



9TH INTERNATIONAL BALKAN FORUM



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9TH INTERNATIONAL BALKAN FORUM “Future of the Balkans Economy and Türkiye”

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The strategic position of the Balkans on the “East – West” and “North – South” connections in terms of energy transmission lines, trade routes and human movements has brought forth the importance of the Balkans region to remain vital every time.

In addition to the eastward expansion of the European Union after the Cold War and the loss of influence of Russia in the region, the ineffectiveness of Türkiye, as before, has brought out an unbalanced situation and an untidy balance situation in the Balkans in terms of the global and regional parameters. This situation caused the countries of the Region to lose power, and resulted in that they were transformed into an EU hinterland to a large extent and a sphere of influence for the US to a certain degree.

The uncertainties about the future of the EU and the Russia’s possibility to strengthen indicate that the stability based on this untidy balance situation in the Region may come to an end in spite of the recent institutional and economic capacity built by the EU. Unless the countries in the Region take initiative in determining their own future, they become a playground for the big powers, and so become unstable. As to Türkiye, which is also in a position of being a Balkan country, it is inevitable to be effected from the developments in the Region.

The Balkans, even though its economic position which is among the most unstable economies, has turned into a competition arena, with the increasing influence of Gulf states such as Qatar, UAE and Saudi Arabia, as well as China and Russia in recent years, driven by the untapped natural resources of the region.

Although Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, and most recently Croatia joined the European Union, the expectation of the Balkan region, which is artificially broken down into the Eastern and Western parts, has yet to be reached, which will bring the region closer to the European Union standards in certain specific areas such as business and startup opportunities, a modern production system infrastructure, resilient health facilities and high-quality education. Balkan countries, after the adaptation of the free-market economy approach, following the collapse of Yugoslavia, experienced a set of serious economic downturns due to the global economic crisis.

There has been a momentum for economic growth in the Balkans region, which is most noticeable in the services sector, particularly by leveraging the encouragement and incentives provided by the European Union in recent years. The region also enjoys a positive turnaround in the balance of trade. It appears, therefore, that European Union membership process has not only a positive effect on the Balkan economies, but also the relations between the countries in the region by mitigating the negative effects of conflicts.

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The increasing trade volume not only contributes to much more products offered by Balkan markets to have access to Türkiye's market, and Turkish brands to be available in the markets of the region, but also to the potential to develop strategic and economic relations between Türkiye and the Balkan countries. In other words, this situation will bring along with it a long-term friendship underpinned by mutual exchanges.

Türkiye, in terms of foreign trade, has increasingly become important both for the Balkan region and Europe, of which Türkiye is the fifth-largest exporter and the seventh-largest importer. Türkiye's foreign investment stock has increased from \$7 billion to almost \$40 billion. The percentage of the investments by Türkiye in the Balkan countries is around 5% of its overall foreign investments, while Romania is the largest in export and Greece is the largest in import. There has been an upward trend in Türkiye's investments in the region particularly Romania, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Türkiye's volume of trade with the 12 Balkan countries has increased 23 billion dollars. The export volume of the Balkan countries is over 500 billion dollars.

Hence, the countries in the Region are required to keep the intellectual infrastructure regarding their future fit, and develop such policies that are appropriate to their interests. **The 9th International Balkan Forum**, which is organized under the main theme of **the "Future of the Balkans Economy and Türkiye"** aims at contributing to this field.

Main Theme

Future of the Balkans Economy and Türkiye

Sub-Themes

Governance of the Economic Competition in the Balkans and Türkiye

EU and the Balkans New Economy Ecosystem after the Brexit

China, Belt and Road Project, the Balkans and Türkiye

New Economic Dynamics in the Balkans

Country Perspectives (Greece, Bulgaria, Türkiye, Albania etc.)