



OPINIONS

Secure Europe needs to remain open Europe

By Srđan Majstorović - 06.07.2018

Op-ed by Srđan Majstorović, Chairman of the Governing Board at the European Policy Centre (CEP) and member of the Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG). Majstorović will be a speaker on the event “Beyond Berlin: What Does the Next Decade Hold for the Western Balkans?”, organized by Chatham House, European Fund for the Balkans and DG Near in London on 10 July, at the margins of the London Western Balkans Summit.

Half way into 2018 it is safe to say it's a comeback year of the EU Enlargement policy. The year started with European Commission's Communication on credible enlargement perspective for the Western Balkans' countries in February, followed by publication of Country Reports' in April (after one-year pause), EU-Western Balkans Summit was held after 15 years in May in Sofia, Council adopted conclusions that paved the way for opening of the EU accession talks with Albania and (soon to be Northern) Macedonia in June 2019, and the Berlin Process Summit fostering closer regional cooperation and integration will be held in London on 10 July. The 2018 is also marked by EU Presidencies of Bulgaria and Austria, countries which recognized the importance of reconnecting the WB region with the EU mainstream. The momentum is positive and there is a window of opportunity that needs to be recognized by both the EU and the Western Balkan countries.

In order to succeed, leaders from the region need to regain the credibility by unambiguously committing to the real transformation in the forthcoming period, especially during 2019. Next year is going to be marked by elections for the European Parliament and subsequently formation of the new European Commission. It is going to be the year of finalization of Brexit negotiations (eventually), heated debate on next EU's Multiannual Financial Framework, framing of EU common migration policy and ongoing debate on future of Europe.

General political environment is not going to be sympathetic towards EU enlargement. This period needs to be utilized by the Western Balkan countries to prove their credibility and capability to push for transformation agenda further, resolve their bilateral and structural issues to be able to legitimately demand positive enlargement agenda from the EU and new European Commission.

Marking the 10th Anniversary of the existence of the European Fund for the Balkans, Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG) have published [European Balkans Partnership declaration](#). Declaration recognized the urgency to transform the positive attention into success, revitalizing reforms in the region and completing the EU in the WB. It called all stakeholders for more sincere and transparent relationship with a clear emphasis on democratic transformation of the region.

European Balkans partnership is set to promote “new togetherness” between EU and the Balkans based on four components: more vigorous EU engagement with the Balkans; more systematic efforts to promote a culture of learning to advance human capital; an honest and lasting regional rapprochement; and a tailor-made vision of closer cooperation in various EU policy areas. The spirit of Declaration calls for Europe without divisions, but a Europe of all its citizens. It steps out of traditional technocratic perspective of the EU integration procedures and invites all stakeholders to reimagine the region and to spark a new narrative of a European Balkans as embedded in the EU.

For the European future of the region it is important to start the accession talks with all Western Balkan countries as soon as possible. It is encouraging to see that based on the Council conclusions from June, the European Commission is preparing the start of the screening process for Albania and Macedonia. Preparation of the Action plans for Rule of Law chapters 23 and 24 should follow immediately after screening. Furthermore, screening should be open for remaining potential candidate countries Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo as observers, and both countries should prepare respective Action plans as well. EU's conditionality based on European values needs to be revitalized to be more transparent, efficient, measurable and to deliver expected results from the candidates. In order to assess the progress and provide guidelines for improvement of the reforms high-level expert missions should be engaged more often.

One of the major challenges in the future will be further development of human capital in the region. Unfortunately, Western Balkan countries are facing different forms of social exclusion, primarily related to unemployment and poverty which is causing significant proportion of the population leaving the region. This challenge needs to be addressed by reversal of the brain drain, improvement of economic, social, health and educational policies, promotion of innovation initiatives, smart economy and digitalization. To support networking among the youth, facilitate creation of regional identity and increase the quality of education there should be coordinated activity to create regional education centre of excellence like College of Europe.

There is no joint future in the region without understanding and accepting common past. Regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations are key to the success of the region. Bilateral disputes need to be resolved as soon as possible. Small and fragmented markets and development of demanding infrastructure projects in the region requires further joint efforts started within the Berlin Process.

Finally, building on the EC's Communication on credible enlargement perspective EU should explore every possibility for inclusion of the Western Balkan countries in broader scope of the EU policies and frontloading of the benefits of enlargement. Western Balkan countries should be invited to contribute to the more secure Europe. Europe that protects is the slogan of current Austrian presidency addressing the fears of citizens and improve security cooperation in the EU. Western Balkan countries are part of Europe and they can contribute to its security. Western Balkan countries are an obvious piece of the security puzzle in fighting against informal migrations, as they proved in 2015/16.

However, secure Europe needs to remain open Europe. Rediscovery of European integration as the regional attempt to cope with the challenges of globalization requires both deepening and enlarging of the EU. To raise the awareness about the positive impact of the European integration, EU and Western Balkan countries must work together in communicating benefits and explaining how cooperation based on EU's founding values is influencing their common future. We share the common geography, history, presence, but more importantly we share the common future. Citizens of the Western Balkan countries need to be included in the European Citizens Consultation process launched by President Macron to have the chance to be informed and contribute.

Conclusions of the Council in June were not easy to reach due to fear and doubts expressed by some EU Member States. In given circumstances, it is encouraging to see that the path for the accession of Albania and Macedonia has been set. The only positive way to address fears and doubts is to prove the capability of the region to resolve the outstanding issues which are portraying bad image of the Western Balkans among the citizens in the EU, i.e. bilateral disputes, rule of law, good governance, division of power and free media. This is the way to prove region's credibility and to enable EU Member States to prove theirs by intensifying enlargement efforts in the forthcoming period in parallel to the deepening of the EU. That should be the way to invest in building European Balkans partnership.

TAGS [BIEPAG](#) [CHATHAM HOUSE](#) [DG NEAR](#) [EUROPEAN FUND FOR THE BALKANS](#) [EUROPEAN POLICY CENTRE](#) [SRĐAN MAJSTORVIĆ](#)



Srđan Majstorović

He has been the Chairman of the Governing Board of the European Policy Centre - CEP starting with 12th October 2017. He was employed in the Serbian European Integration Office since its founding in 2004, and performed the role of Deputy Director between September 2005 and June 2017. In August 2015, Srđan was appointed as a member of the Negotiating Team for Accession of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union.

2 Comments

Sort by **Oldest** ▾

 Add a comment...

 **Bernd Kleinheyer**
Bravo Srđane, zelim Vam sreće, da idemo dalje.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1d

 **Bernd Kleinheyer**
Bravo Srđane, zelim Vam sreće, da idemo dalje.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1d

 Facebook Comments Plugin

Previous article

Macedonia's Sabor ratifies the name agreement for the second time

Next article

Seventh 16+1 Summit takes place in Sofia

[RELATED ARTICLES](#) [MORE FROM AUTHOR](#)





European Western Balkans is a web portal that focuses on the Western Balkans countries and reports on the development of the EU's enlargement policy. The portal was launched in 2014 by the Centre for Contemporary Politics.



CONTENT

- News in brief
- News
- Analyses
- Interviews
- Opinions
- Infographics
- Photo
- Video

SECTIONS

- Politics
- European Integration
- Society
- Security
- Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue

MORE

- About
- Impressum
- Terms and conditions
- Partners
- Contact

European Fund for the Balkans



B | T | D The Balkan Trust for Democracy
A PROJECT OF THE GERMAN MARSHALL FUND

[Terms and conditions](#)