

Espresso.Insight

No. 13/2021

October 8, 2021

**Just a farewell tour? Merkel's
first stop Belgrade, then Tirana:
the Berlin Process hasn't failed,
yet the six have still a long way
to go**

—

Dr. Nicasia Picciano



GROUP FOR LEGAL
AND POLITICAL
STUDIES



GROUP FOR LEGAL
AND POLITICAL
STUDIES

Group for Legal and Political Studies

is an independent, non-partisan and non-profit public policy organization based in Prishtina, Kosovo.

Our mission is to conduct credible policy research in the fields of politics, law and economics and to push forward policy solutions that address the failures and/or tackle the problems in the said policy fields.

legalpoliticalstudies.org

JUST A FAREWELL TOUR? MERKEL'S FIRST STOP BELGRADE, THEN TIRANA: THE BERLIN PROCESS HASN'T FAILED, YET THE SIX HAVE STILL A LONG WAY TO GO

By: Dr. Nicasia Picciano – International Research Fellow, Group for Legal and Political Studies

Merkel's farewell trip to the region, after 16 years of chancellorship and at the height of European politics, began in Belgrade. Meeting with Serbian President Vucic, the focus of conversation was on the political and economic cooperation and the EU integration process. Her visit came ahead of the next EU-Balkans summit under the Slovenian presidency in October. Vucic thanked Merkel for everything she has done for Serbia and the region during her successful and long-term in office, while reminding everyone that Germany is by far the most important trade partner of the country.¹ Also, he stated that the Berlin Process initiated by her in 2014 with a far-sighted vision to promote regional cooperation in the Western Balkans and European integration enabled the space for new opportunities in the area.² In a short space of time this format boosted mutual relations, be it among the youth, civil society or in the field of science.

My heart will also beat for this region, even if politically I will no longer be in office

Six days later Angela Merkel headed up to Tirana where she was greeted by Foreign minister Olta Xhacka and the Minister of State for parliament relations Elisa Spiropalli at the Mother Theresa International Airport. She met the then Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama at the Palace of Brigades. By addressing his Kosovar counterpart Kurti, Rama said; 'Open Balkan does not contradict the Berlin Process'. Yet, Merkel clarified that the *Berlin Process hasn't failed, but there's still a lot to be done*.³ Concretely, the lack of rule of law and competence to varying degrees are widespread, corruption and nepotism are rampant, independent media and critical civil associations are coming under increasing pressure. Last but not least, authoritarian tendencies prevail here and there.

Also, she pinpointed that the Berlin Process is not a substitute for European membership for the countries in the region being at different stages, with Serbia and Montenegro more advanced, BiH having applied for membership, but Kosovo not yet.⁴

Besides that, Merkel emphasized that prosperity, jobs, stability and peace for the countries of the Western Balkans is what it is worth working for, after talks with the heads of government of all six states in the region at a press conference with Albania's Prime Minister Edi Rama.⁵

At the same time, the West has significantly scaled back its involvement in the Balkans over the past few years. And, external actors like Russia, China and Turkey have been expanding their influence there. Yet, the international community will take more and more care of the region, the newly appointed High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina Christian Schmidt

¹West Balkan Leaders Await Merkel's Farewell Tour, 13 September 2021. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/09/13/west-balkan-leaders-await-merkels-farewell-tour/>

²Merkel Sees 'Long Way' to EU Membership for Western Balkan States, 13 September 2021. Available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/merkel-vucic-serbia-balkans/31457285.html>

³Angela Merkel concludes visit to Tirana with an emphasis on regional cooperation, 14 September 2021. Available at: <https://euronews.al/en/albania/2021/09/14/live-blog-german-chancellor-angela-merkel-in-tirana/>

⁴Pressekonferenz von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel und Ministerpräsident Rama zum Besuch der Bundeskanzlerin in der Republik Albanien am 14. September 2021. Available at: <https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/bkin-de/aktuelles/pressekonferenz-von-bundeskanzlerin-merkel-und-ministerpraesident-rama-zum-besuch-der-bundeskanzlerin-in-der-republik-albanien-am-14-september-2021-1960102>

⁵Wohlstand, Stabilität und Frieden der Länder des Westbalkan [online]. Available at: <https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/bkin-de/aktuelles/reise-westbalkan-1958636>

said on another occasion. He has an excellent relationship with Washington and is in office since last August. Besides that, it is an open secret that Merkel had proposed his appointment with Joe Biden being happy to agree.⁶

On her visit in the Albanian capital, Merkel called for closer cooperation and the striving for European Union membership. Particularly, she stressed that the EU, and Germany, have their geostrategic interest in getting all the Western Balkans on board. Also, her significant contribution to the country and the region was awarded with the Medal of Honor titled the 'Great Star of Gratitude for Public Achievements'. And, Edi Rama recognized that no other person did more for the region than the German Chancellor. Moreover, no other person understood this region better than her: the Balkans won't be what they are today without Merkel.⁷

Her support for the European integration of the region, as well as for strengthening the cooperation and development there, was particularly greeted by Olta Xhacka, and the German Ambassador in Tirana.⁸ Merkel concluded her speech with Edi Rama and the other five by saying; "My heart will also beat for this region, even if politically I will no longer be in the office."⁹

Besides local leaders, the German Chancellor also met with representatives of civil society organizations, which have been closely involved in the Berlin Process since 2015.¹⁰

Her departure, while enjoying a high reputation and appreciation in terms of objectivity and competence, might have significant implications for the Western Balkans. Yet, independently from her successor, Merkel seems willing to take more care of the region, and most probably even setting the path for the next German government.¹¹ In other words, she stands for a Balkan policy that sometimes places German economic and stability interests above democracy and the rule of law. Yet, the future integration of the region in to the EU requires exactly the opposite: consistent reforms in those endeavours. *How matching the two?* The new German executive might disclose the enigma. But its future achievements are still to be seen. One certainty remains though: Merkel will be missed across the region.

⁶Merkels Besuch am Balkan: Eine Region mit vielen Baustellen, 13 September 2021. Available at: https://www.zeit.de/news/2021-09/13/merkels-besuch-am-balkan-eine-region-mit-vielen-baustellen?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fde.search.yahoo.com%2F

⁷Presse konferenz von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel und Ministerpräsident Rama zum Besuch der Bundeskanzlerin in der Republik Albanien am 14. September 2021. Available at: <https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/bkin-de/aktuelles/pressekonferenz-von-bundeskanzlerin-merkel-und-ministerpraesident-rama-zum-besuch-der-bundeskanzlerin-in-der-republik-albanien-am-14-september-2021-1960102>

⁸Merkel arrived in Tirana, the first meeting is with Rama. Available at: <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/en/merkel-stignavo-tirana-prvata-sredba-e-so-rama/>

⁹Wohlstand, Stabilität und Frieden der Länder des Westebalkan [online]. Available at: <https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/bkin-de/aktuelles/reise-westbalkan-1958636>

¹⁰Merkel's visit confirmed the importance of civil society in the region, 16 September 2021. Available at: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2021/09/16/merkels-visit-confirmed-the-importance-of-civil-the-society-in-the-region/>

¹¹Merkels Besuch am Balkan: Eine Region mit vielen Baustellen, Available at: <https://www.bkz.de/nachrichten/merkels-besuch-am-balkan-eine-region-mit-vielen-baustellen-117405.html?bPrint=true>

ESPRESSO.INSIGHTS

Espresso.Insights are aimed at decoding the policy research of our Fellows to a broader audience. Espresso.Insights present short summary of analysis and information that help readers and policy-makers in particular, to understand the relevant research, as they suggest possible policy options and argue for certain path of action. Aiming to intensify the debate about policy issues and general public concerns, Espresso.Insights will, in addition, serve as gears to aid an informed decision-making process.



GROUP FOR LEGAL
AND POLITICAL
STUDIES

legalpoliticalstudies.org