

**Report**

**EU-Western Balkans  
Summit –The Morning  
After**

15.11.2021



November  
2021

The conference *EU-Western Balkan Summit – The Morning After* took place in Carolinum, a building of Charles University, on November 5, 2021. During the panel, speakers discussed relations between the European Union and Western Balkans and ways how to get the EU enlargement agenda back on track from the state of a deep crisis. The debate was moderated by Jana Juzová, Research Fellow at the Institute for European Policy EUROPEUM. Introductory and closing remarks were delivered by Milena Hrdinková, State Secretary for European Affairs at the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, the Ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia, Tanja Strniša, and Tomáš Weiss, Deputy Director for Research at the Institute of International Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University.

First, Peter Grk, National Coordinator for the Western Balkans at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia, assessed the outcomes of the last EU-Western Balkans Summit held in Brdo pri Kranju on October 6, 2021. According to his evaluation, the compromise reached at the Summit was positive as it lays grounds for more success in the future. He also emphasized the importance of these summits and their regular organization as they concentrate the attention on the Western Balkan countries. In his statement, Peter Grk mentioned that it is important for the EU to start pursuing its strategic interests in the region instead of just reacting to the developments.

The Ambassador of France, H.E. Alexis Duterre, drew attention to the incorrectness of the cliché that France opposes the enlargement of the European Union to the Western Balkans. On the contrary, he claimed that the French stance on the admission of countries from the Western Balkans region has always been favorable. Given that, Mr. Duterre appreciated the effort of Slovenia to open the accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. On the other hand, he emphasized the importance of the fulfillment of the Copenhagen criteria by the potential future members of the EU. Regarding the EU's involvement in the region, he suggested some areas where the EU and Western Balkan countries should be more proactive in the current situation, without looking ahead to the prospect of the Western Balkans' membership in the

EU. These are for example finishing of regional common market, implementation of the Economic and Investment Plan, stronger security cooperation between the EU and the region, or promotion of regional cooperation.

Janina Hřebíčková, Special Envoy for the West Balkans at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, mentioned the long-lasting support from Czechia to the region of Western Balkans. She confirmed the perspective of the EU accession of the Western Balkans countries would be an important topic during the Czech presidency of the European Union in the second part of 2022. According to her, there is a fatigue in the region caused by the long-lasting EU integration process without evident progress supported by interference of external actors into Western Balkans' domestic affairs. She also emphasized the importance of strengthening of security in the region, especially in the face of external disruptive forces in play, and the fact that Czechia stands strongly against emerging nationalist tendencies or intro-ethnic tensions in the region, putting reconciliation to the core of the EU's engagement in the Western Balkans. In regard to the current deadlock in the enlargement process, she suggested the EU should seriously consider the option of decoupling the accession negotiations of Albania and North Macedonia.

Zoran Nechev, Senior Researcher at Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" – Skopje, claimed that the best step how to move forward in the EU-Western Balkans relations is to treat countries from the region as future EU member states. The Western Balkans countries should thus be included in the EU Justice Scoreboard or the economic European Semester, instead of inventing new tools. According to Zoran Nechev, the rule of law needs to be enforced inside the EU as well because with decreasing respect for these values in the EU, there is a stronger push for authoritarian tendencies growing also in the Western Balkans. Finally, he claimed that an increased effort of EU member states to push the process forward is necessary to make the accession of Western Balkans countries to the European Union faster.



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In general, speakers agreed that the Western Balkan countries are an integral part of Europe and their future inside the European Union needs to be further discussed and worked towards. However, there are still many areas that complicate the process – primarily the fulfillment of the Copenhagen criteria and the threatened security and stability in the region.



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EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy is a non-profit, non-partisan, and independent think-tank focusing on European integration and cohesion. EUROPEUM contributes to democracy, security, stability, freedom, and solidarity across Europe as well as to active engagement of the Czech Republic in the European Union. EUROPEUM undertakes original research, organizes public events and educational activities, and formulates new ideas and recommendations to improve European and Czech policy making.

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## About EUROPEUM in Brussels

Building on a long history of EUROPEUM in Prague, we opened our office in Brussels in January 2016. EUROPEUM has been the first think-tank from the Central Europe to branch out to the heart of the European Union. Our motivation has been to follow the debates on EU policies and politics from close and to contribute to them by strengthening the voice of the Czech Republic and other central and east European countries. At the same time, we would like to use our Brussels presence to boost discussions on the EU back in the region, through introducing research by Brussels-based experts, offering their perspective at local events, cooperating with the media, etc.

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