

BACK ON THE AGENDA: EU ENLARGEMENT AND WESTERN BALKANS

11 APRIL 2018
BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

Ljubljana, 5 April 2018

PRESS RELEASE: PUBLIC DEBATE IN BRUSSELS TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES OF THE WESTERN BALKANS

With the support of the International Visegrad Fund, Centre for European Perspective is organizing a public debate on the challenges of youth in the Western Balkans, EU enlargement and the future of the South-East Europe in cooperation with Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade (IFAT) (Hungary), EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy (Czechia), Slovak Foreign Affairs Association (SFPA) and Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM).

A two-day event will first bring together representatives of young generation and civil society representatives from the 6 countries of the Western Balkans: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia; and V4 partner organization representatives from Hungary, Czechia, Slovakia and Poland.

Visegrad cafe discussion, youth policy boot-camp and civil society networking will take place on Tuesday, 10 April 2018. The topic of **democratization** (corruption, democratic reforms, rule of law), **social affairs** (unemployment, education, brain drain), **youth participation** (youth representation, activism, giving the youth a voice) and **reconciliation** (peacebuilding, intercultural dialogue, interstate relations) will be discussed as a result of the stage-setting essays, written by our young participants.

On Wednesday, 11 April 2018, between 10.00 am and 12.00 pm a public debate will follow at Charlemagne building, Mansholt room, Rue de la Loi 170, Brussels. Our panellists will discuss the future of the EU enlargement process and the Western Balkans with the representatives of the civil society and young generation.

Register here: <http://bit.ly/V4Registration>

Centre for European Perspective is opening the floor to the civil society of the Western Balkans, giving them a chance to discuss their concerns, challenges, ideas and prospects with EU representatives, policy makers and experts. You are cordially invited to take part in a public discussion on the future of the Western Balkans' biggest asset, its youth, in the heart of the EU, in Brussels.



The project is co-financed by the Governments of Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia through Visegrad Grants from International Visegrad Fund. The mission of the Fund is to advance ideas for sustainable regional cooperation in Central Europe.

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BACKGROUND OF THE EVENT

The Western Balkan has returned to the agenda of the European Union. However, getting closer to the EU also brings greater responsibility. The European Commission's motto 'exporting stability, rather than importing instability' must remain a strong pull factor, since it carries the idea of strengthening WB democracies and finally implementing economic and social reforms, which would have tangible results for citizens. The EU-WB enlargement strategy, numerous top-level visits by EU representatives, including a wide range of different regional initiatives, are charting the EU's path ahead. Nevertheless, it is the empowered civil society of the Western Balkans that are best at voicing their ideas and perspectives. And which part of society is more relevant for outlining the prospects for an (EU) future than the young generation?

One question inevitably arises: What do the youth of the Western Balkans have to say? An education system that is incompatible with the labour market, high youth unemployment, a massive brain-drain, anomalies of the state-building process and the slow post-conflict reconciliation process are only some of the everyday concerns plaguing young people in the region. Comprehensive structural reforms, the openness and inclusiveness of public institutions, more scholarships, better education and job opportunities, visa-free regime for the entire region and a chance not only to speak but also to be heard seem to be positive solutions to these challenges. The youngsters of the Western Balkans might see EU membership as the light at the end of the tunnel, but they are also fully aware that their respective governments need to do their part of the job first.



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