



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**.