

## 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 continues to be. The COVID-19 pandemic as well as growing opposition to further EU enlargement has recently complicated the situation. 20 years after the Zagreb summit in November 2000 which opened the perspective of European integration and after profound crises in the region, the future of the Western Balkans seems less certain than during the 2000s. 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 various challenges within and among the countries of the region as well as with and inside the European Union, this expert conference pursues 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 identify opportunities and approaches for possible new 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), Munich & Head of the Council of Europe office in Belgrade

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 SÜDOSTEUROPA-  
GESELLSCHAFT

## DAY 1

MONDAY 7 SEPTEMBER 2020

13:30 REGISTRATION

14:45 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), Munich & Head of the Council of Europe office in Belgrade

15:00 KEY-NOTE LECTURE | **The Western Balkans in the European Union: A difficult relationship**

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 & Board Member of the Southeast Europe Association (Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft – SOG), Vienna (*online participation*)

16:00 COFFEE & CAKE

16:30 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:

*Clive Rumbold*, Senior Expert, Western Balkans Division, European External Action Service, Brussels (*online participation*)

*Simonida Kacarska*, Director, European Policy Institute, Skopje (*online participation*)

*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, Vice-President of the Southeast Europe Association (Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft – SOG) Berlin/Heilbronn

*Jasmin Mujanović*, Assistant Professor of Political Science and Policy Studies at Elon University and author of the book “Hunger and Fury: The Crisis of Democracy in the Balkans”, Elon (*online participation*)

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

17:30 Coffee & Tea Break

17:45 Continued plenary discussion

18:30 End of discussion

Online participation by the wider public

Online participation by the wider public

19:15

DINNER

20:15

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

Distinguished journalists share their views and perspectives and analyses of South Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans. What keeps them up at night when they think about the region? What is it that most people miss to understand about the Balkans? What puzzles them most in South Eastern Europe? What are the crucial questions for the cooperation with the European Union? What can Western Europe learn from the Western Balkans?

*Adelheid Wölfel*, South Eastern Europe Correspondent, Der Standard, Sarajevo

*Norbert Mappes-Niediek*, Journalist and Author focusing on South Eastern Europe, Graz

*Jovo Martinović*, Investigative Journalist, Podgorica (*online participation*)

*Srećko Matić*, Journalist, Deutsche Welle, Bonn

Moderator: *Tobias Flessenkemper*

21:30

COME-TOGETHER

## DAY 2

TUESDAY 8 SEPTEMBER 2020

08:45

BREAKFAST

### IDEA WORKSHOP

The purpose of this round of workshops 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 workshop will follow a “Rotation 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 Balkans 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 strengths 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 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 Macedonia. What can be done to promote sustainable democratic change?

09:45

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

10:00

**WORKING GROUP PHASE**

**Group I – Europe**

**(Room A)**

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

Facilitator: **Miranda Jakiša**, Professor at the Department of Slavonic Studies, University of Vienna (*online participation*)

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

**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 (*online participation*)

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

**Norbert Mappes-Niediek**, Journalist and Author focusing on South Eastern Europe, Graz

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

**Group II – “Togetherness”**

**(Room L)**

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

Facilitator: **Adelheid Wölfel**, South Eastern Europe Correspondent, Der Standard, Sarajevo

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

**Alida Bremer**, Autor, Translator, Editor, and Literary Scholar, Münster

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

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

**Srećko Matić**, Journalist, Deutsche Welle, Bonn

**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

**Evelyn Reuter**, Lecturer, Institute for Slavonci Languages and Caucasus Studies, Friedrich-Schiller-University Jena

**Group III – Democracy**

**(Room E)**

Input Speaker: **Max Brändle**, Head, Friedrich Ebert Foundation's office in Serbia, Bgrade

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

**Valeska Esch**, Deputy Executive Director, Aspen Institute Germany, Berlin (*online participation*)

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

**Jovo Martinović**, Investigative Journalist, Podgorica (*online participation*)

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

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

**Gudrun Steinacker**, Ambassador (ret.), Vice-President of the Southeast Europe Association (Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft – SOG), Vienna

**Claudia Laštro**, Centre for Southeast European Studies at the University of Graz, Graz/Munich

- 11:30** Coffee & Tea Break
- 11:45** 1st ROTATION PHASE | Group I visits Group II, Group II visits Group III, and Group III visits Group I
- 12:15** Coffee & Tea Break
- 12:30** 2nd ROTATION PHASE | Group I visits Group III, Group II visits Group I, and Group III visits Group II
- 13:00** LUNCH
- 14:30** **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.?
- Peter Beyer*, Member of the German Parliament (CDU), Foreign Affairs Committee, Coordinator for the transatlantic relations and Vice-President of the Southeast Europe Association (Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft – SOG), Berlin/Ratingen (*online participation*)
- Majlinda Bregu*, Secretary General, Regional Cooperation Council, Sarajevo (*online participation*)
- Viola von Cramon-Taubadel*, Member of the European Parliament (Group of the Greens), Member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Brussels (*online participation*)
- Valérie Rabault*, Assemblée nationale, President of the Group of Parti socialiste in parliament, Paris (*online participation*)
- Moderation: *Florent Marciacq*, French-Austrian Centre for Rapprochement in Europe (CFA / ÖFZ), Vienna
- 16:00** **Woodland Walk & Picnic under the Trees**  
(Meeting Point: Lobby)
- 17:30** **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.
- 19:15** **DINNER**
- 20:15** **CULTURE TALK | Culture, Arts, and Politics**
- How does the themes like the disappointed aspiration for the European community, the perceived rejection by the EU or the labeling as a crisis region resonate in art and culture? What can we learn from artistic approaches and strategies? The purpose of this evening talk is to change perspective and try to look from, to and at the region through a different lens.
- Alida Bremer*, Autor, Translator, Editor, and Literary Scholar, Münster
- Miranda Jakiša*, Professor at the Department of Slavonic Studies, University of Vienna (*online participation*)
- Moderation: *Tobias Flessenkemper*
- 21:30** **INFORMAL COME-TOGETHER**

**DAY 3**  
WEDNESDAY 9 SEPTEMBER 2020

<b>08:45</b>	<b>BREAKFAST</b>
<b>10:00</b>	<b>PLENARY DISCUSSION   Presentation of the Results of the Working Groups: What Is Missing?</b>
<b>11:00</b>	Coffee & Tea Break
<b>11:15</b>	<p><b>CONCLUDING PLENARY SESSION   Exploring the Future Trajectory – Will the EU and the Western Balkans grow together or move apart in the future?</b></p> <p><i>Christiane <b>Hullmann</b>, Head of Western Balkan Division, German Federal Foreign Office, Berlin (online participation)</i></p> <p><i>Gordan <b>Bakota</b>, Ambassador of the Republic of Croatia in Germany, Berlin (online participation)</i></p> <p><i>Vedran <b>Džihich</b>, Senior Research at the Austrian Institute for International Affairs (oiip), lecture at the University of Vienna and non-resident Senior Fellow at the Center for Transatlantic Relations, Vienna (online participation)</i></p> <p><i>Peter <b>Grk</b>, National Coordinator for Western Balkans, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Slovenia, Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Secretary-General, Bled Strategic Forum Ljubljana (online participation)</i></p> <p><i>Manuel <b>Sarrazin</b>, Member of the German Parliament (Bündnis 90/die Grünen), Foreign Affairs Committee and European Committee, President of the Southeast Europe Association, Hamburg/Berlin (online participation)</i></p> <p>Moderation: <i>Thomas Müller-Färber</i></p>
<b>13:00</b>	<b>GOODBYE LUNCH</b>
<b>13:50</b>	<b>DEPARTURE   Shuttle Service to Wunstorf Train Station &amp; Hannover Airport (HA)</b>

Online participation by the wider public

**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:**

We organize an individual pick-up for those who arrive at Hannover Airport or at railway station Wunstorf, Stadthagen, Minden or Nienburg. Please send your arrival and departure dates to [Miriam.Kamber@evlka.de](mailto:Miriam.Kamber@evlka.de).

**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](https://www.rki.de)). 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.