



We are Europe V Facing the Challenges Together: New Impulses for EU Enlargement

Edited by
Emil Kirjas
and Nejra Vreto



BDF
BORIS DIVKOVIĆ
FOUNDATION

D66
internationaal

WE ARE EUROPE V

FACING THE CHALLENGES TOGETHER: NEW IMPULSES FOR EU ENLARGEMENT

Edited by Emil Kirjas and Nejra Vreto

Proofreading by Anida Hadžić

European Liberal Forum EUPF

Rue d'Idalie 11-13, boîte 6, 1050 Ixelles, Brussels (BE)

info@liberalforum.eu

www.liberalforum.eu

Boris Divković Foundation

Jadranska 7, Sarajevo, BiH

office@bdf.ba

www.bdf.ba

D66 Internationaal / Stichting IDI

Hoge Nieuwstraat 30

2514 EL The Hague / The Netherlands

+31 70 35 66 06 6

internationaal@d66.nl

https://internationaal.d66.nl/

Graphic Design by VV Creative

Published by the European Liberal Forum in cooperation with Boris Divković Foundation. Co-funded by the European Parliament. The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) alone. These views do not necessarily reflect those of the European Parliament and/or the European Liberal Forum EUPF



EUROPEAN LIBERAL FORUM (ELF)

The European Liberal Forum (ELF) is the official political foundation of the European Liberal Party, the ALDE Party. Together with 59 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 Divković 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.

D66 INTERNATIONAAL / STICHTING IDI

D66 Internationaal / Stichting IDI is an independent yet integrated pillar of the international work of the Dutch progressive liberal party D66. D66 Internationaal / Stichting IDI is committed to contribute to working for more sustainable, democratic and open international societies. To this end, D66 Internationaal / Stichting IDI works mainly on political trainings and academies, the development of liberal social thought and best-practice sharing. Respect for human rights and minorities, promotion of inclusive institutions and practice of sustainability are key elements of the projects.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	8	LETTER 9	56
		Letter to MEPs	
		Miomirka Melank, Bosnia and Herzegovina	
LETTER 1	10	LETTER 10	62
Letter to MEPs		Letter to MEPs	
Anes Hodžić, Bosnia and Herzegovina		Mirela Džehverović, Bosnia and Herzegovina	
LETTER 2	16	LETTER 11	68
Letter to MEPs		Letter to MEPs	
Ahmed Kosovac, Bosnia and Herzegovina		Sanela Klarić, Bosnia and Herzegovina	
LETTER 3	20	LETTER 12	74
Letter to MEPs		Letter to MEPs	
Dejancho Cvetanovski, North Macedonia		Luka Nikolić, Montenegro	
LETTER 4	28	CONCLUSION	80
Letter to MEPs			
Mario Paunov, North Macedonia			
LETTER 5	34		
Letter to MEPs			
Monika Zajkova, North Macedonia			
LETTER 6	40		
Letter to MEPs			
Djordje Terek, Serbia			
LETTER 7	46		
Letter to MEPs			
Gor Badalyan, Armenia			
LETTER 8	52		
Letter to MEPs			
Marija Čvorović, Montenegro			

Introduction

The future of the European Union and its enlargement remains a topic of hot debate among all candidate countries and those who aspire to become one. Thus far, seven enlargement rounds have taken place, and now, ten years after the most recent enlargement in 2013 (when Croatia joined), the question being asked is whether it is time for the eighth enlargement. This is the question that has been the subject of fierce debate for decades, especially among the countries of the Western Balkans, but also Eastern Partnership countries, especially after the beginning of the war in Ukraine. A year and a half later, the war in Ukraine has left its mark on the history of the EU and the world. It has affected Western Balkan countries both directly and indirectly by shaking the already fragile pillars of democracy and stability in this region. Even while being constantly reminded of the importance of maintaining peace and stability, and nurturing the beauty of a multicultural and multiethnic society, countries in the Western Balkans are always wary of the possibility of new conflicts.

Guided by European values and principles of enlargement and openness to new countries, Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries have been working on fulfilling the political and economic criteria set by the EU. However, these countries face some common challenges, which have impeded their development for decades, such as fragile and corrupted political systems, a weak economy, and inefficient judicial systems and institutions. Nonetheless, the countries share mutual interests and goals over which to unite in establishing liberal positions; this will allow them to express their opinions and clearly state their European aspirations to some of the most important change-makers in EU institutions.

For the last five years, this has been the goal of the EU Mentorship Program, supported by the European Liberal Forum in cooperation with the Boris Divković Foundation. It aims to create a pool of EU experts among the liberal political parties in these two regions, which are eager to be advocates for change and align their party policies towards the EU agenda, and thus be able to present their viewpoints and initiatives to relevant EU officials within this program.

Support for EU membership in the countries of the Program is still high. However, over the course of the last year, apart from Ukraine and Moldova, these countries have seen fewer implemented reforms and decreasing EU-enthusiasm. If in the past decade in the Brussels circles it was common to hear the term “enlargement fatigue”, which describes the predominant mood in the member states, now the buzz word in the Western Balkans would be “waiting fatigue” as citizens are slowly losing hope as it has been two long decades since the 2003 Thessaloniki Agenda that confirmed the European perspective of the Western Balkans and full membership in the EU is still not in view for any of the countries of the region. These tendencies have been carefully observed not only by the adversaries of EU integration in the Kremlin, but also by the new EU candidates, Ukraine and Moldova, which do not want to fall victim to endless processes and unfulfilled promises. The credibility of European values is at stake. It is crucial that the EU allows for an accelerated membership path for the aspirants, in parallel with implementing essential internal reforms that would make the EU more efficient, more autonomous, more citizen-friendly and more stringent in respect to rule of law and democracy in all member states. The challenge to make these processes both parallel and successful can only be addressed by working closely together in a visionary and determined way. Now, especially ahead of the European elections next year, it is time to demonstrate strong leadership both in Brussels, EU capitals and the accession countries.

Participants of the EU Mentorship Program have written letters to members of the European Parliament, in which they express their views and their willingness to defend them, and their determination to put their countries on the EU agenda, along with some thoughtful questions and demands. The following set of letters has been written by participants from Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. The authors are all very passionate liberal activists, politicians, and advocates for EU enlargement and a joint future in the European Union. Now they are also ambassadors of their countries representing their liberal standpoints to EU leaders in a different, creative, and coherent way.

With this in mind, we invite all readers to join us on this journey, read the letters, and approach the analysis with an open heart toward a better EU future for all of us.



Letter to MEPs

Anes Hodžić
Bosnia and Herzegovina

LETTER 1

Letter 1

Letter to MEPs

Anes Hodžić

Dear Ms. Al-Sahlani,

My name is Anes Hodžić, and I am a member of Naša stranka, the biggest liberal party in the Western Balkans. Given our shared ideological beliefs and your great experience and dedication in dealing with Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Bosnian diaspora, I have decided to write you a letter concerning the current state of my country's integration into the European Union.

I believe that your expertise and influence in the European Parliament would be invaluable in helping to address the challenges that my country and its people face on their path to EU membership.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is at a critical juncture in its European integration journey. The upcoming progress report from the European Commission will assess its progress in key areas such as the rule of law, democratic governance, and socio-economic reforms. Accurate reporting is essential to identify areas that require further attention. Through targeted assistance and capacity-building programs, together with a larger diplomatic involvement in the country, the European Union can help strengthen democratic institutions, promote transparency and

accountability, and foster an inclusive society.

Initiating negotiations between the European Union and Bosnia and Herzegovina as soon as possible is vital for our country's political and economic progress. The country has made significant strides in fulfilling the prerequisites for this step, including legislative frameworks and institutional reforms, and is ready to take an even more determined approach to this question.

Recent elections have demonstrated the readiness of the Bosnian people for change and integration. In these elections, the country has chosen new members of the Presidency and the governments formed after the election have brought progressive forces into power on both state and federal levels of government.

Having all of this in mind, I kindly urge you to advocate for the start of negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Negotiations would demonstrate the European Union's recognition of Bosnia and Herzegovina's progress, inspiring further efforts and mobilizing resources for positive change.

In conclusion, the upcoming progress report presents a pivotal moment for Bosnia and Herzegovina's European aspirations. I ask you to support the reforms that have been started in our country, and stress the urgency of rewarding these improvements with a viable date for starting the negotiations.

Your influence and expertise can pave the way for a brighter and more prosperous future for my homeland

Your influence and expertise can pave the way for a brighter and more prosperous future for my homeland. That would benefit the European Union and Europe at large.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anes Hodžić', written in a cursive style.

Anes Hodžić



Letter to MEPs

Ahmed Kosovac
Bosnia and Herzegovina

LETTER 2

Letter 2

Letter to MEPs

Ahmed Kosovac

Dear Katalin Cseh,

You are receiving this letter from a fellow European citizen with whom you have much in common. While we are neither of the same gender, nor the same generation, and might not share similar interests, what we do have in common are the threats to our security and wellbeing from self-proclaimed “saviors” and rulers. While you have been unfortunate to live through and witness Viktor Orbán’s assault on democracy, I have endured the destructive reign of Milorad Dodik in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I am deeply concerned about the erosion of democratic values in our respective countries and the rise of authoritarianism in our region.

In Hungary, PM Viktor Orbán has systematically dismantled democratic institutions, trampled upon the rule of law, and suppressed media freedom. His hunger for power knows no bounds as he consolidates control, perpetuates corruption, and undermines the fundamental principles of democracy. He pursues his illiberal agenda with an audacity that is infuriating. Similarly, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik has brazenly pursued a nationalist and separatist agenda, fueling

ethnic tensions and undermining the unity of the country. His divisive rhetoric and actions have sown discord, deepened existing wounds, and jeopardized the delicate balance necessary for a functional and inclusive society.

To resist this relentless assault on the pillars of democracy, the suppression of dissent, and the trampling of the rights of ordinary citizens, we must demonstrate resolve and unity. I am inspired by your fierce advocacy for European values and your tireless efforts to defend the rule of law.

I believe that it is through the courage and determination of leaders like you that we can combat the forces of authoritarianism and reclaim the democratic foundations upon which our societies are built.

We have to put an end to this blatant abuse of power by leaders like Orbán and Dodik which betrays not only the trust of their citizens but also undermines the progress we have strived so hard to achieve. We must bridge the divides that leaders like Orbán and Dodik seek to deepen and join forces to protect the democratic values that are under threat.

I am confident that Bosnia and Herzegovina has the potential to become a successful EU member. The country has a long history of multi-ethnic tolerance and cooperation, and its people are eager to join the EU. However, the country’s progress towards EU membership has been hindered by the political instability and ethnic divisions that

I am deeply concerned about the erosion of democratic values in our respective countries and the rise of authoritarianism in our region

have been promoted by leaders such as Dodik.

You have shown great leadership and resolve when you called for sanctions against China for its human rights abuses in the Uighur region and Hong Kong. I urge you to use your influential position to push for the imposition of sanctions against leaders like Viktor Orbán and Milorad Dodik. These sanctions would send a strong signal that the European Union will not tolerate the abuse of power and the erosion of democratic values.

To be free, and to truly live the idea of the EU based on democratic values, we must stop them.

Best wishes,

Ahmed Kosovac



Letter to MEPs

Dejancho Cvetanovski
North Macedonia

LETTER 3

Letter 3

Letter to MEPs

**Dejancho
Cvetanovski**

Dear Ms. Hahn,

I hope this letter finds you well.

My name is Dejancho Cvetanovski, and I am a member of the Executive Board of the Liberal Democratic Party in North Macedonia and the Steering Committee of LIBSEEN. My family—my wife, Adriana and my daughter, Jana—and I are passionate advocates for the integration of North Macedonia into the European Union.

I am writing to you because I believe that the European Union's enlargement and inclusion of the Western Balkans is of paramount importance for the stability, prosperity, and democratic development of the entire region. I am particularly enthusiastic about the renewed interest in EU enlargement, a positive development that shows that Europe is once again united and in agreement on matters of common interest and shared values.

I would also like to emphasize the importance of lifting the "iron curtain" towards the Western Balkans. It is crucial that we do not neglect the countries in the region, including North Macedonia, in favor of other priorities, such as supporting Ukraine. While we must continue to support Ukraine, we must also

ensure that the Western Balkans does not become a forgotten region.

The "brain drain" that has been caused by the lack of opportunities in the Western Balkans is a major concern. Many of our best and brightest young people have been forced to leave their homes in search of better opportunities in the EU. This "brain drain" has had a negative impact on the economic development of the region and makes it more difficult to achieve the necessary reforms. We need to address this challenge together.

I am confident that North Macedonia has made significant strides towards fulfilling the necessary criteria and requirements for EU membership. The country has undertaken extensive reforms in various areas, including the rule of law, judicial independence, public administration, and the fight against corruption. These efforts deserve recognition and support from the European Union, as they demonstrate the government's commitment to aligning with European values and standards.

However, despite the progress made, North Macedonia continues to face a number of challenges on its path to EU integration. One of the key obstacles lies in the unresolved bilateral issues with neighboring countries, such as the name dispute with Greece, which was recently resolved through the Prespa Agreement.

However, Bulgaria has raised a new issue that has prevented North Macedonia from opening

I firmly believe that we can and must demonstrate strong leadership to citizens, while offering each other mutual and direct support

accession negotiations with the EU. This has led to increasing polarization inside the country that is difficult to bridge.

I urge you to use your influence within the European Parliament to advocate for the acceleration of the accession process for North Macedonia. By actively engaging in this matter and using your influence within the European Parliament, you can contribute to a brighter future for Macedonian citizens and help build a stronger and more united Europe.

A timely and fair consideration of the Macedonian membership application is not only vital for the country's future but also for the EU's credibility and commitment to the enlargement process in the Western Balkans. It would send a strong signal of encouragement to other countries in the region, fostering stability, regional cooperation, and the consolidation of European values.

I know that the upcoming campaign for the European elections will not be easy, and at the same time the campaign for the elections in North Macedonia will be fraught with challenges. However, I firmly believe that we can and must demonstrate strong leadership to citizens, while offering each other mutual and direct support.

Lastly, I would like to express my appreciation for the recent visit of German Chancellor Scholz to North Macedonia, as an example of the support that the coalition government in Germany provides. It would be fantastic if other European leaders from the liberal family, such as President Macron, PMs Bettel or De Croo, would also visit our country.

Yours sincerely,

Dejancho Cvetanovski



Letter to MEPs

Mario Paunov
North Macedonia

LETTER 4

Letter 4

Letter to MEPs

Mario Paunov

Dear MEP Vázquez Lázara,

My name is Mario Paunov, a youth activist from North Macedonia. I have been a member, volunteer and leader of various youth organizations and initiatives for many years. I also serve as chief of staff for the President of the Liberal Democratic Party, Monika Zajkova, whom I believe you know. I am passionate about my country's EU membership, having enjoyed the benefits of an Erasmus+ project in Vilnius, Lithuania when I was 18 years old. Since then, I have had many opportunities to visit different parts of Europe.

In a recent interview for a national online portal, I stated that I believe that we, as young activists with ideas and a desire to work, can change things for the better in North Macedonia. It is clear to me that a lot of work needs to be done in our country if we wish to be on par with developed European countries and their highly effective and functional systems.

I write to you as a participant of the EU Mentorship project with a great hope that the EU enlargement agenda remains a key priority. Throughout this project we strive 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.

The focus of my country's government over the past few years has been the start of EU accession negotiations. The lack of a principled approach by the EU in this process allowing for bilateral disagreements to dominate has increased Euroscepticism and created deep divisions on the Macedonian political scene. At the same time, emigration from the country is increasing enormously. We need to reverse this trend and focus on what is important: growing the national economy and contributing to the wellbeing of the EU.

As a country where the main economic sector is agriculture, we can be a major producer of food, which is especially important given the threat of a food crisis in the EU. Our farmers need access to the most recent technology and production standards to be able to produce better quality food suitable for export to EU countries.

I would like to ask you about the measures and regulations that you would recommend as a potential solution for the problems we are facing in this regard. Spain is a great food producer in the EU. I am certain that we can learn very much from the country.

For example, how can North Macedonia benefit more from European Union funds in

I believe that we, as young activists with ideas and a desire to work, can change things for the better in North Macedonia

the sector of agriculture? Would it be possible to discuss the integration of Macedonian agricultural production into the Common Agricultural Policy of the EU now, before full accession into the EU? I believe that that would be a mutually beneficial scenario.

It would be an honor for me to meet you in person and discuss ideas, propositions, and initiatives that I know would be very advantageous and life-changing for both myself and my country.

Allow me to use this opportunity to kindly invite you to visit our country and see our natural wonders and national landmarks. I am certain that you would enjoy your visit very much.

Best regards,

Mario Paunov



Letter to MEPs

Monika Zajkova
North Macedonia

LETTER 5

Letter 5

Letter to MEPs

Monika Zajkova

Dear Mr. Reynders,

Allow me to address you in my capacity as leader of the Macedonian Liberal Democrats. I have been humbled to serve the citizens of my small country, but one that has a rich history and cultural legacy, as a member of the national Parliament.

I am sure that in your years of service in the European Commission, and earlier in the Belgian government and Liberal International, you have had the opportunity to hear much about the political situation in North Macedonia. However, let us set politics aside for a moment and allow me to describe the beauty of my country, particularly as autumn approaches, with the orangey-red breath-taking landscapes, the snowy streets filled with joy and chatter of children, the sound of chestnuts popping open on the grill and the smell of cinnamon mulled wine.

I must also mention the beautiful lakes and mountains, which during summer served as a perfect refuge in the hot nights. Amid that stunning nature, the country's main economic sector is agriculture, which is primarily focused on producing organic and healthy products. As a member we would certainly enrich the EU in many ways.

I decided to reach out to you inspired by your speech at the roundtable discussion which took place in Brussels and was organized for the countries of the Western Balkans by Renew Europe. You said that the judicial vetting is not the only solution. Given out current plans for a judicial vetting, it made me reconsider this approach. I tend to agree with you. There is certainly no easy fix.

The current political situation in my country is far from prefect. We have seen worse times, but certainly better days as well. Our judiciary system faces enormous challenges. You are likely aware that public trust in the judiciary is very low. A recent poll found that only 4% of people believe that the judiciary is fair and impartial. This is a clear threat to our liberal values of justice, equality, and the rule of law.

These challenges contribute to the loss of faith in the democratic functioning of institutions and in the entire EU integration process. Citizens are disillusioned as we entered the EU accession process a long time ago, but have seen few positive developments. It seems that in the process of starting the formal accession negotiations the EU is prioritizing irrelevant bilateral issues rather than focusing on core EU values and criteria – a functioning rule of law and market economy. Together we have failed to take concrete steps towards the final goal: becoming an EU member.

I am confident that we can overcome these challenges and achieve our goal of EU membership. However, we need to take

I believe that by working together, we can make a real difference in the lives of the people of North Macedonia and Europe

urgent action to reform the judiciary. This includes measures to ensure the independence of the judiciary, the accountability of judges, and the fight against corruption. That is the best way to restore trust in the democratic system so that our citizens can feel that functional institutions and independent courts exist to protect their rights as defined by law.

In the parliament I have proposed amendments to the Penal Code to ensure that the cases for high-level corruption do not lapse. It is not an easy battle to win, and support from the EU is essential. I would like to ask for your help in sharing expertise about such Penal Code amendments and justice reforms in the EU that can be applied in North Macedonia. Perhaps together we can make changes in Macedonia that can serve as a positive example for others to follow.

I believe that by working together, we can make a real difference in the lives of the people of North Macedonia and Europe. I would be grateful if you could meet with me to discuss these issues further, either in Brussels or, if you would like, it would be our pleasure to host you in North Macedonia. I am positive that when you experience North Macedonia personally and meet the people living here, you will get more inspired to share ideas and solutions to the challenges we face.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best regards,

Monika Zajkova



Letter to MEPs

Djordje Terek
Serbia

LETTER 6

Letter 6

Letter to MEPs

Djordje Terek

Dear Mr. Grošelj,

I am writing this letter to you as one of the leaders of a new generation of Europhiles from the Western Balkans. My name is Djordje Terek, and I am from Belgrade, Serbia. My previous academic and professional endeavors were based in the EU, including Greece, Italy, and Brussels. Europe is my home. I have never been more certain of that. The set of values and ideals embedded in the founding principles of the European Union is something I identify with and how I live my daily life. I have recently returned to Belgrade, and my return is solely the result of inexhaustible inspiration aimed at the European integration of my country and society, and ultimately accession to the EU.

Upon my arrival, I realized the magnitude of work that lay ahead of us; reforms are slow-paced; crucial sectors are lagging behind; institutions are almost dysfunctional; and public interest in EU accession is waning. Over the past months, massive protests have been taking place across Serbia as a result of the continuous promotion of a culture of violence and the collapse of the institutional systems that should prevent or fight against violence. The trigger for these protests was the tragedy that befell the elementary school

Vladislav Ribnikar when nine children and their custodian were killed. This heart-breaking tragedy is the logical conclusion of a society in which violence prevails. As such, it resulted in months of protests across Serbia organized under the slogan "Serbia against violence". The first protest was organized on 8 May in direct response to the school massacre and the mass murder that occurred the day after, in which eight more young people were killed, and 15 young men and women were injured. It was impressive to watch the number of citizens marching in unity across the nation, mainly spontaneously and of their own volition and not orchestrated by the opposition.

Over the past ten years, various forms of violence have become normalized in Serbian society in every segment of life; on state media, private media, reality shows, in family and educational institutions, parliament, and even in the statements of high state officials. The lack of institutional support is the result of the ever-increasing autocratic rule by President Aleksandar Vučić, who has created a society in which violence, crime, and corruption thrive. Many in the EU have already been briefed about it, likely yourself as well.

I am therefore writing this letter in the hope of gaining support for our fight against violence and against autocracy.

Dear Mr. Grošelj, I was raised in an autocratic system, in a country under the dictatorship of Slobodan Milošević. You are very well aware of the events that unfolded after the collapse of the SFRY. During the reign of Milošević, we

I would like to ask you to provide us with support in our fight against violence and our endeavor to establish of a truly European society in Serbia, where justice and freedom will prevail over violence

witnessed multiple wars and thousands of casualties. This time military conflict is unlikely, but we, as citizens of Serbia, will take part in a mass civilian resistance against the autocracy which thrives in the center of Europe.

As a young person who embraces the values of the European Union, where I spent a considerable part of my life, I would like to ask you to provide us with support in our fight against violence and our endeavor to establish of a truly European society in Serbia, where justice and freedom will prevail over violence. We, as Europeans, cannot allow anti-European sentiment to flourish in the heart of Europe, in a country seeking to become part of the European Union. Such sentiments and such a Serbia cannot be our future.

I sincerely believe that your voice will significantly influence European officials in their decision to address these challenges we face. I and other young people are at your disposal and it is my hope that, through our joint efforts, we can not only condemn but also change the current tragic state of affairs in Serbia.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely yours,

Djordje Terek



Letter to MEPs

Gor Badalyan
Armenia

LETTER
7

Letter 7

Letter to MEPs

Gor Badalyan

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

To: Ms. Karen Melchior
European Parliament

Brussels, 2023

Subject: Letter to MEPs

Dear Ms. Melchior,

I hope this letter finds you well. I believe in mutual empowerment, and I always start and end my letters on a positive note. It is my hope that by the end of this letter this positive energy will reach you, despite being 3,298 km away from Brussels – in the sunny city of Yerevan.

I am Gor Badalyan, and I consider myself not just an advocate for independence and freedom, but someone who is truly involved in the creation of just and free societies. I actively take part in civil society activities, and I am a graduate student in the field of innovation management. The Ayn Rand Center Armenia and The Breath of Liberty are two non-governmental organizations that I founded which focus on informal education

based on freedom, human rights, and philosophy.

Within the framework of the EU Mentorship Program, which this letter is also a part of, we are aiming to advance Armenia's EU integration process. For my part, as a first step, I will once again argue for visa liberalization for my country. I will explain below why this is important.

The struggle for freedom and independence is not easy, but it is real. I strongly believe that this is what we are all striving for. It is this desire that gives us strength, brings a smile to our faces, ignites a fire in our hearts, and inspires us to wake up in the morning and continue our mission. As a concerned citizen who deeply values his country, and as a freedom fighter, I would like to express my thoughts on the current situation in Armenia and its integration into the European Union. I understand that you are a member of the delegation of the EU-Armenia Parliamentary Partnership Committee, and so I am taking this valuable opportunity to address these issues. I am confident that you are doing your best to support both Armenia and the EU.

As promised earlier, I will keep the tone of this letter positive. However, I cannot ignore the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, despite the fact that you are fully aware of the blockade, the violation of the peace treaty, the ongoing casualties, the policy pursued by Azerbaijan, and the tolerance displayed by Armenia throughout.

I kindly request that you seek to expand cooperation, promote dialogue, and address all existing obstacles that hinder Armenia's progress toward closer European integration

Armenia as a state is important in the European context. It has a rich history, a vibrant culture, and a resilient population. The country has demonstrated its commitment to democratic values, human rights, and regional stability. I believe that recognizing and supporting Armenia's aspirations for closer integration with the European Union can bring mutual benefits.

As a member of the EU-Armenia PPC, you have the potential to contribute to the advancement of Armenia's EU integration process. I kindly request that you seek to expand cooperation, promote dialogue, and address all existing obstacles that hinder Armenia's progress toward closer European integration. I, along with thousands of other fearless young people, stand by your side in support of all these efforts. By doing so, we can strengthen the European Union's relationship with a valued partner in the region, promoting stability and prosperity for both sides.

The opinion of Armenians towards the EU is very positive and filled with hope. The public's trust in the EU increased by around 20% between 2020 and 2023. In addition, 60% of Armenians rate their relations with the EU as good, 70% affirm their ability to freely express themselves, and 75% of Armenians do not wish to leave their homeland and settle in another country. These statistics are strong indicators of the progress made in the integration process. Imagine how much these indicators would increase if tangible steps were taken towards integration.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I sincerely appreciate your commitment to the EU-Armenia PPC and your dedication to promoting democracy, human rights, and regional cooperation.

I look forward to our upcoming meeting with great passion and will be happy to show you Armenia from my point of view.

Sincerely,

Gor Badalyan



Letter to MEPs

Marija Čvorović
Montenegro

LETTER

8

Letter 8

Letter to MEPs

Marija Čvorović

Dear MEP Samira Rafaela,

My name is Marija Čvorović and I am from Montenegro. I am a member of the Liberal Party of Montenegro, which is committed to the values of the European Union and supports Montenegro's path towards membership in the EU. I am in charge of preparing different projects and initiatives, especially those related to women's rights and gender equality.

I am writing to you today to express my sincere admiration for your work in promoting women's rights as a member of the European Parliament's Intergroup on Gender Equality and Women's Rights. Your passionate advocacy for the rights of women and girls and for combating gender stereotypes and discrimination has been a source of inspiration. I am particularly inspired by your efforts to tackle period poverty, which is a serious problem that affects millions of women and girls around the world.

While being lucky to have been born in Montenegro – a nation with the most beautiful and breathtaking natural wonders, rich culture and hospitable people – I cannot turn a blind eye to the reality that our national and local governments are not paying enough attention to women's rights, particularly in relation to period poverty. My party, the Liberal Party of

Montenegro, is committed to fighting for women's rights. We believe that all women should have equal opportunities and access to education, healthcare, and employment. We are also working on raising awareness of the issue of violence against women and promoting gender equality in all spheres of society. However, that is not enough. We need our national and local authorities to step in. The position of women in society is of utmost importance in Montenegro's EU integration process. The EU has set high standards for gender equality, and Montenegro must meet these standards in order to become a member. Montenegro would benefit greatly from EU standards for equality between women and men, as these standards would help to improve the lives of women and girls in all areas, including education, employment, and healthcare.

I would also like to ask for your concrete support in areas such as providing technical assistance to Montenegro in developing and implementing legislation and policies on gender equality, including equal pay, and raising awareness of gender equality issues in Montenegro. I believe that it is important to have in-person contact to discuss the betterment of the position of women in societies across Europe. I would be honored to meet with you to discuss our shared goals and to learn more about your work.

I would be grateful to hear back from you.

Best regards,

Marija Čvorović

Montenegro would benefit greatly from EU standards for equality between women and men



Letter to MEPs

Miomirka Melank
Bosnia and Herzegovina

LETTER 9

Letter 9

Letter to MEPs

Miomirka Melank

Dear Mr. Dragoş TUDORACHE,

I am writing to you as a member and representative of the pro-European liberal party Naša stranka from Bosnia and Herzegovina. My name is Miomirka Melank, and I am a member of the Sarajevo Canton Assembly and a delegate in the House of Peoples of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In December 2022, the European Council officially granted Bosnia and Herzegovina candidate status for EU membership. As a country seeking EU membership, Bosnia and Herzegovina is determined to continue meeting the criteria for joining the EU. Politicians in BiH are expected to fulfill a list of 14 priorities and reforms related to democracy and the rule of law, and there is no room for negotiation on these issues.

Our society is divided in different ways. The first division is along ethnic lines. Those in power manipulate citizens by trying to convince them that those of the same ethnicity are the only ones who can guarantee security and ensure economic and social progress.

The second, essential division, is between political elites and citizens. The former have

remained in privileged positions by drawing power, influence, and economic strength from state budgets throughout the post-war period. They have an interest in preserving the existing situation and use every opportunity to corrupt all participants in the political process, while publicly declaring their support for EU integration and a fairer society. The citizens, on the other hand, remain economically weak and in an unequal political position.

Given that you were the coordinator of cases in the field of justice and the fight against corruption during Romania's accession negotiations, your experience would be highly beneficial and useful in further negotiations between BiH and the EU. The involvement of EU representatives is essential to solving these issues. BiH's progress relies on support for its European integration; only in this way is it possible to counter the strong resistance coming from its political and ethnic elites and defend the interests of citizens and liberal political forces fighting for progress in the areas of economy, justice, human rights, crime, and against corruption. Your membership in the EP Delegation for relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo assures me that we would benefit from your expertise and assistance.

In addition to all the efforts and results achieved in the period after the war, the political deadlock has contributed to the slowing down and cementing of existing relations. That is why we need help and advice in answering many questions we face, including:

BiH's progress relies on support for its European integration

What are the key factors in building a high quality legal system?
How can court processes be sped up?
How can we encourage oversight and investigations into cases of high corruption?
How can we ensure that judgments force the state to resolve court cases more quickly?
How can we influence the implementation of judgments?

I am certain that we would be able to have a fruitful discussion on how to address these challenges. There is nothing that replaces human interaction and personal contact, and we would therefore like to invite you to visit us in Sarajevo so that we can demonstrate to you the famous Bosnian hospitality and enjoy in-person discussions.

Best regards,

Miomirka Melank
Representative in the Sarajevo Canton Assembly



Letter to MEPs

Mirela Džehverović
Bosnia and Herzegovina

LETTER
10

Letter 10

Letter to MEPs

Mirela Džehverović

Dear Svenja Hahn,

I am writing this letter from Bosnia and Herzegovina, during one of the most difficult times my country has faced since the end of the war. My name is Mirela Džehverović and I am a member of the liberal party Naša stranka, which focuses on human rights issues and the liberal economic policies necessary for the progress of our nation. Bosnia and Herzegovina is an amazingly beautiful country that, sadly, many throughout Europe associate with sad news headlines. However, on a positive note, I am sure that in your daily life in Germany you have had the opportunity to meet many of my compatriots who have found shelter and a new homeland in your country, and who are hardworking professional people, always ready to crack a joke and make the best of their situation.

On a less positive note, I would like to discuss a concerning situation related to human rights. The adoption of a set of laws related to the protection and promotion of human rights has been side-lined by one of the members of the national Presidency who derogates the authority of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the decisions made by the Office of the High Representative (OHR). The persistent separatist narrative of some

politicians, as well as the nationalist rhetoric that always contains threats of a new war, makes any type of progress in this country seem impossible.

To begin with, the presents situation impedes economic development because there is no possibility of attracting foreign investors, even though the country is rich in natural resources and minerals.

It further impedes investments in infrastructure necessary for the development of process industry and social integration. All of this leaves Bosnia and Herzegovina underdeveloped and on the fringes of Europe.

I greatly admire your political work, especially how passionately you deal with issues in the domain of human rights. In your speeches and your actions, I recognize the same type of work and the same type of passion we have in my party, Naša straka, in which we fight for the promotion of human rights with all our hearts. It is encouraging that we are not alone, that we fight with same vigor, despite coming from different circumstances.

It is in that spirit that I ask you to allow us to work closely together, to team up and to lobby jointly for the betterment of the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and for its entry into the EU. Fulfilling EU standards and becoming a member of the EU is the only possible way for my country to see the light at the end of the tunnel we entered some 30 years ago. We owe it to our citizens to become a prosperous European nation.

Fulfilling EU standards and becoming a member of the EU is the only possible way for my country to see the light at the end of the tunnel we entered some 30 years ago

I am sure that will we be able to jointly fight for all human rights to to the best of our ability and in such a way as to pass a set of laws that will apply the rule of law equally to every citizen. I say every citizen because, frankly speaking, all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina are currently under threat in some way or other.

The situation is extremely alarming, and that is why I am asking you to strongly lobby for the implementation of EU standards in Bosnia and Herzegovina and our entry into the EU. In me and Naša stranka you will have faithful partners. I am very much looking forward to meeting you in person very soon.

Sincerely,

Mirela Džehverović



Letter to MEPs

Sanela Klarić
Bosnia and Herzegovina

LETTER
11

Letter 11

Letter to MEPs

Sanela Klarić

Dear Ms. Von Cramon-Taubadel,

My name is Sanela Klarić. I am a parliamentarian from Bosnia and Herzegovina, a member of the Assembly of the Sarajevo Canton and the House of Peoples of the Parliament of the FBiH. I have also been a member of the Global Alliance for a Green New Deal since 2021, and am an Associated Professor in the Architecture Department at the International Burch University. I teach sustainable architecture, energy efficient architecture, sustainable sport building and infrastructure, natural materials, and green cities.

I have more than twenty years of experience in the EU accession process and working with EU institutions. I have worked in education, CSO capacity building, programs and project development, and policy and research management in the fields of climate change, sustainable and responsible development, regional and rural development, female entrepreneurship, circular economy, environmental protection, and sustainable architecture.

I am writing to you today as part of ELF's EU Mentorship Program to discuss the issue of EU grant funds for citizens' development projects

in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). You are very familiar with all the obstacles faced by my country, but also the opportunities available to it now that we are a EU candidate country, and that is why I believe this letter will be of interest to you.

As you know, BiH is a candidate country for EU membership, and the EU has provided significant financial assistance to the country in the past. However, much of this assistance has not reached ordinary citizens. For example, the IPARD funds for rural development, which were worth €16 million in the 2014-2020 strategic period, are currently being implemented through UNDP with a very low utilization rate.

I believe that this is a major problem that needs to be addressed. Ordinary citizens in BiH need to be able to access and use EU grant funds in order to improve their lives and livelihoods. I am therefore proposing that the EU establishes a dedicated fund for citizens' development projects in BiH. This fund would be managed by a transparent and accountable body, and it would provide grants to projects that are designed to improve the lives of ordinary citizens, such as projects that promote sustainable development, environmental protection, and gender equality.

I am attaching two research documents that provide more information on this issue. The first document, "Cost-benefit analysis of the establishment of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development of Bosnia and Herzegovina," provides an analysis of the

Ordinary citizens in BiH need to be able to access and use EU grant funds in order to improve their lives and livelihoods

economic benefits of establishing a dedicated fund for citizens' development projects in BiH. The second document, "Empowerment of Women Entrepreneurs in Rural Areas in BiH," provides an overview of the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in rural BiH and how a dedicated fund could help address these challenges.

I would be grateful if you would consider my proposal and take steps to make it a reality. I believe that this would be a significant step forward in BiH's EU accession process and would help to improve the lives of ordinary citizens in the country.

I am also writing to you because I believe that you are a strong advocate for the agriculture, rural development, and environment sectors in BiH. I am confident that you will use your influence to help us achieve our goals.

I am available for any further information you or your team may need. I had the opportunity to meet you in person during the Making the Energy Community Fit for CBAM event in Brussels on 23 May. I am in awe of all your achievements and your fight for responsible and sustainable policies in the sectors of agriculture, rural development and environment, as well as of your energy.

I would be very happy to have an in-person discussion with you on the above-mentioned issues and to involve more experts in solving these problems, as well as to raise awareness about them in the EU Parliament.

I am looking forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,

Sanela Klarić



Letter to MEPs

Luka Nikolić
Montenegro

LETTER 12

Letter 12

Letter to MEPs

Luka Nikolić

Dear Ms. Donath,

As the saying goes, "May you live in interesting times." These are interesting times indeed! However, the notion of "interesting" can quickly evolve from a welcome disruption of routine to a dangerous threat that requires immediate action. Foreign malign influence, disinformation, fake news, hybrid warfare, and interference in internal affairs are just some of the concepts that are currently making our daily lives "interesting".

The European Union is undoubtedly facing ubiquitous threats from Russia and from an increasingly assertive China. Both of these countries directly endanger the internal stability of the EU and present obstacles to ensuring European strategic autonomy. The situation in my country, Montenegro, and the broader Western Balkans region is no better. The aforementioned threats, combined with the stalling of accession negotiations with the EU, are pushing the region towards all too familiar and unwanted scenarios stemming from malign third-party influence.

Precisely for this reason, I am writing to you as a persistent Euro-optimist who wants to be involved in the process of bringing my country closer to the proud European family. The EU

Mentorship Program has given me the opportunity to realize that the voices of youth changemakers can be heard by various stakeholder groups, including relevant EU institutions.

I decided to address my letter to you for three reasons. First, your proven track record within the European Parliament assures me that you are the right person to write to about the threat of hybrid warfare and foreign interference in electoral processes as one of its main corollaries. Your engagement in the ING2 committee, among others, speaks volumes about your awareness of the importance of these issues for the normal functioning of individual states, as well as the EU as a whole.

Second, your previous engagement in the Western Balkans through the parliamentary delegation to Albania guarantees that you are thoroughly familiar with the regional context and the problems that most of the countries share.

Third, your brave fight against the illiberal regime in Hungary demonstrates that you have acknowledged the importance of the grassroots community approach to returning societies to the path of respect for European values.

Montenegro has been one of the main targets of foreign malign influence for more than a decade. A permissive domestic environment has exposed it to hybrid Russian operations that threaten the normal functioning of the

As an aspiring candidate for EU membership, Montenegro strives to meet the highest legislative standards, in line with the *acquis*

democratic system. In 2016, Montenegrin authorities revealed and foiled a coup plot. Russian military intelligence officials, backed by a gang of Montenegrin and Serbian actors, planned to deny the election results, detain the incumbent prime minister, and introduce a state of emergency. In 2020, the aftermath of the parliamentary elections enabled pro-Russian agents to penetrate the security apparatus of Montenegro, wreaking havoc within the operations of the new NATO member. All of this has been exacerbated by waves of disinformation, the spread of fake news, and the proliferation of troll farms. The virtual impunity of the perpetrators has given rise to increasingly harmful hybrid warfare tactics. Through various pseudo-epistemic communities, disinformation has permeated academia as well as the private and NGO sectors.

There are many areas where the EU and Montenegro can cooperate to mitigate the effects of malign foreign influence. As an aspiring candidate for EU membership, Montenegro strives to meet the highest legislative standards, in line with the *acquis*. Cutting-edge EU initiatives such as the "EU Code of Practice on Disinformation," the "AI Act," and the "European Media Freedom Act" would certainly help Montenegro regulate its domestic environment. A task force from European institutions would be invaluable. Additionally, your expertise within the ING2 committee would help establish a team that would educate Montenegrin public administration and media on how to tackle disinformation, particularly by implementing independent fact-checking. Finally, it would be very beneficial if you could raise awareness of how important public scrutiny is in societies confronted with forms of irresponsible government. You would inspire citizens to be more politically active and free to speak.

In conclusion, I would like to sincerely invite you to visit the beautiful country of Montenegro, where we would have the opportunity to further develop ideas for future cooperation.

Sincerely,

Luka Nikolić

Conclusion

Our group of persistent Euro-optimists has discussed many burning issues that are crucial for their governments and the future of the European Union. With these letters and points of analysis, we raised awareness of important factors related to EU enlargement and what needs to be done further. As the authors mentioned, we indeed live in a very interesting momentum of foreign malign influence, fake news, and economic crises. The European Union has been confronted with threats from Russia and from an increasingly assertive China, and the same scenario has befallen the Western Balkan countries.

The aggression on Ukraine has created a new momentum in the EU enlargement process in 2022, with Ukraine, Moldova and Bosnia-Herzegovina receiving candidate status, and Albania and North Macedonia being invited to start accession talks. In 2023, for the first time, a target date for accession (by 2030) was proposed by an EU leader, the Council President Charles Michel; this is in line with what last year's members of the EU Mentorship Program suggested in their proposals. The end of 2023 might offer another momentous period for the future of EU enlargement if the member states take bold decisions. However, for a leap forward serious work is required by all.

Even though the European Council officially granted candidacy status to Bosnia and Herzegovina on 15 December 2022, the country is still struggling to meet the required criteria. Ruling elites continue to maintain the status quo and use all their resources to corrupt the government while publicly advocating for EU integration and human rights. Recent elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina have shown that people are ready for change and desire a brighter future within the EU. The upcoming progress report will present a pivotal moment for BiH's European aspirations. We need to emphasize the importance of lifting the "iron curtain" towards the Western Balkans because neglecting them can negatively affect stability and cooperation in the region. North Macedonia requires financial aid and technical assistance to accelerate the EU integration process but also to establish an independent judiciary and regain the trust of citizens in institutions, which can defend their basic human rights.

On the other hand, we have seen the influence of authoritarian leaders in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and their attempts to undermine the fundamental principles of democracy. Serbia has experienced a series of violent attacks, resulting in various protests throughout the year. Violence has been occurring in Eastern Europe as well, particularly in Armenia, with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remaining unresolved and the peace treaty being brought into question. These citizens are seeking the support of the EU on their path towards EU integration, starting with visa liberalization, in order to promote peace building, progress and security in their country, while respecting reform agendas.

"We, as Europeans, cannot allow an anti-European sentiment to flourish in the center of Europe, in a country seeking to become part of the EU. This is not our future."

"We must show leadership in front of the citizens, and the liberal family, within the EP and EU in general, can show exemplary leadership through mutual and direct support".

A liberal future in a united Europe

 /europeanliberalforum

 @eurliberalforum

#ELFevent

liberalforum.eu

Copyright 2023 /
European Liberal Forum EUPF.

This publication was co-financed by the
European Parliament. The European
Parliament is not responsible for the
content of this publication, or for any
use that may be made of it.