

UPF Europe: Brussels Panels Stress Balkan Stability and European Security

Jacques Marion and Alan Sillitoe
November 9, 2025



Brussels, Belgium – In partnership with the office of **Hon. Lukas Mandl**, an Austrian member of the European Parliament, UPF-Europe and Middle East (UPF-EUME) organized a European Leadership Conference on November 19, 2025, under the theme "Balkan Stability and European Security." The event took place at the European Parliament in Brussels and brought together more than 100 participants from across Europe and the Balkan region.



The conference provided a constructive platform for discussing the evolving challenges and opportunities related to stability in the Balkans and its importance for wider European security. In early November, the European Commission stated that EU enlargement is a strategic investment in Europe's stability and security. Just two days before the conference, it was announced that Albania is expected to conclude its

accession negotiations by the end of 2027 and could join the European Union by 2030, alongside Montenegro.

Participants included former heads of state and political leaders from the Balkan region, members of the European Parliament, as well as ambassadors and diplomatic representatives from Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo, and North Macedonia. UPF was represented by European chapter leaders and peace ambassadors, among them **Hon. Keith Best**, chairman of UPF-UK and president of the IAPP Regional Advisory Board, and **Hon. Klajda Gjosh**a, former Albanian minister of European integration, IAPP chair for Albania, and one of the main organizers of the conference.



Mr. Jacques Marion, president of UPF-EUME, opened the conference by welcoming participants and emphasizing the strategic importance of Western Balkan stability for Europe. He introduced the speakers, framing the session around building stable democracies in the Western Balkans.

Hon. Lukas Mandl, co-lead member for the Western Balkans, Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group at the European Parliament in Austria and host of the conference, stressed the need for political leadership to advance EU enlargement. Drawing parallels with historic European milestones, such as the fall of the Iron Curtain and German reunification, he argued that bold decisions shaped Europe positively and similar leadership is needed today. He lamented the lack of progress despite a revised EU enlargement methodology and emphasized that enlargement is essential for a stronger, freer Europe. Citing the late Hon. Erhard Busek, former vice-chancellor of Austria, he suggested that all six Western Balkan countries could be integrated at once.



Hon. Davor Ivo Stier, chair of the delegation for relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo for the European Parliament in Croatia, noted that progress toward EU membership is never linear, but requires persistence and courage. He said the Western Balkans face vulnerabilities including unresolved disputes, external influence, and governance deficiencies that undermine public confidence. He emphasized the importance of conditionality, not as a barrier, but a guarantee of sustainable membership. Hon. Stier advocated gradual integration – participation in EU policies before full membership – while insisting reform must be genuine. Strengthening the rule of law, media freedom, and judicial independence, he stated, are essential for both democracy and security.

H.E. Alfred Moisiu, former president of Albania and chair of ISCP-Balkans, warned that unresolved issues in the Balkans, particularly Kosovo–Serbia relations, pose risks to long-term stability. He criticized the inconsistency of several EU member states not recognizing Kosovo, which undermines normalization efforts. He argued that Serbia's refusal to fully abandon claims over Kosovo, accompanied by increased arms purchases and ties to Russia and China, signals potential future conflict. H.E. Moisiu highlighted the role of history, foreign interference, and Serbia's domestic politics in perpetuating tensions. He urged the EU to act decisively before crises escalate, stressing that Kosovo's independence must be respected and safeguarded to prevent the region from becoming unstable again.

Panel I: Resilience in Transition – Building Stable Democracies in the Western Balkans

H.E. Fatmir Sejdiu, former president of Kosovo, reflected on his country's history of peaceful resistance and suffering under Serbian repression, culminating in the 1998–99 war, mass killings, and forced expulsions. He credited the international community for ending the violence and helping Kosovo build its institutions. Today, Kosovo is recognized by over 120 states and seeks to contribute actively to regional and global democratic structures. However, Serbia continues destabilizing actions, including provocations and the Banjika attack, which he described as state supported. H.E. Sejdiu acknowledged Kosovo's internal weaknesses – political infighting, corruption, and governance challenges – but emphasized the need for proactive policymaking, strong alliances with the West, and harmonization with shifting global dynamics to secure lasting peace and progress.



H.E. Albana Dautllari, Albania's ambassador to Belgium, outlined Albania's significant reforms and strong commitment to democratic resilience and EU integration. She highlighted Albania's justice reform as one of Europe's most comprehensive and emphasized progress in governance, digitalization, transparency, and media protections. Albania supports regional cooperation initiatives and consistently promotes dialogue and stability, she affirmed. As a NATO member, it aligns fully with EU foreign policy and contributes to European security. She emphasized that EU membership is the central goal shaping Albania's reforms, and current momentum, seen in recent negotiation milestones, gives the Western Balkans real hope. She urged all regional actors to focus on the future rather than past grievances, stressing that EU integration offers peace, prosperity, and unity.



Hon. Jovan Jovanović, former member of Serbia's Parliament and ambassador to Indonesia, delivered a candid assessment of Serbia's internal political deterioration and the dangers posed by authoritarian tendencies. He described weakened parliamentary oversight, captured institutions, and a "paramilitary camp" known as 'Ćaciland' near key government offices in Belgrade, symbolizing democratic backsliding. Serbia, he warned, is at a critical moment, especially regarding decisions involving Russian-owned energy assets. Western tolerance of Serbia's democratic erosion has contributed to the current instability, leaving the country neither democratic nor secure. Hon. Jovanović stressed the need to revitalize democracy through support for civil society, countering disinformation, and strengthening EU mechanisms, such as the new Democracy Shield. He called for creative, people-centered engagement strategies to rebuild trust in European integration.



Panel II: Beyond Enlargement – The Balkans in a New European Security Order

The panel's scheduled moderator, **Hon. Klajda Gjosh**a, former minister of European Integration for Albania, was delayed, so **Mr. Gani Rroshi**, director of UPF-Balkans, opened the second session. He framed the session's theme, noting that geopolitical shifts, including the war in Ukraine, have renewed EU interest in the region. He welcomed the distinguished panelists and introduced each speaker, posing targeted questions to guide discussion on security, enlargement, and regional stability.



Hon. MEP Ondřej Kolář of the delegation to the EU-Moldova Parliamentary Association Committee of the European Parliament, from the Czech Republic, focused on the growing difficulty of defending EU enlargement, both to EU citizens and to aspiring member states. He argued that enlargement is fundamentally a security issue: a larger, more united EU is a stronger and safer EU. Hon. Kolář acknowledged contradictions inside the Union, such as member states that undermine common EU policies, which complicate the enlargement narrative. He expressed concern about political stagnation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where leaders rely on the Dayton system as an excuse for inaction. Hon. Kolář also warned that EU complacency risks losing influence to external actors like Russia, China, and Turkey, as seen in Georgia. He affirmed that the EU must explain reforms better and take a more proactive,

strategic approach to enlargement.

Hon. Marija Miteva, government spokesperson and former member of Parliament from North Macedonia, said that European integration is a core security matter for Europe in an age of hybrid threats. She described North Macedonia's significant reforms and sacrifices – including constitutional changes, a new flag, and a new country name – yet the accession process remains blocked by bilateral disputes, causing deep frustration and "enlargement fatigue." She emphasized North Macedonia's commitment to European security, including signing a Security and Defense Partnership with the EU, bringing €15 million in support. Hon. Miteva stressed that the Western Balkans must be fully included in Europe's security architecture and that a values-based partnership is essential for regional stability and shared prosperity.



Dr. Michael Balcomb, senior advisor at UPF-EUME, emphasized that stable democracy and peace in the Western Balkans require not only strong institutions but moral and civic leadership. He proposed four steps: strengthening local leadership networks across ethnic lines; establishing structured cooperation between spiritual/moral leaders and political institutions; linking values-based leadership to real reforms that improve daily life; and training community leaders to counter hybrid threats. Dr. Balcomb stressed that moral leadership can be costly. He noted that many individuals around the world have been imprisoned for defending truth and democracy, citing the recent imprisonment of 82-year-old UPF co-founder Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, jailed for urging respect for democratic principles. He highlighted UPF's work and called for defending religious freedom, noting recent imprisonments of civic and religious leaders. True peace, he argued, requires humility, empathy, and personal transformation.

Hon. MEP Tomislav Sokol of the delegation to the EU-Serbia Stabilization and Association Parliamentary Committee of the European Parliament, from Croatia, delivered a direct and critical assessment of EU policy in the Western Balkans, describing it as largely unsuccessful over the past 30 years. He identified Serbia as the biggest source of regional instability due to democratic backsliding, media control, close ties with Russia, and efforts to influence Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina. He argued that Bosnia's internal divisions remain unresolved and that EU nation-building efforts have failed. Hon. Sokol listed Montenegro and Albania as the only countries close to EU membership, while North Macedonia remains blocked despite major sacrifices. Citing the war in Ukraine as having renewed EU interest in enlargement, creating a brief window of opportunity, he insisted that the EU must use this momentum, support pro-European forces, invest economically, and counter external influence.