

BETWEEN BROKEN PROMISES AND REALPOLITIK: WHAT FUTURE FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS?

Reaction to Brdo Summit by civil society actors in the Western Balkans

25 October 2021

We, the undersigned civil society actors applaud the Declaration, statements and remarks made by the leaders of the European Union (EU), EU Member States and Western Balkans (WB) at the EU-WB Brdo Summit on 6 October 2021.

We fully support the restated commitments made by the EU with respect to the enlargement process and its determination for the decisions to be based on credible reforms by WB countries, fair and rigorous conditionality and the principle of own merits. Similarly, we support the commitments by the WB leaders with respect to democracy, rule of law, human rights, fight against corruption and organized crime, gender equality and the rights of minorities.

We especially appreciate the EU support for the WB countries reaffirmed commitment to inclusive regional cooperation and strengthening good neighbourly relations, including with EU Member States. And the emphasis on empowered civil society and independent and pluralistic media as crucial components of any democratic system, particularly given the worrying trends of shrinking space for both.

The COVID-19 pandemic has left a significant mark on our societies and economies, which makes us deeply grateful to the EU Member states who stood by the WB by providing health and socio-economic support including by adopting an Economic and Investment Plan for the region. Also, prompt and efficient implementation of the recently launched Innovation Agenda for the WB will likely create further opportunities for the youth, and help address the brain drain as one of the most challenging issues the region is faced with.

We commend the WB leaders for acknowledging that decisive efforts are required to foster reconciliation and regional stability, as well as to find and implement definitive, inclusive and binding solutions to bilateral disputes and issues rooted in the legacy of the past. However, we are still witnessing raising ultra-nationalism, hateful rhetoric, democratic decline, rise of authoritarian tendencies and hybrid attacks on democracy throughout the region. We are also disappointed that the WB leaders did not fulfill their 2014 pledges to remove all the barriers to freedom of movement of people, such as the visa regime between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, and the obstacles to travel between Kosovo and Serbia.

At the same time, the EU has failed once again to deliver on its promises made to the WB countries such as starting the accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia and providing visa liberalization for Kosovo, despite the progress made by the former and all of the visa liberalization benchmarks fulfilled by the latter. By not delivering on its promises, the EU is seriously undermining its credibility in the WB and the trust and hopes that citizens in the region have placed in the EU.

Almost 20 years after the Thessaloniki Summit, the EU integration prospects for the WB countries seem more unclear, and region's future more insecure. Whereas heightened tensions within and between the WB countries are a clear evidence that the situation can rapidly escalate and lead to violence. Such a situation provides opportunities for various actors in the region and outside of it to exploit the shortcomings to consolidate their influence and agendas which may undermine peace and prosperity of the region and of the EU.

The stakes are high. The EU Project needs the WB, and we want to enter the EU family. The citizens of the WB are the ones that most benefit from becoming part of the EU family and the ones that directly suffer from broken promises and from our governments' failures. Failing to make the EU integration of the WB a strategic priority followed by convincing evidence that go beyond the repeated commitments will expose the region to further threats and vulnerabilities, and will very likely lead to citizens in the WB countries losing faith. In which case it will become irrelevant whether broken promises and limited progress or whether citizens in the region were ill-informed, placed high hopes or had false expectations with regards to EU's role in the WB and/or EU integration prospects for the region.

We, the undersigned, are united by the shared desire for peace and stability in our region and a common interest in taking our place in the EU family. We are here to turn words into action, and committed to working with WB governments, EU institutions and EU Member States to fulfill the aspiration of the citizens of the region – the full integration of WB countries in the EU.

The EU and its Member States should fulfill their promises made to the WB citizens. WB countries should fulfill their pledges made for years. WB citizens deserve a more promising future.

Signatories alphabetically (1/2):

1. Albanian Center for Good Governance (ACGG), Albania
 2. ALFA Centar, Montenegro
 3. Arjeta Maka, civil society activist, Kosovo
 4. Asocijacija za promociju poslovanja (APROPO), Bosnia and Herzegovina
 5. Association for Democratic Prosperity (ADP– Zid), Montenegro
 6. Avdyl Gashi, civil society activist, Kosovo
 7. Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN), Republic of North Macedonia
 8. Balkan Green Foundation (BGF), Kosovo
 9. Build Green Group, Albania
 10. Building Blocks for Success (B.E.N. NGO), Kosovo
 11. Center for Advocacy and Democratic Development (CADD), Serbia
 12. Center for Democratic Transition (CDT), Montenegro
 13. Center for Economic Prosperity and Freedom (CEPS), Montenegro
 14. Center for Education and Gathering (COD), Jajce, Bosnia and Herzegovina
 15. Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies (CEAS), Serbia
 16. Center for Political Courage (CPC), Kosovo
 17. CIVIL, Republic of North Macedonia
 18. Community Business Development Center (CBDC), Kosovo
 19. Debate Center, Kosovo
 20. European Movement in Serbia (EMinS), Serbia
 21. Fondacija za Razvoj i Demokraciju (FRD), Bosnia and Herzegovina
 22. Forum MNE, Montenegro
 23. Gender Alliance for Development Centre (GADC), Albania
 24. Global Shapers Community Prishtina, Kosovo
 25. GUIDKES-Kosovo Tourist Guides Association, Kosovo
 26. HandiKOS, Kosovo
 27. Humanity in Action, Bosnia and Herzegovina
 28. iACT, Montenegro
 29. Initiative for Progress (INPO), Kosovo
 30. Institute for Democracy and Development (IDD), Republic of North Macedonia
 31. Institute for Development Policy (INDEP), Kosovo
 32. Institute for Project Management and Development (IPMR), Republic of North Macedonia
 33. Institute for Territorial Economic Development (InTER), Serbia
 34. Instituti per Zhvillim dhe Integrim (IZHI), Kosovo
 35. International Debate Education Association (IDEA), Republic of North Macedonia
 36. Kosovo Law Institute (KLI), Kosovo
 37. Kosovo Youth Atlantic Treaty Association (KYATA), Kosovo
 38. Krenar Shala, civil society activist, Kosovo
 39. Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights (YUCOM), Serbia
 40. LGBT Forum Progress, Montenegro
 41. LGBTIQ Social Center, Montenegro
 42. Mirjana Maslovar, civil society activist, Montenegro
 43. Mitrovica Women Association for Human Rights, Kosovo
 44. Montenegro Film Festival, Montenegro
 45. NGO 4 LIFE, Montenegro
 46. NGO AKTIV, Kosovo
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Signatories alphabetically (2/2):

47. NGO Be Active 16, Serbia
48. NGO Department of Inclusion, Serbia
49. NGO The Future, Serbia
50. OJQ "Gruaja Hyjore" Gjilan, Kosovo
51. OJQ Qendra e Gruas "ATO" Vushtrri, Kosovo
52. OJQ VISION 02, Kosovo
53. OTTONomy, Albania
54. People In Need – The Western Balkan Office
55. Protection and promotion of Environment, Culture and Art (proECA), Kosovo
56. Qualitative Institute for Researches, Analysis and Trainings "iCHAT", Kosovo
57. Research Center for Security, Defense and Peace (ICBOM), Republic of North Macedonia
58. Romska Nada, Bosnia and Herzegovina
59. Shoqata "Iniciativa e Pavarur e të Verbërve", Kosovo
60. Shoqata Iniciativa e Grave, Dragash, Kosovo
61. Shoqata Kulturore "Dituria", Serbia
62. Social Workers Organization of Kosovo
63. SUBVERSIVE FRONT, Republic of North Macedonia
64. The Balkan Forum
65. Valon Arifi, civil society activist, Serbia
66. Women's Association Aureola, Kosovo
67. Xhejrane Lokaj, civil society activist, Kosovo
68. YOUNG INTELLECTUALS, HOPE (IRSH), Albania
69. Youth Center Drenas, Kosovo
70. Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) Kosovo
71. Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) Serbia
72. Youth Resource Center, Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina

=====END=====
