

## The Western Balkans in the European Union: new perspectives on integration?

Reflection Forum in the run-up to the Conference of Paris on the Western Balkans

Paris, 30-31 May 2016

### Venues:

30 May 2016, Embassy of Austria in Paris

31 May 2016, French Institute for International Relations

31 May 2016, Representation of the European Commission in France

### Organised by:

French Institute for International Relations (Ifri), Paris; Centre international de formation européenne (CIFE), Nice/Berlin/Istanbul; Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe (CFA), Vienna.

In co-operation with: Sciences Po CERI, Paris; Austrian Institute for International Politics (Oiiip), Vienna; Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), Berlin; Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome; European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), Paris; Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG); Erste Foundation (ERSTE), Vienna

### With the support of:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of France, Austrian Embassy in France, Federal Foreign office of Germany and Federal Ministry for European, Integration and Foreign Affairs of Austria.

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## Context and objectives:

In August 2014, in the wake of the centenary of First World War, the Federal Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel initiated an intergovernmental process with the countries of the Western Balkans. Its aim has been to improve their cooperation, put “fundamentals first” and thereby reinvigorate their European integration. The first conference in Berlin was followed by a second one in Vienna in 2015. A third one will take place in Paris in 2016, marking the middle of the process. The process should end in 2018, at the occasion of the centenary of the end of the First World War.

In this perspective, IFRI, CIFE and CFA will organise a forum for reflection on the Western Balkans in Paris on 30 and 31 May 2016, in cooperation with Sciences Po CERI, SWP, EUISS, IAI, Oiiip and Erste Foundation, and with the support of the Ministry of Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of Austria, the Austrian Embassy in Paris, the Foreign Office of Germany and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France.

The reflection forum, entitled “The Western Balkans in the European Union: new perspectives on integration?”, aims to discuss the relevance of a European dialogue of research and policy institutions on issues related to the Western Balkans and their European integration in the run-up to the Conference of Heads of State and Government from the Western Balkans countries hosted by President François Hollande on 4 July 2016.

The reflection forum will invite the community of European experts working on EU integration in the Western Balkans to highlight the challenges the EU faces in enlargement matters in the Western Balkans today and the contribution research can make to EU policy processes. It will provide a platform fostering the exchange of perspectives between experts working in national and European administrations and researchers affiliated to think tanks or academic institutes in France, the European Union and beyond. The forum will furthermore contribute to broadening the reflection about the Western Balkans among the policy community, the media and the general public. It will also create links to the Western Balkans Civil Society Forum and Sustainable Investment Forum, both organised on the margins of the intergovernmental Conference of Paris in July 2016, as well as establish a bridge to the next intergovernmental Conference to be held in Italy in the summer of 2017.

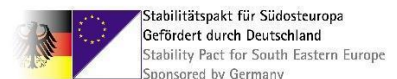
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## Programme

Monday, 30 May 2016

*Venue: Embassy of Austria, 6, rue Fabert, 75007 Paris*

19h00 Official opening

- Welcome by H.E. Amb. Ursula Plassnik, Ambassador of Austria to France
- Welcome by the organisers of the Reflection Forum
- Introduction to the Berlin-Vienna-Paris process
- Key-note address by H.E. Harlem Désir, Minister of State for European Affairs

*followed by a reception and buffet dinner*

Tuesday, 31 May 2016

*Venue: Institut français des relations internationales, 27, rue de la Procession, 75015 Paris*

08h45 Registration

09h15 Welcome  
Dominique David, Institut français des relations internationales (IFRI), Paris

Introduction to the Reflection Forum  
Tobias Flessenkemper, Centre international de formation européenne (CIFE), Nice

09h30 European and regional convergence, interconnectivity and social-economic reforms. Integration without transformation?

Moderator: Dušan Reljić, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), Berlin

Fifteen years of enlargement policy have produced mixed results. On the economic front, the EU's approach has been based on a policy-mix, including aimed at creating an investment-friendly

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regulatory environment to attract FDIs. Structural reforms in socio-economic governance as well as externally- and assistance-driven investments in infrastructure and skills and qualifications are meant to prepare Southeastern European market economies to withstand the competitive pressure stemming from the European Union and boost their economic development. Why has this model not delivered so far? What are the key obstacles to its functioning? On the political front, the EU's approach has long underlined the need for regional cooperation on a series of issues, while dealing mostly bilaterally with Western Balkan states. Sub-regional integration remains limited, despite the work of the RCC. How to strengthen this logic? How to resolve the remaining "big questions" blocking or threatening to block the accession process of some Western Balkan states? What is the added value of the process initiated in Berlin in this respect? And more generally, what assessment can we make of the EU's enlargement model towards the Western Balkans? Has this model fostered Western Balkan states' convergence in light of the Copenhagen criteria?

11h00 Break

11h30 Migration, mobility, transnational and border security. A challenge for the Western Balkans with wider implications

Moderator: Florian Trauner, Institute for European Studies (IES), Brussels

The European integration of the Western Balkans into the area of security, freedom and justice has been premised on the adoption and transposition of the EU's *acquis* in that field. This in turn supposes that bilateral disputes should be resolved; that systems of integrated border management should be built up; that countries in the region integrate into the EU's security mainstream and that they cooperate with agencies like FRONTEX. The framing of this approach has been provided by the post-visa liberalisation monitoring process and the new approach put in place by the European Commission in 2011, which brought chapters 23 and 24 into the centre of the EU accession process. However, with the emigration hike from the region in winter 2014/2015, the transit of more than one million migrants more recently, the outbreak of the border crisis in the summer of 2015 and the suspension of the Dublin procedures, new challenges arise in that specific area. For one, how shall the securitisation of European migration policies impact the European integration of Western Balkan states? Additionally, the issue of Islamic radicalisation has re-emerged as a phenomenon that is either home-grown or rather exogenous. What assessment can we make of regional cooperation in those areas and of the EU's attempt to deal with these issues in the Western Balkans?

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13h00 Lunch

14h30 Democratisation, participation and good governance. How can regional cooperation and the EU promote (again) effective democratisation in the Western Balkans?

Moderator: Natasha Wunsch, Sciences Po, Paris

The enlargement policy has long been considered as the EU's most successful tool for democratising transition countries. The experience of Central and Eastern European countries in the 2000s certainly backed this belief, while comforting the EU's legitimacy in its role of transformative power. However, the state of Western Balkan democracies has not improved over the past decade. On the contrary, it has eroded in several cases. Populism and authoritarian temptations have put Western Balkans' civil society under greater pressure; they have weakened key institutions guaranteeing the rule of law and harmed political pluralism and electoral processes. Young people, in particular, seem estranged both from the political systems as well as increasingly from the idea of European integration making a contribution to their lives. The abridgement of freedom of the media, the degradation of parliamentary democracy, the rise of political radicalisation, clientelism and voter abstention have become markers in many Western Balkan democracies. Why has progress been so limited in this field? What factors, e.g. within the EU's enlargement process, have contributed to the partial backsliding of Western Balkan states' democracies? Can the link between EU accession and democratic progress be re-established?

16h00 Break

16h30 Concluding session: Imagining the Western Balkans and a (dis)integrating European Union

Moderator: Florent Marciacq, Centre Franco-Autrichien (CFA) and University of Luxembourg

General Rapporteur: Sabina Lange, EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris

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The EU's narrative of European integration is increasingly contested by competing regional, structural powers in the region, e.g. Russia or Turkey. The attractiveness of the enlargement process and the legitimacy of the EU as normative power, meanwhile, have been undermined by the multiple crises the EU has undergone lately (in particular, but not only, on the economic level). The enlargement process suffers from the advent of new scepticism regarding the European project in general and, more specifically, from the gradual replacement of the will to establish an ever-closer Union by EU member states' rising focus on defending their national interests. Is a new impetus for integration possible in European public opinions? Are there realistic options for alternative economic models applicable in the region? Could bilateral disputes in the Western Balkans be settled without European perspectives? What should be the relationship between European integration and Euro-Atlantic integration in the region? What would be the consequences of the pursuit of European disintegration tendencies on peace and stability in the region?

18h00 End of the Reflection Forum

Tuesday, 31 May 2016 (continued)

*Venue: Représentation de Commission européenne en France, 288, Bld St Germain, 75007 Paris*

19h30 Official closing of the Reflection Forum  
“The Western Balkans in the European Union: new perspectives on integration?”

- Address by Isabelle Jégouzo, Head of Representation
- Concluding remarks by the organising team of the Reflection Forum

Wednesday, 01 June 2016

*Departure of participants*

*END OF PROGRAMME*

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