

Expert seminar

The Balkans Silk Road
New Perspectives for the Western Balkans as China and
the European Union connect in South Eastern Europe
A seminar of the Reflection Forum “The Western Balkans in the European Union”

Date and Venue

Wednesday, 15 November 2017, 09h00-12h45 (registration 08h30)

Permanent Representation of Austria to the EU, Avenue de Cortenbergh 30, Brussels

Draft Programme

8h30 Registration, Coffee and *Kipferl*

9h00 Opening

- Alexander KMENTT, Ambassador, Permanent Representative to the Political and Security Committee, Permanent Representation of Austria to the European Union, Brussels
- Dominique DAVID, President, Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe and advisor to the President of the French Institute of International Relations (ifri), Paris

9h10 Setting the scene – South Eastern Europe, China and the EU

- Jens BASTIAN, Independent Financial Sector Analyst & Economic Consultant, Athens
- Gudrun WACKER, Senior Fellow, Research Division Asia, German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), Berlin
- Nicolas CENDROWICZ, Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), Deputy Head of Balkans Regional Cooperation, European Commission, Brussels

Moderation: Dominique DAVID, President, Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe and advisor to the President of the French Institute of International Relations (ifri), Paris

10h10 Coffee and networking break

10h30 Views from South-Eastern Europe: China’s engagement in the region

- Dragana MITROVIĆ, Professor of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade, Executive Director of the Centre of Asian and Far Eastern Studies, Belgrade
- Ardian HACKAJ, ShtetiWeb Director, Cooperation & Development Institute (CDI), Tirana
- Zoran NECHEV, European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), Paris and Center for EU Integration at the Institute for Democracy ‘Societas Civilis’, Skopje

Moderation: Tobias FLESSENKEMPER, Senior Fellow and Project Balkans project Director, Centre international de formation européenne (CIFE), Nice

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11h30 Break

11h45 EU's connectivity agenda and the Berlin process: the impact of China's engagement in South-Eastern Europe

- MEN Jing, Professor of European Union-China Relations; Director of the EU-China Research Centre, College of Europe, Bruges
- George TZOGOPOULOUS, Research Fellow, Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) and Centre international de formation européenne (CIFE), Athens and Nice
- Agatha KRATZ, Associate Fellow, European Council on Foreign Relations, London

Moderation: Dušan RELJIĆ, Head of Brussels Office, German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), Brussels

12h45 Conclusion of the seminar

Participation upon invitation only

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Context and objectives

In 2014, German Chancellor Angela Merkel initiated an intergovernmental process with the countries of the Western Balkans (the so-called **Berlin Process**), a number of EU Member States as well as EU institutions. Its aim, now like then, is to boost economic as well as human connectivity in the region, reinvigorate European integration and thereby further the enlargement policy agenda of the EU in the region.

This initiative unfolds in challenging times. Internally, the EU experiences a burgeoning “integration fatigue”, most emblematically seen with Brexit. At the same time, it signals ambiguous prospects of differentiated integration in enlargement matters, while realising the limitations of its transformative power: twenty years of EU engagement in the region have been no panacea - the situation there remains “fragile”, according to the Council, for lack of economic convergence, democratic consolidation and reconciliation.

These limitations make the Western Balkans more pervious to alternative development models. In the past few years, non-Western powers increased their engagement in the region and have become more influential. This is in particular the case of China through its 16+1 Framework, the *One Belt, One Road Initiative* and its €10 billion investment fund set up to finance large infrastructure projects.

China’s engagement in the Western Balkans, in many respects, intersect with the EU’s approach: although Chinese investments are often directed towards projects included in the EU’s Connectivity Agenda, their modalities differ from EU standards and practices. However, for a region struggling to attract European foreign direct investments (FDI), these Chinese investments may represent an alternative to the EU’s development policy scheme.

Keeping this in mind, what assessment can be made of the Berlin process, four years after its launch, in view of the enlargement challenges lingering on a Brexiting EU? Can it still help the EU competing with upcoming approaches from non-Western powers? What are the intersecting and overlapping elements in the European and the Chinese approaches towards infrastructure connectivity? What are their advancements concerning transport and energy connectivity in the region? What are, in general, the geopolitical and geo-economic implications of China’s growing presence in the Western Balkans?

The seminar will reflect and discuss these issues and questions, bringing together experts from South Eastern Europe, China, Brussels and European Union institutions. It is part of the “Reflection Forum: The Western Balkans in the European Union”, a Europe-wide think tank and dialogue initiative launched in 2014 as an expert component related to the Berlin process dynamics. This seminar is organised by the *Centre Franco-Autrichien pour le Rapprochement en Europe* (CFA/ÖFZ) in Vienna, the *Centre internationale de formation européenne* (CIFE) in Nice, the *Institut français des relations internationales* (ifri) in Paris, the *German Institute for International and Security Affairs - Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik* (SWP) in Berlin and the *Cooperation and Development Institute* (CDI) in Tirana, in cooperation with the *Istituto Affari Internazionali* (IAI) in Rome and the *Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso - Transeuropa* (OBCT) in Rovereto.

The seminar on 15 November 2017 in Brussels is also supported by the Permanent Representation of Austria to the EU and the German Federal Foreign Office (Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe).

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