

Rome, 3 March 2020

To the kind attention of the Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Mr. Olivér Várhelyi

Dear Commissioner,

The Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and the Italianieuropei Foundation, under the auspices of the Italian Prime Minister's Office, are delighted to invite you to the **"Roman Talks with the Balkans"**. The event will take place on April, 29th in Rome, in what we hope will become a regular gathering on the Western Balkans and its European future in Rome.

The fate of the Western Balkans is at a crossroad. The EU destination of the region stands to be vindicated by the European Council and, soon thereafter, at the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Zagreb in May 2020. The European Commission's new methodology certainly mitigates the risks voiced by the sceptics of an opening of accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania. Zagreb, in fact, represents a last ditch opportunity for the Union to reaffirm its strategic choice for and with the Western Balkans. At the same time, regional and global volatility has raised the stakes for the region to proceed on its reforms and overcome unresolved conflicts. Notable in this respect is the imperative of reigniting the Serbia-Kosovo dialogue so as to yield a comprehensive agreement. More broadly, much like the European Community was founded by six states whose leaders took upon themselves the great risk and responsibility to move towards peace and integration, the current leaders of the WB6 face a similar predicament today and thus the opportunity to become the founding fathers of a European and reconciled Balkans. Working towards both the goals of European integration and regional reconciliation are those initiatives born and inspired within the Western Balkans to achieve greater intra-regional cooperation, with an aim to fostering reconciliation as well as growth and sustainability.

Against this backdrop, the Roman Talks with the Balkans, under the auspices of the Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, aims at providing the leaders of the Western Balkans and of the EU with a safe, informal and conducive space to discuss reciprocal expectations and develop further concrete initiatives for cooperation. The purpose and timing of this initiative this year is also to provide momentum behind what we hope will be a successful Zagreb summit in May, in the spirit and conviction that European integration and regional cooperation can only go hand in hand.

Hoping that you will accept our invitation, it would be very much appreciated if you could kindly confirm your participation at your earliest convenience.

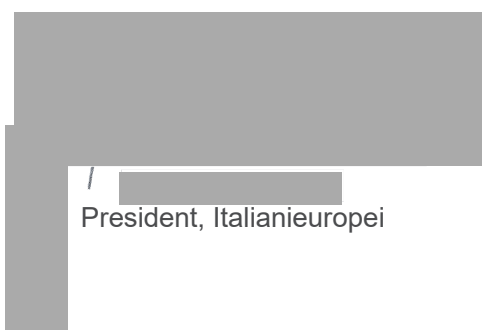
Should you have any queries or comments, please do not hesitate to contact [redacted] at IAI [redacted]@iai.it) and, for all organisational matters, [redacted]@iai.it).

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to hearing from you soon,

With best wishes,



Director, IAI



President, Italianieuropei