

The Western Balkans Discuss the Future of Europe!

North-Macedonia's Perspectives on Europe's Future

Public Discussion

organised in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe (2020-2022)

22 September 2020, 18h00-20h00

Museum of Contemporary Art, Skopje, North Macedonia

Context and objectives

In the past ten years, the European Union (EU) has faced a long list of serious challenges, from the economic and financial crisis in the late 2000s to the outburst of the Covid-19 pandemic earlier this year. These challenges have put the unity of the EU to the test. The need to swiftly react has strained the advancement of **a more robust strategic vision**. While a new reflection on the future of Europe has been initiated with the publication of the EU's White Paper on the Future of Europe in March 2017, followed by President Macron's speeches in Athens, La Sorbonne, etc..., much remains to be done to rediscover the reasons underlying the European integration process in the first place, rejuvenate the European project and make it again a higher source of inspiration for the citizens of the continent.

There could not be better timing for this reflection to be intensified. A new Strategic Agenda has been outlined for 2019-2024 and a two-year "Conference on the Future of Europe" has been launched with the aim to overhaul the general functioning of the EU. Key Member States have already put forward a number of proposals.

The Western Balkans should participate in, and contribute to, this reflection on the future of Europe, as their participation is crucial to strengthen a community of purpose connecting the EU and the Western Balkans. Pushing for such inclusion will be the aim of a new regional initiative taking place in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe. A series of events will be organised from 2020 to 2022 in the capitals of the WB6 and the capitals of key member states of the EU in order to stimulate an interactive and transnational exchange of views across the region and Europe on topics that are of essential significance for the future of the EU and the Western Balkans alike.

Format of the Public Discussion

The Public discussion will be organised for government agencies, parliaments, courts, embassies, universities & think tanks, NGOs, media houses, arts scene, religious representations, etc. It will cover a wide range of topics that relate more to European governance in general than Western Balkan politics in particular.

The discussion will look at the Western Balkans as "a region (already) in Europe", i.e. as a region that can and should contribute to the **grands débats on the future of Europe**. It will explore the possible contribution(s) that Western Balkan societies could make to the making of Europe and reform of the Union, along two guiding questions:

- What should the European Union that the WB6 countries would like to join be about, what should it seek to achieve?
- What distinct contributions could the WB6 countries make to advancing the European project, how would their membership strengthen the Union?

A list of more specific questions that might be reflected upon is included in the **discussion framework** below. The discussion will be moderated by a tandem of experts.

The event will be organised as an open, **interactive Fishbowl Discussion**, moderated by a tandem of trained facilitators. The participants in the event will have the opportunity to share their views. The working language will be English.

Programme

17h30 Networking Drink and Registration @ Museum of Contemporary Art

18h00 Opening

Eva Ellereit, Head of the Office of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Skopje
Florent Marciacq, Deputy Secretary General of the Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe, Vienna

18h15 Kick-off keynotes

Anida Šabanović, Director and Senior Researcher, Foreign Policy Initiative BH, Sarajevo
Visar Xhambazi, Policy Researcher, Democracy for Development Institute, Pristina

Moderation : Harun Cero, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung SOE, Sarajevo

18h30 Fishbowl Discussion with the audience

Facilitators:

Lura Pollozhani, Assistant External Engagement Officer, UNHCR
Viktor Mitevski, Co-founder of the Start-Up Academy, Skopje

19h50 Closing remarks

Nita Starova and Harun Cero, FES Skopje & FES SOE

Discussion Framework

Discussions on the future of Europe have been initiated in 2017 with the publication of the eponymous White Paper on the Future of Europe and President Macron's European speeches. They spread ahead of the 2019 European elections and provided guidance in the elaboration of the EU's new strategic agenda (2019-2024). With the launch of the two-year "**Conference on the Future of Europe**" (2020-2022), this strategic process will expectedly gain momentum and prove crucial to overcome the polycrisis triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic. The aim of this outline is to set the ground for discussions in the Western Balkans on the future of Europe. It therefore identifies major elements in the EU's contemporary *grands débats*, which might be used as building blocks of **a nascent Western Balkan vision for the future of Europe**.

1. Sustainability, including green and just transition and climate neutrality by 2050

- How compatible with its climate ambitions is the EU's economic model?
- Is innovation a panacea for achieving sustainable growth?
- How to advance a greener agenda in times of hyper-consumption, cultural consumerism and e-commerce?

2. Societal challenges

- Should the EU invest more in building solidarity in health and education sector, or should it leave it to the member states?

- Should the EU work towards opening its borders and improving the quality of its migration and asylum systems, or should it rather constrict the asylum system and securitise its external borders?
- How can the EU better promote circular migration?

3. Innovation, competitiveness and digital transformation

- Is further fiscal integration going to threaten the sovereignty of EU member states or is it a chance to start creating stronger European identity which works for all and not only for the very few?
- Is the universal basic income a potential solution to address challenges related to digital transformation and automation?
- Should the EU focus more on promoting ethical standards and privacy protection in the digital economy, or fostering competitive innovation and further digital consolidation?

4. Fundamental values, rights and freedoms

- Are the existing mechanisms effectively enforcing the Rule of Law within the European Union?
- How can the European Commission become more active, including in combatting populist narratives?
- How can the election procedure for the European Parliament enhance democracy in the EU? Should EU governance allow for more direct democracy as a way to counter populism?

5. International role of the EU

- Should the EU relax its unanimity requirement in CFSP matters? How should it accommodate the national sensibilities of its Member States?
- How can the EU step up its support for effective multilateralism in the context of US disruption and great power competition (Russia, China, Turkey)?
- Should the EU offer European perspectives to its Eastern neighbours?
- Should the EU strive for establishing a European Army, for what purpose and with which connections to NATO?

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Centre for European Perspective (CEP), Ljubljana

Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW), Warsaw

Institute for development and international relations (IRMO), Zagreb

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