



Friends of the Western Balkans' statement

We, the network of the Friends of the Western Balkans, representatives of the European social democratic family, including political foundations, members of national and European Parliaments, parties and civil societies' representatives of the region, have convened for our fourth meeting in Sarajevo, co-hosted with the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity. Our objective was to bring progressive and social democratic actors together to reaffirm our firm commitment to the integration of the six countries of the region into the European Union and against the alliance of regional autocracies with European far-right movements.

We acknowledge that the rise of conservative, anti-democratic and autocratic governments, within and outside the European Union, is reaching a threatening scale for the EU's cohesion. In the Western Balkans, in particular, we can perceive the fears of a return to the destructive atmosphere of the beginning of the 1990s. We are committed to not ignoring the Western Balkan autocrats' anti-European behaviour and pledge to stand closer than ever to democratic and civil societies' forces of the region.

We reiterate our statement delivered last June following our meeting in Thessaloniki, twenty years after the Summit which opened the European perspective for the Western Balkans: "we strongly encourage the adoption of a clear road for the Western Balkans". In that regard, while commending both the French-German proposal to simultaneously enlarge and deepen the EU and also the European Commission's Growth Plan, we commit to remaining vigilant and call upon the Council and the member states to (i) avoid further delays in the integration process; (ii) set precise dates not only for accession per se, but also for the institutional reforms that will prepare the Union for enlargement; (iii) ensure the merit-based approach's credibility; (iv) cease the over-politicisation of the process and bilateral involvements at the detriment of real progress and democratic values.

Finally, we acknowledge that the 2024 European elections are of crucial importance in ensuring the fair preparedness of the EU to integrate the six countries of the Western Balkans. In that respect, we, the European social-democratic family, must be vocal in defending the Western Balkan countries' European path.

Sarajevo, 25 November 2023

Signatories

Jonas ANDERSON, Programme Manager, Olof Palme International Center, Sweden

László ANDOR, Secretary General, Foundation for European Progressive Studies

Denis BEGIC, Member of Parliament (SAP), Sweden

Doris BURES, President, Karl-Renner-Institut, Austria



Piero FASSINO, Member of the Parliament, Italy

Lauri FINER, Director, Kalevi Sorsa, Finland

Daniele FRIGERI, President, CeSPI, Italy

Sébastien GRICOURT, Co-Director of the Balkans Observatory at Fondation Jean Jaurès, France

Mojca KLEVA KEKUS, Chairwoman, Društvo Progresiva, Slovenia

Kido KOENIG, Director, Foundation Max van der Stoel, Netherlands

Romina KUKO, Deputy Minister of Interior, Albania

Florent MARCIACQ, Co-director of the Observatory of the Balkans, Fondation Jean Jaurès, Austria

Thijs REUTEN, Member of the European Parliament, Netherlands

Andreas SCHIEDER, Member of the European Parliament, Austria

Johan SCHMIDT, Head of Team Europe, Olof Palme International Center, Sweden

Sanela SHKRIJELJ, Member of Parliament, SDSM, North Macedonia

René SCHLEE, Director, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Dialogue Southeast Europe, Germany

Daša ŠILOVIĆ, Chair of CEE Gender Network and Board Member EFDS, Croatia

Tamara Tripić, former Member of Parliament for the Democratic Party, and Board member of the ECC Gender Network, Serbia

Harald TROCH, Member of Parliament, Austria

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Sorsa
Foundation

M^da Masarykova
demokratická
akademie

**OLOF PALME
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