



Berlin Process

Civil Society & Think Tank Forum 2024

October 9-11, 2024

Berlin

Conference Language: English

Since the second summit of the Berlin Process in Austria in 2015, the **Civil Society & Think Tank Forum** has become an integral part of the Berlin Process, involving civil society to contribute their ideas to advance cooperation and integration in the Western Balkans.

At the 10th anniversary of the Berlin Process, the Civil Society & Think Tank Forum 2024 again empowers thematic working groups to discuss current issues and produce policy recommendations. Civil society representatives have the opportunity to provide input and strengthen their visibility in the Berlin Process, while formulating and discussing recommendations that inform key stakeholders.

During the **Preparatory Forum** in July in Skopje, civil society representatives developed policy recommendations within seven thematic working groups. The results of the Preparatory Forum will serve as input to the **Civil Society & Think Tank Forum** in Berlin, which takes place just a few days before the Berlin Process Leaders' Summit on October 14, 2024. At the Forum in Berlin, perspectives of civil society and think tanks will be presented and discussed directly with decision-makers from the region and the EU.

The organizers would like to thank the German Federal Foreign Office for its generous support of the Civil Society and Think Tank Forum 2024.

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AGENDA

WEDNESDAY, 9 OCTOBER 2024

14:00 – 14:10

Opening

Dr. Christian Hagemann, Executive Director, Southeast Europe Association

Dr. Stormy-Annika Mildner, Executive Director, Aspen Institute Germany

14:10 – 14:30

Welcome Speech

Minister of State for Europe and Climate Dr. Anna Lührmann, Federal Foreign Office

14:30 – 15:45

Spotlight 1: 10 Years of the Berlin Process: Milestones, Successes, & Civil Society Involvement

Mapping Study Presentation:

Dr. Marika Djolai, Visiting Research Fellow, University of Peleponese, Member of the Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG)

Dr. Silvana Mojsavska, Professor, Institute of Economics, University “Ss. Cyril and Methodius” – Skopje

Speakers:

Manuel Sarrazin, Federal Government Special Representative for the Countries of the Western Balkans

Armand Skapi, Secretary General, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs

Albert Hani, Secretary General, Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO)

Moderation:

Dr. Stormy-Annika Mildner, Executive Director, Aspen Institute Germany

Ten years ago in 2014, the Berlin Process was launched as a platform for increased cooperation between the Western Balkans and the host countries of the Berlin Process and the EU. The panel will feature a discussion based on the main findings of a “mapping study” commissioned through this year’s Civil Society and Think Tank Forum to cover ten years of the Berlin Process. What are the major milestones and successes of the Berlin Process? What challenges is the Berlin Process faced with, and how could they be addressed? What should be done to ensure that official commitments translate into progress on the ground? What can be done to ensure that perspectives from civil society are heard by decision-makers?

15:45 – 16:15

Coffee Break

AGENDA

16:15 – 17:30

Spotlight 2: Inclusion of Marginalized Communities

Speakers:

Eriselda Sefa, Mayor of Lushnja, Winner of the Most Roma-Friendly Mayor Award 2024

Isak Skenderi, Executive Director, Voice of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians

Rahiela Mustafovska, Project Manager, Roma Foundation for Europe

Nadire Redjepi, Director for Western Balkans, REDI NGO (tbc)

Moderation:

Rejane Herwig, Policy Advisor, Department Eastern Europe, Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation

The social and economic inclusion of minorities in all aspects of public life is a key goal of the Berlin Process. In 2019 the Declaration on Roma Integration saw the governments of the Western Balkans commit to a clearly defined set of common objectives towards “full equality and integration of Roma”. However, much remains to be done to ensure that marginalized communities can benefit from the same rights and opportunities as the rest of the population. The spotlight discussion will address the following questions. What are some of the biggest barriers faced by marginalized communities in accessing equal rights and opportunities in the region? How can the Western Balkans cooperate to empower minorities across the region and which role can the Berlin Process play in this regard? What can be done to ensure that future reforms remain rooted in marginalized groups’ needs and perspectives? How can civil society most effectively advocate for the rights of minorities at multiple levels?

17:30 – 18:45

Panel 1: Common Regional Market and Mobility

Rapporteur from Civil Society:

Alban Hashani, Executive Director, “Riinvest” Institute

Speakers:

Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska, Secretary General, Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum

Elda Kalaja, Head of Office of the Secretary General, Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)

Zdravko Ilić, Senior Technical Expert, Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA)

Odeta Barbullushi, Resident Professor, Department of European Transformation and Integration Studies, College of Europe Tirana

Moderation:

Alexander Beribes, Western Balkans/Southeast Europe & Russia, Konrad Adenauer Foundation

The past decade has seen increased economic cooperation in the Western Balkans, with the launch of several initiatives aiming at facilitating the free flow of people, goods, capitals, and services within the region. However, the region still faces multifaceted challenges in facilitating mobility and achieving a unified and functional regional market. The panel will therefore focus on the following questions: How has the Berlin Process affected market and economic integration in the region? What measures need to be taken to advance a functioning Common Regional Market in the Western Balkans? What are some of the main challenges posed by current mobility and migration trends and how to address them? Which role can the digital transformation play in enhancing regional integration and mobility? How can CSOs and think tanks be effectively involved in advancing the Common Regional Market and mobility in the region?

AGENDA

THURSDAY, 10 OCTOBER 2024

9:00 – 9:30

Conversation and Discussion with

Ambassador Michael Reiffenstuel, Director for South-Eastern Europe, Turkey, EFTA States, OSCE and Council of Europe, Federal Foreign Office

Moderation:

Valbona Zeneli, Senior Fellow, Atlantic Council of the United States, Europe Center and Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security

9:30 – 10:45

Panel 2: EU Integration and the Berlin Process

Rapporteur from Civil Society:

Zoran Nechev, Head of the Center for EU integration/Senior Researcher, Institute for Democracy Societas Civilis Skopje – IDSCS

Speakers:

H.E. Maida Gorčević, Minister of European Affairs

Ambassador René Troccaz, Special Envoy for the Western Balkans, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs

Anja Wallau, Director for EU Basic Policy Issues, EU Coordination and EU External Affairs, Federal Foreign Office

Wojciech Kowalski, Adviser Western Balkan Strategy, DG NEAR, European Commission

Moderation:

Dr. Christian Hagemann, Executive Director, Southeast Europe Association

Since its launch ten years ago, the Berlin Process has become a valuable platform to promote regional cooperation and dialogue within the Western Balkans region and with the EU. The Berlin Process thus actively complements the EU integration efforts of the Western Balkans. The panel will address the following questions: How can the Berlin Process and the EU enlargement process be streamlined most effectively? How to ensure that the region's most pressing needs and challenges are placed at the center of the Berlin Process' agenda? How to ensure a systematized implementation of the commitments taken within the framework of the Berlin Process? How can civil society and its expertise be involved?

10:45 – 11:15

Coffee Break

AGENDA

11:15 – 12:30

Panel 3: Gender & Diversity

Rapporteur from Civil Society:

Tania Ivanova, President, REACTOR - Research in Action

Speakers:

Edi Gusia, Executive Director, Agency for Gender Equality / Office of the Prime Minister

Julia Koch-De Biolley, Head of Task Force Gender & Diversity, European External Action Service

Dušan Maljković, Philosopher, Writer, Editor of Online Magazine Querr, Belgrade

Moderation:

Maja Stajčić, Senior Programme Officer, Kvinna till Kvinna

The rights of women and LGBTQIA+ people are increasingly threatened in the Western Balkans with rising rates of gender-based violence and attacks on activists, anti-gender movements and stalling implementation of gender equality reforms. The panel will address the following questions: What can be done to ensure that gender and diversity gain more visibility within national discourses and on the agenda of the Berlin Process? How to effectively mainstream gender issues in the Berlin Process and the EU accession process? What can be done to establish an open dialogue between activists, CSOs and decisionmakers on gender-related issues?

12:30 – 14:00

Lunch

14:00 – 15:15

Panel 4: Energy, Climate Change, and Decarbonization

Rapporteur from Civil Society:

Denis Žiško, Energy and Climate Change Program Coordinator, Aarhus Center

Speakers:

Borche Dimitrovski, Secretary of the Municipality of Bitola

Adam Cwetsch, Head of European Green Deal Unit, Energy Community

N.N., Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (giz) (tbc)

Moderation:

Verena Allert, Senior Advisor – Energy Transition Collaboration Western Balkans, Germanwatch

The economic and social repercussions of climate change are set to become one of the most pressing issues of the next decades for the Western Balkans, as the region is highly dependent on fossil fuels and at the same time particularly vulnerable to extreme weather events. The signing of the Green Agenda in 2020 marked an important step in aligning the region's climate and energy targets with the objectives of the European Green Deal. However, the implementation of energy policies and climate legislation remains a challenge in the region. The panel will focus on the following issues: What are the biggest challenges the region faces when it comes to green energy transition and how to address them? Which role should the Berlin Process and the EU play in this regard? What can be done to ensure that the issue gains more visibility in the eyes of decision-makers? How can coal-dependent regions be supported in the green energy transition? What can be done to better include relevant CSOs and experts in the transition process?

15:15 – 16:30

Workshops (not live streamed)

16:30 – 17:00

Coffee Break

AGENDA

17:00 – 18:15

Panel 5: Environmental Protection and Sustainable Economic Development

Rapporteur from Civil Society:

Aleksandër Trajçe, Executive Director, PPNEA

Speakers:

Dr. Eva Kracht, Director-General for International and European Policy, Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection

Lindita Shakiri, Head of Department for European Union, Ministry for Environment and Physical Planning

Fationa Cınaj, Head of the Department for Climate Change, Ministry of Environment and Tourism

Genci Nimanbegu, Mayor of Ulcinj

Moderation:

Katja Giebel, Senior Programme Officer East and South East Europe Division, Heinrich Böll Foundation

The Western Balkans face a set of common challenges related to sustainable development and environmental protection. Especially the need to reconcile the preservation of the unique biodiversity with economic development in the region comes as a necessity for ensuring a sustainable future for the generations to come. The panel will address the following questions: How can environmental protection and economic development be effectively reconciled in the region? What steps need to be taken to increase awareness of the topic within public administrations and among citizens? Which role can the Berlin Process play in improving regional cooperation on environmental protection and sustainable development? How can grassroot movements and CSOs play a role in effectively promoting environmental protection in the region?

18:15 – 19:30

Spotlight 3: Rule of Law and Fighting Corruption

Speakers:

H.E. Vigan Qorrolli, Deputy Minister of Justice

Desislava Gotskova, Head of Secretariat, Regional Anticorruption Initiative

Reinhard Priebe, Chair of the Senior Experts' group on rule of law issues, which prepared reports on the rule of law situation in North Macedonia (2015, 2017) and Bosnia and Hercegovina (2019)

Nemanja Nenadić, Program Director, Transparency Serbia

Moderation:

Dr. Andi Hoxhaj OBE, Lecturer in Law, King's College London

The rule of law (RoL) and eradication of corruption are central conditions for the region's successful EU accession, as well as a key priority of EU support to the Western Balkans. However, the past few years have seen rather stagnation, and in some cases even backsliding of rule of law standards in the region. The panel will thus address the following questions: How can the EU ensure that the promotion of rule of law and the fight against corruption remain central priorities throughout the accession process? Which role can the Berlin Process play in this regard? How can civil society be more actively involved in promoting the rule of law? What could be done at the regional level to reverse the backsliding of the RoL? How can the momentum of institutional, judicial and anti-corruption reforms be renewed?

AGENDA

FRIDAY, 11 OCTOBER 2024

09:00 – 10:15

Panel 6: Dealing with the Past and Reconciliation

Rapporteur from Civil Society:

Sofija Todorović, Director, Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) Serbia

Speakers:

H.E. Donika Gërvalla-Schwarz, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Second Deputy Prime Minister

H.E. Usame Zukorlić, Minister Without Portfolio in Charge of Reconciliation, Regional Cooperation and Social Stability

Ambassador (ret.) Dr. Joachim Rucker, Former Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Kosovo, Former President of the U.N. Human Rights Council

Coming to terms with the past remains a huge challenge in the Western Balkans. The rise of nationalist and divisive rhetoric in recent years is further increasing the polarization within and among countries of the region. This situation poses a threat to the stability and the peaceful development of the entire region. The panel will thus focus on the following questions: How can the Berlin Process and the EU accession process effectively support the region's reconciliation processes? How to ensure that initiatives to deal with the past receive adequate support and visibility in the region? What could be done to encourage a more unified historical understanding of the region's past and its present heritage? Which role can civil society play in this regard?

10:15 – 10:45

Coffee Break

10:45 – 12:00

Panel 7: Disinformation and Cyber Threats

Rapporteur from Civil Society:

Olivera Nikolić, Director, Montenegro Media Institute (MMI)

Speakers:

H.E. Tamara Vujović, Minister of Culture and Media

Kataryna Kruk, Regional Public Policy Lead Central and Eastern Europe, Meta

Moderation:

Zoë van Doren, Policy Advisor for Global Digitalisation and Innovation, Friedrich-Naumann-Foundation for Freedom

The recent years have seen a rise of disinformation campaigns in the Western Balkans, with various actors seeking to actively exploit regional and internal divisions. The Western Balkans are increasingly faced with active circulation of harmful speech and fake news on both social and traditional media as well as with more sophisticated and diverse cyber-threats. The panel discussion will focus on the following questions: How can the EU and the region's governments and institutions cooperate most effectively to counter disinformation and bolster their defense against cyber threats? Which adjustments of the regulatory frameworks could strengthen the region's resilience against disinformation and cyber threats while at the same time protecting media freedom and freedom of speech? What role do social media platforms play and what can be done to ensure their cooperation? Which role can civil society and media organizations play in increasing resilience and digital literacy in the region?

12:00 – 13:15

Lunch

AGENDA

13:15 – 14:45

Spotlight 4: Young Perspectives – How to Make a Difference?

Speakers:

H.E. Prof. Dr. Anđela Jakšić-Stojanović, Minister of Education, Science and Innovation

H.E. Bora Muzhaqi, Minister of State for Youth and Children

Envera Moro, War Childhood Museum in Sarajevo

Ensara Reci, RYCO Local Program Officer in Albania

Lazar Simić, Student, Media Worker, Researcher and Activist

Adrian Flaig, Member of the Managing Board, Albanian Student and Academics Stuttgart

Moderation:

Adelheid Feilcke, Director of Programs for Europe, Deutsche Welle

The Western Balkans are facing high emigration rates of young people. This emigration trend has not only a major impact on the ageing of societies and on the shortage of skilled workers in many sectors - it also influences the country's democratic development and the EU integration path. The panel will thus address the following questions: How do young people from the region perceive the political, economic, societal and educational situation in the Western Balkans? How to empower young people to engage actively in shaping their countries' democratic and European future? Which role can the diaspora play?

14:45 – 15:00

Closing

Dr. Christian Hagemann, Executive Director, Southeast Europe Association