

BALKAN REVIVAL

KICK-STARTING STALLED POLICIES



Spring 2015

Media partner

Europe's World

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Publisher: Geert Cami

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INTRODUCTION

With the new European Commission taking the helm, the EU's enlargement portfolio has been downgraded and subordinated to neighbourhood policy. Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker has said no new states will join during his five-year mandate. How to fight both EU enlargement fatigue and growing impatience among EU hopefuls that could destabilise the Western Balkans?

The participants at Friends of Europe's 12th annual Balkans Summit entitled "Kick-starting stalled policies" examined the difficulties arising from the EU's enlargement freeze and the perspectives for future enlargement to the region. To fight inertia in the accession process with redoubled cooperation to reform, fight corruption and stamp out organised crime in a region with 20 million people and nearly 50% unemployment.

"Today more than ever it is crucial that the EU expand to include the Western Balkans," noted speaker [Edi Rama](#), Prime Minister of Albania. "We understand the EU's enlargement fatigue, but in turn, the EU needs to understand our patience fatigue. We cannot avoid doing our homework but, at the same time, we cannot nourish our European hopes and dreams solely with the chapters of the *acquis communautaire*."

"We understand the EU's enlargement fatigue, but in turn, the EU needs to understand our patience fatigue."



Edi Rama, Prime Minister of Albania

“Times are tough in the EU,” underlined [Benedetto Della Vedova](#), Undersecretary of State at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “In public opinion, the future of the EU itself has become more important than the future of enlargement. However, the future of enlargement is the future of the EU. We Europeans must think strategically, not about the next elections but the next decades.”

Past enlargement rounds added momentum to the EU project, noted co-moderator [Giles Merritt](#), Secretary General of Friends of Europe, enhancing the EU’s soft power and influence. Though the current economic and political crises in the EU have shifted attention inward, participants said it remains in its best interest to breathe new life into the enlargement process.

“It is important to remain focussed on what the enlargement process is all about,” stressed [Christian Danielsson](#), European Commission Director General for Enlargement. “The driving force for accession is the economy, specifically economic development, potential growth, and government reforms. The assessment across the board is that, though the process is difficult, the Western Balkan countries are moving forward.”



“The future of enlargement is the future of the EU.”

[Benedetto Della Vedova](#), Undersecretary of State at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Realistically, much remains to be accomplished in terms of economic reform as well as growth, particularly through regional cooperation, indicated [Goran Svilanović](#), Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). The outlook, however, is good, as recent dialogues – notably the 2014 Conference of Western Balkan States in Berlin – have shown the willingness of the region’s leaders to devote the time and political will to overcoming their difficult past and enhancing economic cooperation.

“When it comes to accession, it is sometimes said that ‘the Western Balkans are pretending to reform and the EU is pretending to enlarge,’” noted co-moderator [Shada Islam](#), Director of Policy at Friends of Europe. “We tend to forget that the EU’s transformative power is economic as well.”

As new economic players such as Russia and China make headway into Southeast Europe, it is essential that EU leaders remain focussed on the future of enlargement and on the future of a wholly united Europe.

“When it comes to accession, it is sometimes said that ‘the Western Balkans are pretending to reform and the EU is pretending to enlarge.’”



[Shada Islam](#), Director of Policy at Friends of Europe

THE EU'S ENLARGEMENT FREEZE – WHAT EFFECT ON THE WESTERN BALKANS?

Since the enlargement round of 2004, the EU has embarked on a series of crises that has resulted in the growth of anti-EU public opinion, a reserved attitude in mainstream political parties, and the political gains of nationalist and extremist political parties throughout Europe.

“The Eurozone crisis, credibility crisis, Schengen crisis – we have seen ten years of continuous crisis that have forced enlargement from the top of the EU’s list of priorities,” said speaker [Andrej Plenković](#) MEP, Vice-Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Croatian former State Secretary for European Integration. “When President Juncker says ‘no more enlargement for the next five years’, he is being realistic and responding to troubled European public opinion.”

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[Andrej Plenković](#) MEP, Vice-Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Croatian former State Secretary for European Integration

The full statement by Juncker stated that, though there will be no more enlargement for the next five years, accession negotiations should continue, underlined [Eduard Kukan](#) MEP, Chair of the European Parliament Delegation to the EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee. So, though the outlook may be dimmed, Western Balkan countries should remain on their paths to accession.

“The EU’s actions should speak louder than its words,” noted Merritt. “What actually happens over the next few years is what matters – the EU’s body language, rather than a formal statement, is what will matter.”

The EU’s troubled decade notwithstanding, substantive progress has been made in relations with the Western Balkans, with most countries moving forward in their accession processes, Danielsson said, adding that there are no clear indications that these processes will devolve in the near future.

Though disappointing, Rama noted that the EU’s enlargement freeze need not drastically affect accession processes. “Achieving the objectives of the *acquis communautaire* is the best and only way to modernise our countries,” he said.

“We should not forget that the Western Balkans is a multi-ethnic region where a miracle has occurred – for the first time in our history we are on the same side and fighting together for a shared European future.”

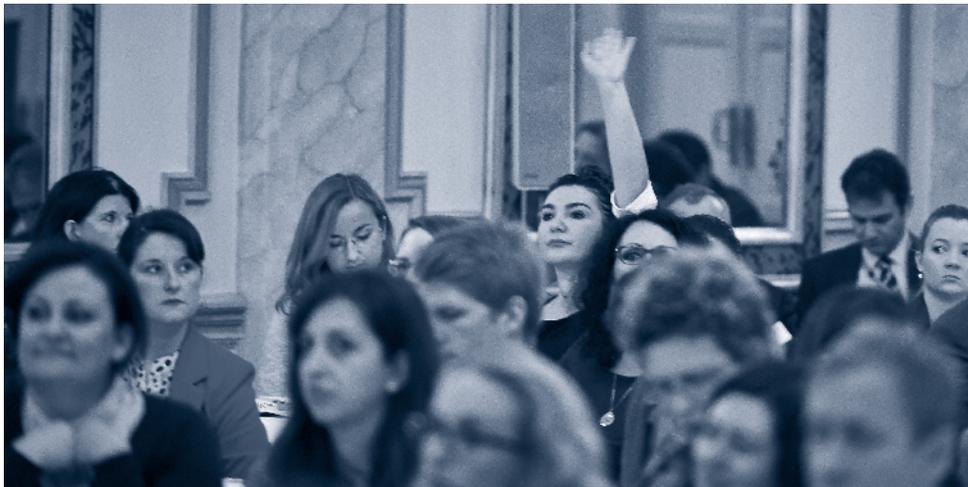
The countries of Southeast Europe, along with the EU, need to adapt a realistic approach to the enlargement process over the next five years, Plenković indicated.



From left to right: [Sergei Stanishev](#), former Prime Minister of Bulgaria, [Suela Janina](#), Ambassador, Mission of Albania to EU

Three essential elements to this approach are as follows:

1. Concentrating on chapters 23 and 24 of the acquis. These systemic chapters (judiciary and fundamental rights; and justice, freedom, and security, respectively) are the most difficult chapters to open and aim to set the stage for the proper functioning of the state. It is recommended that these chapters be opened early on in the accession negotiations and followed up throughout the process.
2. The rhetoric surrounding free movement. The high levels of unemployment and organised crime in Southeast Europe are potentially detrimental to a more open enlargement policy, so the next five years should be reserved for targeted individual approaches for each country.
3. High-level dialogue between all parties. At the turn of the century, the EU-Western Balkans Summits held in Zagreb and Thessaloniki promised regular meetings between the highest levels of leadership, to be held every three years. Since 2003, however, these meetings have devolved to the ministerial level. Reinstating regular meetings between heads-of-state and the highest level of EU decision makers would serve to promote the visibility and credibility of the enlargement process.



As the EU's enlargement fatigue continues, it is even more important to maintain and enhance the political momentum of past enlargement rounds and the enlargement process in Southeast Europe, noted Sergei Stanishev, Vice Chair, European Parliament Delegation for Relations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and former Prime Minister of Bulgaria, in an intervention from the audience.

"Though the EU appears self-absorbed, in real terms, this is not true," he added. "Even during crisis, there has been advancement in the cases of Serbia, Croatia, and Montenegro." It is essential that the EU foster dialogue with the Western Balkans to show them that the process is on the agenda, while at the same time bearing witness to the real political commitments coming out of the region. Events such as the recent Berlin conference would be mutually enforcing and create momentum.

On the EU's side, leaders must consider not only the existing economic and cultural ties but also the geopolitical importance of Southeast Europe as partners against the hotspots surrounding Europe, for example, Ukraine, Libya, and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

"We need to expand the EU to include the Western Balkans to help in stabilising our European neighbourhood," indicated Della Vedova. "We are already tied to the region through trade, migration, and investment, and the Italian Presidency is striving to keep enlargement on top of the agenda. We believe that this is part of the solution to the EU's problems."

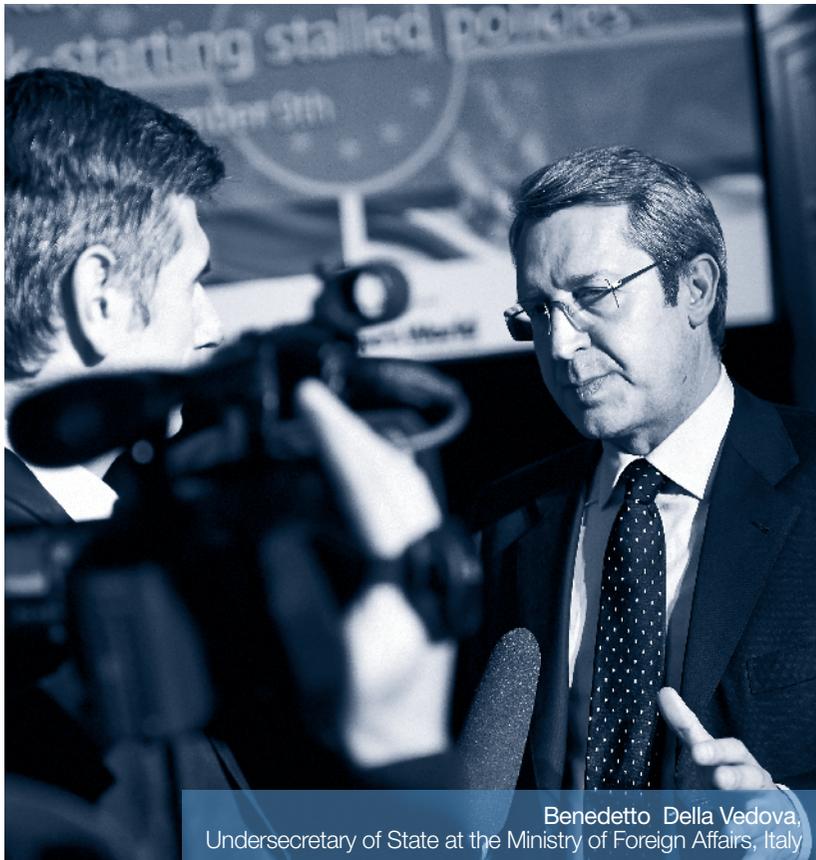
While greater communication and efforts would certainly aid in relations, it must be acknowledged that the accession process is more difficult for candidate and pre-candidate countries than in the past, Kukan stressed.

The bar for accession has been set higher simply because EU integration has greatly progressed since previous enlargement rounds. Cooperation within the EU in terms of justice and home affairs, or economic integration, for example, have evolved past the framework stage and into implementation, thus creating greater challenges for those countries that wish to accede to the EU.

While the promise of entry into the EU acts as a galvanising force for reform, it behoves EU leaders to consider long-term perspectives to nourish the European

aspirations of the region. “While the Western Balkans does its homework, we need more support from the EU to provide a sense of tangibility and cooperation in terms of new projects and economic growth,” noted Rama. “We cannot continue with business as usual but must start thinking outside of the box.”

“For our prosperity and security,” concluded Della Vedova, “enlargement to Southeast Europe must be a strategic priority for the EU. Candidate countries should be encouraged in their reforms and the EU should remain strong in its commitment to the enlargement process.”



Benedetto Della Vedova,
Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Italy

BUILDING TRUST

Looking back over recent years, there have been both positive results and some backsliding in the Western Balkans’ accession processes. While there has been some clear progress in several countries – Croatia, Serbia, Albania, and Montenegro – the situations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo*, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia remain stagnant and troubled.

While the process in Bosnia-Herzegovina has been stalled for nearly a decade due to political dysfunction, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia remains blocked over the name issue with EU member state Greece, and ineffective dialogue and weak state-building continue to plague Kosovo*.

In order to move forward on these issues and to expedite the negotiations for Serbia, Albania, and Montenegro, the region, along with its partners in the EU, need to strive to rebuild trust in each other and the enlargement process, Kukan stressed.

“We can strengthen trust in the Western Balkans by delivering on both sides,” he noted. “We cannot back down from our commitments and must be serious about achieving goals towards accession. This is how to legitimise the process.”

Furthermore, political leaders should accept responsibility for the whole region in addition to their home countries. “The process depends on the willingness of leaders to move forward and even overstep their borders. This would create greater trust in the region,” he said.

“We cannot back down from our commitments and must be serious about achieving goals towards accession. This is how to legitimise the process.”

Eduard Kukan MEP, Chair of the European Parliament Delegation to the EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee





Almost two years since the signing of the Brussels Agreement on the normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo* in April 2013, relations between Kosovo* and the EU, and Kosovo* and Serbia, remain difficult, noted speaker [Engjellushe Morina](#), Co-Founder and Chairperson of the Prishtina Council on Foreign Affairs, Kosovo*.

“Kosovo* has yet to be recognised by the EU as a whole,” she said, “as five member states have serious problems with the decision.” This lack of recognition is in part responsible for the continued absence of a visa liberalisation regime and a signed Stability and Association Agreement (SAA) between Kosovo* and the EU.

Closer to home, she continued, the dialogue between Kosovo* and Serbia is flawed and not moving forward. The Brussels Agreement is criticised by dissenting voices in Kosovar civil society as having violated democratic principles and the sovereignty of the new state.

“In the name of the normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo*, we have ended up with an ‘historic agreement’ with disagreements on both sides and lacking the buy-in of locals, especially those responsible for its stalled implementation,” she concluded.

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Engjellushe Morina, Co-Founder and Chairperson of the Prishtina Council on Foreign Affairs, Kosovo*

*This designation is without prejudice to position on status, and is in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1244/99 and the International Court of Justice Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

Though relations remain tense in some areas of the region, the past year saw some improvement, with the first meeting in 68 years between the Prime Ministers of Albania and Serbia taking place in November, following the 2014 Conference of Western Balkan States in Berlin, which assembled all the heads of state and government of the region.

“In Berlin this year, for the first time, we found ourselves around the table not to question each other’s rights and existence, but to meet the future together.”

Edi Rama, Prime Minister of Albania

In order to enhance trust with the EU, the countries of Southeast Europe need to continue reform efforts and craft policies to bring governance models into line with the accession process. “In working with our partners in the Western Balkans, the European Commission is focussing on civil service law and public administration in order to enhance institutional memory,” the Commission’s Danielsson said. “If the accession process is to move forward in these countries, we need to establish permanent administrative structures.”



From left to right: Engjellushe Morina, Prishtina Council on Foreign Affairs, Eduard Kukan MEP, Edi Rama, Prime Minister, Albania, Giles Merritt, Secretary General of Friends of Europe, Shada Islam, Director of Policy at Friends of Europe, Benedetto Della Vedova, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Italy, Andrej Plenković MEP

In Serbia, this issue has been addressed, with the new government implementing a law to freeze its administration. “To be able to cope with the demands of the enlargement process, we need a stable administration and regular financial and political support from the EU,” Svilanović said.

“To be able to cope with the demands of the enlargement process, we need a stable administration and regular financial and political support from the EU.”



Goran Svilanović, Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)

ECONOMY AND ENLARGEMENT

Several participants noted that the EU should adopt a more coherent strategy towards Southeast Europe overall in order to address outstanding issues and solidify trust in the enlargement process.

Courted by China and Russia, some countries in the Western Balkans are tending towards economic partnerships that are not explicitly tied to EU standards. This while the EU is at once exigent in terms of the reforms set out by the *acquis communautaire* and is putting the brakes on its enlargement portfolio.

Countering the EU's reticence towards enlargement, new economic partners are approaching countries in the region with investment and business proposals. Countries such as China and Russia have a narrower set of objectives – economic, rather than social and political – in the Western Balkans, and could potentially outperform the EU as partners in the region.

“In preparing to move into Southeast Europe, China and Russia are effectively saying that they are there to do business regardless of the state of the judiciary or rule of law,” Della Vedova said. “It could be useful, however, to remember that the main investor in Serbia is Italy. Economic relations between the EU, its member states, and the Western Balkans, are already very strong and will continue to be so.”



The economic performance of the region needs improvement, with an average unemployment rate of 46%, the average GDP per capita hovering around half of the EU average, and growth rate of about a third of the EU's, indicated co-moderator [Stefan Gehrold](#), Director of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) European Office.

These figures become even worse when looking at the most vulnerable groups and excluded communities in the region, noted speaker [Ayse Cihan Sultanoglu](#), Assistant Secretary General and Regional Director for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), adding that “women, long-term unemployed, Roma, and those working in informal sectors, are denied workers’ and citizens’ rights.”

There are however a number of promising policies and programmes being put into place with new connections between educational, labour, and social policies resulting in new developments to reduce inequality and social exclusion.

“The key to achieving sustainable and inclusive economic growth in the region is employment generation, addressing the needs of at-risk groups, and creating green jobs to replenish and protect natural resources,” she said.

Furthermore, technological progress and EU integration are areas that demonstrate a potential for growth and are creating demands for high-skilled labour. Though enrolment in higher education is on the rise throughout most of the region, the numbers of graduates are currently not meeting the demands of the labour market.

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[Ayse Cihan Sultanoglu](#), Assistant Secretary General and Regional Director for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)



To address the unemployment issue, the Regional Cooperation Council has set a goal in the SEE 2020 strategy to create 1 million new jobs by the end of the decade. The UNDP has been working with the governments of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to create new jobs. These programmes have so far seen some success, with nearly 3000 jobs created in Bosnia-Herzegovina and 7000 in Skopje over the past years. These programmes can be scaled up and replicated elsewhere in the region, she stressed.

“When combatting unemployment, one cannot stress enough the importance of education and skills acquisition,” she concluded. “The UNDP is working with government, civil society, the private sector, and communities, to strengthen vocational training, SMEs, and vulnerable groups, especially in small towns and rural areas.”



As witnessed during previous enlargement rounds, accession to the EU provides a major stimulus for growth, noted [Nikola Poposki](#), Minister of Foreign Affairs, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. By working hand in hand with EU and member state governments and the private sector, it is possible to solve the three main problems in order to boost growth in the region: predictability, competitiveness, and access to funds.

“In the years before accession, Ireland, Poland, Bulgaria, and others, found themselves in a golden age of growth, in large part owing to these countries’ enlargement perspectives,” he said. “In the short-term, President Juncker’s enlargement freeze is depriving our countries of the predictability and potential growth that comes with accession to the EU.”

Concerns that the enlargement freeze could extend another five years or more are fostering a lack of predictability and uncertainty in the accession processes of pre-candidate and candidate countries in Southeast Europe. Further efforts from the EU institutions and member states to instil confidence in the enlargement process could greatly increase the appeal of the Western Balkans to investors and trading partners.

Solutions must also be found to improve the competitiveness of the individual countries and the region as a whole, he continued. To increase competitiveness, rule of law reforms must be pushed through and infrastructure must be fixed and updated to increase confidence and access to markets.

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[Nikola Poposki](#), Minister of Foreign Affairs, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia



Impacted by the EU's economic crisis, poor economic performance in the region since 2009 has had a great effect on the capacity to comply with the demands of the accession process. Access to funding remains a serious obstacle to promoting growth in the region. Before the accession negotiation process opens, EU funds are made available but are earmarked for capacity-building and government reforms, rather than infrastructure and other growth-related areas.

"Working with our partners in the EU, we must craft policy that ensures that our governments are searching for economic solutions in both national and regional contexts," Poposki concluded. "Until we can join the EU, we have to learn to function in environments we cannot control and to focus our energy where we can make the greatest difference."

"The Western Balkans' enlargement process is to some degree a victim of the Eurozone crisis," Merritt said. "The answer to this is for the candidate countries to redouble their reform and political efforts to make it plain that they are not free riders but an asset to the EU as a whole."



Christian Danielsson, European Commission, Goran Svilanović, Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council

The links between economy and accession are clear, underlined Danielsson, the European Commission Enlargement Director General. A well-functioning economy takes into account many of the chapters of the acquis, including rule of law, fighting corruption, judiciary and regulatory reform, and so on.

"Looking at trade flows and foreign direct investment, we see that Southeast Europe is already integrated with the EU's economy," he said. "The next steps are about continuing reforms to nurture this relationship."

Focussing on national priorities in terms of labour, pension, and bankruptcy reforms, as well as restructuring of the private sector, is one of the goals of the 'European Semester Light', which, modelled on the EU's annual economic and fiscal policy coordination, helps pre-candidate and candidate countries synchronise their own governance reforms to EU standards.



Another avenue for funding and promoting economic growth in the region comes through the RCC's SEE 2020, which aims to provide a framework to assist governments in the region to achieve their economic goals. Other macro-regional initiatives include the Danube and Adriatic – Ionian strategies, both of which combine the economic efforts of EU and non-EU members in their respective areas.

In terms of increasing funding from the EU, Danielsson stressed that “the funds we have are the funds we have. I cannot see that the Multiannual Financial Framework will be renegotiated or that the European Investment Bank will find more funds.”

“What needs to be done is setting clear economic priorities with our partners in the Western Balkans,” he concluded. “We need to examine the limits and see how to prioritise when it comes to national and regional investments.”

“What needs to be done is setting clear economic priorities with our partners in the Western Balkans.”



Christian Danielsson, European Commission Director General for Enlargement

ECONOMIC INTEGRATION AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

As a follow-up to the 2014 Conference of Western Balkan States in Berlin, a meeting was held in Belgrade in October to explore joint economic cooperation in the region. Stressing the importance of economic cooperation to the region, Gehrold of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung noted that “the Belgrade ministerial meeting did more for regional reconciliation than any other political meeting. In the end, it is all about the economy.”

“I advocate boosting our relations through regional cooperation,” Rama said. “We must combine our national priorities and EU support into regional strategies that can benefit each country individually and boost growth in our region as a whole.”

As an example, the Albanian Prime Minister noted that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania have for years made political promises to connect their railway systems, though at the end of each fiscal year, the national coffers cannot follow through on these promises. While no single country in the region can afford the large-scale projects necessary for stimulating growth, regional cooperation can create tangible results.

“The Belgrade ministerial meeting did more for regional reconciliation than any other political meeting. In the end, it is all about the economy.”

Stefan Gehrold, Director of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) European Office



Danielsson underlined the important role of the Regional Cooperation Council and the support it receives from both the European Commission in concrete terms and from the European Investment Bank and other lending institutions. Regional cooperation is the key to focussing on infrastructure development and getting the economy functioning, he said.

Taken together, the six economies of the Western Balkans – Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo*, Montenegro, and Serbia – have the economic capacity of 60% of Belgium’s economy, noted Svilanović. “Individually, these six economies cannot be strong enough,” he added, “but as a region, they can have an impact. They need to be seen as a functioning market in which one can easily do business.”

The Prime Ministers of these countries sent a message of regional unity during the Berlin Conference, outlining project proposals with strong regional relevance.

“The leaders of the Western Balkans are sharing a clear message – they are ready to cooperate, that they are obsessed with the economy, and that they need to feel greater ownership of the economic decisions for the entire region,” said the RCC Secretary General.

Svilanović suggests reforming the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF) to provide a greater sense of ownership to the political leadership in the region.

“The leaders of the Western Balkans are ready to cooperate, are obsessed with the economy, and they need to feel greater ownership of the economic decisions.”



Goran Svilanović, Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)

As a result of the Berlin Conference, another meeting is planned for March 2015, during which agreements will be made on connectivity, infrastructure, and transportation corridors. Following this, the 2015 Conference of Western Balkan States in Vienna – planned for August 27th – will focus on financing these plans and, ideally, obtaining clear financial commitments from the European Commission and each country’s government.

Regional projects, particularly ones aimed at improving connectivity, are relevant not only for these six economies but for the wider region of Southeast Europe and the EU as a whole, Svilanović stressed.

Though the process of regional economic integration is advancing well, there are some elements that are still missing, he continued. There is a need for an open discussion with international financial institutions to see how far these countries can go in purchasing loans, and a creative approach on private sector engagement with the region. Once solutions can be found for these elements, however, tangible economic results will not be far behind.



From left to right: Ayse Cihan Sultanoglu, United Nations Development Programme, Christian Danielsson, European Commission, Nikola Poposki, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Stefan Gehrold, Director of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

Finally, at some point in the next year, it behoves the various parties to conduct a frank discussion behind closed doors about economic governance. “Let us be realistic, there is a lot of work to do in terms of economic growth. We need to send a strong and positive message that could be understood by EU citizens. These six countries may not be the most glamorous, economically speaking, but the EU needs to see that they are committed to handling their own finances responsibly,” Sivilanović said.

In the end, the bilateral and political issues plaguing the accession process in the Western Balkans, though complex and, in some cases, emotionally charged, can be more easily resolved once these countries demonstrate their capacity for individual and regional economic governance and growth, he concluded.

CONCLUSIONS

The EU has been built on the foundation of a group of like-minded countries to promote peace, democracy, and human rights on a global scale and it is on the basis of this like-mindedness that enlargement to the Western Balkans will become a reality, though the enlargement freeze announced by Commission President Juncker has dealt a blow to the EU aspirations in the region, Rama stressed.

“The choice is clear,” added the Albanian Prime Minister. “Either we have an EU that looks forward only to the next elections, or one that looks to future generations. If we are near-sighted, I applaud Juncker’s plan, but if we want to keep the long view, I think it is unfortunate that he has said this.”



“The choice is clear. Either we have an EU that looks forward only to the next elections, or one that looks to future generations.”

Edi Rama, Prime Minister of Albania

With each country in the Western Balkans in different stages in their accession processes, and considering the geopolitical context of the EU and its neighbourhood, further enlargement is essential and should be treated as such, concluded Engjellushe Morina.

Both sides need to work to improve the process and enhance regional ties in order to complete the map of Europe. “If politics is the theatre, then we have had enough of the Balkan tragedy,” concluded Merritt. “We want to see progress and an exchange of views between equals. No more beauty contests and no more economic limbo, but a strong region integrated into a strong Europe.”

“If politics is the theatre, then we have had enough of the Balkan tragedy. We want to see progress and an exchange of views between equals. No more beauty contests and no more economic limbo, but a strong region integrated into a strong Europe.”



Giles Merritt, Secretary General of Friends of Europe

ANNEX I – Programme

SESSION I

An EU Western Balkans agenda 2015-2020

Developments beyond the borders of Western Balkans countries look likely to have a significant impact on the region's prospects up to 2020, and the ways different national governments react to them will be crucial. As the EU institutions begin their new mandates, what should the Union's agenda for the coming five years look like? Will the reform programmes that some countries have been slow to implement be urged more strongly by the EU, and what needs to be done to accelerate change in familiar problem areas that range from the rule of law and corruption to pressure on independent institutions and media freedom? Now that enlargement towards the Western Balkans is progressing, is it time for the goals and ambitions of the Thessaloniki summit 11 years ago to be revisited and streamlined? What does new Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker's statement that there will be no EU enlargement over the next 5 years mean for the hopes of Western Balkan countries? Could the ongoing crises at the EU borders have an impact on the 'enlargement fatigue'?

Edi Rama

Prime Minister, Albania

Benedetto Della Vedova

Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Italy

Eduard Kukan MEP

Chair of the European Parliament Delegation to the EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee

Engjellushe Morina

Co-Founder and Chairperson of the Prishtina Council on Foreign Affairs, Kosovo*

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Co-moderated by **Giles Merritt**, Secretary General of Friends of Europe, and **Shada Islam**, Director of Policy at Friends of Europe

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SESSION II

Economic development: Is the glass now half full?

Many of the economic problems confronting the Western Balkans region have remained stubbornly difficult to resolve, so how much importance should be attached to the scattered improvements now visible in some sectors and countries? Investment projects backed by the EU are expected to offer some economic stimulus, but private sector FDI is either largely stagnant or has been ebbing away. Above all, unemployment remains a huge brake on growth, with less than half (46%) of working age people in the region's six countries holding a job, as against almost two-thirds across the EU, including in the new member states. The parlous economic conditions of 10 years ago have eased somewhat, making it possible to argue that the half-empty glass is now half-full, but what policy measures must Western Balkan governments now introduce with greater determination? What has to be done to reduce the role of the state in key sectors of national economies, and how can the EU play a more influential role?

Christian Danielsson Nikola Poposki	European Commission Director General for Enlargement Minister of Foreign Affairs of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
Goran Svilanović	Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)
Ayse Cihan Sultanoglu	Assistant Secretary General and Regional Director for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Co-moderated by **Stefan Gehrold**, Director of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) European Office and **Shada Islam**, Director of Policy at Friends of Europe

ANNEX II – List of participants

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