

France and the Western Balkans' EU membership

23 March 2021 – 11am

Open Society Foundation for Albania is inviting you to the open online event on the French role in the EU integration process of the Western Balkans to be organized on March 23, 2021 between 11.00-12.30.

At the approaching European Council meeting, scheduled for the 25th and 26th of March 2021, the question of the Western Balkans' EU integration process is expected to once again take a back seat to the more urgent subjects, such as health crisis and vaccination delays. A seemingly endless path towards the Union membership has become even more dubious in recent years, especially after October 2019 when some EU member states blocked the opening of the EU accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania. The voice of the official Paris was among the strongest in denying the two countries from moving forward with their membership bids, and President Macron has unequivocally rejected the idea of the EU enlargement in the foreseeable future. With France due to hold the presidency of the European Council in the first half of 2022, and with both the Presidential and Parliamentary elections scheduled for next year the upcoming months may be the pivotal moment to revisit and reconstruct the French role in the EU integration process of the Western Balkans.

During this event on **March 23, 2021** two joint sessions will be organized. A first session with the welcoming remarks, and a second session will be French view about the Western Balkans' place in the EU. During the event will be presented the results of the new study 'French Public Opinion on EU Membership of the Western Balkans' prepared by Open Society European Policy Institute in cooperation with think tank D Part as it may be checked [here](#).

[Register in the WEBINAR by clicking HERE for the event.](#)

Agenda of the event

11.00-11.30 Welcoming remarks:

- Mr. **Andi Dobrush**i, Executive Director, Open Society Foundation for Albania
- Her Excellency Ms. **Elisabeth Barsacq**, the Ambassador of France to Albania
- His Excellency Mr. **Dritan Tola**, the Ambassador of Albania to France

11.30 – 12.00 Second session: French view – is there a place for the Western Balkans in the European Union?

What are the views of the French public regarding the EU enlargement to the Western Balkans, and how do they influence the position of the official Paris? What role does the internal French politics play in defining the French position towards the EU enlargement, and can the 2022 elections change the current negative discourse surrounding this topic? Does France utilize bilateral relations with local countries to regain and strengthen its position in the Balkans without allowing any further steps towards the European integration of the region?

Panelists:

- Mr. **Srdjan Cvijic**, Senior Policy Analyst with the Open Society European Policy Institute, Brussels
- Mr. **Yves Bertoncini**, EU Affairs Expert and Consultant. Professor of European issues at Corps des Mines, the Paris School of International Affairs and ESCP Business School
- Ms. **Natasha Wunsch**, Assistant Professor, Political Science/European Integration at Sciences Po, Centre for European Studies and Comparative Politics

12.00 – 12.30 Questions and Answers Session

Moderator:

Mr. **Francesco Maselli**, an Italian journalist, Italy correspondent for the French daily l'Opinion and managing editor of Italian daily Linkiesta.