

# AIIS Newsletter

February 2018

## IN THIS ISSUE :

- Global Go To Think Tank Index: AIIS ranks higher in 2017 among world's best. Read more about it in “Highlight” *page 1*
- AIIS hosts Forum on Russia's Foreign Policy: Albania and Strategic Issues. Read more about it on “Our Events”, *page 2*
- Renowned historian discusses U.S. foreign policy under Donald Trump. Read more about it on “Our Events”, *page 4*
- Polish-Albanian centuries-old ties featured on new Europa magazine issue. Read more about it on *pages 5*

## HIGHLIGHT

# AIIS ranked among the best think tanks in Central and Eastern Europe

The Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS) climbed up the 2017 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report ranking from 23rd to 22nd place among top think tanks in Central and Eastern Europe.

The report, launched by the Lauder Institute of the University of Pennsylvania, places AIIS among the best think tanks in the world and the only Albanian think tank to consistently make the list.

*“AIIS consistently performs well in this very important global index thanks to our consolidated reputation in the region and beyond as well as our excellence in research and projects in the field of security, foreign policy and international relations studies and activities in Albania.”*

— **Dr. Albert Rakipi, AIIS Chairman**

In the global ranking of Think Tanks in 2017, AIIS also climbed up 79th in the ranking for Defense and Security Research area globally and 83rd in the ranking for Foreign Policy and International Relations — globally.

More than 3,500 experts from academia, civil society and decision making institutions

participated in the process of nominating and then ranking institutions worldwide in this one of a kind exercise that has become a reference point for those who seek to understand the standing of think tanks whether by geographical or thematic classification.

Recognizing the quality of research and advocacy of the AIIS and collecting the positive feedback from peers, the Index acknowledges for the fourth year in a row the professionalism and impact of AIIS work.

The ranking is organized on a yearly basis by Think Tanks and Civil Society Programs at the University of Pennsylvania, which conducts research on the role policy institutes play in governments and civil societies around the world.

AIIS is currently implementing long term strategic projects that relate to the European future of Albania: AIIS has established the Joint Centre for Albania-Serbia relations to assist normalization of bilateral relations; completed influential research on the phenomenon of radicalism and foreign fighters in Albania and continued with its communication initiatives for Albania's integration process.

# Russia's Foreign Policy: Albania and Strategic Issues

The Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS) organized a foreign policy forum, as part of its Forum series with diplomats and other distinguished speakers to alert the public, political elites and the business community to contemporary security and foreign policy challenges. The Foreign Policy Forum has been a successful activity of AIIS since 2003 and has given an opportunity to experts and general Albanian audiences to hear and converse with important decision makers from the fields of foreign policy, diplomacy, academia, etc.

The Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Albania Alexander Karpushin was the guest speaker on February 15th. Russia's Foreign Policy: Albania and Strategic Issues was the topic of this Forum which attracted the attention of the public who was eager to discuss with the Russian representative in Tirana, considering the heightened interest on Russia at the time when US-Russia relations had failed to improve over the course of Donald Trump's first year as a President. Earlier in February, Russia launched lawsuits against the United States over the illegal seizure of Russian diplomatic property.

What implications would this have on Russia's relations with Albania and in the region? Commenting on Russia's alleged interest and rising role in the Balkans, the Russian ambassador said every effort by Russia to establish normal relations with Balkan countries immediately becomes a topic of concern for Western politicians.



“We are aware of a special geo-political importance of both Albania and the whole Western Balkans and of course we target strengthening our influence in this part of Europe. I don't know why our Western partners see negative connotation in this and make themselves afraid with Russia's ‘aggressive plans’ in the Balkans,” said the ambassador.

NATO members Albania and Montenegro are the only Western Balkans countries to have joined Western sanctions against Russia. However, Montenegro remains one of the top destinations for Russian tourists and investment while EU aspirant Serbia, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have not joined sanctions against Russia for its Crimea annexation. Responding to Albania's move to join Western sanctions in 2015, Russia imposed counter-sanctions on Albania which almost paralyzed Albania's low but rapidly growing fruit and vegetable-dominated exports to Russia.

“Russia has never been against the European perspective of Albania and that of other countries. The sole interest Russia has in the Western Balkans is overcoming all internal controversy that still exists in the region,” he added.

“For me as Russia's ambassador to Albania, my prime objective and the embassy's main task is re-establishing cooperation and mutual trust between the two countries and people to the high level it used to exist. I am sure we have everything to achieve this,” said ambassador Karpushin, a career diplomat who has been serving as Russia's ambassador to Albania for the past three years.

Tiny Albania and the former Soviet Union were asymmetric allies for more than a decade under communism before they split in 1961 over ideological grounds and had no diplomatic ties for about three decades until the early 1990s when communism in Albania collapsed and the Soviet Union dissolved.

*(Continued on page 3)*

(Continued from page 2)

The 30-year break in diplomatic ties, an Albanian-Russian intergovernmental committee on trade and economic cooperation that has not convened over the past eight years, failure to sign a friendship and cooperation treaty, Albania's 2015 joining Western sanctions against Russia over its Crimea annexation are some of the main barriers that hold back Russian-Albanian political and economic cooperation.

*"We are trying to find common ground to overcome this deadlock. Our dialogue in the past 28 years has been characterized by the excess politicization of bilateral ties and disregard for our common potential"* Karpushin said, noting Albania has the Western Balkan's lowest trade exchanges with Russia.

"I am convinced that establishing direct links between the business communities would be a crucial step toward pragmatic and depoliticized cooperation," he added, hopeful that the intergovernmental committee will be finally held this year with a joint business forum.

Trade exchanges between the two countries slightly dropped to about €80 million in 2016, dominated by Albanian wheat and liquid gas imports.

The exchanges have stagnated at this modest level for at least a decade, accounting for about 2 percent of Albania's volume of trade, according to Albania's state statistical institute, INSTAT.

Meanwhile, Albania's exports to Russia during the past three years have almost been non-existent after Russia imposed counter-sanctions on Albanian meat, fish, dairy products, fruit and vegetables.

Energy, transport, agriculture and particularly tourism are some of the sectors where the two countries can cooperate.

*"Tourism can provide a strong impetus to bilateral relations,"* the ambassador said, noting that neighboring Montenegro, where Russian language is popular is visited by 250,000 Russian tourists a year compared to only about 15,000 in Albania.



The ambassador says the elderly generation, some of whom graduated in Russia until the early 1960s are still nostalgic about Russia and there is interest to learn Russian among the younger generation who are provided free classes and awarded about 40 scholarships a year to study in Russian universities.

"Albanians love our culture, literature, music, paintings and not only. They have not forgotten that in the post-war period, almost all of the Albanian government elite were trained in Russia," said the ambassador.

Asked by journalists over Russia's alleged violation of human rights at home, the ambassador described it as fake news, the same as Russia's alleged interference in the latest U.S. presidential election.

Albert Rakipi, the AIIS head, said that despite the 'agree to disagree' approach the think tank follows, there is space to reflect on Albania's relations with Russia on mutual interests in a new context outside the asymmetric relations and ideological ground that existed under communism.

Albania-Russia relations date back to the late 1940s when the two then communist countries developed close ties until 1961 when they broke over ideological grounds.



# U.S. foreign policy under Donald Trump: The First Year

The Foreign Policy Forum attracts high level speakers from all over Europe and beyond and generates the most positive feedback from the audience as well as the interest of national media in Albania. Following the Russian

Ambassador in Albania, the well-known history professor, Bernd J. Fischer was the keynote speaker to another Forum dedicated to U.S. foreign policy under Donald Trump, on February 22nd.



Bernd J. Fischer is Professor Emeritus of History at Indiana University, Fort Wayne. He is the author of a number of books, translated into Albanian and other languages, among them *King Zog and the Struggle for Stability in Albania* (1984, reprint 2012), *Albania at War, 1939–1945* (1999), *Albanian Identities, History and Myth* (co-editor and co-author, 2002), *Balkan Strongmen: Dictators and Authoritarian Rulers of Southeastern Europe* (editor and co-author, 2007) and *Albania 1943-1945, A View Through Western Documents* (2012), *The Struggle with Rome* (2017). In addition he is a frequent contributor to national and international media including the *New York Times*, the *Voice of America*, and the *BBC World Service*. Professor Fischer was elected as a foreign member of the Albanian Academy of Sciences in 2006.

Donald Trump has in general sustained and reinforced many of Obama's foreign policies or followed ones that were already in place. "There have been no major changes in alliances, but the fundamentals of U.S. foreign pol-

icy such as free trade, climate change, democracy and human rights have either been questioned or rejected," said Fischer, a U.S.-based historian with many publications on Albania. Addressing the forum on U.S. foreign policy under Trump's first year of presidency, Fischer described the current U.S. president as ill-suited for the post, noting inconsistencies and unpredictability in policies and his America First approach. "Trump has been fortunate not having to handle with any major crises yet," Fischer added. He said Trump has sidelined experts in decision-making and the State Department is facing massive resignations of senior diplomats and dozens of ambassador posts in key U.S. allies still remain vacant. Asked on the U.S. foreign policy on the Western Balkans, Professor Fischer said the Balkans continues to remain off the radar and that he doubts Trump "will adjust American foreign policy on the Balkans."

# Pilsudski - 100th Anniversary of Regaining of Independence of the Republic of Poland

On January 31st, the Albanian Institute for International Studies organized an open lecture on the occasion of the 100th Anniversary of regaining of Independence of the Republic of Poland. The focus of this lecture were the different historical aspects of the creation of the Polish state which Prof. Gjergj Sinani and Prof. Assoc. Dr. Genc Luarasi elaborated during their speeches. The event also served as a tribute to the Polish revolutionary and statesman, Jozef Pilsudski, the father of Polish independence. The lecturers spoke about the diplomatic Polish-Albanian centuries-old

ties, which, in fact, date back much earlier, during the Skanderbeg era when the two nations aligned against the Ottoman Empire.

The Ambassador of Poland to Albania, Mr. Karol Bachura, focused on modern-day relations between the two countries. The Ambassador re-confirmed his country's support to Albania's EU integration bid as Albania hopes to open long-awaited accession talks this year.

"We are NATO allies and we certainly support the EU integration process for the Western Balkans and Albania. We see the puzzle as

unfinished without the Western Balkans," the Ambassador said, quoting late Pope John Paul II in saying that 'Europe needs two lungs to breathe,' the second being the Western Balkans.

On the occasion of the 100th Anniversary of Regaining of Independence of the Republic of Poland, a special dedicated section was dedicated to this centenary in AIIS' Albanian publication, Europa Magazine. Read more about it on [page 7](#).



# AIIS, Shanghai counterpart to undertake cooperation projects



The Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS) will launch a new cooperation with the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS) on the future of Albania and China through the One Belt One Road and 16+1 initiatives proposed by the Chinese government.

Representatives headed by AIIS' Chairman Albert Rakipi and SIIS Chairman of Academic Affairs Council Yang Jiemian met on February 27th at the AIIS headquarters in Tirana to discuss the new age China-Albania relations have entered and their implications. China and Alba-

nia agreed to enhance cooperation of infrastructure, production capacity, tourism and agriculture under the two initiatives last April, when Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli visited Albania. Due to Albania's geographic advantage in South East Europe, Gaoli then said the country could have a major role in the Belt and Road and called on both countries to speed up negotiations and signing an intergovernmental MOU, Chinese media reported. Presently, AIIS and SIIS discussed on how to build on this cooperation through informing the respective populations of Albania and China, holding a joint conference and doing research on the topics, as well as fostering cultural ex-

change between the two countries.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), proposed in 2013, aims to build a trade and infrastructure network along the ancient Silk Road trading routes, connecting Asia with Europe and Africa. The BRI is estimated to cover over 68 countries upon completion, equaling 65% of the world's population.

China and Albania have traditionally had peaceful relations, but in the last years China has increasingly been present in the entire region, particularly through economic investments.



SIR HAROLD  
**NICOLSON**

# DIPLOMACIA



Brought to the public in Albanian by *Jorgji Qirjako's* masterful translation, *Sir Harold Nicolson's "Diplomacy"* outlines a history and definition of diplomacy, the art of implementing foreign policy by negotiation. The historical development of diplomacy is traced from primitive origins to modern times, when diplomatic procedure has become highly sophisticated and is controlled by strict conventions.

The latest addition to the AIIS Library of International Relations and History also describes the ideal diplomatist, the varying types of European diplomacy, and recent changes in diplomatic procedure. The remodeled British diplomatic service has been analyzed in the revised chapter dealing with "*The Foreign Service*." The chapter on "*Diplomatic Language*" includes a glossary of words and phrases currently employed in diplomatic usage. An epilogue, added to this third edition, discusses the changes that have occurred in the field in post-war times, and refutes some of the the basic contentions of "*The Ugly American*" view of diplomacy.

*Sir Harold Nicolson*, author and critic, was formerly with the British diplomatic service, and is considered an authority on diplomatic problems and procedure. Some of his other books are: *The English Sense of Humour*; *King George V, His Life and Reign* and *The Age of Reason*.

# EUROPA

BOTIM I 'SHËRËFIA E EUROPËS' & INSTITUTIT TE STUDIMEVE NDERKOMBETARE  
VITI I FËSTË I BOTIMIT NR. 16 / 2017



ALBA ÇELA - ALBERT RAKIPI - ALBERTO CUTILLO - ANDRZEJ STAWARZ - ASTRIT BEQIRAJ  
BERND J. FISCHER - BILLY COLLINS - ELENI SOURANI - ERALDA ÇANI - GENC LUARASI -  
GENC POLLO - JEAN-DOMINIQUE GIULIANI - JERINA ZALOSENJA - JOHANN SATTLER - KAROL  
BACHURA - LEDION KRISAFI - MARIUSZ WOŁOS - MEGAN SOTIRIA MANÇELLARI - NATASHA  
LAKO - PAMELA AZIS - ROMANA VLAHUTIN - SARA KELMENDI - SUSANNE SCHÜTZ - SYLVE  
UKSHINI - TIMOTHY GARTON ASH - TOMASZ STANÇYK - WŁADYSŁAW SZPIŁMAN

*EUROPA Magazine*, a publication of the Albanian Institute for International Studies and House of Europe has dedicated its latest issue to the 100th Anniversary of regaining of independence of the Republic of Poland and the 80th Anniversary of Albanian-Polish Relations. In addition to the Poland section, the remaining two-thirds of the *Europa* magazine offer insight and critical approach on key local, regional and international developments. A special section is also dedicated to arts and culture, wherein this issue featured unpublished poems of the renowned Albanian author, *Natasha Lako*, as well as an excerpt from the novel "*The Pianist*" by award-winning Polish author, *Wladyslaw Szpilman*, who won the Jewish Quarterly-Wingate Prize for non-fiction for the Holocaust memoir.

To find out more about *Europa's* contents, visit: [europa.com.al](http://europa.com.al)

Supported by a grant from the  
Open Society Foundations.



**OPEN SOCIETY**  
FOUNDATIONS