

Roundtable and Debate

"The Western Balkans in the European Union: Perspective for good neighbourly relations"

Skopje, 29 November 2017

Pannel conclusions

The panellists were largely in agreement that there is a narrow opening for the advancement on the enlargement path and a sense of urgency. These were mostly linked to the new role of Macedonia and its engagement on the issue of advancing good neighbourly relations. The Bulgarian presidency and the opportunities it provides in the first half of 2018 were considered to be fertile ground for advancing the enlargement agenda overall, but specifically in the context of Macedonia as well.

While the progress on the neighbourly relations in relation to Bulgaria is palpable, there is a sense of opening in relation to Greece as well. Yet, there is no certainty in this process yet, as the search for a common ground is still ongoing.

In a similar vein, there is a sense of opening at the EU level as well, where after a long time, potential dates of new enlargements have been discussed. Still, the question remains whether this renewed interest will be responded to/digested at the EU level, where the multiple crisis are still looming, including, but not limited to Brexit.

Still, on a more positive note, various experiences from the region as well as from other candidate countries indicate that progress, if supported by political will and reforms, can happen rather quickly. The *tectonic changes* in the Macedonian case are one such example.

The role of the Berlin process in the overall enlargement policy was one that was up for discussion. While the engagement through the process is commendable, its potential framing as an alternative to accession remains along with the need to streamline the positions of all EU actors, including different institutions and member states as to the overall accession strategy on the region. This ultimately should include a reflection on the different modalities of integration, even differentiated ones, in light with the realities in the Union and candidates.

The panellists emphasized the need for joint efforts on the side of the WB6 countries in terms of advocating for their position and ultimately accession. This becomes even more important in the light of the negotiations for the new financial framework, which will need to reflect the enlargement momentum on the potential 2025 accession of the region. In the same vein, the need for joint pooling of resources was underlined, since the region will in any case be more effective by acting jointly.

Organised by:

Institute of Geostategic Research and Foreign Policy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia (IGRFP)

Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe (CFA/ÖFZ), Vienna

International Centre for European Studies (CIFE), Nice/Berlin

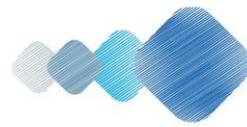
European Policy Institute (EPI), Skopje

Centre for Planning and Economic Research (KEPE), Athens

Centre for Policy Modernisation (CPM), Sofia



PROGRAMME



Институт
за
европска
политика.
Скопје

Wednesday, November 29th

Venue: MFA Building

15h00 Welcome and opening

**Open to the media*

Abdulkadar MEMEDI, Director of the Director of the Institute of Geostategic Research and Foreign Policy (IGRFP), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia
Simonida KACARSKA, Director of the European Policy Institute (EPI), Skopje

Keynote speaker:

H.E. **Ms. Arta TOCI**, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia

15h15 Coffee break

15h30 Roundtable

** A strict policy of Chatham House & non-attribution rule will be followed*

Chair: **Tobias FLESSENKEMPER**, Senior Fellow & Balkans Project Director, International Centre for European Studies (CIFE), Nice & University of Cologne

Speakers:

Ritsa PANAGIOTOU, Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Planning and Economic Research (KEPE), Athens
Juliana NIKOLOVA, Director of the Centre for Policy Modernisation (CPM), Sofia
Florent MARCIACQ, Deputy Secretary General & Research Fellow, Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe (CFA/ÖFZ), Vienna
Zoran ILIEVSKI, Head of the Centre for Policy Research and Analysis, Faculty of Law "Iustinianus Primus", Skopje

Q & A / Discussion

16h45 Concluding remarks

Simonida KACARSKA, Director of the European Policy Institute (EPI), Skopje

17h00 End of the programme, followed by refreshments