

# The Western Balkans in the European Union: Perspectives of a region in Europe?

## Reflection Forum on the run-up to the Summit of Trieste on the Western Balkans

- 26 June 2017** 14h00-16h00: Academic roundtable, MIB Trieste School of Management  
---- 18h00-19h00: Official opening, Palazzo della Regione, Friuli Venezia Giulia Autonomous Region, Trieste  
---- 19h00-20h30: Official reception given by the Central European Initiative  
---- 21h00-22h00: Night-owl thematic presentations on Western Balkan projects, Trieste
- 27 June 2017** 9h00-17h45: Main event, Central European Initiative, Trieste  
---- 19h00-22h30: Transfer to Portorož (Slovenia) and closing dinner hosted by the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

### Organised and supported by

Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome  
Centre international de formation européenne (CIFE), Nice/Berlin  
Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe (CFA), Vienna

French Institute for International Relations (Ifri), Paris  
Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), Berlin  
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Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT), Rovereto

Central European Initiative (CEI)  
Regione Autonoma Friuli Venezia Giulia  
MIB Trieste School of Management  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France  
Federal Ministry for European, Integration and Foreign Affairs of Austria  
Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany  
Friedrich-Ebert Foundation (FES), Berlin/Sarajevo

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## Context and objectives

In 2014, in the wake of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War, the Federal Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, initiated an intergovernmental process with the countries of the Western Balkans (the so-called **Berlin Process**). Its aim is to improve cooperation throughout the region, put “fundamentals first”, and thereby reinvigorate European integration. The first conference, organised in Berlin, was followed by a second one in Vienna in 2015 and a third one in Paris in 2016. A fourth conference will be convened by Italy in 2017, before the process expectedly ends one year later, in 2018, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the end of WWI.

In order to encourage a European dialogue amongst think tanks and academic institutions on the Western Balkans and their European perspective, the CIFE, CFA, IAI and IFRI, together with other institutions, launched in 2015 an initiative that culminated with the organisation of a “**reflection forum**” on the Western Balkans in May 2016 in Paris. The reflection forum took place in the run-up to the conference on the Western Balkans hosted by President François Hollande on 4 July 2016. It created an open platform of exchange for more than 80 key experts coming from all over Europe. This first reflection forum addressed some of the topical challenges the EU and Western Balkan countries face, from socio-economic convergence or migration security to democratisation or geopolitics. In the weeks following the event, an expert report was elaborated in cooperation with the EUISS and transmitted to French authorities before the Paris Conference of July 2016. In the following months, a series of outreach events (panel discussions) were organised throughout the Western Balkans in order to nourish the reflection initiated in Paris on the European politics and EU enlargement.

This process of reflection and think tank mobilisation will be continued throughout 2017. On 5<sup>th</sup> April, a high-level **reflection conference**, organised under the patronage of the Italian MFA, will kick off the process leading to the second edition of the reflection forum, organised on 26-27<sup>th</sup> June 2017, in the run-up to the next intergovernmental conference on the Western Balkans hosted by Italy in July 2017. Contacts have been established in that sense, particularly with Amb. Michele Giacomelli, who is responsible the organisation of the Italy-Western Balkan Summit.

The **second reflection forum**, once again, will convene the community of European experts working on EU integration and the Western Balkans to reflect on the challenges bedevilling the EU’s enlargement policy –once deemed the EU’s most successful foreign policy- and the contribution research can make to address these. Again, the reflection forum, while creating links to the Western Balkans Civil Society Forum initiative, will provide a platform fostering the exchange of perspectives between experts working in national and European administrations and institutions and researchers affiliated to European think-tanks and universities in the EU and the Western Balkans.

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This second reflection forum, dedicated this year to **regional cooperation**, will contribute to broadening the reflection about enlargement and the Western Balkans among the policy community, the media and the general public. Three areas of reflection have been delineated: the resurgence of bilateral and regional tensions, the gap between regional cooperation in repressive and enabling security matters and the pitfalls of gendered models of economic development. Speakers at the forum will not deliver their presentations *ex cathedra* but participate interactively in debates moderated by experienced experts. The reflection forum and reflection conference will set the basis for the elaboration of reflection papers, disseminated across the policy community. They will be followed up by a new series of outreach events (panel discussions), to be organised throughout the Western Balkans as well as in the Berlin Process countries in autumn and spring 2017-2018.

## Draft Programme

### Monday, 26<sup>th</sup> June 2017

14h00-16h00: **Academic roundtable: The Western Balkans in the European Union: Perspectives of a region in Europe?** MIB Trieste School of Management, Palazzo Ferdinando, Via Carlo De Marchesetti, 2, Trieste

Welcoming address:

Vladimir Nanut, MIB Trieste School of Management, Trieste

Chair: Tobias Flessenkemper, Centre international de formation européenne, Nice/Berlin

Panelists :

Eleonora Poli, Istituto Affari Internazionali, Rome

Florent Marciacq, Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe, Vienna

Luisa Chiodi, Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa, Rovereto

Vedran Dzihic, Austrian Institute for International Politics, Vienna

Dusan Reljic, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Brussels

Closing remarks :

Stefano Pilotto, MIB Trieste School of Management, Trieste

### Monday, 26<sup>th</sup> June 2017

18h00-19h00: **Official opening**, Palazzo della Regione, Friuli Venezia Giulia Autonomous Region, Trieste

Debora Serracchiani, President of Friuli Venezia Giulia Autonomous Region

Margot Klestil-Löffler, Alternate Secretary General of the CEI, Trieste

Tanja Fajon, Member of the European Parliament, Ljubljana

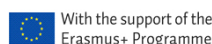
Ferdinando Nelli Feroci, President of the IAI, Rome

Michele Giacomelli, Special Envoy of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Rome

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19h00-20h30 **Official reception** given by the Central European Initiative  
Caffè degli Specchi, Piazza Unità d'Italia 7, Trieste

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21h00-22h00: **Night-owl thematic presentations** on Western Balkans projects  
Grand Hotel Duchì d'Aosta, Piazza Unità d'Italia, 2/1, Trieste

Room 1: Freedom of the press in the Western Balkans

Marzia Bona, editor & researcher, Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa,  
Rovereto

Room 2: #DL18 – Activist Fora

Vedran Dzihic, Austrian Institute for International Politics, Vienna  
Felix Henkel, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Sarajevo

## Tuesday, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2017

8h45: Main event: Registration, Central European Initiative, Via Genova, 9, Trieste

### 9h00: CEI Welcoming Speech

Margot Klestil-Löffler, Alternate Secretary General of the Central European Initiative, Trieste

### 9h10: Opening addresses

Florent Marciacq, Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe, Vienna

Ugo Poli, Executive Secretariat of the Central European Initiative, Trieste

Tobias Flessenkemper, Centre international de formation européenne, Nice/Berlin

### 9h30: Regional tensions and bilateral conflicts in the Western Balkans: how regional tensions become European problems?

Chairs:

Ivana Radić Milosavljević, University of Belgrade, Belgrade

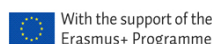
André de Munter, European Parliament, Brussels

It is well-known that European integration was in the first place launched as a peace project. Its most central purpose was -and to a great extent, still is- to enable sovereign states to overcome mutual enmities they may have inherited from the past and thereby improve collective and regional security on the continent. This purpose, today, is nowhere as relevant as in the Western Balkans. However, in the past few years, the region has witnessed a resurgence of tensions, regardless of actual progress towards EU accession or despite symbolic gestures encouraged by the EU. Interestingly, those tensions affect all Western Balkan states. They are exacerbated, *inter alia*, by the political rehabilitation of wartime personalities, the prosecution of political figures in politicised jurisdictions, the involvement of international actors pursuing geopolitical motives, the asymmetrical power at the disposal of EU member states in relation to their bilateral disputes with Western Balkan neighbours, the overall rise of nationalism and identity rhetorics and the return of border politics throughout the region. Regional tensions, against this backdrop, make the maintaining of good neighbourly relations an increasingly difficult task, while considerably undermining prospects of reconciliation. They also pose a fundamental

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challenge to the credibility of the positive peace project promoted by European integration. When did the EU start losing ground in that area? How can it regain its enabling and inspiring power in securing good neighbourly relations in the Western Balkans? How can it overcome the perceived stalemate its involvement seems to have reached in the past few years?

11h00: Networking & coffee break

### 11h30: Internal & regional security: going beyond the repressive security cooperation?

Chairs:

Ruth Ferrero Turrión, Universidad Complutense, Madrid

Erwan Fouéré, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels

Regional cooperation in the Western Balkans is often praised by the European Commission and EU member states as a crucial ingredient of stability. It is instrumental in addressing security challenges in the region, since many urgent issues, such as organised crime, corruption, integrated border management or illegal migration, can only be effectively addressed through a trans-border approach. Significant progress in those areas has been registered in the past few years, including more recently against the backdrop of the migration crisis that led to the closing of the so-called “Balkan-route”. Regional cooperation in police affairs is another example. Despite noteworthy impediments, it seems that Western Balkan states are more than willing to join energies when their stability is at stake. But this readiness to cooperate tends to focus more on the repressive side of security than on developing enabling measures strengthening cooperation among transnational actors, regional non-governmental organisations or through regional institutions. And yet, these are instrumental in building up state and societal resilience through the promotion of rule of law, environmental protection, democracy and social rights. Why, in their pursuit of stability, do Western Balkan states welcome cooperation in hard, repressive security more than they invest energy in enabling measures? How deep is their reluctance to encourage transnational cooperation in soft security matters, e.g. environmental protection or social rights? How can the EU compensate for the lack of support they demonstrate towards cooperation among non-governmental organisations working on enhancing the rule of law and democratic practices at the regional level? Should regional institutions be more empowered in those issue-areas?

13h00: Networking & lunch break

### 14h30: Investing in infrastructures & knowledge: Escaping the gendered-economy trap?

Chairs:

Eleonora Poli, Istituto Affari Internazionali, Rome

Vedran Dzihic, Austrian Institute for International Affairs, Vienna

The EU emphasises the need to enhance connectivity throughout the Western Balkans. In a region marked by enduring post-conflict fragmentation, this connectivity agenda is more than welcome. Western Balkan states, after all, are more integrated with the EU than among themselves. But connectivity is not only promoted as vector of regionalism. It is also strongly linked to economic governance and as such, can contribute to make the Western Balkans more prosperous. At the core of the EU’s connectivity agenda for the Western Balkans lies the development of infrastructures in transport and energy. Notwithstanding the unclarity surrounding the modalities of current connectivity projects, the very nature of the approach and its possible limitations should be further discussed. The

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emphasis on infrastructure projects certainly fail to limit the already widening gender inequality gap in the Western Balkans, since they typically benefit male labour force in the first place and foreign investors more largely. Their eventual impact in the countries, moreover, is only perceivable in the mid-term, whereas vulnerable citizen groups suffer hardship now. Additional investments in health, universities and social services, by contrast, would provide more perceivable benefits to all citizens in the short term. Although RYCO is a step towards a more inclusive type of people-to-people connectivity, its possible success will not compensate for the lack of capacities needed to build a smart regional economy in the Western Balkans offering job opportunities and containing the brain drain. How can the connectivity agenda integrate more the EU's call for developing a knowledge-based economy on the continent? How can the EU help providing better opportunities for women and young people? What progress can be made in the regional promotion of university and vocational education?

16h00: Networking & coffee break

### 16h30: Concluding discussion: refitting the European model Western Balkan style

Chairs:

Simonida Kacarska, European Policy Institute, Skopje

Adam Fagan, Queen Mary University of London, London

The EU's "one size fit them all" model for enlargement has been increasingly contested. The recipe the EU pursued in the 90s has not proved as effective in the Western Balkans as it used to in CEE. What are the missing ingredients? How can the EU further adapt its enlargement policy to regional contexts? Can the EU be brought to question the political and economic model it relies on and promotes? How can the Western Balkans contribute to the EU's self-re-assessment?

17h30: Concluding remarks by Dušan Reljić, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik

### 17h45: End of the discussions

19h00: Transfer to Portorož by bus. Meeting point at the reception of the following hotels:  
Grand Hotel Duchi d' Aosta, Hotel Continentale, Urban Hotel Design

19h15: Departure of the bus from the Piazza Oberdan, Trieste

20h00: **Closing Dinner** hosted by the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Portorož

Welcoming address:

Peter Grk, National Coordinator for Western Balkans, Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ljubljana

Darja Bavdaž Kuret, State Secretary, Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ljubljana  
/ Matej Marn, Political Director/ Director-General for Common Foreign and Security Policy, Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ljubljana

## Wednesday, 28<sup>th</sup> June 2017

End of the programme and departure of the participants

