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THE WESTERN BALKANS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION: ENLARGEMENT TO WHAT, ACCESSION TO WHAT?

*International Conference
 in the run up to the Italian Summit on the Western Balkans*

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BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

In 2014, in the wake of the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War, the Federal Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, initiated an intergovernmental process with the countries of the Western Balkans. Its aim is to improve their cooperation, put “fundamentals first”, and thereby reinvigorate their European integration. The first Summit in Berlin was followed by a second in Vienna in 2015 and a third in Paris in 2016. A fourth Summit will be convened by Italy in 2017, before the process is expected to end one year later, in 2018, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the end of WW1.

In order to encourage a European dialogue amongst citizens on the enlargement process, a Civil Society Forum was launched in 2015 during the Vienna Summit and a second was then held in parallel to the Paris Summit in 2016. At the same time, IFRI, CIFE and CFA, together with several other institutions, launched an initiative amongst think tanks and academic institutions on the Western Balkans and their European perspective in 2015, which culminated in the organisation of a “reflection forum” on the Western Balkans in May 2016 in Paris. Both initiatives provided a valuable platform for civil society and experts from all over Europe (EU and Western Balkans) and were followed by a series of outreach events and forums in all Western Balkan countries in order to share ideas on the Berlin Process.

In the run up to the Italian Summit on the Western Balkans scheduled to take place in Trieste on 12 July 2017, the International Conference will bring together a number of European experts to reflect on the challenges facing the EU and its enlargement towards the Western Balkans. The meeting will kick off a series of events such as a Second Reflection Forum and a Civil Society Forum, which will be both hosted in Trieste in May and July 2017 respectively.

PROGRAMME

8.15 – 9.00 *Registration of participants*

9.00 – 10.00 **WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS**

Elisabetta Belloni, Secretary General, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

Nathalie Tocci, Deputy Director, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)

KEYNOTE SPEECH

Vincenzo Amendola, Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

Q&A

10.00 – 10.30 **FROM VIENNA TO PARIS AND TRIESTE: THE BERLIN PROCESS AND THE CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM**

Johannes Kyrle, Secretary General, Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe

Hedvig Morvai, Executive Director, European Fund for the Balkans

Allan Jones, Head of Unit for Strategy, Policy and EEA/EFTA, European Commission

10.30 – 11.45

FIRST SESSION: INTEGRATION, DIFFERENTIATION AND THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

The past few years have witnessed an odd mix of integration, differentiation and disintegration in the EU. Integrationist progress, however incomplete, has been made on economic matters (e.g. the banking union), border management (e.g. the European border and coast guard agency) and foreign policy (the EU Global Strategy and its implementation). At the same time, the risk of disintegration looms large, with Brexit being the most notable case in point. Differentiated integration is partly a reality, yet one which is rarely discussed openly. What will the Union which the Western Balkans strive to join look like?

Chair

Florent Marciacq, Research Director, Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe (CFA)

Speakers

Stefan Lehne, Carnegie Europe, Austria

Aleksandar Petar Jovanovski, European Policy Institute, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Srdjan Cvijic, Open Society European Policy Institute, Belgium

Dušan Reljić, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Germany

Ivan Vejvoda, Institute for Human Sciences, Austria

11.45 – 12.00

Coffee break

12.00 – 13.30

SECOND SESSION: THE POLITICISATION OF ENLARGEMENT

Enlargement had long been mostly a technocratic process, driven by EU elites with the permissive consent of their constituencies. The big bang enlargement and the enlargement fatigue that followed fundamentally changed this logic. EU enlargement policy has now become a highly political process, partly steered by individual governments, and increasingly susceptible to public opinion pressure. In the absence of a compelling narrative promoting the EU accession of Western Balkan states, the politicisation of enlargement is mainly framed by Eurosceptic and anti-enlargement forces. Assuming that the politicisation of enlargement will remain a fact of life, how to develop a positive enlargement narrative for the Western Balkans?

Chair

Piero Fassino, President, Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale (CeSPI)

Speakers

Igor Novakovic, ISAC Fund and Council for Inclusive Governance, Serbia

Daliborka Uljarević, Centre for Civic Education, Montenegro

Naim Rashiti, Balkans Group, Kosovo

Jean Arnault Dérens, Le Courrier des Balkans

Eleonora Poli, Istituto Affari Internazionali, Italy

Veran Matic, B92, Serbia

13.30 – 14.30

Lunch

14.30 – 16.00

THIRD SESSION: SUSTAINING CONNECTIVITY AND TRANSFORMATION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Because of the journey that both the EU and the Western Balkans have to make, enlargement is not likely to take place in the immediate future. Yet the carrot of accession has traditionally represented the most powerful anchor for the transformation of candidate countries. How can the reform momentum be maintained? What can be the role of specific initiatives to bolster the socio-economic resilience of the Western Balkans? Can initiatives promoted in the context of the Berlin process to boost economic connectivity sustain the transformation of the region, especially by fostering market integration and the rule of law? Connected to this, how can the EU and the Western Balkan countries contain or redirect the economic influence of other external players, which do not view the European future of the Balkans as the desirable direction of travel?

Chair

Tobias Flessenkemper, Senior Research Associate, Centre international de formation européenne (CIFE)

Speakers

Ardian Hackaj, ShtetiWeb, Albania

Luisa Chiodi, Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso, Italy

Srecko Latal, Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Spyros Economides, London School of Economics, United Kingdom

Gerald Knaus, European Stability Initiative, Germany

16.00 – 16.30

CLOSING REMARKS

Michele Giacomelli, Special Envoy for the Western Balkan Process Summit

Ferdinando Nelli Feroci, President, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)