

# REPORT

## Echoes of the EU – Western Balkans Summit: New beginning

Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 2018, 14:00 – 16:00  
European Parliament, Room JAN 6Q2 (Rue Wiertz 60, Brussels)

- **The conference “Echoes of the EU – Western Balkans Summit: New beginning?”, took place on Wednesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 23, 2018, from 14:00 until 16:00 at the European Parliament.**
- **The event was organized by the Think Visegrad Platform in cooperation with Mr. Eduard Kukan, Member of the European Parliament (EPP/Slovakia).**
- **The speakers of this conference aimed to bring forward the developments made in the region and the challenges of the enlargement process, in the light of the Sofia Summit of 17<sup>th</sup> of May 2018 in Bulgaria.**

The event was moderated by *Jana Juzová*, EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy. The moderator presented a range of questions regarding the next steps after the Summit in enlargement and the need for the EU to find a common voice in the enlargement issue. Other questions for discussion included opinions if the Sofia Summit brought any substantial change, and the challenges that the Western Balkans face.

**Genoveva Ruiz Calavera**, (Director for Western Balkans at the Directorate General for European Neighbourhood Policy & Enlargement Negotiations) shared her experience on a personal basis regarding the issue. She talked about the significance that the Summit has by bringing together leaders of the Western Balkans as partners. She highlighted the fact that Summit was more about the renewal and deepening of the partnership between the EU and Western Balkans rather than the

enlargement that everyone was expecting. In that respect she enforced the idea that the partners in the region are vital for the EU and stated her belief that the Sofia declaration is important and needs to be pushed forward. She included the importance of investments and projects in the region which will enhance the unity and advance the EU agenda.

**Anna Orosz**, (Research Fellow at the Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade IFAT, HU), took the floor next by expanding on the challenges that the issue of enlargement has, including the diverging opinions on the topic within the EU's member states. She was attentive to the need of a political message from the EU regarding enlargement in order to save the momentum and keep the spirits high in different levels and sectors of life in the region. She concluded with the need for tangible ideas in order to continue the European enlargement processes.

**Eduard Kukan**, (Member of the European Parliament (EPP/SK), Chair of the EU-Serbia SAPC and delegated Chair of the AFET Working Group on Western Balkans) gave his remarks regarding what the Summit of Sofia brought and lacked. He stated that he saw it as a successful event taken upon the Bulgarian presidency, and it held a lot of political importance although it was not a game-changer. According to Mr. Kukan the expectations were high; the conclusions were realistic. He highlighted the need for the EU politicians to keep the promises given to the countries in the Thessaloniki Summit, that they too can become EU members. While talking about the progress that the countries in the region have achieved, he stressed the need for recognition from the EU's part. He closed his remarks on a positive note, by stating that each actor in this issue, should make the most out of the summit and keep the up the good work done by the Bulgarian Presidency during the Austrian presidency and beyond.

**Tomasz Zornaczuk**, (Head of Central European Program and Western Balkans and EU Enlargement research fellow, Polish Institute of International Affairs) followed up on the points taken by previous speakers, and critically overviewed the slow progress on the enlargement issue since Thessaloniki. He continued by introducing some developments- or lack of thereof- made by the countries and their internal issues as well as the tensions in the region. He was critical of the EU's way of conduct in this respect however, he emphasized the need for EU influence on the region in order to keep at ease influences from powers such as Russia, China or Turkey.

Furthermore, the conference included discussants, specifically Members of the European Parliament such as:

**Alojz Peterle**, (EPP, Chair of the Delegation to the EU-Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee) suggested the need for new approaches to the main problems in the region in order to achieve better results. He stated that this enlargement is different from the one in 2004 and much more complicated because of external forces, however it is delayed for far too long. He concluded by saying that the Western Balkans region deserves more attention from the EU.

**Cristian Dan Preda**, (EPP, Vice-Chair of the Subcommittee on Human Rights, Rapporteur for Bosnia and Herzegovina) followed up on the speaker's comments on the Sofia Summit, by stating that the Summit disappointed because the enlargement was not the main message. He talked about the progress that the countries have made, with a focus on Bosnia. Furthermore, he summarized the challenges the region faces, where focus and energy should be put such as corruption, external influences etc.

**Igor Šoltes**, (Vice Chair of the Delegation to the EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee, Rapporteur for Kosovo) started his comments by highlighting the need for solutions in the region. Regarding Kosovo he stressed the need for the process of visa liberalisation to move forward as it will give a positive message and further consolidate the EU commitment to not only Kosovo but the countries in the region. He also commented on the advancements of the dialogue between Prishtina and Belgrade and the positive role they hold for the region.

**Charles Tannock**, (AFET, Rapporteur for Montenegro) was the last speaker and started his comments by welcoming the different investments that the EU has made in the region starting in infrastructure and all the way to education (such as with the Erasmus programme). He talked about the difference that the enlargement process has gone through and the barriers that have come up in the last years. He stated his belief that the Sofia Summit missed an opportunity to further endorse Albania's and Macedonia potential to open the negotiations talks. Moreover, he expressed that in general the Sofia Summit did not bring concrete action for the Western Balkans and believes that the main hurdles are mainly political internal challenges in the member states. He concluded by stressing the need to reassure the people of the Western Balkans that membership in the EU is feasible and to keep working towards the 2025 framework.

