



Ninth FoWB Network Meeting  
& Willy Brandt Programme Seminar

## **What drives enlargement? Regional cooperation, political shifts and sustainable development**

**Crowne Plaza Podgorica**  
**Cetinjska 7 | Podgorica 81000 | Montenegro**  
**Google Maps: [HERE](#)**  
**tel. +382 20 684 000**  
**email. [info.cppodgorica@ihg.com](mailto:info.cppodgorica@ihg.com)**

**4-5 June 2026**

In the context of an increasingly uncertain and politically contested path to EU accession, regional cooperation in the Western Balkans continues to be presented as a central pillar of enlargement. Yet, over the past decade, the multiplication of initiatives has raised a more uncomfortable question: is regional cooperation still a meaningful driver of integration, or has it become a fragmented landscape of overlapping frameworks, competing political agendas, and diluted impact?

While these initiatives formally aim to advance regional integration and alignment with the EU acquis, their proliferation has generated growing concerns regarding duplication, inefficient use of resources and a lack of strategic direction. In some cases, regional cooperation risks being instrumentalised less as a pathway to accession and more as a platform for accessing funding or consolidating political alliances.

These tensions become even more acute in a scenario of differentiated integration models where one or more Western Balkan countries could join the European Union ahead of others. Such a development would not only reshape incentives for cooperation, but could also expose the structural fragilities and potential redundancies of existing regional frameworks.

In this context, the ninth [Friends of the Western Balkans](#) (FoWB) meeting will place regional cooperation at the centre of the discussion and provide a platform for exchange



among members of the European Parliament, representatives of national parliaments from the Social Democratic family and a broad network of experts.

The discussion aims to critically reassess whether and how regional cooperation can still function as a credible instrument of enlargement. The objective is to identify which initiatives remain fit for purpose and where political attention and resources should be strategically reallocated.

The meeting will also examine the implications of recent political developments in Hungary for the enlargement process. It will also offer an opportunity to present the challenges and opportunities related to the Just Transition in the Western Balkans, aligning with EU Green Agenda goals while supporting affected workers and communities.

The conference is organised by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies in cooperation with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, the Foundation Max van der Stoel, Kalevi Sorsa Foundation, Olof Palme International Centre, Fondation Jean-Jaurès, Karl Renner Institut, CeSPI, Progresiva and the S&D Group in the European Parliament, in the framework of FEPS Enlargement Programme.

The conference will be preceded by the conference of the S&D Willy Brandt Programme.

## Agenda

### Thursday 4 June

#### Morning

*Participants' arrival*

#### Willy Brandt Programme

**15:00-17:45**

**Willy Brandt Programme conference**

**15:00-15:30**

**Registration and welcome coffee**

**15:30-15:45**

**Opening remarks**

**Kathleen Van Brempt**, Member of the European Parliament, S&D Group Vice-President for EU Enlargement



**15:45-16:30**

**High-level panel discussion**

Moderator

**Marta Temido**, Member of the European Parliament,  
Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and  
Democrats, Portugal

Introductory remarks

**Matjaž Nemec**, Member of the European  
Parliament, Group of the Progressive Alliance of  
Socialists and Democrats, Slovenia

With the participation of:

**Ivan Vujovic**, Montenegro, Party leader Social  
Democratic Party (SDP)

**Danijel Zivkovic**, Party leader Democratic Party of  
Socialists (DPS)

**Daliborka Uljarević**, Executive Director of the Center  
for Civic Education

**16:30-17:30**

**Discussion with participants**

**17:30-17:45**

**Closing remarks**

**Tonino Picula**, Member of the European Parliament,  
Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and  
Democrats, Croatia

**19:00**

**Welcome dinner**

Keynote speech

**Neva Grašič**, State Secretary, Slovenia, Ministry of  
Foreign and European Affairs, Slovenia

**Friday 5 June**

**Friends of the Western Balkans**

**8:30-9:00**

**Registration**

**9:00-9:30**

**Welcome remarks**

**László Andor**, Secretary General, Foundation of  
European Progressive Studies (FEPS), Belgium



**Sarah Hees/Kalyani**, Head of Office, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Dialogue South-East Europe, and Country Director, Germany

**Aleksandar Bogdanović**, President of the Political Academy, Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), Montenegro

**9:30-11:00**

**How does regional cooperation still matter? From priorities to trade-offs and strategic choices**

*Over the past decade, a dense ecosystem of initiatives and organisations has emerged, with the ambition to foster regional integration as a pathway towards EU accession. Yet, despite significant political investment, important questions remain regarding the actual effectiveness, coherence and long-term sustainability of these frameworks. This panel will examine whether regional cooperation still represents a credible and strategically meaningful tool for advancing enlargement and will explore the difficult strategic choices that may emerge in the context of a future wave of EU enlargement.*

*Speakers:*

**Anamarija Velinovska**, Head of Centre for EU integration, Institute for Democracy, Skopje  
**Emir Đikić**, Former Director, CEFTA

*Reactions:*

**Romina Kuko**, Member of the Parliament of Albania, Socialist Party of Albania, Albania (online)  
**Matjaž Nemec**, Member of the European Parliament, Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, Slovenia

*Moderation:*

**Harun Cero**, Program Manager, FES SOE, Bosnia and Herzegovina

**11:00-11:15**

**Coffee break**

**11:15-12:45**

**Shifting political landscape in Hungary: implications for EU Enlargement**

*Viktor Orbá'sn historic defeat in last April's Hungarian parliamentary elections marks a potentially*



*significant turning point for EU enlargement policy. Moving from strong support for enlargement toward the WB to increasingly transactional relations with some of the region's most problematic political actors, Hungary played a central role in redefining the political dynamics surrounding accession. This panel will address whether a political transition in Budapest could help unblock some of the current deadlocks within the Council, or whether institutional constraints and broader geopolitical considerations will ultimately limit the scope for major change.*

*Speakers:*

**Berta López Domènech**, Policy Analyst, European Policy Center (EPC)

**Gabriela Greilinger**, PhD candidate in Political Science at the University of Georgia's School of Public and International Affairs (online)

*Reactions:*

**Levente Bazin**, International Secretary, Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP)

**Ivan Vukovic**, Vice President of DPS, Member of the Parliament of Montenegro, and former Chair of the European Integration Committee

*Moderation:*

**László Andor**, Secretary General, FEPS

**12:45-13:30**

**Presentation of FEPS, Progresiva and FMS Study: Empowering Coal Workers for a Green European Future in the Western Balkans**

*Phasing out coal and phasing in renewable energy sources requires informed and inclusive processes that provide economic alternatives and ensure the well-being of the affected communities. The session will present the preliminary results of a study on just transition processes for coal industry workers in the Western Balkans. The study analyses the profiles of different coal mines and their communities to understand the specific needs of coal industry*



*workers, their attitudes towards phasing out the coal industry and the socio-economic and political conditions that influence transition processes (current and future). This research is the first phase of the project Empowering Coal Workers for a Green European Future in the Western Balkans, led by FEPS in collaboration with Progresiva and the Max van der Stoel Foundation (FMS). with the support of Academy for Democratic Development (ADD) in Serbia, Fund for Progressive Policies in Montenegro, Network of Progressive Initiatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Progres Institute in North Macedonia and Institute for Social Policies Kosovo.*

Speakers:

**Maja Pupovac**, Lead Researcher of the Project, Research Fellow at the University of Belgrade, Serbia

Reactions:

**Gledisa Çelaj**, Program Coordinator, Centre for Labor Rights, Albania

Moderator:

**Balša Božović**, Academy for Democratic Development, Chair

Q&A

**13:30-15:00h**

**Lunch at hotel**



in cooperation with

