Seminar on Regional Security
Alumni Community of Interest (COI) Workshop
23-25 July 2019 in Berlin, Germany

The Challenge of EU Accession for Countries Aspiring to EU Membership and for the EU itself

I. **Purpose:** This COI Workshop brings together SRS Alumni from states aspiring to EU membership and from Southeast European EU member states, as well as ‘Representatives of the EU’. The following topics will be discussed:

1. **Pros and Cons of an EU Membership,** and the current public opinion towards EU membership within EU aspirant countries’ (i.e. West Balkan countries and Georgia) and EU member countries’ societies.

2. The (dis-)balance between the European Council’s 2003 THESSALONIKI CONCLUSIONS, the 2018 credible enlargement perspective for […] the Western Balkans of the European Commission and EU’s current political willingness to accept accession of West Balkan and/or neighborhood countries.

3. Fresh, out of the box suggestions for how to overcome these potential deadlocks by sharing responsibilities (i.e. by promoting reconciliation and good neighborly relations, and for the countries of the region to take full ownership, solving outstanding intra-state and bilateral issues), thus identifying a way ahead for the countries with EU aspirations and the EU, as well.

II. **SRS COI Objectives:**

We cordially invite you and a select group of SRS Alumni to participate and to

A. engage in conversation about Western Balkan/ Georgian society’s expectations towards accession to the European Union;

B. compare these expectations with those of EU member countries and their societies concerning EU enlargement;

C. to analyze the application of EU core values to accept new member states into existing EU structures, and to identify necessary changes within the EU and

D. in particular, to identify definitive and measurable, inclusive and binding accomplishment criteria for a EU successful accession (based on the Berlin Process) and draw the necessary conclusions for a way ahead for West Balkan Countries/ Georgia for the 2019 – 2023 timeframe.
III. Background

2018 was supposed to demonstrate a significant revival of EU interest in the western Balkans, with several key events designed to give new life to the region’s European accession process. Positive Trends for EU accession / EU enlargement included:

- the European Commission adoption of a new enlargement strategy paper under the Bulgarian Presidency;
- Romania’s EU presidency decision to keep enlargement on its priority list, recognizing the strategic importance for the union as a whole, because the Western Balkans and Georgia continue to be crucial for the security of the EU’s borders;
- the agreement of Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to change the latter’s name to the Republic of North Macedonia;

In other areas, major setbacks in the region could be observed, many of which remain unresolved. Those include:

- The delay of accession for Albania and North Macedonia by a decision of the June 2018 European Council, owing to their lack of progress in reforms.
- Tensions between Serbia and Kosovo, sparked by a controversial border-swap deal; imposition of 100 per cent tariffs by Kosovo on Serbian goods, etc.
- Growing separatist and nationalistic trends between Bosnia and Herzegovina entities.

Dealing with these problems might again take many years, which could reinforce another challenge: accession fatigue within EU aspirant countries. With the process having already been prolonged for such a long time, citizens of many Western Balkan countries and in Georgia, too, are growing increasingly tired of politicians pushing for reforms while not meeting expectations.

On the EU side, member states remain divided on enlargement, partly because of concern about the consolidation of EU norms in countries, which joined in 2004 and 2007. Additionally, a recent Eurobarometer poll shows that 43 per cent of the EU public support ‘further enlargement of the EU to include other countries in future years’, while 45 per cent are against.

IV. Resulting Tasks

Yet, for the sake of national and regional security, there is a “Shared Responsibility” to invest new energy into circumventing these adverse conditions. Finding new paths towards the mitigation, management and resolution of protracted critical situations and constellations is at the very heart of the SRS resident course at the Marshall Center. We aim to continue with this same approach to finding new paths during this SRS COI.
“Shared Responsibility” is not just a new meaningless buzzword for policy statements. It is about the committed, concerted effort to take serious the responsibility for security. It is not about blame or finger pointing. In addition, new solutions need to include agents who have not been present or visible in past efforts such as women, youth and community leaders. New solutions depend on their voices being heard.

By re-addressing perspectives and a way out of the currently deadlocked EU accession process this SRS COI Workshop also aims at making a contribution to the Slovak 2019 OSCE Chairmanship, whose chosen main motto is “For people, dialogue and stability” to work towards common solutions for shared challenges and to overcome divisions within and between states.

(https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/408353?download=true )