



Fostering democracy in the Balkans

Ten years ago the King Baudouin Foundation, joined forces with the ERSTE Foundation, the Compagnia di San Paolo and the Robert Bosch Foundation, to help foster good governance in the Balkans. Zoran Nechev, Senior Associate Fellow at the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), explains the importance of the European Fund for the Balkans (EFB) and why its mission is as critical today as it was a decade ago.

Since its inception, the EFB has paid for 153 government officials to be trained, funded fellowship grants for 203 young leaders, supported 150 researchers and funded 95 think tanks. This, and related work by the Fund, has significantly contributed to the “development of vibrant civil societies in the Western Balkans,” says Nechev.

EU accession

While the EU accession process of the Balkans countries may seem to have progressed little, Nechev

blames this on a “constellation of circumstances,” rather than issues specific to the Balkans. “By further fostering democracy in the Western Balkans, we are propelling the European integration process,” states Nechev. “Only democratic countries can become members of the European family, and this is crucial for the EFB’s mission.”

Debunking myths

One of the Fund’s vital roles in this process is “supporting the work of individuals and civil society



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organizations that debunk myths about ‘pro-European political leaders’ in the region, who sell national reforms as part of the EU accession process while conducting them in a way that fortifies their position and influence in society”. Nechev agrees that the EFB’s role in the Balkans will remain essential in the years to come - both to disseminate positive results from the region across the EU and to emphasize the Western Balkans countries’ role in helping to address the challenges faced by the EU”.