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The Balkans: Proximity and Neighbourhood

Webinar on

Twenty years after the Thessaloniki Summit: The European Integration of the Western Balkans

Webinar: Online Panel Discussion

Twenty years after the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit, the European integration of the Western Balkans (WB) faces both old and new challenges. The EU accession of Slovenia (2004), Bulgaria and Romania (2007), and Croatia (2013) have not cleared the path for the remaining six Balkan countries. In reality, the WB in 2023 look more like an enclave than ever. In the medium term, the enlargement process has led to problematic experiences with “new” member-states from the 2004 enlargement (Hungary and Poland), resulting in fatigue on both sides – accession fatigue on the WB side and enlargement fatigue in the EU. Moreover, the lack of substantial debates on the very future of the European construction has been undermining the European prospects of the heterogeneous region.

In the short term, the Russian aggression of Ukraine has brought the WB case to light in the eyes of EU decision-makers: keeping these countries oriented towards Europe and, more broadly, to the Western system of alliances has emerged as a significant security issue on the European level and at the scale of the international UN order.

In terms of proximity and neighbourhood, the questions are: Have the Western Balkan states gotten closer to EU membership? Do citizens of the Western Balkan states feel they could become EU citizens one day? Does the EU feel closer in time and space, or would it be the opposite? or do other ‘neighbours’ such as Russia and China feel closer to political leaders in the WB? This happening at the same time as EU accession turns into an unreachable ‘vanishing point.’ How far have we come in the last twenty years, what have we achieved and what are the emerging priorities in the ongoing bellicose context affecting the region. What sound perspectives can we sketch for a region that might turn into an Achilles heel of a European Union?

Taking stock of the achievements and shortcomings of the promises made at the Thessaloniki Summit calls for an interdisciplinary approach. The guest speaker at the webinar will reflect on these issues through a multidisciplinary lens, taking into account both scholarly and policy perspectives.



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This webinar is hosted in the frame of the project The Balkans: Proximity and Neighbourhood:

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