



We are Europe IV Liberal Voices from the EU Neighbourhood

Edited by
Emil Kirjas
and Jasmina Mršo

BDF
BORIS DIVKOVIĆ
FOUNDATION

elf

WE ARE 4 EUROPE: LIBERAL VOICES FROM THE EU NEIGHBOURHOOD

Edited by Emil Kirjas and Jasmina Mršo

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EUROPEAN LIBERAL FORUM (ELF)

The European Liberal Forum (ELF) is the official political foundation of the European Liberal Party, the ALDE Party. Together with 51 member organisations, we work all over Europe to bring new ideas into the political debate, to provide a platform for discussion, and to empower citizens to make their voices heard. ELF was founded in 2007 to strengthen the liberal and democrat movement in Europe. Our work is guided by liberal ideals and a belief in the principle of freedom. We stand for a future-oriented Europe that offers opportunities for every citizen. ELF is engaged on all political levels, from the local to the European. We bring together a diverse network of national foundations, think tanks and other experts. At the same time, we are also close to, but independent from, the ALDE Party and other Liberal actors in Europe. In this role, our forum serves as a space for an open and informed exchange of views between a wide range of different actors.

BORIS DIVKOVIĆ FOUNDATION (BDF)

The Boris Divković Foundation was established in 2013 with the aim of advancing political science and political practice in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region. Since then, the Foundation has promoted a responsible policy, which serves all citizens and operates on the principles of equality, coexistence and solidarity. The Boris Divković Foundation is marked by the desire to harmonize political activity with basic moral principles, which is the idea that Boris Divković advocated during his engagement. The widespread opinion that a combination of morality and politics is impossible is only a consequence of the decades-long rule of irresponsible politicians. The Boris Divkovic Foundation starts from the assumption that a combination of morality and politics is possible, but that it is necessary to carry out ideological decontamination of the notion of politics in public space, which would create conditions for including honest and responsible people in political processes in the Western Balkans.

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Introduction (Not) "Pulling the Plug" on EU Enlargement?

In the past, it would have been impossible to discuss enlargement of the European Union to the East and Western Balkans without determining whether accession to the EU was still an option. The issue has been discussed in the aforementioned regions and within the EU. While some were arguing that ever-expanding EU is extremely challenging, others found it to be rather fortunate and essential for strengthening the EU's geopolitical position. However, most people believe that the process was, at most, comatose.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has a wide-ranging impact on the entire world, and it has resuscitated discussions about potential EU enlargement. The expert analyses are mainly focused on who or what has caused the shift in EU processes after a decade of stagnation. If the EU enlargement is not an option for EU's neighbouring countries, then these regions will become of strategic importance for other geopolitical interests, particularly those of Russia and China.

Recognizing the importance of enlargement, European leaders assessed the progress of Ukraine and Moldova, as well as the potential candidate status for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Also, a recent agreement signed at the Berlin Process Summit¹ is most likely a response to the Open Balkan Initiative that Serbia launched earlier.

The disagreement among EU citizens over whether to pursue further enlargement or not has forced EU officials to consider geopolitical and internal aspects of the future enlargement demands. As a result, rebranding and re-evaluating the enlargement processes and the structure of the European Union are put forward in EU circles. The most recent proposal of the French President Emmanuel Macron, who, rather than advocating for expansion of the Union, suggested a "European Political Community (EPC)" initiative which "embraces" most of the European countries. The initiative was supported by a number of the EU Member States, and its first summit was held in

Prague. At the same time, it has also raised scepticism as it promoted a community of shared destiny, while neglecting the values of the EU.

Naturally, all these developments have sparked debate in European liberal circles. Thus, the EU Mentorship programme, supported by the European Liberal Forum in collaboration with the Boris Divkovic Foundation, aims to ensure mentorship for liberal politicians and political activists from selected EU neighbouring countries. This program helps the participants to align their policies and activism with the EU guidelines. An annual report of the EU Mentorship project analyses recent developments and proposes new directions for advancement.

However, the fourth edition of the EU Mentorship Programme took a different approach. Instead of the usual mentoring on accession talks and EU membership, participants of the 2022 EU Programme learned about a platform that will amplify their voices and provide guidance to design a model of what liberal political activists from the EU neighbourhood want for their home countries in the future.

The following set of letters was written by participants from Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. They are brave liberal political activists, leaders, and freedom fighters who have decided to start a direct dialogue with the selected EU leaders. This strategy differs from the perspective that their governments usually present, as they typically reach the "EU bubble". Therefore, we invite readers to read the following letters with an open mind and heart, as the authors seek and look forward to responses.

1 <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2022/11/03/berlin-process-western-balkans-leaders-sign-agreements-on-increased-mobility/>



Letter to MEPs

Anes Hodžić
Bosnia and Herzegovina

LETTER 1

Letter 1

Letter to MEPs

Anes Hodžić

From: Anes Hodžić
anes_hodzic@hotmail.com

To: Mr. Xavier Bettel
Prime minister
The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg

Subject: EU Mentorship letter about
Bosnia and Herzegovina

Dear Mr. Bettel,

My name is Anes Hodžić, and I am a participant of the EU Mentorship Program organized by the European Liberal Forum (ELF) and Boris Divković Foundation from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The goal of this program is to improve the participants' knowledge on the European Union, develop new skills that we as politicians and activists will apply in the future, and share a first-hand perspective on how the European Union is organized.

As a student of International Relations and Diplomacy, I have participated in multiple workshops and programs focused on Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to the European Union. Although most of these programs have solid theoretical background, they usually lack practical examples. For that

reason, I often wonder how things might possibly change if we only discuss the issues without taking any action.

I was excited to learn that one of the tasks of the EU Mentorship Program was to write a letter to a European official who is familiar with the situation in our countries and supports our European path.

Choosing such politician among hundreds of Members of the European Parliament and 27 different state parliaments, members of European Commission and European Council, presidents, prime ministers and members of government was a difficult and overwhelming task which required hundreds of hours of research.

In the middle of my search, an article "We cannot disappoint them": Bettel on Balkans caught my attention. Although sceptical about the article, I was drawn in by your pragmatic but also emphatic views on the West Balkans and your bold statement that the EU would not be complete without them. I immediately knew who I should address my letter to.

As you are well aware, Bosnia and Herzegovina does not have the European Union candidate status. The numerous causes of this point to the same culprits: corrupt ethno-nationalist ruling elites of the country. The European Union Report from 2019 highlighted the 14 priorities that Bosnia and Herzegovina must achieve to be considered for the candidate status. After

I often wonder how things might possibly change if we only discuss the issues without taking any action

three years of inaction, the priorities were reduced to only eight in October this year. The Commission was eventually recommended granting candidate status to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and this issue will be further discussed by the European Council Union in December.

Although my country has not met conditions set by the EU, I respectfully ask you to support granting Bosnia and Herzegovina candidate status. This would give new hope to the country, as its citizens already emigrate to EU countries for education and work. Two non-nationalistic members of the tripartite Presidency were elected in the most recent elections, paving the way for a reformist and pro-European government. For the first time since the end of the Bosnian war in 1995, this demonstrates that it is not late for reforming our country. However, for this we need assistance and, a token of hope from the European Union.

It is important that the changes happen soon, as intentions to emigrate from Bosnia and Herzegovina are widespread in the population. Our friends and neighbours, colleagues and family members are all leaving in pursuit of better opportunities abroad. They are tired of living in a country that is hopelessly stuck in the past. Granting Bosnia and Herzegovina a candidate status would prevent this and show our citizens that there is a place for us in the European Union. While being a small step for the EU, it would show the residents of Bosnia and Herzegovina that there is still a way forward for them and that they are not forgotten. To finish, I would like to quote Harvey Milk who said: "I know that you cannot live on hope alone, but without it life is not work living. And you, and you, and you, have got to give them hope."

Thank you for your time and consideration of this letter. I know that as a Prime Minister you have a very busy schedule. Nevertheless, I hope that our common European future has a place in your agenda.

Truthfully yours,



Anes Hodžić



Letter to MEPs

Ahmed Kosovac
Bosnia and Herzegovina

LETTER

2

Letter 2

Letter to MEPs

 Ahmed Kosovac

From: Mr. Ahmed Kosovac
ahmed@nasastranka.ba

To: MEP Adrián Vázquez Lázara
 European Parliament

Dear MEP Vázquez Lázara,

Although I am sure you have seen many beautiful places in Europe, you would probably enjoy the greenery, the energy, the tranquillity of the nature of Bosnia and Herzegovina on the train journey from Sarajevo to Mostar. A few years ago, I was a tour guide in Mostar to a group of young Dutch political activists. During the indescribably wonderful and slow-moving journey from Sarajevo to Mostar, I told them the story about Mostar – a beautiful city divided by a street, and a home to both Bosniaks and Croats. This story is quite typical for my country and region.

I am Ahmed Kosovac, a young political activist and elected local councillor of a municipality of the City of Sarajevo. As a member of Nasa Stranka, the liberal party of Bosnia and Herzegovina, I am a participant of the EU mentorship project supported by the European Liberal Forum. Within this project, I get the opportunity to work with the likeminded liberals from the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership.

I am writing this letter to you due to your work experience in Bosnia and Herzegovina that has certainly left certain imprints. If those imprints are still strong and if you believe we can unite, then I am asking you to help us become part of the EU family. At the moment, our attention is on election results and potential new state and federal coalition formation. This system is lengthy and absurd, and in the midst of it, Brussels recommends granting Bosnia the status of EU candidate country. The same wording was used for Ukraine and Moldova, as well as Serbia in 2011. This indicates that Bosnia and Herzegovina should expect the candidate status soon. Although its citizens deserve that, its politicians do not.

For that reason, I would like to personally ask you to insist on the 14 priorities and eight additional steps the Commission requires of Bosnia and Herzegovina to accomplish. Ms. Bisera Turković, Foreign Affairs Minister of Bosnia, said that "our future is within the European family". However, we need to take initiative to accomplish that. And so far, the government has done nothing but further polarize and frighten the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Please be vocal about the need for a value-driven rather than profit-driven growth in our society. I am looking forward to our future in the EU, although we must put in a lot of effort. We shall do our part, and I kindly request your assistance. Can we count on you?

Sincerely,

Ahmed Kosovac

Please be vocal about the need for a value-driven rather than profit-driven growth in our society



Letter to MEPs

Nikola Tamburkovski
Serbia

LETTER

3

Letter 3

Letter to MEPs

**Nikola
Tamburkovski**

Dear MEP Beer,

My name is Nikola Tamburkovski and I come from Serbia. I am a participant of the EU Mentorship Programme of the European Liberal Forum (ELF). It provides political mentorship for liberal political activists from the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries. Our countries are engaged in the EU enlargement process, and we stand for public advocacy of EU integration in the countries we come from.

I am a member of the Free Citizens Movement (PSG), a liberal, pro-European and pro-democratic political party represented in the National Assembly of Serbia and a potential ALDE member. Within the party, I joined the Policy Team of PSG, and I am the initiator and coordinator of the PSG's Foundation for Liberal Public Policy.

Serbia is a member of the Western political bloc, and achieving full EU membership is one of PGS's major programme objectives, as well as my personal commitment. The party strives to democratize Serbia by defeating the authoritarian rule in elections and establishing social and political plurality. Our political philosophy is rooted in upholding the human rights, the rule of law and the European acquis,

gender equality and protection of minorities that are marginalized in Serbia, including ethnic minorities, LGBTI and others. Contrary to many parties in Serbia, we support the promotion of peace and cooperation in the region, and this includes reaching comprehensive agreements with Kosovo based on Kosovo's membership in all international organizations.

I am writing this letter with great enthusiasm to the FDP deputy president, a Renew Europe MEP and vice president of the European Parliament for several reasons. Firstly, the PSG and the FDP share numerous similar ideologies and policies. Moreover, the PSG considers the FDP to be the closest political party in Germany and the entire EU, as well as a model for progress in many other ways. Secondly, the PSG eagerly followed the formation of a new German coalition government (SPD, Greens, FDP) at the end of 2021, with our liberal and pro-European allies in the country, expecting it would cause a shift in Serbia's approach and behaviour within the EU integration process. Lastly, we believed that the liberal, social democratic and green forces' growing power in the European institutions and the European Parliament would add to the movement in that direction.

We operate under the extremely challenging circumstances as citizens and as a party. Serbia is under a ten-year domination of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and its authoritarian and populist leader Aleksandar Vučić. In the past decade, Serbia was among ten countries in the world with greatest decline in democracy and democratic standards.

I would
really
appreciate
it if you
could
discuss
how we
can work
together to
encourage
my country

According to the credible evaluations, Serbia is classified as a hybrid regime, rather than a democratic state. Free and fair elections, the status of the political opposition, freedom of the media and free access to information, and attitudes toward a civil society that values critical thought are the areas most at risk.

At the same time, Serbia's progress toward the EU has been significantly slowed down for a number of years. The only proper reform initiatives taken by our government are just statements on commitment to European integration. Also, due to the specific relationship with Russia and China, the problem of the government's lack of desire to align with the EU's foreign and security policy is present for a number of years. This problem emerged with the Russia's invasion on Ukraine in February this year, and compliance is now at its lowest point in history. Failure to impose sanctions on Russia has endangered Serbia's whole path to the EU.

There is optimism among political actors and members of Serbia's pro-European and pro-democracy public that the European Union's firm and direct demands require of Belgrade regime to end its policy of "sitting on two chairs" and make a clear geopolitical decision, while allowing free and democratic political competition on the internal level will have a significant impact on the country's situation. That will function as a motivator for all internal players who are supporting the right causes at this important historical moment.

In this regard, I am very interested in learning more about the potential external mechanisms that might be used in the near future to promote democratization in Serbia, whether they originate from the EU as a whole, the European Parliament, or the bilateral ties between Germany and Serbia, which are greatly influenced by the current German government. Your personal thoughts and strategies for halting the authoritarian, anti-liberal and anti-Western wave not only in Serbia, but also in the rest of the region, are also of interest to me. One of the main issues in Serbia, apart from the current government's strategy, is the dominant mood of public opinion. Namely, about 80% of the citizens oppose the imposition of sanctions on Russia and the achievement of a comprehensive agreement with Kosovo, and for the first time, more citizens expressed opposition to Serbia's accession to the EU. For the benefit of Serbia, the

region and the EU, we must work together to alter this.

I am a young man who plans to stay and live in Serbia, a liberal and pro-European political activist, and a representative of the PSG parliamentary political party. I would really appreciate it if you could discuss how we can work together to encourage my country to take serious steps toward European integration, Western and Europe-allegiance, and at the very least, to resemble the country you are from. At the same time, I can reassure you that the Free Citizens Movement, which is fully in favour of EU integration, is your trustworthy and sincere partner.

Sincerely,
Nikola Tamburkovski



Letter to MEPs

Nevena Lujinović
Serbia

LETTER

4

Letter 4

Letter to MEPs

 Nevena Lujinović

Dear Mr. Grošelj,

I am writing this letter to you from Belgrade, with a strong desire for the current state of affairs regarding Serbia's EU membership to change immediately. I sincerely hope that you are motivated and ready to assist in re-establishing my country's path toward joining the European family.

My name is Nevena Lujinovic, and I am a participant of the EU Mentorship Programme, which aims to educate and inspire political activists from the Western Balkans to advance EU's integration process and take the required steps for the countries they represent. This programme helps strengthening the capacities of the participants' political parties. I appreciate the opportunity provided by the EU Mentorship Program to discuss the challenges my country is currently facing and look for solutions as an Executive Board Member of the Free Citizens Movement (PSG). This party has always strived to promote European values and move Serbia closer to full EU membership. I strongly believe that Serbia, the biggest Western Balkans EU candidate, should lead this region in pursuing EU membership rather than reversing the process, as highlighted in the most recent European Commission progress report.

I pay close attention to your work, and I want to thank you for your engagement as a Shadow Rapporteur on Serbia's EU membership as well as for all the support you have given thus far. Sadly, I wholly agree with your present position on suspension of accession negotiations with the Serbian government as it continues to reject calls to support the EU's shared position on implementing sanctions against Russia.

It is now evident that Serbia, under Alexander Vučić's leadership, is openly aiming to join the EU while also openly following Putin's totalitarian style. Moreover, the Serbian government has regressed in areas like the rule of law, human rights, media freedom, and freedom of expression. Due to the severe circumstances the world is experiencing now, this should not be tolerated much longer. Serbia needs transparent approach about its intentions and either turn away from Russia or stop as though it is seriously interested in joining the EU. Despite my desire for Serbian journey to the EU to proceed unhindered, I still believe that the existing regime should be held accountable for rejecting EU values. In the end, it does not represent the best interest of its citizens.

However, I cannot be a silent observer. I commit to be pro-active and focus on what we can accomplish as a team to get through the current obstacles. This team consists of the genuinely pro-European opposition parties in Serbia on the one hand, and the EU representatives in charge of the accession process on the other. We ally to raise awareness and change the mind-set of Serbian citizens

I commit to be pro-active and focus on what we can accomplish as a team to get through the current obstacles

whose general attitude toward EU membership has turned unfavourable due to harsh and irresponsible anti-EU rhetoric of Serbian elected politicians. The majority of Serbians choose to live in the European countries rather than in Russia. That demonstrates that the EU is actually perceived favourable by the general public. It is possible to influence the public which would put the pressure on the current regime whose only real concern is maintaining power. Consequently, the Serbian government will either need to change its disastrous politics or to accept the victory of the pro-European forces in the upcoming elections. The EU, Southeast Europe and Serbia would all benefit from that outcome.

I sincerely hope that you, as the member of the Delegation to the EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee, will be open to sharing your opinion on the matter and responding to my initiative. I can guarantee you that the Free Citizens Movement, which strongly supports EU integration, is a reliable and honest partner.

Let me conclude by expressing the hope that our conversation expands beyond mere correspondence. I would thus like to kindly invite you to visit us in Belgrade, where we can enjoy wonderful atmosphere and food, meet great friends and exchange ideas.

Sincerely,

Nevena Lujinovic



Letter to MEPs

Mariam Usenashvili
Georgia

LETTER

5

Letter 5

Letter to MEPs

Mariam Usenashvili

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Mariam Usenashvili, and I am a Georgian participant of EU Mentorship Program. Supported by the European Liberal Forum it aims to integrate young activists from the West Balkans and the Eastern Partnership in the EU integration of the countries they represent.

I am a young lawyer, working as a legal researcher at the Georgian think-tank Civic Idea. I have completed numerous studies on Chinese and Russian 'soft influence' in Georgia and a few larger reports on the South Caucasus in general. Also, I co-authored a comparative analytical research on Georgia's constitutional order and responses to the Covid-19 crisis titled "Virus of Urgency", in which we compared the legal reactions to Covid-19 in Georgia and Europe and made suggestions for the Georgian institutions. Through my research, I came to the conclusion that the Russian and Chinese soft power poses a serious problem in Georgia, especially when it comes to the country's EU integration as well as the EU's influence in the region at large.

As a country that seeks EU membership, Georgia's entry into force of the association agreement between the European Union, the

European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, on the one hand, and Georgia, on the other, on July 1, 2016, was an extremely significant milestone. Since then, Georgia has made an effort to uphold its end of agreement, which has resulted in several legislative amendments that have helped Georgia become closer to EU standards. However, the successful implementation of the law in practice is still a significant norm. The Georgians openly support this initiative and publicly declare their desire to join the EU. The best example of this occurred on June 20, 2022, when tens of thousands of Georgians demonstrated in support of EU integration in front of the Parliament in Tbilisi, shortly after the European Commission recommended delaying Georgian's grant of candidate status.

When the EU Mentorship Program offered me the chance to get in touch with a person help Georgia's process of integrating into EU, I did not think twice. I decided to address you since you are a very knowledgeable member of the EU-Georgia Parliamentary Association Committee who is aware of both the successes and challenges encountered throughout the integration process. I am aware that many young Georgians, like myself, rely on your kindness and support.

The fact that Georgia's government only complies with its commitments under the association agreement on paper would not surprise you. The new laws are either not applied in practice or are applied incorrectly. The government's lackadaisical attitude is the main cause of this. Strongly troubling are the

Your opinion on Georgia's EU integration process is very important, as are your recommendations for the civil sector's initiatives

positions that openly support pro-Russian and the lobbying of Chinese interests in a number of fields using corruptive means. When it comes to Georgia's integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic frameworks, they occasionally persuade Georgian government officials to make inconsistent and clearly anti-Western statements, either indirectly or directly, furthering the propaganda objectives of the Kremlin. The Georgian people have consistently responded to such behaviour in a very resolute manner, primarily through civil protests. However, despite the poor level of education in the country, the prevalence of false information, and the high level of corruption, the governing party consistently wins elections despite flagrant violations of the law. In conclusion, the influence of Chinese and Russian soft power severely impedes the country's pro-Western trajectory.

It is essential that representatives of the European Union get involved in solving these issues. On the one hand, Georgia's progress depends on support from its European integration. It also has strategic importance for the European Union, as it would be a step in the right direction against Russian and Chinese soft power in the neighbourhood and within the EU. The most crucial issue is that Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova all receive candidate status from the European Union without the "trio" being split up. Moreover, just as important as watching the actual elections is the involvement of EU representatives in the pre-election period.

Your opinion on Georgia's EU integration process is very important, as are your recommendations for the civil sector's initiatives. I am thrilled for the opportunity to speak with you. I believe in working together for the benefit of both parties, and I am still convinced that your recommendations and participation will enable me and my fellow citizens - women and men - to make progress toward the advancement of our country. I hope that our communication will go beyond our virtual correspondence and that you will visit Georgia to learn more about its uniqueness and culture.

Faithfully,
Mariam



Letter to MEPs

Dejancho Cvetanovski
Macedonia

LETTER

6

Letter 6

Letter to MEPs

**Dejancho
Cvetanovski**

Dear MEP Joveva,

First of all, let me briefly introduce myself.

My name is Dejancho Cvetanovski. Unlike many of my fellow compatriots I decided to remain in my native Macedonia, where I have been politically active as a member of the Liberal Democratic Party for almost 30 years. Currently, I sit on its Executive Board. I am happily married to Andriana and a proud father of Jana. You might remember that we met this summer at the Skopje Pride.

The major reason I started my political activism immediately after the national independence in 1991 was my first belief that as a nation we are entitled to improved living conditions and a clearer perspective for our children. Our dream has always been to make Macedonia a respectable place to live, within the European Union.

As part of the EU Mentorship Programme, I have the task of contacting a representative of the European Institutions. I didn't hesitate in choosing you. I assume you are familiar with my country given that you often visit there and that your forefathers are from Macedonia. I am also aware that you are head of the EP's Macedonia Friendship Group, which offers

many opportunities for improving mutual relations and increasing support for my homeland.

I would like to express my gratitude for your time. As the Chairwoman of the EU-MK friendship group and a member of the European Parliament, I believe you contribute particularly to the EU's acknowledgment of our principles by sharing your knowledge to your fellow MPs.

Many challenges preoccupy Macedonia. Mainly, they are related to both the country's internal political situation and to the economic crisis provoked by the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's military action in Ukraine. These are causes, too. First of all, we allowed the greatest minds to pass up key positions in the country. We have now endured an agony for almost 30 years. One could argue that it is much more challenging to get on a right path afterwards if the correct one was not picked in the beginning. Of course, it is not impossible to choose the right course.

On the other hand, we have faced a number of obstacles on our way to EU membership, particularly from our neighbours, whose unreasonable expectations (demands) have held Macedonia stuck for close to 30 years. It started with Greece disputing our country's name, despite the international law giving us the right to call ourselves and feel the way we want. We were able to resolve that to some extent, adding "North" as a geographical designation to our country's name. Then Bulgaria imposed dispute which contests the

Our dream has always been to make Macedonia a respectable place to live, within the European Union

fundamental notion of a distinct Macedonian nation and Macedonian language. The solution to this problem is a requirement for Macedonia to join the EU.

To little effect, several bilateral agreements have been reached to address the issue. In a sense, Bulgaria succeeded in forcing its historical narrative on Macedonia and Macedonians as a member state of the EU by pressuring the other members to accept its demands as a prerequisite for the opening of accession negotiations. A significant number of Macedonians came to that conclusion based on the outcome and the acceptance of the so-called "French proposal". Thus, a bilateral issue totally unrelated to the Copenhagen criteria or the aquis communitaire became part of the accession negotiations. There is scepticism about the process even among those citizens who support the EU and want to look forward to the future rather than backward.

Such issues and obstacles are escalating the anti-EU sentiment among the citizens, especially among ethnic Macedonians. Fortunately, the majority currently still supports Macedonia's EU membership. If we do not work together to persuade the citizens that the EU accession process is founded on merit and the Copenhagen criteria, that majority may change. The nationalists and the populists throughout the region are carefully watching these developments and use it as a strong argument in their anti-EU rhetoric. I believe you are well aware of the circumstances that Macedonia and the Western Balkans are currently experiencing.

I'm interested to learn your suggestions for how we can work through this challenging situation as a team. Do you already have any plans for how to win over more Macedonians to the EU in the near future? LDP is reliable partner if have any thoughts and suggestions for what the country should do.

Allow me to ask that you continue to uphold your principles and provide selfless assistance to Macedonia as it works to join the EU. Continue to raise awareness of Macedonia's effort to join the EU through the MK-EU friendship group. Your words matter and will strengthen your colleagues' support for Macedonia.

I would be glad if we can keep in touch in the future. Nothing is more effective than having a face-to-face discussion whether it be in Brussels, Ljubljana or somewhere else. In case you visit Macedonia, I would be glad to meet you.

I remain at your disposal if you need additional information for your next political work.

Sincerely yours,

Dejancho Cvetanovski



Letter to MEPs

Luka Nikolić
Montenegro

LETTER
7

Letter 7

Letter to MEPs

Luka Nikolić

Dear Mr. Flego,

I am writing this letter as a well-known optimist and committed believer in bright and federal future for all of Europe. During the most geopolitically dynamic period since the fall of the Berlin Wall, it is an utterly demanding task to get stakeholders' attention back to an alliance's enlargement policy. As a participant of the EU Mentorship project, it gives me great hope that EU's enlargement agenda is still one of the main priorities. Throughout this project we strived to connect political voices from the Western Balkans region with EU decision-makers. We were able to develop numerous creative policy proposals for accelerating and enriching the enlargement process thanks to our solution-based methodology.

Despite recent domestic challenges, Montenegro has maintained its position as a regional leader in the process of European integration, particularly when considering the number of opened and provisionally closed negotiation chapters in addition to other empirical criteria. In fact, due to the enlargement fatigue on the one hand and anti-EU parties gaining political power on the other, negotiations have slowed down in the previous years. This in no way changes the fact that Montenegro is a leader in integrations with

a feasible and tangible negotiation procedure. Your participation in numerous EU bodies ensures that Montenegrin efforts to join the alliance have a distinct and respected supporter. As an MEP and member of EU-Montenegro Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee, you have been unwaveringly committed to promoting Montenegro's membership in the proud European family. We were honoured by your visit in 2020 and delighted to hear that you believed Montenegro and the Western Balkan countries to be politically, geographically, and culturally equivalent to Europe.

Unfortunately, the voice that Euro-sceptic political actors have largely taken over in Montenegrin politics may now be heard. Despite the formal evaluation of the negotiation process, the Copenhagen criteria have not been significantly advanced. Interference with judiciary reforms and losing momentum in fight against pervasive corruption and organized crime are particularly risky. Infringements on freedom of media and close relationship between clergy and top government officials are two other major ways that Montenegro is exposed to negative influences.

Nonetheless, we must cooperate to prevent any interference with Montenegro's prior obligations to the European Union and vice versa. As a member of D-ME, you have the right to insist on faster and more efficient solutions. This would increase international and local public pressure on political structures that are delaying the process for their own personal gains. Without an effective judicial system,

If you could help coordinate expert advice and training in legal and political matters, that would be of immense importance

Montenegro will not be able to fight against organized crime groups that are increasingly working with politicians. If you could help coordinate expert advice and training in legal and political matters, that would be of immense importance. Putting into action the encouraging measures announced in the wake of ALDE Dublin Summit including the exact date for having representatives from candidate countries as observers in the work of EU institutions would be a crucial step in laying the foundation for knowledge transfer in the respective states. Fostering a new generation of Montenegrin politicians is crucial because they will amp up the voice of the youth in a politically aging society.

Finally, please accept my sincere wishes for your upcoming visit to Montenegro where we can further discuss our respective negotiating positions and potential areas of cooperation. This will be an opportunity to arrange meetings with young and aspiring politicians who need support in advancing European values.

Yours sincerely,
Luka Nikolić



Letter to MEPs

Gor Badalyan
Armenia

LETTER

8

Letter 8

Letter to MEPs

 Gor Badalyan

From: Mr. Badalyan Gor
gor.badalyan.95@gmail.com

To: MEPAuštrevičius Petras
European Parliament

Brussels, 2022

Subject: Letter to MEPs

Dear MEP Auštrevičius,

The world we live in has recently become more complex altering significantly our future plans and strategies. I am writing this letter from a sunny country in light of these geopolitical changes, war, widespread aggression.

My name is Gor Badalyan, and my last name might tell you which country I am from. I am from Armenia, a small country in the Caucasus, or more precisely, a country in the Eastern Partnership. I am a graduate student in innovation management, actively involved in civil society, and the co-founder of two public organizations which focus on informal education and the development of rural communities, aiding villagers in improving community life through social entrepreneurship.

Since Armenia is a developing and flourishing country, we are optimistic about the future. Although it is true that our small size and limited resources frequently limit our ability to accomplish more and prevent us from being independent from Russian influence, we are confident that with the help of properly developed policies, we will soon be able to demonstrate all our positive sides as a democratic state. Armenia is frequently viewed as a crossroad connecting Europe and Asia. Perspectives on the path of EU integration can be rather positive as they offer excellent future for young people. Frequently asked question is what Armenia can offer the EU as it moves toward integration, and it is its quality human resources and human capital which are of great value.

There is excessive fear in response to the recent events in Ukraine since there is less trust in the major unions. However, as a young person, I can already see the beautiful and liberal environment that will grow even further as we move toward EU membership.

I admire your diligence and energy, and I am really excited as I write this letter. The content of my letter is about Armenia's inclusion into the EU, and not regional stabilization or conflict resolution. As a representative of civil society, I place high priority on the issue of visa liberalization since it will be a significant advancement toward integration. Your patience during the panel discussions on the topic of strengthening the Eastern Partnership is something I appreciate very much. I would like to emphasize how frequently you act as a

The fact that you treat problems and processes with maturity is what inspired me to address my letter to you

coordinator, providing a platform for all parties to voice concerns regarding the regional processes. The fact that you treat problems and processes with maturity is what inspired me to address my letter to you. And nobody would classify the work you have done as a simple task or a check list.

Within the scope of EU Mentorship project, I want to create an opportunity to bring up the subject of visa liberalization. Due to my professional background and years of experience, I am aware that the process should be made highly measurable and progress should be achieved in small steps. My participation in EU Mentorship project and raising this issue is one of these small steps.

The progress made in this direction is now relatively slow. The topic of liberalizing EU visas was fixed and underlined as a strategic element in the current authorities' agenda. According to the most recent research, the European side has assured that the European Commission appears to be approve that the member states are responsible for handling the issue. It is not advisable to bring the subject while several member countries have parliamentary and presidential elections. The impact of Covid-19 also reflected on this matter and had a negative effect on how these works were implemented and caused delays in the schedule.

Some member states are concerned that with the liberalization of visas, illegal immigration to their countries will increase due to migration flows and the Ukrainian conflict, and the agreement of all 27 countries is required to make a decision. I should also mention that, in recent years, the number of asylum seekers in EU countries has been consistently declining by about 30% yearly, and this is a key argument that will help this issue. The solution to this problem is to keep bringing it up and to create corridors for small countries like Armenia to move in the direction of integration. Additionally, I sincerely look forward to hearing your thoughts on the matter, as well as your personal opinion and the order in which you envision resolving it.

Getting closer to the union will give us the opportunity to increase our commitment to human rights, democracy, and the right to an independent and free life. We are people who want to be heard and who

want to uphold these values, just like the people in Ukraine. We also have the rights to long and strive for it. And I am sure that you will be the one to take on the enormous task of creating that wonderful reality and environment.

I look forward to our upcoming meeting, and I am happy to show you Armenia.

Sincerely,

Gor Badalyan



Letter to MEPs

Monika Zajkova
North Macedonia

LETTER

9

Letter 9

Letter to MEPs

Monika Zajkova

Dear Mr. Michel,

My name is Monika Zajkova, and it's a privilege to say that I am a Member of the Parliament of Republic of North Macedonia, a small country with rich history and cultural legacy.

My country is unique for so many reasons, including the breathtakingly beautiful orange-red landscapes in autumn; the snowy streets filled with joy and chatter of children; the sound of roasting chestnuts while sipping cinnamon mulled wine and, of course, the beautiful lakes and mountains provide a cool retreat in the hot summer nights. I believe that our country, whose primary industry is agriculture, has a lot to offer the EU.

Inspired by your speech at the UN Security Council, how "Russia is using food as a weapon of war, stealing grain, blockading ports and turning farmlands into battlefields", I thought about the food problems that everyone is experiencing these days, and decided to get in touch with you.

The political situation in my country is not ideal right now, but we have certainly seen worse days. Namely, people are still adjusting to signing the French proposal and the rising inflation is making matters worse. A significant problem that is affecting many farmers is the insufficient

purchase of grain. Given that we began the negotiations with the EU a long time ago and that there has not been any visible progress toward the goal of joining the EU, our citizens' difficult economic position is contributing to a loss of faith in the institutions and in the entire integration process in general.

The issues are challenging, but I still believe they can be solved. If we can help our citizens get through these crises, I believe that trust in the system and its institutions will return. Also, if we can give the people access to the most recent technology and export standards, they will be able to produce food of a better quality that is suitable for export to EU countries, which will help with the current financial crisis. In your opinion, what measures and regulations would you recommend as a potential solution for the problems we are facing? Did your country have similar decline? If so, did you come up with any solutions that worked well to address these problems?

I kindly invite you to visit our country and see our beautiful nation. You will enjoy your journey and create memories that you will always treasure. It is possible that after visiting North Macedonia and getting to know the people, you will be more inspired to propose solutions to the issues we face.

It would be an honor for me to meet you in person and discuss certain ideas, propositions; initiatives that I know would be very beneficial and helpful for myself and my country.

Best regards,

I believe that our country, whose primary industry is agriculture, has a lot to offer the EU

Conclusion A Process for the People

The debate whether to grant Bosnia and Herzegovina candidate status is the most recent step in the EU enlargement process, as seen from the perspective of November 2022. Although the European Commission² gave it the greenlight, there still appears to be doubt about the outcome in some member states³, as we wait for the EU Summit decision in December 2022.

Bosnia and Herzegovina was in the spotlight for a few reasons. Firstly, it is clear that this is a region of ongoing unrest and the intertwining of different geopolitical powers. While most of the Serb population there is heavily influenced by Russia, the rest of the country leans more toward the EU, the USA and to some extent the UK, nonetheless feeling that “the West” is constantly failing them. Although lagging behind, Bosnia and Herzegovina was still more advanced in the integration process than Ukraine and Moldova, who were granted candidate status in June 2022. It was a wise choice to grant candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova for the obvious reasons that it has sent a strong message to Russia and its allies. Nevertheless, many people, especially political leaders and advocates in Austria and Slovenia, questioned whether it was fair to exclude Bosnia and Herzegovina (along with Georgia) from this group.

While the EU has taken several decisions that are very apparent on the Eastern flank, it is laudable that Ukraine and Moldova were given candidate status. It is unintentionally taking losses in the southeast of Europe. When it comes to the Western Balkan “champion” of the integration processes, the European Commission has given Montenegro its worst report to date, and the instability there continues to cause problems for the small Adriatic country. We wonder how the European Union could have permitted Montenegro to regress so far. Formerly a stable country that was making progress toward EU membership, Montenegro now appears to be beyond the reach of political stability. At the same time, the Commission found that Serbia was still not making any progress and that tensions with

Kosovo were at a new peak. Albania and North Macedonia both garnered ambiguous support as well as criticism.

Giving Ukraine and Moldova candidate status in the Eastern Partnership strongly declares that the Union will support the defence of the two countries against any aggression and occupation. The EU viewpoint is being maintained in Georgia, just like it was in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but it must take into account the priorities set by their government. At the same time, Armenians are also working for visa liberalisation, just like Kosovars are, so that their students, journalists, artists, athletes, and other citizens can travel freely throughout Europe. The situation with regard to Turkey’s view of the EU remains in an unending stalemate.

The common problems highlighted above show that resolute action is needed by the EU to avoid the unfavourable status quo. The most pro-European countries in the neighbouring countries are weakened by the uncertainties surrounding the future of the EU’s neighbourhood. When reforms and European forces have had enough of “too little carrot and too much stick”, it is genuinely alarming. As we become entangled in all the bureaucratic models and hollow projects, we keep forgetting that there are actual people on the other side of the EU border. In the case of Ukraine, fighting for their European and democratic futures, they are literally willing to risk their lives for the values that are constantly evaluated and questioned.

Could it be that, if we shift our focus from bureaucratic benchmarks to individuals altering people’s lives, we might have an entirely new perspective on the enlargement process?

² <https://www.reuters.com/article/eu-enlargement-bosnia-idAFKBN2R71BT>

³ https://www.euractiv.com/section/all/short_news/no-candidate-status-for-bosnia-in-december/

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