On April 1st 2016, the Stability and Association Agreement between Kosovo and the European Union entered into force, marking a major step towards Kosovo’s political and economic convergence and candidate status. This agreement is the first contractual link between Kosovo and the Union, although it still leaves the question of the non-recognition of the country by five Member States unresolved.

In addition to necessary political and economic reforms in public administration, the rule of law, human rights and the protection of minorities as well as free trade, the European integration of Kosovo implies an emphasis on regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations. This emphasis in the EU’s approach to Kosovo is supported by all Member States.

Particularly important is the normalisation of the relations between Pristina and Belgrade. The negotiations have been supported by the EU through the facilitation of its High Representative, presently Federica Mogherini. This facilitation process has yielded several positive results. A milestone is the Brussels agreement of 2013, which provides keys in the local governance structure of Kosovo, as well as other agreements on integrated border management, the protection of religious and cultural sites. These paved the way for opening of EU accession negotiations with Serbia and the conclusion of a Stability and Association Agreement for Kosovo. However, not all agreed points have been fully implemented so far, most notably with regards to the creation of the Association/Community of Serb majority municipalities in Kosovo. The mandate of the self-administration of the Association/Community has not yet been agreed, which nourishes uncertainty and distrust within Kosovo’s society.

The relations between Kosovo and Montenegro are stable, although a strife on the demarcation of borders between the two countries hinders the pursuit of Kosovo’s visa-liberalisation process.

Macedonia recognised Kosovo eight months after its declaration of independence. The relations between the two states continue to be positive. In February 2016, several Agreements were signed, e.g. on technical assistance and cooperation regarding European integration. The Kumanovo incident and public statements on the participation of Kosovars therein, however, raised tensions. More recently, the formation of an Albanian platform in Skopje, supported by Kosovo and Albania, to help the opposition party in Macedonia in forming a ruling coalition also stirred tensions.

Kosovo’s relations with Albania, by contrast, are supported through a series of bilateral agreements, e.g. for the protection and support of investment and the intensification of economic cooperation in relation to environment, energy, transport, duties and taxes, etc...
Regional Cooperation and good neighbourly relations are essential to Kosovo’s European integration. In 2013, Kosovo became a member of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). More recently, it joined the working group “Regional Youth Cooperation Office” (RYCO) to promote reconciliation and youth cooperation.

The aim of this conference is to shed light on these questions and other related challenges.

Coordinator:
Sarah Veit: sarah.veit@oefz.at
Tentative schedule

9:00 – 9.15  Opening

Florent MARCIACQ, Chargé de Mission, Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe, Vienna

9.15 – 9.45  Key Notes

Mimoza AHMETAJ, Minister for European Integration to the Republic of Kosovo, Pristina

Michael LINHART, Secretary General, Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, Vienna

9.45 - 10.45  1. Panel: Taking stock: The European integration of Kosovo – driving forces and pitfalls

Chair: Florent MARCIACQ, Chargé de mission, Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe, Vienna

Jeton MEHMETI, Research Director, GAP Institute, Pristina
“Zero Progress: Identifying Kosovo’s challenges in fulfilling the recommendations of the European Commission”

Albana MERJA, Research Fellow, Group for Legal and Political Studies, Pristina
"Stabilisation and Association Agreement and European Reform Agenda: The Importance, Benefits, and Obligations"

Jean-Arnault DÉRENS, Editor in Chief, Le Courrier des Balkans, Belgrade
“The blockade of European integration, Kosovo and the Albanian national question” (tbc)

10.45 – 11.15  Discussion

11.15 – 11.30  Coffee Break

11.30 – 12.30  2. Panel: Kosovo in its regional space – regional cooperation and neighbourly relations

Chair: Tobias FLESSENKEMPER, Senior Fellow and Balkans Project Director, Centre international de formation Européenne (cife), Berlin

Ardian HACKAJ, Director, Cooperation & Development Institute, Tirana
“Contribution of Kosovar Citizen into Neighbourly Relations: an illustration of the other approach to Regional Cooperation in WB6"
Jelica MINIĆ, President of the Forum for International Relations, European Movement Serbia, Belgrade
“Regional cooperation - supporting peace and state-building”

Zlatko VUJOVIĆ, President of the Governing Board, Centre for Monitoring and Research (CeMI), Podgorica
(tbc)

Lura POLLOZHANI, Centre for South East European Studies (CSEES), University of Graz
“The half-hearted cooperation between Kosovo and Macedonia and the lessons to be learned”

12.30 – 13.00 Discussion

13.00 – 13.15 Conclusion

Nataliya APOSTOLOVA, Head of EU Delegation to Kosovo / EU Special Representative in Kosovo, Pristina
(tbc)