



EU-Western Balkans: a shared future?

This seminar seeks to take a look from the viewpoint of institutionalised Europe at the rich, varied reality of the Europe of the Western Balkans (Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, North Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo) and to investigate on the ground what this region of south-eastern Europe thinks about the EU in the current geopolitical context, and about future membership of the Community.

The region is a melting pot of civilisations that provide the foundations of cultural diversity in a plural Europe. It is a crossroads where the Greek and Roman civilisations, Catholicism, Byzantine Christianity, Islam, Slavic migrations and the rise and fall of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires have blended to form a unique, multi-ethnic, multinational region of nation-states.

These plural, ethnically diverse states are working to enhance and consolidate peaceful coexistence between different peoples both internally and externally with their neighbouring countries. The information that our EU societies have concerning the situation in the Western Balkans is distorted and incomplete. They are associated almost exclusively with a generation of ethnic conflict, and this heightens the feeling of "enlargement fatigue" when it comes to integrating Balkan countries into the EU.

In our first panel we want to analyse the diversity that exists, from a broad viewpoint that reinforces mutual knowledge by identifying historical, religious and cultural ties that can help us overcome and clear up the prejudices and stereotypes on both sides that hinder encounters in a single, plural political community based on shared values.

The second panel will analyse the potential for cooperation and for reaching association agreements between the 6 Balkan countries to communication and co-operation among Western Balkans countries, in the context of their EU membership prospective space that can help heal historical wounds and favour peace and stability in the region, thus accelerating the prospects of accession to the EU.

In an increasingly complex, threatening global context, we will also look at the vital importance of this region for security in Europe, and at the growing geopolitical importance of the Western Balkans in the strategic interplay between major powers. Along these lines, Russia, China, Turkey and the countries of the Persian Gulf are all increasingly present in the historical process of slow progress in negotiations with the EU.