

International Conference

Enlargement, Western Balkans and the Future of Europe: Perspectives from France, Austria and Slovakia

19th March 2026

Rakúske kultúrne forum, Hodžovo námestie 1/A, Bratislava

The shifting geopolitical landscape has propelled EU enlargement back to the top of the European agenda, giving renewed urgency to a process that had slowed in the Western Balkans. This momentum was significantly reinforced when the European Council, under the French Presidency in 2022, opened the door to Ukraine and Moldova's EU aspirations, marking a broader strategic shift. In response, France has intensified its engagement across the region through renewed political dialogue, support for stability, investments and efforts to counter disinformation and cyber threats. Austria continues to play a leading role in advocating progress in the Western Balkans, while Slovakia, drawing on the lessons of its own accession, brings valuable insight to the wider discussion on the future of enlargement. This renewed focus also underscores the need to prepare the Union for the changes ahead. In his Bratislava Speech of May 2023, President Emmanuel Macron highlighted the importance of building an enlarged EU capable of decisive action. So, how can the EU sustain a credible and strategically driven accession process? Which reforms are essential to ensuring the Union remains capable of effective action as it enlarges? And how can France, Austria, and Slovakia combine their efforts to shape this new chapter in Europe's future?

This conference, organised by the French and Austrian embassies in Bratislava, in cooperation with the Austrian Cultural Forum Bratislava, the Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe and the French Institute of International Relations, will bring together perspectives from Paris, Vienna, and Bratislava to chart a forward-looking vision for the Union's next phase of enlargement and reform.

Working language: English

16h00 Opening

Ambassadors Nicolas Suran (France) and **Johannes Wimmer** (Austria)
H.E. Juraj Blanár, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs (tbc)

16h15 Discussion

Ulrike Hartmann, Special Envoy for the Western Balkans, Austrian Ministry of Foreign and European and International Affairs

Martin Kačo, Political Director at the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs (tbc)

René Troccaz, Special Envoy for the Western Balkans, French Ministry of European and Foreign Affairs

Moderation:

Katarína Cséfalvayová, Institute for Central Europe

Ivan Vejvoda, member of the Austrian Institute for International Affairs

18h Conclusion

Hans Dietmar Schweisgut, Secretary-General, Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe (CFA/ÖFZ).

18h15 End of the discussion