



BALKAN SAYS 2020 – FINAL REPORT

The Balkan SAYS 2020 seminar was *the 8th consecutive edition* of the annual “Security Architecture Youth Seminar” and was the first organised entirely online in the form of a *webinar*. The Youth Section of the Euro-Atlantic Council of Slovenia successfully transformed the seminar into its online form with the logistical and organisational support from our partners, the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, who allowed us to use their premises and Zoom licence to host the event.

Balkan SAYS 2020 was held on 16th September 2020 and featured 54 participants and speakers from 21 countries.¹ Most of the participants were from the region of the Western Balkans, however, the online nature of the event enabled a wider participation from both within and outside the Euro-Atlantic region.

The overall mission of the seminar remains to **connect young professionals and students from the region of the Western Balkans and beyond**, discuss relevant security related topics, and search for fresh views and solutions to the most pressing regional issues. Additionally, Balkan SAYS aims to bring different views and perspectives together, breaching the gaps and creating new links, which young professionals will be able to use in their future career.

Key goals for Balkan SAYS 2020 were successfully realized and implemented:

- discuss **key challenges ahead of the Alliance** and Euro-Atlantic security and stability, through special focus on the region of Western Balkans,
- **raise awareness and understanding of NATO**, its values, policies, and activities, among the young people from South-Eastern Europe and broader Euro-Atlantic area,
- **promote the Euro-Atlantic perspective** for the countries of Western Balkans,
- **promote common values of peace, security, democracy, and the rule of law.**

¹ Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Hercegovina, China, Croatia, Czechia, France, Greece, Italy, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovenia, The Netherlands, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom and the United States.

PANEL I: CHINA IN THE WESTERN BALKANS – HOW AND WHY IS CHINA INFLUENCING THE WESTERN BALKANS?

Speakers:

- *mag. Mirko Cigler, Slovenian Association for International Relations*
 - *Nina Pejič, Young Researcher, Centre of International Relations, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana*
 - *Baron Lobstein, Economic Counsellor, US Embassy, Belgrade*
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- Speakers outlined several major factors in the relationship between China and the region such as ***capital investments, business ties, infrastructure security, and intellectual property rights***
- The relationship between China and Serbia was also examined, as was the perspective of other actors such as the United States, NATO, and the EU
- The key question of the discussion was on how will China's influence shape ***the future Euro-Atlantic integration*** and whether or not China is using the Western Balkans in a geopolitical power play to show off its economic power as well as a way of entering the EU marked through the states of the Western Balkans

PANEL II: BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA – 25 YEARS AFTER DAYTON

Speakers:

- *BG William J. Edwards, Commander (NATO HQ Sarajevo)*
 - *Faris Kočan, Young Researcher (Centre of International Relations, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana)*
 - *Prof. Dr. Milan Jazbec (Former ambassador of Slovenia to North Macedonia)*
 - *Catherine McGeary, Political Counsellor (US Embassy, Sarajevo)*
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- The wide variety of speakers touched upon issues of economic, political, demographic, and general security challenges faced by Bosnia and Hercegovina.
- Both internal and external developments over the preceding 25 years were discussed and special attention was given to one of the major questions of this panel on whether or not a new agreement is needed.
- Participants' questions were related to the possibility of dissolution of Bosnia and Hercegovina, due to internal pressures, as well as how the international community might be able to further assist the country.
- On the question of a new agreement, both the speakers and the participants broadly agreed that such ***an agreement would not improve the situation***, largely as a significantly better one is, at present, not politically feasible.

PANEL III: CRISES ON THE EU PERIPHERY AND THE FUTURE OF CFSP

Speakers:

- *Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ana Bojinović Fenko (Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana)*
 - *James Wyllie, Reader in International Relations (University of Aberdeen)*
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- Due to its broad topic the speakers were able to engage a very large number of crises on the EU periphery (from Libya, Syria, migration, COVID-19, to Belarus, Turkey, and more).
 - The main thrust of the presentations was that the ***EU is ill-equipped to handle such situations*** and that new crises are likely to occur. The Western Balkans were discussed as a possible additional crisis point and the EU policy on enlargement (which would include the Western Balkans) was analysed. Problems of perception and identity were also raised, as was a discussion on the ***EU as an imperial power***.
 - Participants gave particular attention to relations with Turkey, the ongoing issues related to migration flows, and the internal crises of the EU itself.
 - The participants were interested in the argument of the EU as an imperial power, which resulted in an intensive discussion amongst the speakers.
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