

## Session 7

# Balkans under the Spotlight: Resolving Tensions and Disputes



## **Moderator**

**Nafisa Latic**

## **Speakers**

**Naim Rashiti**, Executive Director, Balkans Policy Research Group

**Radmila Shekerinska**, Former Minister of Defence, Former Deputy Prime Minister, Republic of North Macedonia

**Sabina Cudic**, Member of the National Parliament, Bosnia and Herzegovina

**Mehmet Kemal Bozay**, Deputy Foreign Minister, Republic of Türkiye

## **Discussants**

**Dr. İdlir Lika**, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science and International Relations, Ibn Haldun University

**Dr. Mehmet Uğur Ekinci**, Researcher, SETA

**Dr. Zuhâl Mert Uzuner**, Associate Professor of International Relations, Marmara University

**Dr. Enes Turbic**, Assistant Professor, Balkans Research Institute of Trakya University

**Dajana Barusic**, Researcher, Institute of Strategic Thinking Türkiye

**Dr. Esin Ömer Ulukaya**, Assistant Professor, Trakya University

**H.E. Periša Kastratović**, Ambassador of Montenegro to the Republic of Türkiye

**Dr. Selver Buldanlıoğlu Şahin**, Assistant Professor, Bilkent University

**Berk Cem Tatar**, Diplomat, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Türkiye

## Key Takeaways

- Türkiye actively engages in the Balkans, addressing regional issues and promoting well-being. Inclusive engagement spans ethnic and political lines.
- Addressing demographic concerns, job insecurity, and societal struggles is vital. Green digital transformations and quality-of-life improvements are key strategies.
- North Macedonia's NATO journey highlights the importance of small Balkan countries. EU hesitance poses risks, and Türkiye's integration is seen as transformative.
- Regional initiatives, such as the Open Balkan initiative, can enhance stability. Evolving political landscapes indicate growing maturity.
- The Balkans face geopolitical challenges, with Russia's influence and the risk of destabilisation strategies. Bureaucratic measures are crucial for stability.

## Summary

The Balkans are undergoing significant challenges amidst geopolitical shifts. Tensions in northern Kosovo and separatist rhetoric in Bosnia Herzegovina raise concerns. Türkiye, recognising its strategic role, actively engages in the region, addressing issues such as the electric grid system. The panel emphasises inclusive engagement across ethnic and political lines. Disputes' root causes, including demographic concerns and job insecurity, demand a focus on quality of life and green digital transformations.

The Balkans face a frozen conflict, with war potential upon Kosovo Force withdrawal. Issues include political stagnation, societal struggles, and geopolitical challenges. NATO and EU dynamics are crucial.

North Macedonia's NATO journey, balancing regional and bilateral concerns, highlights the strategic importance of small Balkan countries. The Western

Balkans grapple with EU hesitance, posing risks of losing momentum.

Türkiye's EU integration, though challenging, offers transformative impacts. The EU's strategic direction faces criticism, urging a reconsideration of Türkiye's role, especially in energy dialogues.

Experts stressed the need for peace, exchange programs, and an understanding of Türkiye's evolving global role.

The Balkans, born from Yugoslavia's legacy, struggle with unipolar influences. Regional cooperation, as seen in the Open Balkan initiative, can enhance stability. The evolving political landscape, despite challenges, indicates growing maturity. The region must prevent harmful external dominance.