

Back on the Agenda: EU Enlargement to the Western Balkans

International Experts Seminar, 29 October 2018

Bucharest, Romania

(Representation of the European Commission in Bucharest, Str Vasile Lascăr 31, Nicolae Titulescu room)

10:00 – 10:15 Registration

10:15 – 10:30 Welcome and Introduction

Oana Popescu, Director, GlobalFocus Center

Ştefan Tinca, Director General/ Political Director, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Sorin Ducaru, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute; former Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges, NATO

10:30 – 12:00 Panel I: Now or never? Can Romania's EU presidency put 'enlargement' back in the EU lexicon?

A little more dynamism was injected this year in EU-Western Balkans relations, due to the European Commission's renewed commitment to the Western Balkans agenda. Bulgaria's and Austria's presidencies of the Council of the European Union helped place the topic high on the priority list, creating new momentum for a credible enlargement perspective. As Romania takes over the EU Council presidency on January 1st, 2019, it is essential to further such momentum and provide continuity and progress to this perspective.

On the other hand though, it is not unlikely that the current window of opportunity may close abruptly, if the upcoming European elections deliver a much less enlargement-friendly and more nationalistic and tense political environment. What are then the odds that Romania's EU Council presidency may help take concrete steps ahead with respect to the Western Balkans, that could keep the region on a secure path to accession? How can the EU keep the Western Balkans on orbit and what traction do reforms still have in the region?

Kick-off remarks:

Daniel Stefanov, Sofia Office Coordinator, European Council on Foreign Relations, Sofia

Corina Stratulat, Head of European Policy and Institutions Programme, European Policy Center, Brussels

Expected interventions from:

Senada Selo Sabic, Senior Research Associate, Institute for Development and International Relations, Croatia

Gjeraqina Tuhina, Brussels Correspondent, Radio Free Europe/ RSE Balkan and Radio Television of Kosovo/ RTK

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12:00 – 12:30 Coffee break

12:30 – 14:00 Panel II: From the limited success of FYROM - Greece negotiations to potential progress on Belgrade - Pristina normalisation. What are the chances?

In a region where good neighbourly relations and reconciliation have never been easy to achieve, resolution of the FYROM - Greece historical name dispute could be a success story of open dialogue, committed partnership and mutual respect between the two sides, even after decades of disagreement. Can this be a useful case study for other bottlenecks in the region? Or is it likely to fail internally, despite a bilateral agreement? What does that teach us about the perspectives of the other tough nut to crack in the Western Balkans, the normalisation process between Belgrade and Pristina?

Do the recent negotiations of a land swap provide serious prospects for a peaceful outcome of bilateral disputes? Would that be a welcome and acceptable development for the EU or would it provide temporary relief while creating long-term problems and a dangerous precedent? As simultaneously a strong supporter of Serbia's European accession and a non-recogniser of Kosovo independence, but with a vital interest that the whole region be granted the EU perspective, can Romania contribute to this 'finish line' push toward a solution to be achieved in the next months?

Kick-off remarks:

Kristof Bender, Deputy Chairman, European Stability Initiative, Vienna

Expected case study interventions by:

Simonida Kacarska, Director, European Policy Institute, Skopje

Dimitris Moschopoulos, Amb. (Ret.), ELIAMEP, Athens

Dusan Janjic, President of the Board, Forum for Ethnic Relations, Belgrade

Dr. Florian Qehaja, Executive Director, Kosovo Centre for Security Studies, Pristina

Djordje Popovic, Programme Coordinator, Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence; Protocol Coordinator Belgrade Security Forum, Belgrade

Veton Surroi, politician, publicist, founder of Koha Ditore magazine, Pristina

14:00 – 14:15 Final conclusions

Asen Dimitrov, Policy Analyst / Institutional Team, European Political Strategy Centre
Rufin Zamfir, Programme Director, GlobalFocus Center

14:15 Lunch

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