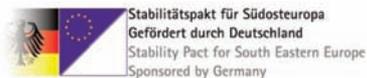

EU ENLARGEMENT AND REGIONAL COOPERATION – IDENTIFYING THE NEXT STEPS

Valeska Esch
Carina Kempf (eds.)

In cooperation with:



The mission of The Aspen Institute is to improve the quality of leadership through dialog about the values and ideals essential to meeting the challenges facing organizations and governments at all levels. Over its sixty year history, the Aspen Institute has been devoted to advancing values-based leadership – to creating a safe, neutral space in which leaders can meet in order to discuss the complex challenges facing modern societies confidentially and in depth, with respect for differing points of view, in a search for common ground.

This reader includes conference papers and proceedings of Aspen Germany's conferences in 2015.

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FOREWORD

2015 was an eventful, difficult year for the world, for Europe and for the Western Balkans. At the start of the year, no one could have imagined how migration through the countries of the Western Balkans would surge over the year, or what challenges the governments of the transit countries would face as a result. Now, at the beginning of 2016, I am happy to say that the achievements of these countries along the Western Balkan route in meeting this humanitarian challenge have been remarkable. Let me take this opportunity to express my profound appreciation for their endeavors.

The real subject of this foreword, however, is events in the Western Balkans, events which are not so spectacular in the public eye as the migration issue but which are no less important. It is a matter of dismantling the burdens left by malfunctioning social systems in all states of the region, and also of removing the causes and managing the consequences of the terrible wars in the former Yugoslavia towards the end of the 20th century.

The Aspen Institute Germany, which helps to resolve old conflicts and supports the countries of the region in moving towards the Euro-Atlantic structures, makes a valuable contribution to this crucial task. One of its now renowned formats is the “subcabinet meetings” supported by the Federal Foreign Office, which serve as a platform for a confidential, trust-based exchange among decision-makers below cabinet level. In 2015, this conference series looked in particular at public administration reform and regional cooperation. Both issues are extremely important for the Western Balkans, as efficient, transparent public administration is key to a modern state, and regional cooperation is not only essential for the welfare of all its immediate neighbors but also constitutes one of the central elements for integration into the European Union, to which the countries of the region aspire.

In 2015 the Aspen Institute Germany again organized conferences at the political level, which attracted considerable attention and respect both in Europe and beyond. The “flagship”, of course, was the Seventh Southeast Europe Foreign Ministers’ Conference in Berlin in November. Traditionally this conference provides an opportunity for participants, including all the region’s foreign ministers, to engage in a confidential exchange of views, but also, in the public program, to highlight issues of topical significance for the region.

Experience has shown that the various states are making the necessary progress at different rates; sometimes they hit a spell of stagnation, and occasionally there are even setbacks. Nevertheless, as long as all stakeholders are working towards the major goal, set forth in the Thessaloniki Declaration, of consistently moving closer to the European Union, we do not need to be fearful for the idea of Europe in this part of the continent. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Aspen Institute Germany and its staff for their untiring work and to wish them every success and all the very best for 2016.



Dr. Ernst Reichel, Ambassador
Special Envoy for South-Eastern Europe,
Turkey and the EFTA States
Federal Foreign Office

INTRODUCTION

Dear friends of the Aspen Institute Germany,

The Aspen Institute Germany has been committed to providing a confidential and neutral platform for debate. In a closed and protected environment, off-the-record meetings are organized to allow for in-depth discussions that respect different points of views. Leaders of the Western Balkan countries have embraced this opportunity and have come together at the Aspen Institute Germany's conferences to discuss regional challenges and current issues their countries are facing. These conferences facilitate in-depth discussions regionally and with German, European, and U.S. decision-makers and experts, as well as representatives from the EU and international organizations. The aim of these conferences is to find common ground with regard to regional challenges and to develop concrete policy recommendations and mutually beneficial solutions. International experts from academia and civil society organizations provide valuable input to these meetings with the papers and insights they contribute to the discussions.

The region has come a long way since the violent break-up of the former Yugoslavia. The countries have overcome violent ethnic conflicts and developed from post-conflict and post-communist countries to young multi-ethnic democracies that are still struggling with the numerous challenges these transitions entail. Today, all countries in the region are determined to become EU member states and many of them are also aiming for NATO membership, with Montenegro most recently being invited to join the Atlantic Alliance. Moreover, regional meetings, cooperation, and exchange have very much improved. The Berlin Process, initiated by the German government in 2014, has given new momentum to both, the EU integration process and regional cooperation, especially in the fields of infrastructural and economic development.

At the same time, challenges remain. The economic situation in the region continues to be difficult and unemployment rates are high. Countries still have quite a way to go before they can be considered consolidated democracies, as demonstrated by the recent political crisis in Macedonia and the political polarization in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Montenegro that in the latter two countries even led to violent protests. Also for Serbia, as for all other countries in the region, the European Commission in its country report 2015 criticizes a lack of oversight of the executive by parliament, a need to depoliticize public administration and strengthen independent regulatory bodies, a need for more transparent campaign financing and electoral processes, as well as media freedoms. Moreover, regional relations were tested by several anniversaries including the 20-year anniversaries of Operation Storm and the Srebrenica genocide that included both, a rise of nationalist rhetoric as well as gestures of reconciliation, and by Kosovo's application to UNESCO and Serbia's following campaign to prevent its membership. Another challenge to both, individual countries and regional relations, has been the huge numbers of migrants and refugees passing through some of the countries of the region. However, after a more than rocky start, countries have demonstrated their readiness and capacity to jointly address this challenge and coordinate efforts in trying to control the flow, register migrants, offer shelter, and provide data to the EU.

Against this background, the Aspen Institute Germany in 2015 continued its efforts to actively contribute to a regular constructive high-level regional dialog. Since 2008, Aspen Germany has provided a neutral platform for seven Southeast Europe Foreign Ministers' conferences and around twenty sub-cabinet level meetings. It has fostered dialog and debate on issues like trust, competition, reconciliation, identity and ethnicity, EU and NATO integration, bilateral security roles, organized crime, energy security, economic development, rule of law, public administration reform, democratic governance, and regional cooperation. These conferences have not only served as an opportunity for a productive exchange of opinions and the development of mutually acceptable ideas for solutions, but have also developed a sustainable regional and international network of decision-makers and experts, which can contribute to establishing trust and closer contact between formerly conflicting countries.

We would like to express our gratitude to the German Federal Foreign Office, whose financial support through the means of the Stability Pact for Southeast Europe made this project possible. We would also like to thank our additional partners in 2015, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Montenegro, which co-hosted this year's conferences with us. Moreover, we would like to thank all participants over the past years, who have so actively contributed to the success of the project, and, in particular, all authors of conference papers, who have provided substantial inspiration and expertise for discussion and often suggested constructive solutions. Finally, we would like to thank David Jackson for his contributions to this publication.

We hope you enjoy reading this book that compiles the conference papers, reports, and recommendations that were developed during the conferences 2015 and we look forward to continuing our commitment to the Western Balkans.



Rüdiger Lentz
Executive Director



Valeska Esch
Senior Program Officer

SUMMARY

In 2015, Aspen Germany held three sub-cabinet level meetings in Belgrade, Budva, and Berlin with high-level decision-makers and experts from the Western Balkan countries, Germany, the EU, and the U.S. During these meetings, discussions focused on democratic governance and public administration reform (conference I) and regional cooperation (conference II), issues that are central to the EU enlargement process. This publication contains conference papers and proceedings of these meetings that give an overview of the topics discussed and the constructive suggestions and recommendations that were made. All meetings followed the Chatham House Rule, which is reflected in the reports.

The most important **reform needs** relating to the topics discussed in 2015 identified **on the national level** were all linked to curtailing the excessive power of the executive branches in the region and strengthening democratic procedures including parliaments, transparency, and accountability. In particular, national governments of the region were called upon:

- To consider political competition less as a zero-sum-game for power but rather recognize the need for a “responsibilization” of elites throughout the region and develop a more constructive and cooperative approach to political competition
- To put more emphasis on the fight against political corruption
- To remove political influence from recruitment procedures for civil servants and instead establish more transparency in recruitment procedures, assessment, and promotion of civil servants
- To focus more on the professionalization of civil service
- To recognize and strengthen the role of parliament including opposition by establishing transparent regulations on 1) political party financing, 2) electoral campaign spending, and 3) democratic inner-party structures and transparent electoral lists to secure the constitutionally guaranteed independence of MPs
- To strengthen parliaments’ representative role, for example by considering that:
 - Different electoral systems can improve closeness to citizens
 - A first-past-the-post system might contribute to more accountability
- To strengthen parliaments’ oversight role including:
 - Laws that provide oversight and resources to support parliamentary work, i.e. offices, research staff, etc.
 - More robust committee oversight systems
 - Supported by non-partisan, relevant, and trustworthy parliamentary research services and bodies, such as parliamentary budget offices or nonpartisan research facilities
 - The instruments of parliamentary inquiry and investigative committees, as they are a tool to secure more accountability of the executive
 - All-party groups in parliament to work on cross-cutting issues of importance as this can contribute towards a more constructive cooperation across party lines and enhance parliament’s expertise
- To be more careful not to neglect issues just because they are not part of the *acquis*
- To consider civil society a partner in efforts of democratizing and Europeanizing the region and be more open to civil society inputs into policy making
- To make sure that despite the difficult economic situation all investors regardless of their origin stick to the rules and standards set by the EU *acquis* criteria

On the **regional level**, further depoliticization of cooperation and a general rethinking about the importance of regional cooperation and political dialog not only as part of the EU accession process but as an asset in itself was considered paramount. In particular, governments were strongly recommended:

- To show more commitment to regional cooperation and reconciliation on all levels of government
- To make regional cooperation more substantial with clearer results for ordinary citizens (Berlin Process is a good step)
- To increase efforts to find ways to resolve long-standing syndromes of mistrust and develop ways of better promoting reconciliation
- To invest more in education and especially mobility of the youth; as a first step, the agreement from the Berlin Process to establish a Regional Youth Cooperation Office of the Western Balkans needs to be implemented
- To invest more political will to establish a clear and coherent regional market in order to attract more investments (one region, one economy) with agriculture, IT, and tourism being niches with high economic potential
- To work on streamlining cooperation processes and show more political will to better make use of existing organizations and mechanisms
- To further depoliticize security cooperation and no longer put political positioning ahead of security cooperation

Finally, a number of recommendations were developed for how the **European Union and its member states** could better support the reform process in the region and further improve the enlargement process. In particular, the EU and its member states were invited:

- To better include domestic factors in both, analytical frameworks on the success of EU conditionality as well as the EU approach itself; existing analytical frameworks often fail to capture domestic factors such as ethnic grievances, weak stateness, clientelistic networks, political corruption, as well as actors interested in the status quo, often leading to shallow reforms that pay only lip-service to EU requirements
- To target the functioning and enforcement of accountability, horizontal and vertical accountability mechanisms are needed
 - Vertical accountability mechanisms: wide range of civil and political rights (freedom of expression, access to information, right of association and assembly) to promote transparency and sensitivity of governments
 - Horizontal accountability mechanisms (institutional system of checks and balances) constitute additional guarantees for the surveillance of elected authorities by independent institutions
- To focus also on political criteria that are not part of the *acquis*, especially since the negative side effect of marginalizing the representative and oversight roles of parliament in the EU accession process cannot be completely avoided
- To strengthen the role of civil society as civil society organizations are *inter alia* needed to monitor and evaluate policy implementation, but to consider that donors should:
 - Help CSOs gain public acceptance by supporting more activities responsive to community priorities
 - Support CSOs outside major cities
 - Support broad participatory decision-making, communicate goals clearly and plainly to ordinary people, make transparent funding decisions
- To focus more on supporting the improvement of media integrity
- To consider investing more in political education and providing unbiased information
- To make better use of macro-regional strategies such as the Adriatic Ionian Initiative and the Danube Initiative as they narrow down cooperation to mutual interests
- To encourage states bordering the Western Balkans to be better engaged in the region
- To send strong signals to western investors that there is a clear EU perspective for the region to attract investment

These recommendations were developed in the conference papers and the discussions during the meetings. On the following pages, you can find summaries of the discussions and the conference papers that so valuably contributed to the meetings.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The following points were unanimously agreed upon and presented by the participants of the 2015 Working Group.

Introduction

- It was a very difficult year, but having in mind how difficult it was, we had pretty good results especially in the EU integration process. There were both, external and internal challenges; Problems of the EU are reflected in the Balkans.
- For example in the migrant crisis, the region has played a positive role; the region has coordinated efforts, has helped the EU cope with the crisis and is trying to control the flow as much as possible. Countries register migrants and offer data to the EU; migrants are coming from an EU member state and going back to EU member states.
- The public in the region is often impatient about the speed of progress with EU integration; managing expectations in society is important.
- The EU accession process affects all levels of society, that is why it has to be an inclusive process that cannot only be left to public administration, but has to include society.
- Because of the need for reforms in the process, new institutions in all countries are being formed to meet the challenges, for example national investment councils.

Public Administration Reform

- Public administration is a pillar of state building.
- Merit-based improvement and transparency need to be improved.
- External expertise for public administration is needed, but at the same time, there is a growing dependency on external expertise.

Democratic Governance

- There is a lack of a developed democratic political culture (role of parliaments, lack of confidence in state institutions).
- More political cohesion and social consensus would help avoid political polarization.
- More democracy in political parties is needed and professionalization of public administration is also very important.
- Better relationship between central and local governments is needed to develop the region and improve democratic governance.

- There is a need to strengthen civil society and find ground for cooperation with civil society; civil society can give expertise and monitor progress, but cannot replace politics; there is a need to find a right balance between all stakeholders from early stages on.

Regional Cooperation

- Given the recent crises and for European integration, regional cooperation is more important than ever.
- Regional cooperation works if there is a concrete challenge, in the context of crisis, the region has strengthened its capacities to work jointly, there needs to be found a way to make cooperation sustainable and not only as a response to crises.
- The Berlin process reenergized regional cooperation and sent a renewed message of the EU perspective to the region; the process includes efforts to achieve progress that directly affects citizens' everyday life to bring the EU enlargement progress closer to citizens.
- There are many different regional cooperation initiatives that need to be streamlined, which is in practice being done in the Berlin process.
- Regional economic cooperation needs to be high on the agenda.
- There is a need to regionally address radicalization in the region; SEECF has passed a declaration; RCC is tasked to develop a platform to address radicalization in the region.
- Cooperation leads to/can support reconciliation and building trust, but it should not be about sweeping the dirt under the carpet, but address the issues, because otherwise, when difficult issues appear, achievements are at risk.
- Reconciliation needs time it is a lengthy process with ups and downs.
- Young people should be brought together in vocational training, education, research, may contribute to normalization in the long term, all have similar problems; working institutionally with youth can prevent radicalization.

SYNOPSIS – DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

The following pages provide a synopsis of the points that were discussed at the conferences in 2015.¹

General Situation

- Weak stateness in the Western Balkans results from ethnic divisions, violence, clientelism, the collapse of central institutions, contested sovereignty, and a lack of bureaucratic capacities to implement a state's visions
- International indices (example Nations in Transit) show a trend of stagnation, inconsequential change, and frequent reversals in most aspects of democratization reforms
- In many cases it is not the laws itself but a habit of non-implementation and exploiting legal ambiguities to advance private interests that undermines the integrity of public institutions
- Many leaders have shied away from making necessary reforms in the economic and institutional field because of political costs (i.a. people losing jobs)
- Established patterns of clientelism defined as rulers' offer of personal rewards to their clients in the form of public sector jobs and the distribution of public resources such as licenses, contracts, and projects in return for votes has been a distinct historical feature of socio-political relations across the Balkans
- There is a tendency to conserve power at the expense of opening up the political system to new voices and political fairness; political adversaries are often slandered as criminals or political parties decide to eschew constructive engagement in favor of a strategy of total opposition

Recommendations

- Many existing analytical frameworks overemphasize the role of top-down EU conditionality in the countries' reform processes and need to include domestic factors such as ethnic grievances, weak stateness, clientelistic networks, and political corruption
- In order to be more successful in driving the domestic reform process, the EU should target the functioning and enforcement of functioning horizontal and vertical accountability mechanisms that serve to hold elected executive authorities responsible for their actions
 - vertical accountability mechanisms: wide range of civil and political rights (freedom of expression, access to information, right of association and assembly) which facilitate the processes of social scrutiny in complex societies and promote the transparency and sensitivity of governing au-

¹ Please note that the following summary will only provide an overview over the points raised by participants. They do not reflect the Aspen Institute Germany's position on the issues addressed.

- thorities to various interests and preferences in the society
 - horizontal accountability mechanisms (institutional system of checks and balances) constitute additional guarantees for the surveillance of elected authorities by autonomous and independent institutions
- Aside from institutional reforms, there is a need to address the root consequences of the problems i.e. political competition as a zero-sum game in SEE; politicians see their opponents as foes and they are more likely to consider destroying them than to cooperate with them → “disunited elite”, no common understanding of political conduct

Questions

- How can government institutions be better shielded from undue influence of business interests and local oligarchs?
- How can the development of a more constructive and open political system be better supported? How can countries be better supported?
- What can the EU do more to hold leaders to account who do not play by the rules?
- How can functioning horizontal and vertical accountability mechanisms be developed?
- Should the EU target the functioning and enforcement of accountability mechanisms that operate outside political structures and serve more the role of a watchdog?
- How can political competition become more constructive and cooperative and a common understanding of political conduct be developed?
- How can the often personalistic style of governance (i.e. ruling politicians have great control of institutions) be overcome?
- How can corruption be limited?

Public Administration Reform

- All competitive countries have a merit-based public administration in which there is a clear distinction between the private and public spheres, a relaxed attitude to accepting talent from abroad, and low levels of corruption
- In Western Balkan countries, there is excessive politicization of the upper echelons of public administration and the size of public employment in the

region is excessive when measured against private employment

- As a consequence, those appointed into posts seldom feel they have to live up to the responsibility of that position
- Talent often leaves the public sector because of poor wages; at the same time, public sector jobs are popular jobs as it often means less work and less responsibility than in the private sector
- There is a reform fatigue in public administration as the status quo is beneficial for many; impetus for reforms also needs to stem from political parties

Recommendations

- Transparency in public administration should be a guiding principle
- Governments should aim to make the hiring and assessment of civil servants more transparent and impersonal
- Professionalization should be the central concept that drives reforms; civil servants require a sense of professional integrity and a sense of being a member of a professional community; there is a need to tackle the system of organized irresponsibility; the EU should support these processes especially through mutual learning
- A clear link between performance, appraisal, promotion, and rewards of civil servants and state employees should be established
- It should be forbidden for public administration employees to participate in political party bodies
- An improved professional education and training system for civil servants should be established

Questions

- How can government commitment for supporting the improvement of professional education and training systems for civil servants be increased?
- While there was general consensus that a one-model-fits-all approach is not entirely suitable, the question remains: How can country-specific approaches be designed and at the same time be reflected in common bench-marking?
- How can a recruitment system for civil servants be standardized to eradicate political influence?
- How can transparency be improved?

The Role of Parliament

- In the Western Balkans there is a gap between how parliaments should function and how they do in reality, which is hollowing out political representation in the region
- A democratic parliament has three core functions: 1) legislative role, 2) oversight role, 3) representative role; in the Western Balkans, they exercise primarily a legislative role
- EU integration dynamics can have a negative impact on the consolidation of parliamentarianism during the accession negotiation stage
 - normal level of controversies and programmatic political differences between opposition and government parties can be drastically reduced
 - they can become rubber-stamping rather than representative institutions; Brussels becomes the primary constituency, resulting in accountability displacement, wherein the internal relationship between state and society weakens
- MPs have become too close to business and parliaments are therefore vulnerable to corruption
- In some countries, a logic of ascriptive representation based on ethno-national identification dominates the electoral campaigns
- Many citizens feel distant from their representatives and parliament needs to focus on representing the interests of citizens
- Constitutionally secured independence of MPs is undermined by authoritarian inner-party structures and closed electoral party lists
- Parliaments struggle to exercise proper oversight over the executive
- Opposition parties face the additional challenge that without the government they have limited access to media to promote their positions; there are limited resources within parliaments to effectively hold government ministers accountable through hearings; there is limited access to non-partisan, independent, and relevant sources of research
- There is a need for socialization of political leaders into strong codes of conduct, instilling a new style and form of politics
- Parties that form the government dispose of strong access to state resources, which affects the formal balance of power both between executive and legislature and government and opposition

- With the current proportional model of representation, ministers, party leaders, and key parliamentary figures are not directly accountable to the electorate; constituency relations mean less than the approval of the party executive body as they distribute positions on the electoral party list

Recommendations

- Agreements on political party financing and transparency of electoral campaign spending should be found
- All-party groups in parliament to work on cross-cutting issues of importance should be established as they can contribute towards a more constructive cooperation across party lines and enhance parliament's expertise
- Since the negative side effect of EU accession on parliaments cannot be completely avoided, the focus should also be on political criteria during accession negotiations in areas that are not covered by the *acquis*
- Strengthening parliaments' representative role
 - Different electoral systems can improve closeness to citizens
 - A first-past-the-post system might contribute to more accountability as it would increase representation duties in the constituencies of elected officials, but would give voters the ability to hold the prime minister, ministers, and leaders of the opposition directly accountable
- Strengthening parliaments' oversight role
 - Laws that provide oversight and resources that support the machinery of parliaments, i.e. offices, research staff, etc. are needed
 - More robust committee oversight systems should be established that will change the nature of parliamentary work and move to onus toward oversight rather than what is currently legislation
 - Oversight committee systems need to be supported by non-partisan, relevant, and trustworthy parliamentary research services and bodies, such as parliamentary budget offices or nonpartisan research facilities
 - The instruments of parliamentary inquiry and investigative committees should be developed and made use of, as they are a tool to secure more accountability of the executive
 - The democratic organization within political parties needs to be strengthened as this would increase the accountability of the government

Questions

- How can the winner-takes-it-all mentality and political culture be overcome to improve parliamentary interparty cooperation?
- How can parliamentary development and capacity building be better supported?
- How can the role of informal networks within parliament be better investigated and minimized?
- Could a first-past-the-post electoral system bring MPs closer to their electorates and ensure their accountability towards the voters rather than party officials or external actors like the EU and therefore strengthen both, the oversight and representative role of parliament?
- How can the domination of ethno-national identification in election campaigns be overcome?

The Role of Civil Society and Media

- The gap between the public and politics is widening; governments are unable to develop trust within their citizenry, while civil culture has been smothered by a polarized political class
- Civil society organizations often deal with issues that are detached from the majority people's everyday concerns, due to the funding of agendas by outside donors rather than domestic priorities (for example LGBT, minorities, human rights rather than local economic or social concerns) there is often a lack of openness in terms of membership, activities, citizen feedback, and spending decisions → lack of acceptance in society
- Democracy is being undermined by general deterioration of the media; politics are often framed as a series of scandals → the tabloidization of politics contributes to the growing political polarization
- Political corruption of media is spreading; costly campaigns are used for political promotion and public funds channeled through advertising agencies are used to distort the media market to exercise political influence over private media outlets; public broadcasters are highly dependent on state funding and influenced by the ruling parties

Recommendations

- The strengthening of civil society could remedy the emerging of a kind of feudal order, in which many citizens feel powerless in relation to the state

- The role of civil society should be strengthened; civil society organizations are *inter alia* needed to monitor and evaluate policy implementation, however, donors should:
 - Help CSOs gain public acceptance by supporting more activities responsive to community priorities
 - Support CSOs outside major cities
 - Support broad participatory decision-making, communicate goals clearly and plainly to ordinary people, make transparent funding decisions
- The integrity of media needs to be fundamentally improved not only by training journalists but also addressing the environment in which it is difficult for them to apply their knowledge
- Training of media owners should be considered
- A c-span style channel could provide more accountability by shedding light on the inner workings of parliaments
- Political education needs to be increased

Questions

- How can state funding of media become transparent and independent from the political agenda of a government?
- How can civil society be strengthened sufficiently to become a real watchdog with an actual impact on the political debate?
- How can politically influenced media coverage be reduced?

The Role of the European Union

- The EU plays a crucial role in all reform areas in the Western Balkans
- There is a risk that issues like education despite its dire state are neglected because they are the sole concern of national governments and not part of the EU accession process and therefore often not high on the agenda
- EU reform process fails to capture domestic factors, for example actors interested in the status quo, complex games of compliance, shallow reforms
- Some SEE politicians actively raise expectations of progress in EU integration amongst the public as a strategic measure as people's frustration is then turned against the EU when actual progress is slower

- Recent drop in support not due to EU (un)popularity but rather due to doubts regarding timely accession

Recommendations

- Governments should not neglect issues just because they are not part of the *acquis*
- The EU should encourage governments to invest more, especially in education, as this will greatly benefit both, political education and economic development

Questions

- How can the EU better consider domestic factors of the reform process, in particular with regard to depoliticization?
- How can the EU better meet the Western Balkans populations' expectations or better explain the process and its duration?
- How can continuous support for the European agenda be secured, despite the growing frustration over the duration of the accession process?

SYNOPSIS – REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

The following pages provide a synopsis of the points that were discussed at the conferences in 2015.¹

Regional Cooperation in the Western Balkans

- Regional cooperation has fundamentally improved over the last years
- There are more than 50 regional organizations, initiatives, task forces, and other institutional structures
- There are gaps in regional cooperation, for example judicial reform; at the same time some initiatives go under the radar, such as the SEE Health Network which does not get sufficient funding as it is not a specific part of the EU's accession framework
- Regional cooperation remains an externally driven process; it is not a default position but must be constantly nurtured through political practice
- Huge potential for cooperation in arts and culture as they could build ties, which can provide a more constructive parallel to the fraught political reality
- Progress in various domains of regional cooperation and increased institutionalization in some is a solid testimony that much has changed for the better. However, cooperation has still not taken a prominent place in local parties' programmatic agendas; instead regional reconciliation remains subjected to the local political agendas and the instrumental use of ethnic identity politics in dealing with past legacies
- Within the framework of the multi-country Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), there is a missing link between the proposing of projects and overseeing their implementation; regional organizations have not been able to fill the gap and perform as binding link between project proposals and their implementation

Recommendations

- The political commitment throughout the leadership, including the communal level, for regional cooperation is essential
- Regional cooperation should be made more substantial with clearer results for ordinary citizens
- Better transport networks are essential for real cooperation since social exchanges and ultimately empathy can only be built if people are able to meet
- Regional cooperation should be addressed in a more strategic manner and the relevance and effectiveness of regional initiatives needs to be increased

¹ Please note that the following summary will only provide an overview over the points raised by participants. They do not reflect the Aspen Institute Germany's position on the issues addressed.

- Broader regional micro-strategies such as the Adriatic Ionian Initiative and the Danube Initiative should be implemented better as they narrow down cooperation to mutual interests
- There should be more pressure on states bordering the Western Balkans to be better engaged in the region

Questions

- Is there a need for the high number of regional initiatives and organizations in the Balkans or should there be more streamlining and efficiency in the whole process of cooperation? If so, how?
- Does the region show that it is respecting its commitment to regional cooperation and good neighborly relations?
- Is there a lack of regional governments' ownership when it comes to the question how the EU grants are distributed among the regional and international organizations?
- How can regular regional meetings and cooperation of political leaders translate into a rethinking in society?

Reconciliation

- Permanent reconciliation can only come through aligned geo-political interests – as a shared strategic goal, accession to the EU is therefore very important for the process
- Stable regional cooperation under the EU mechanisms will not fully prevail unless supported by sincere reconciliation and the assumption of guilt by everyone
- There has been increased regional dialog and cooperation in the past few years, but relations tend to oscillate and therefore stable relations can never be taken for granted
- The pernicious effects of the three way dynamics between dysfunctional institutions, elite discourse framed in terms of ethnic identity politics, and everyday experience of various forms of deprivation, make people susceptible to ethnic identity politics
- Problems of weak governance permeated by systemic corruption reinforce the experience of discrimination in access to jobs, healthcare, education, housing, and other aspects of life, which according to numerous polls concern ordinary people in the Western Balkans the most; the incidence of discrimination is often perceived as ethnically motivated

Combined, these interlocking dynamics are at the core of individual insecurity and preference for 'ethnic security'. In turn, the persistence of ethnic tensions underwrites the fragile social fabric in the Balkans and the reconciliation process

- A functional approach to cooperation has not produced a 'reconciliation dividend', partly because it has ignored the element of human security; questions such as why people seek safety by withdrawing into their own ethnic political groupings must be answered

Recommendations

- More needs to be done for the 'psychological basis' of cooperation, that is finding ways to resolve long-standing syndromes of mistrust and develop mechanisms of reconciliation
- Progress towards reconciliation must include incremental, practical steps – truth commissions, joint historical inquiries, and pan-national school textbooks can all help
- There should be more investment in education and especially student mobility to improve regional relations in the long term; it is not enough for politicians to meet as meeting people from neighboring countries is the most effective way to build links, dispel fear, confront prejudice, and foster reconciliation
- There is a need for real exchange between people; people often lack knowledge about social and political developments in neighboring countries

Questions

- Does reconciliation require brave public gestures or are micro processes, especially a mutual understanding of differences, more important?
- How can reconciliation be better addressed?

Civil Society

- Civil society plays a key role in all societies that undergo a transition from an authoritarian regime to a liberal democracy
- The mere existence of NGOs does not mean that civil society functions well
- Civil society in the region has many good ideas, but is facing the rather difficult challenge of how to communicate, operationalize, and implement them in a political environment, which is partly hostile to civil society

- Cross-national civil society cooperation presages political cooperation and can set an example for politics and society to follow

Recommendations

- Both, EU and governments in the region should implement a new policy, in which civil society is not just a nice decoration in political speeches, but a crucial partner in all efforts of democratizing and “Europeanizing” the region
- Political leaders should regularize the inclusion of civil society inputs into policy making processes
- Civil society should be seen as a partner and not as a foe by politicians as they extend a helpful hand to politicians
- Civil society can follow up on the commitments that their governments made in Vienna, monitor their work, and prepare reports; there should be clear benchmarks for evaluation
- The inclusion of civil society in the Berlin process should be continued in Paris

Economy

- The Western Balkans is still a depressed economic region
- GDP gap between the EU and the region is further widening
- Political cooperation is not translating into enhanced economic cooperation; intra-regional trade is still low
- Stagnation in the Euro area continues to pull neighboring countries in SEE down with it
- There is a need to address economic inequalities within countries
- Infrastructure investments provide a clear vision for future cooperation, but transport is not always enough: increasing jobs and competitiveness must work in synergy with infrastructure so that the new highways are not without activity
- In contrast to CEE, investments do not lead to a partial re-industrialization but focus on the service sector, banking, and retail
- China is becoming a major player in SEE, offering funding and investment opportunities, however, economic investment brings political influence

- Increasingly important role of Turkey in the region, however, important to distinguish between private-led Turkish investment and trade relations in the region and government-sponsored initiatives → the strategic and religious objectives of government-sponsored initiatives have repeatedly called into question the motives of the initiatives

- Restructuring of Greek banks will change the banking landscape in the Western Balkans

Recommendations

- There is a need for a clear and coherent regional market in order to attract investments: one region, one economy; agriculture, IT, and tourism niches could be sectors with high economic potential
- The Western Balkans should also look to new markets in Egypt, Iran, and Turkey
- The region has potential to become the hub for western European countries seeking to invest in the Middle East
- The EU should send strong signals to western investors that there is a clear EU perspective for the region to attract investment → SEE had disappeared from the radar of German business partly because there was the perception of a lack of good news in the region
- Countries should invite investors from all over the world, as long as outside investors stick to the rules and standards set by the EU *acquis* criteria; while economic necessities and poor local governance explain why rules are flouted to get investors on board, this is dangerous for economic actors and the general model of economic governance
- A non-partisan expert body or council that can link EU investments with the region could be a way of circumventing the weak governance
- EU’s macro-economic regions should be used more as an important tool to learn and cooperate
- There remains a need for institutional investment facilitation as key driver forward; maximizing financial synergies from multilateral institutions such as the EIB, EBRD, World Bank, and IPA is paramount
- Private Sector should also be part of this financial engagement and private financial resources for investment need to be identified

Questions

- Do countries risk being caught between an imploding Russia and a stagnating Europe?
- What is the impact of CEFTA?
- Is the ability of crisis-hit countries in SEE to make an economic recovery constrained by the emerging deficits and contradictions in the conceptual assumptions of the reform programs mandated by international (lending) institutions?
- To what degree is the definition and ownership of the reform process by domestic stakeholders critical in successfully executing a multi-decade transition process?
- What defines economic success today in the region's economies, if growth does not lead to the creation of new jobs?
- Are countries in the Balkans stuck in an austerity trap?

Energy

- Geopolitical issues shape energy security in SEE
- Given the size of the Western Balkan countries, there is a need to establish a critical mass, which is nowhere more apparent than in the willingness to seek mutual cooperation in the energy security sector
- Cross border energy networks in SEE are an essential factor to regional economic development
- The crucial factor of Balkans political security and its economic stability is energy security
- With regard to energy security, there are competing projects with different geopolitical interests and regional implications; both Russia and the U.S. are using these competing energy projects to shape countries' economic and geopolitical orientation

Questions

- To what extent does energy in the Western Balkans have a geopolitical dimension and what are its consequences?
- Is the use of U.S. shale gas and the use of LNG a viable long-term option?

Security

- The dominant perspective on regional cooperation in the Western Balkans has been inward looking and so far ignored the links to the transnational security threats manifested in the region
- Main security challenges:
 - Powerful transnational organized crime networks
 - Extremist groups of ethnic, ideological, or religious foundation
 - Vast and seemingly uncontrollable illegal immigration and refugee movement from Asia/Africa into the EU via the Balkan route
 - Alarming problem of the returnee Jihadists from the Middle Eastern battlefields
 - IS/Daesh affiliates for which credible information points out that they are preparing attacks on European soil
- For the most part, Balkan governments have been eager to coordinate with the U.S. and the EU on security issues
- Security cooperation of utmost importance especially since the region is not included in EU structures
- So far, institutional bodies have mainly centered upon the collaboration of national police forces
- The intergovernmental security cooperation in terms of institutions framework of the Police Cooperation Convention for South East Europe is heavily centered in networking and from a strategic point of view, with little use of tactical operations
- Significant work is done by informal cooperation between individual countries on specific tasks
- The presence of religious groups has grown over the last years. They have been recruiting followers among local populations, particularly youth, through a combination of religious indoctrination, financial and other incentives, thus compensating for dysfunctional institutions and economic failures, and building new community bonds. This process is changing the daily experience of security in many parts of the region and promotes ethnic stereotypes
- The lack of recognition of a particular manifestation of security threats of this kind in the Western Balkans, and the role played by the local elites' instrumental use of identity politics, is a concerning thought when assessing the capability to effectively address those threats
- There is a tendency of selective cooperation along language lines, which may lead to the creation of a "Yugosphere" and "Albanosphere" in the Western

Balkans and thereby stagnation of successful development of security cooperation

- In addition, in the case of Kosovo there are political reasons for excluding Kosovo from regional security cooperation or even joining international security organizations → asymmetric cooperation reflects a discrepancy between risk assessment and the preferences in regional security cooperation efforts
- Trust is very important for security cooperation, as it directly affects the main mechanism of the security cooperation: the exchange of information

Recommendations

- The region should be viewed as an equal partner and planner of European security
- Recognizing, understanding, and addressing effectively the complexity of the reconciliation process in relation to security issues is of particular importance from the perspective of shifting responsibility for regional cooperation to the local actors, and the expectations regarding prospects of developing regional responses to emerging security challenges
- There is an urgent need to streamline cooperation processes; the latent infrastructure of cooperation exists, for example with databases, but this can only be activated if there is greater political will to cooperate
- Every approach towards stronger cooperation should take into consideration a step-by-step procedure that of course needs time and patience to fully mature
- Security cooperation should be implemented from top-down and bottom-up, and include not only governmental and formal designs but also request the involvement of the citizens and all various stakeholders
- New structures aimed at tackling the deficit of tactical operations in terms of combating perils such as organized crime and Jihadism should be implemented. As a basis, already existing local-based organizations such as SELEC or those heavily involved in the region such as FRONTEX and Europol could set up mobile, permanent standing, and multi-Balkan task forces that would operate on specialized missions
- Security organizations should also open up to society, not only for promoting their work but also for raising awareness and coupling that with a vision of cooperation
- EU should not only support the region financially, but also provide the necessary know-how, technological infrastructure, and secure the viability of these pan-Balkan structures
- Police forces of the Balkan countries should consider establishing common databases, accessible through secure channels, along with the creation of steering committees on rotation that would set up security agendas in common problems and directly inform member state's ministers in charge requesting for action
- An annual forum on rotation in the Balkan countries should be set up to develop a strategic and high-level approach that would include heads of police, intelligence, interior ministries, and other security functions for an exchange of opinions; this could also be developed for lower ranks, but should in all cases have concrete agendas to be discussed and be results-oriented
- Different levels of specialization should be exploited by joining forces
- Regional security cooperation should also encourage cooperation between independent professionals, be it academics or civil society actors in the field of security
- Security cooperation needs to be depoliticized and political positioning no longer put ahead of security cooperation as common security risks and challenges recognize no borders

Terrorism

- Conservative Islam is not very popular among the large Muslim populations of the region; Balkans does not stand at the epicenter of the global extremist-driven terrorism threat; yet its geopolitical context and socio-economic dynamics make it a vulnerable and politically charged case
- The Western Balkans possess all three main factors most conducive to terrorist activity: 1) high social hostilities between ethnic and religious group; 2) the existence of state-sponsored violence and human rights abuses; 3) high levels of violence, especially organized crime
- Increase in domestic-bred religious extremism and militarism; the trend is relatively small in comparison to its linked global phenomenon, but it holds unique repercussions within the Balkans, especially as it relates to possibilities of political misuse and exaggeration for nationalist, anti-minority agendas
- Even small threats of religiously motivated terrorism can alter important social dynamics and contemporary

patterns of extremism signal worrisome changes in Balkan nations' cultural landscape

- Feeding off widespread socio-economic desperation, radical imams who completed their religious studies in Arab nations and receive funding from these same countries, recruit from the poorest of the population, especially vulnerable youth (Saudi Arabia alone spent about \$500 million in mosque-building projects in Bosnia between 1992 and 2001)
- Extremist groups will try to turn the West against Muslims, mainly by provoking governments and international actors into frantic, divisive actions
- ISIS is specifically targeting the region in their video campaigns against the West and its supposed puppet regimes across the Balkans; there is a threat of so-called "lone wolf" terrorists, who could strike individually and at any time, began to take hold
- A "behind the scenes" collaboration in exchanging vital suspect lists and data to solve the quiz of suspected Jihadists has been slowly developing amongst Balkan countries
- The Jihadist threat has led to an increased cooperation between the countries affected in the Balkans and their partners abroad; especially U.S., UK, France, Germany, and Italy have boosted their assistance to local forces by providing information, training, and equipment

Recommendations

- Strategies to deal with the terrorist issue must be based on a precise understanding of what is meant by terrorism as inaccurate terminology gives rise to the possibilities of misuse of the anti-terror agenda
- Instead of turning Muslim communities into the enemy or the convenient political "other", domestic and international actors must craft narratives of solidarity that pit both the West and the Balkan's moderate Muslim communities against the global forces of religious extremism and militarism
- Tracking of sleeper cells and the sharing of information is crucial
- Action also needs to be taken on the local communal level
- It is important to be careful with wrong-headed policies as aggressive and heavy-handed arrests on suspicions of terrorism can produce backlashes in communities
- Alienating the Balkans from Western influence is a primary tool of terrorist recruitment, and Europe

should never be complicit in fostering such sentiments

Organized Crime

- Intensive communication in international and regional planning has been achieved in the area of fighting organized crime; through safe communication channels (Interpol, Europol, Selec), which the region is part of now, information is efficiently exchanged
- Fight against corruption will ultimately improve regional cooperation, especially in the field of security



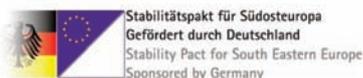
DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

June 15-18, 2015 | Belgrade

In cooperation with:



Ministry of Foreign Affairs
of the Republic of Serbia



The Aspen Institute Germany wishes sincerely to thank the German Federal Foreign Office for its sponsorship of the Aspen Southeast Europe Program 2015 through the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

WELCOME

Dear participants,

the Aspen Institute Germany and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia cordially welcome you to our joint conference on “Democratic Governance and Public Administration Reform.” This conference is the first of its kind co-hosted by the Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Aspen Germany and is part of the comprehensive Aspen Germany Western Balkans program.

Aspen Germany’s Western Balkans program regularly convenes high-level decision-makers, diplomats, and experts from the Western Balkans Six (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia), Germany, other EU member states, the U.S., and international organizations for off-the-record meetings under Chatham House Rule to discuss current challenges and identify viable solutions.

We hope you enjoy the conference and have many fruitful discussions and gain new insights during the next days.

*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Monday, June 15, 2015

Arrival of participants during the day

Accommodation: Falkensteiner Hotel, 10k Bulevar Mihajla Pupina, Belgrade

- 19:30** Departure to Welcome Dinner in front of the hotel
- 20:00** **Reception and Welcome Dinner at the invitation of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dačić**
Venue: Restaurant Savanova, Savsko Setaliste bb, Belgrade

Tuesday, June 16, 2015

Conference Venue: Palace of Serbia, 2 Bulevar Mihajla Pupina, Belgrade

- 08:45** Meeting in the hotel lobby to walk to the conference venue
- 09:00 – 09:30** **Welcoming remarks and opening of the conference**
Rüdiger Lentz, *Executive Director, Aspen Institute Germany*
State Secretary Roksanda Ninčić, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia*
Dr. Ernst Reichel, *Special Envoy for Southeast Europe, Turkey and the EFTA States, German Federal Foreign Office*
- 09:30 – 11:00** **Session I:**
Democratic governance and public administration in the Western Balkans – general assessment

Improvements to democratic governance remain crucial for Western Balkan countries not only on their way to EU accession, but also in terms of stabilizing the region and fostering economic development. The first session will therefore take a general look at the current state of democratic governance and public administration in Western Balkan countries and their progress in the EU integration process. How does the current situation in the Western Balkan countries look? What are the key challenges governments, opposition, and civil societies are facing? What are the most pressing reform issues? How does the state of public administration affect democratic governance? How can the EU's efforts in this field be further improved? How can sustainable implementation and deeply rooted reforms in accession countries be supported? What else should the EU do in order to better support countries in the process?

Moderator: Rüdiger Lentz

Introductions: Arolda Elbasani, *Shallow Europeanization: Top-Down Conditionality, Formal Compliance, and Sources of State Capture in the Balkans*
Paula M. Pickering, *Challenges to Strengthening Civil Society in the Western Balkans*

11:00 – 12:00 **Meeting with First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Transportation, Construction, and Infrastructure Dr. Zorana Mihajlović**

12:00 – 14:00 Lunch

14:00 – 15:30 **Session II:
Public administration reform**

A well-functioning public administration is considered key to democratic governance and economic development. Moreover, citizens expect their governments to ensure an effective public administration, to maintain law and order, to provide public services, and to be transparent and accessible. What are the key priorities when it comes to public administration reform? How can public services and human resources management be improved, in particular with regard to the organization and functioning of public service? How can accountability and transparency be enhanced and administrative procedures and services be improved? What are the most pressing reform needs with regard to public financial management? How can sufficient political commitment be ensured when unpopular reforms are necessary? How can the EU improve its instruments to achieve sustainability of administrative reform? What can the EU and other external actors do to further support these processes?

Moderator: Sonja Licht

Introduction: Tobias Flessenkemper, *European Union Integration and Public Administration Reform*

Expert Comment: Klas Klaas, *Senior Advisor, OECD/SIGMA*

15:30 – 16:00 Coffee break

16:00 – 17:00 **Meeting with State Secretary Dražen Maravić, Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government**

17:00 – 17:45 Coffee break

17:45 – 18:45 **Meeting with Ambassador Michael Davenport, Head of the European Union Delegation in Serbia**

19:30 Departure to dinner reception in front of the hotel

20:00 **Dinner reception at the invitation of Ambassador Michael D. Kirby, U.S. Ambassador to Serbia, and Ambassador Heinz Wilhelm, German Ambassador to Serbia**
Venue: German Ambassador's Residence, Andre Nikolica 15, Senjak, Belgrade

Wednesday, June 17, 2015

09:00 – 10:30 **Session III:
Depoliticization and independence of state institutions and public discourse**

The integrity of state institutions including the depoliticization of the public sector is considered key to democratic governance. The third session will therefore focus on the following questions: What are the major concerns regarding political interference in administration processes? How can clientelism be contained and its influence reduced? How can an effective and transparent system of checks and balances be further promoted? To what extent can the reforms inherent in the EU accession process succeed in reversing established patterns and minimize political control over state administration? How can a systematic, merit-based recruitment process for civil servants be effectively implemented? How can the sustainable implementation of reforms be ensured, especially after a political turnover? How can political discourse about public issues become more constructive? What role does and could the media play? What can the EU and other external actors do to further support these reform processes?

Moderator: Johanna Deimel

Introductions: Milena Milošević, *Impediments to Depoliticization in the Western Balkans: The Case of Montenegro*
Arberësha Loxha, *The Integrity of Kosovo's Administration and Policy Steps for Depoliticization*
Dane Taleski, *Predicaments of Political Divisions in South-east Europe: How to Escape Destructive Polarization?*

10:30 – 11:00 Coffee break

11:00 – 12:30

**Session IV:
The role of parliament**

Aside from its legislative and representational functions, the oversight function of parliament is one of the cornerstones of democracy through its key roles as representative of the people and overseer of the executive. In this context, a constructive opposition has a particularly important democratic function and can ensure transparency and openness of executive activities by subjecting executive decisions to debate and public opinion. What are the main challenges for the legislative branch to fulfill its function of complementing the executive? What role do party politics play? What are the challenges opposition parties are facing? How can a more constructive and compromise-based cooperation across party lines be developed? Which role do or should civil society actors and especially media play in this context?

Moderator: Robert Benjamin

Introductions: Emil Atanosovski, *Challenges in Western Balkan Parliaments – The Need for a Shift in the Classic Parliamentary Oversight Paradigm*
Bodo Weber, *Parliamentarianism in the Western Balkans – Authoritarian Legacies and the Impact of EU Integration*

12:30 – 14:00

Lunch

14:00 – 15:00

**Session V:
What's next? Identifying the next steps**

Moderator: Rüdiger Lentz

16:00

Departure to guided city tour in front of the hotel

17:30 - 18:30

Guided tour through Kalamegdan Fortress

19:15

Departure to dinner at the Wine Atelier Šapat from the hotel
Venue: (Počenta bb, Novi Slankamen)

Thursday, June 18, 2015

Departure of participants during the day

Abazović, Dritan

Makraduli, Jani

Atanasovski, Emil

Milenković, Ksenija

Bancroft, Ian

Milošević, Milena

Barbullushi, Odeta

Ninčić, Roksanda

Bečić, Aleksa

Obradović, Marija

Benjamin, Robert

Pejović, Aleksandar Andrija

Deimel, Johanna

Perin Jarić, Branislava

Eigner, Johannes

Pickering, Paula M.

Elbasani, Arolda

Predojević, Bojan

Flessenkemper, Tobias

Quiring, Anja

Gasal-Vražalica, Maja

Reichel, Ernst

Grubješić, Suzana

Samofalov, Konstantin

Harxhi, Edith

Šepić, Senad

Ilazi, Ramadan

Taleski, Dane

Jović, Željko

Trišić-Babić, Ana

Kiprijanovska, Dragana

Vujić, Zoran

Klaas, Klas

Weber, Bodo

Licht, Sonja

Wilhelm, Heinz

Loxha, Arbëresha

Majstorović, Srđan

The Aspen Institute Germany

Esch, Valeska
Senior Program Officer

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Rapporteur

Kempf, Carina
Program Assistant

Lentz, Rüdiger
Executive Director

CONFERENCE REPORT: DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

David Jackson
PhD Candidate
Berlin Graduate School for Transnational Studies
Social Science Research Center
Berlin

The Aspen Institute's conference 'Democratic governance and public administration reform in the western Balkans' took place in Belgrade, Serbia between June 15-18, 2015. The event brought together 30 select decision makers from South-east Europe (SEE), Germany, the United States (U.S.), and the European Union (EU), with professional backgrounds in government, international and civil society organizations, academia, the security sector, and Foreign Service. The conference was divided into five sessions. The first and second sessions examined progress in democratic governance and public administration reform; while the latter sessions focused on depoliticization and the role of parliaments in the region. The final session outlined some next steps.

Session I: Democratic Governance and public administration reform — general assessment

The session examined the current state of democratic governance in the region and started with the observation that improvements in democratic governance in SEE are not only essential for the region: they are essential for the future of Europe. Despite being overshadowed by the turmoil in Ukraine and Greece, SEE is still of important international concern. Participants advised that advances in governance are really under the microscope, especially as there is a growing awareness that a healthy democracy is much more than a set of formal institutions: the integrity and independence of key governance institutions are absolutely critical.

Experts pondered who is really pulling the strings in the democracies of SEE? Shielding governance institutions from the undue influence of business interests and local oligarchs is not just a matter of good governance but also political *fairness*, an important quality that is smothered by elites who tend to conserve power at the expense of opening up the political system to new voices. Elites also hinder democratic advances through a non-constructive style of politics in which political adversaries are often slandered as criminals or political parties decide to eschew constructive engagement in favor of a strategy of total opposition. In general then, specialists suggested that the political systems are bereft of clear moral rules about what is acceptable: they lack 'categorical imperatives.'

Participants moved on to discuss the EU's role in SEE. It was stressed that we should not lose sight of the fact that EU integration is about bringing nation-states into a framework of democracy and civil society. But it also should not be forgotten that not all matters fall under the scope of accession rules: some areas, education for example, are the sole concern of national governments and these areas should not be neglected just because they are not part of the EU accession process. It was al-

so noted that SEE states will continue to cooperate with Russia, China, and other states as pragmatic strategy to deal with economic challenges, a form of cooperation that should not be seen as treachery but rather something that compliments cooperation with the EU.

Expectation management is a critical part of the accession process. Experts noted a disconcerting tactic deployed by some SEE politicians whereby they actively raise expectations amongst the public, which has not always been helpful as then the public feel frustrated when actual progress is slower than the one projected. Nevertheless, politicians deploy this as a strategic measure as this public frustration is then turned against the EU as a way of increasing the bargaining position of local leaders in relation to accession rules. Speakers suggested that this is reflected in declining support for EU accession – in Serbia, it stands at a lowly 44%, for example. Participants also suggested that the big drop in support in recent years is not about EU popularity *per se*, but because people just simply do not believe EU accession will happen soon. In Serbia it was noted that the EU is still popular amongst the public, especially the prospect of joining the EU-wide labor market, but across all generations there is despair that Serbia will simply never make it. Serbia's relationship with the EU is less emotional and more rational. Ties with Slavic nations may be more instinctive but still leaders and the public understand that the EU is part of a more prosperous future. Despite all these challenges, participants stressed that entry into the EU *is* the grand strategy for *all* states in SEE and representatives called for the EU to open negotiation chapters as soon as possible for all SEE states.

Speakers suggested that the EU could play a more enhanced role when it comes to improving democratic governance. EU conditionality has meant to discipline governance institutions but many speakers suggest it simply has not done that; rather the effects of Europeanization have been rather shallow and stagnant. Understanding the sources of this shallow Europeanization is essential. Indeed, tougher conditionality may be necessary to avoid a repeat of the situation whereby countries, such as Bulgaria and Romania, have entered the EU after undergoing only superficial reforms. Participants also highlighted that despite only modest improvements on the ground, the formal Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) process has advanced quite far with nearly all SEE countries having signed a formal agreement.

It was recommended that the EU could do more to hold the leaders of the country to account and to decriminalize politics. Speakers also stressed that there are always political costs to EU reforms. Reforms of fragile economies, for example, have important political and possibly de-stabilizing consequences: voters will lose their jobs. It was emphasized that countries have shied away from making the necessary reforms because of

these political costs. Moreover, EU reforms demand changes to established patterns of behavior and often people resist adapting to new forms of economic behavior. It was also suggested that the EU could direct more policies to enhance the influence of a new generation of politicians.

Discussions underscored one crucial but often underestimated factor in the democracy 'equation': public communication. The EU, especially, could do more in this regard to send more clear-cut signals to the people of SEE. But it is also forms of local public communications, which are suffering. One speaker noted that democracy is being undermined by the general deterioration of the media, in which politics is often framed as a series of scandals. Much of this insidious 'tabloidization' of politics is done through foreign-owned media outlets whose headquarters reside in Germany or Britain. Speakers suggested that citizens have been 'turned off' from newspapers in recent years. Another worrying trend is that the media often demonizes civil society activism — in Serbia, for example, misleading figures were recently presented about the scale of government funding to NGOs. The constant manipulation of public opinion means an important question presents itself: how to rescue the media from right-wing media organizations who have their own private agendas?

Specialists advised that in trading stability for democracy the EU will ultimately fail in its effort to improve democracy in SEE. It was argued that western European states are in a kind of 'post-Iraq' era in which they are highly sensitive towards excessive intrusion into the democratic processes of other states, and, consequently, lack the self-assurance to really make an impact on the democratic qualities of neighboring states. With regards to the SEE region, this means that only half of the EU's leverage is actually utilized. It is not just about a reluctance to act though, as it was also noted that the whole EU policy framework is itself held back by an ambiguity: the technical and political elements of the Copenhagen criteria have merged, creating an opaque policy framework which has reduced the effectiveness of EU's agency.

Session II: Public Administration reform

The second session examined the state of public administration in the region. Experts advised that all competitive countries (e.g. from Singapore to Sweden) have in common merit-based public administration in which there is a clear distinction between the private and public spheres; a relaxed attitude to accepting talent from abroad; and low-levels of corruption. Experts noted that SEE suffers from an inauspicious inheritance: the one-party systems of the communist era have not bequeathed sound administrative structures. There are currently serious concerns about excessive politicization of the upper echelons of public administration but it was also highlighted that these misgivings are also shared by

established EU member states. Other experts suggested that politicization may not be a problem in itself; rather the problem is that those appointed into posts seldom feel they have to live up to the responsibility of that position.

From the perspective of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), SEE countries are in general rather similar when it comes to administrative capacity, with the exception of Serbia, which is somewhat more advanced though it does not always put its administrative capacity to good use. Important weaknesses afflicting the whole of SEE were identified. The size of public employment in the region is excessive when measured against private employment. Another important issue is the structure of public employment: talent often leaves because of poor wages, for example, and better staff retention policies are important. It was also suggested that young people in Montenegro want a job in public sector because it means less work and less responsibility.

Agile and smaller administrations are necessary across the region. As a general rule, it was stated public spending should not fall under 30% of GDP because under this level it is difficult to invest in education and infrastructure; but should also not rise above 40% because often this leads to wasteful spending. Tackling inefficiencies of the public administration is very important. Experts noted that reforms should involve different elements. Transparency should be a guiding principle and governments should aim to make the hiring and assessment of civil servants as transparent and impersonal as possible. Systems of innovation that aim towards de-politicization are important, as is accurate data on employees. Parliament's role in monitoring reform steps is crucial.

It was advised that reform is critical but difficult, especially as it is very difficult to break entrenched habits and to change staff behavior. Windows of opportunity are very important for making major changes to public administration and public support for reform must be cultivated. It was recommended that the governments of SEE can also go further: the concept of continuous training is also important and governments should communicate much more effectively about what is being done. Mutual learning can also play an important role and civil society should be equipped with the ability to effectively utilize public data.

Experts warned that there is reform fatigue in public administrations and so the impetus for reforms also needs to stem from political parties. Broad-based political support, rather than polarization, is important for neutralizing political backlash. Yet, experts emphasized that politics and public administration often provide a toxic mix. Public administration inefficiencies can be traced to the clientelism and corruption of political parties. It was noted that political trades during elections

often sustains the nepotistic system and local administration is also dominated by political cronies. Finding the will to reform may be difficult as politicians have very little incentive to reform: why would political elites give up the spoils of the state? Participants suggested we should be realistic about how politicians act in the region — that is, for private rather than public interests. It was warned that another possible agent for reform, civil society, has also become entangled into the networks of the captured state.

Participants noted that the EU has an important stake in public administration reform, especially as it is one key pillar of EU accession. Indeed, the EU is prioritizing public administration reform more than ever — public administration issues will dominate European Commission 'progress reports', for example. Other experts suggested that the EU should be less neutral on the politics of administrative reforms and play a more active role. There was a general consensus that one model fits all approach is not entirely suitable but it was unclear how country-specific approaches can be reflected in common bench marking. Mutual learning may do more to enhance change than conditionality. Others were critical that the EU knows that during every election politicians buy support but they do very little to sanction this.

Governments should incorporate innovations into public administration. Digital government and e-services will be important in the future, especially as younger generations will demand new kinds of services. Public opinion surveys of 'user experience' should become more commonplace and 'nudging', that is innovations in public communication, could also improve efficiency. Experts also highlighted that new concepts are important: instead of 'downsizing' we should talk of 'rightsizing' and instead of 'de-politicization' we could talk about 'responsibilization'.

Session III: De-politicization and independence of state institutions and public discourse

The session started with the observation that the gap between the public and politics is widening across SEE, while at the same time governments are under huge pressure to deliver. Disillusionment characterizes citizens' attitudes towards political leaders. Whether right or left wing, successive governments seem unable to develop trust with their citizenry, while civic culture has been smothered by a polarized political class. In the early 2000s in Serbia, society achieved some kind of unity but this dissolved as quickly as it had been constructed. Specialists warned that elites have captured not just the state but also society in SEE. There is a kind of feudal order emerging in which many citizens feel powerless in relation to the state, a situation that should be remedied through strengthening civil society. Even though civil society is struggling to express itself on the street, participants emphasized that civil society can be im-

portant ‘change agents’, especially through monitoring laws and demanding accountability.

During discussions it was noted that it is not just society but politics too has fragmented in SEE. Though all politics is adversarial, in SEE it has become extreme: entrenched polarization of political elites is endangering the functioning of the state. Macedonia presents a worrying situation as unity between different groups is minimal and a zero-sum competition has led to illegal practices becoming the norm in politics, practices that should be investigated through criminal proceedings. Specialists also suggested that the polarization has little to do with divisions of ideology and ideas. In Albania, for example, recent research suggests that the competing parties come from similar roots even if they sell themselves as ideological opponents. Parties tend to construct divisions artificially in order to capitalize and exploit these schisms for their own political gain. Worryingly, then, politics in SEE has been reduced to a game in which constructive engagement between different political groups has been lost to a strategy of total opposition and a discomfort about sharing any aspects of power.

Experts warned that it is not the laws themselves but the absence of the rule of law that undermines the integrity of public institutions. It was noted that in BiH, a new public administration had been working well and there had been a sense that justice and meritocracy was emerging but then the mentality of politicians shifted: suddenly, political leaders stopped implementing law and started to look to find holes in the law. The present difficulties with public institutions can be explained by this habit of non-implementation and exploiting legal ambiguities to advance private interests.

Specialists suggested that laws are not internalized because many developments and policies are externally driven and adopted without debate. In Albania, for example, the World Bank had arrived with a plan for public administration reform and a budget to back it up, which the government accepted without even thinking through the implications of the law or what it would mean for governance. Some participants suggested that the international community has not been as helpful as they could have been in promoting the rule of law. It was suggested that the international community sometimes work with SEE politicians that they can blackmail and force to act in their interests. The EU, for example, showed little constructive engagement with Kosovo when the country struggled through a six-month political crisis in 2014.

Session IV: The role of parliament

This session examined the quality of parliaments in the region. Experts highlighted that there is a gap between how parliaments should function and how they do so in reality, a gap that is hollowing out political representa-

tion in the region. While on paper the Macedonian parliament, for example, may be the best in the region, the formal structures are not good guides to how the parliament actually operates. Indeed, the recent wiretapping scandals demonstrate that parliaments are vulnerable to corruption and that positive improvements are easily reversible. Experts stressed one point: if the parliaments of SEE, the core institutions of democratic governance, do not function properly, then governance will continue to be held back. Observers also noted that many citizens feel distant from their representatives. Exploring ways in which citizens can more effectively connect with political leaders and even engage more directly in governance should focus on the municipal level. Yet, it was highlighted how parliaments can do a good job in SEE. In Serbia, the incorporation of gender-sensitive budgeting demonstrates how MPs can be prompted to operate in progressive ways.

The session moved on to discuss the other various challenges to parliaments. There was a general consensus that parliaments struggle to exercise proper oversight over the executive in many SEE countries, with drastic consequences for the quality of democratic life. Specialists advised that tackling parliamentary corruption should become a bigger issue. It was suggested that in Albania, parliamentary immunity hides the identities of politicians and so people with dubious pasts make it into parliament; in Albania too, MPs have also become too close to business, with the result that the parliament has become a hub between money-launderers and media moguls. Experts advised that the role of informal networks within parliament deserves more scrutiny.

Enhancing representation was seen by experts as key: parliamentarians could do a better job in representing the interests of citizens rather than just party members. In Macedonia, MPs must pay a fine if they do not tow the party line, and many decisions are made informally by the party hierarchy and then rubber-stamped in parliament. It was pointed out that political parties in SEE are structured in a very hierarchical way in which there is little internal democracy. Party aid from western donors seems to have done little to improve the situation. While many resources have been devoted to change and many foreign advisors have been deployed in SEE, political parties have still not opened up. This outcome could be explained by this democratic aid being poorly planned and organized, or just the simple fact that the assistance has not attempted to tackle the core of the issue. Even so, experts called for more focus on reforming the inner workings of political parties in SEE.

During discussions it was emphasized that there is an important EU dimension to parliamentary reform. While parliamentary development is part of formal political criteria for accession and the EU helps parliament with capacity-building, accession also distorts parliaments’ role because they can become rubber-stamping rather than representative institutions. Some participants

went further and argued that there is in essence a suspension of parliamentary life during the EU accession process.

Specialists recommended that in addition to laws that provide oversight and resources that support the machinery of parliaments, healthy parliamentary life in SEE requires socialization of political leaders into strong codes of conduct. Instilling a new style and form of politics is crucial but basic parliamentary capacities could also be enhanced. It was noted that in BiH, the parliament has big secretariats but the skill level of staff is not sufficient. Greater assistance for staff training and research services is very important. Some experts suggested investments into parliamentary support by donors has been too shallow so far and should be stepped up. Others warned that the issue is with the nature of the projects as the international community try to demonstrate change through 'ticking the standard boxes' rather than actually going to the root of the issues.

Session V: Next steps

General next steps to improve governance in the region were discussed. It was advised that 'professionalization' should be the central concept driving reforms: instilling in civil servants a sense of professional integrity and a sense of being a member of professional community can help address the gap between how public administrations should function and the disappointing reality of how they do in practice. It was recommended that the EU integration process can provide an important platform for professionalization, especially through mutual learning. The de-politicization of public institutions should always aim to tackle the system of organized irresponsibility, where actors seldom live up to their public obligations but rather blame the process of reform for their own shortcomings.

During discussions it was highlighted that political discourse in SEE has to become more constructive. Currently, political communication is bombastic and seldom underpinned by evidence or rational justifications. MPs are carriers of public information, and so have an important role in providing accurate and reliable information. In general, political education may be an important tool in driving better politics. Conversations about improving electoral processes should become louder and more distinct, especially as pre-election environments tend to be very problematic, and it was advised that there are ways in which different electoral systems can improve closeness to citizens. Intra-party democracy must improve as must the spirit of cooperation between parties. Patience is a necessary but unlikely feature of political scene in SEE.

Greater investments in youth should come to the fore. Policies for young people should be 'mainstreamed' and government strategies should be 'youth proofed' to assess their effects on young people. It is disconcerting

how much young people despise politics. Youth unemployment is a critical issue: all SEE governments should work on opening more opportunities for young people, especially as the most innovative and talented tend to set their sights on migration. Education systems are in a dire state across SEE but it was stressed that this issue is not high enough on the political agenda.

Improving the integrity of the media in SEE should receive more attention. It was noted that after twenty years of outside investment in the media very little has improved. The training of journalists has been frequent but the problem is that journalists work in an environment in which it is very difficult for them to apply their knowledge. It was proposed that independent commissions to investigate attacks on journalists could enhance media freedom. A C-span-style channel that would shed light on the inner workings of parliaments could also provide more accountability. It was also noted that there are rare examples of independent NGO-based media, which can in the long term make sustainable change. Others recommended that training media owners is more important than training journalists, and in general the corporations of the region need to embrace corporate ethics and social responsibility.

Investing in academic research capacities should be an important element of progress. Experts suggested that many aspects of the region remain understudied, and the EU in particular can help to generate empirical evidence. Research should focus on informal networks and how they interact with formal institutions, as well as the ways in which SEE states have been captured by certain groups.

The growing radicalization of young people and migration to fight for ISIS also needs to be better understood. For some, this represents a real security concern, which has to be addressed. Others suggested that we just do not know yet the scale and reasons for radicalization and warned against exaggerating the issue, which could actually be more about bad governance than ideology. Others pointed to a general confusion over the 'terrorist' issue, which is being exploited for political gains. In Macedonia, it was suggested that nationalist fights are masquerading as anti-terrorism strategies and that there is the potential for political misuse of anti-radicalization policies.

The geo-political significance of the region should be more openly discussed. As well as streamlining and reducing the number of regional organizations in SEE, it was recommended that the EU should be brought firmly back into the debate about the future direction of SEE; indeed, it was recommended that EU should establish a pact with citizens of SEE, something that would be a cultural break for the European Commission (EC) but nevertheless necessary. Participants warned against the EU underestimating the impact of its scaling back of engagement. Others suggested that the focus

should be on finding more practical ways for the EU to reinvigorate democratic reform. It was also argued, however, that the EU's presence still looms large in the region and in fact has created a dependency as many NGOs, political leaders, and government departments rely on EU funds. It was suggested that this dependency has restricted the development of internal accountability mechanisms as domestic leaders treat Brussels as their primary constituency, resulting in accountability displacement wherein the internal relationship between state and society has weakened.

SHALLOW EUROPEANIZATION: TOP-DOWN CONDITIONALITY, FORMAL COMPLIANCE, AND SOURCES OF STATE CAPTURE IN THE BALKANS

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One and a half decades into the process of enlargement, all countries in the Balkans have increasingly embraced EU integration as the grand strategy for their future and have progressed in the institutional ladder of EU accession. The EU has borrowed from the arsenal of the most successful enlargement tools while continuously fine-tuning and elaborating its instruments in order to deal with the specific challenges in the region. Despite the application of conditionality, enrichment of enlargement tools and increasing domestic commitment to the EU agenda, the WB continue to demonstrate a poor record of reforms marked by stagnation, inconsequential change, and frequent reversals. Almost all countries in the Western Balkans remain stuck in a hybrid state of reforms and fit best in the category of hybrid regimes or non-consolidated democracies. Why has the EU enlargement policy failed to trigger deep-seated change across different cases and areas of reform in the Western Balkans? Why have the enriched enlargement tools, particularly the celebrated policy of conditionality, which proved to be successful in previous candidates in Eastern Europe, not delivered the expected results in the Balkans? What are the domestic conditions that inhibit the transformative power of the EU at the receiving end of enlargement?

Part of the problem with mismatching expectations and results on the role of the EU relates to analytical frameworks that overemphasize the role of top-down EU conditionality in the process of domestic reforms. The asymmetrical power that the EU holds in this process, when combined with the high volume and intrusiveness of the rules attached to membership, the argument goes, have an unprecedented influence on the restructuring of domestic institutions and the entire range of public policies in candidate countries. Such analytical frameworks that build on the role of conditionality, however, fail to capture almost everything that happens in the domestic box of analysis – actors interested in the status quo, complex games of compliance, and shallow reforms that pay only lip-service to EU requirements. Empirical research on the region, on the other hand, remains largely within the realm of expectation and has yet to consider and evaluate the role of domestic factors that set those countries apart and its implications for the presumed impact of Europe.

This chapter critically analyses literature on top-down conditionality and brings in the domestic factors that screen, select, and ultimately shape the differential path of reforms in different cases and areas of reform across the WB. At the end, it is the domestic agents operating under a set of constraining domestic structures that determine which rules to take in, how fast, and with what results. The argument proceeds in four sections. Section one elaborates on the failure of EU conditionality to

turn around the poor record of reform in the WB. Section two explores the formal and de-contextualized conditionality-focused approaches that serve to decouple the policy output from the evolutionary domestic process and the array of domestic factors that screen and implement the EU rules in the domestic arena. Section three outlines the core domestic factors – ethnic grievances, weak stateness and corrupt politics – that challenge the transformative power of the EU and give rise to the phenomena of shallow Europeanization across the region. Section four suggests that only functioning horizontal and vertical accountability mechanisms that serve to hold elected executive authorities responsible for their actions can break this vicious circle that entangles divided politics, weak states, and corrupt elites.

The gap between enthusiastic expectations and meagre results of conditionality

By 2000s, the EU had expanded its concept of enlargement to include all Balkan countries left out of the previous wave of enlargement. By that time, EU enlargement was praised as a story of triumph, indeed the most successful aspects of EU foreign policy, which contributed to create peace and stability, inspire reforms, and consolidate common principles of liberty, democracy, as well as market economy in the candidate countries in the East. The Western Balkans (WB), for their part, had moved away from the violent conflicts and exclusionary nationalist politics that held hostage their first decade of democratic transitions (Vachudova 2003; Pond 2006). More flexible elites open to negotiation and committed Europeanists betting their fortunes in the process of EU integration had gained strength in politics, government, and society, creating a friendlier environment for the role of the EU. This EU policy shift towards the region, on the one hand, and increasing domestic demands for integration, on the other, have generated high expectations that EU enlargement will discipline institution-building and foster democratic reforms in the same way that it did in its previous candidates from the East.

One and a half decades into the process of enlargement all countries in the Balkans have increasingly embraced EU integration as the grand strategy for their future. Europe has emerged as the end game of a difficult transition, and a reform agenda that merges the broad consensus of political actors, governing structures, and social players (Elbasani 2013). All countries in the WB have also progressed in the institutional ladder of EU accession. Croatia has made the big jump to conclude accession negotiations in 2011 and assume full membership in 2013. All other countries except of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo have now applied for membership. Montenegro and Serbia have moved to open accession talks while Macedonia and Albania are waiting for the green light to start negotiations. Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAA), the equivalent of European Agreements, are signed with all WB countries. Aid has continued to flow under the new Instrument for

Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), which is explicitly geared towards bringing institutional reforms in line with the EU standards.

During this enlargement process, the EU has borrowed from the arsenal of most successful previous enlargement tools while continuously fine-tuning and elaborating its instruments in order to deal with the specific challenges in the region. ‘Unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans’ (Council of European Union 2003), is embedded into a region-tailored enlargement policy – the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) – where measures of stabilization and accession go hand in hand (Elbasani 2008). The new strategy is centered on the principle of conditionality – the offer of the EU rewards (both financial assistance and membership) after the WB states demonstrated compliance with EU-set requirements. Those requirements are outlined in the Copenhagen Criteria, different regional approaches and SAP conditionality (Pippan 2004). Yet, other layers of demands, lists of priorities, a system of thorough evaluation, and a credible link of domestic reforms and rewards at stake are added along the way in order to ensure the EU’s comprehensive scrutiny into countries’ compliance with enlargement rules. Already in 2006, the EU’s ‘Renewed Consensus on Enlargement’ required application of ‘strict conditionality at all stages of the negotiations’ and that ‘difficult issues such as administrative and judicial reforms and the fight against corruption ... be addressed at an early stage’. In 2011, the EU highlighted the rule of law as ‘a continuing major challenge and a crucial condition for countries moving towards membership’ (Council of the European Union 2011, 4). A detailed operationalization of the rule of law – independent and efficient judiciary, fight against corruption, fight against organized crime, and public administration reform each associated with specific indicators easier to evaluate – followed. This refinement of enlargement strategy and related instruments has indeed addressed some of the previously identified problems of conditionality: 1) lack of clarity on what is expected from candidate countries, 2) use of low threshold for evaluating compliance, 3) use of vague and ad hoc assessments, and 4) incoherent relation between institutional progress and results of reforms (Kochenov 2005).

Despite the application of EU conditionality, enrichment of enlargement tools, increasing domestic commitment to the EU agenda, and growing influence of Europeanists at home, the WB continue to demonstrate a poor record of reforms. International indices show a clear trend of stagnation, inconsequential change, and frequent reversals in most aspects of democratization reforms (Table 1). Reform indices remain especially problematic in areas of rule of law which place those countries firmly in the category of difficult democratizers and thus nearer to the Euro-Asian category than former Eastern candidates of EU (Table 2, 3).

Almost all countries in the Western Balkans remain stuck in a hybrid state of reforms and fit best in the category of hybrid regimes or non-consolidated democracies. Partial and inconsequential reforms feature a gap between commitment to EU integration and poor actual progress towards reforms necessary to advance in the ladder of accession. Commitment to integration shows in common pledges to take the process further and pursue formal reforms in line with EU requirements and standards. Yet, progress in key areas that are to determine the future of each country towards the EU are rather slow, patchy, and reversible. The large gap between enthusiastic commitment to the EU and meager results in practice shows particularly during the implementation stages when domestic actors tend to resist and frequently get back what they have negotiated during the policy making process. This decoupling between the adoption of formal/legal aspects of EU rules and their deficient enforcement during implementation seems to reproduce more continuity than transformation, resulting in shallow and inconsistent Europeanization across different national cases, areas of reforms, and time periods.

The failure of top-down conditionality

Part of the problem with mismatching expectations and results on the role of the EU has to do with analytical frameworks that establish a direct connection between top-down EU conditionality and domestic reforms, thus pre-judging the role of conditionality. Certainly, most research on the WB has made enlargement conditionality the central focus of analyzing the scope of domestic reforms (Elbasani 2009; Noutcheva 2012). After all, the enlargement policy in the Balkans features the same elements that have arguably animated the celebrated success of EU enlargement in previous candidates in CEE, most importantly the substantial rewards underpinning the EU requirement and the strategy of reinforcement by reward (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2006: 88).

Mainstream research on the role of EU enlargement tends to justify and reverberate enthusiastic expectations on the success of conditionality to transfer EU rules and institutions in the candidate countries. Indeed, the EU has made accession contingent upon a set of rather intrusive criteria, which are expanded further with each wave of enlargement. Grabbe seems to voice a widespread consensus when suggesting that “in the context of framing its enlargement towards East, the EU established the most detailed and comprehensive accession conditions ever formulated” (2006: 250). That EU conditions come with the ‘carrot’ of membership and substantial assistance for compliant countries increases the appeal of the EU among candidate countries. The asymmetrical power that the EU holds in this process, when combined with the high volume and intrusiveness of the rules attached to membership, have arguably allowed the Union unprecedented influence on the restructuring of domestic institutions and the entire range

of public policies in candidate countries (Pridham 2005; Kubicek 2003). As Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier put it, the EU’s enlargement strategy has proven so powerful that ‘Europeanization superseded the transition, Westernisation, or globalisation of CEE ... as the dominant motor of institutional change’ (2006: 99). The subsequent advice is to ‘entice’ Balkan countries into reform by offering all what was offered to CEE candidates, and possibly more. The range of EU rewards will discipline and foster domestic reforms in line with EU criteria.

Critical accounts of conditionality, however, suggest that assumptions on the success of EU conditionality transfers tend to ‘overestimate the EU influence’ (Grabbe 2003: 305) and/or ‘prejudge the role of the EU vis-à-vis other sources of domestic change’ (Goetz 2000). The typical overemphasis of the role of the EU in research on enlargement occurs because conditionality is frequently taken as the guiding analytical concept, while results of reform are measured against the EU prescriptions (Brusis 2005: 297; Elbasani 2009: 7-8). Such formal, de-contextualized and short-term assessments of reforms are by definition predisposed to decouple the policy output from the evolutionary domestic process and the array of domestic factors that screen and implement the EU rules in the domestic arena. These evaluations hence fail to capture almost all that happens at the domestic box of analysis – actors interested in the status quo, complex games of compliance, and shallow reforms that pay only lip-service to EU requirements. These intermediate kinds of reforms are particularly pertinent in the context of divided states, failed institutions, mounting political corruption, and weak checks and balances that characterize post-communist Balkans.

Empirical research on the region, on the other hand, remains largely within the realm of expectation and has yet to consider and evaluate the role of domestic factors that set those countries apart and its implications for the presumed impact of Europe. Growing evidence on uneven and shallow EU-led reforms across the region pose the need to contextualize the role of the EU and bring in more prominently the domestic factors that screen, select, and ultimately shape the form of EU transfers across different countries, issue-areas, and time periods.

Domestic obstacles to the transformative power of the EU

The range of domestic factors that challenge and mediate the role of the EU hinges on the delayed trajectory of democratization and state-building processes across the region. All post-communist countries became subject to Europeanization while undergoing large-scale democratization and state-building processes. This did not only prove to be an immense process of transformation, but it also meant that multiple reforms had to advance together in a rough balance in order to prevent general failure. In addition to multiple reforms, Balkan

countries consist of ‘borderline’ cases of democratization, or difficult democratizers that share a set of unfavorable conditions. Challenging factors at the receiving end of enlargement might not be insuperable obstacles, but they constitute specific parameters that Europeanization research has to take into account in order to make sense of overlapping, slow, and intermediate EU-led reforms.

Ethnic grievances

Ethnic heterogeneity and the presence of minorities in the region has been a much-quoted problematic ‘social given’, which proved to complicate and delay the course of reforms. The very dissolution of Yugoslavia constituted a specific ‘critical juncture’, which contributed to ‘lock-in’ ethnic divisions and patchy institutional arrangements that nourished further deep-seated grievances. The state dissolution is not a problem *per se*, but the use of violence is attributed a negative effect upon the future of regime change, as it deepens the grumbles between winners and losers and reduces the chances for smooth and consensual reforms (Parrot 1997). These divisions often give place and crystalize into institutional solutions that empower particular groups at the expense of central state authority thus damaging further the capacities of the state to mobilize common sources in pursuit of the EU agenda.

In addition, the vacuum of state authority created during the collapse of the federal state enables the mushrooming of informal networks that use and prey on the formal institutions, reducing them to empty shells incapable of performing the tasks required by the EU (Kostovicova and Bojčić-Dželilović 2008). Even Albania, which transferred as an intact territory into its post-communist existence, suffered a violent breakdown of state authority in 1997, which enabled the collusion of illegal networks with the highest echelons of political power (Elbasani 2009).

Dimensions of weak stateness

Ethnic divisions, as well as related violence and collapse of central institutions, often result in weak states. Weak stateness in the Balkans takes different forms that have to do with 1) contested sovereignty and 2) the lack of bureaucratic capacities to implement a state’s visions.

The problem of stateness as a contested sovereign authority arises when ‘there are profound differences about the territorial boundaries of the political community and ... who has the right to citizenship in that state’ (Linz and Stephan 1996: 16). State sovereignty, either as externally recognized capacity to engage with other actors in the international system or as internal sovereignty to exercise self-governance, presupposes the existence of a consolidated national ‘unit’. The lack of a firmly established nation-state sharing a common sense

of community that is above mere opinion and agreement thwarts the democratic process (Parrot 1997: 9) and the capacity of a country to pursue the EU’s agenda (Noutcheva 2012). Contested stateness triggers secessionist movements, controversies over national identities, disputed borders, ethnic tensions, and reconciliation problems that absorb much of the energy needed for reforms. As Crawford and Lijphart’s study on the trajectories of post-communist regime change suggests, ‘the legacy of incomplete nation-building is perhaps the most important threat to the project of economic and political liberalisation’ (1997: 25).

The second problem of stateness is related to the lack of the infrastructural capacities to exercise state authority and implement its vision. A weak state apparatus is typically one that, ‘is lacking functional bureaucracies, is hopelessly ensnared in losing battles with predatory rent-seekers ravaging its resources, powerless to monitor lower state officials, unable to extract resources from the population, and operating in a social milieu that renders the rapid regeneration of state structures largely impossible’ (Ganev 2005: 428). Infrastructural weakness can be a derivative of contested sovereignty, but might well feature in consolidated nation states. In both cases, however, weak state capacities create ample opportunities of state capture.

Clientelistic networks and political corruption

Disorderly transitions, state collapse, and patchy institutions across the region have certainly created ample opportunities for ruling elites to emasculate the state by ‘privatizing’ decision-making mechanisms and/or exercising government prerogatives on behalf of clientelistic interests. Patterns of clientelism, defined as political rulers’ offer of personal rewards to their clients in the form of public sector jobs and the distribution of public resources such as licenses, contracts, and projects in return for votes, has been a distinct historical feature of socio-political relations across the Balkans (Diamandourous and Larrabe 2000: 29-33). Combining the logic of appropriation of public office for private ends with the logic of resistance to institutional authority, clientelistic relations undermine further the capacity of the state, weaken its legitimacy, and result in large but ultimately weak states. This type of state is short of necessary capacities to control the functioning of corrupt networks and even implement its policy vision (Krastev 2002). The result is well-entrenched and sticky political corruption and is difficult to unroot.

The phenomena, moreover, does not exclude the ‘liberal capital’ be it individual leaders, political parties, governing majorities, and social groupings favorable to democratization and the project of European integration. Indeed, quite often in the Balkans, committed ‘reformists’ and Europeanists are well entrenched into networks of corruption and state capture. This vicious circle entangles into a whole ethnic grievances, which

feed into weak states, which in return enable and enforce political corruption. Nowhere does the vicious circle that ties corrupt politics, divided polities, and weak states find a more productive soil than in countries that have experienced violent state collapse and ethnic conflict.

Accountability mechanisms that make a difference

Breaking this vicious circle that entangles divided polities, weak states, and corrupt elites requires functioning horizontal and vertical accountability mechanisms that serve to hold elected executive authorities responsible for their actions.

Vertical accountability mechanisms consist of a wide range of civil and political rights – freedom of expression, access to information and the right of association and assembly – which facilitate the processes of social scrutiny in complex societies, and in turn, promote the transparency and sensitivity of governing authorities to various interests and preferences in the society.

Horizontal accountability mechanisms, or the institutional system of checks and balances, on the other hand, constitute additional guarantees for the surveillance of elected authorities by autonomous and independent institutions operating within a system of checks and balances. The institutionalization of the division of powers between mutually interdependent and autonomous bodies, and the elimination of reserved privileges in one institution or the other, endows democratic systems with safety measures to prevent self-perpetuation and the abuse of power by executive authorities and power holders.

Hence, the EU must target the functioning and enforcement of accountability mechanisms that operate outside political structures and serve the role of watchdog in democratic societies.

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Appendix

Table 1: National Democratic Governance, 2005-2014

	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14
Albania	4.25	4.00	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.50	4.75	4.75	5.00	4.75
Bosnia	4.75	4.75	4.75	5.00	5.00	5.25	5.25	5.50	5.50	5.75
Croatia	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50
Kosovo	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.50	5.25	5.50	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.50
Macedonia	4.00	3.75	3.75	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.25	4.25	4.25
Montenegro	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25
Serbia	4.00	4.00	3.75	4.00	4.00	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75
Average	4.39	4.32	4.32	4.32	4.32	4.39	4.46	4.54	4.57	4.54
EU Average	2.38	2.38	2.38	2.50	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.88
Euro-Asian Average	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.38	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50

Source: Nations in Transit 2014

Table 2: Independent Judiciary, 2005-2014

	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14
Albania	4.50	4.25	4.00	4.00	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.75	4.75	4.75
Bosnia	4.25	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25
Croatia	4.50	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.50
Kosovo	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.50	5.50	5.50
Macedonia	3.75	3.75	3.75	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.25	4.25
Montenegro	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.00	4.25	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
Serbia	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50
Average	4.46	4.36	4.32	4.36	4.43	4.39	4.43	4.46	4.50	4.54
EU Average	2.20	2.15	2.13	2.20	2.28	2.33	2.33	2.38	2.35	2.35
Euro-Asian Average	5.65	5.63	5.65	5.75	5.83	5.92	6.00	6.13	6.13	6.15

Source: Nations in Transition 2014

Table 3: Political Corruption, 2005-2014

	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14
Albania	5.25	5.25	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.25	5.25
Bosnia	4.50	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.75	4.75
Croatia	4.75	4.75	4.75	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.25	4.00	4.00	4.00
Kosovo	6.00	6.00	6.00	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.00
Macedonia	5.00	4.75	4.75	4.50	4.25	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.25
Montenegro	5.25	5.25	5.50	5.25	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Serbia	5.00	4.75	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25
Average	5.11	5.00	4.96	4.82	4.79	4.75	4.68	4.64	4.75	4.79
New EU Average	3.23	3.28	3.23	3.15	3.25	3.35	3.33	3.28	3.30	3.45
Euro-Asian Average	6.06	6.13	6.08	6.10	6.10	6.17	6.13	6.13	6.13	6.17

Source: Nations in Transit 2014

CHALLENGES TO STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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Western assistance for the development of civil society¹ (Carothers 1999) in Eastern Europe has been pursued as a grass-roots approach to supporting democratization in the region, helping post-socialist citizens overcome aversion to civic participation. EU assistance for civil society in the region is designed to help pre-accession countries meet the democratic requirements specified in the Copenhagen criteria. Hybrid regimes, war, and international military intervention in the 1990s added a layer of challenges to international efforts to strengthen civil society in much of the region. Despite decades-long efforts to support vibrant civic activism in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, many Western-aided, but domestically developed civil society organizations (CSOs)² – even in Slovenia – are weak (Howard 2011, Rožić 2014). This paper examines civil society's weakness, offers explanations for it, makes suggestions for Western donors, and poses questions for discussion.

How strong are civil society organizations?

In measuring³ the strength of CSOs formed by domestic peoples in the Western Balkans, this paper considers these organizations' ability to bring about policy change and their public support. Donors often focus on policy change. But public acceptance of domestic CSOs is necessary for CSOs to bring about sustainable improvements in local communities and in policy. The attention of international donors is fleeting and policy change induced by European conditionality can be superficial or short-lived (Mungiu-Pippidi 2010).

Policy change. Civil society organizations in Croatia and Serbia played a significant role in removing repressive governments in 2000. Since then, leaders of advocacy groups, such as legal aid, human rights groups, and women's groups have formed stronger networks to monitor and influence government, as well as to raise voices about important political and social issues. NGOs in Bosnia have successfully lobbied for legislation providing for direct election of mayors, for change in the way local institutions respond to gender-based violence, and for Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks to be legally constituent nations throughout Bosnia; in Serbia, NGOs participated in developing the Law on Associa-

¹ There is a vigorous debate about the concept of civil society. For this paper, civil society is conceived of a space independent of the state containing groups formed voluntarily by citizens to protect or extend their interests (White 1994).

² This paper uses interchangeably the terms civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The latter term is most often used by Westerners working on civil society, though it is less well understood in the Western Balkans.

³ Most scholars soundly criticize counting the number of registered civil society organizations as a measure of civil society's strength. Other measures include Freedom House's rankings and USAID's civil society sustainability index.

tions in Serbia (Baskin and Pickering 2015, Helms 2014). Women's organizations in Bosnia also effectively lobbied for the adoption of gender quotas in Bosnia's national legislature and for gender mechanisms at all levels of government. CSOs have recently advocated Freedom of Information laws, by working toward their implementation (in Serbia) or preventing restrictions to them (in Bosnia) (Cohen and Lampe 2011, Erlap 2014). In general, however, NGOs tend to be sidelined in discussions of politically sensitive policies (Howard 2011), including the 2006 constitutional reform process in Serbia. Many government officials in the Western Balkans remain reluctant to engage meaningfully with CSOs on policy, though the environment at the local level is often slightly better than at the national level (Blomberg 2011, Cohen and Lampe 2011). Even local officials often award grants to CSO through opaque mechanisms despite efforts by USAID and the EU, through its Reinforcement of Local Democracy program in Bosnia, to promote a transparent, merit-based system (Pickering and Jusić 2014). Fagen (2011) found that citizen impact on policy change – input into construction projects' compliance with EU environmental impact rules – can more effectively be exerted through unexpected venues, such as local communities (*mjesne zajednice*) than through NGOs. In the Western Balkans, conservative and inward looking monoethnic groups are stronger than liberal groups, which tend to be small; financially and politically weak; and donor-dependent (Zeravčić 2008; Daskalovski 2009; Dorić 2009, p. 175; Nixon 2009).

Public Support. Research since the 2000s on public views of NGOs in the Western Balkans indicates both a lingering skepticism about their objectives and an openness toward their possibilities. Focus groups from several large towns in Serbia, Bosnia, and Macedonia in 2004 revealed that Serb participants expressed predominantly negative views (47% of participants) about NGOs, though 44% of Bosnian and 57% of Macedonian participants expressed positive views (Grodland 2006, p. 233). Focus group respondents who voiced positive views of NGOs did so because they viewed them as achieving results (in Serbia), helping people (in Bosnia), and a positive phenomenon (in Macedonia). Those who expressed negative views of NGOs did so because they viewed them as politicized (in Serbia), untrustworthy (in Bosnia), or selfish/closed (in Macedonia) (Grodland 2006, p. 235). In a nationally representative sample survey in Serbia, few respondents (15%) viewed NGOs as having an impact on the lives of those in their community (Gradjanske Inicijative 2009, pp. 28-9). An activist in the 2014 anti-corruption plenums in Bosnia, which purposefully excluded activists from formal NGOs, characterized local NGOs as professional organizations focused on project-oriented work paid for by donors rather than as local organizations genuinely focused on listening to and advocating for ordinary citi-

zens.⁴ A 2014 study in four medium-sized towns in Serbia (Danković and Pickering 2014)⁵ found that many citizens believe that *genuine* NGOs – those responsive to and working to improve local communities – *could* play a positive role in Serbia's society. But they are often unaware of NGOs. When citizens *are* aware, they do not know enough about them to assess them or they assess them negatively (Table 1). Citizens who expressed opinions about NGOs active in their town or those active elsewhere in Serbia were more negative than toward local women's NGOs. Only 2.2% of our respondents had participated in an NGO. Younger respondents were more likely than older respondents to be more open toward NGOs. The most educated interviewees expressed more negative views of NGOs than those with the least education, most likely due to a more critical approach.

Explanations for weak civil societies: challenges of donors and implementers

Strengthening civil society is a long-term process that requires sustained domestic commitment and careful understanding of domestic contexts. Western agencies have generously supported CSOs that engage in their priorities – democratic advocacy – even when these groups have shallow roots in society. But they are often hesitant to support social service organizations and overlook groups that emerge from informal networks (Sali-Terzić 2001), such as those formed in the workplace (Pickering 2006), around the plenums, or efforts to help 2014 flood victims.

NGOs in the Western Balkans remain heavily dependent on foreign donors, with more than 50 percent of donations to social organizations in Kosovo coming from foreign donors, 35 percent of organizations in Bosnia admitting they depend wholly on foreign donors, and 75 percent of NGOs in Macedonia and in Serbia revealing that foreign donors are their main source of funding (Howard 2011). This dependency on foreign donors and the uncertainty of funding can discourage close contact with local communities (Helms 2014, p. 37). Western Balkan NGO leaders have criticized donors for imposing their own priorities on projects and for providing financial support only for short-term projects (Howard 2011). Some NGO leaders in Serbia who admitted they worked on projects unrelated to their missions because of a need for funding often volunteered their time for mission-related projects. One NGO leader lamented, “donors are rigid and applications are cumbersome. We all are losing the edge of being activists and are turning into bureaucrats. I wish donors were more activities-oriented than project-focused” (Danković and Pickering 2014). NGO leaders were critical of the funding process

⁴ Interview conducted by Pickering, July 12, 2014 in Sarajevo.

⁵ Danković conducted semi-structured interviews in spring 2014 with 100 ordinary people.

and donors' lack of attention to NGOs that are small and outside the capital.

Audits, evaluations of EU aid, and interviews with reformers in Bosnia and Macedonia have identified problems with EU assistance. The perception in most EU candidate and pre-candidate countries is that pre-accession funds suffer from their overly-bureaucratic nature and the extremely demanding, expensive, and time-consuming process of project preparation and implementation (Gjorgjievski 2008, Pickering 2014). While a portion of these judgments may be mere complaining or even a desire to avoid scrutiny of aid dispersion, substantial evidence suggests this is a genuine problem. For example, Daskalovski (2009, p. 355) assessed that few Macedonian NGOs possessed the technical skills and resources necessary to apply successfully for EU assistance for civil society. An analysis of the use of IPA funds found only one percent of the €622 million Macedonia received between 2007 and 2013 went to the civil sector (Institute for European Politics 2013). Research suggests that the EU often assumes capacity rather than helps cultivate it (Elbasani 2013), though IPA II seeks to alleviate some of these problems. EU efforts to bolster civil society in the Western Balkans are not reflected in estimates of the strength of civil societies in the region. According to Freedom House (2014) figures, the strength of civil society since the initiation of the EU accession process has not improved in Macedonia and Bosnia, and it improved only .5 points (on a 1-7 scale) in Croatia.

Lack of follow-up by donors in monitoring reform can create incentives for "photo ops" with reform documents that officials and activists fail to use to improve communities. For example, Skrbić (2009) found that while international donors successfully promoted a process for producing local development plans that included CSOs, they rarely took steps to ensure that civil society groups would be included in the implementation of development plans. Brown (2009) criticizes many evaluations of donor programs for civil society in the Western Balkans for too often over-relying on interviews with stakeholders in the programs who have vested interests in portraying their "success" and for estimating outputs (documents produced) rather than community impact. Independent and rigorous evaluations are needed to learn systematically about what works and what does not in empowering civil society.

Explanations for weak civil societies: norms, activities, openness

Research on assistance for civil society in Eastern Europe and the 2014 Danković and Pickering study in Serbia call attention to three additional reasons why Western-aided NGOs have varying, but low, levels of public support: 1) NGOs' pursuit of norms that often do not resonate among Western Balkan peoples; 2) NGOs' limited responsiveness to domestic priorities; and 3)

NGOs' lack of openness in terms of membership, activities, citizen feedback, and spending decisions.

Norms. Western assistance to Western Balkan NGOs will help NGOs gain public acceptance if the norms they pursue resonate among local peoples. Activists point out that human rights will spread more effectively and with greater legitimacy, albeit more slowly, if they are adapted to local cultural contexts (Sundstrom 2005). Danković and Pickering's 2014 study in Serbia found the vast majority of citizens expressed support for a norm of responsibility for helping those most vulnerable in society. This norm was rooted in an idea of vulnerability tied to socio-economic status, rather than to Western donors' views of those they believed suffered discrimination, particularly ethnic minorities and LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) people. Citizens believed that NGOs should be working on improving social wellbeing and the dismal socio-economic situation. Citizens supported NGO work on social problems: "NGOs make society function better – they pick up where the governmental institutions dropped the ball."

Negative comments about NGOs criticized them for pursuing values seen as foreign, such as gay rights, or values, such as special treatment of minorities, that donors themselves do not uphold. Serb citizens interviewed expressed skepticism of CSOs promoting human rights, since they questioned human rights as a goal that could be realistically achieved or distrusted the intentions of organizations that "preached constantly" about it. The most negative views expressed were toward those Serbian NGOs that respondents considered tools of the West. A respondent from Vranje asserted, "through their involvement in politics, NGOs are the way the West controls events in Serbia" (Danković and Pickering 2014).

Norms that resonate with NGO leaders are on a very different level than the norms that resonate with ordinary people. Ordinary Serbs are focused on surviving the very challenging, daily struggles of existential questions. They are not concerned with working on what they consider to be "abstract" and confusing ideal like democracy, human rights, and civil society that are often incorporated into donor-friendly missions. Local NGOs' repetition of these abstract ideals in their interaction with citizens obstructs their ability to connect to and build a domestic constituency.

Goals and Activities. Western Balkan citizens did not believe that NGOs pursued goals and tangible activities that met priority local needs, which limited public acceptance of them (Pickering 2006). Western Balkan countries face mounting social problems under pressure of high and increasing unemployment (World Bank 2014). Such conditions, together with a long-held norm of responsibility for helping those socially vulnerable, encourage citizens to single out socio-economic issues

as their priority tier of concerns (UN 2013, 40). Yet, Serb citizens criticized NGOs for “talking about things that do not matter much to most people.” NGO work is seen as very abstract at a time when people need help with things more basic. NGOs often fail to engage in tangible activities that promote understanding of their work (Grodeland 2006) and allow citizens to make informed opinions of them, leaving a space to be filled with second-hand information of questionable accuracy. A respondent from Užice described an NGO as, “a type of organization supposedly concerned about issues in society. The funny part is that the loudest ones are dealing with issues that concern one percent of the population” (Danković and Pickering 2014).

Openness. The visibility of NGO activities and the openness of NGO leaders to recruiting more members, making decisions, and accepting feedback by citizens were problems for all the NGOs in Danković and Pickering’s 2014 study. Indeed, NGO leaders could not name specific approaches they used to recruit new members or to obtain feedback from citizens. One NGO leader even questioned the usefulness of citizen feedback, arguing society is “overly suspicious” and reluctant to change.⁶ A woman from Užice once involved in a local NGO blamed the lack of understanding about NGOs on their leaders’ poor communication with citizens: “They have to be more proactive to reach out to people to explain in good basic terms what they do, and they must understand society a little better.” Citizens we interviewed not infrequently described NGO leaders as another elite, “the NGO elite.” Some high profile activists regularly praised by Western donors were considered exclusive and self-righteous. NGOs are viewed by many as primarily a good opportunity for employment, rather than as means to develop civil society and strengthen democratic values in a society.

Recommendations for donors

- Help domestic civil society organizations gain public acceptance and enact sustainable change by supporting those groups that engage in activities responsive to community priorities and consistent with locally resonant norms, particularly socio-economic concerns. For example, projects for youth could integrate work on socio-economic issues with political engagement (Eralp 2014).
- Increase support to responsive civil society organizations outside of the Western Balkans’ major cities; spend time with CSO leaders, local officials, and ordinary people; and rigorously evaluate the

⁶ NGO leaders’ confidence in their ability to decide what is “good for the population” reminded Danković of Communist officials’ confidence in their ability to decide what is “good for the population.” Both are arrogant in their approach to citizens, assuming that elites cannot work *with* citizens but instead must work *above* citizens.

impact of programs in these towns to understand how best and sustainably to empower them.

- Reward civil society groups that engage in broadly participatory decision-making, communicate goals clearly and plainly to ordinary people, and make transparent funding decisions.
- Promote sustainable change by engaging domestic actors – including and beyond CSO activists – in all four aspects of the Project Management Cycle (Narten 2009): identification of the problem, program design, implementation, and evaluation.
- Strengthen unconventional but domestically initiated forms of civic action, such as those facilitated by local communities (*mjesne zajednice*), and informal groups (plenums, economic networks, networks formed to help flood victims).

Discussion questions

- Is there necessarily a tradeoff between supporting civil society groups working on social problems and those working to promote democracy?
- What would increase the attractiveness to donors of supporting slower, but more sustainable change in or initiated by civil society?
- In a competitive environment, how can processes of learning from mistakes and successes in assistance to civil society be developed that are rigorous and informative to policy makers and practitioners?
- How can academics who engage in impact evaluations of democratization programs make their research more accessible to and useful for policy makers and practitioners?

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EUROPEAN UNION INTEGRATION AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM

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The European Union and the countries of the Western Balkans seem to be entering a new phase of relations in 2015. The war in Ukraine since 2014 and the continuous political and economic difficulties faced by all of the six countries of the Eastern Partnership (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) have contributed to the awareness of a **dramatically changed global and European security environment**.¹ At the same time, at the Riga Summit of May 2015, the “*EU embrace of eastern partners turns lukewarm*”.² The level of ambition to contribute to the political and economic transformation in the immediate neighborhood of the Union seems considerably decreased in light of Russia’s aggressive and antagonizing policies and actions. These developments will impact on the countries of the Western Balkans, where people and elites continue to feel not fully embraced by the European Union while struggling with similar – albeit, possibly more manageable in scale – structural challenges as the countries of Eastern Europe.

Some formal European integration steps of the Western Balkans countries have been made in 2014-15. They happened in an uneven manner and were primarily, if not solely, driven by political considerations not least stemming from the developments in the Eastern neighborhood and persistent hesitation of EU member states towards further enlargement. In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, EU conditionality linked to changing the constitutional arrangements have been put aside and the Stabilisation and Association Agreement came into force as of June 01, 2015, concluding for the first time contractual relations with the Union some ten years after the start of the process. Membership negotiations with **Montenegro** continued albeit with increased scrutiny of the functioning of democratic institutions. **Serbia**’s negotiation process with the Union continues to be determined by the normalization of relations with Kosovo and its progressive alignment with the external relations and foreign policy positions of the EU. **Albania** gained candidate status in June 2015 but no date for the opening of negotiations has been set. The example of **Macedonia**, heading for the 10th anniversary of being an EU candidate without negotiating the terms of membership in December 2015, shows the importance and impact of member states’ internal politics on the enlargement process. The situation in Macedonia has been further aggravated by serious concerns regarding the functioning of democratic institutions and of the security sector, with an increasing polarization and mobiliza-

¹ Council of the European Union: Conclusions on Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), 18 May 2015, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/05/18-council-conclusions-csdp/> (accessed 25 May 2015).

² New York Times, 22 May 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/05/22/world/europe/ap-eu-europe-eastern-summit.html?_r=0 (accessed 25 May 2015).

tion of large parts of the population in anti-government protests. While these five countries, the Western Balkans 5 (WB5) have forged contractual relations with the European Union and their citizens enjoy visa-free travel to the Schengen and Schengen-associated countries, **Kosovo** continues to face obstacles in both of these areas. This is due to the fact that five EU member states do not recognize its independence and because the normalization of relations with Serbia seems to no longer progress at the pace set in 2013. At the same time Kosovo, due to its difficult relations with the Russian Federation, seems least likely to be adversely affected in its EU-relations by the developments in Eastern Europe.

The EU integration process on a formal level remained determined by security and political developments in Europe and continued to put a premium on stabilization and association **at the expense of sustainable legal and administrative approximation**. Concerns regarding the sustainability of democratic governance, rule of law and security sector institutions, and the responsiveness of the political systems in general have re-emerged in all of the countries of the Western Balkans. Strikes and popular protests have become more frequent, structural economic and environmental problems are deepening and political antagonisms, polarization, and rhetoric, including on ethnic and national issues, have been sharpening. **An indicator of the persistent internal difficulties to deliver good governance and services to their citizens are the rising numbers of asylum-seekers** from the region. Since 2010, when visa-free travel was introduced, asylum claims more than doubled on an annual basis, while the whole process of visa liberalization rests on the presumption that in countries that enjoy visa-free travel with the Union reasons for fleeing the country must not exist. In 2014, more than 70,000 persons claimed asylum in the European Union. Over the five-year period more than 200,000 cases have been recorded. More than 1% of the WB5 population, not counting Kosovo, have been seeking asylum in the EU in the last five years, in addition to the other legal and illegal avenues of temporary, cyclical, and permanent emigration, which has been taking place since the Western Balkans countries were given an EU membership perspective³.

Long-lasting social and economic structural problems of the Western Balkans have so far been inadequately addressed through the EU integration process. The region remains largely characterized by low levels of social capital, i.e. trust and confidence in people, neighbors, and institutions; too few competitive sectors and industries; a lack of capital and investment, poor infrastructure development, including digitalization; declining educational and vocational training standards and

research and development facilities; an all-near absence in environmental and climate-change policies as well as to address demographic developments. These **challenges are not unique to the Western Balkans** and are shared with EU member states. Precisely because these challenges are common to existing EU member states, progress in these areas has become more important as net contributors to the EU budget in particular are demanding more efforts to make societies and economies more competitive, including in potential member states. In the Western Balkans these demands are facing societies, political elites, and economies, which are hardly liberal (also a characteristic that some EU member states share). The lack of societal, political, and economic competition is necessarily at odds with the liberal agenda and policies of the European Union, which in turn are based on a vision of an **independent and autonomously rule-enforcing public administration** – a role, which public administration has rarely played in the Western Balkans. This is a long resounding echo of the previous political, economic, and legal systems, which placed powers in the hand of elite groups without much accountability and scrutiny. The relatively **small size** of the government units⁴ in the region **constitute difficulties for accountability and transparency** as legislative, executive, and administrative as well as judicial functions are at times highly intertwined. Such systems seem quasi immune to substantial change as they put a premium on system dominance instead of delivery and gradual change. Public administration reform in this respect remains a direct function of a political reform process. This hints to an explanation of the limited success and sustainability of public administration reform efforts in the region and a broader difficulty of the EU in promoting such reforms abroad (article 21 TEU).

The last 15 years or so provided examples of at least three fundamental challenges for the EU when engaging in democratic governance and public administration reform⁵:

- The EU itself is not comprised of countries with perfectly managed public administrations and it is also possible that the EU does not always include fully acceptable democracies.
- The EU has difficulties dealing with deficiencies in democratic governance and public administration, also article 7 TEU provides only insufficient safe-

³ European Stability Initiative (ESI): New facts and figures on Western Balkan Asylum Seekers, 6 April 2015, p. 2, http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/New_facts_and_figures_on_WB_asylum_claims_6_April_2015.pdf (accessed 25 May 2015).

⁴ The largest country of the region, Serbia, has a population about the size of the sixteenth largest member state Bulgaria (7.2 million), the others are as small as 600,000 inhabitants (Montenegro); partly self-governing and administrating ethnically defined sub-state units count between 1.3 million (Republika Srpska) and 25,000 inhabitants (Bosanski-Podrinje Kanton).

⁵ Cf. Dimitryi Kochenov: Law Perspective: Praise Undeserved? The EU as a Democracy Promoter: A Sceptical Account, in: Anne Wetzel, Jan Orbie (eds.): The Substance of EU Democracy Promotion. Concepts and Cases, London 2015.

guards and also does not aim to re-establish the values of article 2 TEU.

- The EU approximation strategy in the areas of democracy and rule of law are not a guarantee against failure. It is also questionable how much of an interrelation there is between the activities the EU and those of states. The difficulties of dealing with problems of countries already within the Union does allow for doubts how much can be achieved in the Western Balkans.

In this respect, one has to be cautious to construct a responsibility of the EU and the enlargement process for achievements in democratization and public administration. While the public administration of the oppressive and regulatory elements of the security sector have been transformed to comply with AFSJ-standards (not least for visa liberalization), other parts which concern economic and social activities have certainly lacked behind or remained untouched. There is also the argument that the EU integration process has negatively impacted on democratic governance by imposing rules and regulations or rewarding elites for securing stability. This argument seems misplaced. As much as it is difficult to congratulate the EU for successfully instigating, supporting, or managing democratic and administration reforms, it is misleading to overestimate a possible negative influence of the EU. The challenge for enlargement is to rebalance the accession process between the bureaucratic self-appraisal of alleged reform achievements by the EU and the real developments in the countries (cf. asylum dilemma above).

Hence, EU integration and the progress in democratic governance and administration reform will need to be differentiated more clearly and cleverly. Against the background of the new strategic European landscape since 2014 on which the Western Balkans feature as a possible place to tension, the **vanishing promises** of the European Union herself in terms of an almost guaranteed avenue to prosperity and freedom, the possible end to the irrevocability of European integration in the case of the UK, and massive doubts about further enlargement in EU member states, advances public administration reform in the Western Balkans may succeed better if **the approach becomes more tailor-made and less normative**. Similarly the visa liberalization process work packages (road maps) for public administration reform could be developed in areas where regional competition can be fostered. This will need to necessarily concern areas of high importance for the population such as access and participation in the **European education, training area, and labor markets, as well as the field of entrepreneurship and business development**. Those improvements may not automatically trigger better democratic governance, but may allow an increase in the social and economic independence and autonomy of citizens within the European Economic Area anchored in increasing contractual ties with EU that re-

mains fully committed to the region in political and security terms. These advances could be rewarded by further integration steps. Yet, whether they will become a key to sustainable democratic governance in the region remains to be seen.

IMPEDIMENTS TO DEPOLITICIZATION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: THE CASE OF MONTENEGRO

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Abstract

Western Balkan states share similar challenges in public administration reform, which prompted the EU to formulate special principles that would be applicable to all Enlargement countries. Montenegro, which expects to be the next country to join the EU, is an illustrative case, which demonstrates the factors hindering depoliticization. With the uninterrupted rule of one predominant party for more than 20 years, despite the EU-driven efforts to professionalize public administration, the country still suffers from undue interference of party politics into state institutions. Given increasingly political EU conditionality, which will hardly attract enough supporters among current power structures, the challenge remains in mapping and encouraging the “norm entrepreneurs” within civil society in the region to further push forward the necessary reforms.

Party patronage, clientelism, or corruption?

Western Balkan states share similar legacies of fusion between state and party politics inherited from the one-party communist rule, which left a negative trace on countries' public administrations whose politicization is one of the major concerns of the European Union (EU).¹ Today, these countries are in different stages of accession into the EU.² They have different political landscapes, troubled economic development, and differing levels of overall institutionalization, which for the purpose of this paper, entails two important things: one is the stability of state institutions and the other one is the level of internalization of democratic rules and EU standards.³

Bearing this in mind, in none of the Western Balkan countries have the rules aimed at depoliticizing state institutions been completely internalized, despite the varying degrees of formal compliance of rules with the EU standards and varying practices in implementation of the standards. The case of Montenegro, which advanced the most, demonstrates that, although the EU accession negotiations do drive pro-reform efforts, aligning the legislation with the relevant public admin-

¹ Public Administration Reform became one of the three key pillars of the most recent EU Enlargement Strategy for the period 2014 - 2015, together with economic governance and rule of law.

² Croatia is now fully integrated into the EU, Montenegro and Serbia being in the phase of accession negotiations, Albania struggling to open accession negotiations after obtaining the candidate status in 2014, Macedonia's bid to join the EU being stalled due to the name dispute although the country was granted a candidate status back in 2005, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo (under the UN Resolution) are lagging behind.

³ Jan Hinrik Meyer-Sahling, Civil Service Professionalization in the Western Balkans, SIGMA Papers, No. 48, OECD Publishing, 2012.

istration principles is only one step towards depoliticized state institutions. In other words, as Petričušić suggests, a mere export of the EU's regulatory framework does not mean democratic consolidation per se.⁴

With regards to public administration reform and depoliticization of institutions, the key impediment is party patronage, which is here, as proposed by Kopecký, Mair and Spirova,⁵ conceived in a two-fold meaning. Party patronage can serve as a form of exchange of public goods for electoral support. In addition, however, it can be used for the party's own organizational growth, through the distribution of top state posts to the party cadre. Conceived in this manner, party patronage is primarily a linkage between the state and party. It does not necessarily mean corruption, or abuse of distributed public posts for private interests. Also, there is no equation between party patronage and clientelism, since the latter is a far more penetrating phenomenon. Nonetheless, the mere fact that party is controlling top posts in state institutions makes it more capable of distributing benefits to the wider electorate.

Many reports on the situation in the region claim that the three phenomena in the Western Balkans, party patronage, clientelism, and corruption, cohabit, or more precisely, that the region is characterized by "governance through clientelism and patronage networks accompanied by large-scale, high-level corruption".⁶ Such state of affairs is simultaneously the demonstration of the problematic track record of the EU in strengthening the rule of law, despite the novel approach, which was first applied to Montenegro. This approach entailed that the key chapters for the fight against corruption and organized crime⁷ in membership talks will be opened first and kept open until the very accession, with additional opening and interim benchmarks which have to be met. The approach of front-loading the rule of law, however, as van Ham suggests, means that the EU's conditionality has become more political, and less economic and technocratic, and that it thus might have painful ramifications for existing political power structures.⁸ In other words, precisely due to the high levels of corruption, which by definition encompasses political elites abusing their offices for pri-

vate gains, it is hard to expect that the politicians will implement the required reforms. In light of the previously described limitations of EU conditionality, the case of Montenegro is particularly illustrative of the manner in which the deficient inter-party competition and party patronage are impeding the depoliticization efforts of both internal and external actors in the country.

Party competition over public resources: the Montenegrin experience

Montenegro, as a country predominantly under the rule of one party since the early 1990s, is a characteristic case for exploration of politico-administrative relations, precisely because one of the distinctive features of the party system is the blurring of the lines between ruling party, government, and the state.⁹ This "awkward embrace" is illustrated by the mere fact that the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) has rented its premises, inherited from its predecessor, League of Communists of Montenegro, to the government throughout the period between 1993 and 2010.¹⁰

Formally, Montenegro has a proliferation of political parties, with the ruling coalition being formed out of seven parties. Nonetheless, the rule of the DPS throughout the years is indisputable and the party in most of the elections managed to win an absolute majority. This lengthy rule has behavioral implications, since, as rightfully noted, when incumbents in the election expect to win, politicization of public administration, and civil service in particular, persists.¹¹ It thus came as no surprise when in 2012 the so-called audio recording affair broke out, with the leaked conversations from the party's session which alleged that, among other things, the ruling party used distribution of public sector posts to influence people's party preferences. This affair, if previous conceptualization by Kopecký, Mair and Spirova is applied, demonstrated party patronage in its traditional sense, as a voter-buying strategy, since, as the leaked formula of the ruling party suggested, one job position equals four votes in the election, since it brings money to entire families.

⁴ Antonija Petričušić, *Democracy without Citizens: Inadequate Consolidation in Two Decades of the Western Balkans Democracy*, *European Quarterly of Political Attitudes and Mentalities EQPAM*, 2 (4), October 2013.

⁵ Petr Kopecký, Peter Mair, and Maria Spirova (eds.), *Party Patronage and Party Government in European Democracies*, Comparative Politics. Oxford University Press, 2012.

⁶ 'The Western Balkans and EU Enlargement: Ensuring Progress on the Rule of Law', *FCO/Wilton Park Conference Report*, March 2013, p. 3.

⁷ These are Chapter 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights) and Chapter 24 (Justice, Freedom and Security).

⁸ Peter van Ham, *Gridlock, Corruption and Organized Crime in the Western Balkans: Why the EU Must Acknowledge Its Limits*, Clingendael report, Netherlands Institute of International Relations, October 2014.

⁹ Other distinctive features include the staging of unfree or corrupt elections; the introduction of the national project which is considered to be above the politics, and the erosion of civil society. (See: Hermann Giliomee and Charles Simkins (ed.), *Awkward Embrace: One Party Domination and Democracy*, Harwood Academic Publishers, Amsterdam, 1999).

¹⁰ Vijesti, DPS i SDP zauzele državnu zgradu, opozicija plaća zakup bez tendera, August, 2013.

¹¹ Michael M. Ting, James M. Snyder, Jr., Shigeo Hirano, Olle Folke, *Elections and Reform: The Adoption of Civil Service Systems in the U.S. States*, *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, September 6, 2012.

Indeed, in Montenegro, the argument that there is too few jobs in public sector and too many votes,¹² does not apply, due to the disproportion between the size of the public sector and the country itself. Public sector in Montenegro in 2013 counted more than 58 000 people,¹³ thus comprising more than 35 per cent of total employment in the country of approximately 620 000 people and approximately half a million voters. Especially state owned enterprises represent a foggy area, since, as the World Bank recognized, the most significant information gap regarding transparency of Montenegrin public finance concerns precisely these enterprises,¹⁴ which account for 4 per cent of total employment and whose management board membership represents another lucrative opportunity for party and high government officials. The cumbersome public sectors are kept across the region due to the creation of jobs which are not driven by the realistic demands, but by the socio-political factors.¹⁵ As the International Monetary Fund noted recently, it is precisely the dominance of cumbersome public sectors in the economies of the region which still hinders the catching up process with the more developed economies of the EU member states.¹⁶

On the other hand, accusations of politicized recruitments did not circumvent Montenegrin opposition parties in certain municipalities where they managed to gain power.¹⁷ This demonstrates not only the breadth of poor practices but systemic deficiencies as well. Research made by the Institute Alternative (IA) suggests that there are still significant legal loopholes, such as impossibility of analogous application of civil service laws and regulations from national to local levels,¹⁸ weak institutional capacities and still persisting high level of discretion during public sector recruitments,¹⁹ and, from the aspect of politico-administrative relations,

a lack of clear delimitation between professional posts and political appointments in public administration.²⁰

Civil Service: Meritocracy or a quest for spoils?

From the aspect of clear separation between state and party politics, civil service, especially its senior posts, plays a crucial role. In the contemporary context, senior managers in public administration are no longer just bureaucrats complying unconditionally with the political requests of their superiors. Precisely due to this reason, the distribution of posts in core civil service and other parts of public sector, apart from generating favors for the party officials and promoting intra-party cohesion, can serve as a mechanism for the control of policy design and implementation.²¹

The EU recognized the importance of professionalizing the top posts in Western Balkan public administrations. SIGMA, a joint initiative of the European Commission and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), lists the prevention of direct or indirect political influence on senior management positions in public administration as one of its top principles in the field.²² This principle further means that the positions such as secretary or director general should be at the border separating professional job positions from political appointments.

The IA's policy study from December 2014 demonstrated that Montenegro has only formally set the boundary between professional and political appointments and that its senior civil service is torn between political priorities of the ruling parties and priorities of the policy reforms. Even though the room for political influence on senior managers has been reduced with the new Law on Civil Servants and State Employees, which started implementing in January 2013, this law did not fully meet expectations on laying foundations for professionalization of the country's public administration²³. A considerable number of senior civil servants, at least 90 of them, were, over the recent years, simultaneously members of advisory and managing bodies of political parties currently in power.

More recent developments in the country do not go hand in hand with meritocratic principles either. The reconstruction of Montenegro's government, which took place in March 2015, was also followed by the shifts at

¹² Petr Kopecký, Peter Mair, and Maria Spirova (eds.), *Party Patronage and Party Government in European Democracies*, Comparative Politics. Oxford University Press, 2012.

¹³ Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Interior, Plan for Internal Reorganization of Public Sector, Government of Montenegro, Podgorica, July 2013.

¹⁴ World Bank's Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability Program (PEFA), 2013 assessment of Montenegro, available at: <http://www.pefa.org/en/assessment/me-jul13-pfmp-public-en>.

¹⁵ For example, in its most recent progress report on Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, European Commission noted that "the routine practice of creating new posts on social and political grounds has artificially inflated the public service". (See: European Commission, *The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Progress Report*, Brussels, October 2014).

¹⁶ See: International Monetary Fund, *The Western Balkans: 15 Years of Transition*, Regional Economic Issues Special Report, March 2015.

¹⁷ For example, former MP of the currently largest opposition formation in the country, Democratic Front, accused in 2013 his party colleagues that they also were not immune to recruitments of party supporters at local level.

¹⁸ Institute Alternative, *Employment in Montenegrin municipalities – merit or party based?*, Podgorica, 2014.

¹⁹ Institute Alternative, *Monitoring Report: Recruitment and Promotion in State Authorities in 2014*, Podgorica, May 2015.

²⁰ Institute Alternative, *Professionalisation of Montenegro's Senior Civil Service: Between State and Politics*, Podgorica, December 2014.

²¹ Petr Kopecký, Peter Mair, and Maria Spirova (eds.), *Party Patronage and Party Government in European Democracies*, Comparative Politics. Oxford University Press, 2012.

²² European Commission, SIGMA, OECD, *Principles of Public Administration*, November 2014.

²³ European Commission, *Montenegro 2011 Progress Report*, Brussels, 12 Oct, 2011.

the positions of director general and secretary. It seems thus that the most important recommendation for a senior managerial post is personal trust of the minister, who is primarily a political appointee, and not the expertise required for leading specialized organizational units.²⁴ In addition, the IA's most recent monitoring of recruitments and promotions in the country's civil service noted that many subjective factors impede the desired effects of the new legislation.²⁵ For example, even though the head of authority's discretionary right not to choose the top-ranked candidate should be only an exemption, in effect it often takes place without heads of authorities providing any specific reasons, and sometimes with very adverse effects on the principle of merit-based employment. Our recommendations thus included further streamlining the usage of discretion in civil service recruitments, establishing a clear link between performance appraisal and promotion and rewards of civil servants and state employees, and forbidding public administration employees to participate in political party bodies.

Instead of a Conclusion: Potential Countering Mechanisms

As Börzel and Risse suggested, in order for the EU to have domestic impact it needs the mediating factors, among other things, "change agents" or "norm entrepreneurs", which will persuade others to follow the rules and to redefine their interests.²⁶ This factor can be also followed by cooperative political culture, which, in the Western Balkans, however, is still not enough conducive to positive changes.²⁷ The two authors also recognized the importance of institutions, or, more precisely, that the EU's impact might be, on one hand, strengthened by the existence of formal institutions which are supportive of changes or, on the other, hampered by the multiple veto points in the institutional structure of each country. As demonstrated in this paper, institutions whose top posts are not filled by meritocratic procedures are not expected to be key drivers of reforms.

Given the limitations of spoils-oriented party competition and persistent politicization, the due attention needs to be paid to the civil society in the region as a key

change agent. Despite the deficiencies in institutional frameworks for cooperation between governments and civil society organizations (CSOs), independent monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation remains a significant tool at the disposal of CSOs, which is very important given the failure of governments in the region to monitor and evaluate the implementation of key laws.²⁸ The formation of coalitions of CSOs for monitoring the progress in certain areas, especially in the light of the EU accession in Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia, is a positive trend, which should be mirrored in other countries as well. The participation of CSOs in the Open Government Partnership, a worldwide initiative, which was launched in 2011 to provide an international platform for domestic reformers committed to making governments more open and accountable,²⁹ is another window of opportunity for advocating governments, which will be more responsive to the needs of citizens. In general, civil society in the region, although still struggling to gain more trust, is relatively developed. Freedom House, which on an annual basis prepares comprehensive reports on developments in post-communist transition countries in Eurasia, the Balkans, and Central Europe, assessed the Balkans as the only 'Nations in Transit' region to show improvements in civil society over the last decade (2005-2014).³⁰

Hence, in order for the public administration reforms to advance, civil society, in its widest sense, including trade unions and media, should be allowed and further strengthened to advocate changes in the field not only by the EU but by domestic institutions as well. Depoliticization of state institutions is thus no one way street, but a multifaceted process and a long term cultural change, which, in short term, should be facilitated by the joint effort of the EU, domestic institutions, and civil society to redefine the interests of current "veto points" – political parties and their patronage networks, embedded in the public sectors.

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²⁴ See: Institute Alternative, *Senior Managers Are Not Ministers' Personal Entourage*, available at: <http://institut-alternativa.org/reagovana-nje-visoki-rukovodioci-nijesu-licna-svita-mi-nistara/?lang=en>.

²⁵ Institute Alternative, *Monitoring Report: Recruitment and Promotion in State Authorities in 2014*, Podgorica, May 2015.

²⁶ Tanja Börzel and Thomas Risse, *Conceptualizing the Domestic Impact of Europe* in Featherstone K. and Radaelli C. (ed.) *The Politics of Europeanization*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 57-82.

²⁷ For example, a survey conducted by the European Fund for the Balkans suggested that people in the region only rarely participate in the initiatives tackling the problems of their local communities, they are not enough interested to take part in civic initiatives, and they do not trust institutions enough. (See: European Fund for the Balkans, *From Yugoslavia to the European Union: 20 Years after 1991 - The Tale of Two Generations*, 2011).

²⁸ Tomasz Żornaczuk (Ed.), *Civil Society in the EU Integration of the Western Balkans*, The Polish Institute of International Affairs, Warsaw, October 2014

²⁹ See: Open Government Partnership at <http://www.opengovpartnership.org/>.

³⁰ *Nations in Transit 2014: Eurasia's Rupture with Democracy*, prepared by Sylvana Habdank-Kołaczowska, Freedom House.

European Commission, *Montenegro 2011 Progress Report*, Brussels, 12 Oct, 2011.

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THE INTEGRITY OF KOSOVO'S ADMINISTRATION AND POLICY STEPS FOR DEPOLITICIZATION

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Introduction

The public civil service system is an important mechanism for an efficient administration and development-oriented state and for countries such as Kosovo, it is also of large importance for achievement of European priorities. However, it is a common practice in transition countries to utilize the civil service system as a tool to accommodate loyal partisans and provide positions and financial support for those civil servants who align and support the government and incumbent political parties (Shepherd, 2003). This consequently impedes the merit, capacity, and professionalism of the civil service and puts pressure on the national budget. Moreover, the lacking abilities and professionalism of some civil servants inhibits the civil service system from properly supporting a functioning government to meet the needs of the people as well as European priorities. This has been highlighted by several European Commission reports for Kosovo. The civil service in Kosovo is relatively large, with unsatisfactory credentials, merits, and training as well as being largely politicized. Although the new legal basis addresses and/or overcomes some challenges, several issues remain in place. This policy brief aims to discuss some of the main shortcomings/challenges of the current legislation and civil service system in Kosovo, which prevent its path towards a politically independent, professional, and efficient civil-service system. It also lists some of the main policy steps to orient Kosovo towards a civil service system that is merit-based, professional, qualified, independent and depoliticized, and efficient and effective.

Kosovo's Public Administration

The international missions in Kosovo generally have modelled the nature and structure of Kosovo's public administration. After the 1999 conflict, Regulation 2001/19 defined the exercise of executive authority by Provisional Institutions of Self-Government (PISG), delineating the general principles of the civil service. The Regulation 2001/36 on the Kosovo Civil Service adopted by SRSG in 2001 listed the basic principles of the civil service¹ that aimed to establish a heavily depoliticized civil service system, tailored and modified to the needs of Kosovo (Hajredini, 2013). After the Declaration of Independence by Kosovo in February 2008, the Strategy for Public Administration Reform was drafted, which foresaw the reform of the civil service.² In addition to institution building, one of the main priorities of public administration reform was also the

¹ Such as: a) equity, b) political neutrality and impartiality, c) integrity, d) honesty and accountability, e) transparency, f) merit, g) non-discrimination and h) inclusiveness.

² See Strategy for Public Administration Reform in Kosovo 2007–2012, 15 February 2007, p. 7, available at: http://www.fridomks.org/media/01_Draft_Strategjia_RAP.pdf.

achievement of European priorities. This is also a common characteristic of the efforts of Western Balkan countries to reform/professionalize their civil service. The Kosovo civil service system is built upon a centralized management system directed primarily by the Ministry for Public Administration, which corresponds with most European civil service management systems. But there are several specific requirements by the EU that relate to the civil service, among others the need to ensure that public administration is independent of the political authorities and establishment of high quality and increased training mechanisms (GLPS, 2012).

The European Commission has continuously addressed the need to reform the civil service in their progress reports. More precisely, it has repeatedly identified the weak public administration as the main obstacle in building a sustainable and efficient system of fighting corruption, advancing the state-building process, and efficiently carrying out legal, political, and economic reforms (GLPS, 2011). In addition, several other European norms focus on distinguishing the role of the civil servant from that of the political staff. This also is in line with the overall European goal of ensuring that the role of a civil servant is not political and that the employment status of civil servants' should not depend on the government (GLPS, 2011).

In June 2010, the new Law on Civil Service (LCS) entered into force, which intended to provide for a merit-based, professional, sustainable, and efficient civil service system.³ The new legislation largely changed the recruitment, promotion, and appointment procedures as well as protection mechanisms for civil servants. Yet in many ways the new legislation paved the way for wider political influence and intervention (GLPS, 2012). More precisely, the most recent changes have increased the authority of politicians in relation to senior civil servants largely via their involvement in the process of recruitment, dismissal, and promotion. Consequently, high levels of political influence and formal political discretion over the employment status and policy orientation of the civil service remain evident. Moreover, an unsuitable and unstandardized training and evaluation system continue to hinder the development of a merit-based and professional civil service system in Kosovo.

Main challenges

Below, we highlight the main shortcomings in Kosovo's legislation surrounding the civil service system such as the many loopholes and channels that provide means for political influence and interference, particularly regarding the recruitment, appointment, promotion, and dismissal processes of civil servants.

³ Law No. 03/L-149 on the Civil Service of the Republic of Kosovo.

1) Though the new law has introduced some positive changes regarding procedures for the selection of candidates (particularly in relation to the examination procedure), the latter is not expected to lead to fundamental changes (Meyer-Sahling, 2012). The law on Civil Service guarantees a leading and dominant role for the government in the management of the civil service, compared to the roles of other institutions, especially the Parliament.⁴ This "not only violates the autonomy of Kosovo's independent executive agencies and regulatory offices, it also positions the government as an important actor when it comes to the functioning of the independent institutions" (Korenica et al, 2011). Clearly the role that the government plays in implementing and overseeing the appointment system for senior civil servants is excessive and challenges the independence and depoliticization of Kosovo's civil service.

2) The government-established Council on the Senior Management Positions which serves as the central managing body under the executive branch and is primarily responsible for developing and managing the appointment process for senior managers.⁵ The structure of this council, and consequently the appointment system for senior managing staff is vulnerable to extreme partisan influence and politicization (GLPS, 2012). This is not in line with European principles, which maintains that the body responsible for the appointment of civil servants should have institutional independence from political authorities.

3) In addition, partisan influence is likely to affect the dismissal process of civil servants (Korenica et al, 2011). There is no central institution responsible for coordinating or standardizing performance appraisals, and performance appraisals therefore are carried out by each institution. As foreseen by legislation in place, with two poor performance evaluations the employee can be dismissed.⁶ In this way, politicians can rid themselves of civil servants who do not display partisan ties or partisan loyalty (Verheijen and Rabrenovic (2007). Moreover, the performance appraisal system is largely based on subjective rather than a standardized, objective, and measurable appraisal criteria, which consequently provides much room for political interference and partisan influence. The artificial quotas – which determine how many civil servants can be evaluated as excellent/very good/good in a given institution – may violate the fairness of the process and can risk transforming the performance appraisal process into an artificial and subjective

⁴ As the government commonly appoints and dismisses general secretaries and CEOs based on political will, general secretaries serve as a medium through which the government and ministers influence the recruitment and appointment of many other civil servants. See Law No. 03/L-149 on the Civil Service of the Republic of Kosovo, art. 12, para. 3.

⁵ Regulation of the Government on the Procedures for the Appointment of Senior Management Positions in the Civil Service of the Republic of Kosovo, No. 06/2010. (2010). Art. 6, para. 2.

⁶ For a more detailed explanation see: Hajredini (2013).

tive one (Hajredini, 2013). This may also suggest that the process will be rather based on the limits set by quotas and not necessarily on the model of performance required by the regulation. This implies that the performance evaluation would fail to play its role as an instrument to identify the training and development needs of institutions; given, according to the regulation, each evaluation should specify the areas where the training is needed and address them to the Ministry of Public Administration.⁷ If dismissed or disciplined, civil servants do have the opportunities to appeal to the Independent Oversight Board, which has the capacity to turn over the decisions of employing authorities. However, the board itself struggles with the implementation of its decisions and political interference (GLPS, 2012). Moreover, the politicized dismissal procedure, particularly for senior managers, risks the administrative autonomy of senior management.

4) In Kosovo, as well as in many Western Balkan countries, the use of the civil service sector to employ political friends is continuously hindering the possibility of attracting high-quality professionals to civil service, reducing performance of the administration, and overburdening the national budget. The level of education of civil servants in Kosovo is unsatisfactory and does not meet European standards (GLPS, 2011). While the number of civil servants who possess a bachelor degree have increased in the last half-decade, approximately only half of civil servants hold at least a bachelor degree. This highlights politicization involved in recruitment for the civil service and raises questions as to whether they possess the credentials, merit, and capacity to carry out the function of a civil servant and are capable of creating and implementing legislation (GLPS, 2011). This said, the lack of proper and standardized training hampers the possibilities of improving the merits and capacity of civil servants, which as the above-mentioned study has shown is largely unsatisfactory.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Regardless of the recent reforms, this policy brief highlights a number of challenges that prevent the civil service system from recognizing the central principles of independence, depoliticization, education and merit, and professionalism. Although depoliticization of the civil service system in Kosovo is of crucial importance the process may be even more difficult when considering both the high number of politically motivated employments within civil service, and the number of civil servants promoted through political support. Moreover, in the Western Balkans, domestic conditions are by and large not promising, therefore civil service professionalization is by and large externally dependent. The weakening of a European perspective for most Western Bal-

kan states since the mid 2000s has reinforced the negative political incentives that originate in the domestic political, economic, and social context (Meyer-Sahling 2012). Due the inexistence of an *acquis* for public administration, the EC will have to consider new mechanisms to foster the importance of civil service reform in the accession process. Alternatively, the pace of professionalization of civil service is likely to remain the same or diminish.

With the above said, not only must Kosovo strengthen the civil service legislation and system to eradicate political interference and clientelism, but Kosovo must enshrine the European principles of civil service into the current legislation and system in order to progress on the path towards European integration. Therefore, a key issue that needs attention at this stage in Kosovo is the development of a new mechanism that will offer effective, continuous and long-term professional education to the current as well as future civil servants at all levels and on an obligatory basis. To achieve this target, we first propose the following policy orientations which are elaborated in more detail in GLPS (2011) and (2012).

First, the government commitment towards supporting the development of an improved professional education and training system for civil servants should be largely increased. Thus amongst others, the government should heavily increase the funding for KIPA and training programs.

Second, the Ministry of Public Administration and KIPA must jointly work to ensure that a long-term training system is devised, namely by transforming KIPA into a national school of public administration.

Third, the development of a new school of public administration should become a prerequisite element for evaluating the merit, credentials, and capacity of civil servants during the selection, recruitment, appointment, and promotion processes of Kosovo's civil service.

By installing certain required credentials for all civil servants and civil service applicants, this national school of public administration would provide means for the standardization of recruitment, appointment, and promotion practices. This practice would also go a long way in standardizing the recruitment system for civil servants and eradicating some of the political influence in the current practices relating to recruitment, appointment, and promotion.

A number of mechanisms relating to the national school could serve this function. First, completion of a one-year professional education programme should be required for all aspiring and new civil servants. Additional trainings should also be available at 6-months and shorter intervals to allow senior civil servants and those aspiring to improve their credentials further develop within the civil service. This would become a standard-

⁷ Law on the Civil Service of the Republic of Kosovo, No. 03/L-149. (2010). Art 34, para. 1.

izing mechanism on which to evaluate the merit, credentials, and professional training of higher-level civil servants and those civil servants pursuing promotion to higher positions. On the other hand, it will make it easier to differentiate and trim cases of political interference and clientelism wherein the civil servant did not have the merit, credentials, and professionalism to attain his/her position in the civil service.

Finally, Kosovo must develop a mechanism that ensures the implementation of the IOB's decisions. The Law therefore should introduce a mechanism wherein the decisions of the IOB, if not executed within a specific time and if there has been no appeal to the court of jurisdiction, be automatically submitted to the law-enforcement division of the relevant territorially-authorized municipal court to execute the IOB decision independent of the government.

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PREDICAMENTS OF POLITICAL DIVISIONS IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE: HOW TO ESCAPE DESTRUCTIVE POLARIZATION?

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Particular, and often opposing, political interests are one of the perils of democracy, as James Madison pointed out in the “Federalist Papers” No 10. Political divisions are inevitable for a regime that allows for plurality. Democracy allows for different political interests and identities to be voiced and to seek representation. Therefore, it is argued that participation and competition are defining characteristics of a democratic regime.¹ It is understood that democracy provides a framework of institutional provisions (e.g. checks and balances) and procedures (e.g. elections); while political outcomes are unpredictable.² Divisions and competition are the main elements of the legitimate battle for power; however, they also increase political polarization. The main efforts for containing the adverse effects, ever since Madison, have been to create an institutional environment that sets off the negative consequences from heightened divisions and polarization. Division of powers between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government is the cornerstone of these efforts, and it has been supplemented with a rise of independent public administration regulators, which assure horizontal accountability.

However, the institutional environment works to assure good governance and to prevent abuses of power, and does not necessarily diminish political divisions or decrease political polarization. For example, the USA has a strong established democracy where political divisions and polarization are significant. However, in the USA, political competitors do not treat each other as foes and often find ways to cooperate despite the pertinent divisions. In Southeast Europe (SEE), in most of the cases, political divisions and polarization have destructive consequences for democracy, and keep most competitors in a political deadlock. Pointing out the differences in the culture of political cooperation exposes the problem, but does not offer solutions. The question remains: how to escape a destructive polarization in SEE, in order to move democracy forward?

In the paper, I first present some of the challenges to democracy in SEE and summarize the prescribed institutional solutions. I then make the argument, that because of specific historical circumstances in the region, transition to democracy has rarely entailed cooperation between the political elites. But now, it is necessary for the political elites to come to terms with each other, in order for democracy to move forward.

¹ Dahl, R. A. *Polyarchy. Participation and Opposition*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1971.

² Scmitter, P. C. and Karl, T. L. “What Democracy Is... And Is Not”, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1991.

The Context and the Prescribed Solutions

SEE countries are firmly set on their path toward Euro-Atlantic integration. Albania and Croatia are NATO members, and while the latter has also been EU member since 2013, the former became a candidate for membership in June, 2014. Macedonia, similarly, is a candidate member; however, it cannot open accession negotiations because of the unresolved name dispute with Greece, which is also blocking the country's accession to NATO. On the other hand, Montenegro has opened accession negotiations and negotiations are due to start with Serbia. Bosnia and Herzegovina recently became part of the Stabilization and Associations Process, and Kosovo is also on the way to attain a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU.

On the other hand, the advancement of Euro-Atlantic integration has not substantially advanced the quality of democracy in the region. The quality of democracy in SEE is better than in countries from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); however, it is worse than in new member states from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).³ Data from the Freedom House "Nations in Transit" report supports this observation. Freedom House measured quality of democracy based on a composite index on a scale from 1 (highest) to 7 (lowest). The data for individual SEE countries, in comparison with average scores of EU new member states and Euro-Asian countries (e.g. CIS and Russia), from 2005 to 2014 is plotted in graph 1 (see appendix).

The data shows that all of the countries gravitate around 4, plus or minus, while Kosovo has the lowest quality of democracy with a score over 5. Freedom House differentiates the democracies in SEE between Transitional Government or Hybrid Regime (e.g. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia) and Semi-Consolidated Democracies (e.g. Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia). On the other hand, the countries share similar problems. For example, elections lead to heightened political relations and are characterized with deep political divisions and political polarization. Instead of political resolution and distribution of power, elections lead to deadlocks. Also, in some places, elections are plagued with serious irregularities such as violence, vote rigging, pressuring the public administration and misuse of public resources.

In Albania, elections in 2009 and 2011 led to an increased polarization between the Socialist Party (SP) and the Democratic Party (DP) and a political deadlock, which required extended EU involvement to overcome. In 2013, there were shootings on election day that left one killed and two injured. However, due to the wide margin of victory, there was a peaceful transfer of power. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, due to the electoral cal-

endar there are elections every two years (national and local). This has created incentives for an on-going political campaign. There is a multitude of parties; however, they remain encapsulated in ethnic blocks and only few make cross-cutting appeals. The strong ethnic divisions persist and there are vested interests based on ethnic identity. The percentage of ethnic group members secures access to politics and public resources. This logic of ascriptive representation, based on ethno-national identification, dominates the electoral campaigns and was also prominent in the recent campaign for the first census in over 20 years. In Kosovo, elections in 2010 faced serious problems. Some of the deficiencies were remedied in the local elections in 2013, even though tensions (including electoral violence) in Northern Kosovo remained and there was a low turnout in the elections in 2014. Also, political polarization has increased within the ethnic blocks. Several new splinter parties, Albanian and Serb, have appeared to challenge the existing parties.

While new parties did not appear in Macedonia, political polarization significantly increased within the ethnic blocks of the deeply divided country. Similar to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, the polarization between the parties in the same ethnic block compounded the democratic deficiencies. Macedonia is in a deep political crisis. The opposition, following the forceful ejection of their MPs from parliament at the end of 2012, wanted to boycott the local elections in early 2013, but succumbed to the EU initiative to participate. The opposition, citing massive electoral fraud, did not recognize the results of the presidential and early parliamentary elections in 2014, and has boycotted parliament. While the EU is again trying to resolve the crisis, it is uncertain if and how the political actors will overcome the polarization and mistrust.

Elections in Montenegro mainly serve to confirm the monopoly of power of DPS and its leader Milo Đukanović. They also show quiet vividly the blurred boundaries between the ruling party and the state, and the usage of public resources for electoral mobilization. Notwithstanding that there were some recent splits in the governing coalition, there is strong polarization between the government and opposition which is based on identity issues and negative campaigning. In Serbia, the SNS dominates the political spectrum after coming to power in 2012. In the elections in 2014, they capitalized on their growing popularity, confirmed their dominance and managed to get a stronger grip on power. Aleksandar Vučić replaced Ivice Dačić as prime minister, and they kept the ruling coalition, while the DS, main opposition party, is still consumed by internal divisions. Even though elections do not have serious deficiencies, the polarization between government and opposition is strong. Some media outlets have aligned themselves with political actors and have amply contributed to public political battles. Even in Croatia, there is strong public and political polarization between the progressive

³ Berglund, S. et al. Eds. *The Handbook of Political Change in Eastern Europe*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd, 2013.

left and social conservatism. The opposition HDZ has resurfaced some divisions from the Yugoslav's past and has labeled the ruling SDP as communist. While some deep-seated ideological divisions are invoked, political polarization increased on social and ethnic minorities issues.

It should be pointed out, that problems with elections are not a momentary phenomenon. According to Freedom House, the quality of the electoral process in SEE has been the same in the last decade – much better than in Euro-Asian countries and worse than in new member states of the EU. The results are displayed in graph 2 (see appendix).

The electoral process in Kosovo has had most challenges, and also in Albania. The quality of elections in the other countries has been, more or less, on the same level in the past decade. This corroborates the commonality of problems, outlined earlier.

The countries face other common problems, such as politicization of public administration and a personalistic style of governance (i.e. ruling politicians have great control of institutions). This results in practices of bad governance and increases the stakes in the polarized political battles. Politics becomes a zero-sum game. Political crises become more likely and create an institutional paralysis. Bosnia and Herzegovina provides one extreme example. The institutional complexity there serves as playground for partisan and personal power battles. While politicians are preoccupied with who will be ousted out of power and who will grab power, the citizens are left without basic services (e.g. newborns not being able to get a personal ID number). There is a fervent dissatisfaction with the political class across the region. In some places, it has led to a lower voter turnout (e.g. Croatia, Kosovo, Serbia) and in others it led to political and inter-ethnic protests, some of which have resulted in violence (e.g. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia). International actors, quite often, interfere to mediate between the political actors to maintain the stability of the countries. For example, Kosovo's challenged sovereignty and internal stability is supported by international actors. The Office of the High Representative (OHR) and the EU Delegation to BiH have a leading role in brokering deals between local politicians. The EU involvement was crucial in resolving the political crisis in Albania, and seems to be instrumental to push toward a resolution in Macedonia.

The media situation is another contributing factor for the growing political divisions and polarization. On the one hand, political corruption of media is spreading throughout the region. Costly campaigns are used for political promotion, and public funds channeled through advertising agencies are used to distort the media market and to exercise political influence over private media outlets. In short, this is the story behind the involvement of Ivo Sanader, former Prime Minister, in

the “Fimi-Media” case in Croatia, the case of the defense minister contracting advertising agencies Promo Sh.p.k and Zoom Sh.p.k. in Albania, or the fact that the government in Macedonia is among the top advertisers in the country.

Many private media outlets have decided to take sides and join the political camps. In Croatia, the press is regarded as partisan, while the ownership and control of the media market is unclear due to existing conglomerates that cross-merchandise media with other businesses (e.g. real estate and retail). The press in Montenegro is also politically divided. “Pobjeda” is largely favoring the government, and “Dan” and “Vijesti” are more critical. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, media are seen as puppets of the centers of power. Money from the public budget allows for political influence in public and private media in regards to news coverage. In Republika Srpska, the public broadcaster and private media are seen as close to Milorad Dodik, and in the Federation BiH media are politically divided. In Macedonia, most of mainstream media favored the government in coverage of the electoral campaigns and in their news reports.

Media coverage and interpretation of daily events is often biased and distorted. Aside from the fact that they diminished journalistic standards in the region, they also contribute to the growing political polarization. The media become an extended field for political battles. In some cases secretly made recordings are leaked in the media, with the aim to cause some political damage, like it was the case in Albania or Montenegro, or are publicly presented, as it is the case in Macedonia, and this goes without the necessary institutional resolution of these cases and the consequences thereof. In other cases, journalists and media serve as extended arm of politics and engage in public and verbal attacks with politicians from the opposite camp. For example, some news anchors in private TV stations have constant rants against the opposition in Macedonia. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there were public verbal clashes between journalist and politicians, and they sue each other. In Serbia, similarly the leader of opposition sues one daily for running constant negative campaigns against him for alleged financial misuses, and one cannot escape the impression that reactions of TV “Pink” against the daily “Blic” have political aims in the background.

At the same time, across the region, the public broadcasters are highly dependent on state funding and influenced by the ruling parties. Media regulators, as public institutions, are also politically influenced. Members of media regulating bodies are elected in parliament and partisan affiliation of the candidates plays a crucial role in their appointments. Journalists are low paid and often employed without formal contracts, which leaves them without adequate legal protection. Macedonia is a striking example for the deterioration of media freedoms. A journalist got a prison sentence for a text he published, which among other things, led the country to fall sharp-

ly on the Freedom of Press Index from 34th place in 2006 to 117th in 2014. In some cases, for example in Kosovo and in Montenegro, journalists were physically attacked. The perpetrators are rarely found and prosecuted.

Institutional reforms are the main instrument prescribed to remedy the outlined problems. The institutional reforms are part of the EU accession process. For example, freedom of media, merit-based public administration, and increasing participation of stakeholders and citizens in policy making, which is opposite of the personalistic style of governance, are central part of the EU agenda. For example, efforts are made to have more public hearings in parliament and to increase cooperation between parliamentary committees and interest groups.

Also, there is a great focus on strengthening the rule of law. The aim is to empower the system of checks and balances and to have an institutional environment, which controls for abusive political elites. In that respect, the new EU approach to the region entails “front-loading” chapters 23 and 24 of the *Acqui communautaire* in the accession process. The idea is to instigate institutional reforms that will protect fundamental rights, and reinvigorate fight against corruption and organized crime, and overall strengthen rule of law. Furthermore, various international donors have started many new initiatives that seek to improve freedom of expression and media freedoms. The idea is to improve the conditions and environment for journalists, to improve the regulatory oversight and to make it more independent, less politicized and more dependent on self-regulatory mechanisms. Associations and unions of journalist exist; however, they need to be strengthened and to be more included in policy making.

Notwithstanding the positive effects and the necessity for institutional reforms, they mainly deal with the consequences and do not address the cause of the problem. The main cause of the problem is that competition in plural settings is understood as a zero-sum game in SEE. It is manifested with heightened divisions and strong polarization. In the merciless battles for power anything goes. Misuse of public resources, political control of institutions, electoral deficiencies and instrumentalization of media are the tools of the political elite in their quest for power. Therefore, one needs to address the political elites to remedy the causes of destructive polarization.

A New Instrument to Improve Democracy in SEE: Political Elite's Rapprochement

Polarized relations between elites in SEE countries are the root of many democratic deficiencies. Politicians see their opponents as foes and they are more likely to consider destroying them than to cooperate with them. According to elite theory, such elite relations denote a

disunited national elite.⁴ Disunited elites are marked by fear and distrust, they see politics as zero-sum game and often engage in violent struggles for power. Structural relations and value consensus are minimal. Elite members have no common understanding of political conduct and have sporadic interactions between factional lines. If the elite is not united, then the result is an authoritarian regime or a short-lived democracy.

On the other hand, the elites can be united. United elites can be ideocratic (i.e. ideologically unified), emerging from a revolutionary crisis, where an extremist group (ideological, ethnic, religious) gains upper hand, destroys rivals and dictates (i.e. Bolsheviks, Communists, Shia fundamentalist in Iran). However, united elites can also be consensual. This means having competing parties, movements and beliefs, but also having basic agreement on rules and codes of restrained political competition. Consensually unified elites have a comprehensive structure of interactions. They have access to each other and to central decision-makers. Politics is seen as a positive-sum game and electoral competition produces durable political institutions. Consensually united elites are considered necessary for the stabilization of democracy.

The issue of a united versus disunited elite usually appears early in the transition to democracy. However, in the SEE region, the historical process was such that unifying the national elite was not always a prerequisite for the transition to democracy. For example, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo had a post-conflict transition to democracy. During the ethnic conflicts, the elite in Croatia and Kosovo were united against an external enemy, and then transition to democracy was externally induced and guided, especially in the later case. However, once the threat of an external enemy was gone, divisions and polarization between the elite appeared. In Croatia some unity was preserved and it was beneficial for the country's democracy, while in Kosovo deterioration in elite relations has hampered the democratic perspective of the country.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is the primary case where external actors induced the transition to democracy. External actors played a key role in forcing national elites in Bosnia and Herzegovina to end the war, to sign the Dayton agreement and to start the transition. It was mainly because of external pressures that national elites have made incremental efforts to support democratization. At the same time, the collapse of the communist regime and subsequent state failure were the critical junctures for democracy in Albania. In this case, also, external actors played a more important role in sustaining democratic changes, than a national political elite which failed to unify and play a constructive role.

⁴ Dogan, M. and Higley, J. *Elites, Crises and Regimes in Comparative Analysis*, 1998.

On the other hand, in Serbia a united elite was a prerequisite for the democratic revolution in 2000. However, it took the entire period of the 1990s to unify the elite against the regime. Notwithstanding that the wide democratic coalition fell apart soon after the changes, the development of democracy was sustained. Also, some of the former actors were forced to reform, to converge in the new elite, and to accept that democracy is the only game in town. However, as elite relations deteriorate, one should be reminded that democratization is a reversible process.

Macedonia is a case in point. It is the only country in the Western Balkans where the national elite was consensually unified in the early 1990s. This facilitated the transition to democracy and market economy. With the aid of international actors, elite unity was maintained during the conflict in 2001, which contributed to a peaceful resolution of the conflict and subsequent rapid post-conflict consolidation. However, in recent years political divisions increased, the elite unity disappeared and democracy went on a backslide.

This all goes to show that disunited national elites produce unstable regimes, oscillating between authoritarian and democratic forms, while consensually unified elites produce a stable regime that may evolve in a modern democracy.⁵ Therefore, it is essential to push the national elites in SEE countries towards consensual unity.

However, a transformation from disunited to united elite rarely happens. One way to achieve it is through an elite settlement.⁶ An elite settlement appears when: a) there is a costly and inconclusive conflict, where all factions suffered heavy losses, so that all are losers and there is no clear winner; and b) in occurrence of major crisis that requires elite action, such as policy failures, power abuses, that threatens resumption of widespread violence. Elite pacts provide another way to unify the national elite. Elite pacts are explicit, but not necessarily public, agreements between those who define rules and exercise powers to protect their 'vital interests'.⁷ They are not a prerequisite for democratization; however, they support the process. Also, political stalemates encourage pacts, which in turn is good for the durability of democracy. Elite settlements and elite pacts are seen as alternative to social revolutions in the ways to push democracy forward.

The time seems ripe for an elite rapprochement in all SEE countries. Some countries face serious political

stalemates and in others, democratic reforms have slowed down. In order to reinvigorate democracy, the elite have to commit to basic democratic principles. In that way they make way for open and peaceful competition, and bring stability by declining the prospect of increased polarization and tensions. The EU perspective provides sufficient incentives for national political elites to find a minimum common denominator to cooperate. A future in the EU provides a common goal and a shared vision. However, the declarative statements now need to be operationalized with practical steps.

A joint elite commitment has to be done quickly, or it will not happen at all, and it has to be a product of partially secret face-to-face discussions.⁸ As an outcome it would be advisable to have a written agreement that can be shared with the public. Then conciliatory behavior and experienced leaders would be needed to maintain the agreement. In order to achieve this, closer people-to-people communication and cooperation is needed on the national level. However, one should be aware that creating a consensually unified national elite might be a long-term project and it may require several generations to reach and sustain it. While the expectations should be realistically managed, there is no other alternative to remove the causes of a destructive polarization, to sustain institutional reforms, and to push democracy forward.

⁵ Higley, J. and Burton, M. G. "The Elite Variable in Democratic Transitions and Breakdowns", *American Sociological Review*, vol.54, No. 1, pp. 17-32, 1989.

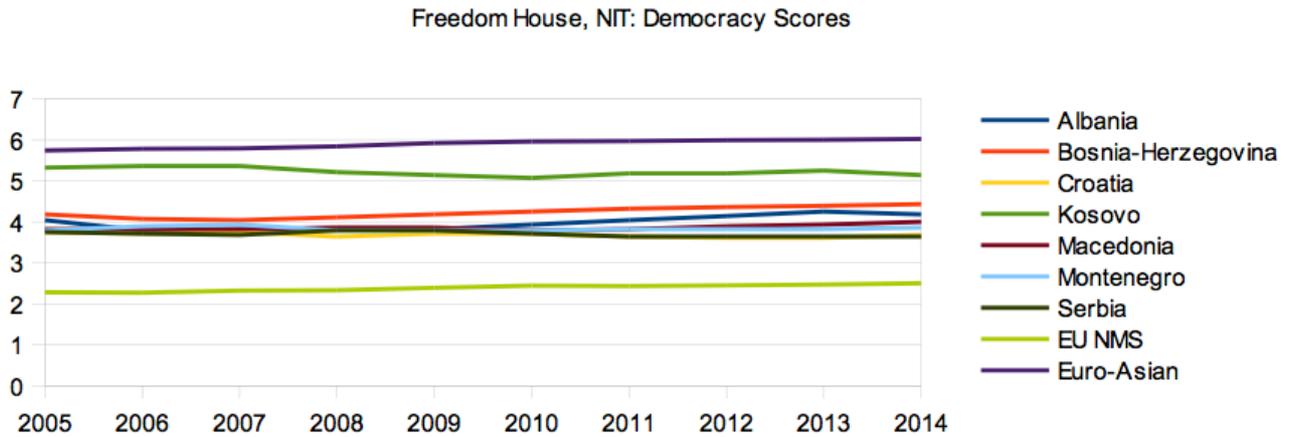
⁶ Burton, M. G. and Higley, J. "Invitation to Elite Theory", In William Domhoff and Thomas R. Dye's *Power Elite and Organizations*, Newbury Park: Sage, pp. 133-43, 1987.

⁷ O'Donnell, G. Schmitter, P. C. and Whitehead, L. *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule. Comparative Perspectives*. Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, p. 37, 1986.

⁸ Burton, M. G. and Higley, J. "Invitation to Elite Theory", In William Domhoff and Thomas R. Dye's *Power Elite and Organizations*, Newbury Park: Sage, pp. 133-43, 1987.

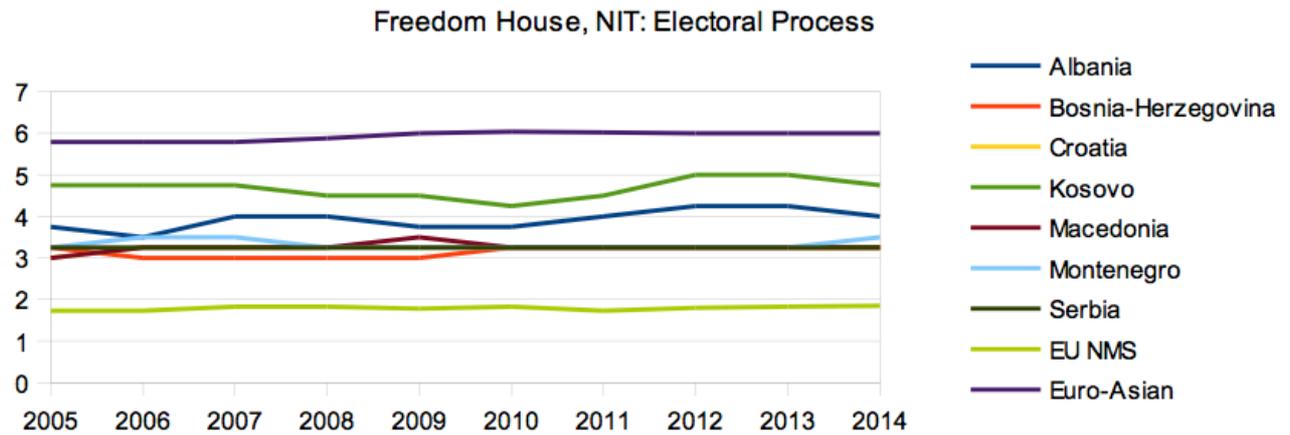
Appendix

Graph 1. Quality of Democracy in Transitional Democracies



Source: Freedom House, Nations in Transit Report

Graph 2. Quality of Electoral Process in Transitional Democracies



Source: Freedom House, Nations in Transit Report

CHALLENGES IN WESTERN BALKAN PARLIAMENTS: THE NEED FOR A SHIFT IN THE CLASSIC PARLIAMENTARY OVERSIGHT PARADIGM

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Magna Carta Libertatum and the development of modern parliament

On June 15, 2015 we are marking the 800 year anniversary of the signing of the *Magna Carta Libertatum*, which is arguably one of the most significant documents for modern democracies. Signed by King John of England on June 15, 1215 at Runnymede near Windsor, the charter of liberties established for the first time the principle that the king is not above the law, a principle that has since evolved into the concept that the government is never above the law. In addition to outlining basic rights, such as the right to a fair trial, it also established one fundamental principle of parliamentarism: limiting taxation without representation. Although only three clauses from the original *Magna Carta* are still valid, the document paved the way to the development of the democratic systems of government in which most of us live today. The right of the English barons to consult and advise the King in his great council evolved over time into the development of the first modern parliament.

The earlier use of the term Parliament, which originally referred to the King's Great Council, dates to 1236. This was followed by the drafting of the "Provisions of Oxford" in 1258, which called for regular parliaments with representatives from the counties. Exactly 50 years after the signing of the *Magna Carta* in 1215, Simon de Montfort, in rebellion against Henry III, summoned a Parliament, which included for the first time representatives of both the counties and towns¹.

A century or so later common people also demanded the right to be consulted on issues such as being marched to the front of battle to defend the King's domain. Again the King was required to give up more of his authoritarian rule and obtain agreement from his people before he embarked on any new policy or expedition. The parliament of England continued to develop as an institution of debate whereby differences of opinion could be resolved if not amicably then at least without bloodshed.²

Over time, we witnessed the development of various streams of political thought, which led to development of political parties. This in turn, over the years, also has led to the development of the principle, the norm today, that a government with a majority in parliament governs. Rules setting out orderly debates, even though at sword's length such as in the House of Commons, were

¹ Birth of the English parliament. Magna carta (1215 to Henry (1399) <http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/evolutionofparliament/originsofparliament/birthofparliament/keydates/1215to1399/>.

² The role of parliaments in holding government to Account and Controlling Corruption, John G. Williams.

created. Education levels among people increased and media were developed. In time, it was up to the parliamentarians to represent people and represent public opinion when they debated various issues in the parliamentary chambers. None of this would have been developed without the concept of accountability to the people through the parliament.

Models of democracies and the Western Balkans

If we take Arend Lijphart's classification about the two general models of democracies, the Westminster model and the Consensus model, we will be able to notice a number of differences.

The five differences on the executives-parties dimension are as follows:

1. Concentration of executive power in single-party majority cabinets versus executive power sharing in broad multiparty coalitions.
2. Executive-legislative relationships in which the executive is dominant versus executive-legislative balance of power.
3. Two-party versus multiparty systems.
4. Majoritarian and disproportional electoral systems versus proportional representation.
5. Pluralist interest group systems with free-for-all competition among groups versus coordinated and "corporatist" interest group systems aimed at compromise and concertation.

The five differences on the federal unitary dimension are the following:

1. Unitary and centralized government versus federal and decentralized government.
2. Concentration of legislative power in a unicameral legislature versus division of legislative power between two equally strong but differently constituted houses.
3. Flexible constitutions that can be amended by simple majorities versus rigid constitutions that can be changed only by extraordinary majorities.
4. Systems in which legislatures have the final word on the constitutionality of their own legislation versus systems in which laws are subject to a judicial review of their constitutionality by supreme or constitutional courts.

5. Central banks that are dependent on the executive versus independent central banks.³

Given the diverse ethnic and linguistic make up and the specifics of the electoral and political systems we could place most if not all Western Balkans countries⁴ with most of their features under the consensus democratic model. Having said that, when answering some of the key questions in the session on the role of parliaments during this conference, I will argue that the various specifics of the consensus democratic model and the young and not fully developed democratic practices in the Western Balkans are actually causing defects: they are counterproductive and harm the further development of the democratic capacity of our countries.

Roles of parliament and how important is parliamentary oversight?

In most simple terms we can define three main roles of any democratic parliament:

1. Legislative role
2. Oversight role
3. Representative role

If we grade their importance we will most likely come to the conclusion that each of these roles is equally important. If we specifically look at the characteristics of Western Balkan parliaments we would likely come to the conclusion that Western Balkan parliaments by their nature and work specificities are parliaments where the legislative role is most dominant. These parliaments mainly discuss, debate, and pass legislation tabled by the governments. Therefore for the purposes of this paper I will refer to the Western Balkan parliaments as legislative parliaments. Their representative and oversight roles exist but in comparison to the legislative role are less significant.

Unlike parliaments in the Westminster models of democracies, such as in the UK, which have Select and General Committees, Western Balkan parliaments have mainly developed legislative committees. The equivalent of the UK "Select Committees" in these parliaments does not exist, except for the respective standing human right committees.

The oversight function of a parliament is carried out through specific modalities, out of which committees are the most common. As Yamamoto points out "committees offer a setting which facilitates detailed scrutiny

³ Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*, Yale university Press 1999, p. 3.

⁴ For the purpose of this paper when referring to Western Balkans we refer to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Serbia and their respective parliaments.

of draft legislation, oversight of government activities, and interaction with the public and external actors”⁵. Committees have rapidly increased their role in the general framework of “numerous efforts across many parliaments to engage more effectively with the public and to improve the way they work” i.e. to “become more genuinely representative of their electorates, more accessible and accountable to them, more open and transparent in their procedures, and more effective in their key tasks of legislation and oversight of government”⁶. Along these lines “a significant part of parliamentary work is now conducted in committees rather than in the parent chamber”⁷, which is a trend also in the legislative bodies of the Western Balkan societies.

Modern representative democracies are founded on the concept of democratically elected and responsible public bodies. The concept of accountability is engraved in the basic fibers of their parliaments. This concept is not exhausted with the elections as the source of legitimate political power. It also includes public responsibility of all branches of government in the elected period, responsibility in front of the people as well as the responsibility of the executive branch before the legislative branch. Besides being the focal point for drafting and passing legislation, every modern parliament has also an important oversight role over the executive branch, a power it can exercise in a variety of ways.

The oversight power of Parliament in the most general sense would mean exercising “powers to examine the expenditures, administration, and policy of the relevant governmental departments”⁸. In this regard “through its core oversight function, parliament holds the government to account on behalf of the people, ensuring that government policy and action are both efficient and commensurate with the needs of the public”⁹, whereas “parliamentary oversight is also crucial in checking excesses on the part of the government”¹⁰.

The very point of parliamentary oversight stems from the fact that “the effectiveness with which parliament carries out its central functions of legislation, budgetary control and oversight of the executive is essential to the quality of democratic life”¹¹ because “in carrying out

these tasks it works together with the associations of civil society, and has the distinctive responsibility of safeguarding the individual democratic rights of citizens”¹². The legislative body is in this respect the safeguard of the democratic processes, which is especially important in young democracies such as the ones in the Western Balkans. In various aspects the makeup and the functioning of parliaments in the Western Balkans does not allow for a well-developed oversight function, which in turn is resulting in the failure to safeguard some key democratic processes.

What are the main challenges for the legislative branch to fulfill its function of complementing the executive in Western Balkan parliaments?

However we decide to define the oversight functionality of Western Balkan parliaments, especially within the scope of committee work, the work is not without its obstacles and challenges. In the sense of the global democratic trends “the role of Parliament has been weakened by the party system and the difficulty of obtaining information from the government”¹³.

We can say that we are witnessing the development of “executocracy” due to the noticeable advantage of the precise technical knowledge that the executive branch often has and the legislative branch often lacks. In this respect it is crucial that the oversight functions of parliamentary committees are generally strengthened. The current situation is one where both legislative and oversight roles of committees in Western Balkan parliaments are combined with limited capacity to even fully complete the legislative role, especially the one coming from the EU legislative alignment processes. In the past decade there have been efforts made in all Western Balkans parliaments to introduce the concept of public hearings and this is a concept that is “catching on” but if you look at the resources devoted to committee oversight processes we can conclude that oversight is not a priority in Western Balkan parliaments, although the situation is improving year by year.

In my view the key challenge for Western Balkan parliaments in the years to come is to break the current oversight paradigm and establish some kind of a “Select committee system” and devote considerably more time and resources for the oversight of legislation than is the case in the Westminster model. The alternative to this, if both functions for legislation and oversight stay combined as in current legislative committees in the Western Balkans, is to make a massive upgrade in the support elements to these parliamentary committees. This would mean an increase in staff support and change in

⁵ Yamamoto, Hironori. *Tools for Parliamentary Oversight: a Comparative Study of 88 National Parliaments*. Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva: 2007. available at <http://www.ipu.org/PDF/publications/oversight08-e.pdf> (10.03.2015).

⁶ Beetham, David. *Parliament and Democracy in the 21st Century: a Guide to Good Practice*. Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva:

⁷ Yamamoto (ibid).

⁸ Silk, Paul & Walters, Rhodri. *How Parliament Works (4th edition)*. Addison Wesley Longman Limited, Essex: 1998.

⁹ Yamamoto, Hironori. *Tools for Parliamentary Oversight: a Comparative Study of 88 National Parliaments*. Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva: 2007. available at <http://www.ipu.org/PDF/publications/oversight08-e.pdf> (10.03.2015).

¹⁰ Yamamoto (2007) ibid.

¹¹ Beetham, David. *Parliament and Democracy in the 21st Century: a Guide to Good Practice*. Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva: 2006.

available at http://www.ipu.org/PDF/publications/democracy_en.pdf (10.03.2015).

¹² Beetham 2006 (ibid).

¹³ Alder, John. *Constitutional and Administrative Law*. Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire and New York: 2007.

modes of operation. This would require investing in more human capital, developing technical and specialist knowledge, support thorough research facilities, developing and improving information sharing systems between the government and the parliament and ultimately devoting far more finances to parliaments for their work. In the current time of austerity this might present a daunting task. I will complete this section by quoting Beetham:

“Where parliaments lack capacity through limited resources, this inevitably affects the balance of power with the executive. Parliament’s oversight work is less rigorous; members become dependent upon the expertise of government staff whose first allegiance is to the executive; governments may simply bypass parliament altogether in the development of policy and legislation”¹⁴

Could the move from “legislative” to “oversight” parliaments fill the oversight and democratic deficit gap in the Western Balkans?

In my view, the short answer to this question is yes. It will contribute to narrowing the democratic gap but it is not a silver bullet to fill the democratic deficit we are facing in Western Balkan parliaments. The issue is slightly more complicated and it is also connected to the electoral models we have in the Western Balkans. In most if not all countries in the Western Balkans, on the one hand the proportional model of representation has “sucked out” the key elected figures out of parliament and placed them into the executive where they do not have direct connections with the legislature. On the other hand it has to a certain extent delegitimized them because it has severed the link between the executive and the electorate. The electorate no longer has the ability to hold individual ministers or party leaders directly accountable on Election Day. In this respect, going back to the points I have made earlier on the Consensus model, it fails the representation and accountability test in relation to the Westminster model and contributes to the lack of the democratic deficit in the Balkans. In first past the post systems such as the Westminster model, voters still have the ability to hold the prime minister, ministers, and leaders of the opposition directly accountable, which is not the case in the Balkans.

What is the role of party politics?

Adding further to the point on moving more towards a model of “oversight” parliaments, we should bear in mind the differences in approach of members of the executive in Westminster models towards parliament. Ministers are MPs as well and they appear at committee

hearings as part of their regular parliamentary work and they spend significant time on representation duties in their constituencies and electoral districts. The approach of government executives who are not MPs coming out of proportional systems toward parliament is different as evidenced in the Western Balkans.

In the proportional model of representation, which is now dominant in the Western Balkans, ministers, party leaders, and key parliamentary figures are no longer directly accountable to the electorate. They are primarily responsible to the party and the party executive, which places them on the party electoral list. This is especially the case on closed party lists. In my view this primary electoral allegiance to the party severely influences the dynamics and relationships between the executive and the parliament. Being an excellent MP with excellent constituency relations and constituency case track record unfortunately means less than the approval of the party executive body when it comes earning positions on the electoral party list.

What are the main challenges opposition parties are facing in the Western Balkans?

The challenges for opposition parties are several fold. Once opposition parties are outside of the system of government they practically face limited access to media to promote their platforms and to effectively present positions (public broadcasting access, parliamentary channels, etc.).

They have limited resources within parliaments to effectively hold government ministers to account through hearings. This point goes back to the issue of setting up type of select committee systems.

They face limited access to non-partisan, independent, and relevant sources of research to inform their policy decisions and challenge government positions (parliamentary research centers, parliamentary budget offices, etc.).

Non-parliamentary parties face severe funding issues while parliamentary parties have far fewer legal funding sources.

How can a more constructive and compromise-based cooperation across party lines be developed?

For start a culture of constructive cooperation needs to be built, promoted, and supported, possibly through state-funded, party-affiliated think tanks and institutes. Unfortunately we have witnessed, most prominently the cases in Albania and Macedonia but in other countries as well, the development of a culture of parliamentary boycotts, which is becoming the norm.

Agreements need to be reached that there are certain parliamentary principles that should be respected, espe-

¹⁴ Beetham, David. *Parliament and Democracy in the 21st Century: a Guide to Good Practice*. Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva: 2006. available at http://www.ipu.org/PDF/publications/democracy_en.pdf. (10.03.2015).

cially around decisions on the consensual passing of parliamentary rules of procedure and appointment in key institutions related to judiciary and rule of law.

Consensual agreements on political party financing and transparency of electoral campaign spending are a must if there is to be a culture of cross party cooperation developed.

Developing and supporting all party groups in parliaments that will work together on cross-cutting issues of importance (gender, disability, European integration, etc.) can contribute towards a more constructive cooperation across party lines.

Conclusion

Parliaments in the Western Balkans are faced with numerous challenges in relation to their three key roles, but especially in relation to their oversight and accountability role and their representation role. In order to make meaningful strides towards narrowing the democratic deficit and the influence gap between the executive and the legislatures in the Western Balkans, we need to make a shift in the classic parliamentary oversight paradigm in the Western Balkans. The current oversight parliamentary paradigm says that with the current models, Western Balkan parliaments have sufficient oversight tools to control the executive through standard tools available such as MPs questions, interpellations, hearings, votes of no confidence, or standard inquiries.

I believe that is far from enough if we take into account the current state of affairs and the democratic deficits that our countries are facing. The key change in mindset and change in the current parliamentary paradigm should be to move to establishing more robust committee oversight systems. In return they will change the very nature of parliamentary work and move to onus toward oversight rather than what is currently legislation. These oversight committee systems need to be supported by non-partisan, relevant, and trustworthy parliamentary research services and bodies, such as parliamentary budget offices for example or nonpartisan research facilities. In support to these two key elements that I have mentioned above, there is a need to reintroduce the concept of "representative accountability" and reform current electoral systems in a way that makes government executives and opposition leaders directly accountable to constituents and constituencies and the link between the voters and elected members is not severed as in the current proportional systems. Unfortunately, as recent events in Macedonia have proved, parliaments have lost a good part of their democratic legitimacy when it comes down to the issue of accountability, responsibility, and representation. In a time when Western Balkans countries are increasingly facing austerity measures, it is necessary for parliaments to take back some of the lost ground on the accountability front

and position them above the executive and break away from the submissive positions that they are holding at present times. The role of civil society, especially watch dog organizations and media, is extremely important in this process since they have a lot to contribute in parliamentary systems that have robust oversight systems and they need to be included through various forms in the daily parliamentary life. Otherwise parliaments in the Western Balkans will be faced with debating on issues in a kind of a closed-circuit system where arguments will be faced only between government and opposition parties and they will be seen as debating clubs which have limited accountability towards constituents.

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PARLIAMENTARIANISM IN THE WESTERN BALKANS – AUTHORITARIAN LEGACIES AND THE IMPACT OF EU INTEGRATION

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A superficial look into the daily workings of parliaments in the Western Balkans in recent months already reveals the difficult reality of parliamentarianism in a region in which most countries' political systems are (at least formally) parliamentary democracies. In Serbia, one of the MPs of the first days of party pluralism, Dragoljub Mićunović, warned at the end of April of the “destruction of parliamentarianism” under the current regime; in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), upon the EU's insistence, the House of Representatives in February approved the joint statement on BiH's EU path that forms one of the cornerstones of the EU's “new” Bosnia approach, a merely symbolic act given the fact that the statement was finalized where the real center of power lies – with the political party leaders; in Macedonia with the boycott of the opposition following the 2014 parliamentary elections and recent political protests against the Gruevski government, parliamentary life has been practically suspended for months. It seems that 15 years after the end of the 1990s Balkan wars and after 15 years in which parliaments were, and still are among the top priority subjects of democratization aid implemented by various international organizations (like the OSCE), the EU, political foundations or domestic civil society organizations, parliaments still remain at the heart of the struggle for stabilizing democracies in the region.

Authoritarian Legacies

Parliaments in the region suffer from a weak tradition of parliamentary democracy. During the long 19th century in some parts of the Western Balkans the development of parliamentarianism remained limited, while in others it suffered from profound structural problems. The transfer of the institutions and principles of parliamentary democracy from the West to societies that lacked the socio-economic preconditions for modern politics led to a distorted parliamentary life characterized by weak party systems, a lack of political culture, unstable coalitions, and the domination of the executive and the (militarized) bureaucracy over the legislature. Combined with the rise of the national question, the transfer of the category of the „nation“ to societies that lacked the modern foundations that underpinned its rise in Western Europe and that led to the domination of reactionary forms of nationalism in the Balkans, this created an explosive mixture. The resulting political instability and instability of parliamentary systems in the region were only multiplied in the interwar period of the first Yugoslavia.

The weak beginnings of parliamentarianism in the Western Balkans was followed by two authoritarian legacies – the socialist Yugoslav and the ethnic nationalist one of the 1990s Balkan wars. Socialist Yugoslav

via, after its break with Stalin and the model of Soviet socialism, had declared its aim to bridge several stages in the development of mankind and to establish a higher form of democracy than the one of the bourgeois society. Tito's Communist party even wrote the separation of powers into one of the Yugoslav foundational principles and experimented with various models of parliaments and federal and republican level that once included a five chamber parliament. Yet the Yugoslav socialist "third way" failed to meet its declared aims; it got stuck with a kind of authoritarian decentralization instead of the declared democratization. Power nevertheless remained with the party-state apparatus, now increasingly secured by informal and semi-formal means. This in return turned the legislatures into a simulation of parliamentarianism.

While the hopes for pluralistic democracy ended up being disappointed by the Yugoslav socialist experiment, the political systems that emerged during the Balkan wars of the 1990s did even more damage to parliamentary democracy. As the introduction of party pluralism turned both into the opening as well as the means for the violent ethnic nationalistic breakup of Yugoslavia, this led to an authoritarian transformation of an unusual type, at least compared to both the developments in other socialist countries in eastern Europe as well as the level of democracy in the second Yugoslavia. This contradictory transformation was marked by the de facto continuation of the rule of old-new one-party systems under the conditions of the formal-legal introduction of party pluralism and liberal parliamentary democracy. This can only be understood in the context of violent ethnicization and nationalistic mobilization and war of the 1990s. In part of the successor countries (Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro) this continuity in one-party rule was secured by manipulation with parliamentary rules and electoral systems, control over media, the re-politicization, ideologization, and de-professionalization of the institutions of state and society, the (semi-)formal control over the economy and the export of ethnic violence to neighboring countries that served as a political threat internally while the use of physical repression remained comparably low. Under such conditions, the (democratic) opposition was left with a kind of parliamentary playground that lends the ruling parties formal democratic legitimacy. As the oppositions rejected the option to take up an armed fight against the regimes, they were left with the options to either boycott parliament and elections, or play to the regimes' rules – an unsolvable dilemma and a lose-lose situation. In the parts of the former country more directly affected by the ethnic conflict and war (BiH, Kosovo), the authoritarian transformation created the rule of mono-ethnic parties (or the rule of coalition of three mono-ethnic one-party systems that built the basis for the later violent, wartime breakup of the Republic) and wartime mono-ethnic de facto one-party parliaments (in the case of Kosovo: underground parliament), with parliamentary life being drastically reduced or suspended.

In both cases of post-socialist development, the new ruling parties had either directly succeeded the League of Communists or the new, anti-communist parties had inherited large parts of the communist party's infrastructure and/or political culture and power techniques. In effect those developments turned the newly established parliamentary systems into a mere simulation of parliamentarianism. The ideas and principles of parliamentary democracy had been profoundly distorted and damaged, as had been all parliamentary parties, from the extreme right to the democratic and anti-nationalistic political specter on the left.

Thus when the permanent ethnic nationalist mobilization of society had ended and the regimes' power in countries like Croatia and Serbia had been seriously eroded, the regime changes of 1999/2000 created the conditions for the end of nationalist one-party systems. But those regime changes and the dichotomy of democratic opposition vs. nationalist regimes at the same time somehow masked the real challenges of democratic transformation, including the establishment of real parliamentary democracy – as the dashed hopes for linear transition to democratic societies and market economy throughout the first decade of the 21st century later proved.

Travails of today's parliamentarianism in the Western Balkans

It would be too negative to state that there have been no positive results in reforming and strengthening parliaments and parliamentarianism in the Western Balkans over the last decade and a half. Yet when one looks at the time span and the amount of efforts and resources poured into strengthening parliamentary democracy in the region, the results are relatively sobering. A majority of structural problems that negatively affect the work and functioning of parliaments remain unresolved.

Parliaments in the region still are far away from substantially fulfilling one of their core functions – oversight of the executive:

- Formal oversight instruments are still poorly developed. Though the institutionalization of question times has improved, government officials still apply various techniques to formally reply to MPs' questions without substantially answering; the instrument of parliamentary inquiry often remains underdeveloped in practice, and even not well institutionalized in some cases; the instrument of investigative committees has hardly anywhere in the region been developed into a tool that secures more accountability of the executive.
- Parliaments' capacity to oversee the drafting, adoption, and implementation of new laws remains poorly developed. This is to a large part the consequence of the excessive use of speedy

procedures that prevents a transparent legislative procedure and secures the dominance of the government.

Several factors in practice weaken the power formally assigned to parliament:

- The strong role of the assembly speaker that manipulates parliamentary rules and procedures, functioning more as an agent of the government than the head of the independent legislature, further weakens parliament's capacities to act independently vis-a-vis the executive.
- As judicial independence remains underdeveloped, state administrations politicized and the public sector in many countries still makes up a large share of the economy, the parties that form the government still dispose of strong access to state resources; this affects the formal balance of power between executive and legislature (as well as that between position and opposition) to the disadvantage of the latter.

Other factors still substantially limit the independence of the individual MPs, whether he/she belongs to the ruling parties or the opposition:

- The party systems with its authoritarian inner-party structures and the electoral systems with closed party lists in many countries of the region largely gut the constitutionally secured independence of the MPs.
- The lack of resources in parliamentary budgets and administrations, the fact that none of the states in the region so far has secured offices and staff for MPs and that only a minority of MPs has an office in his/her constituency to a large extent prevent the specialization and professionalization of the individual MP. This in return adds to the lack of independence.

Several factors structurally weaken the role of parliamentary oppositions: The arrogance of the ruling parties vis-a-vis the opposition based on a winner-takes-it-all mentality and political culture, the manipulation of parliamentary procedures by the parliamentary majority, and the lack of programmatic differentiation within the party systems tend to prevent a strong opposition role, directs opposition-position relations towards a performance oriented, confrontational approach instead of one of cooperation and constructive opposition.

The lack of media freedom and the weak impact of civil society on political parties' and parliament's performances additionally compound the structural weakness of parliamentarianism.

Finally, in some Western Balkan countries (BiH, Macedonia) with institutionalized ethnic power-sharing arrangements the role and function of parliaments is further devaluated by the key role backdoor bargaining processes between the leaders of the ruling parties play.

The ambivalent role of EU-integration

Given the relative persistence of the listed structural problems, the role of EU-integration in consolidating parliamentary democracy in the Western Balkans cannot be underestimated. The Union's conditionality-based integration policy still represents a strong transformational power and exerts an important reform pull effect in the countries of the region. The state of parliamentarianism figures prominently in each progress report within the framework of the so-called political criteria for membership. Without the EU's pressure, for example, Serbia's parliamentary parties probably would have never agreed to suspend the so-called "blank resignations", the central mechanism of party control over parliamentary office that made a mockery out of the country's parliamentary democracy.

At the same time, the EU integration dynamics can also have potentially negative impact on the consolidation of parliamentarianism in the candidate countries of the Western Balkans, namely during the accession negotiations stage. As the case of Croatia has demonstrated, if there is consensus between the parliamentary parties on the EU perspective of a country, and even more so if the opposition is included in negotiations with Brussels, parliamentary life during an accession process that is largely consumed by harmonizing a country's legislation with the *acquis* can be de facto suspended. The normal level of controversies and programmatic political differences between the opposition and position parties can be drastically reduced. This is a potentially worrying aspect, especially as most Western Balkan countries have entered the accession process with a chronically weak parliamentarianism and will exit it as full members of the EU. As such negative side effect structurally cannot be avoided, it is crucial for the EU (member states) to assign high importance to the political criteria during accession negotiations, also in such areas like parliamentarianism that are not covered by the *acquis*.



REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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Monday, September 14, 2015

Arrival of participants during the day

Accommodation: Avala Resort & Villas, Mediteranska, Budva, Montenegro

- 19:30** Departure to Welcome Dinner from the Hotel Lobby
- 20:00** **Welcome Dinner at the invitation of Ambassador Aleksandar Andrija Pejović, State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Chief Negotiator for Montenegro's Accession to the EU**
Venue: Budva Citadel

Tuesday, September 15, 2015

Conference Room: Lobby Bar Area

- 09:00 – 09:30** **Welcoming remarks and opening of the conference**
Rüdiger Lentz, *Executive Director, Aspen Institute Germany*
Ambassador Aleksandar Andrija Pejović
Dr. Ernst Reichel, *Special Envoy for South Eastern Europe, Turkey and the EFTA States, German Federal Foreign Office*

- 09:30 – 11:00** **Session I:**
The state of regional cooperation and remaining challenges

Regional dialog and cooperation in the Western Balkans has substantially improved over the past years. The EU-mediated dialog between Belgrade and Pristina has made an important contribution to this. Ministers of the Western Balkans Six regularly meet in different fora and the German government's Western Balkans summit in August 2014 seems to have boosted regional cooperation further. However, difficulties remain. What is the current state of regional cooperation? What are the main challenges to further deepen regional cooperation? To what extent does reconciliation remain an issue requiring increased regional attention? What are the consequences of the 'regatta principle' of the EU enlargement process for regional cooperation?

Moderator: Anja Quiring

Introductions: Vedran Džihic: *Civil Society in the Framework of the Berlin Process - Game changer or more of the same?*
Jelica Minić: *The State of Regional Cooperation and Remaining Challenges*
Senada Šelo Šabić: *Fostering Reforms in the Western Balkans – Fighting Corruption as an Important Milestone*
Dane Taleski: *Civil Society Forum at the Vienna Summit: Between High Expectations and Modest Achievements*

11:00 – 11:30	Coffee break
11:30 – 12:30	Briefing I: The state of regional cooperation and remaining challenges Ambassador Aleksandar Andrija Pejović
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch
13:30 – 15:30	Session II: Regional security cooperation <p>In today’s Europe, most security threats require regional or international cooperation. Threats like drug trafficking, human trafficking, illegal migration, or terrorism can only be met through security cooperation. What is the current state of security cooperation in the Western Balkans? What are the main security challenges in the region? What should be the key priorities of increased security cooperation? How can cooperation in the fight against organized crime be improved? What is the impact of illegal migration in the Western Balkans and how can governments further cooperate to meet the challenges of illegal migration? How big is the threat posed by terrorism and foreign fighters in the countries of the region? How can the threats be reduced efficiently? What role does the EU and its member states play? What are the fields that require further cooperation between the Western Balkans and the EU?</p> <p>Moderator: Prof. Dr. Eckart D. Stratenschulte</p> <p>Introductions: Vesna Bojičić-Dželilović: <i>Taking Responsibility for Regional Cooperation in the Western Balkans Seriously: What is at Stake?</i> Sidita Kushi: <i>Combating a Shared Menace: Terrorism as a Security and Social Threat in the Western Balkans and Beyond</i> Ioannis Michaletos: <i>Regional Security Cooperation in South-east Europe</i> Florian Qehaja: <i>Uneven Regional Security Cooperation: Lessons Learned and Next Steps</i></p>
15:30 – 16:30	Briefing II: Regional security cooperation with Minister of Interior Affairs of Montenegro Raško Konjević
17:00	Departure to Cetinje
17:45	Guided Tour through King Nikola’s Palace
19:30	Traditional Montenegrin Dinner at Restaurant Belveder

Wednesday, September 16, 2015

09:00 – 11:30

Session III:

Regional economic cooperation, energy security, and infrastructure development

Regional economic cooperation and closer cooperation in the fields of energy security and infrastructure development have been very high on the political agendas in the Western Balkans as well as the EU and its member states. The “Berlin Process” seems to have boosted regional processes and a first agreement on a core transport network has been reached. However, challenges remain. Economic growth in countries of the region remains limited while unemployment continues to be very high. What role can deeper economic integration play in the economic development process of the Western Balkan countries? What are the risks and benefits? What are the next steps that should be taken regionally? What role can the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and its South East Europe 2020 Strategy play in fostering regional economic integration and development? What role does energy security play for economic development? What are the main obstacles preventing countries from developing the energy infrastructure needed? How important is cooperation between the SEE countries in the field of energy? Are the plans of an integrated energy market in SEE anchored by the EU being implemented efficiently and how does this affect the security of regional energy supplies? Is there a need for further regional and supra-regional approaches and agreements to promote greater energy security in the region? Do underdeveloped transport and communication networks constitute an additional obstacle to regional economic development? In which areas of regional infrastructure is improvement most needed? What are the steps that need to be taken next? How can more political will for regional integration be developed? Is there a need to de-politicize regional cooperation? Is there a need for an even stronger EU involvement?

Moderator: Edith Harxhi

Introductions: Jens Bastian: *Regional Economic Cooperation and Energy Security in South East Europe*
Blerim Reka: *The Energy Security Challenges of the Western Balkans: TAP vs. Turkish Stream*

Expert Opinion: Dirk Buschle, *Deputy Director, Energy Community Secretariat*

11:30 – 12:00

Coffee break

12:00 – 13:00

Briefing III: Regional economic cooperation, energy security, and infrastructure development
with Minister of Economy Vladimir Kavarić

13:30 – 14:30

Lunch

15:00 Departure to Kotor

16:00 – 16:45 **Guided tour through the old Town of Kotor**

16:45 – 20:00 **Boat trip at the invitation of Ambassador Gudrun Steinacker and Ambassador Margaret Ann Uyehara**

16:45 – 17:30 Sailing to Our Lady of the Rocks

17:30 – 18:15 Tour on Our Lady of the Rocks

18:15 – 18:55 Sailing to Tivat

18:55 – 19:25 Tour of Porto Montenegro

19:25 – 20:00 Sailing to Tavern Conte

20:00 Dinner at Tavern Conte

Thursday, September 17, 2015

Departure of participants during the day

Barbullushi, Odeta	Reichel, Ernst
Barchmann, Achim	Reka, Blerim
Bastian, Jens	Samofalov, Konstantin
Bojičić-Dželilović, Vesna	Sattler, Johann
Buschle, Dirk	Šelo-Šabić, Senada
Campbell, Ian	Šepić, Senad
Džihić, Vedran	Šljivančanin, Velimir
Harxhi, Edith	Steinacker, Gudrun Elisabeth
Ilazi, Ramadan	Stratenschulte, Eckart D.
Jovićević, Marina	Tahiri, Edita
Kapetanović, Amer	Taleski, Dane
Kiprijanovska, Dragana	Telaku, Heroina
Klemenc, Jelka	Tolksdorf, Helge
Kushi, Sidita	Trišić-Babić, Ana
Makraduli, Jani	Turbedar, Erhan
Michaletos, Ioannis	Uyehara, Margaret Ann
Minić, Jelica	
Mitrović, Vladana	
Moore, Jonathan	
Ninčić, Roksanda	
Pejović, Aleksandar Andrija	
Qehaja, Florian	
Quiring, Anja	
Radović, Snežana	

The Aspen Institute Germany

Esch, Valeska
Senior Program Officer

Jackson, David
Rapporteur

Kempf, Carina
Program Assistant

Lentz, Rüdiger
Executive Director

CONFERENCE REPORT: REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

David Jackson
PhD Candidate
Berlin Graduate School for Transnational Studies
Social Science Research Center
Berlin

The Aspen Institute's conference 'Regional Cooperation in the Western Balkans' took place in Budva, Montenegro between September 15-18, 2015. The event brought together 40 select decision makers from Southeast Europe (SEE), Germany, Austria, and the United States (U.S.) with professional backgrounds in government, international and civil society organizations, academia, the security sector, and Foreign Service. The conference was divided into three sessions. The first discussed the general state of regional cooperation, and sessions II and III focused on the specific areas of security, economic and energy cooperation.

Session I: The state of regional cooperation and remaining challenges

Participants recognized that progress on cooperation has been made in the last few years: the countries of SEE can now meet with fewer inhibitions. Cooperation across all ranks – both ministerial and at the civil servant level – is a regular activity for public institutions; indeed, at least two events of cooperation occur on average each day in SEE, meetings in which joint projects and common problems can be identified and eventually solved. For example, three SEE countries signed new border agreements with their neighbors in 2015, which represents an important step forward for regional relations. Though it was noted that relations between states tend to oscillate, and therefore stable relations can never be guaranteed, participants welcomed the increased dialog between the Albanian and Serbian prime ministers. Representatives from EU member states advised that the challenges for SEE can only be solved if countries work together. Major investments, for example, from large western European companies will only be forthcoming if there is a clear and coherent regional market in which to invest.

Participants also highlighted that challenges still remain. Experts advised that much more needs to be done for the 'psychological basis' of cooperation – that is, finding ways to resolve long-standing syndromes of mistrust and develop mechanisms of reconciliation. In the broader social sphere, it was noted that there is an 'unbelievable lack' of real exchange with, for example, people in Bosnia having no idea about what is happening socially and politically in Macedonia.

State institutions are still beset by problems. People do not simply trust the institutions and there is a gap between the form and substance of politics as outwardly politicians preach democracy and gender rights but in reality only pay lip service to these issues. Democracy has become a vacuous term in the region, wherein many political regimes can be described as sophisticated electoral autocracies.

Lessons from Croatia are also instructive for the other SEE states. Not only have Croatia's governance standards dropped since joining the EU, it has also failed to act as an effective bridge between Brussels and the rest of the region. Representatives of the region painted a gloomy picture for the future, highlighting that many people, especially those with talents, would like to leave SEE states for countries like Germany. Anxieties amongst SEE populations are reaching a crisis point, illustrated by 77,000 SEE citizens applying for asylum in Germany in just one year period in 2014.

Even though many cooperation initiatives have their genesis in SEE, the EU's role has been important in establishing and nurturing structures of cooperation. Experts praised how EU member states, especially Germany, have found new ways of communicating with SEE, notably through the 'Western Balkans 6' and Berlin processes. The Vienna and Berlin processes are yielding practical and tangible results, outcomes that can demonstrate to citizens the benefits of joining the EU, such as a youth office exchange and improvements to transport infrastructure. Experts also suggested that though the Berlin process is a huge success, it has come about ten years too late. Still, the momentum must be sustained, and preparation for Paris 2016 must start now to keep momentum going – otherwise the Berlin process will stall.

Experts advised that regional cooperation is not a default position but must be constantly nurtured through practical policies. Better transport networks were recommended as essential for real cooperation: social exchanges and ultimately empathy can only be built if people are able to meet. Infrastructure investments provide a clear vision for future cooperation. But it was also noted that transport is not always enough: increasing jobs and competitiveness must work in synergy with infrastructure so that the new highways are even used.

Regional cooperation should be made more substantial with clearer results for citizens, particularly as the benefits of cooperation do not seem to reach ordinary citizens. Experts highlighted how there is huge untapped potential in cross-national social issues and ways to address deprivation of everyday material needs should be part of cooperation. It was suggested that there are latent expectations and desires for integration. Young people especially want to see more collaboration in the region, something that raises the significance of the recent decision to set up a youth exchange office.

Speakers suggested that civil society in SEE has more to offer than formal institutions; yet the situation is still that politicians do not care about civil society and its impact on policy is still minimal. Political dialog with civil society often hangs on non-contentious issues. Political leaders should regularize civil society inputs into policy making; also the Regional Cooperation Council is important for carrying forward advice from civil so-

ciety. Participants noted that cross-national civil society cooperation presages political cooperation and how SEE governments deal with civil society is an important litmus test for the overall quality of governance.

For many experts, the role of civil society is about generating new political forms and political classes as well as providing a breathing space for political innovations in SEE. Others suggested that the primary aim for civil society should be about reconciliation and healing wounds in the different countries of SEE. Participants highlighted how the potential is huge for cooperation in arts and culture in SEE, ties which can provide a more constructive parallel to the fraught political reality. Other experts warned that civil society is not a panacea for all the problems in the region, especially as civil society organizations can often have short attention spans and pursue agendas that are not necessarily in the public's interest.

Authentic regional cooperation can only come about if SEE countries internally drive the process. Good neighborly relations are essential. With an eye to Kosovo-Serbia relations, non-interference in the affairs of other states was recommended as the core principle of good neighborly relations. Bilateral disputes should be better understood by policy makers from outside the region, while it was also noted that internal disputes hinder cooperation. BiH cannot agree about strategic goals for the region, for example. Experts attributed the lack of progress to political elites in SEE, whom are stuck in a comfort zone that encourages inertia and holds back progress. Experts recommended that elites in SEE must be galvanized into action.

Participants discussed gaps in cooperation, with judicial reform cited as an area where more could be done. It was noted that many cooperation initiatives go under the radar of the EU. The SEE Health Network, for example, does good work but cannot get funding because their work is not a specific part of the EU's accession framework. Macro-regional frameworks aid regional discussions but, frustratingly, result in few practical recommendations. Others called on there to be more pressure on states bordering SEE to be better engaged in the region.

Experts noted that the refugee crisis is a severe crisis and is a question of solidarity and compassion – for both EU member states and SEE. EU ministerial meetings should include SEE representatives. It was noted that UNHCR has issued a red alert for Serbia, wherein there are 12,000 refugees – in a country that has the capacity to deal with 800 of them. Even so, it was pointed out that Serbia has a plan but there is no plan forthcoming from the EU; indeed, the EU should get its act together first and foremost, after which common approaches to dealing with the crisis, for example in commonly defining the legal definition of a refugee, must be developed.

Session II: Regional security cooperation

Socio-economic difficulties have produced deficits in human security in the SEE, shortfalls that have sown the seeds of instability and explain the limited results of cooperation. Through differentiated citizenship, divisive discourses and poor governance, political elites in SEE bear responsibility for worsening the human security situation. A functional approach to cooperation has not produced a 'reconciliation dividend', partly because it has ignored the element of human security. International discourses on security do not always sufficiently recognize this as human insecurity is persistently overlooked by a dominant focus on states' security. Important questions must be answered: why, for example, do people seek safety by withdrawing into their own ethnic political groupings? Experts advised that the concept of security should be broadened to include this human security.

Participants also recommended that corruption is also a security threat to the region. Day to day issues of how people's lives are affected by corruption need to be firmly on the agenda.

The importance of reconciliation was again underlined. Participants suggested reconciliation requires brave public gestures: political leaders publicly apologizing for past wrongs. Others disagreed: micro processes, especially a mutual understanding of differences, are more important. Most participants agreed that reconciliation is a long and arduous process. For example, Germany took many decades to develop friendships in their near neighborhood. Indeed, the work of reconciliation is ceaseless: after reconciliation, there are issues of war compensation, justice and more. Progress towards reconciliation must include incremental, practical steps – truth commissions, joint historical inquiries, and pan-national school textbooks can all help. Speakers advised that public apologies by politicians can win public support. Participants discussed whether reconciliation in SEE is a pre-requisite to join the EU with most agreeing that reconciliation and EU accession go hand in hand. Representatives suggested that there is no peace without justice; in fact, open wounds in the Balkans have to be resolved in a just manner. Reconciliation is also about collectively moving forward – the joint remembrance of victims is one possible initiative in this respect; in any case, mutual respect is central to reconciliation. Experts also advised that permanent reconciliation can only come through aligned geo-political interests – as a shared strategic goal, accession to the EU is therefore very important for SEE.

Terrorist networks exist and are willing to strike in SEE. Strategies to deal with the issue must be based on a precise understanding of what is meant by terrorism as inaccurate terminology gives rise to the possibilities of the misuse of the anti-terror agenda. Participants identified worrying incidences in SEE whereby the anti-terror

agenda has been used as a pretext to pursue vendettas or misused for nationalistic goals. Experts recommended that the tracking of sleeper cells and the sharing of information are crucial. One point was made clear: stopping all terrorist attacks is not possible. In addition to international cooperation, participants advised that action in local communities is vital. Excellent cooperation between mayors, municipality officials and national actors is already building important preventative structures, measures that should be built upon with further initiatives on education and counter-narratives. Representatives also suggested that EU accession is essential for managing political extremism in SEE. Participants warned against wrong-headed policies as aggressive and heavy-handed arrests on suspicions of terrorism can produce backlashes in communities for example.

Cooperation in police security has steadily improved in recent years, progress that has been enabled via mutual trust. Experts recommended that there is an urgent need to streamline cooperation processes; moreover, the latent infrastructure of cooperation exists, for example with databases, but this can only be activated if there is greater political will to cooperate. Equality in police cooperation is of the utmost importance.

Session III: Economic and energy insecurity

Discussions on the economy struck a pessimistic note. Experts warned that SEE is still a depressed economic region: high unemployment is compounded by stagnating growth and there is a danger of reform reversals. Innovation is still low and 86 percent of production is consumed domestically. Having narrowed ten years ago, the GDP gap between EU and the rest of the region is widening. Political cooperation in the region has not translated into enhanced economic cooperation, with intra-regional trade still low as SEE states mainly trade outside of the region: 76 percent of Macedonian trade is with the EU – only 14 percent is with SEE; moreover, despite a political rapprochement, trade volumes between Serbia and Albania remain low. Due to the economic despair, experts warned mass migration – and brain drain – from SEE will be a perpetual trend: when weather conditions permit, people will vote with their feet and seek economic opportunities in Europe.

Experts recommended that to make the region attractive for outsiders, SEE must present itself as a single, coherent market: one region, one economy. Agriculture, IT, and tourism niches were highlighted as sectors with high economic potential. Also, subnational political economies need to be understood – and supported. Speakers advised that SEE must look to new markets in Egypt, Iran, and Turkey; moreover, SEE could become a hub for western European countries seeking to invest in the Middle East.

More outsider investors are needed in the SEE and public-private partnership projects may be an important in-

strument to increase investment. To attract investment, the EU should send clear signals to western investors that there is a clear EU perspective for the region. The European Commission was praised by SEE representatives for crafting a core methodology for IPA funds; at the same time, it was noted that internal private sector investment within SEE is lacking, especially as private resources are not being mobilized. It was noted that 'Paris 2016' will also focus on social projects and concrete measures to improve living conditions, as well as infrastructure projects. Participants suggested that from now on the 'Berlin process' should be referred to as the 'Paris process.'

To realize the large infrastructure projects, international financing will have to play an important role. The EBRD, World Bank and the EU IPA instrument will all be important, as will foreign powers. Turkey is already an important and powerful regional investor, a political fixer, and a trading partner, with important investments in banking in BiH, road building in Kosovo, and ports in Montenegro. The current Greek government is engaged in SEE, but private investment from Greece will no longer be forthcoming. Greek banks employ 40,000 people in the region, and as 'Grexit' is not off the agenda and the region's credit systems are strongly linked to Greek banks, continued economic turmoil in Greece will have major consequences for SEE.

China is becoming a major player in SEE, offering funding and investment opportunities, with mixed results. China's funding of the bridge in Belgrade was an example of a cost-effective investment realized on time. It was highlighted how economic investment brings political influence. Experts suggested that though SEE should orient towards EU markets, they should also invite investors from all over the world – as long as outside investors stick to the rules and standards set by the EU *acquis* criteria. Poor local governance, as well as economic necessities, explain why SEE governments flout rules to get investors on board – but this is dangerous for economic actors and the general model of economic governance.

Participants noted that economic governance has progressed in recent years; nevertheless, there is huge scope for further improvements. Getting the fundamentals of economic governance right is crucial. Administrative procedures and border crossings are still too cumbersome – this software of the region's economic model should be upgraded, especially as perceptions and experience of outsider investors is important. For example, SEE had disappeared from the radar of German business, partly because perception of not enough good news in the region, but since the Berlin process, there has been a 25 percent increase in investment in region. Corruption and weak governance blight economic development. 'Road mafias' in Serbia are damaging train networks with the purpose of forcing people onto the roads. In Macedonia, investments have to be

'checked' by political elites. Experts pointed out how political dysfunction translates into fiscal dysfunction as certain privileged constituencies, such as former army officers, receive undue benefits from the state. Economic inequalities within countries should also be addressed. A non-partisan expert body or council that can link EU investments with the region could be a way of circumventing the weak governance.

Economic cooperation is working in the region: cooperation mechanisms that took time to develop are bearing fruit. Though the utility of CEFTA was questioned by some, it was pointed out that academic studies have shown that CEFTA is the biggest factor for intra-regional trade. Representatives from EU member states advised that the 'Berlin process' has prompted a constructive atmosphere of cooperation – even so, more work can be done. The EU's 'Macro-economic regions,' comprising of member states and non-members states, were identified as an important tool for learning and cooperation. Subnational cross border cooperation between contiguous localities, realms where there are pre-existing daily relations such as the Shkodra lake region, could be enhanced through greater investment.

Experts suggested it is important to understand that economic developments have a qualitative dimension. Participants underlined that many foreign investments bring jobs with appalling working conditions. Moreover, Central European economies have succeeded in partial re-industrialization – cars for example; in contrast, FDI in SEE is very different and perhaps less constructive as it is concentrated not in industry but in the service sector, banking and retail.

The energy market in SEE was described as complex, dynamic and ever-changing. Geo-political issues shape energy security in SEE. Cold-war style rhetoric has returned with the U.S. encouraging Greece to not think about cooperation with Russia, for example. Once sanctions have been removed, Iran could play a role in relation to energy. Experts advised energy security is not always about geo-political carve up and it was suggested that the EU occasionally projects its paranoia and fears onto the region, with Russian and China activities especially being viewed suspiciously. Representatives from the region recommended that SEE states act from a position of economic weakness – this is why they cooperate with non-EU investors.

SEE countries are making progress in reforming the energy sector but more political will to cooperate together is necessary. Energy integration is, however, back on the political agenda in the SEE, and 'connectivity' is becoming an increasingly important term in political discussions. Clear guidelines from the EU about the correct measures to take in the energy sector are important, but it was also noted that SEE countries should be taken more seriously on energy issues by Brussels and included more in the decision-making process.

CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE BERLIN PROCESS: GAME CHANGER OR MORE OF THE SAME?

Dr. Vedran Džihic
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Civil society plays a key role as a democratic corrective force in all societies that undergo a transition from an authoritarian regime to a liberal democracy. It aims to help develop and sustainably embed a democratic political culture, thus preventing countries from lapsing back into authoritarian rule. Against this background, it is easier to understand why so much – and generally too much – is expected of civil society as a cure for all. In order to get a realistic picture of civil society, its role and potential as well as its limitations – especially in the Balkans – it is first of all essential to move away from over-simplified images of civil society as a panacea. Particularly over the past few years, we have witnessed more and more disillusionment with democracy in several post-socialist countries. Authoritarian tendencies in governing structures and in society are becoming ever stronger and considerably more visible: the path that leads to a stable democratic setup is long; it comes with setbacks and crises and is by no means linear.

What role does civil society play in the Balkans? Research into civil society shows us that in areas with weak or dysfunctional forms of government, where issues of sovereignty and imminent problems such as unemployment, poor social conditions and poverty prevail, civil society takes a back seat. In the Balkans, the nationalistic madness of the 1990s dealt the final blow to the citizens' civic self-identity. This final blow was all the more tragic as in Yugoslavian state socialism, the phenomenon of "citizenship" was merely derived from its affiliation with the notionally Marxist working class that prevailed at that time. During the second half of the 20th century, it was hard to find a critical understanding of citizenship anywhere in the Balkans, and – if it did exist at all – it was only within confined urban spaces. An integral part of this was the ex-Yugoslavian popular culture, whose development was on a par with the American and European trends of the 1970s and 1980s and which served as an important civil and cultural "window to the world" for the peoples of Southeast Europe. Regrettably, the nationalistic madness of the 1990s heavily poisoned even these positive narratives and trends.

In the Balkans, evidence also suggests that the mere existence of an NGO on paper is not synonymous with a functioning civil society. The explosive growth in the number of NGOs after the wars and the resulting "NGO-ization" of civil societies created an "NGO dog-eat-dog world". The battles for the resources of the increasingly professionalized NGOs and its elites were by no means fought in a "civil society" fashion. In this professionalized NGO universe, civil society embedded itself into a pseudo-normal or banal parallel world, in the midst of a deep crisis afflicting these societies. The lack of tangible results, however, directly damaged the im-

age of the NGO-dominated civil society in the eyes of the wider public. As disillusionment with democracy and a post-democratic depression has taken hold across the Balkans over the past few years, a certain civil-society monotony emerged as an integral part of this democratic depression.

The past few years, however, have seen a new dimension and a new quality. The social protests, most of which we witnessed recently, are the most important development of democratic politics in the region in the past two decades. Part of the process of growing up and emancipation of civil societies in the Balkans is the action taken by the citizens of many states in the region, who are vociferously telling irresponsible politicians that they will no longer tolerate political injustices, taking to the streets to protest against elite-dominated and corrupt, yet seemingly democratic regimes, exposing problems and those responsible for them, and trying to combat them. The political establishment, however, is fighting back against these new social movements with all its might. There are plenty of role models for authoritarian rulers, such as Putin or Erdogan, who only know the force of repression, the police, and the deeply symbolic water cannons. When Gruevski allowed the police to use force against the protesters in Macedonia, this was nothing less than an authoritarian reaction to a movement whose criticism had attacked the heart of the regime. The events in Bosnia in 2014 or Skopje in 2015 are just the beginning of a process of critically questioning and challenging bad politics in the Balkans, which can ultimately lead to more freedom and a better life in the region.

Support from the outside will have a decisive impact on the success of these new movements. Instead of viewing the protests as a potential source of insecurity and destabilization of the region, the EU should, therefore, adopt an attitude of acceptance towards the social protest movements and “grassroots” civil society and view them as new actors, who should be listened to and supported. The fact that one central focus of the Western Balkans Summit in Vienna was dedicated to civil society is undoubtedly also a direct consequence of the protests in Bosnia and Macedonia. It is already a commonplace view that an active and accepted civil society is essential to ensuring the success of democratic politics in the long term. As a first step, the summit in Vienna primarily aimed at establishing civil society actors and their viewpoints as a normal and natural part of all future EU activities in the region.

How was the Western Balkans Conference in Vienna organized and what happened during it? The ambitious goal of bringing civil society and official governments in productive dialogue, while at the same time making concrete recommendations for the improvement of the situation in the countries, proved to be a rather chal-

lenging one.¹ The Expert Group assembled by Erste Stiftung in Vienna made a decision earlier in 2015 to organize a series of debates of civil society representatives in the region prior to the Summit. Three topics were selected (creation of jobs and prosperity, building a culture of regional cooperation, and freedom of expression) and debated by civil society representatives in regional workshops in Tirana, Belgrade, and Sarajevo during May and June 2015. As a result the representatives of civil society produced a set of recommendations in each of the three areas, which were also presented at the Summit in front of assembled officials of both the Western Balkans’ countries and EU representatives.² The recommendations were formulated in a quite general manner, listing all the necessary reform areas as well as steps that need to be taken in order to improve the situation in the societies. The content and the substance of the recommendations proved once again that civil society in the region is not short of excellent ideas but is rather facing a difficult challenge of how to communicate, operationalize, and implement them in a political environment partly hostile to civil society. Being aware of this fact the decision was made to organize a set of workshops during the Summit in Vienna (August 26) to work further on operationalizing the recommendations and defining the process between Vienna and Paris 2016 in order to enable civil society not only to formulate concrete demands but to put them on the agenda of governments and the EU. The workshop in Vienna proved to be a very fundamental pillar of the process as 50 representatives of the civil society were able to develop a number of concrete proposals and ideas on how to carry the process further and ensure that civil society becomes an integral part of all reform processes in the region. Right now, in the follow up process to Vienna, several organizations and foundations (Erste Stiftung, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Balkan Fund for Democracy, Regional Cooperation Council) have expressed an interest to support the initiative and ensure the implementation of ideas that have been developed so far.

Another aspect of the Vienna Summit was a prominent public debate with government officials from the region and the EU and representatives of civil society from the Western Balkans. Here, moderated by Ivan Vejvoda, five politicians (Edi Rama, Aleksandar Vučić, Johannes Hahn, Igor Lukšić, and Igor Crnadak) engaged in a debate with six representatives of civil society (Ardian Hackaj, Director of the public policy platform Shtetiweb at the Cooperation and Development Institute, Albania, Meliha Bajramović, Coordinator of Plenum Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Faik Ispahiu, Director and

¹ For all information regarding the civil society aspect of the Berlin process and particularly the Vienna Conference see the webpage <http://www.erstestiftung.org/civil-society-forum/>.

² Comprehensive list of all recommendations can also be found at the webpage of the Civil Society Forum <http://www.erstestiftung.org/civil-society-forum/>.

Executive Producer of the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network and Internews Kosova, Dona Kosturnova, Executive Director of the Youth Educational Forum, Macedonia, Dejan Milovac, Director of the Center for Investigations and Deputy Director of MANS, Montenegro, and Aleksandar Simurdić, Secretary General of the European Movement, Local Council Novi Sad, Serbia). As high the expectations and hopes for a new kind of dialog between government officials and civil society were, they were largely disappointed. Two prime ministers dominated the debate, with civil society representatives and an open debate with the public coming far to short. The debate ended with a long monologue of Aleksandar Vučić, thus putting the civil society in the background and symbolically restoring the rather authoritarian hierarchy within the societies of the Western Balkans.

To sum it up, if there is an urgent goal for the civil society in the region in general and within the framework of the Civil Society Forum and Berlin Process in particular, than this is above all to clearly communicate to governments and many an authoritarian ruler in the region that their success will, above all, be measured in terms of their attitudes towards a civil society that is slowly becoming more confident and organized. Realistically speaking, nobody expects the politicians from the region to – upon return to their countries – start a completely new politics towards the civil society. We will continue seeing a lot of declarative support for civil society while at the same time effectively neglecting demands of the civil society. We will continue to witness attempts to control media and to portray those that are taking their demands to the streets as violent groups of extremists. The soft and even hard repression against protest movements will remain a tool in the hand of authorities to control the situation and ensure that their power positions are not endangered. In any case, it is up to civil society itself to constantly remind the politicians in the region that there is someone out there able and brave to question them and their policies and to be a democratic corrective. If the EU within the Berlin process could find a new policy towards the civil society in the region, in which the civil society is not just a nice rhetorical decoration in political speeches but a crucial partner in all efforts of democratizing and “Europeanizing” the region, a huge step forward would be taken.

THE STATE OF REGIONAL COOPERATION AND REMAINING CHALLENGES

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Setting the scene

The news from the Balkans over the past few months has occurred at a vertiginous speed – most of them have been bad: Greece’s long-term crisis increasingly resembling squaring the circle; Turkey’s problems of internal polarization and spillover of the crisis and the conflicts in its immediate vicinity; Bulgaria’s and Romania’s difficulties with internal reforms that have mostly been frozen since the two states joined the EU; internal tensions and border issues between Slovenia and Croatia; as well as Transnistria’s constant shadow over Moldova’s efforts to persist on further approximation to the EU – this is the regional scene framing the developments in the Western Balkans, a region marking the dark anniversaries of its recent war history. Major bilateral tensions among Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Croatia, and Serbia accompanied the commemoration of the 20th anniversaries of mass war crimes by the Bosnian Serb armed forces in Srebrenica and the mass forced expulsion of Serbs from Croatia during operation “Storm” – the anniversaries of the greatest genocide and ethnic cleansing in Europe since World War II.

To this should be added the recent border dispute between BiH and Montenegro over Sutorina; internal political conflicts in Macedonia that have opened space for terrorist activities, halted thanks to the mediation of Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn; the stoning of Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić at the Srebrenica commemoration, followed by the visit of BiH’s tripartite Presidency to Belgrade, with a common message that, despite all the recent incidents, the leaders of the two states must work towards reconciliation by engaging in joint specific projects bringing prosperity to their citizens; and finally, under pressure from the international community, the end to the prolonged obstruction in the Parliament of Kosovo to the establishment of a war crimes court and the implementation of specific points of the Brussels Agreement between Kosovo and Serbia with a view to normalizing their relations.

Add to this chronology of bad messages the previous announcements by Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama spelling out the intent to proceed with the creation of a Greater Albania, accompanied by an incident at the first soccer game between Serbia and Albania in Belgrade. Tensions were subsequently buffered by a sort of vision building meetings between Rama and Vučić, focusing on building infrastructure connections, economic cooperation, and mechanisms to bring together youth of the two countries.

The Balkan region is full of unsettled bilateral issues. Serbia alone has a long list of more than 30 open issues¹ with all its neighbors and the process of solving them has been slow, not solely the fault of Serbia. But, they reappear whenever tensions in the region rise.

In addition to this political turbulence, the majority of Southeastern Europe (SEE) countries have serious and similar economic problems: high external debt and trade and payments deficit, slow and insufficient structural changes and high unemployment, a great income gap compared to the EU average, and endemic corruption. They all together represent an underdeveloped periphery of Europe. The region had gone through a period of growth and recovery in the decade preceding the global financial crisis, but was hit hard by it, partly due to its heavy dependence on the EU market. Thus, signs of recovery in the EU have been accompanied by some positive economic developments in the region as well, but this should not obscure the real danger that the Greek scenario in different modalities could be repeated across the region.

On top of all these problems, several countries in the region, as a transit route to EU countries, are exposed to a massive influx of refugees from Africa and the Middle East. Since there is no sufficiently comprehensive policy in the EU to solve this problem on a more permanent basis, the region is largely left on its own with all the risks that mass movement and concentration of refugees from vulnerable regions carries.

Beneath all these events there is a regional belt, albeit not always starkly visible, that holds together these actors of the ever-simmering Balkan scene – a kind of “safety net” – consisting of a great number of regional initiatives through which the countries of the region have, in spite of everything, been consistently building effective multilateral mechanisms facilitating the resolution of bilateral problems and crises. This multilateral framework allows for the identification of common interests in many areas, at several levels (from local to national), and rallies a broad range of social actors (from state administrations to civil society organizations), creating a fragile joint tissue of the region.

A short chronology of cooperation

Regional cooperation in the Balkans received a visible, widely-promoted political impetus shortly after the conclusion of the Dayton Accords in 1995, when the EU launched its regional approach to relations with the

newly-created states in the territory of the former Yugoslavia².

However, this important external incentive had a precedent that came from the region itself – the South East European Cooperation Process (SEEC), which was initiated by Bulgaria, in 1996³. The objectives of this initiative were initially aimed primarily at creating a climate of trust, good neighborly relations and stability in the region. This initiative is an original form of cooperation and a genuine voice of the region. It was initiated by the countries of the region, not from the outside, as other initiatives that followed shortly after⁴. Initially, it has not been formally or informally supported by any organization or country outside the region.

This initiative has revived the political will of the countries in the region to cooperate with each other, which had earlier been manifested in the conferences of Foreign Ministers of the Balkan countries⁵, even before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the end of Europe’s division into blocs. The scope of identified issues of common interest was very broad already in these early attempts to establish multilateral mechanisms of cooperation in the Balkans⁶.

The EU made the next step in creating a more consolidated framework for regional cooperation after the end of the Kosovo conflict in 1999, when it launched the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP)⁷, as a specific mode of its enlargement policy towards the Western Balkans. Under the SAP, the countries in the region can advance towards EU membership provided they meet all the set requirements (the Copenhagen criteria). The main objectives of this process include the stabilization of the region and the establishment of free trade both within it and with the EU. Regional cooperation thus formally became one of the pillars of conditionality

¹ With former Yugoslav republics these are largely issues of borders, displaced and missing persons, property issues, use of water resources, trans-boundary pollution, etc. With Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria the issues are mainly minority rights, water management, cross-border pollution etc.

² The Regional Approach was established in 1997, in the wake of the 1995 Dayton Agreement (signed the same year in Paris) to provide the policy framework for bilateral relations between the EU and the Western Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro at that time).

³ Founding members: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Serbia (at that time with Montenegro as the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) and Turkey. Croatia joined in 2005, Moldova in 2006, Montenegro in 2007, Slovenia in 2010, and Kosovo has got a special status of participant invited by the Chairmanship in Office in 2014.

⁴ The Stability Pact, Southeast European Cooperative Initiative or the Stabilisation and Association Process.

⁵ Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Turkey and Yugoslavia.

⁶ Trade, transport, cross-border cooperation, industry, tourism, banking, energy, science and technology, agriculture, water resources management, telecommunications, environment, health care, culture, sport and information. In 1991, in Bucharest, there was even a meeting of parliamentary committees for international relations of the six Balkan countries. See: D.Lopandić and J.Kronja, *Regional Initiatives and Multilateral Cooperation in the Balkans*, European Movement in Serbia, Belgrade, 2011, p.56.

⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/policy/glossary/terms/sap_en.htm

for the Western Balkans. Association Agreements and the following Accession Agreements entail the obligation of regional cooperation and good neighborly relations for each signatory country in the region. Their regional cooperation has been continuously monitored and the results achieved are an important criterion for assessing their annual progress towards the EU.

The Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe⁸, also launched in 1999, complemented the SAP and established specific key regional structures constituting the sectoral backbone of the whole complex and comprehensive regional cooperation mechanism⁹.

It can be concluded that external incentives coincided with indigenous regional initiatives articulating the needs and interests of the SEE countries. At first, they operated in parallel and were uncoordinated, and since 2008, they have acted together, in a carefully structured manner through the establishment of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)¹⁰ as the operational body of the SEECP and the successor to the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. The process of establishing regional cooperation in SEE enjoyed widespread support in the initial phase of operation of the Stability Pact – not only of the EU, the U.S. and Canada, but Russia and Japan as well. The circle of extra-regional partners and sources of support narrowed with the establishment of the Regional Cooperation Council, which was to ensure the transfer of responsibility for further cooperation from the international community to the countries of the region.

The EU remained a key source of support for regional cooperation in SEE, primarily for the Western Balkans as the main target group. Contrary to the initial idea that the EU financing of the activities of the RCC would be gradually reduced from the original one-third share of the total budget of the organization, its financial support significantly increased. One reason is the global economic crisis that heavily struck most of the countries in the region and prevented them from increasing their contributions, and the other, more important one, is the assessment that the RCC demonstrated the capacity to successfully fulfill its mandate¹¹.

⁸ Members: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia. Observer: Ukraine. Supporting partners: Japan, Norway, Russia, Turkey, Switzerland, the United States, European Union member states and numerous international organizations. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stability_Pact_for_South_Eastern_Europe.

⁹ CEFTA 2006, Energy Community Treaty for South East Europe (ECT), Investment Committee for South East Europe (SEEIC), South East Europe Transport Observatory (SEETO), etc.

¹⁰ For participants of the RCC see <http://www.rcc.int/pages/14/structure>

¹¹ To enhance regional cooperation, support political, economic, social and institutional reforms in SEE countries and their European and Euro-Atlantic integration, and contribute to better donor coordination in the region.

The RCC has further managed to successfully coordinate and structure the activities of numerous regional initiatives and organizations formed in all the areas initially defined as RCC priorities¹². In 2013, after the RCC adopted its South East Europe (SEE) 2020 Strategy – *Jobs and Prosperity in a European Perspective* – the structure of the priority areas of action was partly remodeled and the RCC continued to work at three levels¹³.

It took almost 20 years before regional activities began focusing on improving living conditions in the region, competitiveness and development, closely following the vision of the EU Strategy Europe 2020. It was a great achievement to get to the shared vision of the SEE economies to create up to one million new jobs by 2020, increase total regional trade turnover by more than double from 94 to 210 billion Euro, raise the region's GDP per capita from present-day 36% to 44% of the EU average, and add 300,000 highly qualified people to the workforce¹⁴. Peace, stability and security remained high on the agenda, alongside the reconciliation process, which was expected to be an important outcome of all previously listed aspirations.

It should be noted that the flourishing of regional cooperation in the SEE happened in two stages. The first one was in the 2000-2007 period, mostly with the help and support of the Stability Pact for SEE¹⁵. The second wave started in 2008, when the region assumed much greater responsibility for its development through the establishment of the RCC. The gradual transformation of the RCC into the hub of regional cooperation, a mechanism for registering, monitoring and evaluating, and subsequently coordinating and harmonizing dispersed activities of numerous regional players, including better donor coordination and streamlining, has without any doubt played a role in the expansion of multilateral collaboration in SEE. In addition to all the described activities, the RCC also played the role of an incubator for new regional initiatives, in areas in which needs were identified but mechanisms of cooperation had not existed¹⁶.

¹² Economic and social development, energy and infrastructure, justice and home affairs, security cooperation, building human capital and the cross-cutting issues, such as parliamentary cooperation, gender, etc.

¹³ The first level, related to the implementation of the SEE2020 strategy, comprised all the previous priority areas except defense cooperation and greater part of the JHA portfolio, which were addressed at the second level as areas of key importance for the security and stability in the region in order to make possible any other regional activity including the SEE2020. Cross-cutting issues like parliamentary cooperation, gender, cooperation with civil society became the third level of operations fulfilling the mandate of the RCC.

¹⁴ <http://www.rcc.int/pages/62/south-east-europe-2020-strategy>.

¹⁵ The role of Austrian politician Dr. Erhard Busek should be underlined as the *spiritus movens* of that process.

¹⁶ Such as the RCC Task Force on Culture and Society, Social Agenda 2020, the Western Balkans Research and Innovation Strategy Exercise – WISE, working groups on environment and justice etc. <http://www.rcc.int/pages/87/annual-report-on-regional-cooperation-in-south-east-europe-2014-2015>.

The second wave coincided with the outbreak of the international financial and economic crisis, which heavily affected the region's main economic partner, the EU, and consequently the region as well. On the one hand, the available resources for supporting important projects in Europe and the world were reduced. However, in many areas of common interest the region itself took the initiative and demonstrated the will and capacity to identify common problems and articulate possible regional solutions that attracted support.

The current state of regional cooperation

More than 50 regional organizations, initiatives, task forces and other structures (RCC, CEFTA, SEEIC, ECT, etc.) emerged over the past 15 years. There are thousands of donor-funded regional projects in a multitude of areas, spanning from trade, investment, rural development and scientific cooperation to security and police cooperation. They imply broad participation of the public (parliaments, ministries, agencies, etc.) and private sectors, as well as civil society organizations. Important international organizations (IFIs, OECD, UNDP, ILO, etc.) as well as regional and other think tanks (TEPAV, LSE, WIIW¹⁷ etc.) have been involved in their implementation.

Besides security, stability, and reconciliation, which remain the key precondition and desired final outcome of cooperation, the main focus has shifted to the new priorities: institutional strengthening and good governance, competitive economies in the global marketplace, integrated infrastructure development and building knowledge-based societies. We have in recent years witnessed continuous strengthening of functional and sectoral cooperation in the region, contributing to the improvement of multilateral political relations, and improving, albeit oscillating, bilateral political relations. The intensity of regional activities can be qualified as impressive¹⁸.

¹⁷ Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV), the Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies (WIIW), the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).

¹⁸ An indicative sample of the recent regional meetings in the Western Balkans/South East Europe:

- Western Balkans Summit Vienna 2015, as the second conference of the Berlin Process, Vienna, Aug 26-27, 2015.
- Regional Business Conference, Mostar, July 6, 2015.
- The third meeting of Southeast European leaders as part of the Brdo-Brijuni Process, Budva, June 8, 2015.
- The South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) Summit, Tirana, May 26, 2015.
- Foreign Ministers of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP), Tirana, May 22, 2015.
- Regional Cooperation Council Annual Meeting, Tirana, May 22, 2015.
- The inaugural meeting of the Regional Working Group on Environment, Podgorica, May 14, 2015.
- Sarajevo Business Forum, May 13, 2015.
- Regional Cooperation Day, Brussels, May 6, 2015.

The region is now not only appropriately represented in different international and regional fora as an emerging entity, but its agenda is also more effectively communicated to the national administrations and other target groups (business, civil society, etc.). The development of institutional capacities at both the national and regional levels has also contributed to the fulfillment of EU accession-related obligations.

Regional initiatives have facilitated access to various European programs and contributed to the programming of the IPA Multi-Beneficiary Program (IPA MB) through the participation of their experts in IPA MB working groups and coordination meetings. Therefore, they play an important role in the process of European integration of the region not only as consultative bodies, but also increasingly as implementing agencies for the accession-related programs and projects.

The global economic crisis and the contraction of external markets brought to the fore the considerable expansion capacity of regional trade, particularly within the CEFTA framework. Yet, achievements of regional cooperation were limited as the resources and capacities were modest and political will has periodically been constrained by latent or open bilateral tensions.

Regional consultative and monitoring mechanisms have been created in many areas of cooperation (trade, investment, JHA, etc.), providing additional benchmarks for measuring progress along the path towards the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans. Even the most sensitive security institutions in the countries of the region have been motivated to establish close cooperation, including common strategic planning and monitoring.

The bottom-up approach has been gaining ground by strengthening the role and capacity for regional cooperation of the local authorities, business communities, professional organizations, academia, non-governmental organizations, trade unions, and media. The coherence and complementarities of the main regional processes, mechanisms and networks have increased despite the involvement of a broader range of stakeholders.

EU accession prospects are not the only factor underlying the establishment and development of regional cooperation. Authentic regional interests have emerged

- Combating Shadow Economy: A Necessity for Investments in SEE, Sarajevo, April 28, 2015.
- Regional Programmes in Culture and Creative Industries, Durres, April 28-29, 2015.
- The Third Meeting of the South East Europe (SEE) Tourism Expert Group (TEG), Belgrade, April 21-22, 2015.
- Meeting of Western Balkan 6 Prime Ministers on Priority Investments, Brussels, April 24, 2015.
- Ministerial Conference on Justice and Home Affairs, Budva, April 17, 2015.

and been recognized. The characteristics of these interests and those upholding them differ from one field of cooperation to another. Economic and some other forms of cooperation, such as in science, culture, and sport, among civil society organizations and local communities, have all developed in their own right, without too much intervention on the part of state institutions. With increasing frequency, however, it is the governments that stand firmly behind key projects on regulating the regional market, infrastructure, energy, and transport. Here, the EU has stimulated and assisted the emergence of institutions of cooperation¹⁹. New bodies of interest are being set up with a view to ensuring the long-term sustainability of multilateral cooperation.

Reconciliation remains an issue requiring constant attention

Of course, the Srebrenica and the “Storm” anniversaries caused major upheavals in the region, especially in the relations between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and between Serbia and Croatia. The first impression was that we returned to the starting point – the end of conflicts, with high emotions and animosities. Details of marking these anniversaries were this time often insulting to the victims. It seemed that twenty years of efforts by many political leaders, civil society, youths, women, war crimes courts, foreign donors, and peace organizations to help overcome the consequences of war and facilitate the normalization of relations in the region have failed. But the analysis that followed after the emotions quieted down and heads cooled indicates that all the previous efforts had not been in vain. The only concern is related to the impact of these earthquakes and suitability of previous forms through which the process of reconciliation had been taking place.

War crimes courts are still operating and even new ones are being established (Kosovo). RECOM²⁰ is still collecting facts on war crimes and governments generally do not interfere or obstruct its work. The Igman Initiative continues rallying politicians, parliamentarians, representatives of local authorities, NGOs, and international organizations round various forms of regional cooperation and reconciliation in BiH, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia, searching for formulas for longer-term cooperation, such as the Nordic Council.

During the greatest outbursts of nationalist feelings, the Croatian retail chain “Idea” officially opened new stores in Belgrade; popular Serbian singers performing in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia were welcomed by standing ovations; in downtown Belgrade, a Croatian jazz trio was playing popular music in a street cafe;

film, music, and theater festivals brought together artists from the neighboring countries; people could buy books from the neighboring countries in their local bookstores; goods have continued crossing borders; Serbs vacationed in Croatia (but the expelled ones did not go back) and life went on. One Croatian commentator²¹ called on regional politicians not to reconcile people in the region, just not to disturb those who wanted to cooperate.

Serbian Prime Minister Vučić offered a new formula of “aggressive reconciliation”, as a Belgrade commentator dubbed his proposal of a joint Memorial Day for all the victims of Yugoslav wars²². His proposal has been rejected so far; all the victims should be recognized and documented before an initiative like this one can be accepted.

Although the expectations are focused on the triangle Serbia-BiH-Croatia as well as Serbia-Kosovo, it seems that the axis of the new dynamism in regional reconciliation will go along the Belgrade-Tirana line. So far this axis appears the most promising. After a major earthquake, tranquility is always greeted with relief, and people continue to circulate ever more easily within regional borders.

Consequences of the EU enlargement Process ‘regatta principle’ on regional cooperation

The “regatta” accession of the Western Balkan countries to the EU is merit based. Countries fulfilling the membership approach to eventual requirements and able to prove they are ready to join the club should be admitted. It can also be perceived as an impetus to the competitive race for accession that is expected to spur reforms in the countries concerned. The recent announcement by the European Commission that Brussels plans to change the methodology of assessing achievements in its annual progress reports on the Western Balkan countries is very indicative in that respect. “The new methodology will be more precise, evaluating achievements of governments in key areas on a five-point scale. It will provide an objective comparison is the country prepared and to what degree for membership. We have introduced a degree of competition between governments, so that each country can see where it is compared to the region. We hope this will spur reforms”²³.

¹⁹ See footnote 9.

²⁰ RECOM, the regional commission to determine the number of victims of the wars in the former Yugoslavia, rallies over 1800 civil society organizations and individuals from all states created after dissolution of the former Yugoslavia.

²¹ Zlatko Crnčec, “Political Reconciliation in the Balkans is Unnecessary”, *Novi List*, Rijeka, as quoted by Belgrade daily *Danas*, August 13, 2015.

²² Zoran Panović, “Delirium in Livno”, daily *Danas*, August 15-16, 2015.

²³ EC official David Hudson, as quoted in a report on BIRN Conference: Media Freedom Being Rolled Back in Balkans“, *BIRN*, June 12 2015, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/birn-conference-media-freedom-being-rolled-back-in-balkans>.

However, there are warnings that the slowing down of the accession talks and exclusion of several Western Balkan countries from this phase of the enlargement process might lead to further divisions in the Western Balkans²⁴. An author of a paper published in *Foreign Affairs* has already divided the countries by their level of stability and implicitly difficulties with the state building process – and singled out BiH, Macedonia, and Kosovo as sources of instability in the region²⁵. However, if developments in the EU lead to in-depth restructuring and a three-tier EU, Western Balkan countries will remain together regardless of their achievements in the accession process in the short or mid-term²⁶.

The main challenges to further deepen regional cooperation

The main challenges to furthering regional cooperation are intra- and extra-regional; political and sectoral; structural and technical; short term and long term. All of them combined demonstrate the complexity of regional cooperation in the Western Balkans and SEE.

In general, regional cooperation is moving forward. The Western Balkans is the driving force of regional cooperation with the highest density of networks, links, and activities in this part of the wider region²⁷. Changes envisaged in the Southeast European Cooperation Process (SEEC) aimed at strengthening this initiative will also influence both political and sectoral cooperation in the region via the changing balance between the wider SEE framework and the Western Balkans (greater stress on the pan-Balkan initiatives in the area of infrastructure,

energy, parliamentary cooperation, business, security cooperation).

On the other hand, developments within the EU and the further evolution of the EU enlargement policy have great impact on regional cooperation. The new European Commission sent a negative message about the future perspectives of EU enlargement in 2014, when it said that no further enlargement would take place in the next five years. Changes in the portfolio of the Directorate General in charge of enlargement were also a manifestation of “enlargement fatigue” (signaling that the Commission’s task in the next five-year mandate was not enlargement but “enlargement negotiations”). Simultaneously, the EU has evidently taken a more demanding approach to the enlargement process: “The EU has set the bar higher than in previous enlargements. Its ongoing internal challenges resulted in less dedication to the region (mixed accession signals, small incentives)... Moreover, the enlargement environment is more disintegrated than ever with diverse paces of integration both in the EU and the Western Balkans. There is a different negotiation technique required in comparison with the earlier times (more chapters, interim benchmarks, equilibrium clause, and additional emphasis on economic criteria)”²⁸.

Of course, the region is also affected by changes on the broader international stage – the economic and financial crisis, with its social consequences, conflicts in the neighboring regions and the refugee crisis, as well as the changing power balance.

The political will of the main players of regional cooperation is essential. However, the region is facing persistent domestic obstacles on this road: internal disagreements; slow and partial reforms; fragile democratic institutions and poor governance; endemic corruption; and, above all, frequent ethnic turmoil. Lack of appropriate institutional, human, and financial capacities to support political willingness means that commitments are not always coupled with the tools needed to reach the objectives agreed at the political level. There are also problems of intra-governmental coordination within SEE administrations, fragmentation, lack of coordination of numerous activities at the regional level and, above all, physical barriers to better communication in the region (transport and communications infrastructure, for example).

Therefore, there is a need to address regional cooperation in a more strategic manner, and to increase the relevance and effectiveness of the regional initiatives themselves. That was the main purpose of the develop-

²⁴ Knut Fleckenstein, “Continuing on-going accession negotiations without opening additional negotiations during the next five years entails a clear risk of dividing the Western Balkans even further. The countries would be divided into those that have already started accession negotiations and those that are relegated behind and that, independently from their reform efforts, would have to wait for at least five more years before reaching the same stage of the EU accession process”. *Proposals for a S&D position towards the Western Balkans and their ‘European perspective’*, European Parliament, December 2014.

²⁵ Edward P. Joseph, “The Balkans, Interrupted”, *Foreign Affairs*, May 10, 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/southeastern-europe/2015-05-10/balkans-interrupted>.

²⁶ Cornelius Adebahr, “Finally, discussion about a possible British exit from the EU will trigger a debate about a three-tier EU, with political union in the eurozone, a bigger single market group comprising the United Kingdom and possibly Turkey (as well as the Western Balkans one day), and a broader union of democracy and the rule of law based on membership in the Council of Europe – and therefore including Ukraine and the countries of the South Caucasus. Europe still needs more integration, but at different levels”. In “Judy Dempsey Asks: Is Now the Time for More European Integration?”, *Carnegie Europe*, July 15, 2015, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=60714>.

²⁷ In the overview of 47 regional cooperation initiatives in the South East Europe, the average membership for the Western Balkan countries is 46, comparing with 25 for Bulgaria and Romania or 17 for Slovenia and Turkey. *Serbia and Kosovo: European Perspectives and Practicalities*, European Movement in Serbia, Belgrade, 2014, pp.167-175.

²⁸ *European integration of the Western Balkans – can the Visegrad Group countries serve as role models?*, ed. Jelica Minić, European Movement in Serbia, 2015, <http://www.emins.org/uploads/useruploads/forum-it/02-PA-V4Studija.pdf>.

ment and adoption of the SEE 2020 Strategy²⁹. The intensification of regional cooperation in the Western Balkans should be supported by all means and the most viable and efficient regional initiatives should be provided with adequate financial support.

Long term development of regional cooperation is closely linked with the further evolution of the existing regional structures, primarily the RCC and SEECP, but CEFTA, the Energy Community for SEE, et al as well. It also substantially depends on the EU enlargement policy including new initiatives such as the Berlin Process³⁰, or other formats recently launched to enhance EU cooperation with the six Western Balkan states (WB6)³¹.

Above all, it is crucial how deeply certain measures undertaken to interlink regional players will take root and to establish a long lasting structure of interests capable of holding the region together.

²⁹ <http://www.rcc.int/files/user/docs/reports/SEE2020-Strategy.pdf>.

³⁰ <http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/EN/Pressemitteilungen/BPA/2014/2014-08-28-balkan.html>, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014_Conference_of_Western_Balkan_States_Berlin.

³¹ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-14-481_en.htm.

THE STATE OF REGIONAL COOPERATION AND THE REMAINING CHALLENGES

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How far along the road have the Western Balkans truly travelled since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of Yugoslavia twenty five years ago in restoring their European values and approaching what is inevitably the common perspective of integration for the region? This is yet again a topical issue, especially after the ghosts of the past have been awoken over the past months, ghosts that again are proving wrong those who advocated that the Western Balkans will steadily walk towards EU membership and giving wind to those skeptics of future Balkan progress. Or have they never been put to sleep? Or, are they the same ghosts that haunt the Europeans over the approach to migrants and asylum policy? At the same time, recent efforts to cooperate more closely on infrastructure have contained more dialog where it never existed; while, arrangements for the border agreements have given ground to the optimistic expectations that things are accelerating towards ever more cooperation and stability. These two processes go hand in hand, creating contrasting feelings about the Balkans.

To the skeptics, and Brussels is full of those, there is one main question that comes to their mind – do we as the region stay firm on our pro-European path or are we constantly being distracted by our, historically speaking, recent past? Unfortunately, but naturally, the answer is only to some extent positive. The atrocities of the Balkans war must never be forgotten. And this is why a stable regional cooperation under the EU mechanisms will not fully prevail unless supported by sincere reconciliation and the assumption of guilt by each. This brings to attention another fact that at times may be lost from the horizon: the foreign policy of the countries of the region is painted by the same colors – we are all defined by the fate of our neighbors because none of us is an island. Therefore, reconciliation, respect, forgiveness, and open-heartedness represent the core infrastructure of regional relations and our future cooperation under the EU umbrella. In this context, it is especially important to note its interconnection with the enhancement of the existing institutional frameworks and their real capacity to underpin it.

However, as the reconciliation remains the matter to be treated in the course of time and cherished as a question with deeply human dimensions, the endeavors that have been made by the Balkans together with its European partners to strengthen the dialog during the previous years should not be forgotten.

The Thessaloniki Ministerial Conference of May 8, 2014¹ reconfirmed the unequivocal commitment of the EU to the European perspective of the Western Balkans region, in line with the 2003 Thessaloniki EU-Western

¹ www.gr2014.eu

Balkans Summit documents². It also stressed regional cooperation and good-neighborly relations as the significant components that need to be further enhanced, especially through the aligned development of the regional infrastructure.

Chancellor Angela Merkel further reinforced the idea in August 2014 in Berlin by clearly showing an interest of the EU and the Member States to further pursue the enlargement to the Western Balkans as well as regional cooperation. It proved to be a political message of huge importance and potential. The key step towards deepening the political and economic integration of the region was recognized by capitals Europe-wide, but also throughout the region.

From the regional perspective, the improvement of infrastructure in the Balkans is not only the matter of improving the connectivity, communication or development. It is also very important for the good security policy. Feebly developed transport and trade connections result in weak economic cooperation. Restoration of cross-border ties through new corridors and routes requires significant investment, at a cost way beyond the financial capacities of the Balkan economies. This is why European political will is important and this is why future Balkan development plans should be based along the lines of the recent Vienna meeting of our Prime Ministers. It gives the region a chance to deepen political and economic integration, creating conditions for easier transition to the common market of the EU, the effective pursuit of the four freedoms, and lastly thus making an economically stronger, more secure and safer area at the southern flank of the continent. It is also an opportunity to discuss the issues of migration, both from the Western Balkans and through it and a chance for the Prime Ministers to discuss the issues that are also on the table of the European Councils.

Speaking of infrastructure, meetings of Heads of the states, Prime Ministers and Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Economy in Budva, Belgrade, Pristina and Brussels in the year between Berlin and Vienna show that the region and the EU have recognized this and that they all tend to see this part of Europe better connected, economically strengthened, governed by the rule of law and attractive for further foreign investments.

Hand in hand with the priorities of the Union, the region should underpin its sustained growth over the medium-term by focusing on the energy supply and the development priorities of interconnection transmission energy networks. For example, Montenegro is determined to see to the construction of the underwater energy cable with Italy, construction of new inter-connection lines to connect Montenegrin power system with Bosnian

and/or Serbian, expansion of the Pljevlja power plant, and the future plans on connections to TAP through the Ionian Adriatic Gas Pipeline. These are the projects of regional character that better unite the countries in pursuing their common interests than loads of declarations or agreements.

Regional cooperation relies to a great extent on bilateral economic relations. The foreign trade statistics speak of the interdependency of countries in the region. According to the Montenegrin Statistical Office, the foreign trade exchange data for 2013 imply that the highest foreign trade exchange was noted with the CEFTA signatories and the EU. In export, main foreign trade exchange partners were individually: Serbia (€133.5 million), Croatia (€59.5 million), Slovenia (€36 million), and import: Serbia (€505.9 million) and Greece (€149.8 million)³.

Foreign policy priorities of all the countries in the region include good neighborly relations as the cornerstone of the integration processes and determine the conduct of regional cooperation. A number of initiatives in the region in the last years have proven to be a good framework for fostering bilateral cooperation, as well as the grounds for maintaining stability and promotion of close neighborly relations. The question that regularly pops up is whether forty-something regional initiatives and organizations in the Balkans are really needed. Is the money spent on so many of them really used to the good of the region and whether there should be more streamlining and efficiency in the whole process of cooperation? Can any of them address the most topical issue of illegal migrations, readmission, and asylum? These are the questions to which the capitals of the Western Balkans together with Brussels should pay more attention and devote more energy in trying to revive the mechanisms of collaboration.

For example, let us take the issue of Multi-country Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). With representatives of the EU on board, this mechanism should provide a framework for looking into the needs and plans of the countries and the region. What the countries of the region miss is the feeling that they are being asked how the EU grants are distributed among the regional and international organizations. At a number of times one could hear complaints by the governments in the region that they had no idea about certain activities of why certain areas are deemed more important than the other ones. There is a missing link in the overall story of proposing projects and overseeing their implementation – and regional organizations have not been able to fill the gap and perform as a binding link in-between the two.

² http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/gena/76201.pdf.

³ www.monstat.org.

A lot has been done in the past two decades but the region still needs to focus on the enhancement of regional cooperation, both bilaterally and through the multilateral fora. Having mentioned this, the Balkans certainly has a broad platform to do so and to continue to work through the initiatives that stand at its disposal, using as well the micro-strategies such as Adriatic Ionian Initiative and Danube Initiative, which narrow down cooperation to the area of the specific, mutual interests. Strengthening security in the Adriatic area as well as intensifying cooperation among countries of the region can be further pursued through the platform provided by the Adriatic Ionian Macro-region. Both by continuing the political dialog and multilateral cooperation under this format will ensure further enhancement of transport, maritime affairs, fisheries, education, science, and development of small and medium-sized enterprises. Exchange of innovations and the best practices in the broader region could be guaranteed by the implementation of the Danube Strategy, as well as the joint action in the area of environment protection, energy connectivity, mobility, promotion of tourism and culture.

Integration processes offer the possibility to further develop national mechanisms operating in the rule of law area and to jointly enable the Western Balkans to make progress and fulfill European standards. The intensive communication in international and regional planning has been achieved in the area of fighting organized crime. Through safe communication channels (Interpol, Europol, Selec), which the region is a part of now, the information related to police investigations are efficiently exchanged with a view to suppressing all forms of crime. In the context of regional cooperation, the importance of mechanisms such as the Convention on South East Europe police cooperation must be noted. There should be ever more cooperation at the international and regional level and further realize the successful international endeavors of the police.

Police actions that have been undertaken with the Western Balkans countries and international partners that resulted in resolving the severe criminal offences in the area of organized crime have significant effects, as revealed by the measurable results in this area. This is noted due to the fact that after setting the adequate legislative framework in the area of the rule of law, a good track record in the area of fighting the organized crime will be essential.

Nowadays, Europe is facing maybe the worst migration crisis so far. In respect to this challenge, joint solutions are needed, not only among the EU countries, but much broader, in entire Europe. On our part, the region must invest its efforts to align with the EU *acquis* in the area of border security management. The countries of the region should concentrate on developing their national Schengen Action plans in order to be prepared to take responsibility for securing the external frontiers of the

EU once they become members. But the real challenge is for the Balkans to stay calm and help the people transiting on the Balkan routes to the EU. This is not just a test for European solidarity, but also a test for the Balkans to show its capacities in catching smugglers and traffickers and assisting the ones in need.

The EU umbrella provides multiple possibilities for generations to come. The investment in knowledge will benefit individuals, organizations, but also the whole societies and at the same time provide prosperity and social inclusion in the region and the EU. The programs such as Erasmus+ provide the opportunity for young people to go beyond their own borders and acquire new knowledge. The dialogue was successfully held at the conference 'Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of Youth in Action' (RAY) held in Vienna in May this year to foster further development of the youth policy⁴. But the young can have an opportunity to find jobs and pursue their careers in the region only if it manages to improve its economy and offer more employment, better standards and a brighter future.

It takes understanding that none of the processes are unrelated. Economic growth as well as good governance within the public administration may not be achieved aside of reforms in the rule of law, just as the rule of law cannot be further strengthened without economic progress. To some extent the Balkans can round up our individual progresses at homes, but tomorrow, as the members of the Union and equal players in the common market, the region must make an additional effort.

We have all been recently reminded, on the occasion of marking hundred years since the Great War that such tragic events warn of the need for a responsible attitude towards ourselves, towards our neighbors, and towards Europe. It is best defended by a hard work, democratic and economic development, equality, and a respect for the rights and freedoms of its citizens.

One is certain, it takes more than just a will to make this happen. We can be certain that both the political and the entire intellectual elite in the region do not lack it. It does need assistance from its European partners, especially as the path to the Union becomes steeper and harder to climb. Ideally, as the region moves towards the same goal, better connectivity and cooperation should help at every move.

The Western Balkan countries must take their reform agenda more seriously when it comes to both political and economic criteria for the EU membership. This is the precondition of any success. Along the lines of the mentioned initiatives, regional cooperation has to be

⁴ <https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/european-training-calendar/training/ray-triangular-summit-international-youth-work-and-mobility-research-evidence-for-policy-and-practice.4873/>.

upgraded to reflect the current challenges and opportunities. In dealing with its priorities – and these are maintaining stability, pursuing economic development through ensuring transport and energy connectivity, regulating migration flows and creation of societies based on growth and knowledge – the region, together with its European Union partners, has to be creative, well-focused, diligent, and adaptive. This is the only way forward to guarantee success and a better life for its citizens.

FOSTERING REFORMS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS – FIGHTING CORRUPTION AS AN IMPORTANT MILESTONE

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It is a standard line that European integration of the remaining six countries of the Western Balkans (WB), namely Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia, is the key challenge, a crucial framework for conducting reforms which would make these countries eligible candidates for European Union (EU) membership while at the same time building them up as functioning, stable and prosperous nation-states.

However, the path from this starting point is in no way easy as the experience from the last two decades shows. All these countries are associated with the EU through the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP), a specially designed instrument for the WB countries to facilitate their reform processes and bring them closer to the EU. The criticism that this is the framework that will keep the region permanently at the European doorstep proved invalid once Croatia, a former participant in the SAP, joined the EU in 2013. This has been the best proof that there is a membership perspective for the remaining countries, providing they meet the necessary conditions.

A new kind of criticism which says that the fulfillment of membership criteria is a more daunting task now than it was for Croatia, and certainly much more cumbersome than it was for the 2004 and 2007 enlargements, while at the same time the six current and potential candidates are much weaker states, has some resonance but does not alter the basic premise – only with full adherence to EU-required conditions would they be able to join the EU.

We can argue if this is the right approach, but it is the one from which the EU and its member states seem not to show a sign of possible deviation. Coupled with the ongoing crises in the EU and its neighborhood, the insistence on strict fulfillment of the *acquis* and a few additional conditions appears to be a common policy for member states in dealing with any further enlargement. Even members who are traditionally pro-enlargement and those who resist ‘deepening’ of the Union, would not at the present moment act as sponsors of enlargement that allows for exemptions from the conditionality.

Yet, as said, these are rather weak states – underperforming economically, institutionally frail, struggling to overcome the onerous legacy of the wars in the 1990s. Unemployment, in particular of the youth, corruption, deindustrialization, poor social services, and limited media freedoms contribute to the mood of depression and fatalism. Young generations dream of leaving these countries in search of a better future and many have put their dreams in action. The emigration, and brain drain accompanying it, has been pervasive in the region in the

last years. The most recent data shows that every fourth young person would leave BiH in an instant if there was a chance and 40% of the youth would like to settle somewhere else for an extended period of time¹. The situation is similar in other WB states.²

With all this in mind, the EU is making attempts to re-invigorate the reform processes in the region by offering substantial financial assistance to improve the economic and political governance. The region of the Western Balkans is surrounded by EU member states and despite aversion to further enlargement in a number of member states, integrating six new members with a total population of less than 19 million people, a number of whom already have EU citizenship, would not be an impossible task on the condition they are reformed to be able to perform as EU member states.

The two issues are here at play – one is the ultimate willingness of the countries in the region to genuinely pursue reforms and step up their efforts, the second is unequivocal demonstration of the will of the EU to assist them in this process.

In a recent publication of the ECFR (European Council on Foreign Relations), the authors ask whether the EU is losing this region?³ From the perspective of many EU officials, this seems as an unfair question, a reference also to the statement of the High Representative Federica Mogherini made at the meeting at which this report was produced.⁴ However, the criticism of the experts is that the EU focuses on the process rather than substance. The fear is that this could result in the Western Balkans falling into a kind of ‘strategic limbo’, neither in, neither out, a playing ground for actors competing with the EU, not sufficiently developed or democratized to resist the lure of authoritarianism, revamped nationalism, and all other forms of anti-liberalism in politics and economy.⁵

The Berlin process as an antidote

Better economic conditions along with strengthening the democratic rule of law would counter such tendencies. The Berlin process, a 5-year process named after

the capital of the country that took the initiative, should bring the desired incentive.

It focuses on a regional approach, i.e. seeks to strengthen links among the countries and in doing so induce them to cooperate instead of pursuing separate and often antagonistic agendas. The format takes place through infrastructure projects, primarily transport and energy networks, but also education, vocational training, and support to civil society. The Vienna meeting, the second one in the Berlin process, which took place on August 27, 2015 resulted in the EU commitment of 200 million euros of grants in addition to 400 million euros which will be secured through loans by financial institutions. Six transport infrastructure investment projects and four in the area of energy were agreed in Vienna.⁶

These are, indeed, good news. The hope is that this will create a positive climate which would propel leaders of WB countries to commit to reforms and to have the opportunity to see economic growth and job creation through these investments, a focus which adds to the insistence on upholding democratic freedoms and concern about minority rights, which the EU has been mostly associated with in the region. If there is an increasing economic benefit through closer partnership with the EU, the EU can be certain to generate more supporters for the reform processes. Yet, a word of caution is necessary here.

EU leaders present in Vienna commended progress made in the EU-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina dialog and the signing of the border agreements between Montenegro and BiH, and Montenegro and Kosovo. These are excellent pieces of news. Unresolved bilateral issues burden the relations between states and create in general the sense of a region being locked into a web of insolvable issues. Breakthroughs are possible; they should be acknowledged and further encouraged.

The EU’s facilitation of such processes is all fine for the time being. In the end, however, we wait to see leaders in the region making the initiative and settling outstanding issues by themselves, reaching out for support only in a case of impasse or a serious breach of trust. To reach this level of committed, responsible, and reliable leadership, the EU and engaged member states should do more in the meantime.

It requires no new summits, no new financial transfers, no new institutions, and no additional manpower. There is one policy which can have multiple, positive effects in terms of strengthening good governance, building institutions, reinforcing democratic standards, instigating

¹ FENA (Federal News Agency BiH), ‘Purivatra: svaki četvrti mladi čovjek napustio bi BiH’ [Purivatra: every fourth young person would leave BiH], 30 August 2015 at http://www.fena.ba/public2/NewsPrint.aspx?news_id=FSA1469727.

² See also Vlasta Ilišin *et al.*, ‘Youth in a time of crisis’, First IDIZ-Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Youth Survey, Zagreb, 2013 at http://www.fes.hr/E-books/pdf/YOUTH_IN_A_TIME_OF_CRISIS.pdf.

³ Francisco de Borja Lasheras and Vessela Tcherneva, ‘Is the EU losing the Western Balkans? What local experts think’, European Council on Foreign Relations, 5 August 2015, at http://www.ecfr.eu/article/is_the_eu_losing_the_western_balkans_what_local_experts_think3093.

⁴ Sofia Platform, the European Council on Foreign Relations, 29 July 2015, at <http://sofiaplatform.org/2015-2/>.

⁵ See the ECFR report.

⁶ The ‘Final Declaration of the Chair of the Western Balkans Summit’, 27 August 2015, Vienna at http://www.bmeia.gv.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Zentrale/Aussenpolitik/Chairman_s_Conclusions_Western_Balkans_Summit.pdf.

hope among citizens that change is possible and underpinning the sense of ownership of their countries and of their destinies. This is the fight against corruption. Successive polls systematically show that a high percentage of citizens in every WB state view corruption as one of most difficult problems in their societies. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime conducted a research funded by the European Commission and found that the largest worry for citizens in the Western Balkans is unemployment, followed by poverty but corruption comes at a worrying third place.⁷ Transparency International (TI) successively reports on high levels of perception of corruption in all the countries in the region. In its recommendations writing on BiH in 2014, TI states that political will is a crucial first step to reducing corruption. Yet, officials seem to lack the genuine will to tackle it.⁸

Failure to address the gravity of citizens' concerns concerning corruption could undermine positive initiatives or, at least, to slow them down. It is encouraging to see that the EU maintains momentum and keeps the process of enlargement alive with respect to the WB. It is also not fair to expect that the Union shows more concern for worries of citizens in the region than do their respective governments. Yet, if it is seriously committed to seeing WB countries become members one day, the EU can and should demonstrate more political will on its own side to see the fight against corruption handled with determination and without reservation.

This does not imply that member states send their own judges, interfere in judicial proceedings or in any other way take direct responsibility, yet, they can and should do it indirectly – through official statements, training of judges, support to investigative journalists and linking specific assistance to progress in the fight against corruption.

In general, all these countries have established the necessary institutions and adopted legislations designed to reduce corruption in their societies. The main challenge now is to put these into practice. The EU will not have a partner among a number of leaders in the region, except declaratively. This should not be a reason to shy away. After all, the EU is acting in its own best faith and bestowing its own principles.

The long-term view with intermediary steps

The economic reform process, investments in infrastructure projects, boosting of trade and accelerating of exports are crucial and indispensable. A robust economy is the nerve of resilient societies. Investments that could be made through IPA II (1 billion euros for the period 2014-2020) and through other financial instruments could create a momentum for positive breakthroughs in the region. What must not be forgotten, though, is that this region has hardly suffered from profound financial deprivation. Earlier humanitarian aid and post-war reconstruction assistance, however, were given with fewer conditions attached. In some cases it bred comfortable irresponsibility on the part of ruling elites. Changing this mentality is a long-term process.

The new generation of leaders is the hope for the future. Investments in education and student mobility should facilitate further development of these countries. That the EU and the participating states from the region agreed to work strategically in the direction of improving education and assisting student mobility within the region and the EU is a very, very positive sign. Education, in the long run, is the determinant of success. Most young people in the region do not travel. One study in BiH found that over 50 per cent of young people never travelled abroad. Their in-country mobility is also low.⁹ How can regional cooperation become vibrant and durable if people do not meet? It is not enough for politicians to meet – students, businesses, activists also need to meet each other.

It is encouraging to see that there is now a clear recognition of the quintessence importance of education for development of economy and democracy in WB states (globally, I would say). Informed, open-minded and tolerant generations are more difficult to manipulate. Education in a competitive but fair and friendly environment instills values that are later reflected in every other aspect of a person's life. Meeting fellow students from neighboring countries is the most effective way to build links, dispel fear, confront prejudice, and foster reconciliation.

Excellence in research and education is the best insurance against mediocre, second-rate, closed societies, which do not create new wealth and from which the brightest leave as soon as they can. Through IPA II, special grants, bilateral donations – investment in youth and education pays off in multiple ways.

⁷ UNODC, 'Corruption in the western Balkans', 2011 at http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/corruption/Western_balkans_corruption_report_2011_web.pdf. The same results were reported in a poll conducted in Serbia, Blic online, 'Šta najviše muči građane Srbije' [What is the biggest worry of citizens in Serbia], 2012, <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Drustvo/333888/Sta-na-jvise-muci-gradjane-Srbije>.

⁸ Transparency International, Overview, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2014, https://www.transparency.org/country/#BIH_DataResearch.

⁹ Buka portal, 'Mladi u BiH: nisu pasivni, većina pokušava da pronade posao' [Youth in BiH: not passive, the majority is trying to find a job], 30 August 2015, interview with a spokesperson of the Institute for Youth Development KULT, at <http://www.6yka.com/novost/88157/-mladi-u-bih-nisu-pasivni-vecina-pokusava-da-prona-de-posao>.

If education is a long-term goal, and economic growth via infrastructure investments and other instruments a middle-term one, tackling corruption can start tomorrow. All that is required is already in place. It *just* needs to be put in motion. Corruption in higher education is reported to be significant in the Balkans.¹⁰ “The effect of this corruption has had a debilitating effect on these institutions. It decreases the quality of education, creates inequality among current and enrolling students, damages the credibility of universities, erodes motivation, and detaches students from the institutions serving them.”¹¹ Tackling corruption in higher education can be a sensible beginning.

¹⁰ See 'Regionalno istraživanje na percepcija za korupcija vo visoko obrazovanie' [Regional research on perception of corruption in higher education] published by Youth Educational Forum, Skopje in 2013 as a result of the research conducted by the Anti-Corruption Student Network in South East Europe. Report in Macedonian available at <http://www.mof.mk/mofmk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Mof-brosura-regionalno-istrazivanje-za-web1.pdf>

¹¹ Dona Kosturanova, 'For Students in the Balkans, an Education in Corruption', 19 March 2015 at <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/world-s-most-corrupt-university-system>.

CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM AT THE VIENNA SUMMIT: BETWEEN HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND MODEST ACHIEVEMENTS

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The Western Balkan Summit took place on August 27, 2015 in Vienna. It brought together the Prime Ministers, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministers of Economy of the Western Balkan countries together with the President and Members of the European Commission, Presidents of International Financial Institutions, and the Prime Ministers of several EU countries and other high level officials. This was the continuation of the ‘Berlin process’, initiated by Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, in 2014. The idea of the summit is to sustain the Western Balkans’ EU integration momentum and to improve regional cooperation.

The main topics discussed between the heads of states at the Vienna summit were ‘infrastructure and connectivity’, ‘regional cooperation’, ‘youth’, and the ‘refugee challenge’.¹ The huge influx of refugees came abruptly on the agenda as a pressing policy concern and a prime time media headline. It overshadowed the other issues, but failed to yield concrete and joint policies or plans of actions. The political leaders agreed on projects that were prepared before hand, for example several infrastructure projects, and to establish a regional youth exchange system based on the German-French youth office. One day before the meeting between the heads of state, a civil society forum was organized, where civil society representatives from the Western Balkan countries had the chance to interact with the political leaders. This was an interesting novelty in the framework of the Western Balkan Summit. Most of the political leaders from the Western Balkan countries are not used to talking to civil society at eye level; on the contrary, in Montenegro, Serbia, and Macedonia, civil society representatives have come under government pressure.²

To some extent, the foreign press was disappointed in the outcomes of the summit. For example, newspapers in Germany pointed out that the political leaders managed to agree on infrastructure projects worth 600 million Euros, but that the region, faced with huge waves of refugees, was suffering from degradation of democracy and economic deterioration.³ The foreign press did not give great attention to the civil society forum. The

¹ For more detailed information about the background and outcomes of the summit see the Federal Ministry for European Integration and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Austria: <http://www.bmeia.gv.at/en/european-foreign-policy/foreign-policy/western-balkans-summit-vienna-2015/>.

² For more see Florian Bieber, “Small steps and (not so) great expectations. Notes from the Vienna Summit”, *Balkans in Europe Policy Blog*, 28.08.2015 (available at <http://www.suedosteuropa.uni-graz.at/biepag/node/168>).

³ For more see DeutscheWelle, “Самитот во Виена – скромни резултати, лажна хармонија” [Vienna Summit – modest results, false harmony], 28.08.2015 (available at http://www.dw.com/mk/macq=maz-rss-mazpol_makedonija_timem k-47 27-xml-mrss).

same goes for most of the media outlets in the region. But the media did not fail to cover the football match between politicians from the Western Balkans and the EU, which the latter lost.

On the other hand, some of the media in the region reported that civil society representatives, in the framework of the summit, called the political leaders to secure greater freedom of expression and independence of media, and greater involvement of civil society in Euro-Atlantic integration processes.⁴

What was the Civil Society Forum?

The Civil Society Forum was a joint initiative of the Erste Foundation, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), and the Karl Renner Institute, in close cooperation with the Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Austria. It was also supported by the European Fund for the Balkans (EFB), the Balkan Investigative Research Network (BIRN), and the Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG).

These organizations structured and facilitated the inclusion of the civil society at the Vienna summit. In the first instance, in cooperation with the Austrian ministry, three issues were outlined in which civil society representatives could provide their input. The three issues were regional cooperation, freedom of expression and media freedoms, and jobs and prosperity. The next step was taken up by BiEPAG members, who produced three analytical papers covering the main issues in the three areas. The papers were presented to civil society representatives and served as frameworks for discussion. Three separate workshops were organized where numerous civil society representatives were invited to discuss the issues and give their input. For example, FES organized a workshop on jobs and prosperity in Tirana, EFB organized a workshop about regional cooperation in Belgrade, and BIRN organized a workshop about freedom of expression and media freedoms in Sarajevo.

Following the workshops' discussions, several recommendations were developed concerning regional cooperation, freedom of expression and media freedoms, and jobs and prosperity. Civil society representatives identified ways in which they can contribute in overcoming the existing challenges in these areas. Also, they gave recommendations how to overcome some of the remaining issues, such as: dealing with the past, improving regional cooperation, building networks and partnerships, protection of journalists, freedom of media, and opening

new jobs. Civil society organizations vouched to support and/or to monitor the policy implementation, and offered further policy advice. Civil society representatives offered to contribute to policies and strategies that strengthen regional cooperation on social development issues and to contribute toward the development of the institutional and legal environment for civil society on the regional level.

In the past, civil society representatives in many occasions took initiatives to improve the work of the public institutions. The civil society in the Western Balkans has demonstrated that it has the capacity to improve the quality of public services and to compliment the delivery of public goods and services. This has been done through advising public institutions with policy research and expert analysis, but also through helping and supporting the citizens with volunteering and humanitarian actions.

In addition to the recommendations in the three areas, BiEPAG members prepared a policy brief on existing bilateral disputes that impede EU integration and suggested possible ways to overcome them.⁵ The open issues between the countries range from unresolved border and political disputes to issues of statehood and national identities, and minority rights. Besides having the potential to block the EU path of individual countries, these issues pose a security concern in the region. The key recommendations were for Western Balkan governments to sign a joint declaration in which they would commit not to use bilateral disputes to block individual countries' accession negotiations; to initiate an annual review of the state of bilateral disputes within the Berlin process; to facilitate mediation where bilateral efforts fail to yield results, and to create a common framework for the resolution of border disputes.

There was an inclusive and consultative process to provide a comprehensive and structured contribution of civil society to the Vienna summit. One of the underlying ideas was that civil society, building on its credibility, honesty, and integrity, can enrich the policy making process. The recommendations and the bilateral disputes policy brief gave direct proposal for the policy making process. Civil society representatives were invited to Vienna to further discuss their policy contribution and if possible to make the policy recommendations more direct and operational. Also, they were invited to discuss among themselves the future content and perspectives of the Western Balkan summit to consider possibilities how the framework of civil society involvement could be organized or even potentially institutionalized in future, and to plan their future involve-

⁴ For more see BIRN, "Граѓанските активисти бараат проширена улога во иднината на Балканот" [Civil activists demand greater role in the future of the Balkans], 28.08.2015 (available at <http://prizma.birn.eu.com>).

⁵ For more see Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG), "Removing Obstacles to EU Accession: Bilateral disputes in the Western Balkans", *Policy Brief*, August, 2015 (available at <http://balkanfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/BIEPAG-Policy-brief-web.pdf>).

ment on the national level after the summit, and to brainstorm about potential contributions until the next summit, which is to take place in Paris.

There were different expectations for the Civil Society Forum. There were some high expectations, not shared by many though, that the Forum can make the first step toward chaining the policy-making paradigm in the Western Balkan countries, i.e. to turn it from a centralized and not transparent process into an inclusive and participatory policy-making. Other expectations were more realistic and pointed out that it is already an achievement to have the civil society present at the summit, and that a sufficient outcome would be to decrease the tensions and hostilities between civil society and politicians on the national level. The realistic demand was to change the mode of interaction and to open new avenues for increased cooperation.

Civil society representatives had several interactions with the political leaders during the summit. On the one hand, a public debate between political leaders and civil society representatives was organized, but it did not meet all of the expectations, as Vedran Džihić points out in his paper. The politicians took most of the time to express their views and promote their policies, rather than to engage in constructive dialog with the representatives of the civil society. However, some of the participants in the debate felt optimistic afterward. For them the debate was an important step toward “building awareness for the role of the civil society” and “for recognizing the role and the voice” of the civil society.⁶ The politicians should receive credit for taking part in a discussion with civil society representatives. Although, the debate showed that political leaders and civil society representatives need to find a common voice and were unable to exchange opinions on equal footing.

On the other hand, Ana Petrusheva, editor at Balkan Investigative Research Network (BIRN), presented the recommendations to the political leaders and sent them a clear message that the civil society is there to stay, it should be seen as a partner and not as a foe, and that civil society extends a helpful hand to the politicians. Using a sport jargon, since sport activities were an important symbolic element at the summit, Ana told the politicians: “now, the ball is in your court”. She pointed out that it is up to the politicians to decide to what extent civil society will be included in policy-making in the future. If there is a lack of political will to accept the outlined recommendations and if there is lack of political and financial support to implement them, then the

efforts of the civil society to improve things will continue to be marginalized.

What did the Forum achieve?

The Western Balkans Foreign Ministers in Vienna signed a joint declaration, “Declaration on Bilateral Issues”, committing themselves not to obstruct their neighbors’ progress in EU integration. The declaration was drafted by BiEPAG members and was an integral part of the aforementioned policy brief. This is a clear acknowledgment for the BiEPAG experts and for the impact that their policy brief made.⁷ However, it remains to be seen whether the politicians will take the declaration seriously and obey their commitments in the future. In 2016, an assessment in Paris will show the real effects.

It was beneficial for the civil society representatives to have the three consultative workshops and also to further discuss the issues in Vienna. This contributed toward empowering civil society in the region and enhancing the networking capacities. It also helped to create a common understanding of the problems, to point out the similarities and differences, and to craft possible policies and strategies that could be picked up in the future. For the civil society it was another step forward in improving regional cooperation and strengthening a common regional identity; notwithstanding that civil society is already more advanced in both of those aspects than politicians in the Western Balkan region.

The Civil Society Forum undoubtedly helped to improve networking on the regional level; even though, there are several regional forums, some overlapping with each other and others competing with each other, where civil society representatives interact. But unlike the existing ones, which tend to focus on a single issue or structured around one policy area, the Civil Society Forum in Vienna brought together a wide diversity of organizations and civil society activists. It was a challenge to create a common ground and to agree on common arguments, but at the same time the diversity was a strength because it reflected the existing diversities in the respective societies.

During the summit the civil society was empowered *vis-à-vis* the political leaders. Preceding the public discussion between the political leaders and civil society representatives, there was a presentation of grass-root organizations from all of the Western Balkan countries. Doraja Eberle, Chairperson of the Advisory board of

⁶ For more see DeutscheWelle, “Костуранова: Форумот во Виена е пример за признавање на улогата на граѓанското општество” [Kosturanova: Forum in Vienna is an example that the role of civic society is recognized], 28.08.2015 (available at http://www.dw.com/mk/a-18678680?maca=maz-rss-maz-pol_make_donija_timemk-4727-xml-mrss).

⁷ For more see European Fund for the Balkans, “Joint Declaration Adopted by Western Balkans Foreign Ministers in Vienna – Countries Will Not Obstruct Neighbors’ Progress in EU Integrations”, 27.08.2015 (available at <http://balkanfund.org/2015/08/joint-declaration-adopted-by-western-balkans-governments-representatives-in-vienna-countries-will-not-obstruct-neighbours-progress-in-eu-integrations/>).

Erste Foundation, and Ulrike Lunacek, Vice President of the European Parliament, announced the representatives of the grass-root organizations dealing with human rights, women, children, and trafficked persons. The presentation of their work was a strong reminder for all present, including political leaders from the region, that the work of grass-root organizations is very important. Grass-root activist had a chance to send direct messages to the political leaders. For example, Larisa Susa from Plenum Gracanica, from Bosnia and Herzegovina, got a loud round of applause when she said to the politicians: “we tell you what to do and you do it!” In essence, it was a clear and strong demand for an inclusive and participatory policy-making in all of the countries. It remains to be seen whether the politicians, who were carefully listening, will supply.

The Forum could possibly plant the seeds for civil society caucuses or pressure groups on a national level. There were discussions from civil society representatives from individual countries that they should continue their meetings and discussions on the national level, and to monitor the policies and actions of their respective governments in regards to commitments made during the Vienna summit. Civil society representatives felt obliged to continue with their involvement and to contribute in sustaining the momentum that was built up by the Western Balkan summit. It is an early sign that the Forum could potentially increase the capacities of civil society; however, it remains to be seen whether the representatives will actually follow-up on their new found enthusiasm.

What remains to be done in future?

The direct outcomes of the Civil Society Forum were quite modest. However, the same can be said about the outcomes of the Western Balkan Summit. The outcomes of the summit, at least in this assessment, were more important for empowering the civil society, increasing its networking potential, and building its capacities. Besides the signing of the joint declaration, whose implementation is to be seen in future, the civil society did not make a stronger policy impact. It remains to be seen whether the actions and policy-making practices of politicians on the national level will be amenable to their short experience during the summit.

On the other hand, politicians from Western Balkan countries did not discover civil society for the first time in Vienna. Some have a practice of cooperation with civil society, others have a practice of formal consultations, and there are also some who see civil society as political adversaries. In future, hopefully, all of the political leaders will be on the same page and be open for cooperation with civil society members.

It would be beneficial if civil society groups present in Vienna from the same countries remained as a national level caucus. They can then follow up on the commit-

ments that their governments made in Vienna, monitor the work of the governments, and prepare a report about it. Their research should be based on clear benchmarks. If the reports follow a similar structure and are comparable, that is to say that if the governments can be evaluated under a common framework, then the results can provide incentives for the governments to perform better. The reports could potentially improve regional cooperation because they would share policy recommendations and offer exchange of best practices. However, such reports would need to avoid overlaps with EU progress reports and they would need to be accepted positively by the governments.

It is important to change the mode of interaction between politicians and civil society members, from having adversarial relations to having closer cooperation. This would be helpful for the improvement of democracy and would increase the potential for development of the individual countries. Therefore, it is crucial to have another civil society forum in 2016 in Paris. It should be announced as early as possible and prepared in due time. It would send a strong message to political leaders that civil society is an integral element of the process. That the civil society inclusion was not a one-time event concocted for the Western Balkan Summit in Vienna, but that civil society has a functional and important role in an inclusive and participatory policy-making process.

Also, the civil society component should be preserved in Paris because it enriches the policy-making agenda. The discussions between the political leaders, at least in Berlin and Vienna, were focused on building physical inter-connectivity, such as road and energy infrastructure. And these issues are the foundations for the future development of the region and for improving regional cooperation. On the other hand, civil society brings forth a social development agenda that is also important for the development of the region and for improving regional cooperation, for example issues like education, culture, mobility, and youth exchange. The two agendas are complimentary and not mutually exclusive, as the relations between a government and civil society should be. A government is better suited to take the lead in building roads and energy infrastructure, and civil society can play a stronger role in pushing forward issues from the social development agenda. If civil society is not included in Paris, then the risk would be to marginalize the social development agenda, which can be counter-productive for the improvement of regional cooperation in the Western Balkans.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS SERIOUSLY: WHAT IS AT STAKE?

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Some 20 years since regional cooperation in the Western Balkans emerged as a prominent policy and academic issue, local actors' responsibility to drive this process forward has moved to the focus of the official discourse. The argument made is that local stakeholders ought to be in the driving seat to fulfill regional cooperation potential and to complement national-level policy processes and outlooks in addressing the development and security challenges before the individual countries and the region as a whole (Minic 2014; Prifti 2013).

The main purpose of my intervention is to discuss the implications of this shift in emphasis towards local actors' responsibility for the prospects of regional cooperation. It does so through a critical reflection on a number of issues pertaining to regional cooperation in relation to the changing security context in the region shaped by a confluence of economic underdevelopment, weak governance, increased religious radicalization, and pressures of illegal immigration. I suggest that the dominant perspective on regional cooperation in the Western Balkans, which has focused on rebuilding relations to address past legacies, has been inward looking and so far ignored the links to the transnational security threats manifested in this region. Commitment and capacity of all stakeholders remain a constraint in exercising responsibility for forward-looking regional cooperation that would effectively address those threats.

Regional cooperation in the Western Balkans: a case of an inward looking agenda?

Born in the late 1990s out of a need to pacify the post-Yugoslav space, and for much of the time steered by the external fiat, the process of regional cooperation has over time acquired a status of a distinct policy area, supported by an ever more elaborate institutional architecture. The academic and policy literature on regional cooperation in the Western Balkans has been preoccupied with two themes. One concerns the process of regional cooperation as such whereby volumes are dedicated to reviewing its various forms, actors, and institutional schemas (Lopandic 2001; Delevic 2007; Uvalic 2000). This evolution has been amply documented, and it remains at the forefront of the Western Balkans regional cooperation debates, most explicitly in the debates about the role of the Regional Cooperation Council (Minic 2013). The other main theme deals with various aspects of the relationship between regional cooperation and European integration processes in the Western Balkans. These two processes are intrinsically connected in so far as in the post-war Balkans, regional cooperation has been established as formal condition for the European integration process. It has since benefited from a deployment of various institutional mechanisms developed explicitly to facilitate the coupling of region-

al cooperation and European integration processes. A lively and enduring scholarly debate around the issues of congruence – and specifically complementarity between regional cooperation and European integration in the Western Balkans – is being continuously reinvigorated by the changes in their respective modalities (Bechev 2012; Kronja and Lopandic 2012; Anastasakis and Bojičić-Dželilović 2002).

These two themes, namely regional cooperation in the Western Balkans and its relation with the European Union integration process, are rarely discussed in complete separation. Rather, they combine variously in investigations that include – sometimes explicitly, and sometimes on the margins – the question of how successful the regional cooperation process has been in the Western Balkans as it has evolved over the last 20 years. The main rationale behind this initiative, spearheaded by the European Union institutions in response to the wars of Yugoslavia's succession, was to facilitate reconciliation among the populations of the successor states to the Former Yugoslavia (Petrusević and Blondel 2012, Marazopulos 2013). The understanding was that by supporting and promoting various forms of regional cooperation to address common and regional problems associated with the recent past – most directly armed conflicts in the region – it would be possible to bridge the ensuing separation and antagonism among local communities. And it would encourage tolerance, solidarity, and trust building, the very values and principles embodied in the European Union itself as the driving force behind the regional cooperation agenda. This mutually reinforcing dynamics of regional cooperation and European integration are expected to contribute to stabilization and regional security, and by extension to the region's (and the European Union's) capability to respond to transnational security threats including those associated with organized crime, Islamic radicalization, and illegal immigration, which as of late have been a source of significant concern.

Conceptually, reconciliation is at the core of a purported virtuous cycle of regional cooperation and European integration and is therefore a preeminent issue in any assessment of the progress and prospects of regional cooperation in the Western Balkans. Expert opinions converge in arguing that 20 years since the end of the Bosnia-Herzegovina war, reconciliation has failed to take strong roots across the countries and various constituencies in the Western Balkans (Mehler 2012; Kostovicova 2013). A number of events in 2015 seem to corroborate this view, prompting some commentators to claim that inter-state relations across the Western Balkans are at their lowest in a long time with the local leaders' rhetoric erringly reminiscent of early 1990s (Dedić, 2015). In the summer of 2015, relations between Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina took a stumble over the Srebrenica genocide issue, culminating in the incident during Serbia's prime minister's presence at the Srebrenica commemoration event. Croatia's remembrance celebration

of the operation 'Oluja' (Storm), and the decision by the Vukovar municipal authority to remove the Cyrillic script from the public signposts flared up relations with Serbia. Tensions in Kosovo-Serbia relations rose over Serbia's initiative to block Kosovo's application to UNESCO and INTERPOL membership, and between Serbia and Albania over Serbia's Prime Minister's remark in response to the football game incident. Furthermore, to add to this catalogue of unsettling political developments in the broader region with their roots in the legacies of the past, the relations between Croatia and Slovenia were soured by the Piran bay arbitration scandal (Dedic, *ibid*). Throughout the year, a number of equally concerning incidents of violence against ethnic and religious minorities have been registered across the region. The case capturing perhaps most potently a still fragile state of reconciliation in the region – both among the political elites as well as the general public – has been the Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić's ill received initiative, launched after the Srebrenica incident, for a region-wide commemoration day for all the war victims in the region.

The question of the metrics used for gauging progress in Western Balkan regional cooperation is beyond the scope of the paper. Progress in various domains of regional cooperation and increased institutionalization in some is a solid testimony that much has changed for the better in this respect. The process of regional cooperation focused on rebuilding the relations to help the countries deal with the legacies of the past manifested in unresolved issues related to state building, economic underdevelopment, and population displacement, has ultimately rested on the commitment and political will of the region's elites. Thus, impressive regional cooperation on infrastructure alongside a flurry of activities to connect and engage relevant actors and mobilize requisite resources demonstrates awareness of the local elites of the importance of regional cooperation, including the role of reconciliation, manifested for example in the acts of public apology by prominent political figures for the atrocities committed by their countrymen in the wars of the 1990s.

Moving forward with the responsibility agenda in the framework of regional cooperation, the question however remains how to turn this achievement to further reconciliation goals. The limitations of the functional/rational approach to regional cooperation in producing a 'reconciliation dividend' in a context of the nation state building in the Western Balkans have been acknowledged (Marazopulos 2013; Monastiriotis 2012). In reality, despite remarkable achievement in opening multiple paths for cooperation in the Western Balkans, regional cooperation has still not taken prominent place in the local parties' programmatic agendas (Minić 2014; Monastiritos *ibid*). This gives grounds to question the strength of local commitment to deepening regional ties, a process that is expected to follow as the responsibility for developing regional cooperation further shifts

to the local actors. Further uncertainty surrounds the plausibility that the existing framework for regional cooperation uncoupled from the European integration process would work towards sustained and effective regional cooperation.

Thus reconciliation remains an important concern in answering those questions. If anything, the aforementioned events of 2015 suggest that in fact the reconciliation objective remains subjected to the local political agendas and the instrumental use of ethnic identity politics in dealing with past legacies. This is an important missing part in accounting for the failure of functional cooperation to produce a 'reconciliation dividend'. This aspect tends to be on the margins in much of mainstream scholarship on regional cooperation and European integration, but deserves attention in the context of discussions about the responsibility of local actors for regional cooperation. I suggest that the regional elites' instrumental use of ethnic identity politics has not only adversely affected the reconciliation process in the Western Balkans, but has turned it into an issue with potentially broader security implications in the face of growing religious radicalization, increased organized crime activity, and pressures of illegal immigration in the region. Failure to make strides on the reconciliation front on the account of national politics focused on status and other similar high level political issues, has inadvertently played into the hands of other actors, such as those linked to radical ideologies, whose increasing presence particularly in some parts of the region, threatens to deepen the divide among various groups and communities. The ethnic dimension of the incident in Srebrenica this summer and the terrorist group inside FYR Macedonia earlier this year demonstrate this new dynamic in which it is no longer possible to separate internal and external dimensions of security. Thus, recognizing, understanding, and addressing effectively the complexity of the reconciliation process in relation to security issues is of particular importance from the perspective of shifting responsibility for regional cooperation to the local actors, and the expectations regarding prospects of developing regional responses to emerging security challenges.

Regional cooperation, reconciliation, and broader security challenges

The academic and policy debates on reconciliation in the framework of regional cooperation in the Western Balkans tend to bring to the fore issues of transitional justice on the grounds that doing justice to the victims of war crimes committed during the 1990s is fundamental to the region's democratic transition and peace consolidation (Obradović-Wochnik 2013; Kostovicova 2013). This view of reconciliation carries particular weight because it emphasizes the need for active participation by the regional political elites to make this process meaningful, and hence the elites' responsibility for its outcomes. Much less attention has been devoted to

other, seemingly somewhat less politically-charged aspects of reconciliation concerned with everyday experiences of the citizens living in this region. This is despite its intimate links to transitional justice, since official politics and discourse in general, and on transitional justice in particular, directly shape reconciliation outcomes by impacting peoples' everyday life experiences of inter-ethnic relations. Reconciliation in this meaning is essential for restoring the everyday sense of normality in people's lives, which serves as a platform for overcoming the destructive legacy of past wars, not least in a form of damaged relations among different ethnic and religious communities. Reconciliation is promoted by constructive daily encounters among individuals, communities as well as between the citizens and their states. It is inseparable from how people experience security at the individual level, which in the Western Balkans continues to be foremost defined in terms of protection of ethnic identity, in other words as 'ethnic security' (Bojičić-Dželilović 2015; Beha and Visoka 2013). That this is the case is a telling sign of reconciliation failure.

Approaching security as an institutionally, discursively and socially constituted practice (Bubant 2005) is a useful way to understand what people and communities perceive as a source of insecurity in their day to day lives, and how they respond to it. I have elaborated it elsewhere using Bosnia-Herzegovina as an example (Bojičić-Dželilović *ibid.*). The pernicious effects of the three way dynamics between dysfunctional institutions, elite discourse framed in terms of ethnic identity politics, and everyday experience of various forms of deprivation, which combined make people susceptible to ethnic identity politics, are in their most striking form present in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but also in Kosovo, FYR Macedonia, and Serbia. We see the consequences of subscribing to 'ethnic security' (as opposed to the security provided by a law governed state) in persistent ethnic distance among the communities in the region, despite intensification in various forms of regional cooperation.

Thus, in the context of weak governance, economic hardship, inadequate welfare provisions, and general sense of public disillusionment, by instrumentally using ethnic identity politics, regional political elites have been engaged in actively producing insecurity at the individual and ethnic group level through symbolic, institutional, and discursive means. Public discourse in the Western Balkans remains ethnically segregated (Vesnić-Alujević 2012) and thus has bearing on individual perceptions of inter-ethnic relations. What is said, on what occasion and in what place, and the framing of the message, matters to how people internalize issues at stake. It is ominous that those issues of particular relevance for reconciliation, namely human rights, social inclusion, and culture have been notable for their lack of support in the regional cooperation framework, which can be attributed ultimately to instrumental use of identity politics (Minić 2014). It also reflects a prob-

lem of ‘differentiated citizenship’ operating across the region whereby underneath formal human right provisions, in reality some groups are more equal than the others (Krasniqi 2015). Everyday experience matters in terms of the receptiveness of ethnically segregated discourse. Problems of weak governance permeated by systemic corruption reinforce the experience of discrimination in access to jobs, healthcare, education, housing, and other aspects of daily life, which according to numerous polls most concern ordinary people in the Western Balkans; the incidence of discrimination is often perceived as ethnically motivated. Combined, these interlocking dynamics are at the core of individual insecurity and preference for ‘ethnic security’. In turn, the persistence of ethnic tensions underwrites the fragile social fabric in the Balkans and the reconciliation process.

This problem, which is central to the process of reconciliation, has over the years acquired a new dynamic through a growing presence of other actors and agendas, foremost in the shape of radical religious groups. The presence of religious groups has grown over the last twenty years or so. They have been recruiting followers among local populations, particularly youth, through a combination of religious indoctrination, financial and other incentives, thus compensating for dysfunctional institutions, economic failures and building new community bonds. This largely imperceptible process is changing the daily experience of security in many parts of the region and feeding into ethnic stereotypes. Corruption among the top-level public office and its links to organized crime is another illustration of how what is routinely referred to as an external threat to the national and regional security, has become integral to local societal dynamics. The lack of recognition of a particular manifestation of security threats of this kind in the Western Balkans, and the role played by the local elites’ instrumental use of identity politics, is a concerning thought when assessing the capability to effectively address those threats.

The challenge of taking responsibility for regional cooperation seriously

In this paper, the focus on the link between regional cooperation and reconciliation is motivated by three considerations: 1) a series of recent events highlighting that reconciliation remains a problem; ii) a shift from local ownership to local actors’ responsibility for regional cooperation; iii) and the problems that the EU itself has in dealing with some of the emerging transnational security threats. This makes it an opportune moment to reassess regional cooperation and its changing role against a changing security context. The main goal was to demonstrate that the instrumental use of identity politics in dealing with past legacies has been detrimental to reconciliation and, given the changing security context, the prospects for furthering reconciliation through regional cooperation may be even slimmer than hitherto. This point has been argued by drawing attention to the

peoples’ lived experience of security in relation to reconciliation, which helps to better understand a continuing appeal of ethnically segregated discourse, and thus general public attitudes to regional cooperation, which is an aspect overshadowed by the elite-centered discourse.

Looking ahead, through the lens of responsibility of local actors for driving regional cooperation in the way that would facilitate reconciliation, there are various challenges and constraints. Those concern foremost competing priorities and inadequate financial, institutional, and other resources to support the implementation of the SEE 2020 agenda. SEE 2020 as a framework provides the key strategic direction for regional cooperation aligned with local priorities, but requires concerted effort and support of different constituencies. In light of the discussion in this paper, the role of regional elites is pivotal. The responsibility for driving the regional cooperation agenda in support of reconciliation has to be taken in full recognition of the gravity of the problem in the changing security context in which the boundary between external/internal security has become blurred and in full recognition that the EU itself is struggling to respond effectively to those threats. Among other actors whose role has to become more prominent in supporting the new direction in regional cooperation are various transnational alliances that deal with issues that concern people the most – insecure livelihoods and access to welfare, education, and justice. There is a huge space for cross border citizen initiatives working on these issues which would complement the activity of those actors – national and transnational – working in the areas of governance, transparency, and accountability.

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COMBATING A SHARED MENACE: TERRORISM AS A SECURITY AND SOCIAL THREAT IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND BEYOND

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The Balkan Peninsula is no longer a primary hazard for Western Europe and the United States (U.S.) – at least not in comparison to the state of affairs in the 1990s. But with its corrupt, volatile institutions, bleak economic prospects, and still-inflamed ethnic and nationalist narratives, the Balkan region remains especially vulnerable to instabilities and security threats (see respectively, Lilyanova 2015, Uvalić 2014, Kushi 2014). International terrorism and its calls for global recruits is a particularly worrisome trend for Western Balkan societies, still healing from decades of violence and lacking strong security infrastructure to expose developing threats (Woehrel 2008a).

In this article, I first highlight some of the dominant changes within Western Balkan societies that have arisen in the post-conflict era and in tandem with new international security threats. The most significant of these transitions is an increase in domestic-bred religious extremism and militarism, in lieu of the past's foreign fighter worries (see, for example, Maroevic and Williams 2005). Although the trend is relatively small in comparison to its linked global phenomenon, it holds unique repercussions within the Balkans – especially as it relates to possibilities of political misuse and exaggeration for nationalist, anti-minority agendas. Moreover, growing ideological extremism or mere perceptions of extremism may reawaken civil conflicts between antagonistic populations, which have relied on a long tradition of religious moderates to contain instability.

Given the geographic position and historical legacy of the Balkans, any such regional threats could cascade across Europe and the transatlantic sphere. Destabilized Balkan societies could also encourage the inflow of more militant recruits into the heart of Europe and the Middle East, fermenting an atmosphere conducive to global terrorist networks. Hence, it is imperative that the European Union (EU) and its transatlantic partner, the U.S., continue to invest in the socio-economic potential of the Western Balkans so as to curb potential nefarious influences from within and abroad.

Most importantly, however, the West, in defending against shared contemporary security risks, must begin to reshape its political narratives of the Western Balkans to one of unity and inclusion, instead of one that fosters a “civilized us versus uncivilized them” mentality. Alienating the Balkans from Western influence is a primary tool of terrorist recruitment, and Europe should never be complicit in fostering such sentiments. Additionally, analysts, politicians, and citizens alike should remember that in the Balkans, terrorism is a label often thrust upon vilified political opponents and minority ethnic groups – and acts as a political smokescreen for

other domestic issues.¹ Thus, while cautioning against exaggerations and politicizations, I conclude with recommendations for a unified transatlantic response toward global terrorism – being careful not to brand the Western Balkans neither as a secular safe haven nor as a barbaric arena of Islamic terrorism.

Mapping the threats

When discussing security risks stemming from fundamentalist-driven terrorism in the Western Balkans, it is important to recognize that the Balkans does not exist in isolation. Terrorism is a global menace, which increased by 61 percent during the 2012-2013 period, primarily due to the Syrian civil war beginning in 2011 (Institute for Economics and Peace 2014). Five countries – Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria, and Syria – suffered 80 percent of terrorist fatalities in 2013, with more than 6,000 people dying in Iraq alone. The West, measured via the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, only experienced five percent of all terrorist fatalities since 2000, but this group also suffered from some of the deadliest attacks, according to the Institute for Economics and Peace (2014) report.

In general, the Western Balkans is still quite secular and religiously tolerant in social composition, with surveys showing that less than half of Balkan Muslims and only 15 percent of Albanian Muslims see religion as central to their lives. Hence, conservative Islam is not very popular among the large Muslim populations of the region and neither are radical, militant ideologies linked with extremist Islamist fringes (Likmeta 2012). In other words, the Balkans does not stand at the epicenter of the global extremist-driven terrorism threat, yet its geopolitical context and socio-economic dynamics make it a vulnerable and politically charged case. The Western Balkan region possesses all three main factors most conducive to terrorist activity, as determined by the Institute for Economics and Peace (2014): 1. high social hostilities between ethnic and religious groups, 2. the existence of state-sponsored violence and human rights abuses, and 3. high levels of violence, especially organized crime. As a legacy of the bloody wars and ethnic cleansing campaigns of the 1990s, the relationship between Muslims and Christian Orthodox citizens in Serbia, Bosnia, and Kosovo remain uncertain, characterized by protests and vandalism of places of worship by opposing groups (see Naimark and Case 2003, b92 2014a). Contemporary ethnic relations between Serbs, Croats, Albanians, Macedonians, Bosnians, and Monte-

negrins also tend to mimic the hostilities of religious divides and past conflicts, while organized crime is practically a daily defining feature of life (Lilyanova 2015).

Religious radicalism has grown since the fall of Yugoslavia and the collapse of Albania's communist regime, bolstering any lingering social hostilities. The opening of the secular societies to international actors prompted an influx of radical activists, theologians, and militants – seeking to spread their ideologies onto new soil (Woehrel 2008a). Today, still feeding off widespread socio-economic desperation, radical imams, who completed their religious studies in Arab nations and receive funding from these same countries, recruit from the poorest of the population, especially vulnerable youth (Poggioli 2010). As a telling pattern, the vast majority of the leaders of the Balkan militant Islamic movement, such as Nedžad Balkan, Bilal Bosnić, and Kosovo clerics Zekerija Qazimi and Lulzima Qabashi, received their education in the Middle East, where they accepted ideologies very distant from moderate Balkan Islam (Bardos 2014a).

Unfortunately, the international context of rising ideological extremism, civil wars across the Middle East, and resentments against Western policies are beginning to slowly erode the region's secular, moderate foundations. The internet has also made it easier for radical groups to recruit Balkan natives, grooming them from afar (Ninković 2013). For instance, before the conflict in Syria began in 2011, fewer than a dozen natives from the Western Balkans had joined in foreign fighter missions. In contrast, by June 2014, 218-654 Balkan natives were fighting alongside Islamic militants in Syria. These fighters come from Bosnia (50-330 fighters), Kosovo (80-150), Albania (50-90), Macedonia (6-12), and Serbia (30-70) (Holman 2014).

In the next sections, I offer specific cases of this changing regional dynamic, speculating as to its main origins. Second, I introduce a brief framework from which to propose potential solutions. Finally, I suggest several pathways in which the EU and the U.S. can begin to curb the influence of religious extremism so as to minimize the threat of terrorism in the Western Balkans and in the transatlantic sphere.

From foreign fighters to domestic recruits

The countries of the Western Balkans have always possessed high ethnic and religious heterogeneity within small geographic confines, with large (typically secular) Muslim populations existing for centuries. But the violent intrastate campaigns and subsequent international interventions of the post-Yugoslavian era and “multi-

¹ One recent example of this phenomenon can be found in the range of narratives the Macedonian government has employed to distract from its corrupt practices – with the Kumanovo attack still a source of speculation between true ethnic terrorist motives and government-concocted distraction. These narratives typically serve to vilify ethnic minorities under the label of terrorism. See Tumanovska and Coalson (2015) and Jordanovska (2015).

cultural” state-building efforts have acted to politicize religious and ethnic identities across the Balkans.²

Beginning in Bosnia, for example, the intrastate violence of the 1990s attracted the attention of hundreds of foreign fighters from across the Arab world, who heeded the religious divisions that the international community had exposed as an explanation of the mass violence between Orthodox Serbs, Muslim Bosnians, and Catholic Croats (Hedges 1992, Woehrel 2008b). Although many of these mujaheddin were driven out after the war, about 700 to 1,000 of them remained and received citizenship – spurring Western concerns about foreign Islamic radicals creating cells of security-evading “white al Qaeda” from within the Balkans and into Western Europe (Maroevic and Williams 2005, Woehrel 2008a).

This fear was not limited to post-conflict Bosnia, but also encompassed the following crises in Kosovo. Yet excluding inflammatory Serbian and Russian claims about the existence of an al Qaeda presence in Muslim-majority Kosovo, there seemed little Western cause for concern (Centre for Peace in the Balkans 2004). While radical Islamic organizations attempted to recruit among the Kosovar population during the 1990s and beyond, they had limited success in an atmosphere of Western admiration (Woehrel 2008a). At this point, then, Western actors did not seriously consider the risk of native-Balkan bred terrorism as it seemed highly improbable that intrastate conflict between ethnic and religious groups would transform into an international terrorist campaign. Moreover, the foreign fighters within Bosnia were beginning to dissipate in the post-conflict era.

But with increasing monetary investments from Islamic organizations over the years, suspicions grew. Just from 1992 to 2001, Saudi Arabia alone spent about \$500 million in mosque-building projects in Bosnia – with many projects suspected to be fronts for al Qaeda (Woehrel 2008a, Weinberg 2014). The post-war institutional vacuum and the subsequent division of Bosnian territory and institutions along ethnic lines further aided the proselytization of Wahhabi ideology and the politicization of religious identity. Yet even after the September 11 terrorist attack, Western actors still focused on ways in which the Balkan region could facilitate foreign terrorist activity, with its black markets, weak regulations, and insecure borders – not on the potential of native radicalizations (Woehrel 2008a, 2008b).

The following years, however, signaled a gradual change in social terrain. Incentivized by generous Arab funding opportunities and discouraged by previously

glorified Western initiatives, more Balkan clerics began to train in the Middle East, becoming immersed in more radical forms of Islam. The year 2005 brought about a thwarted plot by a Bosnian Islamist group to bomb the British Embassy in Sarajevo and another discovered plan in Croatia to bomb the papal funeral (Maroevic and Williams 2005). Consequently, by the next year, the U.S. State Department warned that the decentralization of the Bosnian state made it an especially vulnerable target for terrorist plots and recruitment (Woehrel 2008a). The threat of so called “lone wolf” terrorists, who could strike individually and at any time, began to take hold.

Measuring the damage: Low numbers, but significant trends

In a brief sum, over the past decade, militant Islamists, native to the Balkans, have planned and attempted a range of violent plots, including but not limited to: the 2002 attack on the U.S. Embassy in Vienna; the 2007 Fort Dix bomb plot; the 2009 New York City subway attack plot; the 2011 attack on the U.S. Embassy in Sarajevo; the 2012 murder of two U.S. servicemen at Frankfurt Airport; and the first Balkan suicide bomb attack in Baghdad in 2014 (Bardos 2014b). Most recently, in Bosnia, a gunman attacked a police station in Zvornik, killing an officer and injuring two others (BBC News 2015). This event prompted the quick arrest of over ten people suspected of terrorist activity (Voice of America 2015). In Kosovo, five men were also recently arrested on suspicion of trying to poison Prishtina’s water supply. The plan is thought to be inspired by ISIS propaganda videos urging Muslims to poison the unbelievers’ water and food supplies (Lyman 2015).

ISIS is now specifically targeting the region in their video campaigns for ‘jihadist glory against the non-believing West’ and its supposed puppet regimes across the Balkans (Gordon Meek 2015). In general, radical elements target poor, rural communities in the Western Balkans. Sometimes, they even pay parents in the beginning phases of regular mosque visits and ideological transformation (Orzechowska 2014).

This propaganda, coupled with gradual social immersion efforts, is having some effect, as a recent report found that in 2013 and 2014 in Bosnia alone, 156 Bosnian men and 36 women travelled to Syria, taking with them 25 children (Azinović and Jusić 2015). Even worse, earlier in the year, Bosnian authorities estimated that up to 1,000 people from the country were thought to be fighting with ISIS (Banco 2014). Reports also reveal the weaknesses of the Bosnian state in combating this small but existing threat. With twenty-two police agencies operating in the country with overlapping jurisdictions, the lack of coordination between agencies on security issues is to be expected. But it is still shocking that Bosnia lacks a single consolidated database on potential domestic threats (Borger 2015).

² For a detailed analysis of how the wars and interventions of the 1990s deconstructed the Balkans along hyper-enforced ethnic and religious lines, in the name of multiculturalism, see Campbell (1998).

These threats have not been lacking across the Balkans as a whole. In the past year, the State Investigation and Protection Agency in Damascus detained sixteen people accused of financing and recruiting Bosnians to fight in Syria and Iraq. This November, Bosnia also detained eleven people suspected of terrorist acts (World Bulletin 2014).

Aside from the recent water-poisoning arrests, five citizens of Kosovo were indicted on terrorism charges for fighting in Syria most recently (Reuters 2015a). In the last year, the small nation also arrested over fifty-five Islamists along with nine imams and indicted 32 suspected terrorists this May alone (Hajdari 2015b, News24 2014, Bytyci 2014). According to various estimates, there are currently between 200 to 300 Kosovars in Syria (Mejer 2014, Hajdari 2015b). On a per capita basis, Kosovo has the most militants of any European nation, and due to its unstable institutions, economic troubles, and unfavorable ethnic relations, it is perceived as one of the more vulnerable Balkan nations for extremist activities (Institute for Economics and Peace 2014, McDonagh 2014).

Dogmatic Islamic pockets are also visible among Albanians in Macedonia, where Saudi Arabian theologians have been active for years. As with other regions of the Balkans, these actors take over parts of civil society through charitable and educational work among the poorest of society – often providing better social goods than inefficient, bickering state apparatuses (Bugajski 2015). Hailed as an example of this creeping dynamic intermixed with nationalist agendas, in May, an alleged terrorist incident took place in the city of Kumanovo in which eight police and fourteen Albanian terrorists, supposedly from Kosovo, were killed (Tumanovska and Coalson 2015). In the aftermath of this attack, Macedonian police arrested nine people out of the sought 36 believed to have fought alongside Islamist insurgents in Iraq and Syria (Reuters 2015b). Macedonia faces particularly high probabilities of terrorist threat politicizations for the sake of government distractions and reactivated ethnic politics.

Serbia faces rising risks as well, even though it lacks large Muslim populations. Serbian citizens have not been impervious to ISIS recruitment calls, with over 100 of them thought to be fighting in the Middle East (b92 2014b). In addition, Serbia faces unique concerns about its Orthodox Christian citizens joining the fight in Ukraine, siding with the pro-Russian rebels (Jackson 2014, DW 2014). Furthermore, the dangers in Serbia lie in the division of both ethnicities and religious affiliations. Most likely, these divisions are ripe breeding ground for sensationalist declarations of Islamic extremism and exaggerations of threats stemming from Bosnian and Albanian populations.

As with the rest of the Western world, the Balkans is now too experiencing the vulnerabilities that come

along with a more open society – with one of them being the rise in public terrorist attempts and recruitment campaigns. It, thus, needs to invest in better systems and infrastructure to eradicate the gradual threat of domestic extremism that is exporting itself across the Mediterranean and into Europe. In the Balkans, even small threats of religiously motivated terrorism can alter important social dynamics, and contemporary patterns of extremism signal worrisome changes in Balkan nations' cultural landscape. One can sense a subtle transformation from a unique, Balkan form of Islam, which has allowed the inhabitants of the peninsula a shot at coexistence, to an imported radicalism that allows little room for multi-religious societies. Perhaps the most worrisome prospect is that hostile Balkan ethnic groups and governments may use threats of terrorism, whether real or constructed, to project other violent political/nationalist agendas.

Preventing a joint threat – creating unified political narratives

All actors aiming to reduce the risk of fundamentalist-driven terrorism in the Balkans must be cautious in their approaches – as they can indirectly contribute to the exaggeration or politicization of threats. Even the most well-intentioned Western actors often fall prey to sensationalist commentaries that automatically correlate Muslim identities with radicalism in a region that remains overwhelmingly pro-West. But isolating the large Muslim communities across the Balkans is also counterproductive and aids the terrorists' cause. Many scholars, indeed, claim that it was the neglect and isolation of rural communities by international governments and organizations that made it easier for Middle Eastern charity organizations and Islamic groups to gain credibility over Balkan governing elites within the past decade (Hajdari 2015a).

Western attention to the Balkans has been waning in the past years. The U.S. has lessened its commitments to the region as the Middle East took foreign policy precedence, while NATO-led peacekeeping forces in Bosnia and Kosovo have been reduced over the decades – with SFOR's Bosnia mission concluding in 2004 (Woehrel 2008b). The EU is now the main regional player, attempting a range of state-building, security-maximizing, economy-boosting initiatives in collaboration with Balkan counterparts.

For the most part, Balkan governments have been eager to coordinate with the EU on security issues. They continue to work with the U.S. and the EU to arrest terrorist suspects, shut down non-governmental organizations linked with terrorist activity, and freeze financial assets of suspected terrorists. Since December 2004, the Albanian government has frozen the assets of main organizations (Taibah, International Revival of Islamic Heritage Society, Al Hamein, and Global Relief Foundation) and many individuals identified by the United Nations

as suspected of supporting extremist groups (Woehrel 2008a). In this past year, Bosnia has passed a law that sentences convicted Islamists and recruiters to up to 10 years in prison (Weinberg 2014). Kosovo and Serbia are also bolstering their anti-terrorism laws, with the Kosovo government prohibiting citizens from fighting in foreign wars (Hajdari 2015b, News24 2014, Bytyci 2014).

But pure legal maneuvers and rash arrests are not long-term solutions to the threat of terrorist recruitment in the Balkans. Instead of turning Muslim communities into the enemy or the convenient political “other,” domestic and international actors must craft narratives of solidarity that pit both the West and the Balkan’s moderate Muslim communities against the global forces of religious extremism and militarism. After all, ISIS recruitments and Islamic militarism are threats shared by European, U.S., and Balkan societies alike.

The only way that ISIS and other Islamic militant factions could win over enough Balkan Muslims so as to pose a significant regional threat into the future is to turn these Muslims against the West. In places like Kosovo and Bosnia, this is a very difficult feat, as citizens still remain immensely grateful for NATO’s interventions in the 1990s and for supporting Kosovo’s independence from Serbia. So instead, extremist groups will try to turn the West against Muslims, mainly by provoking governments and international actors into frantic, divisive actions. If extremist factions succeed in making the EU, the U.S., and pro-Western Balkan governments perceive all devout Muslims in the region as potential terrorists, they will inevitably win. States will begin indiscriminate hunts and arrests in Muslim-majority communities and the EU will fail to address its own creeping Islamophobia.

If, however, domestic authorities and international actors are careful not to over-react to terrorist threats and activities, one of the biggest strategies of terrorist groups will fail. Better yet, if domestic, EU, and U.S. authorities explicitly craft joint policy initiatives, anti-terrorism taskforces, and security infrastructures, the message of unity may overtake past messages of religious division, Western vs. non-Western dichotomies, and “us” vs. “them” mentalities that have long characterized Western policies within the Balkans. It is one thing for the EU and U.S. to throw more highly-regulated or even flexible funding at the Balkans, but it is another to view the region as an equal partner and planner of European security. Aside from preventing a small, but emerging threat of terrorism, this narrative may also be ideal for other forms of cooperation, such as much needed economic initiatives between fraught Balkan nations and their transatlantic partners. The more the EU and U.S. do to convince the Balkans that it, too, belongs in Europe, through unified social, economic, and security measures, the safer all actors will be from extremist takeover in the long-run.

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REGIONAL SECURITY COOPERATION IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE

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*“If one does not know to which port one is sailing, no
wind is favorable”*

Lucius Annaeus Seneca

Southeast Europe is facing a number of challenges, some of which can be described as chronic ones and others that have come into attention more recently, but constitute urgent circumstances that affect not only the region, but also the wider European security architecture. In the first category one could list the powerful transnational organized crime networks that operate in or within the Balkans, and various extremist groups of ethnic, ideological or religious foundation.

The recent challenges include primarily the vast and seemingly uncontrollable illegal immigration and refugee movement from Asia/Africa into the EU via the Balkan route and the alarming problem of the returnee Jihadists from the Middle Eastern battlefields, along with “Islamic State-Daesh” affiliates for which all credible information at hand point out that they are preparing attacks on European soil.

Judging from the above and from the fact that a significant part of the region, it’s Western Balkan one, is still not included in EU structures, the issue of regional security cooperation comes forward as a theme of importance for combatting the aforementioned challenges. In that sense it could be firstly pointed out that important steps have been taken already in this direction and the glass is already half-full rather than half-empty. What is needed though are agility, speediness, and alertness in order to keep pace with the changing security environment.

Security cooperation structures

The institutional bodies that have been created in the region so far have mainly centered upon the collaboration of national police forces. Organized crime constitutes a major challenge and police organizations are on the frontline of combatting it. The following structures are operational:

South East European Law Enforcement Center (SELEC)¹

This intergovernmental body, composed of all South East European countries via their liaison officers in the headquarters based in Bucharest, has been successfully developing a common crime prevention policy, especially on the vital theme of the trans-border organized illicit markets. It is also combined with the South East European Prosecutors Advisory Group (SEEPAG), which couples the police with the judicial regional sectors, fostering cooperation, promoting lessons learned and proposing joint actions.

¹ Official website of SELEC: <http://www.selec.org/>.

Nevertheless it should be noted that the organization is mostly centered in its conception and organization into developing strategic policies rather than implementing tactical ones, which in plain words means that it does not have the capacity to combat everyday crime; instead, the focus is on setting the framework of cooperation and in times assisting in breaking up particular organized crime networks with investigation material already been gathered by local police forces. Amongst the ambitions of its directorship is to have a “Balkan Interpol”, an aim which may well be accomplished in the future.

*Southeast Europe Police Chiefs Association (SEPCA)*²

It is a high-level intergovernmental standing forum that encompasses most of South East European countries police Chiefs, with the notable exceptions of those of Greece and Turkey. This organization, which is based in Sofia, is still in a developing mode, with aim to become an international organization, since it is essentially an association until now. The purpose is to network, link up, and exchange practices between chiefs of police forces, a strategic need nowadays. Nevertheless there are no operational or tactical responsibilities embedded within this entity.

*The Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI)*³

This organization which is part of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe framework is encompassing all Western Balkan countries and acts as a policy support instrument for collaboration in a variety of migration issues, including the security one of border control. It is based in Skopje and it is a strategic entity, certainly not dealing with tactical operations.

*Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)*⁴

The council is an organization operating within the wider issue of regional cooperation, including the security sphere of justice and home affairs issues. Its member states are from all regional countries and it is based in Sarajevo. It also deals from a strategic perspective and has not been involved in operations of any kind.

*Police Cooperation Convention for South East Europe*⁵

This is another high-level and strategic forum that aims to network and increase collaboration in the police sphere, especially in the policy-implementation sense. It includes all countries of the region bar Turkey and Greece but with the inclusion of Austria and Hungary, and with strong focus on Western Balkans. It also pro-

vides seminar type education and it is based in Ljubljana.

A first outline that could be made is that intergovernmental security cooperation in terms of institutions framework is heavily centered in networking and from a strategic point of view, with little use of tactical operations. To all the above one should include the organizations of FRONTEX, UNODC, NATO, OSCE, Europol and other EU bodies, which foster in their own terms cooperation between Balkan countries in the security spectrum, either via collective work or mostly via bilateral or trilateral temporarily cooperation.

A significant work is being done in fact by informal cooperation, which stems from cooperation between individual countries and for specific tasks. For instance Greek and Albanian police have since the late 90's established a strong rapport for issues of organized crime. A latest high-level meeting took place in late May 2015⁶ in the city of Ioannina between the heads of police of the two countries with an agenda stretching from border control, illegal immigration, Jihadist movements tracking, and organized crime.

Due to the extent of this “non-institutional, non-formal” security cooperation, the following clusters and classifications will be provided based on the theme of the cooperation and the countries involved, including military structures. Five countries and with whom they are paired will be presented, all of these already parts of the EU (Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, and Slovenia) with some notes on the rest⁷.

Greece:

- Greece-Albania (high on police cooperation, low on intelligence, low on military)
- Greece-FYROM (medium on police cooperation – low on intelligence, low on military)
- Greece-Bulgaria (high on police cooperation, medium on intelligence, high on military)
- Greece-Romania (medium on police cooperation, medium on intelligence, low on military)
- Greece-Serbia (medium on police cooperation, medium on intelligence, medium on military)
- Greece-Croatia (medium on police cooperation, low on intelligence, low on military)

² Official website of SEPCA: <http://www.sepca-see.eu/>.

³ Official website of MARRI: <http://www.marri-rc.org/>.

⁴ Official website of RCC: <http://www.rcc.int/>.

⁵ Official website of PCCSE: <http://www.pccsesecretariat.si/>.

⁶ Greek weekly newspaper “Proto Thema” detailing on the meeting: <http://www.protothema.gr/greece/article/480344/suskepsi-korufista-ioannina-gia-tin-eglimatikotita/>.

⁷ Part of an ongoing research and seminar-based matrix on security cooperation in the Balkans by the author and the “Institute for Security & Defense Analysis” (www.i-sda.eu) in Athens-Greece.

- Greece-Turkey (medium on police cooperation, low on intelligence, low on military)
- Greece-Montenegro (medium on police cooperation, low on intelligence, high on military)
- Greece-Bosnia (low on police cooperation, low on intelligence, low on military)
- Greece Kosovo (low on police cooperation, low on intelligence, low on military)
- Greece-Slovenia (medium in police cooperation, medium in intelligence, low on military)

Bulgaria:

- Bulgaria-Albania (medium on police cooperation, medium on intelligence, low on military)
- Bulgaria-FYROM (high on police cooperation, low on intelligence, low on military)
- Bulgaria-Romania (high on police cooperation, medium on intelligence, high on military)
- Bulgaria-Serbia (medium on police cooperation, low on intelligence, low on military)
- Bulgaria-Turkey (high on police cooperation, medium on intelligence, low on military)
- Bulgaria-Kosovo (medium on police cooperation, low on intelligence, low on military)
- Bulgaria-Croatia (medium on police cooperation, low on intelligence, low on military)
- Bulgaria – Montenegro (low on police cooperation, low on intelligence, low on military)
- Bulgaria-Bosnia (medium on police cooperation, low on intelligence one, low on military)
- Bulgaria-Slovenia (medium on police cooperation, low on intelligence one, low on military)

Romania:

- Romania-Serbia (high on police cooperation, medium on intelligence, low on military)
- Romania-Albania (high on police cooperation, medium on intelligence, medium on military)
- Romania-Kosovo (medium on police cooperation, medium on intelligence, low on military)

- Romania-FYROM (medium on police cooperation, medium on intelligence, low on military)
- Romania-Bosnia (medium on police cooperation, medium on intelligence, low on military)
- Romania-Montenegro (medium on police cooperation, medium on intelligence, low on military)
- Romania-Croatia (medium on police cooperation, medium on intelligence, medium on military)
- Romania-Slovenia (medium on police cooperation, medium on intelligence, medium on military)

Croatia:

- Croatia-Bosnia (high on police cooperation, medium on intelligence, medium on military)
- Croatia-Serbia (medium on police cooperation, low on intelligence, low on military)
- Croatia-Montenegro (high on police cooperation, medium on intelligence, high on military)
- Croatia-Albania (high on police cooperation, medium on intelligence, medium on military)
- Croatia-Slovenia (high on police cooperation, high on intelligence, high on military)
- Croatia-FYROM (medium on police cooperation, medium on intelligence, low on military)

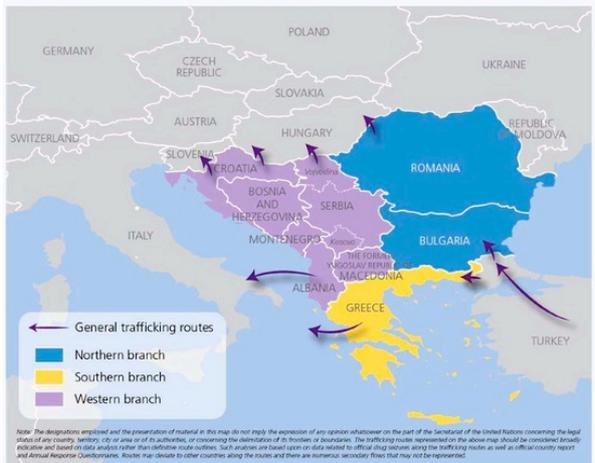
Slovenia:

- Slovenia-Bosnia (high on police cooperation, medium on intelligence, low on military)
- Slovenia-Montenegro (high on police cooperation, medium on intelligence, high on military)
- Slovenia-Albania (medium on police cooperation, medium on intelligence, medium on military)
- Slovenia-FYROM (high on police cooperation, medium on intelligence, medium on military)

To all the aforementioned, it should be noted that Serbia has steady/strong links with Bosnia (Republika Srpska), FYROM, Montenegro, Albania with Kosovo and Montenegro while Turkey enjoys the cooperation with Bosnia, Albania, and Kosovo. It should be noted that this is a rough depiction that is subject to the influence of outside influences and the wider ever-changing geopolitical landscape. The basic outline remains though.

Challenges ahead and pressing responsibilities

Map 2: Identified branches of the Balkan route of heroin in South-Eastern Europe



Source: Annual Report Questionnaire (ARQ) data, supplemented by national government reports and other official reports

Image: Huffingtonpost.com

First of all the issue of organized crime networks in South East Europe is a perennial one, which is actually the foundation for most of the ongoing regional cooperation.

Nowadays, the region continues to be a major producer of hashish in Europe with exports directed mostly to the EU markets⁸. Major producing areas are south Albania, south Greece, Bosnia, Kosovo, and FYROM. Further cocaine imports from South America continue to be directed in Adriatic ports⁹, while the heroin route originating from Afghanistan is reaching the EU either from the land route of Turkey-Balkans¹⁰ or via sea interconnections from Greek or Adriatic ports¹¹.

Moreover, arms contraband supplying ongoing conflicts in the MENA region is being conducted both from the Adriatic shores and the Black Sea, with the inclusion of numerous shipping companies and intermediaries¹².

Human trafficking is a major source of revenue for organized crime networks and heavily influenced by their cooperation with ex-Soviet state “Mafias”, whilst contraband of tobacco, counterfeit products have a major hub for the rest of Europe in the Balkans and form a wider international cooperation network that encompasses regions of East Asia, MENA states, and Ukraine¹³. Apart from the local organized crime syndicates in South East Europe the following ethnic ones also operate either on a permanent basis or through ad hoc consultations: Colombian, Mexican, Italian, Georgian, Russian, Israeli, Ukrainian, Moldovan, Armenian, Turkish, Chinese, Pakistani, Nigerian, Eritrean, Iranian, Afghani, Polish, Lebanese, and Vietnamese. In addition, multiple loose networks composed by members of various ethnicities are involved in all kinds of organized illicit action, with strong preference in using the region for money laundering purposes.

It has to be noted that in some instances the security situation seems to be deteriorating and in a strategic level. For example after a series of crackdowns against the Georgian “Thieves in Law” groups in Spain¹⁴, there are credible information and analysis that point out that the new headquarters of the so-called “Georgian Mafia” are now based in the city of Thessaloniki¹⁵. Moreover the Chinese Triads have gradually but steadily build formidable foundations for their operations in Belgrade, Istanbul, and Athens. A rather recent entrance in the spectrum of security challenges, are the “Motorcycle” gangs¹⁶, which add up to the linkage between the American and Canadian organized crime scene and the Balkan one.

⁸ “New Developments in European Drug Market”, by European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Addiction, 27/05/2014, Web: <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/topics/pods/cannabis-markets-developments>.

⁹ “Serious & Organized Crime Threat Assessment of Montenegro”, Police Directorate of Montenegro, Public Version, 14/02/2014, Pages 26-27.

¹⁰ “Narcotic Superhighways: The Top 5 Routes for Drug Trafficking”, Organized Crime & Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), 22/02/2013, Web: <https://www.occrp.org/en/component/content/article?id=1843:narcotic-superhighways-the-top-5-routes-for-drug-trafficking>.

¹¹ “Greece on crossroads of international heroin trade”, Kathimerini weekly paper, 24/06/2014, Web: <http://www.ekathimerini.com/160976/article/ekathimerini/community/greece-on-crossroads-of-international-heroin-trade>.

¹² “The Balkan arms trade: a growing threat, or growing peace?”, Insight on Conflict, 15/02/2015, Web: <http://www.insightonconflict.org/2015/04/balkan-arms-trade-threat-or-peace/> & “The Odessa Network”, Global Initiative (<http://www.c4ads.org/>), 20/09/2013, Web: <http://www.globalinitiative.net/download/arms-trafficking/>

arms(2)/C4ads - The Odessa Network Mapping facilitators of Russian and Ukrainian Arms Transfers - Sept 2013.pdf.

¹³ “Tobacco Smuggling in Greece: An Overview”, Balkananalysis.com, 11/08/2014. Web: <http://www.balkananalysis.com/greece/2014/08/11/tobacco-smuggling-in-greece-an-overview/> & “Les milliards perdus du trafic de cigarettes”, Slate France, 13/07/2015, Web: <http://www.slate.fr/story/103809/europe-milliards-perdus-traffic-cigarettes>.

¹⁴ “Police arrest 69 in ‘Georgian mafia’ raids”, Independent Newspaper, 16/03/2010, Web: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/police-arrest-69-in-georgian-mafia-raids-1921844.html>.

¹⁵ Unofficial Information by leading Greek security officers as of early 2015.

¹⁶ “The Threat of Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs in South East Europe”, EUROPOL, Threat Notice, (002-2010).



Image: FRONTEX

As if all the above were not enough to cause serious strain to the local police and security forces, new severe challenges have been evolving quickly. A massive outflow of refugees from the ongoing Syrian and Iraqi wars, coupled with the wider instability in the MENA region, has seen a movement of populations that is paralyzing the border control in countries such as Greece, FYROM, and Serbia.

Since early to mid-2015, approximately 800 people per day were entering Greece via the Aegean sea route from Turkey, 70% of them Syrians with the rest being nationals of Afghanistan, Somalia, Eritrea, Sudan, and Iraq. The majority of those then continued their journey towards the final destinations (i.e. North-West Europe) using the Balkan land route from Gevgelija-Kumanovo-Presevo-Nis-Belgrade-Hungary, or by-routes from Greece-Albania-Montenegro-Croatia or Greece-Bulgaria-Romania-Hungary¹⁷. Additional numbers estimated at 100 people per day on average would use the land route from Turkey to Bulgaria and in some cases routes by sea from the same countries. Also immigrants are being sent directly from rather distant ports of Turkey, such as Mersin, via old commercial ships carrying up to 1,000 people to Western Greece, Southern Italy, and Albania. In many cases those ships are being used as “mother vessels” that would unload plastic boats and dispersing numerous smaller groups of passengers, many of those dying in the process. A smaller but increasing route is the one from Egypt/Libya towards the Balkans via the use of old fishing vessels carrying up to

300 people, most of them ending up in Southern and Western Greece¹⁸, with cases also in the Adriatic coasts.

The Jihadist issue, which has gained extensive publicity in the European press, is another hard issue for the regional security and intelligence forces¹⁹. The countries of the Balkans with a special focus on Kosovo, Serbia, Albania, and Bosnia have already sent a great number of Jihadist fighters in proportion to their population²⁰, whilst there is already an established infrastructure of extremists, especially in central Bosnia that can facilitate an easier flow to the rest of the EU²¹, rather than any other “entrance point” (i.e. Spain, South of Italy, or Visegrad countries). In addition, the existence of strong criminal groups that have been mentioned previously and the massive immigration flow are factors that add to these hypotheses. In response, local governments have been alerted and drafted new legislation, along with arresting hundreds of suspects and potential facilitators²².

More alarmingly the Jihadist-inclined networks in the Balkans, and those in the Western region, are inter-linked strongly and for a number of years with their “counterparts in Vienna and Milano” (most of those carrying EU passports and having sleeper – thus undetected – cells), while a formidable “Hawala transaction system” has been established with main hubs in Sarajevo, Istanbul, Athens, Kosovo, and Skopje²³. Thus conventional tools such as economic intelligence, infiltration, and surveillance cannot provide effective results.

Lastly the sheer number of suspected people involved for all the aforementioned do not enable conventional police work to be done. For example a trail and thorough surveillance of a suspect on a 24/7 basis requires minimum a group of 10 officers and of course significant expenses if the numbers on an annual basis adds to a few thousand suspects. A French former high-ranking intelligence officer noted in a recent forum in Greece that the ISIS infiltration into Europe cannot be dealt with using traditional police methodology, such as the one described above, due to the huge number of suspects and the ability of the terrorist network to recruit

¹⁷ “Annual Risk Analysis”, FRONTEX, April 2015, Pages 47-49 Web: http://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Annual_Risk_Analysis_2015.pdf & “The Illegal Immigration in Greece in 2015: A Strategic Overview”, Balkananalysis.com, 25/03/2015, Web: <http://www.balkananalysis.com/greece/2015/03/25/the-illegal-immigration-industry-in-greece-in-2015-a-strategic-overview/>.

¹⁸ Various reports mainly from the Greek-sourced media along with multiple credible information provided by Greek and Italian Coast Guard and police officers.

¹⁹ “EU and Balkan countries ‘tackling jihadism together’”, Deutsche Welle, 21/03/2015, Web: <http://www.dw.com/en/eu-and-balkan-countries-tackling-jihadism-together/a-18330960>.

²⁰ “Mercenaries, Extremists Become Major Balkans Export”, Radio Fre Europe, 15/08/2014, Web: <http://www.rferl.org/content/mercenaries-extremists-become-major-balkans-export/26532364.html>.

²¹ “Bosnia: The cradle of modern jihadism?”, BBC, 02/07/2015, Web: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33345618>.

²² “Sarajevo’s struggles to contain jihadism”, Deutsche Welle, 21/03/2015, Web: <http://www.dw.com/en/sarajevos-struggles-to-contain-jihadism/a-18331506>.

²³ Information provided by various high-level police and Security officers from Greece, France, USA on the subject.

from a distance using the social media or agitating ready-to-be-made “Lone wolves”²⁴.

The lack of sophisticated technological tools of South East European Police forces compared to their counterparts in northern Europe and long-term underfunding further add to the deficiencies.



Image: Die Welt Newspaper

On the other side, a brighter one, the pressing issues mentioned and especially the Jihadist one has led to an increased cooperation between the countries affected in the Balkans, and their partners abroad. More specifically the U.S., UK, France, Germany, and Italy have boosted their assistance to local forces by providing information, training, and equipment. Furthermore, an effective “behind the scenes” collaboration in exchanging vital suspect lists and data to solve the quiz of suspected Jihadists has been slowly developing amongst Balkan countries, without any fanfare but in a quite effective manner.

There have been a number of successes whether at the Greek-Albanian border, the Greek-Turkish one, or the Bosnian-Serbian one that have been kept of the lime-light but are considered being very positive for the overall protection of the European security. Also the experience and operational capabilities for many Balkan security forces is being bolstered by having to deal with such stressful responsibilities and new cadres of officers have been steadily becoming experienced in a wide array of serious and international security threats, hence building the foundations for a more effective security sector policy in the future.

It can be said that for the short-term and for the next 12-18 months, attention by most states will be directed into ensuring that the Balkan road will not be used for the infiltration of Jihadists into Europe, while on the mid- and long-term organized crime surfaces as the main challenge, one which is also directly related to societal

norms and political corruption, thus tackling it is a long-term and painstaking process.

The refugee and illegal immigration issue is one that involves actors and circumstances that all beyond the capacities of all regional countries to counteract. In such a case, the support of the rest of the EU countries plus all MENA partner states is needed, which is another complicated procedure that will have to involve political will and endurance, otherwise it will not be able to be dealt with.

Searching for stronger cooperation

First of all bearing in mind the state of affairs in South East Europe, not only from a security perspective, but also from a whole range of social, political, and geopolitical entanglements, every approach towards stronger cooperation should take into consideration a step-by-step procedure that of course needs time and patience to fully mature.

Secondly, the security cooperation should be implemented both from top-down and bottom-up, and include not only governmental and formal designs but also request the involvement of the citizens and all various stakeholders.

Regarding the formal sector, new structures aimed at tackling the deficit of tactical operations in terms of combating perils such as organized crime and Jihadism should be implemented. As a basis already existing local-based organizations such as SELEC or those heavily involved in the region such as FRONTEX and Europol could set up mobile, permanent standing, and multi-Balkan task forces that would operate on specialized missions.

The above entities could also open up to the societies not only for promoting their work but also for raising awareness and coupling that with the vision of cooperation.

The support of the EU in that respect is crucial not only in financial terms, but most importantly in providing the necessary know-how, technological infrastructure, and securing the viability of these pan-Balkan structures, having already great experience from similar structures and best practices in the rest of Europe. Of course all the above could be included in a type of an international status organization that deals with the region in terms of security.

Furthermore, the police forces of the Balkan countries should consider establishing common databases, accessible through secure channels, along with the creation of steering committees on rotation that would set up security agendas in common problems and directly inform member state’s ministers in charge requesting for action.

²⁴ “6th Executive Security Seminar: The World in 2015: New Threats & Aspects of Regional Stability and Security”, December 2014, Athens-Greece.

In terms of a strategic and high-level approach, a permanent annual forum on rotation in the Balkan countries that would include heads of police, intelligence, interior ministries, and other security functions could become an ideal platform for the exchange of opinions and networking in a discreet way. Similar platforms could emerge also for middle and lower ranks, but in all cases concrete agendas to be discussed should always have to be agreed upon and the aim of these forums should be result-oriented.

Every country in South East Europe has achieved different levels of specializations in terms of security experience, for instance Greece on illegal immigration, Bosnia in radical Islamism, Montenegro in Trans-Atlantic cocaine trading, Turkey in heroin trafficking, etc. Therefore the capacity of each security structure of every country to add its own expertise and gain from the rest of the parties constitutes an interesting opportunity for the future establishment of standing groups that will implement seminar and research projects.

There are already well-established groups of such nature mainly to be found in the academic environment such as the “Standing Groups” of the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR). With adaptation, similar models of collaboration and exchange of information along with trust building is feasible nowadays in South East Europe.

On a more tactical level and as far as imminent threats, such as the one of Jihadism, are concerned there is a need for swift action and agility by the local forces. That means increased and thorough international cooperation with non-Balkan countries which have more capacities or knowledge on the subject, as well as, local partnerships in border control, exchange of suspect lists, procurement of new technological tools, and combat of facilitators which in most cases are linked to entities that are being financed by MENA region radicals, some often of strong international influence. In that sense political will is paramount to securing the region from a terrorist spill over.

At that point it should be noted that the threat faced cannot be countered by the regional countries alone. Strong support by the EU and NATO is needed, which in turn requires further political strength which also includes the adoption of an all-round policy that can be summoned as “No interaction with terrorists and/or facilitators, even if that may fulfill secondary policy strategies of a country”. Otherwise there is no light at the end of the tunnel that international terrorism of such kind could be dealt with, since it feeds itself, amongst other things, by the brinkmanship of international powers and the ability of terrorist handlers of placing themselves often in between, thus gaining indirectly but vitally a chance to inflict damages to all sides at the end of the day.

Finally, but not least in importance, civil society can enchain regional security cooperation through raising awareness, research, and exposure. The direction therefore in that sector would be to further induce civil society stakeholders to remain active and introduce new ones, all under the prism of collective interregional work. Public forums, use of social media, and lobbying are all methods that have been tested successfully in the past and could be further strengthened in the future.

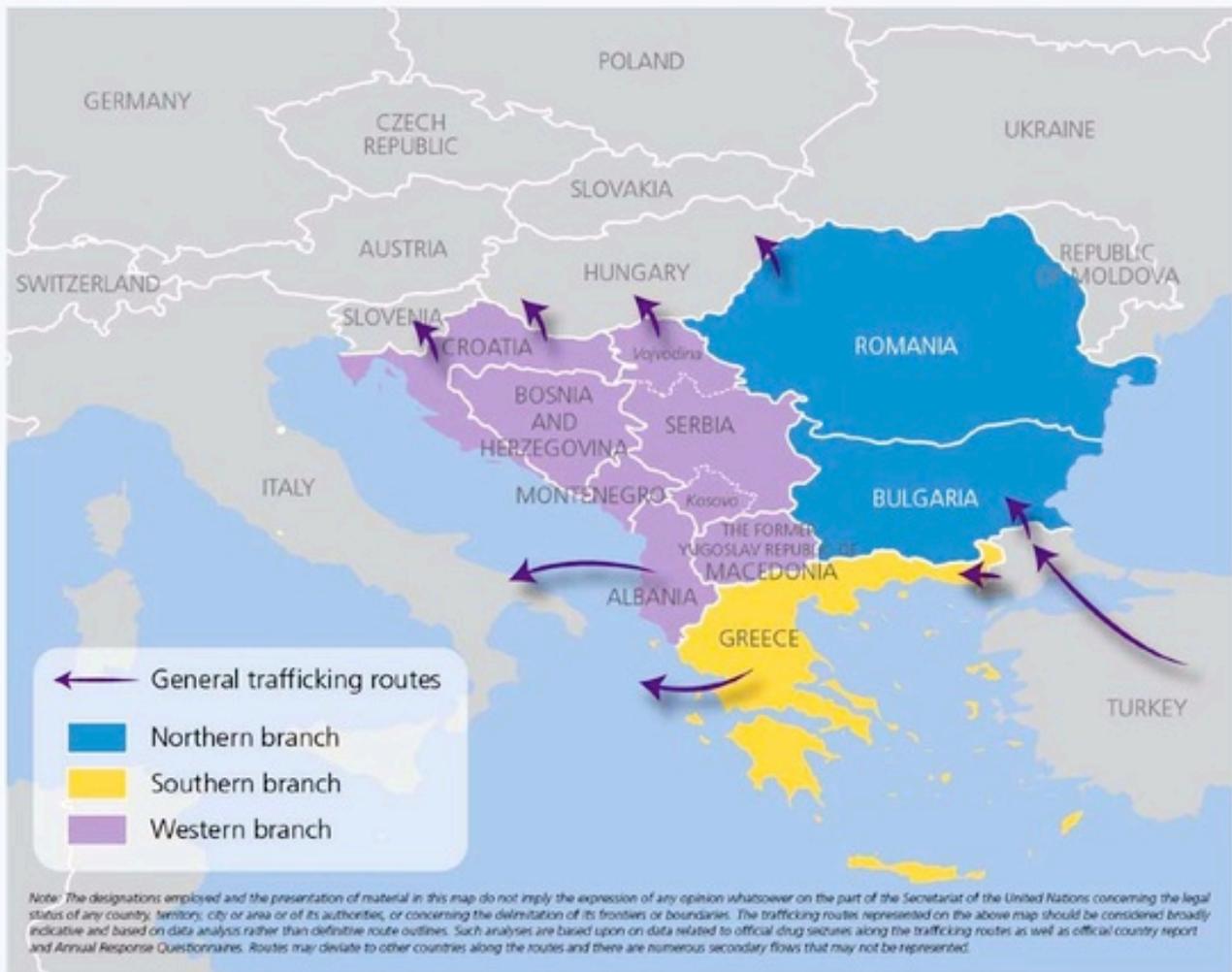
In lieu of a conclusion

Regional security cooperation in South East Europe has already emerged, but it is rather loose, slow-growing and rather weak in terms of public perception and acceptance. In addition a myriad of geopolitical consideration and inter-ethnic differences hamper its evolution. In all terms political initiatives would prove to be the key points for igniting a thorough collaboration, since the state security mechanisms in all countries are by default rigid, conservative, and have set priorities. Thus, the first and foremost for achieving such aims is for politicians to set a direction and strive for it, mobilizing thus the entire mechanisms to move forward.

What is needed is not many but actually few from each country that will set the pace for others to follow. If villains internationally as well as regionally, are already able to have formed strong cooperation, then its high time for the country security representatives themselves to take the initiative and counteract them, setting up a good example for generations to follow.

Appendix

Map 2: Identified branches of the Balkan route of heroin in South-Eastern Europe



Source: Annual Report Questionnaire (ARQ) data, supplemented by national government reports and other official reports

Image: Huffingtonpost.com



Image: Frontex

DIE ROUTEN DER
IS-TERRORISTEN
NACH EUROPA

Image: Die Welt Newspaper

UNEVEN REGIONAL SECURITY COOPERATION: LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

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Introduction

International and regional security cooperation represents one of the most challenging cooperation frameworks. It is particularly difficult for transitioning post-conflict regions to meet these security requirements, though security cooperation remains a difficult exercise even in more developed regions of Europe as well. In many ways, regional security cooperation in the Western Balkans can be seen as a success story due to the international requirements on the region. Starting from scratch, such significant progress has set the precedence for a continued, progress-oriented trajectory; however, more work is necessary in order to successfully reach cohesive and consistent cooperation. Certainly, the full extent of successful implementation will only be realized when such reforms can be viewed from a need-based cooperation perspective rather than that of imposed cooperation.

Regarding attempts to internalize regional security cooperation, it is necessary to greatly reduce the tendency of selective cooperation based on language, trust, and a shared past. Understandably, these elements cannot be ultimately bypassed because they genuinely represent the will and the sovereign right of the countries to decide freely on the partners and level of cooperation. However, it is important to recognize the potential consequences of this divisive cooperation, possibly leading to the creation of “blocks” or “sub-blocks” of countries maintaining cooperation solely based on the preferences of a few. Such behavior may promote the reinvention of “Yugosphere” or “Albanosphere” and thereby the stagnation of progress in the region.

The largest portion of uncompleted security cooperation in the Western Balkans is in Kosovo. This lack of progress reflects an “elephant in the room” that cannot be overlooked. Kosovo’s exclusion from regional security initiatives is a classic example of deliberate selective cooperation, which is rooted in politics rather than security assessments. This leads to disjointed progress across the region, particularly when it comes to the prevailing narrative referring to organized crime deriving from Kosovo, while at the same time preventing its institutions from cooperation through regional security initiatives or bilateral arrangements. The consequences of limited success are noted not only in Kosovo but in the entire region.

This paper is based on the extensive work of the author in identifying the regional security cooperation in the Western Balkans. The paper reflects the data gathered through a number of research projects to which the author directly contributed. The first part of the paper explains the regional security cooperation as a success of the international community. The second part highlights the issues of language and trust representing key elements in security cooperation. The final part briefly out-

lines the case of Kosovo and its difficulties to access regional security initiatives due to the political positioning of some regional countries.

Shifting “externally-driven” cooperation into “necessary norm”

Regional security cooperation, at minimum, should be imagined in the context of regional multilateral relations, as the future success of security cooperation relies heavily on a unified effort from nations across the Western Balkans. Regional security cooperation implies the creation of a political region of the Western Balkans, which includes all former federal units of Yugoslavia, minus Slovenia, plus Albania. The cooperation is often applied in the wider context of Southeast Europe (SEE), which includes all former Yugoslavia, Albania, Bulgaria, Rumania, Greece, Turkey, and often Moldova as well.

In the context of the Western Balkans, regional security cooperation reflects a rather externally driven project. The cooperation did not derive “organically” from the countries of the region themselves but as a condition for the possibility of membership in the European Union (EU), NATO, and other international organizations. The externally driven regional security cooperation does not diminish the final goal of maintaining cooperation for the greater good and shared benefits. The cooperation is mainly intended to target the statutory security actors that retain the coercive means of use of forces such as: armed forces, police, intelligence, judiciary, emergency services, and other related institutions. By bringing these actors together, it is possible to ensure that cooperation is being introduced across the institutions.

Regional security cooperation should normally also encourage cooperation between independent professionals, be it academics or civil society actors in the field of security. By doing so, administrations could claim a more independent approach to cooperation as opposed to an elitist project that lacks the support of the people.¹ This argument rests within the broader framework of security communities. The concept of communities was first proposed by Carl Deutsch in the late ‘50s, who explained the need for security cooperation in the Western European context.² It was similarly applied in other post-conflict areas such as the Western Balkans. While the primary intention was to ensure measurable results in the state-related institutions, it was equally important to facilitate platforms and discussions between these

groups of professionals.³ Utilizing these groups strengthened the integrity of Western European cooperation, lessening the burdens of politics and distrust.

The regional security cooperation should gradually turn from an “externally-imposed condition” to a norm that has to be internalized in the cooperation between the major security actors in the region. While cooperation is being advanced up to a normal and frequent level of exchange and communication, it remains selective and applicable only within the scope of the interest and preferences of the countries and political elites currently involved in discussions. Specifically, it appears that security cooperation is more developed in the northern sub-region of the Western Balkans and less in the southern part of the region.

Re-defining “Yugosphere” and the subsequent creation of “Albanosphere”

When focusing solely on security cooperation within the Western Balkans, one has in mind two main prerogatives of cooperation: language (culture) and heritage. Language plays a major role in all dimensions of cooperation, particularly in the security sector. Language can even determine the likelihood of partnerships due to the selection of “preferred” actors of cooperation – i.e those speaking the same or similar language(s). With the exception of Albania and Kosovo, Western Balkan nations speak southern Slavic languages, which are officially different languages, yet carry various similarities.⁴

The language barrier has steered professionals in choosing their most preferred partners – meaning their homologue police or military officer. In a regional study measuring police officer tendencies and regional cooperation, we have found that these preferred partners greatly impact regional relations. For example, a Montenegrin police officer would rather communicate and cooperate with his/her Serbian or Bosnian counterpart than his/her Albanian or Kosovar counterpart.⁵ The same has been found from the other side; for example, a Kosovar police officer would rather communicate and cooperate with his/her Albanian counterpart.⁶ Further research and analysis indicates that this sort of preference stems from the language advantage.⁷

¹ Hansen Annika (2008) Local ownership in Peace Operation. in Donais Timothy. Local ownership and security sector reform.

² Deutsch, Karl W. et al. (1957). Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience.

³ For example, in the context of Western Balkans, we have created a consortium of think tanks entitled “From conflict zone to security communities.” There was one think tank per country.

⁴ A distinct difference is with a Macedonian language, which is fairly different – though easily understandable – in the former Yugoslav setting.

⁵ Interviews as part of the joint consortium: “From Conflict Zone to Security Community”.

⁶ Bekaj Armend and Florian Qehaja (Upcoming). Caught in quagmire: Kosovo Police Profession. in Ejdus Filip (2015) Security Communities in the Western Balkans.

⁷ Ibid.

Even so, the question may arise: *to what extent does language matter in regional security cooperation?* A culture's language(s) is a distinct element of its affiliation to that community, and it certainly considers the other community to be proximate to the language with which its respective police officer identifies. However, one should not see language as an obstacle; rather, as a facilitator to communication and exchange. When reviewing cases of the EU, police cooperation is perhaps more present among for example German police officers and Austrian police officers. The same is between, for example, Czech and Slovak police officers. On the other hand, it is not a major obstacle, for example, for the Hungarians to cooperate with Czechs, Slovaks, and Poles within the Visegrad platforms, regardless of the distinctly different languages between the three.

However, in the context of the Western Balkans, language preference may be an element that may reflect a hidden intention of exclusion. In the best scenario, the language argument may be an unintended consequence of exclusion. In the worst scenario, it represents the hidden narrative that is rooted in the political and socio-cultural reasoning. Trust is also very important in the context of security cooperation. It directly affects the main mechanism of the security cooperation: the exchange of information.

The language, trust and therefore ultimate preference is also linked to heritage. In this case, it is certain that more cooperation between, for example, Macedonian, Serbian, Montenegrin, and Bosnian police officers is carried out due to the shared past of the former Yugoslav security system; hence, the "Yugosphere"⁸ in security cooperation reflects a positive knowledge-sharing platform, but it is applied selectively to the countries sharing the same heritage. This unintentionally leads to the creation of the so-called "Albanosphere", which maintains unlimited bilateral cooperation between Albania and Kosovo. The arguments for this cooperation are the same as above, but from the opposite socio-cultural perspective.

This situation can be explained from practical examples. To illustrate, although there are reports of certain types of smuggling being conducted from Albania or Kosovo, there might be less interest to cooperate with, for example, the Macedonian police officers because they would rather cooperate with their Serbian counterparts. In a number of police raids in Macedonia during 2015, there were clear official reports indicating links between these groups and some groups in Kosovo (and perhaps Albania).⁹ Even so, the reporting suggested that there were frequent communications between Serbian and Macedonian police officers and politicians instead

of official communication with Kosovo or Albanian police. The asymmetric cooperation reflects a discrepancy between risk assessment and the preferences in regional security cooperation efforts.

Consequently, this leads to improved cooperation between Kosovar and Albanian police, which is conducted bilaterally on all levels. According to a former senior officer of the Kosovo Police, it is "no secret that the communications between both police services are excellent."¹⁰ According to him, this cooperation is not always needed at the level that exists; the fact that joint border patrols and traffic patrols have been introduced may reflect a reaction to the absence of similar, if not the same level of cooperation with other countries in the region.

One may not argue that there is a reciprocal lack of communication between, for example, Albanian Police and Serbian Police. The meetings and exchanges are done as part of regional security initiatives, but there is no substantial and/or practical cooperation between the two countries. The communication is done solely to fulfill a formal requirement of arranging contacts and potential exchange as part of the overall efforts in "ticking the box" that the cooperation is taking place with no intentions to deepen it. The limited interest of police cooperation is also reflected among the public opinion in both countries, which showed that respondents in Albania and Serbia express little interest that their security institutions cooperate.¹¹

Overall, the regional security cooperation is comparatively more advanced than it was in early 2000s, but it has created groups of preferred countries and professionals which reflect preferences of language, culture and shared past. Such policies do not unite and align security cooperation within the framework of risk and threat assessment. In fact, it occasionally echoes deliberate exclusion due to political or cultural reasoning.

Kosovo's exclusion as the "elephant in the room"

Kosovo continues to face major challenges in joining regional security initiatives. It therefore represents one of the largest unresolved puzzles of the overall jigsaw of regional security cooperation. Its regional prospects are being openly hindered by the proactive position of the Serbian Government to block Kosovo's membership in regional security cooperation. Periodically, this act of blocking Kosovo from this institution is done also by Bosnia and Herzegovina – which, like Serbia, does not recognize Kosovo's independence – further complicating regional security cooperation. This "blocking" pattern is purely based on the political position each of the two countries has taken by not recognizing the state-

⁸ For more please see <http://www.economist.com/node/14258861>.

⁹ For more please see <http://www.independent.mk/articles/17316/Kumanovo+Clashes+Macedonian+Prime+Minister+Visits+Injured+Policemen>.

¹⁰ Interview with former senior police officer of Kosovo Police (October 21st, 2014).

¹¹ SRF, Public Opinion Survey, 2013.

hood of Kosovo. In doing so, the authority of the security providers in Kosovo is also not being acknowledged.¹² This pattern is applied albeit an agreement reached between the Governments of Kosovo and Serbia in Brussels, allowing Kosovo's membership in regional initiatives – including security initiatives – by a designation that does not prejudice its political status.¹³ As a result, the agreement nominally satisfied the primary positioning of both parties, but it had a clear goal of completing the jigsaw of cooperation by including Kosovo in the regional framework.

It is both irresponsible to hear arguments referring to crimes or other problems originating and taking place throughout Kosovo without a clear understanding of its exclusion from regional security cooperation. In diplomatic terms, this has been framed as a paradoxical attitude damaging the prospects of regional security cooperation. Out of approximately 40 regional security initiatives from SEE, Kosovo has successfully managed to gain full membership to the following: Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), Centre for Security Cooperation (RACVIAC) and Migration, Asylum and Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI).¹⁴ The participation of Kosovo in the programs of these initiatives is limited and largely unclear. Kosovo's membership has also been blocked in other notable regional initiatives such as the Southeast European Law Enforcement Centre (SELEC), Adriatic Charter, and Police Cooperation Convention.¹⁵ Along the regional security cooperation, there is a prevailing narrative that openly underscores diplomatic lobbying against Kosovo's membership in INTERPOL.¹⁶ This narrative reflects the hidden political intention of Serbia to challenge any attempt for fostering entirely the regional security cooperation.

Conclusion

The Western Balkans reflect a partially successful story in applying a regional security cooperation framework. It was unimaginable just a few years ago that cooperation could reach an extent that the barriers of the past are no longer the primary obstacle. However, it is uncontested that this nominal success should be attributed to the international community which introduced so called “sticks” and “carrots” in order to impose concrete regional security cooperation as part of the ambition to join international organizations, namely EU and NATO. In other words, the cooperation could not be reached at the existing level in lieu of the role of international

community. This, on the other hand, raises the need for consistency in cooperation, which can be reached once it is widely considered as a necessary norm and therefore internalized into the work of all security institutions.

On the other hand, the prevailing obstacles to security cooperation have to do with the “natural” alignment of some countries to conduct cooperation and communication out of preferences. The preferences are found to be either language or trust based, which at least unintentionally excludes partnership with some countries. Should cooperation continue at the existing format, it may easily position countries into two spheres of preferences: the invention of “Yugosphere” and creation of “Albanosphere”. While cultural preferences should normally not be viewed as an obstacle but rather a facilitator of cooperation, it appears that in the context of the Western Balkans these choices may reflect a hidden preference of some countries to justify the lack of willingness to apply cooperation equally throughout the region.

Last but not least, the continued obstructions to Kosovo's membership in security organizations are against the spirit of regional collaboration. Political positioning is being put ahead of security cooperation, but cooperation has proven to be unavoidable in light of common security risks and challenges, which recognize no borders. The last puzzle of cooperation, at least nominally, will not be completed until Kosovo's inclusion in the overall regional security framework and international security organizations.

¹² Qehaja Florian. 2014. Kosovo-Serbia. Carrying out normalisation and implementation.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Emini Donika. 2014. Inclusion or Exclusion? Minorities in the Security Sector in Post-Independent Kosovo.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Speech of Serbian Foreign Minister openly calling upon the countries to reject Kosovo's bid to INTERPOL. http://www.tanjug.rs/full-view_en.aspx?izb=195174.

REGIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND ENERGY SECURITY IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE

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I.

Since the onset of the global economic crisis of 2008-09 countries in Southeast Europe have sought to overcome the protracted recession. They have experienced that the economic recovery is a work in progress. Moreover, the implementation and performance of internationally mandated structural reforms lag [far] behind the immediate social and political costs.

Within Southeast Europe the region of the Western Balkans continues to be a depressed economic region. Employment is scarce and unemployment remains high. But the surprising, or frightening fact is that the issue of unemployment is politically irrelevant when it comes to general elections.

For many observers and citizens in the region the economic narrative formulated by international creditors has so far failed to deliver the promised goods. As the *EBRD* observed in its *2013 Transition Report*, there is a real danger of reform reversals gaining ground in various transition countries of SEE in which the London-based Bank operates. Add to this observation the fact that both Bulgaria and Romania, despite being members of the EU since 2007, continue to be subject to the annual *Co-operation and Verification Mechanism* by the European Commission (EC).

II.

In my view the focus of this panel on ‘*Regional Economic Cooperation*’ sums up correctly what needs to be done and how to frame the challenges ahead for the region of SEE, in particular the Balkans. Policy makers in the Balkans are gradually coming to the understanding that presenting the different countries as one *region* and one *economy* is the way forward. Establishing a critical mass is nowhere more apparent than in the willingness to seek mutual cooperation in the energy security sector (e.g. pipeline construction, transmission of liquefied gas, utilization of hydro power).

But other sectors also have competitive advantages if and when the idea of pooling resources further gains ground. I am particularly thinking of the regional potential to position the Balkans as an agricultural provider, a tourist destination, transport infrastructure coordinator, and an educational hub (most importantly as an IT hub).

Having said that, we should nevertheless acknowledge that regional economic cooperation is high on the policy prescription agenda of European institutions and international creditors. But I doubt that it is really a driver of economic development domestically in the region.

III.

The most promising and complex example of regional cooperation on the ground in SEE is taking place in the energy sector.

The *TAP* and *Turkish Stream* pipeline projects are major public-private investment consortia in regional energy cooperation. But they are also competing projects with different geo-political interests and regional implications. Both Russia and the United States are using these competing energy projects to shape countries' economic and geopolitical orientation.

The countries directly involved in these diverse initiatives include Russia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, Serbia, Greece, Macedonia, Albania, Hungary, and Italy. The pipeline projects are the largest joint venture investments in SEE.

The Moscow-backed pipeline project *Turkish Stream* would bring natural gas across the Black Sea to Turkey and the rest of Europe. The project is hosted by the Russian state-controlled energy giant *Gazprom*, carrying Russian gas to Europe and bypassing pipelines that run through Ukraine. *Turkish Stream* replaces an earlier Russian initiative for a pipeline to Europe called *South Stream*. The latter project was abandoned by Russia in late 2014 because of European Union rules that would have made the project unpalatable to Moscow by requiring *Gazprom* to share the pipeline with other suppliers.

But for *Turkish Stream* to move forward, various bilateral agreements have to be reached and signed. Given that Turkey currently only has a caretaker government following the inconclusive June 2015 parliamentary elections, the flagship bilateral agreement with Russia cannot be signed and ratified. In short, unresolved politics in Ankara is interfering in the operational execution of the project. Thus, as long as Turkey and Russia have still not agreed on the Turkish part of the proposed pipeline, any subsequent *Gazprom* deal with Greece would be meaningless.

By contrast, the United States is encouraging various countries in the region to subscribe to the *Trans-Adriatic Pipeline* (TAP) project. This Western-backed initiative would transfer natural gas supplies from the Caspian Sea in Azerbaijan to Italy and onward to other European destinations. Critically, the project excludes Russia.

The dueling sales pitches by the U.S. and Russia regarding regional energy cooperation are reminiscent of Cold War struggles and the attempt to nudge individual countries into one's own camp. To illustrate, the U.S. is intent on addressing Greece's geopolitical value as a NATO outpost at the southern tip of the Balkans and as an important gateway for energy transmission from

Central Asia. Regional energy cooperation is thus becoming a geopolitical tug of war, defining from whom Europe can satisfy its energy supply needs.

IV.

Cross border energy networks in SEE are an essential factor to regional economic development. This political objective is shared by all stakeholders in the region. But the financial capacity of participating countries to deliver remains limited and fragile.

This joint involvement will require major investment resources in the energy security and distribution networks of individual countries. It is obvious that most countries in the region cannot shoulder the required levels of up-front funding for such investment. Third-party institutional investment facilitation therefore remains a key driver forward. The *EIB* is the largest international financial institution investing in the region (roughly €29 billion through 2014).

The *EBRD* is a major equity investor and a facilitator of (micro finance) lending programs for SMEs that continue to face major problems to access liquidity from domestic banks. Hence, maximizing financial synergies from multilateral institutions such as the *EIB*, *EBRD*, World Bank, and IPA of the EC remains paramount and a work in progress.

However, the private sector must be part of this financial engagement. Identifying private financial resources for investment remains a major challenge for the countries in the region. The formative role played by Greece in the 1990s until 2008 will not come back any time soon. Other countries have gradually – and somewhat hesitantly – stepped into the void left by Athens, most importantly Turkey and increasingly China.

V.

Regional economic cooperation and investment capacity in SEE cannot be separated from the medium-term perspectives of EU enlargement. The enlargement issue remains on the agenda. But that is more the result of developments in Ukraine than any proactive engagement on the part of Brussels towards Ankara, Podgorica, or Belgrade.

The decreasing impact of the enlargement agenda in Brussels is most prominently reflected in the EC President Jean-Claude Juncker's statement from June 2014 that "*no further enlargement will take place over the next five years*".

But the countries currently in the process of accession negotiations – Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey – also face a major challenge in defining their own strategic priorities: These accession countries and other candi-

date countries cannot know at present what kind of EU they could be joining in the future. Will the UK still be a member then? Part of the answer was found following the outcome of the general elections in Britain and the commitment of Prime Minister David Cameron to hold a referendum on British EU membership in the course of 2016. In addition, will Greece still be a member of the eurozone also impacts on the definition of EU membership? I will say more about Greece and the linkage to SEE in a moment.

VI.

For different reasons, Germany and Turkey continue to maintain a focus on the Balkans. Both countries are prepared to take initiatives supporting regional cooperation and invest political capital towards its implementation. Germany is mainly doing this through high-level diplomatic investment, e.g. when Berlin staged in August 2014 the first-ever meeting of *all* the government leaders, including ministers of foreign affairs, economy and finance ministers from Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia.

The 'Berlin Process' now has momentum leading to the follow-up meeting in Vienna in August 2015. At a time when EU enlargement fatigue is growing across the continent, the Berlin initiative served to underline that the German government has not forgotten the aspirations and challenges of the six countries from the region that continue to seek a "European perspective". Berlin is prepared to spend additional diplomatic capital and financial resources with regard to specific policy challenges within and between countries of SEE. This concerns most prominently advancing the German-Polish initiative focused on a *European energy union*, comprising current EU members, candidate and accession countries.

VII.

The role of Turkey in the region is becoming ever more important and substantial. As a diplomatic facilitator, a regional investor and trading partner, Turkey is proactively involved in Bosnia Herzegovina (e.g. banking, airline), Montenegro (e.g. Port of Bar), Serbia, Albania, and Kosovo (e.g. road infrastructure). Bilateral free trade agreements exist with varying countries of the region and Turkey. But this involvement is highly unbalanced. No Balkan country ranks among the top 10 trading partners of Turkey.

However, it is important to distinguish between private-led Turkish investment and trade relations in the region and government-sponsored initiatives. While the commercial focus of the former is self-evident, the strategic and religious objectives of the latter have repeatedly

called into question the motives of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's initiatives.

The *Turkish Stream* pipeline project currently being discussed between Ankara and Moscow will only reinforce the notion that Turkey is in the process of becoming a major transit country for the whole of the south of Europe, and possibly even beyond.

VIII.

Coming from Athens and looking at the political economy of SEE, I need to make a reference to recent Greek developments and the challenges these pose for the banking sectors in neighboring countries. The issue of 'Grexit' or 'Greekkaccident' is currently high on the agenda of Euro area crisis management.

But it is also a challenge that requires immediate attention by finance ministries and central bank authorities in Albania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, and Turkey. The domestic credit systems of these countries are adversely influenced by the transmission channel of Greek banks' subsidiaries. The exposure of these subsidiaries to Greek sovereign debt, T-bill issuance, deposit [outflow] dynamics, inter-bank funding channels and NPL formation is such that minimizing the danger of contagion must be a Plan B scenario that central bank governors in neighboring countries are currently contemplating/implementing. Greek banks' subsidiaries in neighboring countries have a branch network totaling 2,500 units and employ roughly 40,000 people, with a large market share in Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Albania.

Since Greek banks are also under the restructuring obligation of the European Commission to reduce their foreign subsidiary network, the banking landscape in neighboring countries will change. We can already observe this process with regard to *Finanzbank* in Turkey (NBG) and the withdrawal of *Eurobank* from Poland and *Alpha Bank* from Ukraine, respectively.

Concerns in the western policy community that the on going Greek-Russian energy flirt could evolve into an energy alliance are rather far-fetched in my view. In the event of *Grexit*, it is doubtful that the proposed *Turkish Stream* gas pipeline across the Black Sea will be routed through Greece. In particular Russia would be seeking more reliable partners and more sustainable transportation routes. In short, using energy as a political tool to blackmail eurozone countries is not an option worth testing in practice.

IX.

In terms of political economy, my two biggest concerns for the region is that stagnation in the Euro area continues to pull neighboring countries in SEE down with it.

Hardest hit are countries in the region that have strong trade ties and financial sector linkages/interdependency with Greece and Cyprus. Turkey on its own cannot do the heavy lifting in terms of follow-up investment and spear heading bilateral trade relations. Equally, the economies in SEE risk being caught between an imploding Russia and a stagnating Europe. The dependency of the Russian economy on energy exports as its core budgetary revenue strikes a precarious balance.

Every candidate country engaged in or preparing for accession negotiations with the EC has to develop a strategy on how it plans to maneuver between Brussels and Russia in the near future. This implies that the Commission in Brussels will scrutinize every trade agreement, energy contracts, and loan agreements with Russia as well as sensitive infrastructure investments.

- Most importantly, Brussels is constantly demanding from the negotiating teams in Serbia and Podgorica to adhere to the existing sanctions regime against Russia, e.g. concerning refraining from exploiting the Russian ban on EU agricultural producers/exporters.
- This compliance requirement also applies to existing EU members as the infringement proceedings against Bulgaria and *Gazprom* illustrates. DG COMP (Internal Market and Services Directorate) is currently investigating how public procurement contracts were awarded to Russian and Bulgarian energy companies.
- One indirect consequence of this investigation was the decision by *OAO Gazprom* to halt work on the *South Stream* pipeline project in December 2014.

X.

Let me conclude with a rather sobering question. It follows from these observations to ask if we have to revisit the underlying assumptions of the economic reform narrative in the region? Put otherwise, is there a need for an entirely different economic agenda or growth paradigm? The following issues require deeper elaboration for the region:

- Is the ability of crisis-hit countries in SEE to make an economic recovery constrained by the emerging deficits and contradictions in the conceptual assumptions of the reform programs mandated by international (lending) institutions?
- Are the lessons learned from the current economic crisis such that they require a root-and-branch re-evaluation of the economic (growth) agenda that countries decide to formulate and implement?

- To what degree is the definition and ownership of the reform process by domestic stakeholders critical in successfully executing a multi-decade transition process?
- What defines economic success today in the region's economies? European officials have been hyping the recovery in some countries of the Western Balkans. While these economies are finally starting to grow again they are hardly creating new jobs.
- But success Western Balkans style means unemployment rates in double digits and real income per capita that is still below pre-crisis levels of 2008/09.
- Are countries in the Balkans stuck in
 - Transition (EBRD);
 - An austerity trap?
 - In a development trap? Low share of exports to GDP.
 - In a reform trap?
 - In a political trap (Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo)?

The major economic difference between CEE and SEE:

- CEE economies have succeeded in re-industrialization in specific sectors (e.g. cap manufacturing, logistics, supply chain management).
- FDI arriving in SEE is mainly concentrated in services, banking, telecoms and the retail sector.
- It is currently doubtful if regional economic [energy] cooperation – important in its own right – can bridge the economic gap opening up between and within these regions.

Appendix

Turkey's 'South Stream' and Russian gas

Russia has decided to redirect its 63 billion cubic meter (bcm) pipeline to deliver gas to southern Europe. Instead of constructing the first overland section through Bulgaria, a member of the European Union, the pipeline will instead go through Turkey and onto Greece.



THE ENERGY SECURITY CHALLENGES OF THE WESTERN BALKANS: TAP VS. TURKISH STREAM

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Introduction: delayed post-communist and post-conflict transition

The European reform of the Balkans is still unfinished. Although geographically located in Europe, geopolitically the region remains the most fragile point of European stability. Twenty-five years after the end of communism and twenty years after the Balkan wars, the countries from this region are still continuing three unconcluded transition processes: from communism to post-communism; from war to peace; and from state to market economies.¹ These states share at least five common features. All have an identical strategic orientation towards EU integration, but share a history of mutual conflict. All countries have a multi-ethnic composition, but weak governance and undeveloped economies.²

This November, the Dayton Peace Agreement for Bosnia and Herzegovina marks its 20th anniversary. This first peace agreement after the Balkan wars was followed by the next four peace agreements: “The Rambouillet” (1999), “The Kumanovo”, (1999); “The Konchul”, (2000); and “The Ohrid Framework Agreement”, (2001). All these peace treaties were reached through international mediation and their biggest achievement was putting an end to the wars in the region. The wars ended, but not the sources of these wars. Peace-building was not followed by democratic and functional state building. European Commission (EC) progress reports continued to express concerns about the lack of progress on: rule of law, fight against corruption and organized crime, independent judiciary, human rights, and free media. The countries of the Western Balkans are far from “threatened states” according to the “Global Peace Index”³, but each country is still affected by internal and external political problems.

Aiming to stabilize the region, the European Union inaugurated the “Process of Stabilization and Association” for the Western Balkans 15 years ago. Through the Stabilization and Association Agreements (SAA), Brussels tried to put conditions on the integration of Balkan states after their stabilization. Even the naming of the region had changed, from “South Eastern Europe” to “Western Balkans”. However, the re-naming failed to bring about the European transformation of the region. Until today, only one of the components of the EU’s strategy has been implemented: stabilization. But

¹ Blerim Reka: “The Geopolitics and the Techniques of EU Enlargement”, Aspect Brussels, 2010.

² With only 0.6% of the GDP of the EU, with unemployment reaching 35-40% and the lowest flow of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), the Balkans remains one of the poorest parts of the European continent. During 2009-2013, only 21.8 billion USD were invested by foreign investors in the whole region according to the World Bank; See more: www.nova.mk (04.05.2015, 10:31).

³ They are ranked between 50-55, among 162 countries in the world in 2015; see more: 2015 Annual Report of “Global Peace Index”.

not the second one: association. Only one state: Croatia became EU member (in 2013, after eight years of negotiations). Other Balkan states remained with various statuses vis-a-vis Brussels. Montenegro began membership negotiations in 2013. Macedonia has been waiting ten years for the beginning of these negotiations, Serbia three, and Albania two. Bosnia and Herzegovina has no candidate status yet, and Kosovo is still waiting to sign the SAA, remaining the only country without a visa free regime with the EU.

After 15 years, the integration of the Balkans into the EU was almost forgotten. Although in the last decade (2005-2015), Brussels defended itself with “enlargement fatigue”, the EU is also fatigued: institutionally, and financially, without time to deal with the integration of the region. By the end of the last year, the President of the EC, Jean-Claude Juncker announced another 5 year pause of enlargement – till 2020. EC Commissioner Johannes Hahn reconfirmed the same on May 1, 2015 saying: “no future EU enlargement in the Balkans will happen during this term” because: “the situation in the former Yugoslavia and in other Balkan countries is fragile.” Similar views are evident in EU member states. France is without interest for enlargement. Great Britain has no interest in the EU. Only Germany last year activated a ‘wake-up call’ towards Brussels and the Balkans in order to restart this process.

This economically undeveloped, energy insecure and unintegrated region could pose a security risk for the whole of Europe in the future. The Western Balkans is not just a region of geopolitical battles where old and new Cold War spheres of influence are clashing. Gas pipeline could drive new Balkans geopolitics too. For the Balkans, gas or oil has not only economic and ecologic consequences. It challenges also its energy security and its geopolitical position. Two main energy corridors would configure the geopolitical future of the Balkans. One is: “Turkish Stream” (a Russian gas pipeline from Turkey to Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, and Hungary to the EU market); and the other one is the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) (Azerbaijan gas pipeline from Turkey to Greece, Albania, and Italy, thus reaching the EU market).

Energy in the Western Balkans has its geopolitical dimension. By increasing the energy security of the region, European security will be improved, too.

1. Germany’s wake up for Brussels and the Balkans

German Chancellor Dr. Angela Merkel understood that the *status quo* of EU enlargement in the Western Balkans could no longer continue. Concrete, serious and convincing action should be undertaken to revive the process. On August 28, 2014 her new initiative brought back to the European agenda the almost forgotten Balkans. The first annual meeting in Berlin last August was followed by one in Vienna this August as regular annual

support conferences for the countries of the region towards their European integration. Following the political nature of the Berlin summit last year, this year’s Vienna summit concentrated on concrete regional energy and infrastructural projects.

The Berlin initiative for the Western Balkans came at a crucial time: a decade after the EU’s greatest enlargement (2004/2007) and a decade of *status quo* in the integration of the Western Balkans. Germany is assuming leadership to push forward the whole process. Chancellor Merkel understood that the promises of the Thessaloniki Agenda (2003) for a “European Perspective” of the Western Balkans would not suffice, unless followed by concrete and credible political actions of the European leadership. This *status quo* approach towards the region was a boomerang for the EU: in Germany, 40% of all asylum seekers came from the Western Balkans⁴.

The region becomes important after recent dramatic developments east and south of the borders of the EU. However, Merkel’s initiative does not mean that enlargement is granted. Neither the criteria will loosen up or will be withdrawn altogether. Her message must be understood as a wake-up call to the EU’s forgetfulness of the region, wherein a century ago, the First World War had erupted and wars in former Yugoslavia had ended only two decades ago. This initiative was precisely what was missing for quite some time: a serious political commitment of the European leadership. In a very crucial time when European stability is threatened by three main challenges: ISIS, the war in eastern Ukraine, and Greece state bankruptcy. Keeping the Balkans in a strategic limbo could open the door other players outside of the EU.⁵

2. “Unfinished Business” in the divided Balkans between new Cold War lines

Since last year, the U.S. has reminded Europeans of their “unfinished business in the Western Balkans” and

⁴ According to German Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere: “Der Spiegel”, (17 July 2015); According to the Director of BAMF (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees) Manfred Schmidt, till August 01, 2015, 94,000 asylum applications from the countries of the Western Balkans were registered in Germany. Germany is facing a massive wave of immigrants and several changes of the law are expected in September 2015 from stopping new immigrants from the region and introducing working papers; to 5 years stop of entering in Germany for those who received negative decision for asylum (According to DW, 08.08.2015; see also: “Shqip”, 09.08.2015, p.5).

⁵ Although Balkans countries have individuals who are fighting for ISIS or for pro-Russian separatist in eastern Ukraine, their governments condemn involvement of their citizens in these wars. On February 24 in Tirana, South East European Cooperation Process (SEEC) issued a “Joint Statement against Terrorism”, and again in Tirana on May 19, 2015 a Strategic Forum against radicals and extremist gathered key Balkans countries as well as U.S. and UE officials. As regards EU sanctions against Russia after the annexation of Crimea, almost all Balkans countries, except Serbia and Macedonia, joined them.

this year, through Secretary of State John Kerry, that the Balkans is in the “first firing line”.

Since the escalation of the Ukraine crisis, the ‘Cold War’ fever has affected the Balkans too. East-West division has returned in the region, aligning closely to the division of the sphere of influence of 25 years ago. Three main factors influenced this geopolitical change: world financial crisis (2008); European gas crisis (2009-2010); and Eastern European security crisis (2008-2014).

Since the first post-Cold War involvement of the Russian army (in Georgia, 2008) followed by the annexation of Crimea (2014) and the continued support for separatists in the war in east Ukraine, (2014-15), there are fears that the eastern crisis of 2014 could be spread towards the Balkans.

On November 17, 2014, German Chancellor Merkel, warned about an increasing Russian influence in the Balkans, in particular after Lavrov’s statement against NATO membership of the Balkan countries. During her last visit to Budapest early this year, German Chancellor Merkel criticized the “un-liberal democracy” of Hungary, described as a copy-paste model imported from Russia. Hungary last year signed a 12.5 billion Euro contract with Russia for recovering old nuclear equipment from the Soviet period. On February 01, thousands of citizens in Budapest protested against Hungary’s pro-Russia policy. Hungary remains the key gas gate for the EU market for the Russian gas pipeline “Turkish Stream”, and Turkey its starting point, after the Ankara agreement between Putin and Erdogan on December 01 last year. But by the end of July 2015, the Russian-Turkish negotiations were suspended.⁶ If Turkey cancels its participation in the new Russian gas pipeline, the whole project will be questionable, as happened last year with “South Stream”.

3. Russia-West energy clash in the Western Balkans

The Western Balkans is not just a region of geopolitical clashes. An energy clash could become decisive for the new Balkan geopolitics in the second decade of this century. No: Fukuyama’s “the end of history”; neither Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” could explain the foreign challenges of the region. A gas pipeline would drive the new Balkans geopolitics. The gas has not only economic and ecological consequences for the region. It challenges also its energy security.

After the end of the gas project “Nabucco”⁷, a new gas pipeline TANAP was launched by “The Joint EU-

Azerbaijan Declaration on the Southern Gas Corridor”, (in Baku in 2011)⁸. The crucial part of this corridor is TAP (Trans Adriatic Pipeline)⁹. Of the Balkans countries, Albania constitutes the key transit gas route towards the EU market. The important geopolitical position of Tirana will attract neighboring countries to be linked in TAP. The possibility of Macedonia to be linked with a branch from TAP was discussed this year by the Ministers of Economy of Albania and Macedonia¹⁰. Macedonia participated too in a ceremony in Kars (Turkey) of launching construction of TANAP.¹¹ In parallel, Macedonia is keeping its links with the Russian gas pipeline “Turkish Stream”, participating in its consortium meeting together with Russia, Hungary, Turkey, Serbia, and Greece, (Budapest, 7 April 2015).

Greece could play an energy game too: keeping its promises towards Russia to be transit for Russian gas as a part of “Turkish Stream”; but also staying a transit for Azerbaijan gas within TAP.¹² In June 2015, U.S. Secretary for Energy tried to convince Greece to sign TAP instead of Turkish Stream. But a few days later in St. Petersburg, the ministers of energy of Russia (Aleksandar Novak) and of Greece (Panajotis Lafazanis) signed on June 19, 2015 the memorandum for construction of Turkish Stream in Greek territory.¹³

So Greece and Albania would increase their geopolitical position through its energy transit status. Apart from this Russia-Greece energy agreement on “Turkish

⁸ By which project a 3.500 km gas pipeline TANAP will provide Turkey with the gas from Shah Deniz in the Caspian Sea (Azerbaijan) through Georgia to Turkey and through Turkey through TAP to the EU market. This gas pipeline will be connected with Greece, Albania, and Italy to the EU as a part of TAP. Around 25% of the construction for this southern gas corridor is completed and the first gas to Europe will be delivered between 2018-2020. The total costs of the project are estimated around 55 billion USD.

⁹ On July 03, 2015, the construction work for TAP started in Albania in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Azerbaijan gas company SOCAR signed in December 2014. The first funds of 1.1 million Euros for this project was approved by the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF). Through TAP, Albania will become the key stream of the southern energy corridor, having in mind that 209 km of this pipeline (870 km) would pass through its territory. It will start from the Turkish-Greek border, continue to Albania and through the Adriatic Sea into Italy to the EU market. Construction works in Albania started and are expected to be finalized by 2018, and the Albanian economy will receive 1.1 billion Euros investment. Based on the analysis of Oxford University, “in the next three years the Albanian GDP will be increased by 160 million Euros per year”. (See: “Mapo”, “Panorama” (03.07-22.07.2015); see also: Ditmir Bushati: “Nyja Energji- Siguri në Evropën Juglindore”, (“Shqip”, 02.08.2015, p. 9).

¹⁰ Tirana, 9 February 2015

¹¹ 17 March 2015

¹² Greece will try to maximize financially its geopolitical position and it is expected to ask for more money for transit fees. Especially because 478 km of TAP will go through Greek territory.

¹³ “Greece, Russia: Leaders Sign Agreement on Turkish Stream”, (TASS, 19 June 2015). According to this agreement, a project of 2 billion Euros will be funded by Russia’s VEB bank and by a Greek company. It is expected that construction work will start in 2016 and finished in 2019.

⁶ “Russia, Turkey: Turkish Stream Negotiations Suspended”, (Haberturk; Trend; Reuters; 31 July 2015, 08:17 GMT).

⁷ A gas pipeline supported by the west in order to prevent Russian gas pipeline in the EU market.

Stream”, the Albanian-Greece energy partnership within TAP could be challenged by their un-resolved bilateral territorial disputes over the Ionian Sea.¹⁴ In the beginning of July this year, two Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Ditmir Bushati (Albania) and Nikos Kotzias (Greece) in Tirana attempted to overcome this bilateral problem.

Besides TAP, another alternative for the Balkans countries to release from Russian gas dependence could be U.S. shale gas and the use of LNG through the Croatian base Krk at the Adriatic Sea. After convincing Croatia last year to be oriented towards LNG (instead of using natural gas), the USA is now trying to convince Serbia (dependent on Russian energy)¹⁵ to use LG via Croatia; or Azerbaijan gas through the southern corridor TAP. Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić in the beginning of June 2015 declared the “need for diversification of energy sources”, which means that other alternatives than “Turkish Stream” would be considered too.

It is expected that the EU and the USA would not allow the realization of “Turkish Stream” in the Balkans, as last year they did not allow “South Stream”. In March 2015, the EU declared the energy deal of Hungary and Russia of 12,5 billion Euros illegal and decided against an energy monopoly position in the EU energy market. On July 20, 2015, the EU Council accepted the “Action Plan for Energy Diplomacy”, according to which the diversification of energy sources will be the key EU energy policy in the future. According to this new EU energy strategy, which is in line with the “European Security Strategy” (2014), “a diplomatic support will be given for southern gas corridor”.

4. Interdependence of Energy and Route Corridors in the Balkans

Balkans countries are not disputing only about energy, but also about the primacy over route corridors. Energy and route corridors are linked and interdependent too. Together with energy lines, the route lines in the region will gain importance. The region remains at the crossroads between Europe and Asia, Central Europe and Africa, and between Middle East and Far East. Of ten pan-European corridors, six go through the Balkans. In particular two of them, 8 and 10, are of the key geostrategic importance as main transitional axes to the Mediterranean Sea.¹⁶

These route corridors are linked with railway and energy corridors, too. Pan-European corridors affect not only EU geostrategic interests, but also the national interests of the Balkan countries. They will influence energy corridors, too. Each country is trying to prove that “its corridor” is of key importance in order to get finance from Brussels through TEN-T (Trans European Transport Network). Six EU member states¹⁷ and six non-EU countries¹⁸ (two of which are NATO members) are involved in this Balkans corridor “battle”, protecting their own national interests and their economy.

Currently, Hungary, Serbia, and Greece keep a pro-Russian orientation. Macedonia is trying to resist becoming the last chain of that vertical strategic axis between Budapest-Athens. Greece could ignore Italy and Albania, as well as Bulgaria (who are for “corridor 8”) and opt for “corridor 10”. In that case, Italy would lose a ground connection with the Balkans and Turkey as well as Bulgaria, which would be left out from that geostrategic axis. If so, Greece will neglect the historical road “Via Egnatia”, which many centuries ago was in the same direction like today’s “corridor 8”¹⁹, and in a way a link towards the “silk road”.²⁰ In addition, the EBRD is supporting the next route corridor project in the Balkans: “Ionian-Adriatic Highway”, from Albania to Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia. Based on commitments made at the “Berlin Summit”²¹, EU Commissioner Hahn at the Prishtina Ministerial Conference “Western Balkans 6”²² promised 130 million Euros for regional infrastructure. During the Vienna Summit²³, the countries from the region were expected to present concrete energy, route, and railway projects.²⁴

проекти на Балканите”, (Геополитика & Геостратегия, София, бр. 4/2015, стр.40; ISSN 1312-4579).

¹⁷ Italy, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece.

¹⁸ Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania, and Turkey.

¹⁹ Connecting the Adriatic Sea and the Middle East through Istanbul started from: today Italy to the Albanian port Durres, continuing to today: Macedonia, Greece, and Turkey.

²⁰ Recently, the “silk road” is becoming again globally important after plans of China to build “Trans-Euro-Asian railway” of 13,000 km, connecting China with Europe (40 billion USD). What is important for the Balkans about this new China railway is that Istanbul will be again be a key crossroad – together with Moscow.

²¹ Berlin, August 28, 2014

²² Prishtina, March 25, 2015

²³ Vienna, August 27, 2015; In the Vienna Summit: EU- Western Balkans (27th August 2015) the following energy, route or rail way projects will be discussed: Bosnaski Shamac-Doboj-Sarajevo-Mostar-Bijaca; (BiH-Croatia); Podujevo-Nis, (Kosovo-Serbia); Durres-Tirana-Elbasan-Struga-Tetovo-Skopje-Deve Bair (Albania-Macedonia-Bulgaria); Batrovci-Beograd-Nis-Skopje-Bogorodica (Croatia-Serbia-Macedonia-Greece); Subotica-Novi Sad-Beograd-Nis-Gradina, (Hungary-Serbia-Bulgaria); Debeli Brijeg-Bar (Montenegro); Podgorica-Durres-Fier-Tepelene-Qafe Bote (Montenegro-Albania-Greece); Gradishka-Banja Luka-Lasva-Travnik, (Croatia-BiH); Beograd-Podgorica-Bar (Serbia-Montenegro); Lezhe-Prishtina-Doljevac-Nis (Albania-Kosovo-Serbia). At least five priority projects are expected to be financed by EU in the Vienna Summit: South-North Corridor (part of Highway Ion-Adriatic) of 865 million E; East-West Corridor (part of Corridor 8) of 400 million E; Railway Bajze-Tirana of 182 million E; Railway Durres-

¹⁴ Greece was marked as “its” oil/gas zone: Yoini: 5; and Albania defended it as part of its territorial integrity. A bilateral agreement between Albania and Greece (signed in April 2008), was declared “unconstitutional” in the same year by the Constitutional Court of Albania, because Albania had to give its territorial waters to Greece. The same position is being kept by the current Government of Albania, which rejected that agreement.

¹⁵ Around 80% of Serbian natural gas demand is covered by Russia.

¹⁶ More about Balkans corridors see: Блерим Пека: “Геополитическите измерения на транспортните и енергийни

Even in such a micro area like the Balkans, there is a clash on macro-road corridors, which includes big players like the USA, China, and Russia, and rising regional powers such as Turkey. Three pan-European corridors (4, 8, and 10) also include Turkey – the biggest regional power, key energy transit route, and the second biggest army in NATO.

These two main route corridors are very much linked with two key energy corridors: TAP and “Turkish Stream”. Their interdependence could divide the Balkans into two parts: Adriatic Balkans (Albania, Montenegro, and Macedonia) linked with TAP and Route Corridor 8; and Continental Balkans (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Greece), linked with “Turkish Stream” and route corridor 10.

One of the crucial factors of Balkans political security and its economic stability is energy security. The Western Balkans need a common energy market. Since 1998, in order to avoid these energy and route clashes and attract foreign direct investment for a common regional market, several regional initiatives were launched. The main objective of all these regional initiatives was to overcome mutual and multiple border regimes and six different tax and customs instruments in such divided markets.

One of the first initiatives was “Balkans Area of Free Trade Agreement” (BAFTA, 1998) as an area of free trade in the Balkans.²⁵ Then, after the war in Kosovo “The Stability Pact for SEE” was launched in 1999, and later in 2005: CEFTA. In 2012 in Tirana the “Balkans Benelux/AGREEI” was launched, and finally in 2013 in Podgorica the model of “WB 6+”.²⁶

Lin-Pogradec (connecting Albania-Macedonia-Bulgaria); Railway Durres-Vlora.

²⁴ Expectations are that the highway Prishtina-Skopje will be finalized by 2017; at this time the highway Belgrade-Gevgelija is also expected to be completed; and the railway Durres-Skopje in 2020.

²⁵ This was my project presented for the first time in the international conference: Balkan Forum, Paris, 27.11.1998, and later published in many research journals. Project BAFTA, was presented in my speech: “The Europeanization of the Balkans; or the Balkanization of the Europe” in the round table of the “Balkan Forum” (Paris, 27-30th of November, 1998); Then as a project, BAFTA, was presented in my paper: “New geopolitical realities and the European and regional integration of Kosovo” presented in the conference of RINVEST Institute, (Prishtina, 1-2nd of March, 1999); Then the project was published in the special edition/book of the conference: “The economical-social development of the Albanian Economists, (Tirana, 25-26 November 1999); This project was then presented in some other international conferences, such as: “Kosovo-Ajourdhui” (Paris, 26-28 of June, 2000); in the conference of Foreign & Commonwealth Office: “South East Europe- Joining the European Mainstream”, (London July the 7th, 2000); Finally, the project was further developed and published in a up-dated version in: “Euro-Atlantic Review”, Vol. I, No.1/2002, pp: 9-12.

²⁶ On September 17, 2013, Montenegrin Foreign Minister Igor Lukšić presented an initiative to form the so-called Western Balkans Six, their Parliamentary Assembly, “and a joint Balkan police.” The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro has submitted the initiative as “a working document.” Lukšić earlier initiated “a new concept of regional cooperation in the Western Balkans” that would

The common idea of all these initiatives is the creation of a common market in the Western Balkans, with formal political borders of the states of this region as parts of a free trade area and a regional market. The EBRD is discussing with the countries of the region the establishment of a regional common market.

Free regional market together with a regional energy market and regional infrastructural projects would increase economic growth, political stability, and the geopolitical importance of the region. In the Western Balkans, energy and security are interdependent. Energy has its geopolitical dimension. By increasing the energy security of the region, European security will be enhanced.

include: Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. This project was discussed at the end of September 2013, in New York, as they gathered for the session of the UN General Assembly. The document envisages the establishment of a regional center to fight corruption and organized crime. According to the working paper, members of the “Western Balkans Six” would make efforts to simplify the crossing of national borders within the area comprising their territory to the extent of abolishing passports as a necessary travel document, “while maintaining a high level of border security.” The most important initiatives and projects that would be agreed by prime ministers and foreign ministers would be handled by coordinators selected from among prominent experts in the subject area, the document proposes. In 2013 the initiative has received the support of experts from the cabinet of former Commissioner for Enlargement Stefan Fule.



ASPEN WORKING GROUP SOUTHEAST EUROPE

December 2-3, 2015 | Berlin

In cooperation with:



The Aspen Institute Germany wishes sincerely to thank the German Federal Foreign Office for its sponsorship of the Aspen Southeast Europe Program 2015 through the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

December 2, 2015

Arrival of the participants in Berlin during the day

20:00

Welcome dinner

Venue: Restaurant Weinrot, Hotel Savoy Berlin, Fasanenstraße 9, 10623 Berlin

December 3, 2015

Working Group

Venue: Hotel Savoy Berlin, Fasanenstraße 9, 10623 Berlin

09:30 – 11:00

Democratic governance and public administration reform

11:00 – 11:30

Coffee break

11:30 – 13:00

Regional cooperation

13:00 – 14:00

Lunch

14:00 – 15:00

How to address the remaining problems?

15:00 – 16:30

Preparation of presentation

16:30

Coffee

Public Event

Venue: China Club Berlin, Behrenstr. 72, 10117 Berlin

19:00

Presentation of results followed by a discussion of Dr. Ernst Reichel, Special Envoy for South-Eastern Europe, Turkey, and the EFTA States, German Federal Foreign Office, with Rüdiger Lentz on “The Roles of the Western Balkans and Turkey in a Troubled Europe”

Knut Abraham

Odeta Barbullushi

Ramadan Ilazi

Marina Jovičević

Dragana Kiprijanovska

Sonja Licht

Aleksandar Andrija Pejović

Anja Quiring

Ernst Reichel

Manuel Sarrazin

Johann Sattler

Helge Tolksdorf

Bodo Weber

Aspen Institute Germany

Valeska Esch
Senior Program Officer

David Jackson
Rapporteur

Carina Kempf
Program Assistant

Anna Kuchenbecker
Deputy Director

Rüdiger Lentz
Executive Director

Additional guests to the welcome dinner

Achim Barchmann

Marieluise Beck

Josip Juratovic

REPORT: WORKING GROUP SOUTHEAST EUROPE 2015

David Jackson
PhD Candidate
Berlin Graduate School for Transnational Studies
Social Science Research Center
Berlin

The Aspen Institute's Working Group on Southeast Europe was convened in Berlin on December 3, 2015. The meeting brought together five select decision-makers from Southeast Europe (SEE), as well as government officials and politicians of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of Austria. The workshop focused on democratic governance, public administration, and regional cooperation.

Public administration:

Discussion on public administration reform started with the observation that because public administration reform is so strategic and far-reaching within the context of EU accession, it amounts to state-building. Across the region, new instruments and institutions are being established to meet these demands, like national committees for EU integration. In Macedonia public administration reform is an important political priority, with measures being taken to enhance checks and balances in the system. Judicial reform in Albania has been a rather successful attempt at rebalancing powers between government institutions: the integrity of the judiciary has been strengthened and a code of conduct and normative frameworks have been clarified and acted upon. Modernized practices, such as one-stop-shops and computerization, are providing more efficient services to citizens and businesses in Serbia.

While some official reports in SEE suggest progress in public administration reform, it was also acknowledged that challenges still remain. Even though modern laws and best practices are adopted, implementation is still the most important step in the reform process. Experts recommended that modes of implementation should be strengthened for action plans to be realized. Ongoing political challenges and scandals, such as in Macedonia, also distort reform processes.

Participants agreed that human capital development is an essential aspect of an effective administration. Experts recommended that merit-based recruitment procedures must be immediately strengthened throughout the region. It is also important to attract as many people who have graduated from abroad as possible. In Albania, for example, while the criteria for entry into public service have increased, it is those who have graduated abroad who seem to be most capable. Reform efforts must also focus on transparency, which is a fundamental element of good governance. But it was noted that creating transparency procedures places additional work pressure on bureaucracies.

Discussions emphasized that mobilizing a coalition of reformers within public administration is vital to sustain progress. Experts also noted how public administration reform in SEE could stoke social conflict, especially due to the unemployment that ensues from 'rationaliz-

ing' the public sector. Slimming public administration is a very challenging task therefore, and one expert underscored how the impending 5 percent cut in public administration jobs in Serbia will be difficult 'to sell' to the public and public administrative workers.

To ensure the sustainability of public administration reforms, the governments of SEE should work closely together with EU institutions. 'Twinning' projects with EU states may be a constructive mode of reform. Positive interventions from the EU generate immediate support for accession in SEE but negative consequences of EU reform, especially public administration job losses, may prompt discontent. Experts advised that in terms of processes and activities, the public administration dimension is the weakest link in the EU accession process, partly because of occasional institutional gaps between SIGMA and the European Commission. A major challenge for all countries will be how to implement EU accession criteria, which demands the creation of new public bodies and agencies. Better communication and understanding between public administration officials and EU integration ministries on the ground is important. External support, especially from SIGMA and EU institutions, is necessary. Even so, participants advised that external consultants often ignore social context and local solutions, which undermines the sustainability of reform. Dependency on external expertise could also become problematic. Participants recommended that the Regional School for Public Administration is an important institution for exchange and dialog in SEE and should be further developed with the EU's help as the central training institution for the region.

Democratic governance

During discussions on democratic governance in SEE a consensus emerged: the democratic political culture across the region is weak. Experts warned that liberal democracy is not 'the only game in town'; indeed, the extent of hidden politics, string-pulling and rule-flouting means that SEE countries could be described as being 'facade' democracies. The rise of populism, whether the rejection of democratic rules as in Kosovo, patriotism contests in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), or the excessive nationalization of discourse in other states, is a worrying trend.

As the executive branches of governments often seek to dominate over the other branches in SEE, more power should be accorded to parliament. Yet, experts also warned that many parliaments lack an adequate culture: most parliaments are dysfunctional or are openly disregarded, a problem, which feeds into a spiral of citizen discontent and apathy.

All participants agreed that while civil society cannot substitute for the state in the region, it is nevertheless an essential part of a vibrant democratic culture and a focal point for improvements in governance. Experts warned

that civil society input is still not taken seriously by governments in SEE. In Kosovo, it was pointed out that there is a growing chasm between civil society and the state. Participants recommended that formal mechanisms must be developed in SEE so that civil society can be more effectively included in the decision-making process. It was also pointed out that civil society should be made more accountable, especially as they can add fuel to social discontent and politicize public administration.

External actors have a role to play in encouraging a better democratic culture. Speakers warned that due to a perceived unwillingness to compromise and confused lines of communication, the EU integration process is stoking frustrations amongst Kosovar political leaders. To be less remote and exclusive, the EU integration process needs to be brought into the domestic political sphere and closer to citizens. NATO was identified as a factor shaping political dynamics in Montenegro.

Experts warned that political parties in SEE are not contributing to the development of a democratic political culture. Worryingly, parties seem to dominate many aspects of social life, including the media and business. Experts recommended the system of party financing should be reformed immediately to be more transparent. An important dynamic identified in Montenegro is the continued political fragmentation of the political parties.

Local government is an important aspect of democratic life in SEE, especially as core services – water, agricultural irrigation, roads, health and education – are provided at this level. Participants advised that local and central governments should work together in a constructive way. Furthermore, regional cooperation can be strengthened through co-operation at the local government level, especially as subnational relationships across borders are underdeveloped. It was noted by experts that the principle of 'subsidiarity' is important for good governance.

Regional cooperation:

Experts noted that cooperation between states, both in the EU and SEE, is at a critical juncture. Positive developments have been evident in the Balkans, illustrated by the recent Serbian-Albanian rapprochement. Constructive modes of dealing with the 2015 refugee crisis have also been established; a spirit of joint working that should be harnessed to other challenges. One recommendation was made clear: SEE must now focus on becoming constructive members of the international community.

Some experts suggested that the region is undergoing a renaissance of regional cooperation, witnessed by the unprecedented numbers of regional exchanges. Others were less convinced, believing that there are too many fora of regional cooperation, with a lot of them produc-

ing hot air rather than concrete results. It was also noted that regional cooperation is facilitated through ignoring ‘elephants in the room’, and it is questionable how cooperation is anticipating resolutions to the latent conflicts and tensions in the region.

Experts stressed that instability can spread across the continent: the repercussions of EU crises are felt heavily in SEE. Strides have been made in reconciliation and efforts to defuse tensions (for example, between BiH and Serbia) have been done in a mature way. Even so, the EU should be aware that SEE could be quickly destabilized and the sudden return of economic migrants to SEE could induce instability. Common projects to deconstruct historical myths are essential. Experts warned that the strategic behavior of some politicians in SEE is unhelpful, in particular the tendency to artificially inflate tensions in order to claim credit for defusing them. Though it was noted that reconciliation is essential, experts suggested that normalization – basic trust building between national groups – should be worked on before reconciliation. To this end, youth cooperation was recommended as very important with the establishment of youth cooperation offices in Tirana and Belgrade lauded during discussions.

Experts recommended that daily cooperation, not just in region but also across Europe, is necessary at the operational level to deal with the twin challenges of refugees and ISIS. Communication and correspondence must immediately increase across borders. EU machinery is currently too cumbersome in SEE – the EU has not been providing sufficiently targeted and effective relief to help Macedonia, for instance.

The extent to which the EU was necessary for SEE cooperation was debated, with some speakers recommending that the EU should be more pro-active in deciding on the formats of regional cooperation. The EU should send clear signals that regional integration and cooperation is a pre-requisite for accession. It was also recommended that the expectations of frustrated populations should not be linked to EU accession – this is the big framework but national action is for now much more important. It was also noted that support for SEE accession is not really growing in the EU. Nevertheless, existing EU-designed cooperation mechanisms are working, with micro-strategies, such as the Danube and Adriatic regional strategies, yielding results. While the EU should send clear signals to frustrated SEE publics that resources are flowing into their countries, more conditionality on EU funding could be helpful. Additional financial instruments for the region may be necessary, especially projects that have a ripple effect, such as infrastructure projects.

Participants stressed the importance of the ‘Berlin process’ as a crucial engine for regional cooperation. It offers an excellent opportunity to revitalize the region economically and to deliver concrete benefits, outcomes

that are crucial to halt the flow of human capital out of the region. The ‘Berlin process’ should continue to focus on measures that could spur growth and employment. Still, economic cooperation is not enough: there should be a common normative framework to lock SEE countries in a democratic trajectory. A European perspective offers this framework, as does the ‘Berlin process’ with its soft measures and instruments.

ACRONYMS USED

AFSJ	Area of freedom, security and justice
AGREEI	Action Group for Regional Economic and European Integration
BAFTA	Balkans Area of Free Trade Agreement
BiEPAG	Balkan in Europe Policy Advisory Group
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BIRN	Balkan Investigative Research Network
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CEFTA	Central European Free Trade Agreement
CIS	Central and Commonwealth of Independent States
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSOS	Cooperation between governments and civil society organizations
DP	Democratic Party
DPS	Democratic Party of Socialists
DS	Democratic Party (Serbia)
EBRD	European Bank of Reconstruction and Development
EC	European Commission
ECFR	European Council on Foreign Relations
ECPR	European Consortium for Political Research
ECT	Energy Community Treaty for South East Europe
EFB	European Fund for the Balkans
EIB	European Investment Bank
EU	European Union
EULEX	European Union Rule of Law Mission
Europol	European Union's law enforcement agency
FDI	Foreign direct investment
FENA	Federal News Agency BiH
FES	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
FRONTEX	European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union
FYR	Former Yugoslav Republic
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HDZ	Croatian Democratic Union
IA	Institute Alternative
IFI	International Financial Institution
ILO	International Labor Organization
INTERPOL	International Police Organization
IOB	Independent Oversight Board
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
JHA	Justice and Home Affairs
KIPA	Kosovo Institute for Public Administration
LCS	Law on Civil Service
LGBTQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning
LNG	Liquefied Natural Gas
LSE	London School of Economics
MARRI	Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NBG	National Bank of Greece
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OECD	Economic Co-operation and Development
OHR	Office of the High Representative
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

PISG	Provisional Institutions of Self-Government
RACVIAC	Centre for Security Cooperation
RAY	Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of Youth in Action
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
RECOM	Regional Truth and Reconciliation Commission for the former Yugoslavia
SAA	Stabilization and Association Agreement
SAP	Stabilization and Association Process
SDP	Social Democratic Party of Croatia
SEE	Southeastern Europe
SEECF	South-East European Cooperation Process
SEEIC	South East Europe Investment Committee
SEEPAG	Southeast European Prosecutors Advisory Group
SEETO	Southeast Europe Transport Observatory
SELEC	Southeast European Law Enforcement Center
SEPCA	Southeast Europe Police Chiefs Association
SIGMA	Support for Improvement in Governance and Management
SNS	Serbian Progressive Party
SP	Socialist Party
SRSF	Special Representative of the Secretary-General
TANAP	The Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline
TAP	Trans Adriatic Pipeline
TEG	Tourism Expert Group
TEN-T	Trans-European Transport Networks
TEPAV	The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey
TEU	Treaty on the European Union
TI	Transparency International
UK	United Kingdom
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
U.S.	United States of America
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	Western Balkans
WB5	Western Balkans Five
WB6	Western Balkans Six
WIIW	The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies

THE ASPEN IDEA

The Aspen Institute Germany promotes values-based leadership, constructive dialog amongst conflicting parties, and Euro-Atlantic cooperation to support and enhance a strong open society.

The Aspen Idea

The Aspen Idea goes back to 1945 when Chicago businessman and philanthropist Walter Paepke (1896-1960), son of German immigrants from Mecklenburg, arrived in Aspen, a then sleepy town in the mountains of Colorado. Under the impression of the human and moral catastrophe of World War II, Paepke dreamed of “a place where the human spirit can flourish.”

Paepke was a trustee of the University of Chicago and close friends with its president Robert Hutchins as well as with philosopher Mortimer Adler. Together they shared one vision: To create a platform for dialog for leaders, thinkers, and artists from around the globe to step away from their daily routines and reflect on what makes good leaders and a good society.

Their dream came true in 1949 when Paepke made Aspen the site for the celebration of the 200th birthday of German poet and philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to commemorate the historic and abiding philosophical ties that America and the rest of the world had with Germany, despite the aberration of Hitler and World War II. The 20-day gathering attracted such prominent intellectuals and artists as Albert Schweitzer, Jose Ortega y Gasset, Thornton Wilder, and Arthur Rubinstein, along with members of the international press and more than 2,000 other attendees. That year, Paepke created what is now the Aspen Institute.

Today, the vision and reach of the Institute extend far beyond its original roots. In policy programs, seminars, public events, and global leadership initiatives, the form and force of the Institute have grown to confront contemporary challenges and matters of collective concern. The Institute is based in Washington DC and has campuses in Aspen, Colorado, and on the Wye River on Maryland's Eastern Shore. It also maintains offices in New York City and has an international network of partners in Germany, France, Italy, the Czech Republic, Romania, Spain, Japan, India, and Mexico.

Aspen Germany

As the first Institute abroad, Aspen Germany was founded in 1974 in the midst of the Cold War. Its founding members included former Chancellor Willy Brandt, former High Commissioner for Germany John J. McCloy, Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, the Governing Mayor of Berlin Klaus Schütz, historian Lord Alan Bullock, the future President of West Germany Richard von Weizsäcker, sociologist and politician Ralf Dahrendorf, and publicist Marion Countess Dönhoff among others. Together they envisioned creating a symbol of transatlantic community.

Under the leadership of Shepard Stone (1974-1988), Aspen Germany's first director, the institute made a significant contribution to achieving mutual understanding between the East and West blocs during the Cold War. Aspen was one of the few places where high-ranking East bloc and West bloc representatives were willing to meet in a neutral, respectful and confidential atmosphere in order to look for solutions to the East-West conflict together.

Stone's successors extended this tradition and also focused on issues facing Southeast Europe and the Middle East. Since the early 1990s, Aspen Germany has been focusing on the developments in Southeast Europe when the Institute joined forces with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and initiated the International Commission on the Balkans, which was followed by a young leaders study group on the future of the region. Today, Aspen Germany offers different fora for regional dialog, both on the Foreign Ministers' level as well as on the Subcabinet and civil society level.

Since its inception, Aspen Germany has been enabling constructive dialog amongst conflicting parties and promoting Euro-Atlantic cooperation to support and enhance a strong open society.

The Aspen Institute Germany promotes values-based leadership, constructive dialog amongst conflicting parties, and Euro-Atlantic cooperation to support and enhance a strong open society. Aspen Germany does this by convening decision-makers and experts from politics, business, academia, media, culture, and civil society in three programs, the Leadership Program, Policy Program and Public Program.

The Aspen Institute is an international non-profit organization that fosters enlightened leadership, the appreciation of timeless ideas and values, and open minded dialog on contemporary issues. The Aspen Institute USA was founded in 1950. The institute and its international partners seek to promote the pursuit of common ground and deeper understanding in a non-partisan and non-ideological setting. Aside from “The Aspen Institute”, there are nine independent Aspen Institutes in France, Italy, Czech Republic, Romania, Spain, Japan, India, Mexico, and Germany.

Leadership Program – The Aspen Seminar

The Aspen Seminar is an exceptional leadership program promoting values-based leadership and enabling substantial dialog about challenging political and social topics. Hidden away from the demands of the daily routine and in a confidential setting, small groups of highly accomplished leaders are given the space to address fundamental aspects of human existence, including the role of the individual, societal order, and the limits of power. Based on classical and modern texts of renowned philosophers and thinkers, and guided by two highly skilled moderators, participants reflect on timeless ideas and values and their continued relevance in today’s world.

Policy Program

Aspen Policy Programs actively address current policy challenges. In closed-door conferences and seminars focusing on complex political and social trends and developments, decision-makers analyze common challenges and develop viable solutions. Kick-off introductory presentations by international experts lay the groundwork for focused debates with policy makers with the aim of forging an international consensus among politicians, diplomats, and experts from academia, business, and the media. During the discussions, participants develop constructive suggestions and policy recommendations, which are subsequently published.

Public Program

The Aspen Institute Germany’s Public Program addresses a broader invited public. It serves as a forum for discourse, where new ideas can be discussed in a fruitful environment of interested and informed individuals. The central theme of the Public Program is values-based leadership, the mission of the Institute. Thus, it is discussed how leaders can deal with the political and economic challenges of our time and how they are currently being dealt with.



EU ENLARGEMENT AND REGIONAL COOPERATION – IDENTIFYING THE NEXT STEPS

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