

"Western Balkans: Back to Instability? Challenges and Prospects"

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¹ Efforts have been made to represent the views expressed in the conference in the most adequate manner. The author and ELIAMEP's South-East Europe Programme remain responsible for any mistakes in this report. For any clarifications please contact: iarmakolas@gmail.com

PROGRAMME

Welcoming remarks

Thanos Veremis, Professor Emeritus, University of Athens and Vice President of ELIAMEP, Athens

Luan Shllaku, Executive Director, Kosovo Foundation for Open Society, Prishtina

Presentation of the study “Being Greek, Being Kosovar... A Report on Mutual Perceptions”

Chair: **Dimitri A. Sotiropoulos**, Associate Professor, University of Athens & Senior Research Fellow, ELIAMEP, Athens

Speakers:

Ioannis Armakolas, Assistant Professor, University of Macedonia & Head, South-East Europe Programme, ELIAMEP, Athens

Iliriana Kacaniku, Programme Coordinator, Kosovo Foundation for Open Society, Prishtina

Discussants:

Venera Hajrullahu, Executive Director, Kosovar Civil Society Foundation, Prishtina

Marilena Koppa, Assistant Professor, Panteion University & former Member of the European Parliament, Athens

Kosovo Seven Years after the Declaration of Independence

Chair: **Alexis Heraclides**, Professor, Panteion University, Athens

Speakers:

Dimitris Moschopoulos, UNDP Advisor to Kosovo institutions on Religious and Cultural Heritage & former Ambassador and Head of the Hellenic Republic's Liaison office in Prishtina

Lulzim Peci, Director, Kosovo Institute for Policy Research and Development, Prishtina

Jovan Teokarevic, Professor, University of Belgrade

Nikolaos Tzifakis, Assistant Professor, University of the Peloponnese

Roundtable Discussion: Return to Instability in the Western Balkans?

Chair: **Tasos Telloglou**, Investigative Journalist, Star Channel and *Kathimerini* daily, Athens

Speakers:

Sonja Biserko, Director, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Belgrade

Dimitris Kourkoulas, former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece & former Director DG Enlargement, European Commission

Agron Bajrami, Editor in Chief, *Koha Ditore* daily, Prishtina

Dane Taleski, Executive Director, Institute for Social Democracy 'Progress' Skopje

Charalambos Tsardanidis, Associate Professor, University of the Aegean & Director, Institute of International Economic Relations, Athens

Axel Sotiris Wallden, Author and former Head of Unit, DG Enlargement, European Commission

Opening Remarks

The programme began with opening remarks from **Thanos Veremis**, Professor Emeritus at the University of Athens & Vice President of ELIAMEP and **Luan Shllaku**, Director of the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society. Professor Veremis emphasised ELIAMEP's tradition of work involving the Western Balkans; he also reminded the audience of ELIAMEP's organisation of conflict-prevention workshops on Kosovo in the mid-1990s. Mr Shllaku also highlighted the history of fruitful cooperation between ELIAMEP and KFOS.

Panel I: Presentation of the study 'Being Greek, Being Kosovar... A report on mutual perceptions' and discussion of its findings²

The first panel discussion was based around a presentation of the results of the joint ELIAMEP-KFOS report entitled 'Being Greek, Being Kosovar... A report on mutual perceptions.' The report presented findings and analysis from parallel opinion polls undertaken in Greece and in Kosovo in April and May 2013. **Dimitri A. Sotiropoulos**, Associate Professor at the University of Athens & Senior Research Fellow at ELIAMEP, chaired the panel, and opened the discussion by reminding the audience that though the report provides only a static representation of mutual understanding at one point in time, the research is entirely new and provides us with a useful snapshot of public opinion and perceptions.

Ioannis Armakolas, Assistant Professor at the University of Macedonia & Head of the South-east Europe Programme of ELIAMEP, began the discussion by presenting the findings from the Greek survey. He outlined the background of the project, and the core paradox of two nations in such close proximity remaining in many ways unknown to one another. In addition, up to now there has been very little quantitative data on attitudes and perceptions between Greece and Kosovo.

The presentation was divided into three areas – the levels of information the participants had and the accuracy of that information, Greek attitudes and stereotypes towards Balkan neighbours in general, and public perceptions of diplomatic relations concerning the Kosovo question.

The Greek public is generally fairly uniformed about Kosovo. More specifically, in response to the question on whether Kosovo has declared independence, only 42% responded positively. 43% responded that they didn't know, and 15% responded negatively. In response to the crucial question about the makeup of Kosovo's population, only 47% of respondents answered that the majority was of Albanian origin, as opposed to 31% who answered incorrectly that

² The full report can be accessed [here](#) in English and [here](#) in Greek.

the majority was of Serbian origin. 22% did not answer, or chose 'I don't know.' Dr Armakolas stressed that this misconception about the demographics of Kosovo is important because it influences responses to a range of other questions in the survey. A fairly consistent percentage of about one quarter of participants either chose not to answer or marked 'I don't know' for most of the questions, indicating again a general lack of awareness of the issues discussed in the survey.

The second part of the survey examined Greeks' attitudes towards individuals of different national origins. Greek public opinion demonstrates a general openness towards the other Balkan countries, with more than two thirds of respondents answering that they would accept Turkish, Serbian, ethnic Slav citizens of FYROM and Albanian individuals as family members or friends. Less than one tenth of respondents argued that individuals of other Balkan origins were not wanted in Greece.

Responses were differentiated mostly by a positive leaning towards individuals of Serbian origin, rather than specific negative attitudes towards others (based on Serbia's more positive coverage in Greek media and public discourse of 'Greek-Serbian traditional friendship'). Demographics proved influential in responses: younger and more educated respondents were clearly more tolerant towards ethnic Albanians, and the opposite was seen among respondents over age 65.

Questions were also asked about the likelihood of the respondent hiring an Albanian or a Kosovar as a seasonal employee, and more than 60% answered that they would be likely or very likely to do so. However, around 36% answered that they would be rather or completely unlikely to hire Albanians or Kosovars.

No significant statistical differences were observed between the responses towards Albanians and Kosovars, indicating that Kosovars are not viewed much differently than Albanians (though a third of the sample believed Kosovars are of Serbian origin). There are two possible explanations for these responses: current high unemployment rates make all respondents more reluctant to admit that they would hire a foreigner, while most educated respondents gave similar answers irrespective of their knowledge of actual demographics, implying a degree of tolerance. There were more significant differences in responses among less educated respondents.

Participants were asked to select from a short list what categorisation first came to mind upon hearing an individual was of a certain national origin. 18% of respondents chose 'criminal' in relation to Albanians, likely reflecting significant media stereotyping of Albanians and frequent association with criminality. With regards to Kosovars, 47% of respondents identified them with workers, 10% with criminals, 6% with tourists, 5% as students and 3% as business partners. Kosovars'

percentages are quite similar to those of Slavic citizens of FYROM. On the other hand, most Greeks characterised Serbs as tourists, students and business partners, while Albanians were more often considered workers. Most negative stereotypes towards Kosovars (and the rest of the Balkans in general) were expressed by members of older age groups, belonging to the ethnocentric and conservative end of the ideological spectrum. Interestingly, a considerable percentage chose not to answer.

The third part of the survey dealt with foreign policy related questions. Respondents were asked about their perception of Kosovo's relations with other countries, and then specifically about the recognition of Kosovo's independence. To the question of which country is Kosovo's 'closest friend,' 32% chose Albania, 16% Serbia and 12% USA. These answers show that a portion of the respondents have an inaccurate impression of the relations between the countries, which inevitably impacts their perceptions of the citizens of those countries. For example, those who believe (incorrectly) that Serbia is Kosovo's 'closest friend' view Kosovars more positively (less frequently identifying them as criminals). Participants answered the question on Kosovo's 'biggest enemy' with 33% choosing Serbia and 13% USA, with more than quarter choosing not to answer.

When participants were asked whether Greece should recognise Kosovo as an independent state, they were given the information that independence has been declared and the state has been recognised by most European countries. The responses indicate that Greek public opinion is essentially divided with a little more than a quarter choosing not to answer. 38% agreed that Greece should recognise Kosovo's independence, while 35% believed Greece should not. Inaccurate information has influenced the responses in the 'pro-recognition' column; positive responses toward independence were influenced by the perception that Kosovo is majority Serb. Thus, when taking into account the (in)correct information about Kosovo's demographics the picture of attitudes towards recognition changes. More specifically, among those who have correct information regarding the national identity of the majority of Kosovar citizens, 44% reject Kosovo's independence versus 33% that favour recognition and 23% that expressed no opinion. Interestingly, the pro-independence camp remains quite strong at one in three of those polled. Further analysis shows the highest percentages in favour of independence, among those who have correct information about the Kosovar population, were found in the age group 35-44, in residents of Thessaloniki, and the most cosmopolitan and the most progressive respondents. In contrast, the highest percentages against recognition were found in the age groups 45+, those with university education, residents of Athens/Attica, the most ethnocentric and most conservative, and moderately cosmopolitan and moderately progressive individuals. Again, within the same group that holds correct information about Kosovo's population, the majority who supporting recognition due so in order to follow the

policy of other EU member states, and while those who reject recognition mostly explain their choice with the desire to maintain strong ties with Serbia.

In conclusion to the presentation of the Greek survey, Dr Armakolas offered the following points:

- The degree of information that Greeks have about Kosovo is low and often inaccurate.
- The vast majority of the Greek public does not hold negative attitudes towards Kosovars; in fact the levels of acceptance are similar to those toward other Balkan nations (with the exception of Serbs who have much higher acceptance rates).
- Greeks' patterns of stereotyping are also similar to those for other Balkan nations and associated with certain minority segments of the population (older, more ethnocentric, conservative).
- Socially progressive, more cosmopolitan and more ideological respondents (except the far left and far right) hold generally positive attitudes towards Kosovars and other nations.
- 'Pro' and 'anti' recognition appear to be 'neck to neck' but only due to incorrect information. Among the better-informed public, the 'no' camp outweighs the 'yes' camp by 11 percentage points (33% to 44%). A quarter of those polled are without opinion, regardless of level and accuracy of information.
- A wider and more diverse group, in terms of ideological and socio-political orientation, holds the position of non-recognition.
- The most cosmopolitan, the most progressive and the young are the most open to idea of recognition.
- Irrespective of position on recognition, the majority favours improved relations with Kosovo.
- Anti-Americanism is a powerful explanation for attitudes on the diplomatic aspects of Kosovo's question, but does not affect attitudes towards Kosovars, which remain generally positive.

Iliriana Kacaniku, Programme Coordinator at the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society, continued the presentation with the results from the parallel Kosovo survey. The questionnaire began by looking at Kosovo citizens' travel destinations in the region. Likely due to visa restrictions, Greece is Kosovars' least visited country in South-eastern Europe. Only 4% have visited Greece, as opposed to 50% who have visited Albania, 13% Turkey and 27% the former Yugoslav countries. Visitors to Greece from Kosovo were mostly tourists, similar to the other countries of the Western Balkans (excluding Albania). 25% of respondents came to Greece on business. The fact that the majority of Kosovars who have travelled to Greece have done so for tourism purposes likely explains why their impressions of the country are overwhelmingly positive (70% chose 'good' or 'very good' impression).

The Kosovo survey also examined the populations' openness in a similar way to the Greek survey, asking whether participants would accept individuals of other national origins into their various social circles. The conclusions were quite different from the Greek survey, indicating a general cultural openness in the social sphere, accepting members of other ethnicities as friends or business partners, but with a conservative core, with an unwillingness to accept members of other nationalities into the family.

Specifically related to Greeks, the largest portion of respondents said they would accept Greeks in various social capacities: as visitors to Kosovo (25%), co-workers (15%), friends (12%), neighbours (9%) and equal citizens of Kosovo (7%). The general trend of conservatism within the family is maintained towards Greeks, across the spectrum of personal identification – just 1% of those who self-identified as socially liberal would accept having a Greek as a family member.

A similar question from the Greek survey was also asked in the Kosovar survey – what is the first impression that comes to mind when the respondent hears that someone is from a particular country. In Kosovo, Greeks are most often considered as tourists or business people (70%) in total. However, 12% answered that they believed the visitor might be engaging in illicit activities.

The survey then moved on to ask participants about relations with Greece, and the respondents demonstrated good knowledge on the issue of non-recognition, with 72% of Kosovars aware that Greece has not recognised Kosovo's independence. Interestingly, Kosovars are aware of Greece's non-recognition more than they are aware of Romania or Bosnia's non-recognition (59% and 53% respectively).

The survey also included a question on the anticipated results of the new Serbian-Kosovar process of 'normalisation of relations' facilitated by Brussels. An overwhelming majority (73%) stated that the agreement would bring forth new recognitions, whereas 17% said that it would not. On the other hand, the majority, 68%, of Kosovars are optimistic that Greece will recognise Kosovo's independence, probably because of European pressure. Those who believe Greece will not recognise Kosovo overwhelmingly cited the country's good relations with Serbia (62%) as a reason and only 19% cited potential complications on the question of Cyprus. As far as Kosovo's future relations with Greece are concerned, Kosovars seem to want to establish friendly relations with Greece. In total, 92% believe that Kosovo should have friendly relations with all countries.

The survey concluded with broad questions, as in the survey of Greek public opinion, which asked about foreign affairs and the role of the United States.

Respondents were asked to choose which country they considered Kosovo's greatest friend, and 57% choose the USA and 36% chose Albania.

Kosovo remains a heavily pro-American country. This is confirmed by the answers that survey respondents gave when asked about the role of the United States in global affairs. A majority of Kosovars, 54%, think that the role of the United States in international politics is always positive. A significant share, 42%, have a more ambivalent view and state that the role of the USA is sometimes positive and sometimes negative.

This result compared to the Greek answers is quite interesting. The percentage of respondents who answered that the role of the United States in international politics is sometimes positive and sometimes negative was exactly the same (42%) in both cases. However, half of Greek respondents answered that that role is always negative, while half of Kosovar respondents answered that that role is always positive. Conversely, 1% of Kosovars believed the role of the US is always negative, and 2% of Greeks believed the role is always positive.

After the presentation of the opinion polls' data, **Venera Hajrullahu**, the Executive Director of the Kosovar Civil Society Foundation observed that, 'informed or uninformed, perceptions matter.' She noted that of those Greeks who *are* informed, there are both pro- and anti- recognition positions with two main justifications – to conform with the rest of the EU (in favour of recognising Kosovo) or to preserve good relations with Serbia (by not recognising Kosovo). However, Ms Hajrullahu noted that these positions do not have to be opposed because both countries have a European perspective. Normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo is occurring through EU mediated dialogue, and it would be mutually beneficial to get both closer to each other, and the region closer to stability.

Marilena Koppa, Assistant Professor at Panteion University & former Member of the European Parliament, provided further commentary. Professor Koppa noted that if these results appeared in the media, where the real damage from stereotypes is done, then perhaps the impact would be greater. Stereotypes are pervasive, and reach law, behaviour, and nationalism. The survey results inspired Professor Koppa to mention seven points.

First, Greece does not have a Balkan policy. In the 1990s, Greece was not involved in the violence that shook the region, but was involved in bilateral disputes with neighbours. Later, Greece took initiative with the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit, acting as a bridge between the EU and the rest of the Balkans. During the decade of the 2000s, this progress was not capitalised upon and indeed Greece's leadership in the region regressed. Second, business and banking enterprises did not contribute to further mutual knowledge and understanding. Instead, immigration from Albanian

changed Greek perceptions of its neighbours. The influx of Albanian immigrants did not lead to a bridge of understanding, as it could have done had it been probably taken advantage of. Third, there was no immigration policy, so the influx of Albanians has been considered chaotic. If it had been logical, perhaps the outcome would have been different, but we see a weakness in Greek society in the difficulty to accept Albanians, which by now are a well-established immigrant community into the second generation.

Professor Koppa noted that the understanding of 'others' and a society's treatment of 'others' is reflexive. Greece reacts to developments with the Greek minority elsewhere, and uses the Albanian minority in Greece as a policy tool. Fifth, with regards to Kosovo, the logic of the 'enemy of our friend is our enemy' has been applied in this situation, in solidarity with Serbia. Despite good work, like the establishment of the liaison office in Pristina, Greece's position is influenced by Spain, which has perhaps the harshest anti-recognition position in the EU. This position is counter to the reality of Kosovo's irreversible declaration of independence, and thus cannot last. In addition, the European Union is a possible tool to reduce the influence of nationalism, but this potential has not yet reached the ground. Nationalism is alive and well. Finally, the key to understanding nationalism is its characterisation as a horizontal force that reaches across the political spectrum, from far left to far right, all across the board. The Greek crisis has certainly influenced its reach, and contributed to further ethnocentrism. Nationalism is not, however, a Balkan problem, but a political tool that can be (and has been) applied in many different cases. The conclusion of the report is a message to us all, and we need peace, stability and progress, with a heavy dose of realism.

The panel was followed by a question and answer session based on the findings of the survey and the commentary. First, Mr. Dimitris Kourkoulas disagreed with Professor Koppa, saying that there *is* a Greek Balkan policy, and that despite the economic crisis Greece still plays a positive role in the Western Balkans. Economic presence remains, not to mention that progress has been made toward the recognition of Kosovo. Mr. Axel Sotiris Wallden responded that Greece tends to portray itself as not part of the problem in the Balkans, and yet the name issue with FYROM is clearly an open question and 'part of the problem.' Professor Koppa agreed, answering that Greece cannot have a productive Balkan policy when there is an open issue such as that with Skopje on the table. The consequences of the Greek crisis have led to a decrease in influence but also economic repercussions in the Balkan countries where Greece was heavily involved in the economic sphere. In addition, Kosovo was never a priority for the Greek government.

Panel II: Kosovo Seven Years after the Declaration of Independence

The second panel, chaired by **Alexis Heraclides**, Professor at Panteion University, dealt with the domestic political and security situation in Kosovo, and challenges of public policy. The role of the international community and the international status of Kosovo, the dynamics of international recognitions, the perspectives of non-recognising EU member states, and the status and prospects of the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue were also on the table for discussion.

The first speaker, **Dimitris Moschopoulos**, UNDP Advisor to Kosovo Institutions on Religious and Cultural Heritage and former Ambassador and Head of the Hellenic Republic's Liaison office in Prishtina, asked the question 'Is the declaration of independence legal?' Doubts about legality and political considerations about relationships with neighbours prevented Greece's recognition, as did loose associations with the Cyprus question. The thought was that abstention would allow Greece to play a balancing role in the debate, taking a 'status neutral' position. However, there was no such position, since 'status neutral' was not actually neutral. The question of legality was answered in July 2010 with the decision of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which found that the declaration did not violate international law. Ambassador Moschopoulos extensively referenced the decision of the ICJ in order to illustrate that the argument of the illegality of Kosovo's declaration of independence can no longer be sustained and thus cannot be a justification for non-recognition; the ruling is a sovereign decision that a state may or may not accept, but arguments based on international law have largely become void. Ambassador Moschopoulos also quoted the ruling of the ICJ to demonstrate how the case of Kosovo is fundamentally different from that of Cyprus and the occupied territories in the island. Ambassador Moschopoulos concluded by discussing the implications of the ICJ decision and whether Greece should recognise Kosovo. He stressed that Greece's potential recognition of Kosovo's independence would not be a hostile act towards Serbia, since eventually Serbia will also have to recognise Kosovo as well as it will be unable to join the EU without the normalisation of relations with a country that has been recognised by the vast majority of the Union's member states.

Lulzim Peci, Director of the Kosovo Institute for Policy Research and Development continued by describing the domestic situation in Kosovo, ordered by priority in Kosovo today: organised crime, economic development/migration, dialogue with Belgrade, EU/NATO integration, and international recognitions. Mr Peci argued that EULEX and international involvement in general has failed in the fight against corruption and organised crime, and in the adequate prosecution of war crimes. The Special Court is the result of the collective failure of EULEX and domestic institutions. He also stressed that Kosovo's future relations with the EU depend on the recognition of the five non-recognising member states. Moreover, he argued that after the crisis in Ukraine there is a threat of growing Russian influence in the region, but this is not the most immediate concern. Instead the 'Putinistic style of

governance installed in the region from Budapest to Ankara' is the more worrying trend, as the region moves towards illiberal democracy and autocracy. Nationalism is the result of failed transitions. With regards to relations with Serbia, thanks to the involvement of Brussels, the two sides have arrived at a 'fragile détente' – they are not friends, and will need confidence building measures in order to move forward. Serbia still sees Kosovo as an existential threat, and indeed a security threat. The balancing that has been the trend up to now is not leadership - balancing is over. Greece could help Serbia through recognition, as now it is only prolonging the issue. Finally, Mr Peci stressed that the talk of Greater Albania is nonsense. Albania is a NATO member and aspiring EU member, and would require consensus to enlarge its territory. This is definitely not in the interest of Albania or Kosovo.

Jovan Teokarevic, Professor at the University of Belgrade, continued the discussion by asking, 'Will Serbia continue the normalisation of relations with Kosovo?' Professor Teokarevic noted that recently 'new novelties' have been seen, in non-political areas of cooperation, like academia, and in Pristina cultural week in Belgrade which was well-received and unremarked upon by the right-wing tabloids. These developments thaw relations, but of course don't directly affect the issue. Serbia will continue the normalisation of relations because even if it wanted to stop the process, it is now impossible, as 'the Rubicon has been crossed.' Normalisation does mean gradual recognition, and now it is inevitable, but it could indeed be a very long process with plenty of roadblocks. Patience will be required. Kosovo relations are locked into Serbia's own EU accession process, and this process is not going to be abandoned. Both the government and the opposition are tied to the EU process and the new situation with Kosovo has already passed the 'two election test.' Vucic continues to become a strong leader *post* Brussels agreement. Serbs from Northern Kosovo have participated in two Kosovar elections.

Professor Teokarevic argued also that the Brussels agreement has been the only success of the incumbent government, and it will return to the EU issue because it will not be able to curb the economic crisis. In addition, relations with Kosovo will be part of the conditionality that Serbia must fulfil. EU transformative power is still strong, and can be seen, for example, in the concessions the previously nationalist government has made in the Kosovo negotiations and in the treatment of war crimes. Teokarevic further argued that Kosovo Serbs are the least predictable player, but they cannot do much without the Serbian government. Indeed, independence is increasingly been seen as the 'last problem' of the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and as such is considered the final chapter of independence movements; in that context, there has been a radical decrease of interest in the problem. The economic situation and other problems still overshadow Kosovo in the eyes of the people in Serbia. The external context however is of course important – the EU and US insistence on normalisation and the EU5 non-recognisers. Serbia depends on the coherence of that group of five in order to maintain its position – if one were to step out, it would

change the game. Finally, Serbia will not abandon the normalisation process, because the alternatives are either impossible or far worse.

The panel was concluded by **Nikolaos Tzifakis**, Assistant Professor at the University of the Peloponnese who delivered a presentation on the socio-economic situation in Kosovo and the ramifications of the lack of solution to the final status question. The main issue is migration and the on-going huge exodus from Kosovo, with the main destination Germany via Hungary. Although the EU tends to emphasis the 'pull factors,' the 'push factors' leading to this outflow are more significant. Those push factors are firstly socio-economic, combined with a decline in foreign direct investment. There is despair with the resilience of the political system, marginalisation of ethnic groups, and pessimism about EU access. The 'Pull factors' are given as the Kosovo-Serbia agreement on freedom of movement, social media that plays on desperation, human smugglers and the length of the asylum application process in the EU. The policy responses pay the most attention to pull factors. EU states have focused on border controls, acceleration of the asylum process, repatriation of those whose asylum seeking status has been rejected, information campaigns, and increasing aid. The EU has also implemented a threat regarding the visa liberalisation process for Kosovo passport holders. Kosovo authorities have also reacted in several ways, including a 'Stay in Kosovo' campaign, and a re-examination of citizens' debts. However, the root causes have not yet disappeared, and the danger of civil unrest should not be ignored. Indeed, those returning to Kosovo from unsuccessful emigration attempts are even more desperate, often having liquidated all assets to finance a move to the EU, and thus returning to Kosovo with even less than before. Thus, the EU must devote more energy to fighting corruption and strengthening the rule of law in Kosovo, and the EU perspective of the region is in need of a renewal, or some kind of new stimulus.

Panel III: Roundtable Discussion - Return to Instability in the Western Balkans?

The final panel took the form of a roundtable discussion, chaired by **Tasos Telloglou**, Investigative Journalist for Star Channel and *Kathimerini* daily. The focus of the discussion based around the political crisis, instability and interethnic relations in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, political volatility in Bosnia and Herzegovina, questions of quality of democracy in the Western Balkans and diplomatic tensions between Athens and Tirana. Open questions such as, 'Is there an Albanian question in the Balkans?' 'What is the role of Tirana?' 'Is EU accession still a realistic prospect for the region, and is it still the solution for stability and development?' were brought up. Mr Telloglou asked each the participants several specific questions and the audience also participated in the discussion.

Dimitris Kourkoulas, former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece & former Director DG Enlargement, European Commission, was asked about the continuing potential of EU transformative power in the Balkans, and he answered affirmatively, by citing EU transformative power up to now as a 'success story,' despite the major short-coming of failing to prevent the Yugoslav wars. However, he noted, the EU did not have the tools then that it does today.

The Western Balkans presents a mixed picture: Croatia has clearly benefited from the EU's transformative power, while the mediation of the conflict between Serbia and Kosovo is also on its way to becoming an EU success story. On the other hand, neither Bosnia-Herzegovina nor the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia can be considered to have benefited from EU transformative power. Albania is in between – success has not yet been confirmed, and the cooperation of local political elites will be key to the conclusion. Finally, in Greece the EU's transformative power did not lead to the expected outcome. The EU has made mistakes, like closing its eyes to totalitarian leaders, but that does not mean that European perspective is gone. There is a natural hesitancy due to the crisis, and conditionality will now be more demanding, but the Western Balkans *will* join the EU eventually.

Axel Sotiris Wallden, Author and former Head of Unit, DG Enlargement, European Commission, was asked from what angle Brussels faces the Western Balkans. He began by presenting the 'standard Brussels answer' which is that yes, enlargement is realistic but at this stage the ball is in the countries' court. This answer, he argued, is not sincere, as right now Brussels does not have a coherent policy leading to membership in the short or medium term. Instead, there is currently a *sui generis* development policy, which involves the introduction of good governance principles. The enlargement structure in general is kept alive due to geopolitical considerations, although the vision of an inclusive and united Europe has already faded away, not to mention that fact that in several candidate countries democracy is missing. Mr Wallden also argued that the current strengthening of conditionality is a strategy of delay *ad infinitum* leading to a 'Europe of the fittest.' If the goal of conditionality was simply the establishment of democracy, the strategy would be different. The EU is not looking to enlarge, and thus democratic/reformist and pro-EU formations are squeezed between the EU and risky nationalism. The danger now is to not let populism monopolise the political sphere, because present day Europe is deeply sick and cannot be relied on.

Mr Telloglou also asked, 'How far can the EU go in its involvement in institution building?' Mr Wallden answered that the EU's hands-on approach is not an effective way to promote good governance. For one thing, if we look at the EU's policy as a whole, the crisis is not simply explained by a dichotomy between Southern Europe and the rest. Finally, unemployment is currently an EU-wide problem, but also a core problem in the Western Balkans and one that has not been

addressed by EU sponsored reforms and recent efforts to satisfy conditionality requirements.

Agron Bajrami, Editor-in-Chief of Kosovo's Koha Ditore daily, was asked about the view from Pristina on the violent incident in Kumanovo. Mr Bajrami answered that in both Kosovo and FYROM state institutions are failing to address the biggest challenges and threats, and are willing to misuse ethnic relations for political gain. The problem is interlinked to levels of democracy – a democratic appearance is used by dictatorial political elites currently in control. The EU is also at fault to some extent, for posing as a partner with the elites, and thus prolonging the possibility of finding a solution. Indeed, the root cause for disillusionment is incomplete/unimplemented solutions

Sonja Biserko, Director of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, was asked about whether Serbia's EU path has stabilised the region, and she answered with the example that the 2012 election was won on an anti-corruption platform, and then the Stability and Association Agreement was signed. The combination of European and American support for the future is especially important, in response to the opening of space for Russian influence in Serbia due to energy vulnerability and religious affinity. The chair also asked Ms Biserko about her perspective on human rights issues in the region. She answered that the EU is not dealing with human rights effectively, as it is not appropriately built into the accession process. The accession negotiation chapter on Education is almost always closed in a few days.

Dane Taleski, Executive Director of the Institute for Social Democracy 'Progress' in Skopje, was asked if the name issue is a contributing factor to instability in FYROM. Mr Taleski answered that yes, it is, in that there is a deadlock on EU/NATO progress because of the lack of resolution on the name. The leadership knows that reforms will be politically costly, so instead of making substantive progress it preserves a façade of democracy, with total state capture and criminalisation. The rising ethnic tension is a peripheral effect, used to deflect attention from the political situation. The current instability is *not* just polarisation between two political parties, but it is a manifestation of a larger clash in which democratic forces are trying to change an authoritarian system personified by Gruevski. Instability and unpredictability will continue as long as the name factor remains unresolved and the deadlock on EU progress continues. Mr Taleski was also asked about whether FYROM has made progress since 2001. He answered that indeed quite a bit of progress has been made, resulting in the Commission's recommendation that EU accession negotiations be opened. In terms of institution building, much has been done, but the progress has been either unsustainable or

misused. The goal should be the improvement of the quality of democracy, but 'if you scratch the surface, you see that the process is politicised.' Instead of qualitative change, there is just an illusion of progress.

Charalambos Tsardanidis, Associate Professor, University of the Aegean & Director of the Institute of International Economic Relations, was asked whether Greece is exporting instability in the banking sector and how it can instead become a factor of stability. Professor Tsardanidis pointed out that in the economic field, Greece was a main importer and a source of remittances. In bilateral foreign policy, Greece is in trouble due to the crisis, which could be exploited by other countries in the region as a chance to increase their influence. In the Europeanisation process, Greece was considered a paradigm, due to its membership in NATO and the EU and an example in terms of the Europeanisation narrative, but of course this discourse is no longer quite as influential as it was.