

WESTERN BALKANS MANIFESTO FOR THE FUTURE OF EUROPE



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Western Balkans Manifesto for the Future of Europe

Sarajevo, 2022

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My Vision of Europe

by

Alida Bremer

According to legend, at the beginning of the 10th century, the Greek pilgrim Pontus found refuge under an aqueduct in a bay on the Tyrrhenian Sea, where Salernus, a Latin Christian, had also sought shelter from the storm. Salernus was injured and was treating his wound with unusual herbs, which intrigued Pontus. He, an Eastern Christian, told Salernus how, according to his knowledge, a wound should be treated. Two more people were looking for a hiding place that night, a Jewish traveller named Helinus and an Arab traveller named Abdela. Having joined them, they also – each according to his own knowledge and tradition – attended to Salernus' wound, which healed quickly, and the four agreed to establish a school together. This was the birth of what we understand today to be Western academic medicine. Women were also allowed to study and teach in the medical school of Salerno, whose heyday was in the 12th century.

The harmonious collaborative research and teaching at the Schola Medica Salernitana, one of the first European universities, is, for me, the model, not of a utopian vision of Europe, but of a realistic one, as this school was a reality. I like this image because the wisdom of the community of different traditions can be found everywhere in Europe, but is in the greatest concentration in the Balkans, as if the whole of the Balkans were that refuge in the bay of Salerno. It is up to us Europeans to remember these strengths and, like the

Meine Vision Europas

Der griechische Pilger Pontus fand zu Beginn des 10. Jahrhunderts, so lautet die Legende, Unterschlupf unter einem Aquädukt in einer Bucht am Tyrrhenischen Meer, wo schon Salernus, ein Latiner, Zuflucht vor dem Sturm gesucht hatte. Salernus war verletzt und behandelte seine Wunde mit ungewöhnlichen Kräutern, die Pontus neugierig machten. Er, ein Christ östlicher Prägung, erzählte Salernus, einem Christen westlicher Prägung, wie eine Wunde seines Wissens nach zu behandeln sei. Zwei weitere Personen suchten in jener Nacht nach einem Versteck, der Jude Helinus und der Araber Abdela. Hinzugekommen, kümmerten sich auch sie – jeder nach seiner Tradition – um die Wunde von Salernus, die schnell heilte, und die vier kamen überein, gemeinsam eine Schule zu gründen. Es war die Geburtsstunde dessen, was wir heute als westliche Schulmedizin verstehen. In der Medizinschule von Salerno, deren Blütezeit im 12. Jahrhundert lag, durften auch Frauen studieren und lehren.

Das harmonische gemeinsame Forschen und Lehren an der Schola Medica Salernitana - einer der ersten europäischen Universitäten – ist für mich das Leitbild einer nicht utopischen, sondern einer realistischen Vision Europas, denn diese Schule war eine Realität. Dieses Bild gefällt mir auch deshalb, weil die Weisheit der Gemeinschaft verschiedener Traditionen zwar überall in Europa anzutreffen ist, doch auf dem Balkan in der höchsten Konzentration, als

four healers from this forgotten, yet genuinely European, legend, to find harmony with the whole world. Only in this way will we be able to make a contribution to preserving the world.

In one of the fundamental works of European culture, a clever, but tired, man moves from war to peace, from conflict to humanity, from danger to safe harbour. That is Odysseus, the seafarer, for whom Penelope is waiting on their native island of Ithaca, a no less important character for the understanding of our human existence. Since Odysseus' fateful and metaphor-laden sea journey, during which terrifying dangers and sensual temptations lay in wait, whilst the homecomer was guided by longing for security and love, we know that reaching peace, and a worthwhile life, are possible. Stories, poems, plays, musical compositions, works of art, dialogues, and joint projects help us to understand this as much as science and education do. Cultivating these activities intensively, committing us to mutually and respectfully getting to know and understand one another, beyond greed and fantasies of power, means healing our wounds and those of others.

The text was translated from German into English by Martina Birkhoff.

wäre der ganze Balkan jener Unterschlupf in der Bucht von Salerno.

Es ist an uns Europäern, uns dieser Stärken zu erinnern und so wie die vier Heiler aus dieser vergessenen, jedoch genuin europäischen Legende mit der gesamten Welt in Einklang zu kommen.

Nur so werden wir einen Beitrag zur Erhaltung der Welt leisten können.

In einem der Grundwerke der europäischen Kultur bewegt sich ein kluger, aber müder Mann vom Krieg zum Frieden, vom Konflikt zur Humanität, von der Gefahr zum sicheren Hafen. Es ist Odysseus, der Seefahrer, auf den auf der heimischen Insel Ithaka Penelope wartet, eine nicht weniger wichtige Gestalt für das Verständnis unseres menschlichen Seins. Seit Odysseus' schicksalhafter und mit Metaphern erfüllter Seefahrt, auf der erschreckende Gefahren und sinnliche Verlockungen lauerten, während der Heimkehrer von

Sehnsucht nach Geborgenheit und Liebe auf seinem Weg geführt wurde, wissen wir, dass das Ankommen im Frieden und ein sinnvolles Leben möglich sind. Das zu verstehen, helfen uns Erzählungen, Gedichte, Theater- und Musikstücke, Werke der Kunst und der Kultur, Dialoge und gemeinsame Projekte genauso wie Wissenschaft und Bildung. Diese Tätigkeiten intensiv zu pflegen, uns dem gegenseitigen respektvollen Kennenlernen und Verstehen zu widmen, jenseits von Gier und Machtfantasien, bedeutet unsere und die Wunden der Anderen zu heilen.

The Western Balkans Discuss the Future of Europe!

Introduction by Dr. Florent Marciacq & Harun Cero

After a bumpy start, the Conference on the Future of Europe is on ... and already about to end. Time is running out for those who wished to contribute to the EU's advancement of a more robust strategic vision, and regrettably, the Western Balkans were only invited to join the Conference at its margins. Their accession perspectives do not rank very high on the agenda of most Member states, and the countries of the region missed another opportunity to join forces in addressing this issue together.

Yet, the jig is not up. It is not the first reflection process and it will not be the last, for discussions on the future of Europe are anything but new! Some twenty years ago, a similar process, conducted under the auspices of the EU, paved the way for the Laeken Declaration. Germany's vision of a "European Federation" (championed by Joschka Fischer) found a contrasting echo in Jacques Chirac's call for a "Federation of European States". And Vaclav Havel, in his speech at the European Parliament in February 2000, called on the EU to establish itself as supranational community and adopt a Constitution.

These *grands débats* on the future of Europe have always been part of the European project itself, even though they temporarily lost impetus in the 2010s. The long list of serious internal and external challenges that the EU had to face certainly explain this difficulty for Europeans to project themselves in the future. The international and European debt crisis, the outbreak of war in the EU's neighbourhood, the refugee and migration crisis, the British vote to exit the EU, democratic backsliding across Europe, the rise of China's economic diplomacy, and the fierce return of Russia on the European stage all put the EU to the test. These challenges have now been topped off with the outburst of the pandemic, and the fear that "tomorrow's world might look like yesterday's – only worse" (to quote French Foreign Minister Le Drian).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine, one of the EU's closest neighbours, is the latest dramatic test, which Europe will have to face. In addition to imposing violence on people in Ukraine, it entails a major breach of the regional, European and international orders and openly challenges peace, freedom and democracy. While their scope and scale remain

unclear, the implications of this war can already be felt in all regions in Europe, including of course in the Western Balkans.

Understandably, the need to swiftly react to a changing environment, to improvise contingency plans, and to mitigate tensions among the Member states has strained the advancement of a more robust strategic vision. While a new reflection on the future of Europe has been initiated with the publication of the EU's White Paper on the Future of Europe in March 2017, followed by President Macron's speeches in following years, much remains to be done to rediscover the reasons underlying the European integration process in the first place, to rejuvenate the European project, and to once again make it a source of inspiration for the citizens of the continent. The Conference on the Future of Europe aspires to do that. But the reflection that it encourages should and will extend beyond 2022.

Certainly, in the Western Balkans much will depend on governments' commitment to advance key reforms, especially with regards to the rule of law. Progress in this area will remain key to determine the actual pace at which the countries of the region are likely to move forward toward the EU. But the Western Balkans, as future Member states, are nonetheless entitled to participate in and contribute to this reflection on the future of Europe. This reflection, after all, is not only about a Union which they are striving to join but about the future of the continent which they belong to. Beyond the need to contemplate their future in the same light as the EU's, their participation is essential to build a shared sense of belonging across the region; to increase the joint ownership of the European integration project and give Western Balkans citizens the opportunity to mobilise and engage in discussions transcending ethnonational lines. The inclusion of the Western Balkans is crucial to strengthen the community of purpose connecting the EU and the countries of the region in the making of a stronger Europe.

The challenges undermining the Western Balkans' transformation today resonate in many ways with those faced by the EU. The post-Covid uncertainties, growing socioeconomic disparities, demographic decline, erosion of democratic values, rise of populism, lack of solidarity, persistence of bilateral tensions, rising insecurity, and geopolitical tensions are by no means peculiarities affecting the countries of the region alone. Rather than considering the Western Balkans as essentially different from the EU for want of membership status, and locking them up in an agonising accession policy, the EU (and the countries of the region themselves) should start seeing southeastern Europe as a full-fledged "region (already) in Europe". Whether we like it or not, the EU and the Western Balkans are *already* in the same European boat.

There is a point to be made but pressing for it would require a regional push. As a region, the Western Balkans are worth more than the sum of their parts. As a region, they can gain better leverage in EU politics. The Western Balkans do not need to ask for the EU's permission to discuss the future of Europe: they are entitled to create imaginaries, nurture visions, voice strategic preferences. What they need are Europeans who share their vision on the *finalité* of European integration, the value of European democracy, the importance of solidarity, and the advancement of the EU's strategic autonomy. And these are no rare commodity, given the resonance of citizens' aspirations across the EU and the Western Balkans.

Pushing for such inclusion has been the aim of an initiative launched in 2020 by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (Dialogue Southeast Europe) and the Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe. In the past two years, a series of 12 workshops and public discussions have been organised throughout the region with the following guiding questions:

- What should this European Union be about, which the countries of the Western Balkans are eventually going to join? What should it seek to achieve and what should its strategic priorities be?
- What distinct contributions can the countries of the Western Balkans make to advancing the European project? How can their membership strengthen the Union?

Organised in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe, these workshops and public discussions have gathered about 200 participants, including journalists, intellectuals, activists, politicians, trade unionists, employers, religious representatives, artists, etc. To facilitate the discussions, a group of 12 experts from the region was constituted and briefed on the *grands débats* unfolding in EU capitals on European democracy, economic and monetary reforms, social Europe, demography and mobility, foreign policy, defence, and migration. The discussions, which this group of experts has moderated in the region over the past two years, have guided and informed the following Manifesto.

A Western Balkans Manifesto for the Future of Europe

This Manifesto draws the contours of a vision from the Western Balkans for the future of Europe. It is backed by two years of discussion work with citizens from the Western Balkans, with deliberations steered by a group of 12 experts from the region and the participation of a broad spectrum of civil society representatives.

Introduction

The Conference on the Future of Europe opened an opportunity for European citizens and civil society to have a say on how to reform the European Union (EU) and prepare it for new challenges. The proliferation of crises over the past ten years have put the European project to the test. Socio-economic inequalities, national populism, and neo-authoritarianism have undermined the ideational foundations of European unification. Democracy in Europe is declining, and the outburst of the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the sense of fragility of the Union, which needs to be addressed by forging a robust vision for the future of Europe that inspires citizens and broaden their horizon. The outbreak of the war in Ukraine is a watershed moment in the history of the Continent, which the Union needs to face with resolve and strategic determination.

This Manifesto includes recommendations on how to shape a forward-looking Europe that looks beyond immediate threats and resolvedly sets its course amidst mushrooming challenges. It is a contribution from the Western Balkans to the *grands débats* on the future of Europe. As a region in Europe, the Western Balkans not only share the Union's present challenges, they also share a common future, and as such, a responsibility towards the European project.

What We Stand For

A Europe of Fundamental Rights and Democracy

We believe that the future of the European project is contingent on its capacity to effectively sustain and consolidate its founding values. Their steady erosion, accompanied by the resurgence of nationalism and authoritarianism in Europe, is a direct challenge to the core idea of Europe. Therefore, the Member states should spare no effort to defend and nurture the fundamentals on which the European project is

built. A Europe of Fundamental Rights and Democracy is a Union that inspires trust by its citizens, asserts its *raison d'être*, and offers a bright future. We call on the Member states to give primacy to those values that constitute the soul of Europe. They need to enshrine the respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights as commitment to Europe, and accordingly empower Community institutions. We stand for a Europe that deepens its political integration and establishes a transnational democratic order, in which citizens' rights are secured through effective check and balances.

We believe that the institutions of the EU should play a more important role in promoting the rule of law and addressing systemic deficiencies in the EU's current system. It is on this level that a Europe of Fundamental Rights and Democracy can be forged and the EU's model for progressive governance be consolidated. We encourage Member states to step up their ambitions for Europe and go beyond the (albeit necessary) consolidation of corrective measures (infringement procedures, rule-of-law/budget conditionality, etc.). Their ambitions should entail more systemic reforms of the European architecture. This includes a shift towards majority voting in the Council, the further empowerment of the European Parliament, the strengthening of direct democracy, and the constitutionalisation of European democracy, allowing European Courts to broaden their jurisdiction.

A Europe of Citizens, for Citizens

Europe belongs to citizens. It cannot remain a project solely driven by national political elites and transnational market operators. It should seek to inspire the many. We believe, in this sense, that the development of a stronger European public sphere is of paramount importance to the fabric of European democracy. European citizens need to be better connected to European debates; they need to participate more actively in European governance and be more involved in decision-making on the local, regional, national and EU level. We call on the Member states of the EU to open broader avenues for citizens' engagement in EU affairs. A Europe of citizens is a Europe built by European citizens.

Boosting this engagement will require forging a stronger sense of belonging to the Europe. We call on the Member states to unambiguously embrace the European identity of their citizens and encourage their engagement as European citizens. Building a Europe for citizens

will only succeed if new generations of Europeans can grow and be educated as European citizens. We believe that European-wide citizenship education is an urgent necessity, which should be introduced in the curricula of current and future Member states' schools, as a stepping stone for later participation in European civic initiatives.

We believe that civil society will be the backbone of a Europe of citizens, for citizens. Civil society organisations have proved critical (in both senses) in monitoring reforms, but their future contribution should extend beyond those tasks. We call on the Member states and the European Union to involve civil society organisations more thoroughly throughout the various policy processes, including in decision-making on all levels of governance. Civil society organisations should contribute to forge Europe's strategic orientations.

A Europe that innovates

The European Union is one of the most advanced and dynamic centres of innovation in the world. It also hosts one of the most inclusive education and social systems. We welcome the singularity of the EU's model, which seeks to boost progress on different fronts, and call on the Member states and the EU to adopt strategies that reinforce the link between innovation, education, and social and environmental welfare. We believe in a Europe that invests in knowledge and human capital development, in which public institutions play a strategic, enabling, and balancing role.

We believe that mobility should be further encouraged among current and future Member states. It allows knowledge to be shared and jointly produced, and enables a more even distribution of socio-economic benefits. Investments in European transnational innovation networks, which link universities, enterprises, and private and public research centres, would help boost multidirectional mobility. We believe that such networks should be the backbone of the Union's knowledge-based economy.

While the formation of European tech giants might be necessary to safeguard Europe's strategic autonomy in the digital age, we believe that excessive concentration could be detrimental to Europe's territorial and social cohesion. We call on the EU and the Member states to balance these imperatives rather than giving in international competition, and forge, together with social forces, a genuine vision guiding Europe's fourth industrial revolution.

Social Europe

Global competition has been key to accelerating the decline of the welfare state in Europe. It has given market forces a leading role in structuring social relationships and led to the trimming of social policies. While the Covid-19 pandemic has called this shifting dynamic into question, much remains to be done to reinstate the state in its legitimate responsibility to protect and promote the social well-being of its citizens. We believe, however, that in a globalised world, this responsibility should rest in the first instance on the EU level.

Rather than reacting to existing crises and seeking to alleviate their impact on society, social policies need to take a more proactive look at the challenges the EU will face and help build more resilient and just societies in the long-term. We call on the EU to boldly move beyond its ambitions to expand Europe's social safety nets, and instead make social policies a common strategic thread in the advancement of its model. We also call on the EU to increase coherence in social policies and design a European social system that promotes both mobility and social justice. We believe that the more prosperous Union becomes, the more attention it should pay to fighting poverty, unemployment, job instability, discrimination, and social exclusion, both in current and future Member states.

A Europe that upholds its strategic autonomy

Globalisation, digitalisation, and geopolitical rivalry will continue to put the EU's strategic autonomy to the test. We believe that the EU should be willing and capable of setting its course in global politics for the benefit of its citizens and in observance of fundamental principles. We therefore call on the Member states to boost the EU's cohesion in foreign, security, and defence policy matters, and make the EU a more effective international actor. We welcome the initiatives and proposals aiming at enhancing the EU's capacity to act, but believe that the EU's readiness to uphold its strategic autonomy hinges upon citizens' sense of belonging to a security community, which remains too elusive on the EU level. Mobility could contribute to enhance Europeans' mutual understanding amidst inconsistent threat perceptions.

A more effective European foreign and security policy, committed to fundamental principles and the promotion of multilateralism, would increase the credibility and legitimacy of the European Union as an

international actor, and expand its influence on global politics. The Russian invasion of Ukraine should bring the EU to re-assess its approaches in eastern and southeastern Europe and make the enlargement policy more strategic.

The Western Balkans Will Contribute to Making Europe Stronger

*Upholding the *raison d'être* of the European Project*

The European project was born out of the ashes of World War II. The beginning of the new era was marked by the defeat of Nazism and fascism, the end of empires, and de-colonisation. We recall that wars, with the suffering and destruction they caused, gave the European project its *raison d'être*. Cooperation on an equal footing, mutual understanding, and reconciliation have guided European nations out of the vicissitudes of violent history. We praise this noble accomplishment, but believe that the primary *raison d'être* of the European project has not lost its topicality.

As the European project became a reality, the reverse dynamic took place in the Western Balkans. The fall of Yugoslavia, followed by the outburst of ethnic conflicts, paved the way for disintegration based on ethnic hatred and nationalistic ideologies. A decade of destruction, ethnic cleansing, and war crimes reigned before a return to normality and civility in the region. During that terrible time, nationalism flourished, lessons from World War II were forgotten, and European ideals were disregarded.

The wars in the Western Balkans are an important reminder of how bad things can get when Europeans forget history. It is a living reminder of what can happen, should the European project falter on a continent marked by centuries of wars. The recent tide of nationalism and revisionism in Europe takes on a whole new dimension when it is gauged against the backdrop of Western Balkan history.

We believe that the Western Balkans are this necessary reminder. Their misfortune is also an account of the darker side of European history, common to all nations on the continent. Genocide, hate speech, racism, and nationalism constitute powerful inner demons, which are best faced by tying together the future of European nations. We believe that we all need to embrace this *raison d'être*, shaped by history, and be wary of forgetfulness. In this, we are all Europeans. This is our responsibility and burden.

A Region in Europe

As a region at Europe's margins, powerful narratives of unruliness have long been imposed on the Western Balkans as defining elements of their identity. Stereotypes prevailed and conveniently bolstered Western Europe's ascendancy. This orientalisation of the Western Balkans as the "powder keg of Europe" or a "hotbed of corruption and organized crime" has not lost its relevance. It is still brandished with a moralising sense of superiority and dazzling belief that the region does not belong in Europe. We oppose this delusion and call the Western Balkans to be recognised for what they are: a region in Europe.

The Western Balkans' belonging to Europe is rooted in history, but also in sheer geography. This is important, since the European project, although driven by ideals, pertains to integrating territory. An enclave in Europe, the Western Balkans are indisputably part of the economic, human, and political geography of the Continent. This inclusion, which stereotypes readily ignore, means that issues in the Western Balkans cannot be contained by keeping the region outside the EU. We believe that they need to be addressed as European issues.

This is especially the case for bilateral disputes, which sometimes involve Member states and need to be resolved in a European framework. We believe that the resolution of bilateral disputes in the Western Balkans is key to making Europe stronger.

Likewise, the growing presence of external actors in the Western Balkans is a source of vulnerability for the Union's strategic autonomy. Russia's disruptive diplomacy, China's economic engagement, and Turkey's influence find better conditions to thrive in a region kept at bay by the EU than in a region which is considered as integral part of its geography. We believe that the Western Balkans, as the last piece of the European puzzle, are essential to complete the geostrategic aspirations of the Union.

Enhancing European Security

The Western Balkans is sometimes seen as one of the most volatile regions in Europe. It has the potential to generate a considerable amount of instability. If the region, together with the EU, can address pressing issues such as state capture, organized crime, illegal migration, and hate speech, this will directly contribute to a safer and more secure Europe.

On a political level, we believe that the Western Balkans should continue their shift from security recipient to security provider. Proactive participation of the Western Balkan countries in the EU missions deployed under the banner of the Common Security Defence Policy increases the EU's crisis response and enhances its role in global security affairs. We call on the EU and the Western Balkans to intensify their security efforts and contribute to the overall security of Europe.

Tapping the Potential of Economic Integration

The ambition of the European Union to accelerate its environmental transition are of paramount importance. The Paris Agreement on Climate Change and European Green Deal are ground-breaking milestones which reflect the EU's commitment to both multilateralism and environmental protection. With its sunny climate and favourable winds, the Balkan Peninsula has a great potential for becoming a European hub in the production of green energy and thus support the Union's environmental ambitions. We believe that green investments in energy infrastructures and connectivity should further nourish this dynamic and expand the Western Balkans' contribution to the making of a greener Europe.

On a more general level, both the region and the EU yield the benefits of connectivity. With their geographical position, the Western Balkans are best suited to become a functional node for transit, trade, and logistics and expand the European market accordingly. We believe that deepening economic integration is key to controlling the Eurasian flow of goods transiting through the region towards the EU, and thus better protect the EU's strategic interests.

The integration of Western Balkan economies is also an opportunity for European producers, who will find in the region a rich offer of geological, natural, and human capital resources. We believe that the Western Balkans can judiciously support the EU's efforts at reshoring its productive and manufacturing activities. This is also the case in the food-production sector, where the Western Balkans offer plenty of underused high-quality farming land.

Embracing Diversity

People in the Western Balkans share a long history of living together, despite their differences and the outbreak of wars. We believe that

their interpersonal experiences of diversity constitute a rich multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multiconfessional heritage, which reflects the EU's aspirations to build a solidary community. In that sense, the Western Balkans can contribute to the rejuvenation of the EU's motto, "unified in diversity".

Integrating Western Balkan mixed societies would also help oppose the misguided and populist temptation of redesigning the functions of the Union as an exclusive club of wealthy, developed countries. We believe that this idea contradicts the *raison d'être* of the European project. Diversity is a foundational element which enriches the European project and opens avenues for its advancement.

About the Authors



Blert Tuci is currently working as Project Manager at EuroPartners Development organisation. Previously she has managed the EU Information Corner at the Municipality of Tirana. Ms. Tuci is a member of EU Policy Hub where she contributes as researcher for issues related to European Integration process. She is author of several articles in Balkan Studies, Civil Society Development in the Balkans and the EU Integration Process in the Western Balkans.



Oltion Kadaifciu has been working in civil society organizations, education and development. He is a blogger and creative writer contributing in theater and other artistic and social happenings in Albania. Mr. Kadaifciu worked at the Albanian Development Fund as the citizen engagement and community relations specialist and regional development specialist. He also was a lecturer at the Kristal University in Albania, where he taught research methods and political sociology.



Anida Šabanović is a Project Manager for Center for Civil Society Promotion in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ms. Šabanović works on projects dealing with European integration, policy creation, capacity building of government institutions, fight against corruption, promotion of human rights and women's rights. She has experience in drafting policies and has cooperated with different non-governmental organizations in BiH as well as international organisations. Ms. Šabanović has experience in consultancy and has been author, co-author or contributor of reports, political analyses and texts related to European integration process as well as gender issues.



Rasim Ibrahimagić is a Research Associate at the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Sarajevo, working mostly on political education and foreign policy issues. Before joining FES BiH he coordinated the Initiative for Monitoring the European Integration of BiH, a 40-members civil society coalition which contributes to monitoring of reforms and overviews the application of EU policies, laws and standards in BiH.



Donika Emini is leading the CiviKos Platform, a secretariat gathering 270 CSOs in Kosovo. Ms. Emini was a recipient of the OSI – Think Tank Young Professional Development Program as part of the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies where she previously worked (2013–2019). Furthermore, she was a Research Fellow at the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) Paris Office HQ – fellowship granted by the European Fund for the Balkans. Her fields of expertise include regional cooperation, dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, security cooperation between Western Balkans and the EU (CSDP). She has been actively working in the Eastern Partnership Countries on cybersecurity as part of EU funded projects.



Visar Xhambazi works as a project manager at Sbunker, a current affairs blog in Kosovo dealing with politics, society, culture and economics. He previously worked as a policy researcher and project manager at Democracy for Development (D4D) Institute in Kosovo. Mr. Xhambazi is also engaged with two German-based organizations. He is a young professional advisor at United Europe and is a member of the M100 Sanssouci Colloquium. He focuses primarily on US foreign policy, Euro-Atlantic integration, regional cooperation and the Western Balkans. He is the author of several policy papers and articles. His work has been published in several local and international magazines such as Prishtina Insight, Balkan Insight, Visegrad Insight, The Globe Post and New Eastern Europe.



Jovana Marović is a Vice President of the United Reform Action (URA), a pro-European green political party in Montenegro. From 2004 until 2021, Ms. Marović worked as a Counselor for the European Union within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' multilateral department, an advisor for International Relations and European Integration within the Cabinet of the Budva Municipality's Mayor, a Research Coordinator at the Institute Alternative (a think tank), a Special Advisor to the Minister of Labor and Social Welfare, and the Executive Director of the Politikon Network, a think tank based in Podgorica. She was a Member of the Working Group for Chapter 23, Judiciary and Fundamental Rights from 2012–2021, within the Montenegrin Accession Negotiations for EU membership, and a member of the Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group, BiEPAG, from 2015–2021.



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→ **Lura Pollozhani** is a researcher working at the Centre for Southeast European Studies at the University of Graz. Previously Ms. Pollozhani was an Advisor to the Prime Minister of the Republic of North Macedonia on cooperation with international organisations. She is a co-founder of the Women's Mentorship Network, Stella, a non-profit organisation with a mission to inspire, empower and connect girls and women by advancing access to education, entrepreneurial opportunities and social change. Her work has been published in several local and international magazines.



→ **Jovana Spremo** works as Advisor specialized for EU integration related policies at Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights YUCOM. Ms. Spremo is the coordinator of the Working Group for Chapter 23 of the National Convention on European Union. Her expertise is in the domain of rule of law, with special focus on EU negotiation process, mainly covering topics related to judiciary and war crimes. She also covers topics of protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as in transitional justice and reconciliation. She is engaged in monitoring the Brussels Agreement implementation and the process of normalization of the relations between Serbia and Kosovo, with focus on judiciary integration.



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charge of policy research and advocacy initiatives within the Fund, including coordination of the Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group and think tank support programmes. He managed the Gallup Balkan Monitor, a regional public opinion survey conducted through partnership with Gallup Europe (2009–2011).



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Imprint

© 2022

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

Publisher: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Dialogue Southeast Europe

Kupreška 20, 71 000 Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

www.fes-southeasteurope.org

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Design / Realization: pertext, Berlin

ISBN 978-9926-482-59-6

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