

TENTATIVE PROGRAMME

One continent, one future: The EU enlargement to the Western Balkans

Saturday, 22 February 2020

Hotel Tirana International, "Skanderbeg" Square (or Sheshi "Skenderbe"), Albania

The process of enlargement of the European Union (EU) to the Western Balkans has proceeded in recent years amidst alternate interests of reticent and divided EU Member States and produced mixed results. In 2018, the decision of the European Commission to issue a new strategy towards the Western Balkans, which recognised that the interests of the EU and those of the region largely coincide, and the Prespa agreement between North Macedonia and Greece, seemed to have finally cleared the field for further and more concrete efforts towards enlargement. Last October "non-decision" by the European Council to open negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, however, has again blocked the whole process, and risks to frustrate even further the Western Balkan countries' hopes to join, one day, the European Union. Against this backdrop, 2020 could represent a real turning point in the relations between the EU and the countries in the region that aspire to membership. This conference aims to offer an opportunity to key stakeholders in the region, European progressive policymakers and experts to engage in a frank discussion on the challenges ahead, on how to allow the process to gain momentum and turn enlargement into a more concrete perspective for the region and for the EU.

09:00-09:30 *Coffee & Registration*

09:30-09:50 **Mayor's welcome to Tirana**
Erion Veliaj, Mayor of Tirana, Albania

Welcome remarks

Teuta Vodo, Executive Director, Qemal Stafa Foundation, Albania

Stine Klapper, Head of Office, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Tirana, Germany

László Andor, Secretary General, Foundation for European Progressive Studies, Hungary

09:50-10:00 **Setting the scene**

Luigi Soreca, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Albania, European Union

10:00-10:15 **Keynote speech**

Edi Rama, Prime Minister, Chairman of the Socialist Party (SP), Albania

10:15-12:00 **Breaking the political deadlock, boosting enlargement**

The European Union will need to overcome internal division and provide a more credible commitment to enlargement in the months to come. But some EU Member States are reticent and do not wish to boost engagement in the region, in a moment in which the European Union is still recovering from a succession of internal crisis. What can progressive forces on both sides do in order to break the political deadlock and offer the Balkan people a credible European perspective?

Isabel Santos, Member of the European Parliament, Portugal

Ioannis Armakolas, Assistant Professor, Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy, Greece

Taulant Balla, Secretary General, Socialist Party (SP), Albania

Ljupcho Nikolovski, Secretary General, Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), North Macedonia

Moderator: tbc

12:00-12:15 **Concluding remarks**

László Andor, Secretary General, Foundation for European Progressive Studies, Hungary

12:15 *Reception with drinks and tapas*