

12th May 2021, 14:30-15:30 PM MESC

## **The role of the EU in solving political issues based on historical disputes: The case of Bulgaria and North Macedonia**

*(closed expert discussion)*

### **Background**

As political forces are re-arranging themselves in Bulgaria after the parliamentary election on 4 April 2021, current relations between North Macedonia and Bulgaria are at the lowest level since decades. The enthusiasm after signing the "Agreement on good neighborly relationship" on 1 August 2017 has turned to an open dispute between the two governments over historical heritage and the question of identity of ethnic Macedonians. The official blockade of the Bulgarian government of the approval of the negotiating framework for North Macedonia and the official denial of the Macedonian language has further deteriorated the fragile relationship.

Consequently, the situation is heavily burdened by ethnonational, biased interpretations of the past and strong nationalistic rhetoric. During the last two years, several developments damaged the mutual trust and cooperation between the two governments who are now accusing each other of obstructing the Agreement. While both governments are trying to come out of the current limbo situation and to adopt an action plan for implementation of the Agreement, a bilateral multidisciplinary experts committee on historical and educational issues could not fulfil the expectations that Sofia and Skopje had.

This situation puts the EU integration process of the WB6 in danger, as North Macedonia's start of accession talks is hostage to the veto power of Balkan EU Member States who are using it to impose their political stands on history and memory.

The aim of the debate is to discuss and exchange ideas and views on the current relations between North Macedonia and Bulgaria in the context of the EU enlargement and the importance for the WB6 European integration. The discussion will address also the role and responsibility of the EU institutions and EU member state.

### **Welcome notes**

Facilitator **Simon Ilse**, director HBS Belgrade

### **The EU's engagement vacuum in the Balkans**

**Erwan Fouéré**, former EU ambassador to North Macedonia

### **Macedonia's approach (pro's and con's) to the dispute**

**Dr. Simonida Kacarska**, Director of the Institute for European policy - Skopje

### **Bulgaria's approach (pro's and con's) to the dispute**

**Vessela Tcherneva**, Deputy Director of ECFR and Director of its Sofia office

### **Education, history and text-book revision**

**Prof. Eckhardt Fuchs**, Director of the Georg Eckert Institute, Braunschweig

Key messages from the **Western Balkans 6 Strategy Group** members  
Please find their related statement on the historical dispute [here](#).