



POLAND-WESTERN BALKANS

Together Towards the Future

edited by: Anna Kurowska

Krisafi • Hadzovic • Marku • Pejovic
Risteska • Minic



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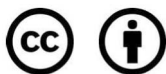
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Preface:	Anna Kurowska, Director for Grants and Projects, Foundation Institute for Eastern Studies	5
Chapters:		
1.	Albania, the Berlin Process and Poland's role Ledion Krisafi, PhD	7
2.	Poland – Western Balkans. Together Towards the Future CASE STUDY: Bosnia and Herzegovina Sanita Hadzovic	11
3.	Kosovo in Berlin Process and Poland's input in this process Donika Marku	15
4.	Polish Experience and Advocacy within the EU Enlargement Policy Through Montenegro Lens. Marko Pejović	20
5.	Think Thanks and the Failure to Launch the Connectivity Agenda in the Berlin Process – Poland's Role in Inspiring Change Dr. Marija Risteska	25
6.	The role of Poland in the Berlin Process – A view from Serbia Jelica Minić Ph.D.	29

Preface

On May 1, 2004, Poland became a full member of the European Union. 16 years on, we are listed among the countries that have made the most of this opportunity. The economic and infrastructural development as well as a number of political reforms are presented as exemplary to other countries aspiring to join the European Union.

An important and complementary point of the EU enlargement policy is the Berlin Process, in which Poland held the presidency in 2019. Its main event was the Western Balkans Summit in Poznan (July 2019). The meeting was attended by representatives of the state authorities and NGOs from the Western Balkans region. Thanks to the support of the EU countries, including Poland, the necessary reforms have a chance of gaining wide public support in the countries of the region.

It should be pointed out that the last 15 years have been difficult for the European Union. The bloc has been up against many crises (economic, migration, Brexit, etc.), which was also reflected in the growing Euro-scepticism of certain social groups. But how is the role of Poland and the process of European integration itself seen – and evaluated – by the representatives of the WB6? Each of them presents different points of view and different perspectives on Poland's efforts to integrate the Western Balkans with the European Union.

Marko Pejović (Montenegro, the Center for Democracy and Human Rights) points out the support that Poland provides to aspiring countries, emphasising the importance of the Poznan Summit in 2019. He also refers to the integration process as seen in Montenegro and to the challenges awaiting this relatively young country on its way to the European Union.

Ledion Krisafi (Albania, the Albanian Institute for International Studies) also refers to Poland's presidency in the Berlin Process, mentioning some infrastructure projects in Albania financed under the scheme. Interestingly, despite the large – in fact, one of the largest in the region – public support for European integration in Albania, many citizens believe that the country is not ready to open the accession negotiations.

Jelena Minić (Serbia, the European Movement in Serbia) admits that the Poznan Summit marked a great success in terms of Poland's commitment to the EU integration of the Western Balkans, even though it was hardly visible in the region before taking over the presidency of the Berlin Process.

Ms Minić also speaks of Serbia's difficult path towards the European structures, citing the complicated Belgrade-Pristina relations as one of the factors hindering the implementation of appropriate reforms.

Marija Risteska (North Macedonia, the Center for Research and Policy Making) presents the perspective of North Macedonia that only recently resolved a long-standing name dispute with neighbouring Greece. Ms Risteska looks at the issue of European integration from the perspective of think tanks, emphasising the key role of the Polish think tank network in the process of EU integration before 2004.

Sanita Hadzović (Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Centre for Security Studies) argues that in Bosnia and Herzegovina the process of European integration has mainly been a peace-building project, but remains one of the priorities of Bosnian foreign policy. She also stresses the need for an ever greater involvement of Poland in the Western Balkans region, also within the Visegrad Group, whose presidency Poland has been holding since July 2020.

Donika Marku (Kosovo, Kosovar Centre for Security Studies) points out how the complicated internal situation and the still unstable neighbourly relations with make Kosovo's road to European integration bumpy. Ms Marku speaks of the crisis in which the European Union has found itself and argues that Poland should get ever more engaged as an advocate of the Western Balkan countries' cause in the EU

The Berlin Process is extremely important for the future of the European Union. It should do its utmost to bring the countries of the Western Balkans closer together. As one of the best examples of a successful transformation and an opportunity taken, Poland will continue to promote the European integration process and spread the idea of cooperation. We hope that the complexity of perspectives on Poland's involvement in the Berlin Process in the WB6 region will increase the awareness of Poland's role in the European Union. We also hope that this publication will contribute to the promotion of the idea of the European Union enlargement and of the Western Balkans being an integral part of modern Europe.

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Albania, the Berlin Process and Poland's role

Ledion Krisafi, PhD

Background

The Berlin Process is one of the most important EU-Western Balkans initiatives in recent years. Launched at the Berlin Conference in 2014, it has re-energised Western Balkans' EU integration perspective and helped push through several regionwide projects in infrastructure, connectivity, energy, youth that would not have been possible otherwise.

Albania has embraced the Berlin Process since the beginning as an excellent opportunity for the region and has been active in all the summits organised since 2015. Despite this readiness, it has benefited less than the other countries involved, which prompted the opposition to accuse the government of negligence and lack of preparation.

Poland has played a considerable role in the Berlin Process since the very beginning. Historically, Poland has been a staunch supporter of Western Balkans' EU integration, stressing its financial, economic, security and geopolitical benefits. At the same time, Poland has repeatedly offered its successful experience of EU integration as a model for the Western Balkans countries. Brexit means that Poland is now EU's fifth largest state. Consequently, Poland's role and weight in EU affairs has increased, including with respect to the Western Balkans-EU relationship, as evidenced by the Poznan Summit in 2019.

Albania and the Berlin Process

The most important part of the Berlin Process has been the Connectivity Agenda that has financed 39 projects, with an investment value of EUR 3.2 billion. Albania has benefited less than its neighbours, with grants worth EUR 78.2 million against EUR 88.7 million for Kosovo, EUR 217.1 million for Bosnia and Herzegovina, EUR 147.7 million for North Macedonia, and EUR 244.8 million for Serbia.¹

The following projects involving Albania have been financed in the framework of the Berlin Process since 2015:

1 EU-Western Balkans, Boosting Connectivity, July 2019 Factsheet https://wbif.eu/storage/app/media/Library/6.%20Connectivity%20Agenda/boosting_connectivity_factsheet.pdf

- Albania – the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Power Interconnection (I): Grid Section in Albania
- Mediterranean Corridor: Montenegro – Albania – Greece Rail Interconnection
- Extension of TEN-T Core Network: Reconstruction of Durrës Port, Quays 1 and 2
- Mediterranean Corridor (R2): Tirana-Durrës Railway

As of 2020, none of these projects has been completed.² Some are still in the design phase, even though selected long ago. For example, Albania's leg of the project "Albania – the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Power Interconnection (I): Grid Section in Albania", approved in 2015, had no contractors selected as of February 2020,³ while North Macedonia, for its part, started work in September 2017.⁴

The same situation is with the Tirana-Durrës Railway, part of the Mediterranean Corridor, selected in 2016. Albania has not selected the construction company so far. The project involving the reconstruction of Durrës Port, Quays 1 and 2, selected in 2017, is still in the design phase.⁵

Despite these issues, the public support for EU integration continues to be the highest in the region.⁶ The last AIIIS poll in 2020 points to an 86% support for Albania's integration in the European Union.⁷ Even so, almost half of the respondents said that Albania is not ready to open negotiations with the EU, while 45% were more optimistic, believing that Albania would join the European Union within the next five years. A mere 16% were not aware of the criteria that Albania should fulfill to become part of EU.⁸

When it comes to the Berlin Process, the public opinion in general has little knowledge on what it is and what projects have been selected and financed. Hence, Albania's failure to attract more projects and to complete the projects selected does not seem to have any bearing on the public opinion's perception of the Berlin Process and Albania's role in it.

2 Investment projects selected for EU funding 2019, https://wbif.eu/storage/app/media/Library/6.%20Connectivity%20Agenda/connectivity_agenda_brochure.pdf

3 Lidhja energjitike me Maqedoninë, OST Drenova: Brenda 5 muajsh shpallim fituesin, punimet zgjasin 3 vjet <http://www.scan-tv.com/lidhja-energjetike-me-maqedonine-ost-drenova-brenda-5-muajsh-shpallim-fituesin-punimet-zgjasin-3-vjet/>

4 Investment projects selected for EU funding 2019, https://wbif.eu/storage/app/media/Library/6.%20Connectivity%20Agenda/connectivity_agenda_brochure.pdf

5 Ibid.

6 AIIIS, The European perspective of Albania: Perceptions and realities 2020

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

The Polish presidency and Albania

Poland and Albania maintain very good bilateral relations. Poland advocated opening the accession negotiations with Albania, even though other EU members refused.⁹ Both countries had emerged from the same communist past and pursued similar reforms and developments, from a centrally planned economy to a market one and from a totalitarian state to a liberal-democratic one.

Poland took over the presidency of the Berlin Process in 2019, focusing on four pillars¹⁰:

- Economy
- Security
- Connectivity
- The civil dimension

The most important event of the Polish presidency was the 2019 Western Balkans Summit in Poznan, during which EU grants worth EUR 180 million were allocated to 8 projects.¹¹

While the summit was deemed successful, for Albania it was hardly so. Out of the 8 projects selected, none was in Albania. Despite the fact that economically the summit was a failure for Albania, on the political front it was a relative success. The Polish presidency offered a significant political input. Poland has been the most vocal supporter of Albania's and North Macedonia's opening of negotiations with the European Union, which was a key message of the Poznan Western Balkans Summit in July of 2019.¹²

Conclusions

The Berlin Process and the related projects are making an impact throughout the region. However, things are going very slowly, and in the case of Albania, all the selected projects are still in their infancy. In fact, none of the projects approved in either country of the region has been completed yet.

9 Tek Polonia, Shqipëria ka një aleat të vendosur, një përkrahës të përkushtuar dhe një mik të vërtetë, Revista Europa, 6 mars 2020; <http://europa.com.al/index.php/2020/03/06/tek-polonia-shqiperia-ka-nje-aleat-te-vendosur-nje-perkrahes-te-perkushtuar-dhe-nje-mik-te-vertete/>

10 Polskie przewodnictwo w Procesie Berlińskim, Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych, <https://www.gov.pl/web/dyplomacja/polskie-przewodnictwo-w-procesie-berlinskim>

11 Investment projects selected for EU funding 2019, https://wbif.eu/storage/app/media/Library/6.%20Connectivity%20Agenda/connectivity_agenda_brochure.pdf

12 Emina Muminovic, Poznań Summit highlights: What has marked the 2019 Berlin Process meeting?, <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2019/07/06/poznan-summit-highlights-what-has-marked-the-2019-berlin-process-meeting/>

Poland's greatest input is sharing its experience. The Western Balkans comprise the states that had gone through the same communist and transition periods as Poland. While Poland has been the most successful example in Eastern Europe, the countries of the Western Balkans are still hampered by high unemployment, shortage of infrastructure, devastating brain drain, insufficient regional cooperation despite numerous initiatives, widespread corruption, and weak state institutions.

Albania has been slow to embrace the Berlin Process. The other countries in the region, like North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, have benefited more, despite having populations and economies comparable to Albania's.



Ledion Krisafi

He has been with the Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS) for almost three years. His main areas of interest are history of the international relations of the Balkans and Eastern Europe, geopolitics and security. He has published a book on the relations between Albania and Yugoslavia after the Second World War and several articles in academic journals. Ledion Krisafi holds a PhD in International Relations and Political Sciences from the European University of Tirana.

Poland – Western Balkans. Together Towards the Future

CASE STUDY: Bosnia and Herzegovina

Sanita Hadzovic

A few decades ago, most of the region of today's Western Balkans (WB6) constituted the federal state of Yugoslavia¹. After the breakdown of Yugoslavia in 1991, followed by almost a decade of armed conflicts, the diplomatic and military support of the European Union (EU) and NATO was noticeable in the WB6. In 1997, the EU set conditions for developing a regional approach and relations with the individual countries of the WB6. The slow process of EU integration of the WB6 began in 1999, with the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP), and in June 2000, the EU Council decided to open the door to the potential accession of the WB6 at a meeting in Santa Maria De Feira. Then, at the November 2000 Zagreb Summit, the region confirmed its full commitment to the SAP. Since 2014, the Berlin Process provided new dynamics and resulted in progress within the political, economic and social regional cooperation.

Unlike the other WB6 countries, the process of EU integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) occurred primarily as a peace building project. Peace was a priority after the armed conflicts and integration of BiH into Euro-Atlantic institutions was a logical step to provide a new constant basis for it. This commitment was defined by the Parliamentary Assembly and the Presidency of BiH's decisions and programs during 1999 and 2000. The PA of BiH defined a strategy for carrying out reforms in order to bring BiH closer to EU membership. During the Thessaloniki EU Council summit in June 2003, BiH, along with the other WB6 countries, was identified as a potential candidate for membership. Since then, progress has been made within BiH's integration process, starting with the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) in 2005, the Agreement on Visa Facilitation and Readmission (2007), the Agreement on Trade (2008), etc. Finally, on the 15th of February 2016, BiH applied for membership. The Commission adopted its opinion on the application in May 2019, identifying 14 key priorities for BiH to fulfil, indicating why BiH does not meet the criteria at this stage and how the country still must go through serious reforms. BiH remains a potential candidate country until it can successfully answer all of the

1 Yugoslavia was set up as a federation of six republics, with borders drawn along ethnic and historical lines: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia.

questions on the EC's questionnaire sheet as well as „ensure the functioning of the Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee and develop a national programme for the adoption of the EU acquis²”. The EU membership remains one of the foreign policy priorities³ for BiH, according to the External Strategy Policy for the period 2018-2023.

After the region was out of focus of interest, there was an impression that the WB6 is again becoming one of the priorities of the EU, due to the new enlargement strategy published in February 2018 and the summit EU-WB held in Sofia in May 2018. The above-mentioned Strategy⁴ aims to maintain a credible enlargement perspective based on six initiatives focused on six areas. Within the Berlin Process, in 2019, Poland was the presiding country. The strategic importance of the Polish presidency is based on three facts. First, Poland can be classified as a “new” EU country; second, it has undertaken a serious chain of reforms prior to joining; and third, Poland is committed to EU enlargement and integration of the WB6. Although it is not much emphasised in the public, the commitment has a history. It starts in the 1990s, when Poland strived to join the EU and NATO, and several thousand of Polish soldiers served in missions in the WB. Some examples of the engagement in BiH are UNPROFOR (1992-1995), UNMIBH (1995-2002), IFOR/SFOR (1996-2004) EUFOR Althea (since 2004), OSCE Missions, etc.

Poland's presidency within the Berlin Process was primarily based on the commitment to EU enlargement and integration of the WB6, with promoting good practices and sharing experience, plus strengthening regional cooperation. At the Poznan Summit, in July 2019, it was defined how “leaders unanimously reaffirmed their unequivocal support for the EU perspective of the WB. In this context, the Polish government reiterates its conviction that the future of the entire region is in the EU⁵”. The support comes mainly in the field of security and stability. The WB6 is one of the foreign policy topics mentioned at the website of the Polish Ministry of External Affairs, where it is stated how “Poland supports candidates and potential candidates at two levels — political and technical. We want to share our transformation success and experience of

2 Commission Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for membership of the European Union, 29th of May 2019. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-bosnia-and-herzegovina-opinion.pdf>

3 The foreign policy strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2018-2023; The Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo, March 2018

4 A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans, Strasbourg, 6th of February 2018. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf

5 Western Balkans Summit Poznan.Chair's conclusions; July 2019. Available at: https://www.premier.gov.pl/files/files/chairs_conclusions.pdf

the difficult reform process”⁶. The importance of the WB region for Poland can be presented through a few simple facts: the WB is a scene where processes important for Poland are going on. The failure to join the EU and destabilisation of the area would present a problem to the international community, including Poland. Also, the WB6 region is characteristic due to the high presence of influence of various countries important to Poland, such as the US, Russia, Turkey, etc. However, many authors argue how the Polish influence in the WB6 remains limited due to insufficient engagement, stating that “awareness of the scale of involvement in the stabilisation of the region is very limited and rarely exploited on the international scene”⁷. Awareness rising can be achieved through various means, for example more bilateral visits between Poland and the WB6. Leading Polish politicians rarely visit the region. According to Adam Balcer, “President Lech Kaczyński has been to the Western Balkans three times, President Bronisław Komorowski twice, and President Andrzej Duda only once in 2019, when he visited BiH and Albania (participation in a regional summit)”⁸. Poland needs to genuinely raise its involvement in the WB region, through sharing its experience with the transition and generally deepening regional cooperation through different initiatives. The positive examples are the initiatives and actions of the Visegrad Group⁹ in the WB6. Poland has taken over the presidency of the Visegrad Group in July 2020.

Coming back to BiH, the EC clarified what it sees as the minimum needed for BiH to open the membership negotiations. Currently, regional cooperation in the WB is in the focus of EU. The latest strategy for the WB is opening a possibility of EU enlargement in 2025 and is a great signal for the region. This can be a good opportunity for BiH. However, BiH continuously lags behind the other countries of the region. By irregularly and untimely fulfilling the basic obligations in the process of integration, BiH does not show a true commitment to reform processes. Part of the reason why the EU has been unable to address BiH’s longstanding institutional deadlock has been the weak interest of BiH’s authorities in joining the EU. This has made them only rarely willing to comply with EU demands. Also, almost 60% of citizens of BiH believe that BiH’s membership in the EU would have no or negative impact on the country, and 36%

6 The website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Republic of Poland; Foreign Policy Topics: Western Balkans. <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/western-balkans>

7 Western Balkans and the Polish Issue, Adam Balcer, Issue 02/13, Aspen Review. Available at: <https://www.aspen.review/article/2017/west-balkans-and-the-polish-issue/>

8 „Direction: Balkans! The significance and potential of Poland’s cooperation with the Western Balkan states”, Adam Balcer, Warsava 2019.

9 A cultural and political alliance of four countries of Central Europe (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia)

are convinced that the country will never become a member of the EU¹⁰. Such opinion is indicative of the problem of the slow progress of BiH. On the road to EU membership, BiH will need to implement reforms in many areas. It is up to BiH's politicians to move from opinion to action and concertise their verbal commitment to the EU integration. For sure, the support of internal actors, including Poland which has made efforts to advance the integration of the WB countries, will remain an important factor. The EU must stay determined to intensify its engagement in the region in all areas and promote the respect of EU values and principles and the pursuit of reforms.



Sanita Hadzovic

She has a Master's degree in Law, completed at the Faculty of Law within the University of Sarajevo. Since June 2016, she is employed as a legal adviser/researcher in the Centre for Security Studies Sarajevo. Her primary research interests are focused on the security sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as the Western Balkans region, and their EU and NATO integrations.

10 Balkan Public Barometer: Survey, Regional Cooperation Council, Sarajevo, April 2020

Kosovo in Berlin Process and Poland's input in this process

Donika Marku

Kosovo in the Berlin Process: Gains and Challenges

The Berlin Process has been a stepping stone for Kosovo's regional and European perspective. This process has enabled Kosovo to be equally represented at summits and participate in projects along other Western Balkans states. Up to 2012, Kosovo was represented in regional initiatives by UN's Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). However, in 2012, Serbia agreed that Kosovo could act on its own behalf, provided that it designates itself as Kosovo* with the accompanying footnote: "This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence". It is worth noting that while at summits in Berlin, Vienna, and Paris Kosovo appeared with footnotes, it did not in Trieste and during the summits that followed.¹ However, in spite of being treated on equal terms with other governments from the region, Kosovo has not managed to leverage this platform to boost its benefits.² To date, Kosovo's main benefits from this process have been in the fields of connectivity³, energy and regional cooperation.⁴ However, Kosovo has been facing major internal and political challenges that prevent it from maximising the benefits from the process.

A core challenge for Kosovo has been the complicated regional situation (barriers and blockades from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, accusations of Kosovo and Serbia towards each-other during the Summit in Poznan), which was referred to even by German Chancellor Angela Merkel who argued that coordinating projects in the Balkans is not an easy task and, in particular, the lack of an agreement between Serbia and

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- 1 Pajaziti, M. (2019) "Importance of the Berlin Process for Kosovo and the Balkans" [Online] Available at <https://balkaneu.com/importance-of-the-berlin-process-for-kosovo-and-the-balkans/>
 - 2 Emini, D., Marku, D. (2018) "KOSOVO in the Berlin Process: gains and challenges" [Online] Available at http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/BerlinProcess-Gains-Challenges_983241.pdf
 - 3 Read more regarding connectivity agenda and energy in Emini, D., Marku, D (2018) "KOSOVO in the Berlin Process: gains and challenges" Available at http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/BerlinProcess-Gains-Challenges_983241.pdf
 - 4 Read more regarding Regional Security Cooperation in Emini, D., Marku, D. (2019) "Regional Security Cooperation in the Western Balkans" Available at https://idscs.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/a5_regional_security.pdf

Kosovo makes it increasingly difficult to implement projects. It is clear that even the best agreement or projects are not sufficient when bilateral disputes are not resolved.

Kosovo has been facing internal political instability as a result of frequent elections and change of leadership. This has shifted the institutions' focus from the European integration agenda, including the Berlin Process.⁵ The latter has been perceived only in light of infrastructure projects. However, such a perception should change, for the Berlin Process encompasses a wide range of issues, such as bilateral disputes, political reforms and democratisation. Kosovo needs a national strategy and a broad consensus on this process to maximise both the economic and political benefits. The Berlin Process has also showed the Balkan countries that they have no perspective if they do not address their "housework" affairs. Therefore, it is crucial for Kosovo to focus on the rule of law, as it has the most problems in this regard.⁶

Criticism

During the six-year period, the effectiveness of this project has been questioned. It has been argued that the EU should work on adapting a new and more realistic approach towards the region. This is because the "Berlin Process" is perceived as an outdated one that does not apply to today's reality, with the Western Balkans' EU enlargement out of the picture. Thus, it does not reach its goal of strengthening the Balkans' EU accession. As such, EU leaders face a choice of wasting their energy on this illusion or accepting their mistakes and coming up with a better plan for the region.⁷

It has been perceived that EU member states have been hijacking the Berlin Process for their own agenda, while adding little to the process. Furthermore, the EU member states wanted to get involved and get credit for aiding the WB towards their EU path, while not being fully committed to resolving the issues that would strengthen the foundations of stability in WB. For example, France hosted the summit in Paris for taking credit rather than out of genuine interest for or commitment to the region. This was confirmed by France's unwillingness to offer Albania and

5 Pajaziti, M. (2019) "Importance of the Berlin Process for Kosovo and the Balkans" [Online] Available at <https://balkaneu.com/importance-of-the-berlin-process-for-kosovo-and-the-balkans/>

6 Bëhet thirrje që të përgatitet Qeveria e ardhshme për Procesin e Berlinit në 2020-në (2019) <https://dplus.org/behet-thirrje-qe-te-pergatitet-qeveria-e-ardhshme-per-procesin-e-berlinit-ne-2020-ne/>

7 Bieber, F. (2018) "It is time to ditch the Berlin Process" [Online] Available at <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2018/07/10/time-ditch-berlin-process/>

North Macedonia a concrete prospect for starting the accession talks in 2018 or give its approval for Kosovo's visa liberalisation.⁸ Likewise, hosting the London summit at a time when Britain was seeking to leave the EU was seen as inconsistency. With this in mind, the large sums poured into the WB have been seen as money given, while the WB states wait for a real change to occur.

Another point is that this process has suffered from the lack of transparency. Moreover, preparation of annual summits has not always been public and the selection of annual topics seemed like an ad hoc exercise rather than part of a carefully devised strategy. Consequently, the WB governments could manipulate the perceptions of achieved results in communication with other stakeholders and general public, since there were no specific outcomes expected from the process. If this process is set to continue, it is important to limit and prioritise the number of issues addressed in order to avoid the weakening of concrete tasks. Also, the Berlin Process should be seen as an end in itself separated from the accession process, as a means to keep the European Commission engaged in the process.⁹ The Berlin Process has made it apparent that EU does not speak with one voice. Furthermore, only the countries that support the accession of the WB states have participated in the process and the EU's internal divisions have not been addressed.¹⁰

Poland's input in the Process

Cooperation with the Western Balkan states stands as a foreign policy priority for the four Visegrad states. Furthermore, these states have committed to support the WB countries in their efforts to accede to EU membership and serve as models for the WB region. While such a commitment does exist, each of these states is pursuing its own foreign policy and interests in the WB countries.¹¹ When the Poznan Summit was around the corner, various discussions emerged on whether Poland is an adequate state to host it. In order to assess Poland's input in Berlin Process, it is worth looking through its foreign policy goals.

8 Ibid;

9 BiEPAG (2017) "The future of the Berlin Process" [Online] Available at <http://biepag.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/The-Future-of-the-Berlin-Process.pdf>

10 Griessler, Ch. (2020) "The Berlin Process" *Sudost-europa*. Volume 68 no. 1 2020 [Online] Available as a pdf file.

11 Griessler, Ch. (2018) "The V4 Countries' Foreign Policy concerning the Western Balkans" *Politics in Central Europe* 14 (2): 141, Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327722760_The_V4_Countries'_Foreign_Policy_concerning_the_Western_Balkans

Throughout 1990s, Poland kept security as its key foreign policy goal, whereas after joining the EU and NATO, it focused on fostering democracy.¹² However, from 2012 up to 2016, its foreign policy focused on its role in the international context, while holding the relations with Germany and France strategically important.¹³ Also, the fact that WB are not a close neighbour of Poland has prevented it from developing a significant attention for this region.¹⁴ At the same time, Poland's 2012-2016 foreign policy document made no mention of Poland's relations with the WB, just noted the importance of the EU enlargement. Yet, different analysts have pointed to Poland's commitment to the WB. This involvement would make it easier to persuade the partners from the Visegrad Group that they should intensify cooperation with this part of Europe. Also, the WB need to deepen the regional cooperation and the Visegrad Group should act beyond its backyard.¹⁵

At the Poznan Summit, the Polish government reiterated its conviction that the future of the entire region is in the European Union, while perceiving the region through cultural lenses, a culture which is deeply rooted and similar to Europe's.¹⁶ Ambassador Wieslaw Tarka stated during the Poznan Summit that Poland is very pro-EU enlargement, for it strongly believes that the WB states are part of Europe, and Poland does not have any hidden interest in this process.¹⁷ Yet, this support is not unconditional, since Poland has stressed the importance of reforms in the WB, the rule of law, fight against corruption and organised crime as well as respect for human rights. Such a chairmanship in the Berlin Process is in line with the EU goals and would serve as an example of political transformation.

Poland used the Berlin Process as a platform to establish the Strategic Relations Between the EU and the Western Balkans. Furthermore, according to the Warsaw Institute, the program of Poland's presidency in the Berlin Process came as a result of a long-time experience coupled with a genuine

12 Zornaczuk 2009 cited in Griessler, Ch. (2018) "The V4 Countries' Foreign Policy concerning the Western Balkans" *Politics in Central Europe* 14 (2): 141, Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327722760_The_V4_Countries'_Foreign_Policy_concerning_the_Western_Balkans

13 Griessler, Ch. (2018) "The V4 Countries' Foreign Policy concerning the Western Balkans" *Politics in Central Europe* 14 (2): 141, Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327722760_The_V4_Countries'_Foreign_Policy_concerning_the_Western_Balkans

14 *Ibid*;

15 Balcer, A. (2013) "West Balkans and the Polish Issue" Available at <https://www.aspen.review/article/2017/west-balkans-and-the-polish-issue/>

16 Wojtyczka, I. (2019) "Poland Establishes Strategic Relations Between the EU and the Western Balkans" [Online] Available at <https://warsawinstitute.org/poland-establishes-strategic-relations-eu-western-balkans/>

17 EWB (2019) "Tarka: EU Accession of the Western Balkans is in the interest of Poland" [Online] Available at <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2019/09/30/tarka-eu-accession-of-the-western-balkans-is-in-the-interest-of-poland/>

commitment to establishing ties in the Balkans. Poland's involvement in the WB is rooted in four pillars: economy, connectivity, civil dimension and security.¹⁸ The Summit in Poznan highlighted Poland's wish to be more involved in the Berlin Process and to share its transformation experience.

Summary

The Berlin Process has opened a new area of regional cooperation, enabling Kosovo to be equally represented with other Western Balkan states. Furthermore, Kosovo has benefited from this process mostly through the connectivity agenda and regional cooperation. Yet, Kosovo has been facing the core political challenges due to the constant blockade from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina that is harming regional cooperation and stability. Six years into the process, there have been very limited results, calling its effectiveness into question. Throughout the years, the Western Balkans have not been a key sphere of interest for Poland. Yet, Poland used the Berlin Process as a platform to establish the Strategic Relations Between the EU and the Western Balkans.



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18 Ibid;

Polish Experience and Advocacy within the EU Enlargement Policy Through Montenegro Lens

Marko Pejović

The diplomatic initiative proposed by German Chancellor Angela Merkel in 2014, which brings together the Western Balkans 6 (WB6) and their EU partners, including the latest acceding member states, is so significant in that the latter have already completed the transition process now at work in the WB6. The integration of the WB6 countries and improved cooperation between them in all fields as well as reforms are the key messages of the Poznan Summit, showing that there is a further European perspective for all Southeast European countries.

Poland is a country that underwent the political and economic transformation in 1989 and has successfully overcome the challenges now facing the WB6 countries. Thus, it is fully aware of the importance of political and technical support for the WB6 countries to fulfill their European aspirations. This especially refers to Montenegro, which has entered the ninth anniversary of the negotiation process, often influenced by pro-Russian intentions.

Poland joined the Berlin Process in 2018 as observer, at the invitation of the German Chancellor. However, Poland's participation in the process should not be viewed exclusively in the context of the summit, or its planned and achieved results, as it was very active in previous years, too. Throughout its presidency, Poland was especially engaged in relations between neighboring countries and their accession to the EU through events at the ministerial or expert level, such as the „Berlin Process Ministers of Foreign Affairs” (April 11-12, 2019), which was focused on youth issues in the region and open bilateral issues, and the experts event „Reinforcing the European Integration of the Western Balkans – Learning from the Past, Preparing for the Future” (May 13-14, 2019) which was held in the context of the civil society component of the Berlin Process, in the run-up to the Poznan Summit in 2019.

Poland's participation is particularly important as it is a country that actively supports the EU enlargement. In fact, its presidency of the Berlin

Process coincided with the launch of the new term of the EU bodies, which began with strong and encouraging messages on the enlargement, something heartening given that the enlargement policy was not high on the agenda of the previous European Commission.

Recognising Poland's efforts in advocating EU enlargement and the importance of it from the point of view of Montenegro, one can talk about Poland's support to Montenegro at the political and technical level, noting the following:

- Membership of Poland in various groups or processes that support the EU enlargement and help maintain the dynamics in opening successive negotiation chapters, such as the Berlin Process, „Group of enlargements friends“, Visegrad group, etc.
- Bilateral and multilateral meetings, through which initiatives are proposed to further strengthen the integration process
- Development assistance through the provision of grants
- Experience of reconciliation and best practices through examples of the Polish-German reconciliation and youth cooperation
- Economic experience, sustainable exploitation of natural resources and structural funds of the EU that led to an increase in gross domestic product from 48 to 74 percent of the EU average
- Transfer of know-how in energy, wood processing and agriculture, and cooperation in these areas

Due to Montenegro's excellent bilateral relations with Poland, and since Poland's involvement in this process was warmly welcomed, Montenegro recognises Polish involvement as an additional incentive in the realisation of Montenegro's European aspirations, given that one of the goals of the Polish presidency was to keep the WB6 high on the agenda of the new European Commission, in addition to the fact that the results of Poland's fifteen-year membership in the EU "clearly show that accession is a difficult process, but worth all the effort"¹. Furthermore, the importance of cooperation within the NATO alliance is emphasised as an added value to the bilateral relations between Poland and Montenegro.

Poland is the first presiding country of the Berlin Process to have changed the approach towards the Western Balkans region, contrary to the ex-cathedra concept most often pursued by the EU. Namely, unlike the

1 <https://europeanwesternbalkans.rs/vel-sek-poljski-prioriteti-u-okviru-berlinskog-procesa-su-ekonomija-po-vezanost-civilno-drustvo-bezbednost/>

previous presiding countries, Poland used the concept of “hearing the region”: what is important, what they are facing, what should be changed, where are mistakes, etc. Moreover, Polish delegates visited the region and held meetings with representatives of different organisations and institutions on technical, expert and political levels, especially the regional meeting with CSOs in Skopje and the meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, which indicates that Poland’s efforts are aimed at strengthening stability and economic development for all. That summits pursue a narrower and a more pragmatic approach does not change the fact that a good governance and the rule of law should remain a top priority for both EU member states and candidate countries. However, the Berlin Process should target narrower areas in order to achieve maximum results in parallel with other EU accession processes.

Although during the Vienna Summit in 2015, the *Declaration on Regional Cooperation and the Solution of Bilateral Disputes* was signed, one can talk about minor progress, except for the achievement of the Prespa Agreement and the finalisation of the border dispute between Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Poland took advantage of the Berlin Process and further focused on bilateral issues, which was the main topic of the meeting of foreign ministers of the Berlin Process.

The Sixth Summit of the Western Balkans within the Berlin Process focused on economic issues, the integration agenda and the results achieved in the implementation of the Multiannual Action Plan for the Regional Economic Area, as well as on the cooperation between the civil society and entrepreneurs. At the same time, it was an opportunity to see progress in fulfilling the commitments of the London Summit. In addition to the meeting of the Prime Ministers of the Western Balkans, three meetings on the ministry level were held: a meeting of Economy Ministers, Foreign Affairs Ministers and Internal Affairs Ministers. In addition, the Business Forum and the Civil Society Forum were held.

Montenegro particularly appreciates the sharing of Poland’s experience in the EU accession process and cross-border cooperation, as well as experience from local and regional authorities in strengthening their socio-economic development. **On the other hand, providing platforms for businesses, officials and civil society within the Business Forum and the Civil Society Forum was aimed at connecting entrepreneurs, sharing knowledge, and exchanging experiences of non-governmental organisations.**

Regarding the Poznan Summit, there are some very meaningful events for Montenegro, such as the signing of the *Declaration of Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process*², which committed governments to continue and increase efforts for the full equality and integration of Roma in the societies in which they live, especially in the field of employment, housing, health and education. In the context of supporting young people and reducing the youth unemployment rate, it is important to emphasise the signing of the *Declaration on Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications*³, with the aim of improving mobility between WB6 for employment purposes, as well as *Youth Guarantee scheme*⁴. The scheme will support youth employment in the Western Balkans and is expected to leverage investment of at least EUR 60 million for the young people in the region to enhance their entrepreneurial capacity and provide job opportunities. Within the *Investment Framework for the Western Balkans*⁵ EUR 180 million were laid out, including eight new transport and energy projects.

However, despite the efforts of Poland and other EU partners, greater political will is required in the Western Balkans to integrate this region as much as possible, which would create the preconditions for the growth and development of the WB6 countries as future EU members.

Finally, it is important to point out that the relations between Poland and Montenegro are constantly being upgraded, and that the Poznan Summit was another opportunity to improve cooperation, so meetings on the margins of the summit and the cooperation between the representatives of Montenegro and Poland led to the following results:

- Improved cooperation in the fields of education, science and culture after the signing of the Cooperation Program between the two governments;
- Further improvement of cooperation in the field of agriculture towards increasing trade in agri-food products between the two countries, exchange of experiences and knowledge between the state, scientific and educational institutions, farmers and the implementation of specific investment projects;

2 <https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/docs/105/declaration-of-western-balkans-partners-on-roma-integration-within-the-eu-enlargement-processrn>

3 https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/document-library/declaration-on-recognition-of-academic-qualifications-in-the-western-balkans_en

4 https://berlinprocess.info/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/chairs_conclusions.pdf

5 *Ibidem*

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- Further strengthening of economic cooperation and the cooperation between the chambers of commerce of the two countries.

Montenegro's integration in the EU is one of the few issues on which there is a general popular consensus that provides a tailwind for the process. Although Montenegro was part of the state union of Serbia and Montenegro, the double-track approach (to negotiate accession in the field of trade and customs policy at the level of member states) in the negotiation process enabled progress in the EU integration and the signing of the first agreement that regulated relations with the EU – the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) in 2007. In December 2008, Montenegro applied for the EU membership, and in December 2010, the European Council has formally awarded the status of an EU candidate country to Montenegro. Accession negotiations with Montenegro were opened in June 2012. Eight years later, Montenegro has opened all chapters and temporarily closed only three. In 2020, Montenegro accepted the new methodology of the European Commission, and in the upcoming period, more political will and reforms are required in different fields.



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Think Thanks and the Failure to Launch the Connectivity Agenda in the Berlin Process – Poland’s Role in Inspiring Change

Dr. Marija Risteska

Center for Research and Policy Making
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The European Union’s fatigue of enlargement and the stalled reforms in the Western Balkans received a response in 2014, on the initiative of German Chancellor Angela Merkel: the Berlin Process¹. It mitigated the negative impact of recent developments at the EU level (Juncker Declaration, establishment of a unique DG in charge of both the enlargement and neighborhood policy, shift from enlargement to integration fatigue, Brexit, etc.) and thereby kept the WB6 leaders “busy”². Conceived as a means for several European Union member states with keen interests in the Western Balkans to engage closely in the Europeanisation of the six aspiring Western Balkans countries, to step up regional cooperation and contribute to further European integration, the process has so far succeeded to contribute to the improvement of bilateral relations and the resolution of bilateral disputes between the Western Balkan states and their EU neighbours³.

Unlike other countries in the region, North Macedonia has entered the process as only one with demarcated borders, but with two disputes with neighbouring Greece (name issue) and Bulgaria (language and history). The Berlin Process paved the way for Montenegro to first sign two border demarcation agreements (with Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and later with Kosovo), followed by the signing of the same between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. The signing of *Joint Declaration on Regional Cooperation and Good Unneighborly Relations*⁴, provided an impetus for the

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- 1 German Federal Government, “Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans”, 28 August 2014. <https://archiv.bundesregierung.de/archiv-de/meta/startseite/finaldeclaration-by-the-chair-of-the-conference-on-the-western-balkans-754634>
 - 2 <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/sarajevo/13948.pdf>
 - 3 Adnan Ćerimagić and Zoran Nechev (2019) “Resolution of Bilateral Disputes in the Western Balkans: Role of the European Union and Berlin Process”, EFB
 - 4 UK Government, “Joint declarations on regional cooperation and good neighborly relations, war crimes and missing persons in the framework of the Berlin Process”, 9 July 2018. <http://wb-csf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Joint-Declarations-signed-at-the-Leaders-Meeting-of-the-Western-Balkans-Summit-by-Berlin-Process-participants.pdf>

resolution of bilateral issues with agreements between North Macedonia, Bulgaria and Greece.

Prior to the Berlin Process, the EU promoted regional cooperation through political dialogue. The process offered reconceptualisation, putting it in the center of the region's European integration, resulting in improved planning, preparation and monitoring of genuinely regional projects. (financed by the EU, the international finance institutions and the RYCO)⁵. The Berlin Process has provided a privileged platform for the Western Balkan leaders to meet and discuss outstanding issues. "Over the next four years, we will further our endeavors to make additional real progress in the reform process"⁶ on the levels – economy, development and connectivity – that "the Berlin Process has not advanced very much"⁷.

Building on the EU's Connectivity Agenda in transport and energy, the Berlin Process serves as a "prioritisation mechanism to focus new infrastructure investments into selected projects."⁸ With it, the European Commission gave more weight to connecting the region by defining the core transport and energy Trans-European Networks to be financed as a priority, setting aside an extra EUR 1 billion from EU pre-accession funds and EUR 4 billion from IFIs⁹. However, in the span of 6 years, only 39 projects have been approved, revealing the region's lack of capacity in preparation for financing of concrete, mature, regional infrastructure investment projects reflecting the priorities of the WB6 countries.

Macedonia has so far benefited from EUR 3.2 million (of which EUR 2.2 million investment and EUR 1 million grant) out of EUR 32.9 million investment/grants committed to financing the region's infrastructure projects. This is mainly due to weak administrative capacity and incompatibility between the national and EU procurement procedures¹⁰. The situation can be improved through IMF's assistance aiming at bolstering the capacity to

5 Florent Marciacq (2018) The EU and the Western Balkans after the Berlin Process Reflecting on the EU Enlargement in Times of Uncertainty, FES

6 German Federal Government, "Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans", 28 August 2014. <https://archiv.bundesregierung.de/archiv-de/meta/startseite/finaldeclaration-by-the-chair-of-the-conference-on-the-western-balkans-754634>

7 Dušan Reljić from the German Institute for International and Security Affairs in an interview for Euractiv: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/bulgaria-and-north-macedonia-assume-joint-presidency-of-berlin-process/>

8 EU funds – resources in support of the reform process or wasted EU tax payers money? <http://www.crpm.org.mk/european-integration-publications/>

9 https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/connectivity_agenda_brochure.pdf

10 Florent Marciacq (2018) The EU and the Western Balkans after the Berlin Process Reflecting on the EU Enlargement in Times of Uncertainty, FES

plan, select, and carry out infrastructure projects¹¹. However, the state capture phenomenon with ongoing hybrid regime features¹² will likely remain the real plague affecting Macedonian institutions and hampering the regional, economic development, investment and connectivity priorities of the country within the Berlin Process.

For democratic development in the Western Balkan countries, the most important outcome of the Berlin Process is the inclusion of the civil society in monitoring of the achievements and policy dialogue. After years of advocacy, the civil society forum was first organised in London, and then in Trieste, Paris, and Poznan, as a formal part of the Berlin Process. However, the impression remained that content-wise “the discussions were too general and did not reflect on the previous work done and recommendations provided by civil society organisations by way of civil society forum policy briefs”¹³. This might have been due to the lack of policy relevant discussions, or CSO’s limited capacity to formulate advice in policy relevant ways, or lack of trust and history of cooperation that is pertinent to the responsiveness of governments to civil society ideas. In Poznan, the Think Tank Forum format was initiated during the Polish presidency of the Berlin Process, which allowed for a more structured policy dialogue to be stirred with policy experts. However, the discussions during the Think Tank Forum revealed a striking mismatch between the Berlin Process and therefore the government’s need to fully benefit from the process (policy advise and support, monitoring of achievements in economic development, connectivity and investments), and what think tanks had to offer in dialogue. Most of the contributions and discussions were related to human rights, corruption, governance in the six Balkan countries and EU enlargement policy, not specific to economic development and connectivity. Obviously, this results from the fact that only few think tanks in the region work on this issue, and that there is a limit to competition, and thus to pluralism of ideas. On Macedonia’s side, only one economist from governmental academic institution contributed to discussions, but on a theoretical and not a policy relevant level. Even in general, not taking the Poznan Summit participants as an example, domestic knowledge regimes in this area are in their infancy. Regarding the connectivity agenda, only one think tank continuously follows development, namely the CDI

11 Public Infrastructure in the Western Balkans, Opportunities and Challenges, R. Atoyan & alii, IMF European Department, 2018

12 <https://freedomhouse.org/country/north-macedonia/nations-transit/2020>

13 Zoran Nechev, Ivan Nikolovski, Jelica Minić, Mariola Qesaraku 2018 Western Balkans Summit: 3 key take-aways from London DECEMBER 2018, SEE Think Net

– Cooperation Development Institute¹⁴. Additionally, the think tank literature reveals a genuine lack of incentives to stimulate such work in the region¹⁵.

In this respect, I see a specific role for Poland, with its superior economic think tank community which has proved instrumental in the success of the EU integration process. The strong think tank scene, which informed the policy transformation of the Polish society and stirred economic reforms, contributed to capacity building, implementation and monitoring of investments and thus development, through the right knowledge management can be of great benefit to the Berlin Process. It will address the scarcity of economic think tanks and/or economic policy analysis and ideas relevant to inform the Berlin Process in the Western Balkans and Macedonia. Incentives for economic analysis, related to the connectivity agenda, MAP REA and overall economic development, through regional cooperation and facilitating the knowledge sharing between Poland and the Western Balkans, will contribute to the Europeanisation of the region and step up regional cooperation under the Berlin Process.



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14 https://cdinstitute.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/CDI_Berlin-Process_April2019.pdf

15 Goran Buldioski (2020) Think Tanks In Central And Eastern Europe And The Quality Of Their Policy Research, Evrodijalog 15, Studiorum http://studiorum.org.mk/evrodijalog/15/pdf/EVRODIJALOG_Br_15_Buldioski_ENG.pdf

The role of Poland in the Berlin Process – A view from Serbia

Jelica Minić Ph.D.

Poland is getting involved in the Western Balkans

Against the background of other EU member states, including the members of the Visegrad Group, Poland has not been considerably involved in the Western Balkan economic and political affairs. Although Poland regularly joined the Visegrad Group's declarations supporting the European and Euro-Atlantic path of the WB6, its interests, expertise, and experience were mostly focused on the Eastern Partnership countries as its immediate non-EU neighbourhood.

Poland had not been very visible in the Western Balkan region before the Poznan Summit. But there has been a general perception that Poland is the strongest and successful "new" member state of the EU, with significant experience to be shared concerning the accession negotiations and reforms, as well as economic achievements before and after joining the EU.

Before the preparations for the Poznan Summit began, Poland was not very familiar with Western Balkans' affairs. But specific lines of cooperation did exist in the fields of security, economy and culture, as well as through cooperation of academic and civil society organisations. That made possible getting a comprehensive overview of the situation in the region in a rather short period of time. Months of intensive consultations, brainstorming sessions and conferences led to the most impressive Western Balkan Summit since the Berlin Process launched six years earlier. As the final outcome, Poland declared itself as the advocate of the Western Balkans' EU integration, donated EUR 0.5 million through the Western Balkans Investment Framework to prop up the economic development and infrastructural interconnections in the Western Balkans, supported Anti-Corruption Programme and Small Arms and Light Weapons Control Map, and offered to share its institutional experience of 15 years of EU membership.

All presidencies of the Berlin Process have had some particular priorities beside the standard ones: economy, connectivity, security and civil society. The value added of Poland's presidency was its special focus on local and regional authorities of the Western Balkan countries, as well as its decisive

involvement of an expert community. In line with these innovations, two new formats in the series of ministerial meetings, forums and round tables were introduced: the Forum of Cities and Regions, organized before the Poznan Summit, in Rzeszow, in June 2019, and the Think Tank Forum as one of the core brainstorming session during the Poznan Summit. Both of these events brought in new dimensions and levels to the functioning of the Berlin Process, and diversified considerably the range of participants. As a result, concrete new initiatives and important projects were ushered in, such as the transformation of mining regions, which was highly relevant for the WB6, namely in anticipation of them entering an intensive process of decarbonisation.

The other important initiative that came out from the Think Tank Forum is the joint project of think tanks from the Visegrad 4 and the WB6 called "Think Balkans", which became operational in July 2020, with the support of the International Visegrad Fund. The attention given to civil society and the expert communities from the region was remarkable, with debates, networking, conclusions and concrete arrangements better structured and more effective than previous years.

The Poznan Summit was also marked by the attendance of representatives of civil society at the three ministerial meetings (foreign affairs, internal affairs, and economy), along with high level representatives of the European Commission, EIB, EBRD, OECD, RCC and RYCO. The "omnipresence" of the civil society representatives during the summit with an "open door" access to the most of events succeeded in combining and synergising different social groups of the WB6 societies in a very productive way.

Long-term effects can be expected in the economic field in particular. The Western Balkans Business Forum involved 300 participants dealing with digital development, energy, agriculture and food production. Comparing to previous summits, Poland's presidency devoted the highest attention to economic issues, while making panels and conferences dedicated to these topics open to a number of entrepreneurs.

Regarding the visibility of the Poznan Summit in the region and beyond, the best sources of information were the European Western Balkans portal, providing numerous reports on the events and interviews with participants, and the RCC Daily News Overview, offering all relevant links to the WB6 national and international reporting on the summit. The websites of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Fund for the

Balkans were the most reliable source of the official documents from the summit.

Poland and Serbia – promising developments

Serbia and Poland have maintained diplomatic relations for a century, with a track record of cooperation in different fields: political, economic, educational and cultural, and with numerous agreements signed. Bilateral relations have been successful particularly in the economic and cultural fields. In 2018, the trade volume between the two countries reached EUR 1.16 billion, and in the first nine months of 2019, almost EUR 1 billion. The cooperation has been well-established in mining, energy, infrastructure, automotive and engineering industry, with the good prospects for expansion in the IT sector, traditional industries, agriculture, biotechnology, ecology.¹

The ruling parties in Poland and Serbia have been on the same side of the political spectrum as members² or associate members³ of the European political groups, which gives ground for a closer cooperation between the two governments. Thus, it is not surprising that a year later the political impact of the Poznan Summit on bilateral relations between Serbia and Poland can be estimated as very successful. After his address and bilateral meetings during the Bled Strategic Forum, on 31 September 2020, President of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić gave a statement regarding important changes ahead of the Western Balkan region and Europe. "I heard for the first time some ideas on how the region and Europe are going to look like. We will rely ever more on Poland on our European path," he said.⁴

However, Serbia has not been an easy case on the European path. According to the public poll of January 2020, 54% of citizens would vote in favour of and 24% against Serbia joining the EU if a referendum was organized.⁵ In Albania and Kosovo the EU accession is approved by 87% and 75% of citizens respectively, in Montenegro, North Macedonia and Bosnia

1 http://www.rtv.rs/sr_lat/ekonomija/aktuelno/ekonomska-saradnja-srbije-i-poljske-na-uzlaznoj-putanji_1070146.html

2 Law and Justice (PIS) is a member of the European Conservatives and Reformist Group in the European Parliament.

3 In November 2016, Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), became an associate member of the European People's Party (EPP).

4 https://www.slobodna-bosna.ba/vijest/167992/vuchic_je_donio_odluku_evo_na_koga_se_odlucila_srbija_oslanjati_na_svom_evropskom_putu.html

5 <https://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/9/politika/3822106/stabilno-visoka-podrska-clanstvu-srbije-u-eu-54-odsto.html>

and Herzegovina – by around 60%, while Serbia is polarised with 26% of the population for versus 24% against, according to the Balkan Barometer 2020.⁶ The accession negotiations with Serbia started in January 2015, and in December 2015, two negotiating chapters were opened, followed by four chapters in 2016, six chapters in 2017, four chapters in 2018, two chapters in 2019 and none in 2020. The dynamics of negotiations has not been promising.

Moreover, the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue is going back and forth, and the number of EU competing actors on the domestic stage is growing (Russia, China, Turkey, Arab Emirates). In the period 2015-2020, the economic performance was Serbia's main asset. In addition, Serbia has been an active regional player, despite the complex bilateral relations with the former Yugoslav republics, and one of the key beneficiaries of all regional initiatives. This is also the case with the Berlin Process. In these conditions, the relations between Serbia and Poland still have a lot of space to expand as long as the innovative approaches adopted during the Polish presidency of the Berlin Process are properly implemented.

The Polish presidency of the Berlin Process had Poland rise to a more prominent level in the Western Balkan diplomacy. This could make its support to the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the aspiring countries better targeted and more effective. The exclusively positive historical memories of Poland in the region and expectations that it will continue this legacy in the future could be one of its main strengths in the fierce international competition in the Western Balkans.



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6 <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/95/balkan-barometer-2020-public-opinion-survey>

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