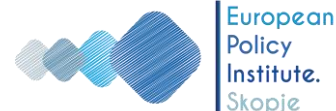




Ambasada
Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej
w Skopje



Roundtable EU foreign policy and regional integration: insights from Poland and Macedonia

Skopje, 7 December (Thursday)

Venue: Holiday Inn Skopje

The Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Skopje in cooperation with the European Policy Institute, Skopje are organising a roundtable on EU foreign policy and regional integration accompanied with a presentation of the *New Eastern Europe Journal*, published by the *Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe*. The roundtable is foreseen as forum for information exchange and to generate fresh ideas for cooperation between the Polish and Macedonian counterparts.

Agenda:

- 09.30 - 10.00 **Registration**
- 10.00 - 10.15 **Welcome:** H.E. Jacek Multanowski, Ambassador of Republic of Poland
- 10.15 - 10:30 **Presentation of *New Eastern Europe Journal***
Adam Reichardt, Editor-in-Chief of *New Eastern Europe*
Laurynas Vaiciunas, Director, The College of Eastern Europe Publishing House
- 10:30 - 12:00 **Panel discussion:** EU foreign policy and competitors
Adam Reichardt, Editor-in-Chief of *New Eastern Europe*
Laurynas Vaiciunas, Director, The College of Eastern Europe Publishing House
Aleksandar Jovanovski, Programme Coordinator, European Policy Institute, Skopje
Moderator: Simonida Kacarska, Director, European Policy Institute, Skopje
- 12:00 - 12:30 **Cocktail**

Event report

The roundtable on EU foreign policy and regional integration organized by the **Embassy of the Republic of Poland** in Skopje, in cooperation with the **European Policy Institute**, started off with a warm welcome from **H.E. Jacek Multanowski**. He noted the experience of Poland in undergoing a process of reconciliation and drew comparisons with the Western Balkan region, for which reconciliation and the fostering of positive neighborly relations is also a pertinent theme. He described how the government in the Republic of Macedonia is being watched closely in this regard and wished the country every success.

Presentation of *New Eastern Europe* Journal

Adam Reichardt, Editor in Chief of **New Eastern Europe**, presented the history and work of the journal, noting that it has a broad coverage of the Visegrad₄, central Europe, the Baltic and Balkan regions, the post-soviet states and Asian nations. Emphasizing the importance of the Balkans, Reichardt referenced a recent essay published in this journal which, warning that Europe should not risk losing the region, was reportedly heard by Brussels.

The Director of the **College of Eastern Europe** Publishing House, **Laurynas Vaiciunas**, went on to outline the activities of this organization, which he described as focusing on publishing (both magazines and books), education (through seminars and summer schools), and ideas-sharing (such as through the Eastern Policy Conference). He explained that in Poland, 'Eastern Policy' has a specific meaning: relating to the former Soviet Union, rather than the Asian continent. The Balkans, he clarified, are on the boundary of this conception, sometimes included and sometimes not.

Panel discussion: EU foreign policy and competitors

In terms of EU foreign policy, **Adam Reichardt** outlined his interpretation of the main trend in this area, notably the slow movement in policy regarding southeast Europe since the 2004 enlargement. He maintained that this was due to several factors, such as: the 2008 economic crisis and subsequent crisis of the Eurozone; the 2013-14 war in Ukraine; the 2015 migration crisis; the process of Brexit; the case of Catalonia; Russia's information campaign in Europe; and the rise of the far left and the far right in certain countries. All of this, he posited, has resulted in an identity crisis for the EU, which has no clear vision for its future. In terms of positive policy developments he cited the Eastern Partnership and the Berlin process. One key theme raised by Reichardt was that of security. He noted that the Balkans has been deemed a fertile ground for ISIS recruitment, with data showing there to have been 140 foreign fighters from the Republic of Macedonia in the ranks of the terrorist group in 2016. He questioned whether measures for de-radicalization and reintegration were in place in the event of the defeat of ISIS, whereby such nationals may return home. Furthermore, he showed his support for the recommendations of the Atlantic Council Report on US foreign policy in the Balkans, which included: a permanent military presence in the region; strong cooperation with Serbia; the resolving of the name issue; and engaging youth in the region. When this topic was revisited in the question and answer session it was noted by moderator **Simonida Kacarska**, Director of the **European Policy Institute**, that the mention of military presence creates some uncomfortable feelings, especially given the extensive efforts to democratize the region.

Laurynas Vaiciunas went on to explain the current focus of Polish foreign policy, that of energy security, and the implications this has in terms of a close connection with Russia. He described the importance of regional cooperation for Poland, explicitly the V4 and the Three Seas initiative. He concluded by advocating for the pursuit of 'North-South' integration as well as that of 'East-West', encouraging cooperation in this respect between organizations from the respective geographies.

Aleksandar Jovanovski from the European Policy Institute gave a comprehensive overview of EU foreign policy in the Republic of Macedonia since the early 2000s, broken down into three stages. During the *first phase*, surrounding the 2001 internal crisis, EU foreign policy was focused on mitigation and conflict resolution, resulting in the Ohrid Framework Agreement. Subsequently the SAA was signed, leading to a greater presence of the EU in the country and increased financial assistance. The *second phase* of EU foreign policy began positively, with the Republic of Macedonia receiving candidate status, carrying out substantial reforms in democracy and rule of law, qualifying for IPA and undergoing the visa-liberalization process. Yet the moment whereby the country was not invited to join the NATO alliance due to the name issue with Greece was highlighted as a 'turning point' for the country in terms of backsliding. The *third phase* was described as problematic due to frequent political crises such as the wire-tapping scandal, worsening relations with Greece and Bulgaria, and major political developments in Europe. The EU's foreign policy became mainly about security, which was clearly visible during the refugee crisis. It was concluded that there is now a new momentum given the change in government and the renewed interest of the EU in the region.

During the **question and answer session** the themes revolved around (1) radicalization, (2) EU and Macedonian approaches to Russia, and (3) the role of smaller states within Europe.

In terms of **radicalization** in the Republic of Macedonia, a detailed account was given of the research conducted by the think tank **Analyica**, which highlighted two key factors in violent extremism: Firstly the institutional response, which has been predominantly focused on repressive measures, resulting in a drop in recruitment but also the driving of recruitment underground; and secondly the social driver of the problem, which was found to be ideological conviction.

Regarding **approaches to Russia**, a question was raised about the existence of a joint EU foreign policy on Russia, to which **Adam Reichardt** responded that in terms of sanctions there appears to be agreement, albeit not without skepticism from some nations, but that beyond that a 'joint policy' is difficult to observe. He reflected the question back to the Republic of Macedonia, noting the country's lack of support for such sanctions and asking if the change in government indicates the amendment of this position. **Simonida Kacarska** agreed that one of the areas in which there has been a drop in alignment with the EU in recent years is common foreign security policy, although whether the new government will seek to remedy this is yet to be seen. She also highlighted that the Republic of Macedonia has witnessed a shift in public opinion in the last couple of years, with a steep increase in those who view Russia as a strategic partner.

The **role of smaller states within Europe** was explored, with **Laurynas Vaiciunas** claiming that despite having limited resources such nations can nonetheless contribute in Europe if they focus on

prioritizing the issues they pursue. He suggested that the strength of any small country is having specialist knowledge and this should be used to bolster their contribution.

Overall the discussion was engaging and informative, addressing pertinent issues both for the region and the EU more widely. It effectively fostered the potential for cooperation between the organizations present. The European Policy Institute would like to thank the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Skopje for its cooperation in organizing this event, as well as all those who attended.