



UNIVERZA V LJUBLJANI  
University of Ljubljana

RECTORS' FORUM  
OF SOUTHEAST EUROPE  
AND WESTERN BALKANS



## Fostering Research and Educational Synergies Across Southeast Europe and the Western Balkans

12 June 2025 | 10:30 – 16:00

Permanent Representation of the Republic of Slovenia to the European Union,  
*Rue Joseph II 14, 1000 Brussels*  
*(on-site, in-person event)*

### Conference Conclusions

There is already a wide range of **collaborative activities** taking place among universities in Southeast Europe and the Western Balkans. However, there remains **significant untapped potential** to deepen and improve these partnerships. The **Rectors' Forum of Southeast European and Western Balkan universities** continues to play a key role in fostering cooperation, within the scope of its available resources.

The European Union has made various funding instruments available to these non-EU countries – such as WIDENING, INTERREG, Horizon Europe (HE), IPA, and WBIF – demonstrating a clear commitment to supporting their integration. Nevertheless, **further efforts and targeted initiatives** are needed to maximise the impact of these opportunities. At the same time, countries in the region **must continue aligning with EU standards across all sectors** in order to fully benefit from and contribute to European integration.

The event, **co-organised** by the **Slovenian Business and Research Association (SBRA)** and the **University of Ljubljana**, underscored the shared will – and indeed the necessity – for closer cooperation between universities in the region. Participants expressed strong and unified **support for the University of Belgrade** during its current period of difficulty.

Speakers represented academic institutions not only from **Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro**, but also from **Italy and Germany**. In addition, **key representatives from European institutions** were present, including the **European Quality Assurance Register**, the **European Students' Union**, and – most notably – **EU Commissioner Ekaterina Zaharieva**.

EU Commissioner Zaharieva emphasised the importance of **strengthened collaboration between the Western Balkans and the EU** and shared notable updates on the forthcoming **FP10 programme** and the establishment of the **Competitiveness Fund**. She also voiced her **support for the University of Belgrade** and reaffirmed the **EU's commitment to the region**.

The Rectors' Forum reaffirmed its support for EU enlargement towards **Southeast Europe and the Western Balkans** and called for continued **institutional and financial support** to reinforce **academic and research ties** across the region.