

## THE WESTERN BALKANS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION – GROWING TOGETHER OR MOVING APART?

### Challenges, Opportunities, and Perspectives

MONDAY, 7 September - WEDNESDAY, 9 September 2020  
Protestant Academy Loccum

The future development of the Western Balkans including the region's integration into the EU was uncertain for a while. The current COVID-19 crisis as well as the veto by the French President Emmanuel Macron against the opening of accession negotiations with Albania and Northern Macedonia has further complicated the situation. 20 years after the Zagreb summit in 2000 which provided perspective of European integration and after decades of profound crises in the region, the future of the Western Balkans seems less certain than a few years ago. Revanchism, ethno-nationalism, and authoritarian developments risk being the key feature of the 2020s. Brain drain and information disorder weaken perspectives of future prosperity.

While taking into account the numerous challenges within and among the countries of the region and with and inside the European Union, this expert conference has a forward-looking approach and aims to develop innovative ideas which might help to stop that the Western Balkans and the EU are growing further apart. Together with practitioners and experts coming from the countries of the region and across the EU, we will address three intertwined challenges – namely authoritarian rule, ongoing ethno-political cleavages, and the search for a new European approach for the region. Jointly we will try to develop new opportunities and perspectives on possible solutions.

#### The conference committee:

**Thomas Müller-Färber**, International and Security Affairs, Protestant Academy Loccum  
**Tobias Flessenkemper**, Member of the Board of the Southeast Europe Association (Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft – SOG)

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#### THIS CONFERENCE IS FUNDED BY:



Gefördert durch:  
**Brot für die Welt** mit Mitteln des Kirchlichen Entwicklungsdienstes



## DAY 1 MONDAY 7 SEPTEMBER 2020

### 13:30 REGISTRATION

Guests who travel from abroad are welcomed to arrive the day before (Sunday, 6 September 2020)

### 14:00 WORDS OF WELCOME

**Thomas Müller-Färber**, International and Security Affairs, Protestant Academy Loccum

**Tobias Flessenkemper**, Board Member of the Southeast Europe Association (Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft – SOG), Düsseldorf/Belgrade

### 14:15 KEY-NOTE LECTURE | The Western Balkans in the European Union: A difficult relationship (via video link)

Between “enlargement fatigue” and “accession refusal”, the Western Balkans cannot be detached from the European Union as a region, yet today the perspectives of “togetherness” seem more elusive than 2003 when the EU promised their full integration. This key-note lecture will introduce the range of issues, opportunities, and challenges of a difficult relationship and provide an overview of current and historic developments that shape the Western Balkans predicament. How will this region, surrounded by EU Member States, find its place in the political, cultural, social, economic and institutional construction of Europe?

**Florian Bieber**, Professor of Southeast European History and Politics and Director of the Centre for Southeast European Studies at the University of Graz, Vienna (invited)

### 15:30 COFFEE & CAKE

### 16:00 OPENING ROUND-TABLE DISCUSSION | The Western Balkans in the European Union: What next?

This open round-table discussion will allow for a panoramic overview on the ideas, initiatives, and concerns regarding the immediate future of the region and Europe as a whole. The purpose is to identify possible pathways for new, alternative or forgotten approaches to overcome the current political and diplomatic gridlocks, to reduce elements of state capture, from which the region is suffering, and to develop positive visions for European “togetherness” against the backdrop of a continental surge of revanchism, glorification of war criminals and abusive use of history. In that sense, this discussion shall nurture the work of the second day of the conference and allows to test ways out of ossified structures of thinking about Europe and the Balkans.

#### OPENING IMPULSES BY:

**Wojciech Kowalski**, Advisor, Western Balkans Strategy, DG NEAR, European Commission, Brussels (invited)

**Florent Marciacq**, French-Austrian Centre for Rapprochement in Europe (CFA / ÖFZ), Vienna (confirmed)

**Simonida Kacaraska**, Director, European Policy Institute, Skopje (confirmed)

**Josip Juratović**, Member of the German Parliament (SPD), Spokesperson of the Subcommittee on Crisis Prevention and Conflict Resolution and Member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Berlin/Heilbronn (confirmed)

Moderator: **Christian Hagemann**, Deputy Director, Southeast Europe Association (Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft – SOG), Munich (confirmed)

### 17:00 Coffee & Tea Break

### 17:15 Continued plenary discussion

### 18:30 DINNER

**19:30** **EVENING WITH THE MEDIA | What Keeps You Up at Night When You Think About the Western Balkans?**

Representatives from the press who focus their career first and foremost on the Western Balkans share their views and perspectives on the region. What keeps them up at night when they think about the Western Balkan? What is it that most people don't understand about the region? What is for them still puzzling about the Western Balkans? What are the most curial questions for the future? What can Western Europe learn from the Western Balkans? Etc.?

*Adelheid Wöfl*, Western Balkan Correspondent, Der Standard, Vienna (confirmed)

*Norbert Mappes-Niediek*, Free Journalist and writer focusing on South Eastern Europe, Graz (confirmed)

*Jovo Martinović*, Investigative Journalist, Podgorica (invited)

Moderator: *Tobias Flessenkemper*, Board Member of the Southeast Europe Association (Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft – SOG), Düsseldorf/Belgrade

**21:00** **FINALE AND COME-TOGETHER**

**DAY 2**  
**TUESDAY 8 SEPTEMBER 2020**

**08:30** **BREAKFAST**

**IDEA WORKSHOP**

The purpose of this workshop is to identify innovative ideas to address three intertwined challenges that the Western Balkans are facing – authoritarian rule, ongoing ethno-political cleavages, and the search for a new European approach for the region. The most parts of the idea workshop will be structured by the Gallyer Walk method. The goal is that we arrive in the end at a set of presentable recommendations and appealing questions that need to be addressed in the future.

**Working Group I – Europe: On A Search for A New EU Approach Western Balkans**

The European approach towards Western Balkan is in crisis. Emmanuel Macron's veto to the starting of accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia brought the EU's strategy to transform the region to a sharp end and raised the question how the Union and its Member States wish to go on in the future. What were the strengthes and the flaws of the old EU-approach? How would a new strategy of the EU and its Member states towards the region look like? Will it be as powerful as the accession tool?

**Working Group II – “Togetherness”: Dialogue and Reconciliation**

Despite numerous attempts to reconcile, many intra- and inter-societal conflicts from the 1990s wars remain virulent in the Western Balkans. They slow down economic progress, burden the political sphere, and were often named as one of the major obstacles to the European integration of the region. Considerable efforts were undertaken in the past in this fields with projects and initiatives reaching from transitional justice, cultural exchanges, youth contacts, dealing with the past projects, and bilateral disputes reconciliation. What impact did these efforts have and what should be done in the future to overcome ethno-political cleavages?

**Working Group III – Democracy: Strengthening Democratic Change**

The recent EU strategy for the Western Balkans issued in Spring 2018 makes clear that the countries of the region “show clear elements of state capture, including links with organized crime and corruption at all levels of government and administration, as well as a strong entanglement of public and private interests”. Authoritarian control of the states and societies in the region are widespread in the region and they have become more severe in recent years – apart from some positive development such as in Northern Mazedonia. What can be done to promote sustainable democratic change?

**9:30** **PROCEDURAL INTRODUCTION | What Will Happen During the Idea-Workshop**

**9:45** **WORKING GROUP PHASE**

**Group I – Europe**  
**(Room A)**

Input Speaker: *Adnan Ćerimagić*, European Stability Initiative (ESI), Berlin (confirmed)

Moderation: *tbc.*

*Aleksandra Tomanić*, Executive Director of the European Fund for the Balkans, Belgrade (invited)

*Christian Castagna*, Director, VoisinageS (NeighbourhoodS), Paris (confirmed)

*Peter Grk*, National Coordinator for Western Balkans, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Slovenia, Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Secretary-General, Bled Strategic Forum Ljubljana (confirmed)

**Group II – “Togetherness”**  
**(Room B)**

Input Speaker: *Mario Mažić*, Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) and Board Member of the Humanitarian Law Center Kosovo, Zagreb (confirmed)

Moderation: *Thomas Osorio*, University Leuven (invited)

*Đuro Blanuša*, Secretary-General, Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), Tirana (confirmed)

*Marika Djolai*, European Center for Minority Issues (ECMI) Flensburg (confirmed)

*Saranda Bogujevci*, Activist, Member of Parliament in Republic of Kosovo, Co-artist of Bogujevci/Visual History Exhibition, Priština/Manchester (invited)

*Christoph Lüttmann*, Managing Director, CSSP, Berlin Center for Integrative Mediation, Berlin (invited)

**Group III – Democracy**  
**(Room C)**

Input Speaker: *Max Bründle*, Head, Friedrich Ebert Foundation's office in Serbia, Begrade (confirmed)

Moderation: *Valeska Esch*, Aspen Institute Germany, Berlin (invited)

*Corina Stratulat*, Head of European Politics and Institutions Programme and Senior Policy Analyst, European Policy Center, Brussels (confirmed)

*Ardian Hackaj*, Director, Shteti Web, Cooperation and Development Institute (CDI), Tirana (confirmed – online participation)

*Siddharth Tripathi*, Postdoctoral Fellow Willy Brandt School of Public Policy, University of Erfur and Visiting Fellow at German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), Erfurt/Berlin (confirmed)

**10:30** **Coffee & Tea Break**

**10:45** **FIRST ROTATION PHASE | Group I visits Group II, Group II vists Group III, and Group III visits Group I**

**11:30** **Coffee & Tea Break**

**11:45** **FIRST ROTATION PHASE | Group I visits Group III, Group II vists Group I, and Group III visits Group II**

**12:30** **LUNCH**

**14:00** **PLENARY SESSION | What to Do? How to Move on With the European Policy Towards the Western Balkans?**

The purpose of this panel is to provide insight into the current policy debate about the future approach towards the six Western Balkan states. What will be Brussels approach towards the region in the years to come? What does Western Europe want from the region – what's its interests? What are possible scenarios for the future

development of the region if there will be no promising approach by the EU? What are the entry points for a policy debate about a strategy for the future? Etc.?

*Majlinda Bregu*, Secretary General, Regional Cooperation Council, Sarajevo (invited)  
*Damir Arnaut*, Member of the House of Representatives (Naša stranka political party), Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo (invited)  
*Viola von Cramon-Taubadel*, Member of the European Parliament (Group of the Greens), Member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Brussels (confirmed)

Moderation: *Thomas Müller-Färber*, Protestant Academy Loccum

15:30 **COFFEE & CAKE**

16:00 **WRITING SESSION | Future Questions and Recommendations**

Based on the insights and knowledge you gathered throughout the day your group is asked to write about the topic of your discussion forum recommendations and questions that need to be addressed in the future.

18:30 **DINNER**

19:30 **CULTURE TALK | Culture, Arts, and Politics**

How does the themes like the disappointed aspiration for the European community, the ongoing rejection by the West or the labeling as a crisis region resonate in art and culture? What can we learn from this view? The purpose of this evening talk is to change perspective and try to look upon the region from another point of view.

*Alida Bremer*, Autor, Translator, Editor, and Literary Scholar, Münster (confirmed)  
*Miranda Jakiša*, Professor at the Department of Slavonic Studies, University of Vienna (confirmed)

21:00 **FINAL AND INFORMAL COME-TOGETHER**

## DAY 3 WEDNESDAY 9 SEPTEMBER 2020

08:30 **BREAKFAST**

09:30 **PLENARY DISCUSSION | What Have We Learned? What Have We Missed?**

*Adis Merdzanovic*, ZHAW School of Management and Law Institut für Marketing Management, Winterthur (invited)

--- followed by plenary discussion ---

10:30 **Coffee & Tea Break**

10:45 **CONCLUDING PLENARY SESSION | Way Ahead: Key Take Aways of the Conference and What Shall We Do With it?**

*Christiane Hullmann*, Deputy Head of Department, Western Balkans, German Federal Foreign Office, Berlin (invited)  
*Gordan Bakota*, Ambassador of the Republic of Croatia in Germany, Berlin (invited)  
*Vedran Džihič*, Senior Research at the Austrian Institute for International Affairs (oii), lecture at the University of

Vienna and non-resident Senior Fellow at the Center for Transatlantic Relations, Vienna (prel. confirmed)  
*Peter Grk*, National Coordinator for Western Balkans, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Slovenia, Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Secretary-General, Bled Strategic Forum Ljubljana (confirmed)

Moderation: *Thomas Müller-Färber*, Protestant Academy Loccum

12:30 **GOODBYE LUNCH**

13:20 **DEPARTURE | Shuttle Service to Wunstorf Train Station & Hannover Airport (HAJ)**

### FORMAT:

Conferences at the Protestant Academy Loccum provide forums for open-minded discussions on urgent and pressing issues. They endeavor to establish dialogues between actors from different fields and backgrounds with the intention to provide impetus to "think out of the box". The Protestant Academy Loccum hosts meetings over 48 hours/two nights for between 60 to 80 participants and is open to those with the expertise to share or an interest in the subject.

### ARRIVAL/DEPARTURE:

Loccum is located 50 kilometers west of Hanover in Lower Saxony, Germany. The nearest airport is Hanover (HAJ). The nearest train stations are in Wunstorf, Stadthagen, Minden and Nienburg. Detailed travel directions will be sent to all registered participants.

### SHUTTLE BUS:

(Please book a seat in advance!): Monday, 7 September, departing in Wunstorf train station at 12:30 (please follow the station exit marked "ZOB"). Wednesday, 9 September arriving in Wunstorf at approx. 14:00 p.m. For those who arrive at Hannover Airport, we organize individual pick-up.

### COVID-19 REGULATIONS

The conference is strictly following the hygiene guidelines. In particular we have cut the number of participants in order to allow at all circumstances the required social distancing rules (Further information are available at [Robert Koch Institute](#)). Since our conference compound is spacious and located at the rural and sparsely populated countryside of Northern Germany, we are well prepared to hold this conference even under the current situation of the COVID-19 crisis.