

From Thessaloniki to Sofia and Beyond: Heading towards a Credible European Enlargement to the Western Balkans?

6 JUNE 2018, 10:00 – 17:00

**ROMA EVENTI
VIA ALIBERT, 5/A, ROME**

AGENDA

BACKGROUND

The year 2018 marks the 15th anniversary of the Thessaloniki European Council, which for the first time affirmed explicitly the membership perspective of the Western Balkans. In May 2018, the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Sofia reiterated the unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans (WB6) and revamped the EU's engagement with the region. The new Strategy for 'A Credible Enlargement Perspective for and Enhanced EU Engagement with the Western Balkans', adopted by the Commission in February 2018 set out a path for Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia/FYROM and Albania to eventually accede the Union by 2025.

Over the last decade, the multiple crises that have beset the EU have coupled with a reform slowdown in the WB6 to weaken any appetite for further EU enlargement. Negative politicization of enlargement has taken hold, whereby EU Member States, mired in their internal problems, have at best become indifferent to the Western Balkans. As the EU is still struggling with a number of internal and external challenges (ranging from eurozone governance to migration management), some believe that time is not ripe yet for investing massive political capital in the relaunch of the enlargement process.

Since 2015, however, EU players have gradually re-awoken to the strategic relevance of the WB6, rekindling EU attention and commitment to the region. Europeans have realized that there is no irreversibility in the modernization, democratization, and pacification of the Western Balkans. Without strengthened and visible EU commitment, the WB6 could once again go astray. These signs of a positive politicization of enlargement remain fragile. Without successful reforms in the Western Balkans renewed EU political commitment to the Western Balkans could backfire, emboldening nationalist and populist voices both in the Union and in the WB6 who oppose integrating the Balkan countries into the EU. Reforms and concrete cooperation specifically in the areas of economy and rule of law are key to sustain the newfound push for European integration in the Western Balkans.

In light of the above, the **Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)** in cooperation with the **European Commission's Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR)** and the **European Fund for the Balkans**, is organising an international conference in Rome to engage politicians, journalists, businesspersons, civil society actors and academics in a creative forward-looking exercise on the future of European enlargement towards the Western Balkans. The expected impact of the event is to advance an understanding of the strategic win-win gains that the EU and the WB6 would get by recommitting to reform and cooperation, as much as of the costs of not doing so, which would fuel nationalist, populist and illiberal discourses in both the EU and the Western Balkans.

DRAFT PROGRAMME

- 09:30 – 10.00** **Registration and Welcome Coffee**
- 10:00 – 10.30** **Welcome remarks**
FERDINANDO NELLI FEROCI, President, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)
MYRIAM FERRAN, Director for Strategy and Turkey, European Commission (DG NEAR)
HEDVIG MORVAI, Executive Director, European Fund for the Balkans
- 10:30 – 12:00** **Panel I: The Commission's Strategy for the Western Balkans: moving towards a credible integration**
Chair:
NATHALIE TOCCI, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)
Speakers:
MYRIAM FERRAN, European Commission (DG NEAR)
SRDJAN MAJSTOROVIC, European Policy Centre, Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG)
ARMANDO BARUCCO, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
EMANUELA DEL RE, Member of the Italian Parliament, Professor of Sociology
STEVEN BLOCKMANS, Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS)
Q&A
- 12.00 – 12.30** **Coffee break**
- 12:30 – 14:00** **Panel II: National perspectives on the Western Balkans: is there a politicization of the accession process?**
Chair:
ELEONORA POLI, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)
Speakers:
MICHELE GIACOMELLI, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
MARKO KMEZIC, University of Graz, Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group
TOBIAS FLESSENKEMPER, Centre international de formation européenne (CIFE)
STEFAN LEHNE, Carnegie Europe
Q&A
- 14:00 – 15:00** **Lunch**
- 15.00 – 16.30** **Panel III: Democracy and state fragility in the WB6**
Chair:
IGOR BANDOVIC, European Fund for the Balkans
Speakers:
DANE TALESKI, Foreign policy adviser in the cabinet of Prime Minister Zoran Zaev
ARDIAN HACKAJ, Cooperation and Development Institute (CDI)
ADNAN CERIMAGIC, European Stability Initiative
JOVANA MAROVIC, Politikon Network
ARBËRESHA LOXHA, Group for Legal and Political Studies
Q&A
- 16:30 – 17:00** **Concluding remarks:**
NATHALIE TOCCI, Director, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)
BEATRICE COVASSI, Head of the European Commission's Representation in Italy