

THE WESTERN BALKANS: EUROPE'S (UN-)WANTED CHALLENGE?

OpenForum (Budapest)

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Deadline: April 3, 2009.

Please send your applications with the subject »OpenForum Budapest« to the following address: office@citizens-of-europe.eu.

Information: http://projects.citizens-of-europe.eu/openfora/?page_id=259.

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What is the OpenForum Budapest about?

The European Union proved to be really effective in using its soft power in Central-Eastern Europe. The enlargement process that was based on strict conditionality made it transparent what the EU wants, offers and demands in return. The candidate countries there in principle needed to reform their countries themselves in order to join the Union as equal members. European integration has been a voluntary project for everybody involved since its very beginnings; it has been designed even as counter model to imperial (national) politics.

The European Union has accepted an even stronger role of a »civilizatory« power in the Western Balkans. It has been a long-standing supporter (witness the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe), it took a strong role in overcoming national problems like in Macedonia, and growing international opposition notwithstanding it has become a guarantor of state-building, economic development and civil reconciliation in the region in Bosnia, Kosovo and beyond.

However, the concern with institutional reforms in the EU throughout the last years has diminished prospects of further enlargement. Moreover, European public attention for the developments in the Western Balkans is by far lower than the EU's role and responsibility would suggest. Only urgent crises or fundamental decisions bring this part of Europe into the news in most of the EU member states and usually countries like Montenegro or even Serbia are getting out of the general horizon quite quickly afterwards.

During OpenForum Budapest we will among others focus on the following questions:

- What can the European Union do in the fields of efficient institutions and sustainable economy in order to support the process of accession?
- Does the Union really have the means to succeed?
- Is the role of the European Union in the Western Balkans in accordance with its own interests, fundamentals and aims?
- What does the lack of public attention mean?
- Could more attention be gained and if so, how? What about citizens opinions on the matter? What can be done to bring this vital decisions closer to them? On what fields is civil engagement and cooperation between activists from different Western Balkan countries or (minority) groups possible, and how can it be intensified?

What are OpenFora?

OpenFora are conceptual platforms in the form of weekend debates. They set up spaces where European diversity and citizenship can be experienced in practice. Their objective is to bring together people from all over Europe regardless of their age, social or professional background in order to exchange views and experience on topics related to current social and political life in Europe. So far, we have realised eight of them Berlin, Vilnius, Wrzesnia, Pozarevac, Prague, Paris, Brussels and Cascais.

The hosts

The *Hungarian European Society* is a non-governmental and non-partisan organisation that intends to be involved in the ongoing international dialogue on the future of liberal democracies (cf. <http://www.europesociety.hu>).

Citizens of Europe is a group of individuals who feel responsible for the future of Europe. The common aim is to promote active citizenship (cf. <http://www.citizens-of-europe.eu>).



Whom would we like to meet in Budapest?

Everyone willing to actively engage in an intensive debate characterized by low hierarchies is welcome to this OpenForum. All opinions are valuable and will be considered as expressions of personal perspectives. Participants are invited to present whatever opinion they have on the subject matter; yet they need to be prepared to see their positions questioned and should enjoy taking part in a creative process of recalibrating thought by joint reflection. Experienced moderators assist participants during the debate. Academic and professional backgrounds are relevant for us only to the extent that they allow for interesting contributions to the debate.

What will you gain by participating in the OpenForum Budapest?

- You will get to know local and international associations and initiatives;
- You will network and exchange experiences among a pool of exciting professionals;
- You will experiment with and appreciate mutual respect and recognition when initiating and participating in a transnational European debate;
- You will leave the event with more (i.e. new, productive and challenging) questions than you brought with you in the first place.

