and their EU counterparts) have been clinging to one particular realisation of the topical metaphor – that of *marathon*. The reasons for this are twofold: (1) marathon is, by definition, very long and exhausting; slowing down at some points might even seem as a good strategy to endure the hardships of the race and reach the finish line successfully and with some strength still in reserve; and (2) paradoxically enough, one can still pinpoint and relish in one's "leading" position on the racing road relative to other participants.





Needless to say, a leader in any race and especially so in a long-distance one can easily lose their leading position and building one's case on a leadership less than halfway a marathon is building one's house on sand. It is highly unlikely that politicians are unaware of that, but they have other concerns to tend to. All in all, be it a marathon or a hurdle-race it is never a race against time, but it is somehow always a competition with one's neighbours. A comparative advantage over a neighbouring country even if one is still dangerously far from the finish line (which, in addition to the distance and the hurdles, is still possible to even

be movable) is, for the Balkan countries a reason to celebrate. It is only important to bear in mind that it, by no means, could be a sprint because the results are known fast and the racers and those waiting for them at the finishing line both know the participants lack the resolve and the stamina needed to reach the line any time soon. This is why both the EU's reluctance to let the racers join them at the family dinner table as well as the racers' inability to make it for the dinner are conveniently explained by the length of the road taken.

Critically reflecting on this discourse, we may conclude that it is neither the winning nor the taking part that counts but outpacing thy neighbour. The salient use of this metaphor contributed to, what Charteris-Black (2006, 580) calls, creating "a politically influential representation", in which, it seems, little does it matter when (or even if) any of the WB's countries will access the EU in the foreseeable future as long as some of them are "faster" than the others. Thus, the use of the metaphor highlighted some aspects of the complex political situation and backgrounded the others, which is what Semino and Masci argued that metaphors can do (1996, 267). It appears that the target itself has been obliterated and conveniently replaced by a goal more reachable and gratification more immediate: we are at the forefront of a desert marathon towards a European oasis and little does it matter that our water supplies are running out as long as we are in inch closer to the goal than our neighbour.

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Publication history

Date received: 3 January 2020
 Date accepted: 10 October 2022
 Published online: 6 April 2023