

"Some slight friction threatening in the Balkans" MEPs meet MPs from the Western Balkans

On 26 and 27 June the EP's directorate for relations with national parliaments organised an inter-parliamentary colloquium to give MEPs and MPs from the Western Balkans — Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia — the chance to exchange views on the region's problems and to think about how the EU can improve its Balkan strategy.



Do your homework and you will join the EU

This was the message given to Balkan politicians by Doris Pack, chair of the EP South-East Europe delegation. Ms Pack assured them of EP's commitment towards EU membership for the region's states. She described the EU 'absorption capacity' debate as nonsense, since the Copenhagen criteria very clearly lay down the rules of the game: "If the EU cannot reform its old structure then we will have problems with absorption capacity". Doris Pack stressed that the Western Balkans are in the heart of Europe and only populist politicians dare to write off their EU accession.

Change borders through dialogue

Speaking about Kosovo, foreign affairs committee chair Elmar Brok did not dispute the right to self-determination but also raised the possibility of changing borders through negotiations. He agreed with Doris Pack that the EU needs to reform before another mass enlargement. "EU countries saying yes to enlargement and no to the constitution are not telling the truth", he concluded.

Olli Rehn suggests...

Enlargement commissioner Olli Rehn made a few suggestions to Western Balkan countries:

- don't leave reforming the judiciary and fighting organised crime and corruption till the last minute;
- go for regional agreements rather than bilateral ones;
- ensure proper border control.

Reconciliation means strong civil society

Nenad Sebek, executive director of the centre for democracy and reconciliation in South-East Europe, pointed out that reconciliation among Western Balkan countries is possible only by building a strong civil society in the region to tackle violent nationalism. The centre is building up human capital in these countries where many intelligent youngsters' main ambition is to emigrate.

Complaints from national MPs

Balkan MPs had a few complaints too:

- a sizeable chunk of EU funds do not reach their intended destination;
- reconciliation is not possible without fully involving political elites and leaders;
- lack of reconciliation must not prevent the Western Balkans countries joining the EU;
- the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina was an imported war — Bosnians and Herzegovinians had no reason to fight against each other.

Source: EP Newshound, 4 July