

CONFERENCE REPORT

The <u>Belgrade Security Forum (BSF)</u> represents the most relevant event between Istanbul and Vienna for key actors to meet and discuss foreign affairs and security policy in the Balkans and Europe. The Forum considers various perspectives and opinions and contributes to the resolution of the most pressing issues. Initiated and hosted by three partner civil society organizations – <u>the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence, the European Movement in Serbia</u> and <u>the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy</u> – the BSF aims to create and strengthen the security community in the Balkan region and provide a meaningful contribution to on-going European and global security debates. The BSF has four strategic goals:

- 1) to be a point of reference and "the place to be" for discussion of key developments in the Balkans;
- 2) to advance the debate on the issues faced by Europe and inform the region accordingly;
- 3) to enable the Balkans to contribute to the resolution of some of the key issues faced by

Europe, such as how to strengthen Europe's global "actorness";

4) to strengthen the BSF community.



BELGRADE SECURITY FORUM 2017

BSF 2017 was held under the title "Building a Common Future in the Age of Uncertainty". Donald Trump's victory at the end of 2016 represented more a venture into the unknown than a clean break with the past. As the old order was weakened, one thing became certain: no more "business as usual". The United Kingdom's decision to leave the EU and the much-speculated "hard Brexit" has had and will have a profound effect, posing difficult questions over how to proceed. What will be the raison d'etre of this post-Brexit EU? Who will help Germany steer the European "ship" across the rough waters that lie ahead? With it seeming too optimistic to expect more integration, many advocates fall back to the less ambitious goal of the Europe of nations. Nevertheless, the resurgence of geopolitics has led to renewed interest in the Western Balkans. What might happen if it is left to its own devices, and its own dangerous dynamics of conflict and cooperation? The rise of populism, coupled with a sharp rise in in-state inequality and the establishment of the "post-truth" world view, brings us to the question of whether democracy is ready for this tumultuous future. Do we have the necessary tools? What is to be our response? How can we build a common future in an age characterized by uncertainty? BSF 2017 discussed these and numerous other issues

The 7th Belgrade Security Forum gathered together more than 120 speakers and 700 participants from 35 countries, as well as 250 journalists from the Serbian, regional and international media.

The list of speakers at BSF 2017 included (but was not limited to):

Ana Brnabić, Prime Minister, Government of the Republic of Serbia; Aleksandar Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia; Christian Danielsson, Director-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations at the European Commission; Hon. Rose A. Gottemoeller, Deputy Secretary General of NATO; George A. Papandreou, Former Prime Minister of Greece; Florian Bieber, Director of the Southeast European Studies Center, University of Graz; Sławomir Sierakowski, Founder of the Krytyka Polityczna (Political Critique) movement and Director of the Institute for Advanced Study in Warsaw; Amb. Cameron Munter, President and CEO of the EastWest Institute (EWI); Valbona Zeneli, Professor of Security Studies and Director of the Black Sea Eurasia Program at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies; Arben Gashi, Member of Parliament of Kosovo; Catherine Fieschi, Founder and Executive Director of Counterpoint Global; and Igor Crnadak, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

BSF ACADEMIC EVENT

This year's BSF Academic Event continued the Forum's tradition of providing theoretical input into policy debates, highlighting the need to take academic research into account in policy making processes. This event is a unique feature of BSF, enabling interactions and networking between the academic and policy communities. This year's Academic Event was entitled "The European Union as a Global Crisis Manager" and was concerned with the European Union's civilian power in light of recent developments in world affairs. This part of the Forum was organized in partnership with the project "EU-CIVCAP - Developing EU CIVilian CAPabilities for a Sustainable Peace".

The Academic Event opened with the keynote lecture "European Security and Crisis Management Since 2003: Is the CSDP Fit For Purpose?" delivered by Professor Michael E. Smith of the University of Aberdeen. In his lecture, Professor Smith presented a brief history of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), discussed the effectiveness of the CSDP before and after the Lisbon Treaty and elaborated on priorities for strengthening the CSDP and making the EU a strong global actor. Three thematically organized panels followed, each consisting of four academic paper presentations followed by comments from one discussant, a policy practitioner.

The first panel focused on civil-military synergies in EU conflict prevention and peacebuilding and discussed how to improve the effectiveness of EU crisis management. The second panel scrutinized implementation of the EU's Comprehensive Approach in practice, with a focus on the Western Balkans and the Horn of Africa. Finally, Academic Panel 3 analysed the EU missions in Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Somalia and the Occupied Palestinian Territories and discussed issues of local ownership in peacekeeping missions and the planning capacity of CSDP missions, as well as some negative impacts of the missions, such as how EU missions might aid and abet authoritarianism.

The overall conclusion of the BSF Academic Event was that the EU's crisis management instruments have been set in motion and are showing some results, but there remains significant room for improvement.

Recommendations/action points:

- An integrated approach must be fully implemented in the EU's external interventions.
 - The EU must achieve a better understanding of the local contexts in which missions operate.
 - The identified "lessons learned" should be institutionalized.

METHODS, CAREERS AND NETWORKING CAFÉ

The BSF Academic Event is traditionally complemented by an additional program for PhD students and other interested researchers, entitled the Methods, Careers and Networking Café. This innovative type of session encourages participants to engage in informal and unstructured yet focused discussions with the hosts – senior and established academics. The hosts of this year's Methods, Careers and Networking Café were Ana E. Juncos, who spoke about "Surviving your PhD", and Professor Michael E. Smith, who spoke on the topic "From qualitative analysis to your first book contract". The Method Café was attended by over 20 doctoral and post-doctoral students from various countries.



BCBP @bezbednost_org

Citizens of Europe want the #EU to get involved, #democracy building, fighting #crime, #community development -@ProfMESmith#BelSecForum

https://twitter.com/bezbednost_org/status/ 918021770099286016

EU-CIVCAP @eucivcap

"Peak of #CSDP innovation was 2005; CSDP went into "autopilot"/hibernation after 2008 for several years" - @ProfMESmith at the

#BelSecForum.

https://twitter.com/eucivcap/status/9180 18146333810688

SonjaStojanovicGajic @StojanovicSonja Is executive mission needed in #CSDP missions - that is a lesson that must be learned based on @EULEXKosovo Pierre Mirel #BelSecForum 2017

https://twitter.com/StojanovicSonja/status/918117943304736768





Strategic goal 1: The BSF as a point of reference and "the place to be" to discuss key developments in the Balkans

The primary strategic goal of the BSF is not only to remain the most relevant forum in the Balkans for discussion of regional issues and developments, but also to grow. The BSF strives to contribute to the resolution of the major problems that burden the region and impede its European integration. The BSF encourages more inclusive dialogue, and to that end it hosts not only high-level decision makers but also think-tankers, academics, civil society activists and journalists. This edition of BSF continued the tradition of opening the floor to a variety of stakeholders with expertise and practical experience in the field of Balkan politics.

As with previous editions, this year's Forum discussed Serbia-NATO relations. This panel brought together Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabić and NATO Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller. The session ended on a rather positive note, with both speakers emphasizing good cooperation between Serbia and NATO through PfP, IPAP, joint military exercises etc. While Serbia's official stance of military neutrality remains unchanged, the panel concluded that Serbia's neutrality and its good relations with Russia do not represent an obstacle to deepening Serbia-NATO cooperation.

When Balkan developments are discussed, another key topic is certainly relations with the EU, which were the focus of the Berlin Process panel. Following the fourth edition of the Western Balkans Summit, held this summer in Trieste, the panel discussed the results achieved so far and questioned whether the strengthening of economic ties within the region can truly lead to all other issues being settled. Discussion focused on the positive results achieved in economic relations and youth cooperation and the topic of "stabilitocracy" in the region, complimented by the EC's Director General of Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations Christian Danielsson. The importance of this initiative for keeping the topic of the Balkans and the prospects for EU enlargement on the table and making it more economically attractive was stressed. The panel concluded by highlighting the need to "energize the spirit of political leaders" in order to energize the spirits of citizens, and called upon civil society in the region to step up promotion of the Berlin Process and European integration.

On the other hand, another think-tank session gathered regional experts to explore possible story-lines for the scenario, "What if the Western Balkans Never Becomes Part of the EU?" With the EU's internal crises, stalling of the enlargement process and democratic backsliding in the WB, the panellists agreed that the EU's current approach to the WB is inadequate. Non-accession of WB countries in the medium term could leave a political and ideological vacuum to be filled by external actors like Russia and China, leading to the rise of populism with much worse consequences, such as border issues being reopened. The panellists see civil society as a crucial player in advocating for the necessary reforms to the rule of law and the judiciary in both Brussels and the region, and even more importantly in the case of non-accession, pushing for continuation of the reforms. The panel concluded that the EU should re-think and re-contextualize its approach to the WB in the light of the new circumstances.



The increased presence of capital originating from authoritarian states was seen as a potential challenge to the region's development. There is no doubt that WB countries need foreign direct investment as their infrastructure crumbles, but it is the political influence that comes with it that causes concern, given the context marked by weak rule of law and corruption, including lack of transparency and accountability of public servants. Panellists came to the conclusion that civil society has a major role to play, acting in a close understanding with the EU to monitor progress in implementation of Serbia's action plans on chapters 23 and 24. Another thought-provoking recommendation was that each country should be allowed to draw funds only if it makes sufficient progress in the mentioned chapters. Civil society could also engage the private sector, which could help to open dialogue, even forming a group to advocate for change(s) in public administration.

BSF 2017 continued discussion of another important topic discussed in its previous editions: the role of women in politics in the Balkans. Panellists agreed that the world of politics is still a man's world, with a striking discrepancy between the proclaimed norms of gender equality and the actual state of affairs. While women in the Balkans can find a place in civil society, the positions of political and economic power are still reserved for men. The panel pointed out that women need to "take their destiny into their own hands", but also to make alliances with men – since genuine gender equality benefits everyone, not only women.

The panel on the Belgrade-Prishtina dialogue is traditionally among those attracting the greatest attention from the BSF audience, as well as the media. During this panel, political representatives of the governments of both Serbia and Kosovo expressed firm commitment to further normalization of relations, with one primary goal – a better life for all citizens. However, it must be noted that the commitment expressed at this kind of event does not reflect the political practice of the governments. The dialogue has slowed down drastically over the past year, and a number of problems persist, including lack of transparency of dialogue, slow implementation of agreements, nationalist rhetoric and issues of prosecution of war crimes, missing persons, property ownership and many others. The panel pointed out that the EU perspective is the major driver for both parties to negotiate, but also stressed that more local ownership is needed.



Finally, increasing the resilience of e-government services in SEE was another focus of this year's BSF. Discussion focused on the importance of developing and keeping e-government safe, developing relevant institutional structures and international cooperation over cyber security, which is seen as crucial given the transnational nature and specificities of cyber security threats. A positive example of the development of e-structures was provided by Estonia, the first country to introduce e-voting, which showed that "being small is a privilege if you are smart, connected, and efficient". Panellists agreed that the complex nature of cyber threats requires a "whole-nation approach", including actions at individual, national and international level, involving not only state stakeholders but also the private sector, civil society and academia.

Recommendations/action points:

- The EU should include Western Balkan countries in its projects and reforms.
- Civil society has a crucial role to play in advocating for necessary reforms to the rule of law and the judiciary, both in Brussels and in WB capitals.
- Genuine gender equality requires solidarity among women, but also solidarity and cooperation with other disempowered groups.
- The Belgrade-Prishtina dialogue must be more inclusive, more transparent, and focused on citizens instead of the particular interests of politicians and their parties.
- The specific nature of cyber security threats requires the participation of diverse stakeholders.



Milos Popovic @milos_agathon

#Serbian P.M.:

#NATO is emotional issue and will remain burden for cooperation, but we need to be pragmatic and work together.

#BelSecForum

https://twitter.com/milos agathon/status/918406046644887552

European WB @European_WB

@DanielssonEU: Berlin Process is about

connecting and increasing investments within Reg. Economic Area. #BelSecForum @BelSecForum @eu near

https://twitter.com/European WB/status/9 18387732287774720

EPI.Skopje @epi_mk

Milos Djindjic @CEPBelgrade: We need to make a demand at home for EU related reforms.#BelSecForum

https://twitter.com/epi_mk/status/9184564 53026992129



Belgrade Forum @BelSecForum

Less #women you have in representation, the longer the problem will stay emphasized @gordanacom on #BelgradePristinaDialogue #belsecforum https://twitter.com/BelSecForum/status/918765056489336832

Vlad Galushko @vlado1978

Closer economic interaction is a necessary, but not alone sufficient condition for normalization between #Kosovo and #Serbia. Involvement of both local communities in #mitrovica - a must. #BelSecForum

https://twitter.com/vlado1978/status/9187 56040124006400

Strategic goal 2: BSF advances the debate on the issues faced by Europe and informs the region accordingly

Although primarily focused on the Balkans and its EU perspective, the BSF strives to discuss global and European security concerns and advance debate about these issues in the Balkans. To that end, the Forum hosts experts from EU member states as well as from non-EU capitals, who contribute to a better understanding of global security debates among Balkan audiences



A pessimistic tone prevailed during the plenary panel discussing the future of the EU, with speakers expressing their deep concern about a number of negative trends in the EU as well as about enlargement fatigue. It was pointed out that the existential threat to the EU is primarily internal rather than external. The panel stressed the seriousness of anti-democratic tendencies and civil rights violations in some member states, such as Hungary and Poland. An important point made during the discussion was that Euroscepticism does not necessarily emerge from nationalism, but from EU citizens' disappointment at the democratic deficit of the EU bureaucracy and unmet expectations that the EU would provide a better living standard for all.



One of the main topics at this year's BSF, which was echoed in discussion of many other topics, was the global problem of growing inequality. Speakers at this panel identified numerous causes of this worrisome trend – all related to the dominant neo-liberal order – such as the concept of trickle-down economics, tax havens, lobbying and corruption, crony capitalism, the strong resistance to change of capital owners and policymakers, and so on. It was underlined that although economies started growing again after the 2008 economic crisis, all the growth goes into the pockets of the richest, while the burden of the crisis is borne by the rest of the population. Unfortunately, this panel was not particularly optimistic. Very few concrete measures for reducing inequality (e.g. introducing universal basic income) were proposed during the panel, indicating the severity of the problem and the need for radical structural changes.

Closely related to both inequality and the topic of the EU's future is another major BSF 2017 topic: populism. During the panel on this phenomenon, it was indicated that populism emerges when democracy fails to fulfil its promises. A growing dissatisfaction among citizens – due inter alia to striking inequalities – paves the way for populist politicians and parties. Populists base their strategy rhetorically on blaming the "enemy other" for all the problems of society. They win elections by addressing the "bread & butter" issues that others neglect. However, soon after they win, populists switch to identity politics, which as a rule are exclusionary and racist. While discussing populist tendencies in Hungary, Poland, the UK, France and the Western Balkans, panellists noted that EU membership could unfortunately not be seen as a cure for populism.

One of the issues that populists widely abuse is that of migration and refugees. This year's BSF, like the Forum's previous editions, discussed the migration crisis and its consequences. It was argued that after the migration crisis, an integration crisis would ensue. In this regard, the panel pointed to a contradiction — a large number of EU citizens are hostile to immigrants, arguing that they will undermine European values, while at the same time such xenophobic attitudes themselves represent a great threat to European values. The panel concluded that the refugee and migration crisis is both a humanitarian and a political challenge.



Another factor (mis)used by populists is religion, or religious identity. One breakout session explored the connection between the notions of religion and security, especially with regard to radicalization connected with, or on the basis of, religious identity. Next to the young (men under the age of 30), migrants and prison inmates were seen as some of the groups under the greatest risk of being (becoming) radicalized. One issue that caused considerable concern and stirred debate among panellists and the audience were proposals to monitor places of worship. Another issue discussed at length was the impact of content available online, particularly on the young.

Two ongoing conflicts – in Ukraine and Syria – were understood as contemporary proxy wars. Identifying the political ideas and strategies at their core and formulating adequate answers proved too difficult a task for our speakers. Olena Snigyr underlined what she sees as the offensive nature of Russian politics and shared her view that its "brand" of interventionism, rather than stopping, will spread across Europe. To this she added the danger of using Russian paramilitaries to disrupt a society. Philip Cunliffe stressed that the nature of contemporary interventionism has a greater impact on regional powers than previously, thus broadening the traditional understanding of interventionism. Cyber attacks were mentioned as one of the dominant characteristics of contemporary proxy wars. All that speakers could agree on with regard to recommendations was "strengthening political vision, international cooperation and exchange of experiences" and united action – which seems further away than ever.

Recommendations/action points:

- In order to flourish, the EU must be a political union, not simply a technical or economic grouping.
- Europe needs to address the democratic deficit within the EU's bureaucracy.
- Europe has to create jobs and have the political authority to respond to threats and challenges.
- In order to combat populists, non-populist parties need to address "bread & butter" issues, without turning them into identity divisions.
- The root causes of the migration crisis need to be addressed, not only its consequences.
- With young people in mind, think more about promoting constructive content online.
- A unified political vision, cooperation and action are needed in order to counter fake news.
- The EU should work on strengthening the common asylum system.



Nicolas Bouchet @nickbouchet

#populism vs #democracy? Slawomir Sierakowski: In #Poland we don't have politics of left or right but of right or wrong.#BelSecForum

https://twitter.com/nickbouchet/status/9 18493129774452736

Biljana Dakic @Biljana Dakic

Globalization happened in markets, but not in other areas. Unregulated capital has undermined social contract. @GPapandreou#BelSecForum

https://twitter.com/BiljanaDakic/status/9 18418977403080704

Rufin Zamfir @Rufin Z

#BelSecForum @CER_lanBond: As a brit, I can say that #Brexit is an existential threat to #FU.

https://twitter.com/Rufin Z/status/91814 5152639733762

Rufin Zamfir @Rufin Z

<u>#BelSecForum</u> Fr Robin Fox: When it comes to <u>#Security</u>, <u>#ReligiousLiteracy</u> is key

Ambasadorka Da Budem

@ambasadorkaa

Eastern European region is the best place to learn about Russian interventionism, says Olena Snigyr #belsecforum

Belgrade Forum @BelSecForum

Largest number of #refugees are not in #Europe - they are in the developing countries - Argentina Szabados @Unmigration#BelSecForum

https://twitter.com/BelSecForum/status/91 8194649877155841





Strategic goal 3: Belgrade Security Forum calls on the Balkans to contribute to the resolution of some of the key issues faced by Europe, including the question of how to strengthen Europe's global "actorness"

Another goal of the BSF is to contribute to the active role of the Balkans in the wider European debate, in order to engage the Balkans as an active participant in, and not only a mere subject of, global security debates. The BSF aims to foster the idea of the Balkans as part of the solution to pressing European security and political issues, such as strengthening Europe's global "actorness" for instance.

Along these lines, one of the plenary panels at this year's BSF focused on an <u>EU-Balkans common future</u>. The panellists disagreed on the effectiveness of recent speeches in which Macron and Juncker underlined the European future of the WB, with some assessing them as insufficient and representing a "minimum common denominator", while others saw them as an opportunity for the EU to regain its credibility. The topic of premature accession, discussed through the examples of Romania and Bulgaria, also provided various perspectives. The relaunch of the Thessaloniki vision was highlighted as a priority for the EU, as the EU needs a new project for the Balkans with real and tangible prospects for the region's citizens.

The issues of democracy, the rule of law, the judiciary and media freedom are seen as the main problems for the WB, while the EU's main problems lie in political leadership and authority. The panel concluded that enlargement is in the EU's interest, as there is no geopolitical alternative to full membership for the EU in the WB, while at the same time this is the responsibility of all of us for future generations.



The new political reality of fake news was discussed in the panel "Soft Power Revisited: Alternative Facts for a Post-Truth Reality", in the light of Brexit and the election of Trump, which were seen as megatrends for the rest of the Western world. While fake news and manipulation happened before, although on a smaller scale, today we are facing a new combination of technology and populism, with the proliferation of social media, the commercialization of regular media and politicians who allow themselves things that politicians of the past did not. Politics is developing in a new direction and becoming a spectacle, as Dejan Jović stressed, which is focused not on rational, argued debate, but on the easily manipulated issue of identity. The social, economic and media changes in the USA were stressed as largely fuelling Trump's election, lessening the importance of the legitimacy of political elites. The panellists concluded that people's lack of trust in traditional political parties and their credibility leads to the need for something "new", with the "new" being tainted by populism.

The topic of Brexit was the focus of the panel on The Western Balkans in a Brexiting EU, which discussed the ramifications of Brexit, the merits and dangers of a "multi-speed Europe", the potential effects on EU integration of upcoming elections in Austria and Italy and the threat of creating a European "stabilitocracy" which refuses to condemn authoritarian measures taken by its member states and within its neighbourhood. The implications of hosting the next Berlin Process conference in London caused the most debate among panellists. Some panellists questioned whether the enlargement agenda could be properly addressed in a country currently negotiating its exit from the EU. On the other hand, others argued that this would send a message about the UK's continued investment in Europe, with Britain still able to play an essential role in European security and foreign policy and the WB issue. Finally, the possibility of making EU accession a collective, simultaneous objective and a regional rather than a national project was also raised.

Recommendations/action points:

- EU membership for the WB is the only way to complete the reunification of Europe.
- The EU should rethink its approach to the WB region and make full membership a real and tangible prospect, so that citizens can feel safer and more optimistic about their future.
- Increasing transparency, a more resilient civil society and more research on media funding are the key to countering fake news.
- In order for the Berlin Process to succeed and European cooperation to be sustainable, CSOs must be included.



Tweets

Dan @DanijelPantic

#BelSecForum Fratini: Juncker 2025 EU expansion statement completely insufficient. EU lacks new vision vis -a-vis Balkan enlargement.

https://twitter.com/DanijelPantic

European WB @European_WB .@OAnastasakis: There is an opportunity for European Commission to give the boost for EU agenda of #WB countries. #BelSecForum @BelSecForum https://twitter.com/European WB/status/918788696924676096

Belgrade Forum @BelSecForum Agreement between #Serbia and #Kosovo will be much easier to reach than establishing the #RuleOfLaw, @srdjancvijic @osfEUpolicy #BelSecForum https://twitter.com/BelSecForum/status /918791105206013952

Amb. Kyle Scott @usambserbia
Fascinating panel on post-truth reality at
#BelSecForum. How to help see through
false narratives and seek facts?
https://twitter.com/usambserbia/status/918513980603273216



Strategic goal 4: Strengthening the BSF community

Speaking of the generations to come, we reached out to millennials. One breakout session discussed whether they see themselves as agents of change. Some objected, citing issues like the brain drain, the rise of nationalism and a crisis of values. Others hoped for a quick transformation from a protest group to a real political movement, offering the example of Macedonia. All were in agreement that millennials should be seeking to influence their respective governments. But being young doesn't automatically make you an agent of change; to become that, one must engage others. Another highlight from this panel concerned reform of the education system; and finally: the brain drain must be turned into "brain circulation", with young people with knowledge also returning.



@NOMolestieStrad

Dona Kosturanova: it's not just about being rebellious, but of asking what you deserve #belsecforum #youth4change #fyromprotests #reform Fascinating panel on post-truth reality at #BelSecForum. How to help see through false narratives and seek facts?

#belsecforum #youth4change #fyromprotests #reform









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