



# WESTERN BALKANS AT THE CROSSROADS: ASSESSING THE INFLUENCE OF EXTERNAL ACTORS

## CONFERENCE AND PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH OUTCOMES WESTERN BALKANS AT THE CROSSROADS: ASSESSING THE INFLUENCE OF EXTERNAL ACTORS

**Date:** 26 April 2019

**Venue:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic

In the past couple of years, the former Yugoslav states that are not (yet) members of the EU or NATO have been confronted with a wave of rising ethnic and social tensions, authoritarian impulses and corruption scandals leading to democratic backsliding and social unrest in a number of cases. These vulnerabilities appear to be exploited by external actors for the purpose of increasing their leverage to achieve tactical and strategic gains. The Balkans have historically been a zone of great-power rivalry. Stagnating European and shrinking US involvement in the past decade and too distant prospects of the integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures have expanded the window of opportunity for other external forces to step in.

Will the recent EU and NATO initiatives (new EU strategy for the region, infrastructural projects, re-stated commitment, accession/moves on the NATO tracks) prove to be sufficient to reverse the trend?

The conference is co-organized by Prague Security Studies Institute and the Institute of International Relations under the auspices of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, and in cooperation with the Foreign Ministry's Department of Foreign Policy Analysis and Planning. It aims to assess the influence of all external actors playing role in the region in the changing global context marked by worsening of Western relations with Russia, fears of Chinese economic expansion, increasingly tense relations with Turkey, and increasing presence of the Gulf. In this context, it will discuss current challenges and vulnerabilities of Western Balkans countries as well as foreign policy objectives and strategies of external actors and how these are interconnected. It seeks to get together senior EU and NATO officials, Balkan experts, policy-makers, diplomats, academics and researchers as well as specialised journalists to approach the topic from a variety of perspectives instigating a fruitful debate.



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## DRAFT PROGRAM

08:30–09:00 Registration

09:00–09:10 **Welcoming remarks**

**Petr Lang**, *Program Director of the Prague Security Studies Institute & Ondřej Ditrych*, *Director of the Institute of International Relations*

09:10–09:20 **Opening remarks**

**Tomáš Petříček**, *Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic*

09:20–11:00 **Western Balkans at the crossroads of external**

**influences—Long-standing alliances or recent geopolitical games?**

Moderator: **Ivana Cvetković Bajrović** (*Senior Program Officer of the National Endowment for Democracy, United States*)

Speakers: **Pieter Feith** (*Consultant of the European Institute of Peace; former ICR/EUSR Kosovo, Netherlands*)

**Maxim Samorukov** (*Deputy Editor of Carnegie.ru, Russia*)

**Hamdi Firat Büyüç** (*Analyst and Journalist at the Balkans Investigative Reporting Network, Bosnia and Herzegovina*)

**Marko Ivković** (*Serbia Resident Senior Program Manager, National Democratic Institute, Serbia*)

Commentary: **Kristof Bender** (*Deputy Chairman of the European Stability Initiative, Austria*)

11:00–11:15 Coffee break

11:15–12:45 **Implications for the role of international organisations in the Western Balkans**

Moderator: **Tomáš Dopita** (*Institute of International Relations, Czech Republic*)

Speakers: **Janina Hřebíčková** (*Special Envoy for the Western Balkans, MFA, Czech Republic; former Head of the OSCE Mission to Montenegro*)

**Jolyon Naegele** (*Former Head of Political Affairs Office at the UN Mission in Kosovo, Czech Republic*)

**Sonja Licht** (*President of the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence, Serbia*)

**Adnan Huskić** (*President of the Center for Election Studies; Sarajevo School of Science and Technology, Bosnia and Herzegovina*)

Commentary: **Ioannis Armakolas** (*Assistant Professor, University of Macedonia, Greece*)

12:45–13:45 Lunch break



## WESTERN BALKANS AT THE CROSSROADS: ASSESSING THE INFLUENCE OF EXTERNAL ACTORS

- 13:45–15:15**      **Western Balkans’ perspective — Mapping foreign influences and local vulnerabilities**  
Presentation of the key findings of the year-long project “Western Balkans at the Crossroads” led by PSSI and supported by the National Endowment for Democracy.
- Moderator: **Thomas Kulidakis** (*Balkan Commentator for the Czech Radio and Czech Television, Greece*)
- Speakers: PSSI researchers from the region working on the project  
**Srećko Latal** (*PSSI researcher; Regional Editor of the Balkans Investigative Reporting Network, Bosnia and Herzegovina*)  
**Hana Semanić** (*PSSI researcher, covering Montenegro; Central European University, Hungary*)  
**Maja Bjeloš** (*PSSI researcher, Serbia*)  
**Vesa Bashota** (*PSSI researcher, Kosovo*)  
**Martin Naunov** (*PSSI researcher; UNC-Chapel Hill, North Macedonia*)
- Commentary: **Arlinda Rustemi** (*Strategic Analyst at the Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, Netherlands*)
- 15:15–15:30**      Coffee break
- 15:30–17:00**      **New external actor in the South East and Central Europe—Comparing the role and perception of Chinese investments in the Western Balkans and CE region**  
Presentation of the research outcomes of the project “Comparative analysis of the approach towards China: V4+ and ‘One belt one road’” supported by the International Visegrad Fund.
- Moderator: **Martin Hála** (*Sinologist, Founder of Sinopsis, Czech Republic*)
- Speakers: **Stefan Vladisavljev** (*Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence, Serbia*)  
**Bruno Surdel** (*Centre for International Relations, Poland*)  
**Jonáš Syrovátka** (*Prague Security Studies Institute, Czech Republic*)  
**Matej Šimalčík** (*Institute of Asian Studies, Slovakia*)  
**Peragovics Tamás** (*HAS Centre for Economic and Regional Studies, Institute of World Economics, Hungary*)
- Commentary: TBD
- 17:00–17:10**      **Concluding remarks – Jan Šnidauf**, *Chief Advisor to MFA, Czech Republic*
- 17:10–18:00**      Glass of wine, *Large dining hall*