

WHAT ARE THE BREXIT CONSEQUENCES FOR THE EUROPEAN PATH OF THE WESTERN BALKANS AND HOW TO FACE THEM?

Integration
Talks



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Acknowledging the latest European developments and the necessity for meaningful information on the common European future of the Western Balkans, the **EU policy Hub** is launching the 'E-talks' initiative to provide an European virtual platform that will discuss the most pressing issues the countries of the Western Balkans are facing. The format of this platform, include interviews and analysis of EU level and national policy-makers, experts and academics that discuss a pressing issue from different perspectives, guided by a set of citizens questions and concerns.

Please join us for a meaningful E-Talk on the challenges of the Western Balkans towards European Integration

EU Policy Hub is a Forum of young professionals aiming to promote, monitor and impact on the performance of the Albania's European integration process

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Experts of the region are discussing the different scenarios of the Brexit impact on the European future of the Western Balkan countries, mostly warning for a slow down if not abandoning EU Enlargement at all. In your opinion what is the most probable scenario?



I do understand that the Brexit vote has raised concerns in the six Western Balkan countries that are in the enlargement process. But in practice we already have been facing EU-scepticism and enlargement-'fatigue' for some time. This has so far not hindered the opening of new chapters in the enlargement negotiations nor the conclusion of the SAA agreement with Kosovo. The Brexit-decision nevertheless marks the beginning of a period of uncertainty inside the EU. The UK has been one of the strongest supporters of enlargement, so the uncertainty whether or when it is going to leave the EU will unfortunately also weaken enlargement-support in the EU.

I am glad, however, that at the recent Western Balkans' Conference in Paris, the third one in a row in the framework of the Berlin Process, all Heads of States and Governments as well as ministers present have clearly emphasized their commitment to the enlargement of the six Western Balkan countries – with or without the UK.



The EU will not abandon its enlargement policy because of the UK referendum on Brexit. However, we can expect that more attention will be dedicated to the question how to strengthen the EU and its institutions in order to fulfil more efficiently the concrete expectations of EU citizens towards the EU. Both can be done in parallel.



EU today is not business as usual. Last years, We have been facing several crisis. There is a lack of solidarity and a lack of citizens' trust in European policies. These all call for urgent EU changes. The transformation is needed before any enlargement. The current situation in EU may slow down the process but I am confident that the EU enlargement to the WB will continue. The recent proof is the July's opening of the Chapters 23 and 24 in Serbia's EU Accession negotiations that are crucial to fight corruption and organized crime and defend fundamental rights. Awareness of need to support and help Western Balkans on it's EU path remains strong as we need each other in the fight against common challenges of 21st Century, such as migration, climate change, energy efficiency, terrorism.

Much of the future development will depend on how EU decides to respond to the current situation. What normative approach and policy measures do EU institutions need to take, in order to reduce negative consequences of the Brexit into the European path of the Western Balkans?



The management of the day-to-day business of the Union will not be jeopardized, and therefore as Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighborhood Johannes Hahn rightly said, this also means that we have to guarantee continuity in the enlargement process. Commission-President Jean-Claude Juncker said in his speech in the plenary session of the European Parliament that "the British vote has clipped some of our many wings. But our flight goes on. We will not halt our journey into the future. New horizons await. And we are flying towards horizons that are those of Europe and of the entire planet." For me, the next horizon lies in the Western Balkans.



Since the UK referendum on Brexit, the EU has already reconfirmed the accession perspective for the Western Balkans. The High Representative Federica Mogherini therefore attended the Western Balkans Summit which took place in Paris on 4 July. At this occasion, she stressed that there is no change in the EU's enlargement policy. This position is shared by the European Parliament.



EU needs an ambitious reform. Europeans feel disconnected from the European policies. Brexit was a wake up call for Europe. Shock in Great Britain and the damage caused in its economy and financial market raised the fears especially among young population. One of EU key challenge of today's Europe is economy, we need to boost growth and jobs. We need to regain the trust of Europeans. People need to be in the centre of future decision making process. We must strengthen the role of the European Parliament as a platform for a dialogue with our citizens. We have to give a stronger voice to youth. Change of EU narrative is needed and a clear understanding in what EU we want to leave and what role our states are willing to play in it.

The role of the domestic actors from the Western Balkans is also crucial for not losing the European perspective. Whose task and what immediate measures are domestically required to overcome Euro-scepticism and substantially progressing towards EU accession?



The very idea of the EU to follow the founding principle of cooperation instead of confrontation is still at the core of the Union. Job creation, for example via investment in energy efficiency and renewables, has had success in many parts of the Union. That can also be the case in the Western Balkans, we have to aim at that!

The Western Balkan states are European countries, they have EU member states all around them. Reconciliation and EU enlargement remains in the interest of both the European Union and the candidate countries. I and many of us in the EP have heavily criticized President of the Commission Juncker's statement in 2014 that „there will be no enlargement till 2019“ – not that I believe it to be realistic but because it was tremendously demotivating!

I also maintain that bilateral disputes should never be misused as leverage to block a country's progress on its path towards the EU. My and the goal of the European Union is to have all Western Balkans countries join in. Setbacks can always happen; but we have to continue ambitiously, in the interest of all citizens. The European peace project will not be finalised without the six Western Balkan states joining the EU.



It is up to the candidate countries – their governments and parliaments, political parties and civil society – to make the countries ready for EU accession. The European Commission and the EU Member States will continue to support the EU-related reform process in Albania and in the other candidate countries. But the work must be done by the countries themselves! It is therefore all the more important that civil society initiatives such as the EU Policy Hub continue to monitor their country's progress on the way towards EU accession and remind the political leaders of the people's aspirations for their European future.



The key to strengthen the knowledge about the EU and the Accession process is the dialogue with citizen. People deserve the truth, it is very important that the process is transparent and that the civil society and NGOs are strongly engaged with their critical thinking. I believe that the governments need to establish good communication strategy to make people better understand the tangible things and benefits from the complex and technical opening of the chapters. For example that a necessary reform of the judicial system will open the way to resolve the pending cases of the individuals and allow independent judgments and justice.