

European Prospects for the West Balkan

Political Salon with **Miroslav Lajčák** and **Wolfgang Petritsch**, October 15



I. Krastev, W. Petritsch, M. Lajčák

The IWM prepared a Political Salon for October 15 dealing with the European Prospects for the Western Balkans. The current High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina (OHR), Valentin Inzko was supposed to meet the ex-OHR and the current Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Miroslav Lajčák. However, Valentin Inzko had to cancel due to political developments in the Balkan region. Fortunately, the IWM succeeded in finding a replacement: Wolfgang Petritsch, Austrian diplomat serving in OHR from 1999–2002. The Editor of Foreign Affairs of *Die Presse*, Wieland Schneider, and IWM Visiting Fellow Ivan Krastev chaired the discussion.

In his opening speech, Lajčák emphasized that “there are no better perspectives than the European ones for the Western Balkans” but also stressed out that “the whole process lost its dynamic and credibility.” He voiced his recommendation to the international community: to find a compromise between political and technical criteria for EU entry, set neither too high nor too low, and approach all countries in the region in the same way and, last but not least, to promote regional cooperation.

Wolfgang Petritsch then commented on Lajčák’s views, high-

lighting that the whole region is dependent on the European internal integration process while the regional power of Serbia must not be overlooked. They then discussed the impact of a visa-free zone for all the Balkan countries. Bosnia and Albania had been excluded since they do not fulfil the criterion of biometric passports. Lajčák and Petritsch pointed out that this decision was made on technical grounds rather than on political ones.

The question whether Bosnia and Herzegovina would gain EU candidate status if a new Constitution is implemented remained unresolved in the following discussion with the audience. Yet keeping in mind that the leaders of Bosnia’s three major ethnic groups recently failed to reach an agreement on constitutional reforms for the country, it seems there is still a long way to go towards the European Union. ◀

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Miroslav Lajčák is Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia and was the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina from 2007 to 2009.

Wolfgang Petritsch is Permanent Representative of Austria to the OECD. He served as the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1999 to 2002.