

26 April 2024

Press Release

The Bridge Forum Dialogue (BFD) organised a conference under the title “**The European Union and the Western Balkans. Enlargement: ambitions versus realities?**” on 23 April 2024. The event was hosted at the Auditorium Cité in Luxembourg. The speaker was Ambassador Stefan Füle, former European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy.

In his **introduction**, Mr Etienne de Lhoneux, Chair of the Executive Committee of the BFD, noted that enlargement has returned to the EU policy agenda. In this context, he emphasised that the Western Balkans should be given priority.

He extended a warm welcome to the speaker, Ambassador Stefan Füle.

Mr Füle presented a comprehensive vision of the EU enlargement process over many years. He expressed that the desire of countries to join the EU is good news. Enlargement is of strategic importance. It includes, but is not limited to, checking compliance with the EU rulebook for that purpose.

Dr Zamira Pode-Hirsch acted as Moderator of a lively Questions and Answers Session. Many questions focused on the issue of the lengthy delays in candidate countries’ entry into the Union.

Mr Füle responded to each question, taking into account the unique situations of the various candidate countries. Montenegro or North Macedonia could join rapidly. Albania is on track but still has some homework to complete. The same for Bosnia-Herzegovina. For Kosovo, which is not recognized as independent State by all EU Member States, a technical solution can be found in the future Agreements. This is a prerequisite for an agreement with Serbia. Beyond economic and regulatory issues, the political will remain essential.

The EU is perceived as a space of freedom and peace.

In this regard, widening the EU is not so different from deepening it, as both processes involve structural changes and significant costs. This has been the EU’s mission since its inception nearly 70 years ago.

Detailed information on this conference is available on the website of the Bridge Forum Dialogue asbl www.forum-dialogue.lu

Photo: from left to right:

Mr Etienne de Lhoneux, Chair of the Executive Committee of the Bridge Forum Dialogue

Dr Zamira Pode-Hirsch, Moderator of the conference

Ambassador Stefan Füle, former European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy

Their Royal Highnesses the Prince Guillaume and Princess Sibilla of Luxembourg

