

Highlights

MP Open Call #13

Your Direct Line to Europe's Policymakers

7 December 2021

The OED is committed to strengthening dialogue between policymakers across Europe by providing a neutral, informal, and accessible space for conversation. Our monthly, online MP Open Calls grew out of this mission and are a space for parliamentarians to set the agenda, discuss pressing national and European issues, and support each other by sharing best practices and concerns.

Our call was joined by three parliamentarians from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, and Sweden. These were joined by Adnan Ćerimagić, Senior Analyst at the [European Stability Initiative](#) in Berlin. The call revolved around the recent international attention directed to institutional crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as on the impact of the role of member states in shaping the EU's policies towards the Western Balkans.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE CONVERSATION

- **International attention is back on Bosnia and Herzegovina** as Milorad Dodik, representative of the Republika Srpska, threatened to pull his constituency from state-level institutions.
 - Dodik's rhetoric and plan provoked expected, nervous, and realpolitik reactions from other actors in the region. For example, the chairman of the largest Bosniak party ASD Bakir Izetbegović spoke in length about the strength of the Bosniak arms industry.
 - "The issue lies within the rule of law – without it, everyone is in trouble."
 - "EU officials are back in the region: enlargement commissioner Varhelyi, as well as EEAS director Angelina Eichorst."
- **Questions arise on whether the institutional instability in Bosnia (and the Western Balkans) is linked to a weakened EU position in the region.**
 - "Up until now, EU policy has provided stability for the region. If there is no sincere prospect for accession to EU membership, countries in the Western Balkan have less incentive to follow EU policy."

- “Joint German, UK and US efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina are significantly weakened by the total collapse of EU policy in the Balkans. To prevent further escalation, and to move forward the six countries of the Western Balkans will need a new policy.”
- “There is currently little willingness among the EU commission and Member States to transform the accession process.”
- “It is already difficult for the EU27, responsibility also lies within Western Balkan nations to maintain their commitment of meeting EU standards.”
- **What is the role of other regional actors in the Western Balkans?**
Participants discussed a lessened presence of the United States, while Russia remains interested as a regional player with its connection to Serbia.
 - “The issue is not just about Bosnia and Herzegovina becoming part of the European Union, it’s also about Serbia becoming part of the EU... with Serbian accession, they would legally abandon any claims they have on Bosnian territory.”
 - “There are political forces in Serbia and the Republika Srpska saying that ‘the time is now’ to pursue their goals of unification, where prospects of EU membership have momentarily stalled.”
 - To counter the Transnistria path of Republika Srpska, the US, Germany and UK are ready to use sanctions against individuals and business that are key supporters of such path. Sanctions however are never the first choice but would be used if further and more concrete steps would be made by Dodik.
- **What about minority rights in the region?** MPs discussed whether local authorities were adequately safeguarding peace on the ground and the right of minorities in multi-ethnic areas.
 - “Bosnia and Herzegovina does not look the same as it did in the mid-90s. What we have seen in the past ten years is a return of the multi-ethnic narrative that was present before the conflict. Ethnicity is not central to daily life in Bosnia and Herzegovina.”
 - “Bosnia and Herzegovina has the smallest state legislature in Europe, with 42 seats in its House of Representatives. This small lower house contains 12 different parties, which makes it one of the most pluralist parliaments in Europe.”

RESOURCES

- [EU Summit: No Firm Timeline for Balkans Accession](#), Deutsche Welle (DW), October 2021.

In October, EU and Western Balkan leaders have wrapped up a one-day summit in Brdo Castle in Slovenia with promises for greater integration but have not committed to a solid timeline for the six countries to join the 27-member bloc.

- Opinion: [The Western Balkans Leaving the EU Dream Behind](#), Aljazeera, October 2021.

Even in countries where EU stock is traditionally high, like Albania and North Macedonia, the bloc's resistance to enlargement is taking its toll. Even in these countries, being in favour of European integration no longer helps politicians win elections.

- Opinion: [Parliamentary Diplomacy in the Western Balkans](#), The German Marshall Fund of the United States, November 2021.

The Berlin Process—the initiative launched in 2014 by Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel, aimed at enhancing regional cooperation and reconciliation, and thereby speeding the EU accession process—has a greater potential to succeed if parliaments get involved more directly. As an initiative with a heavy governmental focus, it has grown to be an important forum for cooperation in the Western Balkans, yet it lacks parliamentary diplomacy.

- Proposal: [Open EU Single Market to the Balkans For a merit-based EU accession process that offers a credible goal](#), European Stability Initiative (ESI).

Membership in the Single Market would allow the Western Balkan states, once they meet all the requirements, to benefit from the four freedoms – the free movement of goods, capital, services, and persons. At the same time, sceptical member states could avoid debates about accepting new members into the EU. Enlargement policy can have a major impact, as long as it is credible, merit-based, and serious.

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

The Open European Dialogue is a network driven by MPs. We look forward to hearing from you and helping you as best we can to connect and work with your colleagues from across Europe in these challenging times.

Keep in contact with your colleagues! Please know that you can always find the contact details of all OED members on the [members-only area of the website](#). Should you have issues logging in, you can contact jcoenen@gmfus.org.

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