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## **EU MEMBERSHIP HAS NO ALTERNATIVE TO THE WESTERN BALKANS**

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European Western Balkans (7 June 2019)

Participants of the GLOBSEC forum panel Western Balkans: Drifting away from Europe?, agree that there is no alternative to the Western Balkans integration into European Union and that the EU must constantly support this process.

President of Montenegro Milo Đukanović said that there is no plan B for the country when it comes to the European Union, adding that Montenegro has become a member of NATO and has advanced in European integrations more than other countries.

He warned that Balkans need to become EUs zone of responsibility because geographically it is part of Europe.

There are new players at the geopolitical scene and we have to open our eyes or else we would be very surprised. Russia, China, and others are seeking their place and their position in the Balkans. And how much they will get, depends on how much EU and NATO will give them, warned Đukanović.

Answering the moderators question about the newly opened highway which was Chinese investment in Montenegro, Đukanović said that they didnt have any room to choose any other offer. The offer that they got from China was so much more favorable that they couldnt do anything else.

Why havent we offered such a solution and such bid from European Investment Bank (EIB), why did we get it from China? Because China is taking the space, the EU leaves empty, concluded Đukanović.

On the other hand, the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić doesnt see the problem with Serbia cooperating with non-EU actors such as Russia.

Speaking about Serbias trade agreement with Eurasian Union, he emphasized that it is very important for exporting Serbian goods to that market. On the other hand, Serbia is on the EU path and it will not be part of the Eurasian Union.

If you ask me if we are going to conclude more arrangements with Russia and with China for the sake of our people □ yes we gonna do it. And no one can stop us in that, said Vučić and added that he will also always say to Vladimir Putin in person that Serbias strategic goal is the European Union

Ekaterina Zaharieva, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria, said that Bulgaria

wants to see all six Western Balkans country in near future, became part of the European family.

She thinks that EU leaders must not meet once in 15 years with the leaders of the Western Balkans, but must consistently support European integration of the Western Balkans.

We continue after the presidency to be one of the strongest supporters, we organize meetings, delivering expertise and of course continue to convince more enlargement skeptical European member state that it is a win-win process, said Zaharieva and added that she believes that the European project will not be complete without Western Balkan states.

Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) Majlinda Bregu thinks that regional cooperation is not going forward and reminded that when she took office, she traveled the region.

She also pointed out that the EU will never be complete without the Western Balkans, and added that transformation and reconciliation through economic development are things that can really happen in the region.

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