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SEP 18, 2023

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CERES Seminar

Cooperation over division in the Western Balkans - Geopolitical Challenges in the context of the War in Ukraine

Majlinda Bregu , Ph.D.

Secretary General, Regional Cooperation Council,
South East European Cooperation Process

The Western Balkans have come a long way over the last two decades, since they started their economic transformation processes and embarked in the EU accession process. From a region deeply marked from the fragile political environment and hostilities of the past, to a region working hard to diminish the development gap with the EU through a deeper economic integration with the EU Single market. While EU membership remains a strategic priority for the region and overall support for the process is high 59%, in the last years, the accession process of Western Balkans stalled due to issues within the European Union but also because of the limited progress of the region itself. This long lingering in the waiting room of the EU, created space for different actors to try to “seize the opportunity“, to infiltrate their influence in building anti-western rhetoric and anti-western persuasion.

Today, with the new geopolitical circumstances, the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine has had for sure a positive effect in consolidating and strengthening the EU (and NATO) unity as well its geopolitical approach and the geopolitical way of thinking. In a special survey conducted by RCC measuring how the war affected the perceptions and sentiments of the citizens in the Western Balkans region resulted that an overwhelming 70% of respondents believed that the war in Ukraine calls for greater security cooperation with the EU and NATO.



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Furthermore, as the Ukraine War is irreversibly changing our continent, it also served as the wake-up call to shift the Enlargement process on top of the priorities of the Union and give a boost to the accession process. Will the Western Balkan region seize the momentum? Will it prove it through genuine reform actions, regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations, as preconditions of the EU accession process? Will the EU speed up its reform process to enable another 'big bang' enlargement or the 'gradual integration' and 'multi speed' Europe will be the new approach to cope with Enlargement?

Speaker's Biography:

Mrs. Majlinda Bregu is a distinguished Albanian politician and took office as the Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council on January 2019. She is the longest serving Minister of European Integration in Albania (March 2007 to September 2013). During those years she kept as well the position of the Government



Spokesperson. Mrs. Bregu has been elected as Member of Parliament of Albania, as a Democratic Party member (Centre Right), for three consecutive legislatures (2005-2017). During 2013 – 2017, Mrs. Bregu chaired the European Integration Committee of the Albanian Parliament. From 2015-2017 she also chaired the National Council for European Integration which is the highest consultative body on European Integration in Albania. She is graduated in Social Sciences and holds a Master's degree in Social and Political Science and a PhD in Sociology. Mrs Bregu had an extensive academic and media experience also.

Majlinda Bregu is born in Tirana on 19 May 1974. Married, and mother of two. Fluent in English, Italian, and good in Spanish.