

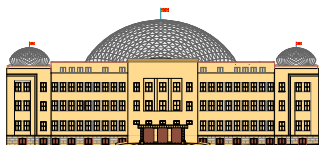
A blue-toned map of Europe serves as the background for the top half of the poster. Overlaid on the map are twelve yellow stars, arranged in a circle, reminiscent of the European Union flag.

# CONFERENCE

## ON INTER-PARLIAMENTARY DIALOGUE TO FURTHER PROMOTE THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION OF THE WESTERN BALKANS

**Skopje, 20 October 2023**

Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia  
Room Boris Trajkovski



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



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## Background

Strengthening democratic resilience and respect for the rule of law and human rights; promoting reconciliation and good neighbourly relations and creating the conditions for stronger economic and social progress in the Western Balkans are a geo-strategic investment in peace, stability and democratic security for the whole of Europe.

In Thessaloniki in 2003, concluding a historic summit between the Western Balkans and the European Union, the European Union reiterated its unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans. The prospect of membership of the European Union acted as a catalyst for addressing challenges and introducing reforms. Since Thessaloniki, the commitment to enlargement has been repeatedly confirmed at the highest political level, by both the European Union and the political leaders of the region. The length of time that has elapsed, however, and the failure to adequately reward progress have sapped political momentum and public enthusiasm.

With the adoption of [Resolution 2456 \(2022\)](#) on “Supporting a European perspective for the Western Balkans” (rapporteur: Mr George Papandreou, SOC, Greece), the Parliamentary Assembly called for a new impetus to be given to the European Union enlargement process.

As regards its own activities the Assembly resolved to play a greater role in supporting a European perspective for the Western Balkans by stepping up interparliamentary co-operation activities addressed to the countries concerned, aimed at enhancing democratic resilience, institutional capacity, the ownership and sustainability of reforms as well as civil society consultation and participation in the political decision-making process

## The aim and format of the event

The event aims at providing parliamentarians from the region with a broad platform for cooperation and dialogue to discuss challenges they face and good practices towards European integration.

The regional event is co-organized by the Parliamentary Assembly's Interparliamentary Cooperation and Project Support Division (ICPSD), the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy and the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia.

# PROGRAMME

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**8.30 – 9.00**

## **Registration of participants**

**9.00 – 9.45**

## **Opening session**

**Talat Xhaferi**, President of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia

**Tiny Kox**, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

**Bojan Marichikj**, Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs, Republic of North Macedonia

**Zsolt Németh**, Chairperson of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), Chairperson of the Hungarian Delegation to the PACE

**9.50 – 12.30**

## **Session I – A geopolitical challenge**

The past few years have witnessed a geopoliticisation of the region, with the Russian Federation extending its political influence through an array of soft power tools, including economic investments, media presence, energy policy and vaccine diplomacy. Against the background of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine – an open affront to international law and European values – there is a risk that this influence will be used as a wedge to deepen fractures and lead to further destabilisation. It is thus imperative not to lose focus on the Western Balkans, even if the need to support the European aspirations of other countries, such as Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova, has emerged in the meantime.

### **MODERATOR:**

**George Papandreou**, PACE Rapporteur, Supporting a European Perspective for the Western Balkans

**9.50 - 10.10**

### **KEY-NOTE SPEAKER:**

**Adrienn Kiraly**, Special Advisor for Western Balkans, Directorate General for Enlargement and Neighborhood, European Commission

**10.15 - 10.45**

### **Panel discussion with the participation of:**

**Etjen Xhafaj**, Member of the Parliament of Albania

**Arbër Ademi**, Chair of the Commission of European Affairs of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia

**10.45 - 11.00**

### **Coffee break**

**11.00 - 11.30**

### **Pannel discussion continued:**

**Marina Ragus**, Vice-Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Assembly of Serbia

**Arbreshë Kryeziu**, Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Diaspora of the Assembly of Kosovo\*

**Lord Stuart Peach**, UK Special Envoy to the Western Balkans

**11.30 - 12.30**

### **Exchange with the audience**

**12.30 - 14.00**

### **Lunch break**

## Afternoon Session

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### 14.15 – 16.00 Session II – Public opinion

#### MODERATOR:

**Despina Chatzivassiliou-Tsovilis**, Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

■ The length of time that has elapsed since the Thessaloniki Summit where the European perspective became a real option for the first time, however, and the failure to adequately reward progress have sapped political momentum and longstanding public enthusiasm about the European project. Surveys show that an increasing number of people in the Western Balkans, especially among the youth, are pessimistic about the prospects for accession to the European Union. The European vision is losing its shine. In its place, ethno-nationalism has resurfaced, a very worrying development in a region in which the specter of violence still looms large.

#### 14.15 – 14.30 KEY-NOTE SPEAKER:

**Klotilda Bushka**, Member of the Parliament of Albania, Chairperson of the Legal Affairs, Public Administration and Human Rights Committee, Member of the Albanian Delegation to the PACE

#### 14.30 - 15.30 Panel discussion with the participation of:

**Aleksandar Brezar**, Editor, Euronews View

**Nedeljka Ivošević**, Member of the Bureau of the Council of Europe Advisory Council on Youth

**Peter Hurrelbrink**, the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation's Resident Representative for North Macedonia and Kosovo\*

**Erjon Tase**, Executive Director, Academy of Political Studies, Tirana, Albania

#### 15.30 - 16.00 Exchange with the audience

#### 16.00 - 16.15 Coffee break

\* All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

**MODERATOR:**

**Aleksandar Nikoloski**, Chair of National Council for Euro-integration and member of the delegation of North Macedonia to the PACE

■ In the context of their strategic partnership and taking into account considering their common values and convergence of interests, the Council of Europe, and the European Union should intensify their political dialogue on how to accelerate the European perspective of the Western Balkans, paying also attention to the ownership and sustainability of the reforms and the need to involve civil society. In this process, it is also important to coordinate and cooperate with all relevant actors, including other regional and international organisations and financial institutions, and build on the strengths and added value of all those concerned. Better and Their stronger cooperation would also enable a better use of Council of Europe tools and expertise in the fields of the rule of law, democracy and human rights.

**16.30 - 17.00 Panel discussion with the participation of:**

**David Geer**, Ambassador, Head of Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of North Macedonia

**Vitomir Raguz**, Head of the European Relations Office, Council of Europe Development Bank

**Elvira Kovács**, Member of the Parliament, Vice-President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Chairperson of the European Integration Committee of the National Assembly of Serbia

**17.00 - 17.30 Exchange with the audience**

**17.30 - 17.45 Conclusions**

by **Darko Kaevski**, Chairperson of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia Delegation to the PACE, and **George Papandreou**, PACE Rapporteur on Supporting a European Perspective for the Western Balkans

**End of conference**

**[www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)**

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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