



# BELGRADE SECURITY FORUM

Belgrade, October 16 – 18, 2019

## STRIVING FOR JUSTICE IN A DIVIDED WORLD

[www.belgradeforum.org](http://www.belgradeforum.org)





# BELGRADE SECURITY FORUM 2018

## Conference Report

Launched in 2011, the [Belgrade Security Forum \(BSF\)](#) has rapidly become the most important security conference between Istanbul and Vienna. It aims to create a relevant policy venue that will contribute to the development of a security community in the Balkan region as well as providing a meaningful contribution to the ongoing European and global security discussion. Initiated and hosted by three partner civil society organisations – [the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence](#), [the European Movement in Serbia](#) and [the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy](#) – the BSF creates a place where Balkan policy- and opinion-makers, as well as members of the academic community and civil society, meet with their counterparts from other parts of the world in order to exchange views on the pressing security issues of the day.

### **The BSF's core values and mission:**

- Europe as a community of values, with a stronger foreign and security policy
- The Balkans (South East Europe) as an actor in and subject of global debates
- Nurturing greater and mutual (rather than particular) interests
- Democratising “high politics” by insisting on a culture of inclusive dialogue
- Debates that are topical and insightful
- Autonomous, created by three civil society organisations

### **The BSF's Strategic goals 2016-2020:**

- 1) to be a point of reference and “the place to be” for the discussion of key developments in the Balkans;
- 2) to advance the debate on the issues Europe faces 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.



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## Conference Report

### BELGRADE SECURITY FORUM

The 9th BSF was held from 16th to 18th October under the title “Striving for Justice in a Divided World”. This edition of the BSF strived to address the multiple crises currently faced by the Balkans, Europe and the world: the continuing crisis of the liberal model; nations facing what are now labelled as “hybrid” threats; crises of leadership; uneven growth and rising inequality; demographic crisis; migration; and the urgent need for action to address the impact of climate change. These wider trends unfold in a context marked by increasing global competition (and confrontation) between West and East, North and South and also internally, as the “populist tide” shows no sign of receding.

Against this background, the Belgrade Security Forum 2019 discussed the following questions: Can the international community overcome conflicts of various intensity as it seeks a more unified approach? Are the core values of the international community endangered by the current state of the international order? How can the international community protect and promote the values of peace and justice, and how can long-lasting frozen conflicts be solved? What is the role of regional actors in the process of overcoming differences in their own societies and communities? Can an individual be certain of their personal safety in a time of new threats?

With some pride, we report that this year we hosted 99 panellists, of whom 43 were women and 56 men. They interacted with 350 registered guests – policy makers, diplomats, think tankers, activists and scholars – in the presence of more than 150 accredited domestic and foreign journalists from 40 media outlets in 13 countries. They attended 3 plenary panels, 2 special events, 2 academic panels, 1 academic keynote speech, 6 break-out sessions and 7 side events, covering a number of current political and security issues around the future of this region and Europe as a whole, as well as contemporary global issues.

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The list of speakers at BSF 2019 included (but was not limited to):

**Amb. Frédéric Mondoloni**, Director for Continental Europe, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, France; **Rt Hon Catherine Ashton**, Chancellor, University of Warwick Senate, Former EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy; **Vesna Pusić**, Member of Parliament, Croatia; **David Kostelancik**, Office Director for South and Central Europe, U.S. Department of State; **Ian J. Manners**, Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Copenhagen, Denmark; **Nathalie Tocci**, Director, International Affairs Institute (IAI), Italy; **Blerta Cela**, Deputy Regional Director, UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office; **Milada Anna Vachudova**, Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA; **Alexey Kovalev**, Head of Investigations, meduza.io, Russia; **Susanne Schütz**, Director for South-East Europe, Turkey and EFTA States, Federal Foreign Office, Germany; **Goran Trivan**, Minister of Environmental Protection in the Government of the Republic of Serbia; **Ivo Vajgl**, former member of European Parliament; and many others.



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### BSF ACADEMIC EVENT

A distinctive feature of the BSF is its Academic Event, which takes place on the first day of the Forum, with the aim of feeding the policy portion of the conference with sound academic input. The first nine Academic Events (2011-2019) have shown this conference to be a relevant platform for scholarly discussion on pressing security issues, and even more importantly, a forum for dialogue between the academic and policy communities. This year's Academic Event, “[Regional Security and the Retreat of Liberalism](#)”, was organised in partnership with the OSCE Mission to Serbia and the Open Society Foundation. In one keynote speech and two panels, the event discussed the implications of the crisis of the liberal order for security in Europe and the Western Balkans.



The Academic Event started with a keynote lecture, “[Ramifications of the Retreat of Liberalism for the EU and Its Normative Power](#)”, delivered by Professor Ian Manners from the University of Copenhagen's Department of Political Science. Prof Manners started by making a clear distinction between liberalism as the idea of freedom and neoliberalism as the privatisation of public life, pointing out **three current tendencies: the decline of liberalism; the rise of authoritarian nationalists; and the rise of neoliberalism**. He argued that the EU has been and continues to be in crisis, and that the crisis does not come only from the outside, but also from within the EU itself as it perpetuates inequality within the context of neoliberalism. Manners concluded that the way out of the current predicament is to strengthen solidarity and address people's real security concerns.

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The keynote speech was followed by two thematically organised panels – one dedicated to European security and the other to security in the Western Balkans in the context of the crisis of liberalism. The first panel examined the notion of ontological security and the relation between ontological and regional security; comparatively analysed the Russian concept of “sovereign democracy” and the Hungarian concept of “illiberal democracy”; and discussed the (de)politicisation of EU enlargement, while the second academic panel was concerned mainly with problems of ethno-populism; foreign – both Western and non-Western – influences in the Balkans; relations among Western Balkan states; and how all these issues influence security in our region.

### Recommendations/action points:

- We should first re-think what security means to us and then what meaning it has for whom. The first question is concerned with our understanding of security, while the second asks: who the “we” is in that understanding of security.
- The EU should start thinking about how to act on its own in the security field, independently from the United States.
- The politicisation of EU enlargement is needed – in the sense that enlargement should be treated as a political rather than a technical process.



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### METHODS, CAREERS AND NETWORKING CAF

The BSF Academic Event was complemented by an additional program for PhD students and other interested researchers, entitled the [Methods, Careers and Networking Café](#). This session encourages participants to engage in informal but focused discussions with the hosts, who are senior scholars. The hosts of this year's Methods, Careers and Networking Café were Dr Patricia Greve of the University of Toronto, who discussed how to conduct interviews in IR research with participants; Professor Milada Anna Vachudova of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, whose topic was "The EU did it! Theorising the impact of the European Union on domestic and regional outcomes in populist times"; and Professor Ian Manners, University of Copenhagen, who talked about normative, explanatory and practical theory and methods in Critical Society Theory. The Method Café was attended by around 20 doctoral and post-doctoral students from various countries.

#### Tweets

Jelena Pejić  
[@ueuachic](#)

Ian J. Manners holding academic keynote speech at the [#BelSecForum](#): You cannot engage in normative power unilaterally, then it is violence. Solidarity is needed.  
<https://twitter.com/ueuachic/status/1184381494900510720>

Marko Savkovic  
[@Savkovic\\_Marko](#)

What EU citizens want post-2016, more than anything else is peace. An intriguing

def. of power by Manners: power means the ability to share something, not use violence. And if the EU should do something, it is strengthen the idea of solidarity. [#BelSecForum](#)  
[https://twitter.com/Savkovic\\_Marko/status/1184373597667762176](https://twitter.com/Savkovic_Marko/status/1184373597667762176)

SonjaStojanovicGajic  
[@StojanovicSonja](#)

Withdrawal of #US from #INF (Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty) communicated to Europeans that

the U.S. does not care about them which created feeling of existential anxiety  
Michael Onderco [#BelSecForum](#)  
<https://twitter.com/StojanovicSonja/status/1184385736071667712>

Filip Ejodus  
[@FilipEjodus](#)

Illiberal democracy is just a moment before liberal democracies become authoritarian regimes argues Milada Vachudova [#BelSecForum](#)  
<https://twitter.com/FilipEjodus/status/1184415315603656705>

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

The BSF seeks to contribute to the resolution of the political and security issues that burden the Balkan region and slow its European integration. Moreover, the BSF contributes to the democratisation of policy debates about the Balkans by inviting and hosting not only high-level decision makers, but also think-tankers, academics, civil society activists and journalists. The tradition and continuity of the BSF have been driven by raising awareness of global issues that affect and influence the Western Balkans, as well as by bringing these issues into public discourse in the region and finding common answers to common challenges.

The [Grand Opening event](#) of BSF 2019 discussed the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries and state-building capacities in the region. Sonja Licht, President of the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence, pointed out that **Western Balkan politics are rightly dominated by the notion of EU enlargement but, given the slowdown of this process, the region's countries should focus on internal democratic state-building, as well as on enhancing regional cooperation.** The panellists agreed that the EU is incomplete without the Western Balkans, and strongly supported continued cooperation between the EU and the Western Balkans as crucial for transmitting a sense of unity and addressing issues that individual countries cannot address alone. This panel took place on the day the European Council decided not to open accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia, so the panellists were still hoping for a positive decision. Some insisted that, despite the domestic challenges in these two countries, the EU should have given a green light as a reward for the countries' commitment to meet the EU's requirements and standards. Ambassador Frédéric Mondoloni stressed that **for France the enlargement process was based on two principles: the fulfilment of all criteria by candidate countries and reform of the process itself.** David Kostelancik from the U.S. Department of State pointed out that the USA remained committed to helping to improve the situation in the region and providing assistance in the conduct of good governance and state-building in the WB.

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The topic of EU enlargement was addressed in another session, entitled “[Consequences of Delayed or Denied Balkan States EU Accession](#)”, which sparked a debate on how the visible slowdown in enlargement could impact the region's commitment to reforms and the patience of its societies. It was pointed out during the panel that although the EU membership perspective has kept Western Balkan governments motivated to carry out reforms, the recent impasse has caused a deterioration in this regard. Milica Kravić, a journalist from Novi Sad, Serbia, argued that although minority rights in Serbia have been good on paper, their implementation is hampered by corrupt structures, especially when it comes to the rights of LGBT+ people, Roma and women. Tirana journalist Edlira Gjoni focused on the Albanian perspective after the negative decision on the start of accession talks. She pointed out that Albanian citizens' growing sense of unfair treatment, rejection and being second-class-citizens of Europe could reduce their support for the EU, which has so far been very high. Zagreb journalist Borna Sor and Zhidas Daskalovski, a professor at the Faculty of Security in Skopje, **criticised the current format of the Berlin Process for imposing technical language and shifting the focus away from core political issues like democracy and rule of law.**

A session entitled “[Women's Contribution to Peace, Democracy and Development in the Balkan Region](#)” aimed to explore further opportunities for the active engagement of women in national and regional politics, bringing new narratives into the political arena and fuelling bilateral and regional cooperation by applying innovative approaches. The panellists were mostly focused on the representation of women in political institutions and on women in leadership, but the structural gap between men and women was also discussed. Despina Syrri, Director of Symbiosis-School of Political Studies in Greece, noted that this gap exists in six core domains: work, money, knowledge, power, time and health.



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As happens every year, BSF 2019 discussed the topic of Kosovo and Kosovo-Serbia relations. While the topic of the Belgrade-Prishtina dialogue was part of various sessions, two were dedicated specifically to this topic. The plenary panel [“Belgrade and Pristina, Normalising Comprehensively”](#) gathered young opinion-makers from Kosovo and Serbia. The main question discussed during this panel was: **what can we expect from the new Kosovo government, primarily in regards to the Brussels Dialogue?** The panellists had different opinions. Milica Andrić Rakić, a journalist from North Mitrovica, was not very optimistic about candidate for Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti's ability to bring positive change into the dynamics of the Dialogue, and even argued that the situation in Kosovo is now similar to that in Serbia in 2012, when Vučić rose to power. Agon Maliqi, a policy analyst and activist from Prishtina, was of the opinion that while Kurti had used populist rhetoric in the past, he leaves room for the possibility of positive change. On the other hand, Prishtina journalist Una Hajdari spoke of **Kurti's idea of “radical honesty”, which he plans to implement in the Brussels Dialogue, pointing out that Vučić might not be comfortable with this,** as in the past the two leaders in the Dialogue would usually send different messages to their publics. However, the panellists seemed to agree that the EU has lost a large part of its credibility, which might pose an obstacle to future negotiations.

This year, Kosovo was the topic of another session which introduced [a new format](#), presenting the findings of an opinion poll entitled [“Normalisation of relations between Belgrade and Pristina from citizens' perspective: What we know and what we feel”](#). The authors of the research report, Nikola Jović and Milan Krstić from the University of Belgrade's Faculty of Political Sciences, discussed Serbian citizens' perceptions of the Brussels Dialogue and Kosovo in general. One of the survey's main findings is that **the topic of Kosovo provokes primarily emotional reactions among Serbian citizens, which is the main reason it is difficult to demobilise the long-standing narratives in which Kosovo is presented as the “heart” of the Serbian state and the cornerstone of Serbian identity.** The survey also examined public support for various scenarios for the future of Kosovo, pointing out that only two scenarios would have significant support among citizens: that Serbia recognises Kosovo while northern Kosovo municipalities become part of Serbia; and that Serbia does not recognise Kosovo's independence formally, but accepts its membership of the UN. One of the main conclusions of the session was that the entrenched nationalist narratives have increased ethnic distance from Albanians among the Serbian public. This session attracted great attention among the BSF audience and the media, and the BSF team plans to introduce more research presentations in future.

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### Recommendations/action points:

- Cooperation between the EU and the Western Balkan countries must continue, despite the slowdown of the accession process.
- The EU enlargement process, as well as accompanying initiatives such as the Berlin Process, must shift the focus away from the technical aspects of reforms in Western Balkan countries towards core political issues such as democracy and the rule of law.
- The dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia needs more transparency from both sides, as well as from the EU.

### Tweets

Valerie Hopkins  
@VALERIEin140

“When you make a commitment to a country that has done if the bravest of brave things, you must honour it,” Baroness Catherine Ashton tells @BelSecForum regarding French blockage of opening EU accession talks with North Macedonia.  
<https://twitter.com/VALERIEin140/status/1184748735995273216>

Una Hajdari  
@UnaHajdari

“I was glad to see dads and their sons wear women's soccer jerseys — with a woman player's name and number on the back — after the World Cup last year. Seeing a woman be their sports hero is remarkable,” says @MollyMontgomery at a panel on women's contributions.  
#BelSecForum  
<https://twitter.com/UnaHajdari/status/1184813091135070210>

Faith  
@faithjbailey

The lack of trust between Kosovo and Serbia prevents out-of-the-box solutions... The EU needs to react to how Serbian media dehumanizes Albanians every single day.  
@HidrofilnaVata  
#BelSecForum  
<https://twitter.com/faithjbailey/status/1185138859023261696>

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## Strategic goal 2: The BSF advances the debate on the issues Europe faces 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 the debate in the Balkans about these issues. To this end, the Forum hosts experts from EU member states and non-EU capitals, who contribute to a better understanding among Balkan audiences of global security debates.

The special BSF event “[A Case for Military Neutrality in the 21st Century](#)” gathered General Milan Mojsilović, Chief of General Staff of the Serbian Armed Forces and General Robert Brieger, Chief of Defence Staff of the Austrian military. During the panel, the special complexity of modern military neutrality was presented from the perspectives of speakers who lead the defence forces of two European countries that are aiming for military neutrality. One of the main discussion points was the sustainability of military neutrality, which public opinion interprets with a dose of scepticism. Related to this point was the issue of how the citizens of both Austria and Serbia understand the concept of military neutrality and its interpretation as a foreign interest. The role of bilateral and multilateral cooperation was also discussed, as was the importance of how to communicate military neutrality to key partners. **The panel highlighted differences between military and political neutrality.** General Mojsilović noted that Serbia is the only Western Balkans country to choose the route of military neutrality, and that this was determined by historical and political factors, with Kosovo's status being one of the most important. Still, **Serbia does not put military security above other methods of cooperation, and is committed to international cooperation in all forms of security, especially over comprehensive issues like organised crime.** Additionally, speaking in the context of further European integration, it was underlined that military neutrality does not contradict security cooperation with the EU. General Brieger stated that Austria is a friend of the Western Balkan nations and that Vienna is a factor in Balkan security. He also said that **exporting security deflects the import of uncertainty** and emphasised the need for regional cooperation, especially over border security.

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The panellists in the side event “[Women in Security Sector Reform – Promoting the Inclusion of Women in Crisis Management](#)” agreed that **promoting the inclusion of women in international crisis management missions and military actions would contribute to the effectiveness, credibility and legitimacy of these security sector institutions**. It was noted that gender balance in missions is important because it increases the operational success and effectiveness of missions and operations. Also, **female leadership positions are important because women in these positions are less tolerant than men of discrimination and sexual harassment**. It was noted that advocacy for gender equality often comes from outside the security sector, and that there is still a need to raise awareness of the importance of the issue.

**The importance of historical context was highlighted at the beginning of the session entitled “[Winter of discontent in the MENA region](#)”**. Hillary Kalmbach, Senior Lecturer at the University of Sussex, explained the importance of memory and history (even distant history like the crusades and Mohammed, together with the history of colonisation) in shaping the future of this region. It is because of history that democracy and other progressive ideas are considered to be a Western intrusion. Secondly, she pointed out that the deeper emotional and cultural needs of people are not met by MENA regimes, as they focus only on the basic meaning of security, while not providing for higher needs, including a quality of life that is better than a basic lack of threat. The characteristics of temporary context in the MENA region are political apathy, strongman rule and the army as an important political and economic factor without any kind of monitoring or accountability. The importance of religious factors was highlighted, with concerns that religious extremists are not addressed in the right way, while security concerns are often put before the democratisation of the whole region. Additionally, the presence of external actors was pointed out as an important factor in the whole region, with concerns that there is potential for further negative developments based on the mentioned variables.

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The session “**Belt and Road Initiative – European Perspectives**” created a platform for dialogue about the rising presence of China in Europe. The panellists discussed the consequences of this emerging actor in Europe, mostly in the Western Balkan region, but also in Central European countries, and how the partnership with China could impact the European perspectives of these regions. It was noted that **China operates through loans and is not present in the Balkans to be an altruist, meaning that there are potentially worrying long-term consequences.** Anastas Vangeli, Doctoral Researcher at the Polish Academy of Sciences, pointed out that the Belt and Road initiative is not toppling the liberal world order, but is creating a kind of hybrid. The Chinese narrative is successful in the Western Balkans because it is a new player, with no troubling history in the region, and it does not have a negative image in the eyes of the wider public. It was also noted that **China is often a "plan B" for the region's countries**, especially when it comes to finances and cooperation with international financial institutions. Besides the Western Balkans, Central European countries also welcome the Chinese presence. Agnesz Szunomar, Head of the Research Group on Development

Economics at CERS HAS, noted that **countries have to be patient and get to know the Chinese business culture and habits in order not to fall into potential traps of cooperation with China.** The panellists agreed that China comes in with no baggage and is funding projects the EU would never fund, which may be "red elephants", potentially more disruptive than useful. The panel concluded with the message that the challenge for governments is to adjust to Chinese influence, and that if the EU wants to counter this influence it should work harder to build stronger connectivity with Western Balkan countries.



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### Recommendations/action points:

- A durable solution for both sides in the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue must be found, with commitment from both regional and global actors to making it sustainable.
- The solution of important regional challenges lies in the further democratization of regional actors, even if the root of the challenges is to be found in historical heritage and global actors' different approaches to the region.
- Overly generalized approaches should not be taken when looking at Asia, but rather caution should be used in taking account of the individual interests and positions of the states that comprise it.
- West-Russia relations could be further damaged by the emerging alignment between Russia and China, and the West should be strategically prepared.

### Tweets

Katarina Djokic @kolofdjuti

Kosovo's status is the key to Serbian military neutrality, says Chief of General Staff of Serbian Armed Forces at #BelSecForum

<https://twitter.com/kolofdjuti/status/1184488202305966081>

Theresa Fallon @TheresaAFallon

Changes needed to ensure women's active role and gender-balanced #securitysectorreform processes were discussed by SGM Marijana Simonovska

Trajkoska @Defence\_MKD, LT COL Marko Marjanović @mo\_i\_vs, @denisemazzolani @OSCE and LT COL Egil Daltveit @norway\_belgrade. #BelSecForum

Tena Prelec @tenaprelec

@AnastasVangeli: Belt & Road facilitates the emergence of China as a European power. It also pushes forward the ongoing issues in Europe. It is not yet a 'plan A' anywhere in the Balkans, not even in Serbia, but it is now a solid 'plan B'. <https://twitter.com/tenaprelec/status/1185094054410964992>

Stefan Vladislavljev

@Vladislavljev\_S @The\_China\_RoadCriticizing Chinese presence in Western Balkans can be counter productive, and EU should maybe focus more on helping countries more than on criticism #BelSecForum [https://twitter.com/vladislavljev\\_s/status/1185106021989134336](https://twitter.com/vladislavljev_s/status/1185106021989134336)

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### Strategic goal 3: The 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”

The BSF aims to contribute to the active role of the Balkans in the wider European debate about pressing security and political issues. After decades of the Balkans being perceived as a problem for European security, the strategic goal of the BSF is to foster the idea of the Balkans as part of the solution.

The plenary panel “[Overcoming Great Power Competition: East, West and the Rest](#)” discussed foreign influences in the Western Balkans, primarily potentially harmful Russian and Chinese influence. The panel was also concerned with the resilience of the Western Balkans as states, democracies and societies. Christopher Coker, Director of LSE IDEAS and Professor of International Relations, pointed out some misconceptions about the end of the Cold War and the Berlin Wall being the turning point in international relations and security. According to Coker, two major events in 1979 caused insecurity in Europe: the opening up of the Chinese market and the Iranian revolution. The panellists agreed that **we often overestimate Russia's influence in this region and underestimate China's influence and power**. Theresa Fallon, Director of the Centre for Russia Europe Asia Studies (CREAS), argued that China poses a greater long-term strategic challenge than Russia, not only to the Western Balkans but also to Europe. **She pointed out that China's strategy is to convince us that they have no strategy**. When it comes to cyber security, Russian journalist Alexey Kovalev underlined the lack of resources in Russia and pointed instead in the direction of China, saying that he would be much more worried about the possibility of Chinese hackers attempting a cyber-attack in the future. EU and U.S. influence was also a topic of discussion during this panel. Michel Foucher, Chair of Applied Geopolitics at the College of World Studies, pointed out that if the EU is to remain a relevant actor in the Western Balkans, it needs its own reforms.

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The session entitled “[The 'Big Bang Enlargement': 15 Years Since the EU's Greatest Accomplishment](#)” focused on the 2004 enlargement of the European Union and its consequences 15 years on. The panellists explored current EU enlargement policies, especially in regards to the Western Balkans. Martin Povejšil, Deputy Minister for Security and Multilateral Issues at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Czech Republic, described the 2004 enlargement as one of the EU's biggest successes, emphasising its positive perspectives in terms of economic growth and stable institutions, but also admitting the resulting political divergences and difficulties in single market integration. Nathalie Tocci, Director of the International Affairs Institute in Italy, stated that **the 2004 enlargement had its “dark” and “light” sides, but that it was certainly a historical necessity. She warned that it would be incorrect to apply the old enlargement policies to current circumstances in the Western Balkans and the EU.** Bernard Hüttemann, Secretary General of the European Movement Germany, pointed out the success of the “Big Bang enlargement”, primarily as a shield against Russian influence in Central Europe, while Ivo Vajgl, a former member of the European Parliament from Slovenia, expressed his worries about the state of democracy, and especially media freedom, in Serbia.

This year's BSF introduced the topic of youth (e)migration as an issue that all Western Balkan countries have in common. The session “[Our Own Migration Crisis: People Are Leaving and What Can Be Done about It?](#)” dealt with issues of youth alienation, youth emigration and the circularity of migrations and explored the effects of this trend and whether it has a positive side. Alida Vračić, Director of Think Tank Populari, argued that youth emigration from the Balkans is not only due to economic reasons, but is also caused by political factors related to identities. Peter Grk, Secretary-General of the Bled Strategic Forum, asserted that both the EU and young people from the region have to put pressure on Western Balkan governments to invest more effort in solving problems like corruption, the lack of hope and unemployment. Nevertheless, **the panellists agreed that migration is not a new phenomenon and is here to stay. What is important is to utilise the development potential of migration and build links with the diaspora.**

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### Recommendations/action points:

- In order to remain a relevant actor in the Western Balkans, the EU needs to reform itself in many areas, inter alia to move from the principle of unanimity in decision making towards qualified majority.
- Instead of ticking boxes, the process of enlargement has to bring substantive and consistent changes. Strict conditionality regarding the rule of law should be supported by enhanced engagement with all countries in the region, regardless of their position in the accession process.
- The countries of the Western Balkan region should approach diaspora groups and encourage them to consider returning to their home countries, not just as investors but as people with education, professional experience and international connections.

### Tweets

Marko Kovacevic  
@Markodkovacevic

For several times today we have heard speakers at [#belsecforum](#) quoting [@JHahnEU](#) assessment that [#EU](#) "overestimated Russia and underestimated China" in the Western Balkans.  
<https://twitter.com/Markodkovacevic/status/1184506496832458753>

SonjaStojanovicGajic  
@StojanovicSonja

[#China](#) is not accidental but strategic [#power](#) in [#Europe](#) and more serious than [#Russia](#).  
[@TheresaAFallon](#)  
[#BelSecForum](#)  
<https://twitter.com/StojanovicSonja/status/1184504147749605376>

Most Europa  
@EuropaMost

[#BelSecForum](#) "Economic convergence that followed the Big Bang Enlargement of the EU in 2004 was undoubtedly a success, while political convergence is still unfinished. [#Enlargement](#) vs. multi-speed [#Europe](#) <https://bit.ly/2P5Pc4P> via [@EWB\\_eu](#) [#WB6](#) [#EU](#) [#WesternBalkans](#)  
<https://twitter.com/EuropaMost/status/1184842018977136641>

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### Strategic goal 4: Strengthening the BSF community

Besides the topics regularly addressed by BSF, each year the Forum seeks to broaden its scope and keep pace with current debates. This year's BSF dedicated great attention to topics related to climate change and environmental issues. BSF 2019 also discussed the issue of social justice and introduced some new formats – besides the presentation of a public opinion survey mentioned earlier, this year's Forum included a one-on-one conversation.

Three BSF sessions this year addressed the problems of climate change and climate security. The session entitled “**Climate Security: Adapt, Mitigate, Change**” strived to answer the question of how the changing climate is affecting security and what needs to be done. Vladimir Đurđević, Professor at the University of Belgrade's Faculty of Physics, warned that an increase in global temperatures above 2 degrees Celsius would result in serious economic decline, while Janez Kopač, Director of the Energy Community Secretariat, talked about the danger of coal power plants, especially in the Western Balkans, which is largely dependent on this type of power plant. Francine Pickup, UNDP Resident Representative in Serbia, pointed out that **climate change affects poverty-stricken communities the most, and therefore marginalised people carry a double burden.**



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Further, the session “[Image of the Future: A Green, More Developed Western Balkans](#)” explored the importance of women and local communities in collective efforts to combat climate change, air pollution and other environmental issues. Irena Vojáčková-Sollorano, UNDCO Regional Director a.i. for Europe and Central Asia in Istanbul, stressed the importance of working with local communities, and especially young people, to tackle ecological issues. Majlinda Bregu, Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council, also called for a bottom-up approach in dealing with ecological issues. She presented the findings of a survey showing that 84% of people in the region perceive climate change as a problem but 60% do not care about air pollution. Blerta Cela, Deputy Regional Director of UN Women Europe and the Central Asia Regional Office, focused primarily on the gender perspective, arguing that **women are the solution to many of the development challenges we face**, and pointing out that **women are often on the front line in the battle against climate change**. Julian Popov, Fellow at the European Climate Foundation in Brussels, noted that moving towards a greener economy is actually beneficial in economic terms, not only in the long term but also immediately.

The third session concerned with climate change was entitled “[Socio-Economic Aspects of Climate Change Impacts in Serbia in the Context of UNFCCC Reports](#)”. This session discussed the effects of climate change in detail, including temperature rise, the greenhouse effect, etc. The panellists agreed on several common points, most importantly that climate change has a negative socio-economic impact, resulting in natural damage, job losses and GDP decline. It was mentioned that **despite existing scepticism and denial of climate change, the realities we are experiencing reveal the dangers it poses**. As Danijela Božanić, Climate Change Expert from Climate Action Consulting in Serbia, pointed out, “The consequences of climate change will be there, no matter if we approve or disapprove of their existence.” Regarding the stance of Serbia in these matters, the panellists argued that although the country has signed and ratified vital agreements on climate change and climate protection, there is no adequate implementation of these agreements in practice.

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One of this year's plenary panels asked the question “[Is There Hope for Justice in a Divided World?](#)” This panel dealt with the issue of growing inequalities and declining trust in the judiciary. Tobias Flessenkemper, Head of Office at the Council of Europe Office in Belgrade, talked primarily about rights related to sexual orientation, gender identity and other issues that are still considered controversial, pointing out that **an intergovernmental mechanism is a crucial part of the successful implementation of human rights**. On the other hand, Danilo Ćurčić, Programme Coordinator at the A11\* Initiative for Economic and Social Rights, insisted that the fight against poverty must be an obligation for the government. He argued that **social rights are part of human rights, and a lack of funds must not be an excuse for not protecting them**. Bibi van Ginkel, Owner and Founder of The Glocal Connection – Platform for Shared Security, suggested that we need to invest in “small justices”, that is, we have to focus on the micro level to achieve full equality in our daily lives.

A new format introduced at this year's BSF is a conversation between a moderator and one speaker: the session “[Asia's Delicate Security Architecture](#)”, during which Dragan R. Simić, Dean of the University of Belgrade's Faculty of Political Science, talked with Tae-Hyung Kim, Professor and Chair of the Political Science Department at the Social Science College at Soongsil University, Seoul, Korea. Prof. Kim outlined three main challenges to Asia's security architecture: power politics, the trade war between the USA and China and the rise of nationalism. He spoke about the liberal idea of preventing war through economic co-dependency, but he noted that the recent trade war between the USA and China proves that this co-dependency no longer exists, as China is now actively investing in military build-up and modernisation. Prof. Kim was not optimistic about the emergence of any common Asian security framework, as the two powers concerned, the USA and China, are still in full confrontation.



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### Recommendations/action points:

- When it comes to battling climate change, although we can all do a lot individually, the crucial thing is to change policy.
- Since environmental pollution does not stop at borders, international cooperation in fighting pollution is needed.
- Social and economic rights are part of human rights, and governments need to start assuming their responsibilities in this regard.

### Tweets

#### European Western Balkans

@EWB\_eu

Climate change causes not just social issues, but number of health issues, jeopardizing human security. @NedretEmiroglu

@BelSecForum

#BelSecForum

[https://twitter.com/EWB\\_eu/status/1184768010348847104](https://twitter.com/EWB_eu/status/1184768010348847104)

#### Belgrade Forum

@BelSecForum

Julian Popov @julianpopov from @BPIE\_eu argues that reducing climate risks requires a deep economic transformation. "Moving towards greener economy is actually beneficial in economic terms," he noted.

#BelSecForum

<https://twitter.com/BelSecForum/status/1185101000669048832>



#### Belgrade Forum

@BelSecForum

"Opening up the doors and inviting people to the table - two indispensable steps in fighting on the ground for #HumanRights and #Justice", Bibi Van Ginkel @bibivanginkel pointed out.

#BelSecForum

<https://twitter.com/BelSecForum/status/1184858563941982212>

#### Marko Savkovic

@Savkovic\_Marko

Big differences between Europe and Asia that determine whether this is going to be "Asian century" by Kim: there is no pan-(East)-Asian identity; political and economic systems of countries are vastly different; travelling around is more difficult - unlike in Europe #BelSecForum

[https://twitter.com/Savkovic\\_Marko/status/1184882300007391232](https://twitter.com/Savkovic_Marko/status/1184882300007391232)

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