



BELGRADE
SECURITY
CONFERENCE



PATHWAYS TO **FREEDOM**

17-19 NOVEMBER 2025

SAVA CENTER

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===== AGENDA =====

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BCSP

Belgrade Centre
for Security Policy

Day 1

Monday, 17 November

16:00 – 17:00

Registration of participants

17:00 - 17:05

Introduction by the Masters of Ceremonies

17:05 - 17:15

Opening remarks

17:15 - 17:30

Documentary dedicated to Ksenija Atanasijević,

Serbian philosopher and the first female professors at Belgrade University

17:30 – 19:00

Serbia's Moment of Truth: Can Justice Prevail?

Since late 2024, Serbia has been experiencing its deepest political and institutional crisis in over a decade. Triggered by a tragic event in Novi Sad and fuelled by mass protests against murderous corruption and impunity, the crisis has exposed a collapse of trust in institutions, the instrumentalisation of state repression by the ruling party, and government's refusal to engage in a dialogue with opposition and civil society. The protests, led by students and supported by wider civic initiatives, have raised demands for political change but face fierce repression.

The European Union has so far reacted with mixed signals – condemning violence but failing to exert decisive pressure. The possible scenarios for the period ahead range from prolonged status quo and authoritarian entrenchment, through EU-mediated compromise, to escalation, repression, or even early elections. Each scenario carries significant implications for Serbia's democratic future, the resilience of its society, and the credibility of its EU integration path.

This panel will explore what pathways could lead Serbia out of crisis and how democratic renewal might be achieved in practice. What are the realistic pathways for Serbia to move out of the current political deadlock? Can early elections or EU-mediated dialogue create space for democratic recovery? How can student-led and grass-

roots movements sustain momentum and translate street energy into sustainable political change? How should the EU respond to authoritarian drift in Serbia, and what role might Russia or other external actors play in shaping the outcome?

19:00 – 20:00

The Lighthouse Award 2025 Ceremony followed by a cocktail reception

Day 2

Tuesday, 18 November

09:00 – 10:00

Registration and welcome coffee

10:00 – 11:00

Transatlantic Relations: Still a Pillar of International Order?

The transatlantic relationship faces a defining moment amid overlapping crises – wars in Europe and the Middle East, authoritarian assertiveness, and weakening multilateral norms. Traditional pillars of cooperation – NATO, democratic governance, and an open international order – are under strain as U.S. and European priorities diverge.

With the Ukraine conflict dragging on, alliance cohesion is crucial for European security and global deterrence. Yet, widening transatlantic and inter-European rifts over responses to Middle East violence, humanitarian protection, and international law highlight deeper challenges. Beyond these crises, great-power competition, climate insecurity, and democratic backsliding raise doubts about the alliance's ability to adapt to a multipolar world.

This panel will examine whether the transatlantic partnership can still act as a stabilising force. How resilient is its security architecture under sustained pressure? How do policy differences across the Atlantic affect the West's ability to uphold norms and manage crises? What role can the transatlantic partnership play in addressing global instability? What are the long-term consequences for global governance if cooperation between the West falters?

11:15 – 12:15

Indo-Pacific's Future, World's Fate: U.S.–China Competition and the Role of Regional Actors

The Indo-Pacific has become the central stage of 21st-century power politics, marked by intensifying U.S.–China rivalry, military build-up, economic decoupling, and fragile red lines – none more critical than Taiwan. The United States has reinforced its role through initiatives like AUKUS and the Quad, with Japan and Australia emerging as a frontline security actors alongside Washington and its allies. Meanwhile, China continues to expand its influence through military presence in the South and East China Seas and economic projects such as the Belt and Road.

Japan has deepened defence cooperation with the U.S., South Korea, and the Philippines, positioning itself as a key actor in regional stability and a central pillar of the Quad. Europe is also seeking a stronger role through its Indo-Pacific strategy, promoting rule-based order, economic engagement, and conflict prevention, though questions remain about its effectiveness.

This panel will explore the risks of U.S.–China confrontation, the evolving role of Taiwan in global security, and the capacity of regional, Australian, and European actors to shape outcomes. Can existing frameworks manage escalating tensions, or is a new security architecture needed? What are the key flashpoints, and how might economic interdependence and diplomacy help contain them?

12:15 – 12:45

Coffee break

12:45 – 13:45

Deconstructing Democracy: Back to Basics or Reinvention?

In recent years, the rise of authoritarianism has shifted from a regional concern to a systemic challenge to democratic norms, institutions, and alliances. Autocratic regimes – from Moscow to Beijing – have grown more assertive, wielding military aggression, disinformation, and economic coercion to expand their influence and discredit democratic models.

Yet the threat to democracy is not only external. Across the West, illiberal currents are advancing from within. Elected leaders in democratic states increasingly resort to authoritarian tactics: eroding judicial independence, capturing media, weakening civil society, and undermining trust in elections. Authoritarian practices are crossing borders and corroding democracies from the inside. Once seen as exceptions, these trends now stretch from Central Europe to North America, shaking the very foundations of the liberal democratic order.



This panel will explore how democracies are being tested – and how they are responding. In an era of geopolitical instability and democratic backsliding, key questions arise: What led to the crisis of democracy and what needs to be fixed? How can trust in democratic governance be restored? Is democratic order as such still possible or should it evolve into new forms? How can democracies defend themselves without succumbing to illiberalism? And what would it take to rebuild global democratic solidarity in a world increasingly defined by power politics and ideological rivalry?

13:45 – 15:00

Lunch

15:00 – 16:00

Unarmed in the Unseen War: How to Counter Hybrid Threats in Europe?

Eastern and southeastern Europe today face mounting pressure from Russian hybrid warfare. Drone and missile incursions threaten critical infrastructure and civilian lives. Disinformation campaigns erode trust in institutions, polarise societies, and weaken democratic resilience. Electoral meddling demonstrates Russia's intent to shape political outcomes far beyond its borders. Together, these tactics contribute to an atmosphere where the region appears to stand on the brink of war.

This panel will examine how these threats intersect with Europe's internal vulnerabilities and divisions, highlighting the risks for neighbouring countries and for the continent's overall security architecture. It will explore the extent to which hybrid operations destabilise governments, undermine Euro-Atlantic integration, and fuel authoritarian tendencies. At the same time, it will address the urgent question of how European and transatlantic actors can mount a coordinated and credible response.

How are Russian drone and missile incursions reshaping security perceptions in Europe's east and the Balkans? In what ways do disinformation and electoral interference erode democratic resilience? How prepared are European states to counter the hybrid dimension of Russian aggression?

16:00 – 16:30

Coffee break

16:30 - 16:45

Keynote speech

16:45 - 18:00

EU Enlargement at a Turning Point

The EU has reaffirmed that the Western Balkans, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia are part of the European family, and 2025 was hailed as a symbolic year for a renewed wave of enlargement. Yet despite stronger rhetoric from Brussels, uncertainty persists. Candidate countries struggle to reconcile optimistic messages with slow progress, while public trust in the process continues to erode.

At the same time, internal EU dynamics cast a long shadow. The mantra of “no enlargement without reform,” coupled with the growing influence of right-wing populists across member states, raises doubts about the Union’s political capacity to deliver. Enlargement is again caught between geopolitical urgency and domestic hesitation.

This panel will debate whether enlargement can remain credible in the face of competing pressures. Can transitional models such as phased integration offer real solutions? How will the rise of populism within the EU shape the political space for enlargement? Can the EU accession process still assure genuine democratic improvement in candidate countries, and what is the interplay between geopolitics and democracy in shaping these outcomes? And what are the consequences for Europe’s security and credibility if this momentum falters?

Day 3

Tuesday, 19 November

09:00 – 10:00

Registration and welcome coffee

10:00 – 11:15

Three parallel sessions:

1 Lost in Geopolitics? Post-Yugoslav Views on Security, Sovereignty and the Future of Europe

The European security architecture is in a state of flux. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, tensions between great powers, and the uncertain role of the EU have reawakened existential debates about sovereignty, alliance, and global order, particularly in Europe’s southeast. Still, the post-Yugoslav space remains a geopolitical grey zone, where legacies of past wars, partial integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, and divergent perceptions of threat continue to shape foreign policy orientations and societal attitudes. This panel, drawing on data from Security Radar 2025:

Europe – Lost in Geopolitics, a public opinion survey conducted by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), will examine the question: How do post-Yugoslav societies, both their populations and elites, view European and global security, and what does that mean for the region's geopolitical future?

2

On the Frontlines of Freedom: Youth Shaping the Western Balkans' Future

Young people are becoming some of the most prominent voices of protest and reflection in a period of deep uncertainty. Across Serbia, the Western Balkans, and beyond, Generation Z is questioning the meaning of freedom amid a rapidly changing global order, growing injustice, and a decline in trust in institutions. As the first digital-native generation, they navigate complex realities with empathy, emotional intelligence, and a heightened awareness of both individual and societal challenges. The discussion, featuring BSC Young Leaders as main speakers, will explore how generational experiences, technological environments, and shifting social values shape young people's understanding of freedom, civic engagement, and responsibility in today's world.

3

Resetting Enlargement: A New Approach towards the Western Balkans

For years, the EU's enlargement process in the Western Balkans was stalled, thus, draining democratic energy, slowing reforms, and eroding public trust. Russia's war in Ukraine changed this dynamic and transformed inertia into urgency. Enlargement is now framed as a geopolitical imperative, elevating the Western Balkans alongside Ukraine and Moldova. Yet, speed without safeguards risks turning accession into a security-driven checklist rather than a transformative process based on merit. While fast-tracking could finally break the deadlock, it could also weaken conditionality, enable backsliding, and hollow out democratisation.

What the Western Balkans need is not just a quicker path to EU membership but a Smarter Enlargement Approach: a staged, citizen-centred framework that acknowledges regional complexities and couples political engagement and investment with rigorous rule-of-law criteria, more funding, credible safeguards, and citizen participation. Such a reset can ensure integration delivers real, lasting change, anchoring democracy, resilience, and prosperity.

11:15 – 11:45**Coffee break**

11:45 – 13:00

Three parallel sessions:

1

Public Presentation of SecuriMeter 2025 Report: Western Balkans Regional Security Perceptions

The Regional Cooperation Council's (RCC) SecuriMeter 2025 survey provides a unique window into how citizens across the Western Balkan Six (WB6) perceive security, governance, and everyday risks, from corruption and migration to cyber threats and economic uncertainty. The 5th annual SecuriMeter report aims to objectively inform the public so that the key decisions about the lives of citizens and their region can be based on facts and informed opinion, not prejudice or guesswork. Data gathered from over 6,000 respondents reveal growing trust in regional and European cooperation, but also highlight persistent concerns over general security, personal safety, economic security, corruption, and depopulation.

The main discussion themes include: perceptions of security, corruption and public trust, and human security. The session will link some of the key findings and trends to broader regional security dynamics. Speakers will explore how citizen perceptions can inform policymaking and how evidence-based dialogue can bridge the gap between public expectations and institutional action. The discussion will also touch on the broader question: how can societies in the WB6 strengthen resilience, retain talent, and rebuild trust in local institutions?

2

Recalibrating EU Support: Strengthening Candidate Countries' Resilience to Malign Interference

Geopolitical circumstances continue to push the EU into adjusting its enlargement policy. The EU has made a historic strategic commitment by granting candidate status to Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, and by reaffirming the European membership goal of the Western Balkan countries. This pivotal political step represents a clear goal to counter Russian and Chinese influence but has not yet been fully translated into a policy framework capable of effectively tackling the multifaceted malign interference that candidate countries face daily. These nations are on the frontline, not just kinetically, as in the case of Ukraine, but also in confronting hybrid threats, disinformation campaigns, and economic pressures aimed at undermining their democratic institutions, security, and Euro-Atlantic integration paths.

This roundtable session, grounded in the extensive research of the REUNIR Horizon Europe project, addresses these critical threats and proposes concrete recalibrations of the EU's approach. The discussion will focus on how EU support



can be transformed to build foundational resilience, ensuring that candidates can withstand and recover from malign influences in three key spheres (military, political/democratic, and socio-economic) while continuing reforms on the path towards membership. Drawing on unique empirical evidence gathered from field research in nine accession countries, this session will outline how the EU can evolve its toolboxes to meet this momentum.

3

Democracy Under Siege: The Rise of Anti-Establishment Extremism in Europe and Serbia

Across Europe, anti-establishment actors—movements, parties, and public figures—are increasingly challenging the liberal-democratic order. These anti-establishment tendencies often go beyond legitimate criticism of the system and evolve into calls for its complete replacement with models that would represent a significant democratic regression. The roundtable aims to provide a deeper understanding of the causes and consequences of this trend, both in the European Union and in Serbia.

A special focus will be placed on the paradox of Serbia: although marginal anti-establishment actors exist, the greatest threat to democracy today comes from the ruling Serbian Progressive Party, which formally advocates for European values but in practice acts as an anti-establishment force, violently undermining institutions and critical public discourse. Discussions will also address how political elites misuse the label of anti-establishment extremism to silence democratic critique, and how foreign malign actors exploit public discontent to weaken trust in democracy across Europe and the region.

13:00 – 14:00

Lunch

14:00 – 15:15

Three parallel sessions:

1

Hands-On Strategy Exchange: Human Rights Defenders and Civil Society under Repression

Across the Western Balkans, civil society organisations and human rights defenders face increasing pressure through restrictive laws, smear campaigns, and the proliferation of government-organised NGOs (GONGOs). This session explores the ways in which civic space is being undermined - from security threats to activists, to the instrumentalisation of fake civil society actors that distort public debate and influence policymaking. Through an interactive panel discussion, participants from Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina will share first-hand experiences



and reflect on mechanisms of solidarity and resistance. The conversation will focus on how regional cooperation among genuine civil society actors can counteract these trends and protect the integrity of civic engagement.

The session combines brief panel presentations with interactive thematic stations, allowing participants to engage directly with key challenges facing civil society in the Western Balkans. Panelists act as facilitators in small groups, guiding discussions on themes such as security of human rights defenders, GONGOs and disinformation, regional solidarity and cooperation.

2

Peace Matrix: Sequencing Peace for European Security

As Russia's war against Ukraine grinds on, Europe faces the challenge of moving from crisis management to a sustainable peace architecture. The need is not only to end active hostilities but also to shape a stable security order that prevents renewed conflict and restores trust in European security institutions. Developed within the Conversations on European Security project, the Peace Matrix – a strategic framework designed by the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP) and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Vienna – offers a roadmap for sequencing political, diplomatic, and security steps in conflict resolution. Drawing on insights from experts across Western Europe, North America, Russia, and Ukraine, it identifies where incremental agreements are feasible, how priorities can be aligned, and where external support can reinforce pathways to peace.

This session will present the Peace Matrix to the wider policy community and debate its potential application for Ukraine and Europe's future security. Key questions include: Can sequencing approaches help overcome entrenched positions and foster incremental progress? How can European actors synchronise diplomatic, security, and reconstruction efforts? And what role can such frameworks play in designing a broader rules-based peace architecture for Europe?

3

Digital Repression and the Future of Civic Space

One year after Amnesty International released "A Digital Prison: Surveillance and the Suppression of Civil Society in Serbia," this roundtable will examine what has changed, if anything, in the landscape of digital threats to civil society in Serbia and globally. The discussion will explore how spyware and surveillance technologies continue to be used against journalists, activists, and human rights defenders, and whether any progress has been made in strengthening protection, oversight, and accountability.

From a technical perspective, participants will assess new trends in spyware deployment, vulnerabilities in digital infrastructure, and the evolving methods of cyberattacks targeting civil society. The legal discussion will focus on whether



Serbia's regulatory and judicial responses have advanced in line with international human rights standards, and how global practices can inform domestic reforms. Finally, the human rights dimension will highlight the lived experience of digital repression, its effects on freedom of expression and association, and steps needed to build resilience and defend civic space.

The roundtable aims to generate concrete recommendations for improving digital safeguards, ensuring independent oversight of surveillance technologies, and enhancing the digital resilience of civil society actors in Serbia and beyond.

15:15 – 15:45

Coffee break

15:45 - 17:00

Three parallel sessions:

1

Swiss Neutrality and Peacebuilding in the Balkans: Lessons for Regional Dialogue

Switzerland's long-standing tradition of neutrality has been central to its global role in diplomacy, mediation, and peacebuilding. This roundtable will explore how the principles and practices underpinning Swiss neutrality—credibility, discretion, and inclusivity—can inform reconciliation and institution-building efforts in the Western Balkans. Participants will discuss how neutrality, as both a value and an operational approach, contributes to building trust, facilitating dialogue, and fostering resilience in divided societies.

The session will also reflect on the adaptability of the Swiss model to the region's current political and social realities. By examining both the opportunities and constraints of neutrality in polarized contexts, the discussion will assess how neutral actors can remain effective amid competing narratives and interests. What are the main elements that make Swiss neutrality a credible and sustainable model in peacebuilding? How can the principles of neutrality and discretion be adapted to the realities of the Western Balkans? What lessons from Switzerland's mediation and "good offices" can inform regional dialogue efforts? Where are the limits of neutrality in deeply polarized environments, and how can they be managed? How can neutral facilitation contribute to rebuilding trust and institutional resilience in the region?

2

Feminist Peace in Hostile Times: Reimagining the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in an Era of Global Backlash

As the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda marks its 25th anniversary, feminist activists and policymakers are confronted with a critical question: How can we ensure the WPS framework remains politically relevant amid rising militarization, disinformation, and shrinking civic space? From the wars in Ukraine and Gaza to the intensifying anti-gender backlash in the Western Balkans, both global and local crises are reshaping how women and marginalized communities experience insecurity. These challenges are compounded by militarism, extractive economies, and patriarchal governance, deepening existing vulnerabilities.

Our discussion will explore how feminist movements are responding – by forging transnational alliances, resisting authoritarianism, and envisioning new pathways for democratic resilience. We aim to foster a vibrant exchange that connects global feminist struggles with regional experiences, challenges dominant security narratives, and reimagines peace as feminist, inclusive, and sustained through care and cooperation. This panel will bring together feminist peacebuilders, researchers, and women's rights advocates to reflect on the evolving meanings of peace and security—moving beyond institutional checklists toward a truly transformative vision rooted in justice and solidarity.

3

Europe's Clean Technology Dilemma: The Role of CEE Region

As Europe races to meet its climate targets, it faces a strategic dilemma: how to scale up green technologies without deepening its dependence on Chinese supply chains. From solar panels and EV batteries to rare earths and critical raw materials, China's dominance poses long-term risks to the EU's autonomy, resilience, and geopolitical credibility. This panel examines how the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region can play a unique role in reducing Europe's vulnerabilities. With vast raw material potential, emerging manufacturing hubs, CEE countries are increasingly central to Europe's green-tech future. The Western Balkans, in particular, offer untapped opportunities, but also face intense competition for influence from China and other external actors.

17:00**Closing Remarks**

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