

*Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB), Centre d'Étude de la Vie Politique (CEVIPOL)  
International conference*

## **POLITICAL REGIME DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE**

**May 5-6 2022**

*Salle Kant/Kant Room  
Institut d'Études Européennes (IEE)  
Avenue F.D. Roosevelt 39  
1050 Brussels, Belgium*

After the turbulent 1990s and promising early 2000s, Southeast Europe (SEE) has gone through a various array of political regime developments. Remarkably, the supposedly parallel processes of democratization, market liberalization and Europeanization have brought about mixed results over the last decade. Echoes from the region's authoritarian experiences are all but a memory of the past. Some SEE countries have embarked upon autocratization, as witnessed in the cases of Serbia under Aleksandar Vučić since 2014, the secessionist attempts by Milorad Dodik in Bosnia's Republika Srpska, and Turkey, hegemonized by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Similar troublesome tendencies – although of different magnitude – can be observed even in Slovenia, once the regional democratic frontrunner, under the premiership of self-styled Donald Trump admirer Janez Janša.

Yet, autocrats in SEE have not remained unchallenged. A plethora of domestic actors, ranging from the political opposition in Kosovo and North Macedonia, the Orthodox Church in Montenegro, anti-corruption agencies in Romania, the Speaker of Parliament in the case of Slovenia, as well as grassroots movements across the entire region, have stepped in and actively resisted autocratization. Some of these efforts proved to be successful in toppling autocratic leaders and led to a shift in power, such as in major cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and at the national level in Bulgaria, Montenegro and North Macedonia, ending the long domination of Boyko Borissov, Milo Đukanović and Nikola Gruevski. Accordingly, imposing a unique and all-embracing paradigm – either democratization or autocratization – to account for all the political regime evolutions that have occurred in SEE over the last decade would excessively simplify the complexity of such developments. The cases of Bulgaria – holding its third legislative elections in 2021 in an attempt to produce a stable ruling majority – or of North Macedonia – where Zoran Zaev, who had posed as a symbol of a reformist pro-EU wave in SEE, in particular after the 2018 Prespa Agreement, has recently handed-in his resignation – highlight that complexity.

Indeed, despite democratic stagnation, the undermining of checks and balances and the attraction of support via ethnopopulism and clientelism in some cases, the ascendance of would-be authoritarian elites has happened during a phase of sustained economic growth and regime stability. Ultimately, regional autocrats have managed to present themselves as pragmatic leaders, capable of providing solutions to severe crises, such as refugee waves or the COVID-19 pandemic. The most significant example has been Vučić's cooperation with the EU during the former and acquisition of vaccines from China and Russia during the latter. This kind of political regime, termed as "stabilitocracy" by scholars dealing with the region, has provided autocratic-minded leaders in SEE with a high degree of external and internal legitimacy. Even EU institutions, traditionally portrayed as unquestioned democratizing actors, nowadays refrain from promptly condemning autocratic practices in SEE. Furthermore, they have sometimes legitimized autocrats and their parties by advancing the enlargement process even in the absence of tangible democratic reforms, in the quest of security at the European borders.

### **Conference Program**

Day 1 – May 5

9:30 – 10:00

Opening remarks and coffee break

10:00 – 12:00

#### **Panel 1 - The stalled Europeanization of the Western Balkans**

*Neo-Imperialism versus Self-Determination in Kosovo? The Politics of Lëvizja Vetëvendosje!*

Frauke M. Seebass - Andrassy University Budapest (in person)

*The construal of the European Union in contemporary Albanian political discourse*

Ledia Kazazi - University of Elbasan (online)

*The Perils of Protracted EU Accession: "Eurofundamentalist" and "Euroopportunistic" Governmental Discourses on the EU in North Macedonia and Serbia*

Kristijan Fidanovski - University of Oxford (in person)

Discussant: Venelin Bochev - Université Libre de Bruxelles (in person)

Chair: Guido Panzano - Université Libre de Bruxelles (in person)

12:00 – 13:30 Lunch break

13:30 – 15:30

## Panel 2 - **Beyond the EU. The influence of external actors and regional initiatives**

*EU External Relations and the Western Balkan Candidate Countries for EU Membership: The Belt and Road Initiative in Context*

Julija Brsakoska Bazerkoska - Ss. Cyril and Methodius University (online)

*The Political Economy of Hybrid Regime Illustrated Through Turkish Investments in Serbia*

Sabina Pačariz - King`s College London (in person)

*Kosovo – the Policy of Non-Recognition and the Internal Stability*

Piotr Sieniawski - Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University Warsaw (in person)

*Open Balkan, an opportunity within the EU perspective or an authoritarian resurgence?*

Elda Zotaj and Joana Kosho - Aleksandër Moisiu University and Aleksandër Xhuvani University (online)

Discussant: Simone Benazzo - Université Libre de Bruxelles (in person)

Chair: Venelin Bochev - Université Libre de Bruxelles (in person)

15:30 – 16:00 Coffee break

16:00 – 18:00

## Panel 3 - **The challenge of upholding the rule of law in Southeast Europe**

*Hybridity and composite regime in judiciary governance of Albania: Subcontracting justice to international advice*

Islam Jusufi - Researcher, Skopje, North Macedonia (online)

*Twinning Processes of the EU Candidate Countries as a Europeanization tool*

Mehlika Özlem Ultan - Kocaeli University (online)

*Romania's fight against corruption: Ambition, accumulation and abuse*

Martin Mendelski - University of Mainz (online)

Discussant: Venelin Bochev - Université Libre de Bruxelles (in person)

Chair: Leonardo Puleo - Université Libre de Bruxelles (in person)

20:00 Dinner

Venue to be defined

Day 2 – May 6

10:00 – 12:00

#### Panel 4 - **Varieties of autocratization. Insights from the Western Balkans**

*Challenge to democratic regime: Case study from Albania in 2013-2021 from the Western Balkans*

Dorina Bërdufi and Afrim Krasniqi - Aleksandër Moisiu University and Academy of Albanological Studies (online)

*Changing Street Names in Belgrade and the Political Development of Serbia*

Dimitrije Matić - Institute for Recent History of Serbia (in person)

*Competition, Political Polarization and the Social Media in North Macedonia*

Sasho Ognenovski - Macedonian Scientific Association and ZRUM Perun Artis (in person)

Discussant: Vedran Dzihic - Österreichisches Institut für internationale Politik (online)

Chair: Luca Tomini - Université Libre de Bruxelles (in person)

12:00 – 13:30 Lunch break

13:30 – 15:30

#### Panel 5 – **Ethnic relations and political trajectories in Southeast Europe**

*A “sterilized” democratization factor: the case of the Kurdish vote in Erdoğan’s Turkey*

Max-Valentin Robert - Sciences Po Grenoble (online)

*Ethnic Cleavages and Permanent Post-conflict Discourse in the Balkans*

Stefan Surlić - University of Belgrade (online)

*Can institutions break ingroup favouritism?*

Daniel Bochsler - Central European University and University of Belgrade (in person)

*On the Political Representation of the Turkish Minority and the double faced “Movement for Rights and Freedoms” : from “the Bulgarian ethnic model” to the political stigmatization*

Petia Gueorguieva - New Bulgarian University (online)

Discussant: Guido Panzano - Université Libre de Bruxelles (in person)

Chair: Simone Benazzo - Université Libre de Bruxelles (in person)

15:30 – 16:00

Concluding remarks