

On February 4th 2016, the Albanian Institute for International Studies and the Embassy of the Netherlands in Albania organized the first session of a series of Foreign Policy Forums for 2016. Keynote speaker to this event was the Dutch Ambassador in Albania, Her Excellency Mrs. Dewi van de Weerd. The topic of the Forum was “Discussing the new security environment in Europe: challenges and responses from the Dutch perspective.” The Netherlands has the EU Presidency for the first six months of 2016.

Executive Director of AIIS, Albert Rakipi opened the forum highlighting the need to debate security issues in Europe, not just the EU in order to fully grasp their impact, both for the EU but also for the perspective of aspiring countries such as Albania.

Ambassador van de Weerd presented and elaborated on the main priorities of the Dutch Presidency of the EU. The highest priority remains tackling the radical terrorist threat and the migration crisis. Ambassador argued that Europe is facing a complex and global phenomenon such as terrorism. Her Excellency reiterated that in order to cope with this hybrid terrorist threat that behaves like a state in imposing taxes, bearing a flag and having its own currency, the EU should provide a coordinated and complex response. It is important to note Ambassador Dewi van de Weerd explained that the real menace that the new terrorist environment is putting on Europe is the attack on the European values and way of life. The military solution is not the only possible solution. She emphasized that what is needed is a new policy perspective that looks at the whole cycle of development of this phenomenon at all the pertinent levels. Therefore, a complex and appropriate response includes training, domestic cooperation with religious leaders, teachers and families in order to anticipate and prevent the radicalisation of the youth. At the basis of this response is respect on human rights and the rule of law. The Dutch Ambassador expressed her firm belief that Europe is able to find a balance between freedom and security. She praised the support and the cooperation of Albania in the Global Coalition on Terrorism as the recent participation of the Western Balkans in the Hague Plan of Action.

A second important issue and policy that was explained by Her Excellency relates to the migration crisis that Europe is facing. She argued that a distinction should be made between the terrorists and the refugees. The refugees are not to be considered as terrorist rather they are fleeing such an environment. On the other hand, Her Excellency acknowledged that fact that there is instability around Europe and her borders. What remains a high priority in the Dutch Presidency of the EU is the EU asylum policy and the strengthening of the external borders. Although the EU migration system is under pressure, the EU abides by its values of solidarity. Therefore, the Ambassador reiterated that it is the obligation of the EU to provide a temporary safe haven to the refugees. On the other hand, referring to the case of Albanian immigrants in the Netherlands in the last year, Her Excellency stated that the Albanian authorities are cooperating rather well with the Dutch government and that the future of the immigrants is to build a future in Albania.



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At the end of her speech the audience had the chance to discuss with Her Excellency about the new challenges present to EU, the tools provided to address terrorism and migration crisis, the solidarity shown by the member states, the risks of the abolishment of the Schengen agreement, and border control.

AIIS Deputy Director Alba Çela asked Ambassador van de Weerd about the strength of the commitment of the EU to maintain the Schengen agreement and Her Excellency reconfirmed that the EU is working hard to preserve this achievement.

During the Q&A session with the audience, Ambassador van de Weerd pointed out there is no easy solution as the threats itself require strong efforts on cooperation, but the EU is truly responsible for the foreign policy, by working hard on providing of the adequate tools to address this crisis also through the compromise between member states for a solution. The Dutch Presidency of the EU shall be characterized as Her Excellency described the Dutch way of doing, as being pragmatic, outspoken and efficient.