

Roundtable and Debate

The Western Balkans in the European Union

Good neighbours today, good members tomorrow?

Western Balkans Reflection Forum Series – the Berlin Process and EU Enlargement Strategy

Skopje, 25 February 2019, 16h00-20h00
Park Hotel & Spa

After years out of the radar, the Western Balkans now seem to be back on the agenda of the EU. The new Enlargement Strategy, issued in February 2018 and the EU-Western Balkans Summit convened in Sofia in May 2018, fifteen years after the Thessaloniki Declaration, both tentatively illustrate the new impetus given by the EU to its enlargement policy. The new dynamic that may be emerging builds on four years of Berlin process. After Berlin, Vienna, Paris and Trieste, a new Western Balkans Summit took place in this framework in London, in July 2018. What has been the overall contribution of the Berlin process so far and what support can it deliver in 2019 in Poznan and beyond? Is the new impetus indicative of more credible enlargement perspectives for the countries of the region?

Accession, for some countries of the region, may be in sight. But it is hardly in reach, at least in the years to come. The EU's reform agenda and forthcoming elections of the European Parliament, multiannual financial framework negotiations, Brexit and other internal and external affairs will continue to capture the attention and mobilise the energy of the member states and EU institutions in the near future. These competing priorities will not make enlargement a smoother, more predictable process; instead, they will make it more dependent on EU politics. How to keep enlargement on the EU's agenda, not only in Brussels, but also in EU capitals? How to better prepare EU Member States for enlargement? Which broader geopolitical factors will have an impact on the EU's enlargement policy?

The stakes are high for the countries of the region: their accession to the EU will depend on the EU's own reform agenda, but of course, also on their ability to fulfil a rising number of conditions. Among them, good neighbourliness has become one of paramount importance, for North Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia in particular, but not only. For the EU, settling bilateral disputes is *sine qua none*, but it seems far from enough. What priority is it given in the EU's approach? How consistent is the EU in its attempt to foster good-neighbourliness, beyond the mere settlement of bilateral disputes? And how advance a broader understanding of good-neighbourliness in the Western Balkans that goes beyond the letter of the Vienna Declaration on Bilateral issues signed in 2015? How to "deepen" the relationship between solving bilateral issues, good-neighbourliness on the one hand and regional cooperation and reconciliation on the other?

This roundtable will address these questions and many others. It will open an interactive discussion between key experts from the EU and WB6 on the one side and students, researchers and citizens of on the other side. The roundtable is part of the "Western Balkans Reflection Forum" initiative, a framework project launched in 2015 by a network of European think tanks in support of the Berlin Process. The initiative promotes discussions with experts in an inclusive, interactive format on strategic, policy-oriented issues relevant to the European Union and the Western Balkans.

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Programme

16h00 *Welcome and opening*

- Simonida KACARSKA, Director, European Policy Institute (EPI), North Macedonia
- David OBERHUBER, Country Director, German Development Cooperation (GIZ), North Macedonia
- Renate KOBLER, Ambassador of Austria to the Republic of North Macedonia
- Christian THIMONIER, Ambassador of France to the Republic of North Macedonia

16h30 **Keynote speech**

- Beti JACEVA, Director of the Directorate for European Union, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, North Macedonia

16h45 **Only good friends will make it to the end? Good neighbourliness in the enlargement policy**

- Nikolaos TZIFAKIS, Associate Professor, University of the Peloponnese, Greece
- Peter GRK, Secretary General of the Bled Strategic Forum, Slovenia
- Élise BERNARD, Director of Studies, Europa Nova, France
- Thomas MÜHLMANN, Austrian Federal Ministry of Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, Austria

Moderator: Florent MARCIACQ, Deputy Secretary General and Research Fellow, Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe (CFA/ÖFZ), Vienna / Senior Fellow, Centre international de formation européenne (CIFE), France / Germany

18h15 *Coffee break*

18h30 **Settling bilateral issues is more than settling bilateral issues! Good neighbourliness in Western Balkans' domestic politics**

- Đorđe BOJOVIĆ, London School of Economics (LSE), United Kingdom
- Marta SZPALA, Senior Fellow, Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW), Poland
- Bárbara MATIAS, Senior Fellow, Group for Legal and Political Studies (GLPS), Kosovo
- Zoran NECHEV, Head of the Center for EU integration and Senior Researcher, Institute for Democracy 'Societas Civilis', North Macedonia

Moderator: Simonida KACARSKA, Director, European Policy Institute (EPI), North Macedonia

20h00 *End of the programme, followed by refreshments*

The working languages will be English, Macedonian, Albanian and French with simultaneous translation.

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