



# DEMOCRATIZATION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

PROMOTING MULTI-ETHNIC OPEN SOCIETIES TO  
COUNTER RADICALIZATION AND POLARIZATION

Valeska Esch (ed.)

In cooperation with:



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This reader includes conference papers and proceedings of Aspen Germany's Western Balkans conferences in 2016.

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# FOREWORD

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“The future of the Balkans is within the European Union.” That was the promise made by the EU Heads of State and Government in Thessaloniki in 2003. It contains a clear European perspective for all countries in the region and has no expiry date. The countries of the Western Balkans can continue to count on this pledge; it is referred to and renewed *inter alia* at the annual meetings of Heads of State and Government in the framework of the Berlin Process, most recently in Paris on July 4, 2016.

All six countries of the Western Balkans are aiming for full membership of the EU; to this day, this goal is an attractive one, even though it is now clear to everyone that adjusting to European norms and standards is anything but a picnic. If we do a reality check, however, we see that the power of attraction exerted by the European project is not in itself enough to transform the countries of the Western Balkans into stable States with functioning, democratically mandated institutions and resilient societies. The opposition of those who fear the loss of privileges and sinecures is strong; corruption and patronage are deeply rooted; people are susceptible to backward-looking nationalist narratives; and there is far too little recognition that, after decades of stagnation, reforms are inevitable – with or without European integration. All of that was true before the EU plunged into what looks like its deepest crisis ever. Now, some actors in the Western Balkans use this crisis as an additional excuse to back away from the changes needed to save their countries from spiraling into an abyss of poverty and insecurity.

My conclusion: Repeatedly flagging up the EU perspective is a valuable exercise, but it is not enough. If the EU wants to keep the Western Balkans on track and prevent the region from being captured by others, it must send out strong political signals and mobilize all available forces.

For years now, the Aspen Institute Germany has offered an important platform for a trust-based exchange between decision-makers and civil-society representatives from the countries of the Western Balkans, Germany, other EU member states and the US.

In 2016, at the so-called sub-cabinet meetings, the Aspen Institute Germany looked at the topics “Democratization of political processes and overcoming political-ideological polarization” and “Countering Radicalization, Nationalism, and Division: How to Better Promote Inclusive, Multi-ethnic, Liberal Societies?”. As these are topics at the heart of the process of transition in the countries of the Western Balkans, the Federal Foreign Office was delighted to support this project. This publication summarizes the results and recommendations of these meetings. I thank the Aspen Institute Germany for organizing the conference series, which was in every respect successful, and hope that you will find this an interesting read.

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





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# INTRODUCTION

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Dear friends of the Aspen Institute Germany,

2016 was a year of major changes in the international environment that have a strong impact on Europe and Germany, but also have serious implications for the Western Balkan countries. In the first half of 2016 political attention for the Western Balkans increased, due to their constructive role in providing for the refugees en route to Western Europe, particularly when Macedonia closed its borders to Greece, alleviating the flow of refugees. Events during the second half of the year, however, confirmed fears in the Western Balkans of a shift in priorities away from the region. In this context, the result of the Brexit referendum has been a major cause for concern, as fears are that the EU and its member states will enter a period in which priorities will be ever more inward-looking at the expense of EU enlargement. At the same time, the United Kingdom has traditionally been one of the main supporters of EU enlargement to the Western Balkans and the region itself. Moreover, the rise of right wing populism across Europe, a growing threat of terror attacks by Islamist extremists in EU member states, the continued challenge of accommodating and integrating refugees from the Middle East and Northern Africa, as well as the potential geopolitical implications of a potential shift in U.S. policies after the election of Donald Trump as President seem to further marginalize enlargement issues and the concerns of the region.

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 are gradually progressing towards that goal, and many of them are also aiming for NATO membership, with Montenegro's accession to the Atlantic Alliance being in the ratification process. 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, and the 2016 Summit in Paris has reconfirmed the region's perspective of joining the EU. In addition, following the example of the Franco-German Youth Exchange Office, it initiated the establishment of a Regional Youth Cooperation Office for the Western Balkans (RYCO) in 2016.

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 liberal democracies and major reform issues include the independence of the judiciary and public administration from political interference, the development of a functioning rule of law, the strengthening of parliaments to enable them to exercise their control function over the judiciary, media freedom, and minority rights. Moreover, 2016 again was characterized by deep political polarization within the Western Balkan countries, particularly visible in the run-up to the passing of the judicial reform in Albania, the events surrounding the elections in Montenegro, the continued political crisis in Macedonia, and the blockade and even violence in the parliament of Kosovo. Nationalism and radical positions also continued to play a role in the previous year, inter alia in the election campaigns in Serbia and Macedonia, in a series of rhetoric spats between Croatia and Serbia, in particular in light of Croatian objections to the opening of new negotiating chapters in Serbia's EU accession process, and in the continued divisions, including a controversial referendum in Republika Srpska, in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Against this background, the Aspen Institute Germany continued its efforts to actively contribute to a regular constructive high-level regional dialog in 2016. It 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. Since 2008, 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. Aspen Germany has provided a neutral platform for seven Southeast Europe Foreign Ministers' conferences and around 25 sub-cabinet level meetings. 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. Over the past years, the Aspen Institute Germany has fostered dialog and debate on issues like trust, 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, the role of parliament, and regional cooperation. International experts from academia and civil society organizations provide valuable input to these meetings with the papers and insights they contribute to the discussions. These conferences therefore 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, politicians and members of the civil society, 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 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania, which co-hosted this year's conference 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 contributions and expertise for discussion and often suggested constructive solutions. Finally, we would like to thank Ingrid Schulte and Nicola MacColl for their contributions to this publication.

We hope you enjoy reading this compilation of conference papers, reports, and recommendations that were developed during the conferences in 2016 and we look forward to continuing our commitment to the Western Balkans.



Rüdiger Lentz  
Executive Director



Valeska Esch  
Senior Program Officer

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# SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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In 2016, Aspen Germany held three sub-cabinet level meetings in Durrës, Alt Madlitz, 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 the democratization of political processes and the role of parliaments as well as radicalization, nationalism, and the improvement of regional relations. 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 2016 conferences were characterized by a growing concern about developments in Europe and the rise of populism and nationalism, in particular after the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom in June. There is a growing fear in the Western Balkans that the interplay between an increasingly inward-looking EU due to the incumbent Brexit negotiations, rising populism, the potential geopolitical consequences of the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States, the refugee crisis, and a rising number of conflicts around Europe could further shift the EU's priorities away from the region. As a consequence, the credibility of the European perspective is more and more questioned in the region, which may give rise to nationalism, as leaders will look for new sources of legitimacy vis-à-vis their electorates. At the same time, participants agreed that there is no real alternative to the full EU integration of the Western Balkans countries and a series of reform priorities were identified.

The most important reform needs relating to the topics discussed in 2016 identified on the **national level** were linked to curtailing the excessive power of the executive branches in the region and to making political processes and decision-making more inclusive and transparent. In particular, national governments of the region were called upon:

- To step up the democratization efforts and increase performance on alignment in the country, which will help in the EU integration process
- To refrain from publicly blaming the EU for difficult reforms and to explain decisions better to the public (instead of just saying “we do it because the EU wants us to do it”)
- To refrain from using polarizing language and from constantly referring to past divisions and rather use rhetoric oriented toward the future
- To respect parliament more as an independent institution, be more open for actual parliamentary debate, and avoid the excessive use of urgent parliamentary procedures
- To respect opposition as part of the democratic system and refrain from labeling opposition as enemies or traitors
- To better respect media freedom and refrain from labeling critical media as traitors or foreign mercenaries, as criticism and freedom of speech are integral parts of democratic processes and enable people to make informed decisions
- To invest more in education, especially political and civic education
- To do more to educate students and empower girls to be engaged with politics to ensure that there is a well-qualified pool, including women, to choose from
- To consider civil society organizations partners that can support governments in their reform efforts with analysis, advice, and communication to the public
- To include professional and expert organizations (such as youth organizations, engineers, environmental technicians etc.) in policy making
- To invest more in economic reforms and the establishment of a common market
- To include the network of the chambers of commerce in the region in regional cooperation efforts and better support them in the initiatives they have already taken
- To realize that regional cooperation and integration are benefits in themselves and to refrain from raising expectations of external ratification for cooperation
- To set a better example for normalizing regional relations by normalizing the rhetoric about neighboring countries (and no longer try to find excuses or blame the EU for having to meet with counterparts from within the region)
- To openly communicate the benefits and initiatives of regional cooperation to the public

On the **regional level**, it was considered paramount for the region to be more proactive when it comes to regional cooperation, to realize that regional integration is an asset in itself that needs to be explained to the people, and to focus more on issues that will deliver concrete results for the people. In particular, governments were recommended:

- To become more of an actor as a region, take more initiative and not just wait for the EU and its policies; Serbia and Albania could take a lead role
- To focus more on regional integration beyond EU initiatives since the more attractive the region is the higher will be the support for EU enlargement in the EU and its member states
- To jointly work on the establishment of a common market and to finally abolish non-tariff barriers within CEFTA
- To jointly work on key issues that have been neglected, but would bring concrete benefits to the people (for example job creation and education)
- To work on further regional integration that would make people's lives easier and to improve the framework for freedom of movement in the region (for example solve the question of health care for people living in another country)

- To consider business entities, chambers of commerce, and civil society organizations a second track to advance regional cooperation and increase interaction between initiatives from these actors and government policies
- To strengthen the RCC's ability to coordinate regional integration
- To focus internally as a region on how to better deal with nationalism and anti-EU parties
- To give full support to the Regional Youth Cooperation Office for the Western Balkans (RYCO) to enhance regional youth exchange
- To increase the exchange of civil servants in the region
- To better cooperate in the field of research and development and to approach the EU with concrete projects if further assistance is needed
- To invest more efforts into finding the missing people from past conflicts and to establish a common truth and history

Finally, a number of recommendations were developed for how the **European Union and its member states** could better support the region and strengthen its European perspective:

- To address issues of EU enlargement openly despite the current lack of popularity of the topic without fear of voters' responses and instead explain the benefits of EU enlargement, as otherwise the EU and its member states further undermine the credibility of the process
- To unite behind the European perspectives for the Western Balkans again as currently there is hardly any united EU policy on the Western Balkans, but rather different groups of member states with different policies
- To more actively support the region politically to avoid leaving a vacuum in the region that is being filled by other actors (e.g. Russia, Turkey, China)
- To improve the communication of the EU's benefits to the public
- To invest more in media freedom in the region and even consider anti-propaganda against increasing misinformation
- To finally begin considering the region as a partner, especially in the context of the refugee crisis, during which the region played a very constructive role without receiving the same support as EU member states did
- To invest more political capital in the region, especially member states, to counter the growing influence of often more visible external actors
- To be more open to address issues that are priorities for the Western Balkan countries and not only EU priorities; for example, a regular high-level dialog with the heads of states of the Western Balkan countries could be established to set the agenda
- To focus more on monitoring the state of democracy in the region and to empower actors who fight for democracy
- To not tolerate unacceptable Western Balkan policies but always take a clear and open stance when red lines are crossed even if only rhetorically
- To work on mapping and streamlining the numerous EU and regional initiatives together with the Western Balkan countries to make better use of the region's resources
- To consider a mechanism of financing to immediately support agreements made bilaterally or regionally at the countries' own initiative
- To work on solutions together with the region to ensure that the different stages of countries in the EU accession process and the inherent stricter standards do not impede regional trade and cooperation
- To provide more economic support and incentives for FDI in the region, which would also address the issue of Chinese, Saudi, and Russian capital in these countries, and put a stronger emphasis on job security
- To consider increasing the financial support for research and innovation in the Western Balkans
- To consider opening more EU programs to the Western Balkan countries, especially for the youth, and to clearly communicate this to raise the attractiveness of the EU in the region
- To further improve the country reports to better consider the different stages of the accession process, as reports are increasingly compared regionally, which raises both, people's expectations and government accountability, but can sometimes be misleading
- To avoid the delay of opening chapters for political, especially bilateral, reasons
- To avoid setting different standards and benchmarks as conditionality for different countries (for example Kosovo's visa liberalization process and the issue of the ratification of the border demarcation with Montenegro)
- To clarify what the Berlin Process entails, as every host country has had their own focus, follow up on initiatives from previous Summits, and to consider moving the focus of the Berlin Process beyond technical issues to include further pressing regional issues
- To follow-up the initiative to address bilateral issues in the Berlin Process
- To invest more efforts in finding ways for the Belgrade-Pristina dialog to better trickle down to the people and connect the political process with society

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.

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# SYNOPSIS OF THE SOUTHEAST EUROPE PROGRAM 2016

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*The following pages provide a synopsis of the points that were discussed at the conferences in 2016.<sup>1</sup>*

## **Ethnic and Nationalist Policies – The Current State of Play**

Effects of Brexit on the Western Balkans:

- Britain will no longer be a central actor in the region (nowhere is the British foreign policy more inextricably interlinked with its EU membership than in the Balkans; Britain would be advocating for a strategic course for the region that it has itself decided to abandon)
- Brexit is likely to change the wider debate about enlargement; two possible scenarios:
  - The EU should not take in any new members until it has resolved its internal issues and dealt with the fall out of Brexit
  - The EU should hasten to bring in the Western Balkan countries to ensure that nationalism and radicalization in those countries does not spread and become a threat to the EU
- There is also a wider question about growing populism and nationalism across Europe

The trigger for Brexit was not just nationalism but the effect of globalization, particularly on employment

### Recommendations

There should be a credible accession prospect, as the lack of it could increase Euroscepticism in the region.

Issues such as job security should be improved, as they play an essential role in the rise of nationalism, also in the Western Balkans

The EU needs to identify what it is the people really want and work out how to deliver it

The EU needs to improve the communication of its benefits to the public

There is a need for renewed pressure from the EU in the region to ensure that reforms continue to be made

### Questions

What can the EU and its member states do to increase the credibility of the enlargement perspective?

Should countries be allowed to integrate in the EU sectorally, for example in transport and energy, to increase their commitment to the Berlin Process' projects, give the European Commission a way for it to monitor their behavior, and provide new, intermediate steps on the way to full membership?

## **The Role of Parliaments**

The recipe for democratization is to build up stable political systems and institutions as soon as possible; there are no shortcuts

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

Successful democratization requires stability, just as stability benefits from democratization

States should be conscious not to confuse short-term stability with lasting transformation but should find those internal factors that will lead to lasting change

Due to the legacies of communism and conflict, there was no democratic political culture preceding the transition period and institutions were not trusted and failed to deliver

The Bundestag as an example of a functioning parliament with efficient instruments that are used to control the government

- MPs have the right to ask questions, which the government must answer either in writing or in the plenary:
  - Minor interpellation: a parliamentary fraction or 5% of MPs can hand in a question to the government in writing through the President of the Parliament that has to be responded to by the government within two weeks
  - Major interpellation: a parliamentary fraction or 5% of MPs can hand in a question to the government in writing that has to be responded to by the government in the plenary
  - Individual MPs can pose four questions per month in writing to the government which it has to respond to in writing within a week; questions and answers are published weekly
  - During question time every MP has the right to ask up to two questions each week parliament is in session
  - A parliamentary fraction or 5% of MPs can call an immediate parliamentary debate for a topic of current general interest at any time (“Current hour”)
  - Government questioning: on Wednesdays after an internal cabinet meeting, MPs can ask Members of the Government questions of current interest for 30 minutes
- Annual budget debate provides the opportunity to hold the government accountable for its spending
  - Right to annotate bills and set a community of inquiry creates an environment where the opposition works to support the government by allowing for constructive dialogue between parliamentary groups

Main reasons for weak parliaments in the region:

- Poor organization and lack of internal democracy of political parties leads to government control over parliament and patronage networks
- Lack of integrity of party members as there is a tendency for them to act as voting machines for the executive rather than standing up to defend the values the party stands for (leads to a lack of citizens’ trust in parliament)
- Shortcomings in the rule of law

- Lack of financial capacity
- Lack of professionalism and people who can provide high quality content, judgment, and advice
- Language is predominantly negative and focuses more on what other groups are doing wrong instead of how it could be done right
- Political debate is characterized mostly by harsh polarization and a confrontational approach

Parliamentary scrutiny is regularly undermined by insufficient government reporting, excessive use of urgent parliamentary procedures and weak parliamentary committee structures

The EU enlargement process has a negative impact on the role of parliaments in the region:

- Leaves little to no room for domestic autonomous politics
- Adaptive pressures considerably reduce the scope of public policy debate
- Political polarization is increasing with the increasing challenges Europe faces and the diminishing prospects of enlargement

Political polarization and the inability of political parties to resolve their divergences through negotiations and consensus is limiting the ability of countries to push forward with reforms. This has shifted the role of the international community from that of a mediator to that of an arbitrator, undermining the democratic institution-building processes

### Recommendations

Governments should respect parliaments more as an independent institution, be more open for actual parliamentary debate, and avoid the excessive use of urgent parliamentary procedures

Opposition should be respected as part of the democratic system and not be considered or labeled as enemies or even traitors

Opposition parties should develop a clear agenda according to their values and criticize the government for wrongdoings, but be supportive when it comes to shared goals in order to strengthen their own credibility

Mechanisms should be developed which foster inclusion instead of the winner-takes-all logic and create a dynamic, constructive conversation between domestic political actors on all sides, including interest groups and civil society, for a more consensus-seeking process

Further mechanisms for government scrutiny should be considered

Questions

How can parliaments be strengthened vis-à-vis the executive in order for them to be able to fulfill their key functions within a democratic system?

Are electoral changes or the introduction of further checks and balances necessary?

Is there a need for different laws for party funding and more support structures to increase professionalism in parliament, including offices, staff, and advisers?

**Ideological and Programmatic Differences between Political Parties**

Functions of political parties include:

- The recruitment of personnel
- The aggregation of interests of ordinary citizens
- Providing a linkage between citizens and the people who govern them

Both in the Western Balkans, but also in more established democracies, there is a disconnect in the linkage role parties play → rise of populist parties

Political frustration is high, but political participation and election turnout are very low

The survival of parties is contingent of three elements:

- Party organization, including a strong membership base and network, and capable professional staff
- Party leadership with morals that can lead the party in new directions, but also mechanisms to replace leaders without the party falling apart
- Appeals of the party to the electorate; appeals can be divided in three types:
  - Short term: can be novel, but quickly wear off
  - Medium term: tend to be socio-economic issues
  - Permanent: often ethnic-based appeals

While ethnicity is one of the most permanent appeals of a party, it risks the danger of ideological cleavage and might suppress debate on issues that have a cross-ethnic appeal (unemployment, corruption, social justice, environment)

→ ethnicity is often used to manipulate the system and such a system of ethnic patronage is hard to dismantle with constitutional and democratic means

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the international community, and in particular the EU, have become constant deadlock-breakers of ethnic politics and at the same time increasingly depend on ethnic power brokers who can maintain local peace, to the detriment of democracy and rule of law

Intra-ethnic competition throughout the region is reinforced by kin-states, external influences of global actors and processes

Money plays a big role in how successful a party can campaign, set up professional structures, etc.

The rise of new, populist political players is due to a strong sense of disconnect between ordinary citizens and those who wield power as well as a belief that the existing system is working for the benefit of an elite few rather than the many (anti-establishment sentiments and appeal of the newness)

→ New populist players have often raised expectations and failed to live up to promises

In the best-case scenario, those parties introduce competitive incentives that cause long-established parties to listen to voters and curtail their own rent-seeking

Parties can only regain people's trust if they are able to deliver on their promises

Recommendations

Politicians need to learn to explain their decisions better to the public (and not just saying "we do it because the EU wants us to do it") and also listen to the people and enter into dialogue with them

Schools should provide pupils with more civic and political education to develop a more politically educated population

Questions

How can the political zero-sum games be ended and a more constructive and compromise-driven political debate be introduced?

How can a better intra-party democracy be developed?

**Women's Political Participation**

Many legislative improvements have been made and various legal mechanisms exist, but structural conditions that extend far beyond legislation and election mechanisms are the main obstacles to women in politics

Cultural and behavioral obstacles such as the continuation of rigid gender roles and stereotypes hinder women in their career choices

Positive change requires a shift in attitudes towards women in politics

Governments need to ensure that even if legislation is in place, it is actually followed in practice

Controversial point: argument of quality and quantity when considering the use of quotas to facilitate the participation of women in parliament

#### Recommendations

Women themselves should come together in solidarity to show consensus and support for each other and women's rights and issues; female leaders should use their role to empower girls and young women to engage with politics

To ensure that there is a well-qualified pool of women to choose from, governments should do more to educate students and empower girls to be engaged with politics

#### **Radicalization and Political Polarization**

There is a crisis of democracy even in developed democracies

Democracy is a system that is not possible without serious and ongoing public debate

There are different kinds of polarization: ethnic, nationalistic, and political

There are a number of possible explanations for the rise of political polarization in the Western Balkans:

- Legacies of war and communism, shallow roots of the political culture of dialogue, tolerance, and compromise
- Inexperience in democratic ways of thinking
- A political culture of seeking absolute power rather than collaboration; compromise is often seen as weakness or defeat rather than a step towards a unified solution

Public discourse is increasingly being loaded with nationalistic and ethno-centric rhetoric, putting inter-ethnic relations at risk and hampering the Western Balkans' way towards EU enlargement

The political scene is often dominated by power struggles, not just between political parties but also within them

The opposition is considered as an enemy rather than a legitimate political opponent and government parties tend to exclude opposition parties from the policy process

The opposition in most countries has been weak and unable to develop constructive and coherent opposition policies; the attitude has been simply to oppose rather than to offer clear and convincing alternative policies

The rise of social media usage in campaigning has led to a preoccupation with how to sell a position rather than delving into the substance and has increasingly

been providing a platform for polarized debate and hate speech

In the case of Kosovo, the current EU visa regime is contributing to the risk of radicalization: young people in Kosovo want opportunities and if they do not get them they will 'vote with their feet', just like in other countries in the region. For example, it is easier for Kosovo youth to study in Turkey than in the EU

The rise of radicalization is also possible because of weak institutions and corrupt political elites

The region is subject to at least four geopolitical concepts:

- Atlanticism (USA and NATO)
  - Continentalism (EU Enlargement)
  - Putin's Euroasianism
  - Erdogan's Neo-Ottomanism
- The latter two are examples of mythological conceptions of mutual, centuries-old Serbian-Russian or Bosnia-Turkish relations

Radicalism in the region is not exclusively Islamic radicalism but rather nationalist radicalism

Russia's influence in the region is likely fuelling nationalist tendencies, and its influence is growing; however the growing Russian influence might be more of an anti-EU/anti-America sentiment than a real pro-Russian one. Nonetheless, Russia's soft power should not be underestimated

When it comes to fighting Islamic radicalism, there is a shift towards a more holistic approach to preventing the spread of extremism with an increasing role for civil society and moderate religious leaders. Nevertheless, law enforcement agencies maintain a level of readiness and observe individuals that have the potential to use force as a means to reach certain political or ideological goals

Islamic radicalization has fragmented the population including the Islamic population itself

There are estimates that around 1,000 citizens from the Western Balkans region have joined terrorist organizations like IS and Jabat al-Nusra, with thousands of supporters also residing within the region

It is a mistake of the international community to try and "air-drop" consultants in order to quickly fix the problems of radicalization, as this approach fails to acknowledge the involvement of local communities and specific societal groups that could better foster prevention

There is little regional security cooperation, which makes it difficult to deal with the problems that arise



Recommendations

The EU and its member states should refrain from tolerating undemocratic social phenomena, immaturity, and irresponsibility of the political elite in the region

Political players need to accept responsibility when something goes wrong

Politicians should refrain from using polarizing language and labeling their political opponents

The education system needs to be improved as it is failing to engage young people and the lack of economic development and job creation creates a breeding ground for radicalization

The accession process for the Western Balkans countries should be sped up to avoid a further rise in nationalism and radicalization with potentially tragic consequences for the region and the EU

The EU should avoid creating a vacuum in the region and allow other international actors space to enter, as has already been happening in the case of Russia, Turkey, and others. The EU can do this by showing its interest in the region, by continuing the accession talks, and providing more support to the region

The governments in the region should better identify what their young people want

There are two components that need to be included in any policies the international community implements in the Western Balkans:

- A security-military component to prevent any military conflicts or illegal activities and to act against terrorism; its purpose is to create a sense of security and system stability
- A political component that must be better used to convince people that Euro-Atlantic perspectives are realistic and a better and prosperous life is possible

To prevent violent extremism (PVE), the international community should not undertake PVE in partner countries, but should instead focus on supporting local actors willing to undertake PVE by:

- Providing development assistance
- Playing an advisory role in order to ensure that a holistic approach to prevention and deradicalization is undertaken by local governments
- Ensuring that local governments endorse community involvement in PVE including civil society, the Islamic community, and community leaders
- Seeing the root causes also from a developmental perspective as they are rooted in a set of social problems such as lack of perspective, unemployment, isolation, poor education

- Tailoring international assistance to identify the general social needs and make direct contributions to long-term investments

Local researchers and other natives should be involved in all measures as they speak the local language and better understand the ideology and patterns of behavior

Local dialog needs to involve the most influential local stakeholders, be it religious leaders, civil society activists or municipal officials, and should focus on a counter-message to extremist ideology

The battle in the digital space is one of the biggest challenges; it is therefore important that civil society and local activities are active on online platforms to disseminate counter-messages in local languages

Genuine efforts should be undertaken to strengthen the secular system and to invest in the education system to make it sufficiently credible so that people do not find Islamic conservatism and some Imams more attractive than their schools and teachers

The visa liberalization process for Kosovo should be sped up and more opportunities for exchange with EU member states for young people from the Western Balkans should be established, for example through full inclusion and better use of Erasmus+ Programs

The current systems should be more open and transparent by building multi-ethnic civil society groups that monitor electoral performance based on state-building and good governance indicators, rather than parties being judged based on ethnic criteria

Questions

Can stronger engagement of civil society and academics in advising and explaining policies help to address political polarization and an increasing gap between political elites and the people, especially considering that most governments are untrusted institutions?

How can political leaders reach the people better?

**Regional Cooperation**

Taking into consideration the shared past, the rise of nationalism, authoritarianism, and radicalism, as well as the worsening standards and quality of living throughout the region, the need for strengthening multilateral ties in the Western Balkans is ever more important

One of the factors affecting effective regional cooperation are people's mindsets and perceptions emanating from the past

Euro-Atlantic integration has been a strong impetus for regional cooperation, therefore regional cooperation is

most advanced in policy areas that are interlinked with EU and NATO integration, economy, and infrastructure

There are mixed opinions on the value of the Berlin Process as another top-down initiative

- It is an important tool for reform
- It should rather be driven by internal actors, not EU actors; as without more ownership of the process, there will be no real change

Nonetheless, the Berlin Process has brought about a series of concrete results:

- Projects in infrastructure and connectivity in transport and energy
- Establishment of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO)
- Declaration on outstanding bilateral issues, however, the signing of this declaration was more of a symbolic gesture as little has been done to uphold the declaration in practice
- Connection of the political process to a Civil Society Forum (and in Paris Business and Youth Fora), however, little interaction between the official summit and the fora

Enlargement fatigue and the erosion of democracy in the Western Balkans endanger true regional cooperation and the main political initiatives to advance regional cooperation become technocratic and policy specific

Bilateral disputes remain a great challenge to regional cooperation

According to the RCC Balkan Barometer 2015, 60% of citizens want to see more regional cooperation and 76% believe that improved regional cooperation can positively affect the economy

→ An agenda that seeks to overcome the existing bilateral disputes, promotes regional cooperation, and offers a credible perspective for development in the future is likely to find high public support

So far, there has been little initiative from within the region to effectively cooperate with one another; very few fora between universities and academics or opportunities for young people exist

There are numerous intergovernmental initiatives focused on promoting and improving cooperation in various areas such as economic development, energy and infrastructure, media, civil society, security, and many others, mostly linked to Euro-Atlantic integration; however, two issues hinder these efforts:

- Most of these initiatives are only implemented at the highest political levels, driven by elites, with limited to no inclusion of the lowest level actors, and in most cases, with little to no effect on or benefit for the people
- They seem to rest on the assumption that the region needs to go forwards without looking back-

wards, bypassing the development of programs exclusively related to improving inter-ethnic cooperation within and between countries

Regional cooperation between civil society actors encompasses different social development areas (e.g. education, reconciliation, EU integration, culture, youth, environment) and is based on growing vibrant regional civil society organization networks

Regional cooperation between civil society actors contributes towards building a shared regional identity and directly contributes towards amassing the political will to alleviate outstanding impediments to regional cooperation (e.g. bilateral disputes) and to sustain and increase regional cooperation

Systematic mechanisms for grass-roots reconciliation, which would have assisted in the establishment of genuine peaceful inter-ethnic relations and healed the wounds between grass-roots actors, have been completely absent from the agendas of state authorities

It is important to also deal with the past in order to make progress in the present

#### Recommendations:

For the Western Balkans to face forward, the state at play demands regional cooperation that extends beyond the political and economic spheres, and rather goes into decoding the old warring sides and developing inter-ethnic cooperation within and between societies, beyond the high political levels

Rather than focus on regional cooperation as a separate initiative, more effort should be put into developing a strong economy, strong civil society institutions, strong educational institutions, free media, and a credible rule of law, which would subsequently help foster regional cooperation

It is of paramount importance that debates on inter-ethnic cooperation are revitalized

The Berlin Process should move the focus beyond technical issues and include a focus on improving good governance and strengthening the rule of law; both are indispensable to ensure that the commitments made to improve transport and infrastructure can be implemented

Business entities and civil society organizations should be seen as a second track to advance regional cooperation

Greater interactions between civil society's regional cooperation initiatives, including business ones, and government-led regional cooperation initiatives should be developed to strengthen the sustainability of regional

cooperation so that the effects trickle down to everyday life

Questions:

What should the next steps to resolve the remaining bilateral conflicts be?

How can the EU improve its support of these processes?

Is a lack of trust between countries a reason for a lack of genuine cooperation? If so, how can trust be built?

**The Role of Reconciliation**

The Western Balkans are in a state of negative peace, i.e. the absence of war or conflict, but no mutual understanding and crossing of ethnic lines

In the aftermath of the post-Yugoslav wars, the political elites have failed to demonstrate sufficient political will to rebuild the social fabric

Many of the political elites represent the past and therefore are an obstacle to reconciliation

Politicians tend to place particular emphasis on their "own" victims and, particularly in divided societies, depict themselves as the true protectors of so-called national interests

The process is so far only being led and guaranteed by external actors

Reconciliation is often misunderstood as forgetting or ignoring the victims

People involved in reconciliation initiatives are often badged as traitors

Despite the quantity and quality of evidence and sources made available in the past 25 years, it is still not possible to reach a consensus over many significant historical and paradigmatic events and agree on a common regional history

There is also the risk that bringing justice will threaten peaceful relations

There is a need not only for the improvement of inter-ethnic relations, but also intra-ethnic reconciliation, for example between those who participated in the wars and those who did not

Also as a means of reconciliation, economic development and job creation is important

Germany's successful reconciliation with France can serve as an example; Germany's efforts to commemorate its victims was an important part of the process

A reconciliation process entails a voluntary initiative of the parties to engage in a pursuit of changing identity, values, attitudes, and patterns of interaction

Reconciliation happens on three different levels

- Primary socialization, i.e. parents behavior (do not play with the out-group children so as to avoid conflicts)
- Parallel lives (i.e. separate schools, etc.), which raises concerns over the prospects of being able to create a shared future
- Perception of national identity (claim a certain country/territory belongs to one particular ethnic group)

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are different initiatives that oppose imposed ethnic identities by the elites and support reconciliation initiatives, including war-veterans from all sides of the conflict, women, and pensioners

→ These kinds of initiatives are often not acknowledged by institutions and are not given enough space in the media; moreover, they depend to a large extent on foreign aid and support, which again imposes specific agendas

Recommendations:

There should be more efforts, including at the highest political level, to use the numerous facts that have been established to come to a common truth and history

More efforts should be invested to find the missing people from past conflicts; this may also provide an opportunity for wider discussions about the fact that all sides had victims, which needs to be acknowledged in order for societies to move forward

Public discourse and especially statements by the political elites should refrain from constantly referring to past divisions and rather use rhetoric oriented toward the future; to address the past from the perspective of recognition and redefinition

Reconciliation efforts need to be made from inside the Western Balkan countries and not simply be enforced by external actors

In terms of reconciliation, the EU needs to deal with all countries in the region equally; there is still resentment about the fact that Croatia, Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria have already been accepted to join the EU while not fully addressing the issue of reconciliation themselves

A genuine inclusion and involvement of members of civil society in reconciliation, who will be tasked to coordinate the grass-roots work, could ensure that the initiative will be driven by values rather than national and political interests

The creation of an initiative exclusively about grass-roots inter-ethnic cooperation should be considered, for example through the establishment of a Regional Office for Grass-Roots Inter-Ethnic Cooperation

Areas of cooperation within a grass-roots initiative should include:

- Work on issues such as acknowledging and dealing with the past, personal healing of the directly affected, legitimization of the other's truth
- Intergroup emotions, feelings of hate, fear, and loathing, views of the other as dangerous, desire for revenge and retribution, tolerance and trust-building
- Forward-looking issues such as a shared vision of a common future, willingness for cooperation and forgiveness

Questions:

How can a rethinking with regard to reconciliation as a forward-looking process, including on the individual level, be initiated?

How can support for the development of a more liberal and tolerant young generation be supported rather than the passing on of stereotypes, mistrust, and ethnic divisions?

**The Role of Media**

Media in the Western Balkans never became independent or gained its own strength; no longer censorship but political, economic, or social dependence and self-censorship

Western Balkan countries are mostly hybrid democracies, there are three main illiberal threats that affect media freedom: religious extremism, populism, new nationalism

Media is a pillar of democracy on the one hand, but on the other hand it needs to be viewed from the angle of capitalism; there is a climate of fear and job insecurity among journalists

A culture of clientelism has become the norm, leaving the media under the control of businesses and politics  
→ economic crisis has especially affected small countries with weak media and advertising markets

Usually public broadcasters present all points of view, but in most Western Balkan countries it tends to be state-run media

Illiberal trends of religious extremism, populism, and new nationalism are both reflected and shaped by media

Opposition parties are most adversely affected by a lack of media freedom

Citizens are not provided with objective views and facts, leading to a problem of uninformed voters and political views

The decline in the credibility of politics has been inevitably associated with the decline in the credibility of the media

The rise of the internet, new media, and new technologies have provided more opportunities for freedom of expression, civic journalism and the enhancement of democracy in general, but it has also given rise to new concerns such as the spreading of gossip, baseless accusations, undue criticism, hate speech, and cyber-nationalism

Also in developed democracies, the ability for free media to shape political debates in a significant way, as demonstrated by Brexit, is a worrying development

As a result, people lose trust in media and politics, which leads to a deligitimization of these institutions and a lack of accountability; the role of the media as a watchdog is not being fulfilled

Journalists could benefit from more support and stronger civil society influence, or trade unions, to incentivize journalists to act in an ethical way

Recommendations:

All countries in the region have adopted media legislation that is generally positive, but more focus should be put on implementation

Politicians should refrain from labeling critical media as traitors or foreign mercenaries, as criticism and freedom of speech are an integral part of democratic processes

Questions:

How can media independence be better supported?



# DEMOCRATIZATION OF POLITICAL PROCESSES AND OVERCOMING POLITICAL- IDEOLOGICAL POLARIZATION

June 14-17, 2016 | Durrës

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 2016 through the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

## **Tuesday, June 14, 2016**

*Arrival of participants during the day*

*Accommodation: Palace Hotel, Rruga "Pavarësia", plazhi Apollonia, Durrës, Albania*

**20:00**

### **Reception and Welcome Dinner**

**Dinner speech by Ditmir Bushati, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania**

*Venue: Palace Hotel, Terrace*

## **Wednesday, June 15, 2016**

**09:00 – 09:30**

### **Welcoming remarks and introduction by**

*Rüdiger Lentz, Executive Director, Aspen Institute Germany*

*Odeta Barbullushi, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Republic of Albania*

**09:30 – 11:00**

### **Session I:**

#### **The Role of Parliaments**

Aside from their legislative function, parliaments have an oversight and a representative role in the political systems of democracies. However, in the Western Balkans, the consolidation of parliamentarianism seems to be facing numerous challenges. What is the role of parliaments in the region? Can parliaments exercise their three core functions adequately? How can the representative and oversight roles of parliaments be strengthened? What is the role of opposition? How important is the contribution of opposition parties and how can it be supported? Which role does the organizational structure of political parties play? What are the effects of the EU enlargement process on parliaments in the region and how can they be attenuated? How important is parliaments' participation in public debate and how do parliaments live up to their role?

Moderator: Rüdiger Lentz

Introduction: Davor Boban, *The Croatian Parliament and the Transformation of the Political System*

Comment: Christian Petry, *Member of the German Bundestag*

**11:00 – 11:30**

Coffee break

11:30 – 13:00

**Session II:  
Radicalization and Political Polarization**

Increasing radicalization of political parties and a growing polarization of political dialog are phenomena that have occurred throughout Europe, in particular more recently. Especially in the Western Balkans, political polarization has had severe consequences and has led to political crises in most of the countries. Why is political polarization on the rise? How can it be met? How can political crises be avoided? How can opposition better find its role of a democratic opposition? How can moderate, democratic opposition be strengthened? Is there a lack of a culture of compromise? Can a general strengthening of parliament and parliamentary procedures alleviate polarization? What does this mean for the future of the EU and the countries' Euro-Atlantic integration?

Moderator: Sonja Licht

Introductions: Dorian Jano, *Persistence of Political Polarization in the Balkans*  
Věra Stojarová, *Political Polarization on the Rise: The Czech Republic and Beyond*

13:00 – 14:00

Lunch break

14:00

Departure to Tirana

15:00 – 17:00

**Public event organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania on “The Role of the European Union in the Democratic Processes in the Western Balkan Region”**

*Venue: Ministry of Foreign Affairs*

Opening Remarks: Odeta Barbullushi

Moderator: Remzi Lani, *Director, Albanian Media Institute*

Speakers: Remzi Lani  
Sonja Licht, *President, Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence*  
Roland Gjoni, *Board Member, Fulbright Albania*  
Tim Haughton, *Centre for Russian, European and Eurasian Studies, University of Birmingham*

17:15 – 18:15

**Meeting with Ilir Meta, Speaker of the Albanian Parliament and Leader of the Socialist Movement for Integration**

**18:30 – 19:30**

**Meeting with Lulzim Basha, Leader of the Democratic Party**

*Democratic Party, Headquarter*

**20:00**

**Informal Dinner with Public Viewing of the France-Albania European Championship Match**

**Thursday, June 16, 2016**

**09:00 – 10:00**

**Session III:**

**Ideological and Programmatic Differences Between Political Parties**

On the first sight, given the number of political parties, the political landscape in Western Balkan countries seems very diverse. Nonetheless, distrust in politics and disengagement from political life runs high in the entire region. How can political parties better reach people and represent them? Is there really a so often referred to lack of vision in political parties in the region? What role does ethnicity play in multi-ethnic societies regarding programmatic developments of parties? What is the impact of the EU integration process?

Moderator: Helge Tolksdorf

Introductions: Roland Gjoni, *Ethnic Politics in the Western Balkans: The State of Play and Ways Forward*

Tim Haughton, *Castles Made of Sand and Stone: Political Parties in Central and Eastern Europe*

**10:00 – 11:00**

**Session IV:**

**The Role of Media**

Freedom of media and expression has been a concern in all countries of the region, as was again highlighted by the European Commission's recent enlargement strategy. What role does media play regarding the perception of politics in public and people's participation in elections? How does the quality of media impact on people's disenchantment with politics? What is the impact of a lack of media freedom on the political landscape? How are especially opposition parties affected? What is the role of the EU and how can the EU better support these essential freedoms?

Moderator: Edith Harxhi

Introduction: Alina Dobрева, *The role of media*

Remzi Lani, *Balkan Media: A Complex and Unfinished Story*

**11:00 – 11:30**

Coffee break



**11:30 – 12:00**      **Introduction by H.E. Milena Harito, Minister for Innovation and Public Administration, on: “Efforts of the Albanian government in promoting women’s political participation”**

**12:00 – 13:00**      **Session V**  
**Women’s Political Participation**

While legislation promoting gender equality is largely in place throughout the region, a lack of implementation and acceptance throughout society is often criticized. What are the major challenges women in politics are facing? What role do female members of parliament play? How can gender equality in politics be better promoted? What are the chances of gender equality regarding distrust and political disengagement of society? How does the organization of political parties affect women’s political participation? What role do female voters play?

Moderator:            Ana Trišić-Babić

Introduction:         Abdulla Azizi, *Analysis of Women’s Political Participation Practice in Macedonia and How to Move Forward*

**13:00**                Lunch

**14:30**                **Departure to Kruja**

15:30 – 17:30      Visit of the Castle and Ethnographic Museum

17:30 – 18:30      Visit of the Old Bazaar of Kruja

19:00                 Dinner at the Hotel Panorama Kruja

**Friday, June 17, 2016**

*Departure of participants during the day*

Dritan Abazović

Johann Sattler

Abdulla Azizi

Senad Šepić

Odeta Barbullushi

Věra Stojarová

Davor Boban

Helge Tolksdorf

Josip Brkić

Erinda Toska

Gordana Čomić

Ana Trišić-Babić

Alina Dobрева

Romana Vlahutin

Gledis Gjipali

Roland Gjoni

**The Aspen Institute Germany**

Blerina Gjylameti

Valeska Esch

Shpresa Hadri

*Senior Program Officer*

Edith Harxhi

Carina Kempf

Tim Haughton

*Junior Program Officer*

Anke Holstein

Rüdiger Lentz

*Executive Director*

Ramadan Ilazi

Ingrid Schulte

*Rapporteur*

Dorian Jano

Dragan Krapović

Remzi Lani

Sonja Licht

Gentiola Madhi

Jani Makraduli

Kejdi Mehmetaj

Vjosa Osmani

Christian Petry

Snežana Radović

Konstantin Samofalov

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# CONFERENCE REPORT: DEMOCRATIZATION OF POLITICAL PROCESSES AND OVERCOMING POLITICAL-IDEOLOGICAL POLARIZATION

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**Ingrid Schulte**  
**Master of Public Policy candidate**  
**Hertie School of Governance**

The Aspen Institute's conference "Democratization of Political Processes and Overcoming Political-Ideological Polarization" took place from June 14-17, 2016 in Durres, Albania. The event brought together 33 select decision makers from the Western Balkans (WB), Germany 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, each focusing on a different, yet integral aspect of the democratization process: the role of parliaments, radicalization and political polarization, ideological and programmatic differences between political parties, the role of media, and women's political participation.

This idea that democratization is a process, not a singular event, was emphasized and reinforced throughout the conference. It requires transformation, which many Southeast European countries are aspiring to achieve. Yet these countries have been faced with many setbacks in the past years and months, having to overcome difficult challenges, many of which stem from political-ideological polarization.

## **Session I: The Role of Parliaments**

The first session of the conference focused on the role of parliaments in the region and brought up the question of whether parliaments are – or can be – exercising their three core functions (legislative, oversight and representative) adequately. Using the transformation of the Croatian political system and parliament as a starting point for the session, one expert provided an analysis for two separate time periods and systems of government in recent Croatian history, the semi-presidential and full liberal democracy. As a country that has successfully become a part of the EU, the Croatian transition offered participants valuable insights on lessons to be learned.

In the first period, defined as 1990 – 2000, the Croatian system of government was similar to the Duma in present day Russia. The government did not have a legislative democracy and lacked a system of checks and balances. Instead, the president was dominant and had significant constitutional powers, simultaneously being the leader of the dominant political party. His dominance was a significant barrier of Croatia's transition to a full democracy. The second period, post-2000, saw a change in government with parliamentary elections, a new president and a transition to a full liberal democracy with the country's application to join the EU. Unlike 1990s where there was nothing pushing the government to change, the EU was a significant influence on Croatia's move to a full liberal democracy.

Some participants wondered if the EU accepted Croatia as a member to present an example to other countries seeking membership. While Croatia made it clear that the way to Europe is through reform, countries must prove that they are ready. The EU asks for certain reforms and provides support to countries to reach these goals, but the process is a two way street. There needs to be a give and take because ultimately, the biggest motivation for reform must come from within countries themselves, which seems to be proving difficult to achieve.

Furthermore, Croatia transitioned from one period to another after death of the president, but what other options are there? To answer this question, one expert emphasized the importance of the civil society, like NGOs, and oppositional parties. The recipe to democratization is to build up stable political systems and institutions as soon as possible, as there are no shortcuts. Successful democratization requires stability, just as stability benefits from democratization. If there are no free and fair elections, people cannot come to power in a proper way. As a result, states should be conscious not to confuse short-term stability for lasting transformation and find those internal factors that will lead to lasting change.

Continuing with the question of the role of the opposition, one participant used the German system of government, specifically the Bundestag, as an example of the role that the opposition can play in a well-functioning parliament. In such a system, there are various instruments, which can be used to control the government. MPs have different rights to ask questions, which the government must answer in writing or in the plenary (interpellation), an annual budget debate provides opportunity to hold the government accountable for its spending, and the right to annotate bills and set a community of inquiry creates an environment where the opposition works to support the government by allowing for constructive dialog between parliamentary groups.

Other participant discussions outlined four main reasons for a weak parliament. First, political parties pose the main obstacle for the region and need to be reformed, an issue which is actually the topic of Session III and thus discussed in detail then. Second, the integrity of party members is called into question. It is important for party members to have integrity, but not all do. Integrity is having the strength to stand up and say no, to speak out and defend the values the party stands for, and to fight for the things that any MP should fight for that will help their citizens. Successful parliaments require not only political parties with strong values, but MPs with good character. This ties into a lack of citizen trust, not only in parties, but in the whole election process. Parliament cannot be better than the election process and than people want it to be, but in some WB countries the citizens participate, but do not believe in the election process. The political culture in countries needs to

change, and parliaments need to not be reduced to voting machines creating documents that are unimplementable. Unfortunately, this is consistently the case when there are tensions, whether they be political or ethnic, and laws are passed for the sake of short term fixes. Third, there is a huge gap in terms of financial, economic and political power from globalization that has resulted in a rise in inequality everywhere. This affects parliaments who wrongly trade the well-being of citizens for the repayment of debts, for example from bailouts or investors. Last, the language in weak parliaments is predominantly negative; instead of focusing on what other groups are doing wrong, parliaments would be better of focusing on what groups are doing right.

The session concluded with a general understanding that ultimately, the success of parliament is contingent upon a number of factors. In any parliament, it is not just about the money or external pressure, even if the EU is providing support for a country's reforms, but about the internal factors – like professionalism within parliament and people who can give content, judgment, advice and power and balance to parliament – such as opposition parties, civil society and well-intentioned leaders.

#### **Session II: Radicalization and Political Polarization**

Participants acknowledged that there is a problem with the way democracy and its functions are perceived, even in developed democracies, and that it is a system that is not possible without serious and ongoing public debate. Recent dialogs have seen an increase in support for radical and polarized views, which has had severe consequences and led to political crises in most WB countries. Experts clarified that there can be different kinds of polarization, such as ethnic, nationalistic and political, but lamented the persistence of polarization as a whole.

Experts proposed a number of possible explanations for the rise of political polarization. One expert presented that the first and most important reason is the legacies of war, communism and inexperience in democratic ways of thinking, which countries carry with them. In the region, everyone is seeking absolute power instead of collaboration. Political polarization is also found in media and the political agenda, thus there is a need to engage civil society and academics, particularly when considering that most governments are untrusted institutions.

Using the Czech Republic as a comparison, another expert suggested “strong men,” or dominant political leaders such as Zeman, creating opportunistic leaks to instill a hostile and fearful environment, as an additional explanation for the rise of polarization. Thus governments and politics are being confronted with a territory of fear – self-created by politicians who are looking for

short terms – and how to manage citizen fear, a challenge which will take time and has political costs.

Another point that was brought up was the attitudes parties and individuals have towards compromise and defeat. The culture towards both those things is quite negative, and quite often they are viewed as weaknesses rather than as steps towards a unified solution. Political players refuse to take responsibility when something goes wrong, causing citizens to feel helpless and unsupported and more likely to turn to the extremes. Instead, politicians should strive to enter a dialog with the people and close the gap between them by building a basis with voters and supporters to have a strong organizational structure.

To mitigate polarization in general, participants put forward a few suggestions, for example to avoid referenda, which create a dichotomy that contributes to polarization, and labeling, as language tends to reinforce divisions. Different groups have different visions, which may be reinforced by labels, or even different interests such as political or economic motivations. This has become a traditional aspect of today's politics, with the rise of social media usage in campaign and a preoccupation with how to sell a position, rather than delving into the substance and depth of campaign platforms. Looking at the situation of many countries in the WB, it was concluded that strong leaders are not necessarily a problem; it depends on the kind of strong leader a country has. Countries need strong leaders that have values and moral personalities. Finally, to understand and deal with polarization, it must be understood why people may be seduced by opposing or extreme arguments, such as feeling let down, betrayed or unsupported by their parties.

### **Session III: Ideological and Programmatic Differences Between Political Parties**

Going into detail on the point of political parties that was brought up in the first session, this session examined the relationship between political parties and the people. Experts observed that the new normal state of politics in the world seems to be crises, tying into the conversations about fear from the last session, in addition to chronic challenges connected to issues like demography, competitiveness and democratic linkage, which weaken states.

To answer the question of the role of political parties, experts emphasized that their functions should include the recruitment of personnel, the aggregation of the interests of ordinary citizens and, as a key role, should be to provide a linkage between citizens and the people who govern them. One expert observed that there is currently a disconnect in that linkage role parties should be playing, not just in SEE, but many modern democracies, as evidenced by the rise of extremist parties such as the AfD and Podemos in recent years. These new parties

work on platforms of anti-establishment and anti-corruption but seem to have short time horizons. To make a difference, however, countries need parties that will last, as lasting change takes time and continuity.

It was suggested that the survival of parties is contingent on three key elements. First, the organization of the parties. While people used to think this did not matter so much, it has become evident that party organization is vital to ensure party longevity. Having a strong membership base, network and capable professional staff provides advantages such as attracting more voters and enabling stability during times of political turmoil. Second, party leadership is important. As touched on in Session II, a strong leader is necessary, but the wrong kind of strong leader may be detrimental in the long run. Thus parties require leaders with morals that can lead the party in new directions and through stormy weather, but dependency on an individual is also not conducive to survival and thus parties should also have mechanisms in place to replace one leader with another without falling apart. Last, an important element contributing to the endurance and success of parties are the appeals of the party to the electorate. These appeals can be divided in three types: short term, which are more novel but quickly wear off; medium term, which tend to a more socio-economic side of things; and perhaps the most permanent, ethnic-based appeals. Overall, these three considerations contribute to the relationship the electorate has with parties, and how citizens perceive politics. People in recent years have been losing trust in their politicians, but strong parties and party success may perhaps be one aspect that will show the people competence in their governments.

Discussion amongst the participants incorporated the arguments that had been made by experts and confronted questions such as how political parties can better reach and represent people. A participant raised the point that without ideologies all political parties would just be interest groups, while another observed that the first priority of parties is how to get into power – both statements which must be taken into account when trying to improve parties. Additionally, when considering approaches to attract new members, two groups are important to keep in mind – women and youth. In many cases, these groups have typically been underrepresented and political parties need to be active and engaged in rebuilding the trust of these voters.

With regard to ethnicity, the point was made that while it may bring people together, it also risks the danger of ideological cleavage. Additionally, ethnic tensions may actually suppress debate on issues that affect everyone – social corruption, inequality, etc. – and cause them to recede in importance. However, it is hard to get rid of ethnic parties, as they are the first common denominator of political identity for many voters. One method that was recommended by an expert to improve political parties was using quotas to instill cooperation amongst

ethnicities, citing Kosovo as an example, as there 20 seats are reserved for minorities, they need at least 2 Serb ministers and it is part of the constitutional mandate that minorities be in the coalition, amongst other criteria. Finally, a last point raised in this session regarded the role of money in parties, and that its weight and influence should not be ignored.

In sum, experts made it clear that they were not claiming that ethnicity is the only illness of the region, but that ethnicity is being used and manipulated. A certain level of ethnic contention can be good because it can introduce a certain level of predictability, but it can also cause other issues to be overshadowed. The status of political parties in general is subject to a number of drivers, but parties must work to build trust with their electorates and can start this movement by ensuring that their ideologies are in line and work for the betterment of the people they represent.

#### **Session IV: The Role of Media**

Session IV highlighted the role of media on the perception of politics in public and people's participation in elections. Issues of media pluralism and media freedom are recurring all over the Balkans. Before 1999, the region was dealing with an obvious enemy to media freedom – censorship. Once censorship was abolished, people thought everything would be fine, but the media never really became independent or gained its own strength. Several factors such as political, economic, social environment influence media, while media in turn contributes to polarization, creating a feedback loop of decline and stagnation.

Experts argued that the view of media in region has been a bit simplified, having taken view from the angle of democracy. Much of the political environment in the Balkans is a hybrid democracy, and such systems face three main, illiberal threats – religious extremism, populism, and new nationalism – which all in turn affect media freedom. While media is a pillar of democracy, it also needs to be viewed from the angle of capitalism. A culture of clientelism has become the norm, leaving the media under the control of businesses and politics. Markets have been saturated by media outlets, which are fueled by economic interests and owned by people seeking profit. Additionally, the economic crisis that has hit all countries, whether EU member states or not, has had an impact on media. This has been especially felt in small countries that have weak media and advertising markets. When in crisis, markets shrink, making the state the biggest advertiser.

Achieving true pluralism in the media can be a challenge. From the internal side, there is usually one media outlet that presents all points of view which is usually public service broadcasters, however, in many Balkan countries, this tends to be state-run media. On the external side, there is still no solution to create fair represen-

tation for the whole spectrum. The effect is that there are underrepresented groups in society, which feeds disappointment, dissatisfaction and can lead to conflict, as different groups views are not well represented by the media to the opposing side.

Opposition parties are perhaps most adversely affected by a lack of media freedom. Distorted political representation ties into the aforementioned culture of clientelism, demonstrated by media blackmailing. Furthermore, citizens are not informed with objective views and facts, leading to a problem of uninformed voters and political views.

When people lose trust in the media and politics it leads to a delegitimization of these institutions and a lack of accountability, as the role of the media as a watchdog is not fulfilled. However, to provide an optimistic view on a bleak picture, one participant did remind everyone that despite problems with media, some journalists are still making efforts to maintain journalistic ethics, engage civil society with media and make a contribution to investigative journalism. Journalists could also benefit from more support and stronger civil society influence, or trade unions, to incentivize journalists to act in an ethical way – and not be subject to bribes, as occurs in Serbia because of the terrible economic conditions that journalists are subject to.

In terms of the role the EU plays in ensuring the freedom of the media, one could argue that it has learned from states of the past and thus is taking a new approach with the countries currently going through the accession process. The EU has played a significant role in pushing for reforms to improve media freedom, but these measures have not proven to be sufficient. Media freedom actually has deteriorated in many countries as a result of accession efforts to improve media freedom being unsustainable. Often, they were implemented to meet the requirements of the EU, but did not persist after countries had been accepted and joined. Instead of this attitude, participants believed the EU should find better ways to support this essential freedom.

#### **Session V: Women's Political Participation**

The last session of the conference, stimulating conversation on challenges to women's political participation in the region and how to promote gender equality, brought to light an important and personal topic to many of the participants in the room. Multiple times over the course of the conference participants pointed out that gender balance among the conference participants as a positive aspect of the event, and many participants expressed gratitude that women's political participation had finally been dedicated its own session.

Experts stated that structural conditions are the first obstacles to women in politics, the issues extends far beyond legislation and election mechanisms. While wom-

en should not just be included on electoral lists, but also make it from the lists to the actual government or leadership, the attitudes and respect they garner from men in parliament or from their political parties may be varied. If countries want to improve the gender dynamic in politics and increase the power of women, a few things must happen. Positive change requires a shift in attitudes towards women in politics. Governments need to ensure that even if legislation is in place, it is actually followed in practice. Participants highlighted that male leaders can learn from the example from the Swedish parliament, which has a male network which is doing work for betterment of women. This shift, however, cannot just be behavioral, but also requires systematic changes to be implemented in parliament.

In addition to the role male leaders need to play to catalyze change, participants acknowledged that women themselves need to come together in solidarity to show consensus and support for each other and women's rights and issues (like abortion). When women come together, they are all fighting for the same agenda, and they should embrace this. Conversation about solidarity led to the subject of inequality. Participants were reminded that lack of solidarity and lack of empathy are higher when inequality is higher because just people tend to just focus on what they are struggling with, regardless if a man or women.

Another heavily debated point was the argument of quality or quantity, when considering the use of quotas to facilitate the participation of women in parliament. While participants acknowledge that quotas may result in unqualified women being elected, historically, women have been faced with exceptionally high and unjust expectations. Women should not have to defend the right to a quota, as it is a natural right given that 50% of the world's population consists of women. Furthermore to ensure that there is a well-qualified pool of women to choose from, governments could and should do more to educate students and empower girls to be engaged with politics from a young age and to provide training to women.

Though the context and attitudes towards women are changing in many countries in the region, the problem of mistrust was once again raised in this session. Political and civil society voices need to be engaged in the dialogue surrounding women, so that voices of women both involved in politics and the average female citizen are heard and accounted for. To mitigate cultural and behavioral barriers, one expert recommended that governments should promote an increased awareness towards women through information campaigns, training centers for women, encouraging parties' programs to take gender specific needs into consideration, ensure that women are selected according to criteria equal to men and develop ongoing monitoring. Ultimately, increasing women's participation in politics is collabora-

tive movement that will require effort from men and women and political and civil society alike.

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# THE CROATIAN PARLIAMENT AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

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## Introduction

A quarter century after the start of transition, the transformation of political systems in East-Central Europe (ECE) became a success story. A combination of different internal and external factors enabled the consolidation of liberal democracy in this part of Europe. It still suffers from different deficiencies, as can be seen in Hungary in 2016, but it is far from the complete breakdown of democracy like it did in Europe in the interwar period.

Democratic consolidation demands stable political institutions. The only choice that ECE countries had at the beginning of the 1990s was pretty simple: copying what was successful at that time in the West and implementing it in domestic political systems. Parliament was among the most important institutions, so one of the goals of democratic transition was the transformation of communist assemblies into institutions similar to legislatures that existed in advanced democracies in the West. Free and fair elections, a multiparty system, and continuous sessions throughout the year were aimed to allow these neglected institutions to exercise their three core functions and to actively participate in the building of a new democratic political system. Early changes of constitutions and the adoption of relevant legislation were intended to enable this process, but the consolidation of democracy was very difficult. Croatia shared this problem with other post-communist countries, although with additional, specific issues relating to war and the illiberal regime of President Tudman and the ruling Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) party. Relations between the president, the government, and the parliament and the role of the ruling party were similar to those in Putin's Russia: there was an omnipotent president who was the charismatic leader of the ruling party, which enjoyed an absolute majority of seats in the parliament. That system of government changed after the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2000, when Croatia started its second transition.

## Structure of the Parliament and Elections

The Croatian Parliament – Sabor – was founded as a medieval institution in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, it had represented only Croatian aristocracy. From that time on and with the introduction of voting rights, it became more representative of society as a whole. The only period in which it did not exist was in the first Yugoslav state from 1919-1941. During WWII, the quisling puppet Independent State of Croatia formally had a parliament, but it was a powerless institution that was not elected by citizens and had only three sessions in 1942. The antifascist movement declared the Federal State of Croatia, which had as a quasi-parliament the Country's Anti-Fascist Council of the People's Liberation of Croatia (ZAVNOH) dominated by communists, in 1943. Immediately after the war, it



became the Parliament of Croatia, one of six federal republics of the reconstituted Yugoslavia.

During the communist period, the Croatian Parliament did not completely resemble the model of parliaments in other communist countries. Although absolute power resided in the Communist Party, parliaments of Yugoslav Republics had regular meetings with limited but existing deliberations. In the last communist Constitution of 1974, the Croatian Parliament was divided into three councils – The Council of the Associated Labor, The Council of Municipalities, and The Socio-Political Council – which made it a quasi-tricameral legislature. The legislative process was rather complex and, in some cases, parliament shared it with assemblies of a few “self-managed interest communities” (SIZ), extra-parliamentary bodies in charge of representing and fulfilling different social functions, such as education, housing, etc. Each council had the right to adopt laws from its domain independently from the other two councils and, in some cases, two councils shared the rights for the adoption of specific laws. Citizens had voting rights only within the Council of the Associated Labor, and only if they were students or members of the working class. Members of the other two councils were elected indirectly: The Council of Municipalities was elected by municipalities’ assemblies and The Socio-Political Council was elected by socio-political councils of municipalities’ assemblies. In Yugoslavia, this was called the delegative system. It made Croatia and Yugoslavia unique cases, even among communist states. Voting rights were uneven and limited, considering that direct elections were reserved only for students and the working class. On the other hand, there was more than one candidate in each electoral district and that practice was introduced before Hungary did the same. Parliament was more than a rubber-stamp institution, hence it had sessions with limited deliberations throughout the year. Despite that, Yugoslavia was a one-party dictatorship with the League of Communists in power as the main one of the five socio-political organizations that had the right to exist. Linz and Stepan ranked Yugoslavia among post-totalitarian countries even at the end of the 1980s.<sup>1</sup>

The first multiparty elections in Croatia were held in April and May 1990, roughly at the same time as multiparty elections were held in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. Unlike them, in Yugoslavia, like in the USSR, there were no elections for the federal parliament, but only for parliaments of constituent republics. In Croatia, the first multiparty parliamentary elections were held according to the new electoral law that was based on the French model: a single-member district (SMD) with two rounds of voting. If no candidate won the majority in the first round, all candidates that won more than 7% of votes in the first round went

on to the second round. Elections were held for all three councils of parliament, albeit with voting rights of each citizen for two or, if they had working status<sup>2</sup> or were pupils and students at universities,<sup>3</sup> for all three councils. A decisive victory was caught by the HDZ and the constitution-making process under its leadership started only a month and a half after the convocation of the new parliament. At the end of the year, a new Constitution was adopted and it introduced a new bicameral parliament. The old three-council parliament proceeded to work until new elections in 1992, but effectively operated as a unicameral body. Two new chambers were introduced in the 1990 Constitution: the House of Representatives and the County House. The first chamber had legislative powers and citizens with equal voting rights elected its members. The second chamber had consultative and veto powers. Each county had three representatives, which were directly elected by citizens regardless of how many voters lived in the county.

After the 1990 elections, there were two more cycles of elections for the whole parliament or for its first chamber in the first decade of post-communism: in 1992 and 1995. In 1993 and 1997, there were only two elections for the second chamber of parliament, which was eventually abolished in the constitutional reform of 2001. In all those elections, the HDZ won a majority of seats and became the dominant party in the party system. The first elections for the first chamber were held on August 2, 1992, after the ceasefire that ended the first stage of the war in Croatia. Presidential elections were held the same day and they also resulted in a triumph for the HDZ. Unlike the revival of post-communists in the second free elections in Poland in 1993 and in Hungary in 1994, these elections almost crushed the reformed post-communist party in Croatia. Most other parties were also fierce opponents of the HDZ, but war solidified its power and its policy of proclaiming itself a political center that united different segments of the Croatian (ethnic) nation. This was a winning formula for electoral success. War strengthened nationalist feelings in 1991-1992 and the HDZ used it extensively. The next elections in 1995 were held after the Croatian government put under its control most of the territory in the military action “Oluja”, held until then under the control of rebel Serbs. Opposition did not have a chance to win those elections because that period saw a highlight of the HDZ’s popularity and it again won a majority of seats for the third consecutive time. But its success was not only about popularity. It was also about the type of electoral system that contributed to such distribution of seats. For the 1992 and 1995 elections, HDZ chose a mixed electoral system. Like Germany’s system, which is a combination of proportional and majority voting

<sup>1</sup> Linz, Stepan 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Zakon o izboru i opozivu odbornika i zastupnika (*Law on elections and recall of councilors and members of the Parliament*), <http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/252511.html> (July 16, 2016), Article 4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

systems, Croatia's system, too was a combined electoral model. However, since the combined electoral models were not connected, it resulted in a majority effect on the system, unlike Germany's system, which results in proportional representation.<sup>4</sup> It made possible that HDZ, with around 40% of votes, won about a two-third majority of seats. Eventually, the end of the war and the ongoing economic crisis in the late 1990s resulted in the declining influence and popularity of the HDZ. At the end of 1999, the HDZ and opposition agreed on a new electoral system. The proportional system became an acceptable solution for all relevant parties and until 2016, six cycles of elections were held under its rules.

### Role of the Parliament in the 1990s

In the first decade after the fall of communism, the Croatian Parliament had a secondary role in comparison with the executive. This was a common characteristic shared with many other post-communist parliaments, but for different structural and functional reasons. Post-Soviet legislatures might be weak because party systems in their countries are non-consolidated and their presidents have been able to successfully confront them.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, examples of other countries indicate that the consolidation of the party system does not necessarily contribute to increased power of the parliament. Croatia and one other country in Southeast Europe (SEE) – Albania – are similar in this respect: they have had problems with democratization and weak parliaments despite relatively quickly consolidated party systems. From 1990 to 2016, HDZ in Croatia was in power for a total of 18 years and according to this criterion it is one of the most successful parties in the post-communist world.

During the 1990s, Croatia had a semi-presidential system of government of presidential-parliamentary subtype.<sup>6</sup> President Tuđman was twice elected by direct vote in the first ballot and was leader of the HDZ. This party enjoyed an absolute majority of seats in both chambers but, in spite of this, the parliament was a weaker institution than the president and the government. This put Croatia in the same category with post-Soviet countries which have so-called superpresidential systems, in which presidents dominate all other political institutions. Although the Croatian president in the

1990s did not enjoy powers like legislative initiative and legislative veto, he was able to dominate the political system. The parliament and the government were *de facto* his organs, which were used to implement his politics. Still, there were differences between post-Soviet superpresidential states and Croatia: their level of political rights and civil freedoms have been lower in comparison with Croatia and their multipartism have, in many cases such as in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, been a sham. The Croatian regime had neither the intention nor the ability to completely control all political parties that threatened it in elections. Instead, activity through and domination over formal institutions was enough for the regime to stabilize its power.

Croatia's president and Parliament, according to the constitutional provisions, were in transactional relation. In reality, however, it was a hierarchical relation<sup>7</sup> that resembled the present-day relation between President Putin and Russia's State Duma. First, dominant parties in Croatia and Russia were dependent on presidents. President Tuđman was not the sole founder of that party, but from the very beginning he built up huge popularity and charismatic status both among its rank-and-file and its supporters. The HDZ did have its own brand that made it popular in parallel with Tuđman, but he was its main actor and there was a strong connection between them in the eyes of voters. On the other hand, President Putin built the United Russia party and it is not clear whether it would survive as a dominant party in the Russian party system without his leadership and popularity. Second, both the HDZ and United Russia could maintain its power and influence only through parliament and regional and local assemblies. Unlike in communist times when most activities were done outside the rubber-stamp parliaments, in post-communist systems, including Croatia and Russia, it became necessary for parties to compete in elections in order to come to power and to canalize this power through formal institutions. And third, to build up their personal powers, both Tuđman and Putin needed control over the parliament. Eventually, this permitted Tuđman's and Putin's systems to work in this way: the president is the dominant leader of the party, the party has an absolute majority of seats in both chambers of the parliament, and said party forms a one-party government. This enables the dominant role of the president in the political system and the weakening of the checks and balances mechanism at the expense of the parliament. A weak or even non-existent exercise of that mechanism is one of indicators that there is no liberal democracy in a country.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> More about different types of mixed-member systems in: Shugart, Matthew Soberg, Wattenberg, Martin P. (2001), „Mixed-Member Electoral Systems: A Definition and Typology“, in: Shugart, Matthew Soberg, Wattenberg, Martin P. (eds.), *Mixed-Member Electoral Systems: The Best of Both Worlds?*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 9-24.

<sup>5</sup> See: Boban, Davor (2011), *Polupredsjednički sustavi Rusije i Poljske*, Zagreb: Fakultet političkih znanosti.

<sup>6</sup> See about difference between presidential-parliamentary and premier-presidential types in: Shugart, Matthew S., Carey, John M. (1992), *Presidents and Assemblies: constitutional design and electoral dynamics*, Cambridge; New York; Oakleigh: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>7</sup> Importance of two types of relations in semi-presidentialism is highlighted in: Shugart, Matthew S. (2005), *Semi-Presidential Systems: Dual Executive and Mixed Authority Patterns*, *French Politics*, Vol. 3, No.3, pp. 323-351.

<sup>8</sup> Schedler, Andreas (2006), „The Logic of Electoral Authoritarianism“, in: Schedler, Andreas (ed.), *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*, London: Boulder, p. 4.

That also makes parliament an institution that enhances authoritarian tendencies of the president instead of an institution that contributes to the establishment of a new democratic system.

Despite war and the existence of the non-liberal democratic regime in the 1990s that negatively affected democratization, Croatia's political institutions were stable and that situation was more similar to the situation in other ECE countries than in the Southeast European ones. With the latter, in turn, Croatia shared the deadlock in the democratic transition and created a situation where the regime stabilized itself, even if it could not fully consolidate. This created a situation in which Croatia shared the fate of some Latin American countries that had two transitions: the first from an autocratic regime into the delegative democracy, and the second from this form of democracy into a liberal democracy.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Change of the System of Government in 2000 and the New Role of the Parliament**

The first change of the government after the fall of communism was in 2000. The results of parliamentary and presidential elections in that year enhanced the role of the parliament. Newly elected President Stjepan Mešić left his party and although he did not want to be “a ficus” in the office, this move was in accordance with the view that the president in a parliamentary system should not be a member of any party. After the new parliament twice changed the Constitution – in 2000 and 2001 – the Croatian system of government shifted from parliamentary to semi-presidential. That was supposed to enhance the role of the parliament and the government in relation to the president. The turn from a semi-presidential to a parliamentary system and the abolishment of the second chamber could be seen as the strengthening of the political system and a continuation of democratization. The parliamentary system of government had to disable any potential pretender on dominant power, such as President Tuđman. That was also a release of the parliament from control by any dominant figure. Since then, the only head of the executive has been the prime minister and the head of state has only had substantial constitutional powers in foreign policy, defense, and national security. Unlike the 1990s, the parliament in the new decade began to resemble legislatures of Central European and Western parliamentary democracies: no party has had an absolute majority of seats and has been able to solely form a government; parties are the only ones who dominate parliament; there has been only a small number of independent Members of Parliament (MP); president has no influence on the parliament. Despite the leadership of gov-

erning parties residing in the government, parliament has become stronger than before.

In a new decade arose a new problem. Once the dominance of the president was removed and the political institutions were reformed, it became obvious that it was much easier to enact constitutional changes and adopt new ideas than to bring them to life. A consolidated party system with strong parties that were not ready for complete transformation was the main obstacle for the establishment of a fully consolidated liberal democracy. A lack of intraparty democracy and unwillingness (or incapability) to fully develop the rule of law in Croatia enhanced party leaderships in the executive and parliament again became the most significant political institution primarily for opposition's activity. At that moment, the former ruling party was part of the opposition. The loss of power in 2000 forced HDZ to reform itself. This enabled it to remain a relevant political actor and also prevented the new government to rule without any checks and pressures from the opposition.

Ivo Sanader, the HDZ's chairperson after Tuđman's death, turned the HDZ into the presidentialized party in which he dominated.<sup>10</sup> After the HDZ returned to power in December 2003 and formed a new government with Sanader as the prime minister, his domination over the party gave him strong influence on the parliament, too. This created similar relations in a triangle party-government-parliament as exist in some parliamentary democracies in Western Europe, but with one important difference. Baylis argues that „[i]n any parliamentary system the relationship of the prime minister to his or her party and the strength and discipline of the party in the party system are critical to his or her success or failure.“<sup>11</sup> The reformed HDZ exercised that discipline but it was not only a product of the proper functioning of the party's organs. It was more a product of Sanader's dominance over the HDZ that almost resembled that of Tuđman. Consequently, the main problem for the role and functionality of the parliament became the quality of the activities of relevant parties. Common party functions, such as aggregation and articulation of interests, representation of the society, creation of links between the state and society and education of their rank-and-file for public positions have been deficient since the establishment of the multi-party system. Therefore, the role of parties in power and in the opposition is not the same as it is in advanced democracies. Croatian parties are catch-all players that ignore their programs and ideology (if any) in order to maximize electoral votes. This is particularly evident in the establishment of patronage networks by some parties, especially by the HDZ,

<sup>9</sup> More about delegative democracy in: O'Donnell, Guillermo (1994), *Delegative Democracy*, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 55-69.

<sup>10</sup> Nikić Čakar, Dario (2013), *Prezidencijalizacija političkih stranaka*, Zagreb: Fakultet političkih znanosti.

<sup>11</sup> Baylis, Thomas A. (2007), *Embattled executives: Prime ministerial weakness in East Central Europe*, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 40, pp. 81-106, p. 84.

whose network involves veterans' associations and the Catholic Church.

The second problem was the role of the parliament in decision-making. It was obvious after the new ruling coalition changed the system of government, but continued to keep the executive as the core branch of power and the parliament as the place for the second echelons of their rank-and-files. Before every parliamentary election, the parties' leadership forms electoral lists and determines the order of the candidates (Croatia had closed and blocked lists until 2015). As a result, the party in government tightly controls the party in the parliament and the control function of the parliament is therefore significantly reduced. In addition, many MPs have not been fulfilling their duties or have not been capable of doing so, since their main function is to raise their hands to adopt bills initiated by the government. One illustrative example of that were negotiations with the EU, in which the parliament was the place for ratifying and adopting EU legislation but negotiations were led by people outside of it and without any significant influence of that institution. Therefore, the role of the parliament in the 2000s has been only partially enhanced, making that institution a passive actor who participated in but did not helm the transformation of Croatia's political system.

The third challenge to the functionality of the parliament after 2000 draws its roots from the 1990s. It is almost taken for granted in the relevant literature that the strong parliament and an executive president with the constrained powers is the beneficial constellation of power relations for the successful democratization in one country. After 2000, when the presidency lost its status as one of two heads of the executive, the parliament's role increased. However, the problem with the role and functioning of the main political party in Croatia, the HDZ, remained. It was almost a paradoxical situation during the 1990s and the time of war: despite defective democracy and devastating ethnic wars in the former Yugoslavia, no extreme right wing party in Croatia enjoyed a significant portion of seats in the parliament. The HDZ was a catch-all party for almost the entire conservative and nationalist right wing part of the electorate. Its wide spectrum of rank-and-file, especially among members of the party leadership who belonged to different worldviews, and its desire to maximize its catch-all electoral potential kept it from leaning to the extreme right and its immense popularity inhibited the rise of other right wing parties. After 2000, the HDZ remained a major right wing party that has still attracted different supporters and members from the political right and that became a problem for the functioning of the parliament. Since parliament is the basis for entering to national politics in Croatia, it is in the interest of different radical and extremist candidates to enter into that institution through elections. Membership in the HDZ or a coalition with that party are the best ways to achieve this aim. For that reason, the HDZ is not able to

transform itself in the modern conservative party like Britain's Conservative and Unionist Party or Germany's Christian Democratic Union and it still fills the parliament with politicians that are not conducive to the modern liberal democratic ideas and values. Because of that, parliament is still an important focal and starting point for extreme and radical politicians to enter national politics, which further threatens democracy in Croatia.

#### **Core Functions of the Croatian Parliament**

While the dominance of the executive over the parliament in Croatia has threatened its establishment as a strong institution, its legislative function has never been contested. It had a monopoly on this function even in the most difficult war period from 1991 to 1992. Even when the president in that period issued decrees with the force of law, they had to be subsequently confirmed by the parliament. In the whole post-communist period, parliament has never stopped its convening and sessions, nor has it shared its legislative power with other institutions. The government has initiated most bills, but that practice is also usual in the advanced democracies of the West.<sup>12</sup> The Croatian Parliament has always had a clear majority and between 1995-2016, early parliamentary elections have never been called. Moreover, such a clear majority with a strong party discipline produced legislative work that was often accelerated, reducing the extent of deliberation involved in law-making. This continued even after 2000, when the accelerated procedure of legislative work had to be brought into line with the *acquis communautaire*. The second house of the parliament, which existed from 1993 to 2001, had veto rights, but in eight years of its existence, it was used only once. Constitutional powers, electoral law, and political practice show that Croatia had asymmetrical incongruent bicameralism.

The representative function of the parliament was eroded in the first half of 1990. Population living in the territory that was not under the government's control and the part of refugees residing outside Croatia (both comprised maybe not more than one fifth of the population) did not participate in parliamentary elections in 1992, 1993, and 1995. Representative function was fully restored only in the election for the second chamber of parliament in 1997, when the population of the whole territory participated in it. But even then, refugees who were not living in Croatia did not participate. In addition to this, there was one intra-parliamentary issue. During several months of 1994, most of the opposition left the parliament dissatisfied with the behavior of the ruling HDZ. Parliament proceeded to function without them. Despite this problem, a blockade like the one that existed in Ukraine in 2000 when parliament was split in

<sup>12</sup> Hague, Rod, Harrop, Martin, Breslin, Shaun (2001), *Komparativna vladavina i politika: uvod*, Zagreb: Fakultet političkih znanosti, p. 307.

two,<sup>13</sup> never occurred in Croatia. Turnout in the parliamentary elections in the entire post-communist period was above 50%, and parliament has never been obstructed by any other body.

Finally, the control function of the parliament has been the most problematic. It has been more exercised by the opposition than by the ruling coalition's MPs. Since the first multiparty elections in 1990, the role of the opposition remained important, since most oppositional parties advocated further democratization of the country in the 1990s. In addition, they were not under the control of the regime, rather being its fierce opponents. Deliberations they pursued in parliament and ideas that they presented to the public contributed to the prevention of Croatia's transformation from communist autocracy into the post-communist authoritarian system. Instead, Croatia's democratization resulted with 'only' a defective democracy. This is a much better result than Serbia's, Belarus' or Albania's fate at that time. In that decade, elections in Croatia were free, even if they were not completely fair. Part of the media was under the regime's control and subsequently worked in its favor. Opposition suffered from intraparty splits, lack of access to all the media, and inability to fight HDZ's popularity built on nationalism. The HDZ formed all governments after 1992 and the only vein for oppositional parties to achieve any significant impact on the public was through the parliament. The importance of this was highlighted by the fact that there were neither large public protests nor any other form of non-institutional activities in Croatia, unlike in Serbia or Armenia<sup>14</sup> during that time. In 1994, the faction Croatian Independent Democrats (HND) split from the HDZ. Shortly after that, the HND became an irrelevant party, but showed that institutionalized activity could threaten the strength of the dominant party.

## Conclusions

The activity of the Croatian Parliament from the first multiparty elections 1990 to 2016 can be divided into two periods. In the first period from 1990 to 2000, during the existence of the semi-presidential system and the rule of the HDZ in defective democracy,<sup>15</sup> parliament was the weakest institution of the state power in the triangle president-government-parliament. In the second period, after 2000, parliament has been only partially strengthened due to the change of the system of government from a semi-presidential system to a par-

liamentary system. The dominance of the president of the republic from the first period completely disappeared and the parliament became independent from the president. Formally transactional relations between two institutions also disappeared, because the president lost significant constitutional powers.<sup>16</sup>

After 2000, the influence of the president on the parliament was converted to the influence of prime ministers. Although the system of government was changed, the problem still remains in another political subsystem – party system – because the decision-making process in the relevant parliamentary parties is not sufficiently democratic. Since parties are dominant actors in parliament, the lack of internal party democracy becomes a weakness of the parliament, too. This means that the main problem is not the dependence of the parliament on the government but the influence of the ruling parties' leaders on that institution. This arises due to the weak influence of many MPs on the activities of their own party.

One of the problems that emerged in all post-communist countries that are now members of the EU is a lack of political conditionality as an external mechanism of democratization. It forced candidate countries to transform themselves into liberal democracies but after they succeeded in that, there was no more incentive for further progress. This problem also affects Croatia and is visible in the emergence of referenda initiatives with illiberal agenda and the rise of populism in recent years. Still, three years after Croatia's accession to the EU in July 2013, this problem is not too serious and probably the only way in which the Croatian Parliament could inhibit the strengthening of liberal democracy in Croatia is if it becomes an institution in which extreme or radical parties are able to influence the legislative process and the formation of the government.

In order to avoid this danger, it is necessary to pay attention to two factors. First, the political culture in Croatia should be changed into the direction of such civic culture<sup>17</sup> in which neither extreme political option will gain relevance. Second, proper formal education and proper informing of citizens about politics, democracy, and the way in which the democratic political system should function would turn citizens into critical voters who are more resistive to populism and non-democratic ideas. Finally, recommendations that we offer for the strengthening of parliament as an important political institution for the functioning of the democratic political system are: a) further changes to the party system and its main actors to ensure bigger intraparty democracy;

<sup>13</sup> D'Anieri, Paul (2007), *Understanding Ukrainian Politics: Power, Politics, and Institutional Design*, Armonk and London: M. E. Sharpe.

<sup>14</sup> Way, Lucan (2009), „State power and autocratic stability: Armenia and Georgia compared“, in: Wooden, Amanda, Stefes, Christoph (eds.), *The politics of transition in Central Asia and the Caucasus: enduring legacies and emerging challenges*, Routledge, pp. 75-102.

<sup>15</sup> Merkel, Wolfgang (2011), *Transformacija političkih sustava*, Zagreb: Fakultet političkih znanosti.

<sup>16</sup> Duverger, Maurice (1980), A New Political System Model: Semi-Presidential Government, *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 165-187.

<sup>17</sup> Almond, Gabriel A., Verba, Sidney (1963), *The Civic Culture or The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, Sage Publications Inc.

b) the dismantling of patronage networks; and c) increasing professionalism among MPs to enable them to successfully fulfill their parliamentary duties. In this way, all three core functions of Parliament could be better realized and this institution would become stronger than now.

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# PERSISTENCE OF POLITICAL POLARIZATION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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## Introduction

The countries of the Balkan region have been continuously marked by deep political polarization and gridlock conflicts, which continue to impede democratic consolidation and progress toward European Union membership. If we refer to the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI), the party systems in the region have been characterized continuously by a moderate-to-high level of polarization (please see appendix).<sup>1</sup>

In Albania, a very tense political animosity and polarization has been noticed during and after elections. The latest parliamentary elections, although not contested as usual, have been characterized by continued mutual mistrust between the main political parties.<sup>2</sup> The harsh polarization and confrontational approach between the two major political groups have dominated political life even after elections with insults and accusations on either side, an antagonistic attitude of hardly discussing and negotiating over the country's most urgent issues (e.g. justice reform).

Political polarization in Bosnia and Herzegovina is almost exclusively divided along ethnic lines and still has a large number of political parties, considering its population size and the required coalition to govern the country. Radicalization and polarization in Bosnia and Herzegovina have led to the formation of two post-election ethnic party blocks (the Serbian SNSD-SDS and Croat HDZ-HDZ 1990) that impede coalition or alliance for major country's reforms.<sup>3</sup>

Croatia, an EU member state since 2013, is fairly characterized by limited polarization but still has radical parties at both extremes, although small parties are an issue on the rise.<sup>4</sup> The Croatian Conservative Party, rep-

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<sup>1</sup> Question 5.1 on Party System, asks whether there is a stable and socially rooted party system able to articulate and aggregate societal interests, considering also the level of polarization. A score of less than 4 indicates high polarization, a score of up to 7 indicates moderate polarization and a score of 10 considers low polarization of a party system.

<sup>2</sup> See: OSCE (2013) "Report to the Permanent Council by the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania", 31 October 2013" Available at <http://www.osce.org/albania/107715?download=true>; and "Albania's elections active and competitive, but mistrust between political forces tainted the environment, international observers say", 24 June 2013, Available at <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/103062>.

<sup>3</sup> Weber, B. (2014) "The Limits of The EU's Transformative Power in Bosnia-Herzegovina – Implications for Party Politics", in *EU integration and party politics in the Balkans*, Corina Stratulat (ed.), EPC Issue Paper No.77, p.103.

<sup>4</sup> Small parties with Eurosceptic views from the far-right-wing are the Croatian Party of Rights, Croatian Pure Party of Rights dr. Ante Starčević, Autochthonous Croatian Party of Rights, Croatian Christian Democratic Party and Only Croatia – Movement for Croatia, whereas from the far-left-wing are the Red Action party, a Eurosceptic party strongly against the EU and NATO.

resented in the European Parliament by its leader Ruža Tomašić, has joined the European Conservatives and Reformists, the Eurosceptic political group in the European Parliament.

In Kosovo the relations between the government coalition and the opposition remain difficult and polarized. Furthermore, Serbian minority parties are completely distancing themselves from political life while the radical nationalist Self-determination political movement is exerting violence and pressure on parliamentary life. Both of them are trying to adapt to the majority party system, causing political polarization among citizens.

In Macedonia lately, besides the polarized ethnic relations for political reasons, we have seen strong political polarization where the government lacks the political will to build and create an inclusive policy-making process, which has been followed by the opposition's boycott of parliament and several violent protests, which resulted in the government resigning.

Political polarization of Montenegrin politics has been previously witnessed on grounds of attitudes towards statehood and their ethno-national identities divided into pro- and anti-independence blocks. Polarized frictions more than between the government and opposition have been growing within the government and the opposition itself. After the 2014 presidential election, the opposition parties went through political interior disputes and divisions (e.g. some high officials of the Positive party left and formed the Civic Movement). Lately, the strong political polarization has been reflected in the media, which is significantly influenced by the business and political interests of the media owners.

The Serbian political scene is highly fragmented and the political elite continue to be polarized along statehood issues, such as Kosovo independence, autonomy of the Vojvodina province and other ethnically diverse regions such as Sandžak, which has a largely Muslim Bosniak population, or the Preševo municipality, which has large ethnic Albanian populations. As a result of the perceived EU pressure to normalize relations with Kosovo, EU membership in Serbia is a highly politicized and a polarizing topic in the political arena.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Why Persistent Political Polarization in the Balkans**

Political polarization in the region has become more complicated and lately we have seen increased polarization and less compromise for a number of reasons. Political polarization has arisen from both continuously

historic rooted factors and the dynamically changing domestic and European context. From a historical account, the conflictual political culture in the region is seen to be conditional on the limited experience of liberal democracy before and during communist rule. In terms of a more current approach, the importance of domestic actors as well as the supportive role of the EU are the major reasons for the rise of radicalization in the region.

#### *Legacies of conflictual political polarization*

Conflictual political polarization in the region is primarily and foremost because of the legacies of war, the communist past, and the particular historical experience of the area.<sup>6</sup> The Balkans, contrary to the Central European countries, differ with regard to the extent that their political culture resonates with liberal values and the extent to which political dialog and compromise can be achieved. A pre-democratic political culture did not precede the transition period; institutions were not trusted and failed to deliver, leaving empty ground for the introduction of liberal democratic political culture and norms. Although more than two and a half decades have passed since the collapse of communism, the Balkan states are still failing to function in a democratic pluralistic context. In terms of political behavior, nationalistic, populist, and authoritarian tendencies are still deeply embedded in the region. In many of the Balkan countries, the non-democratic political cultures could be found on the political agenda where the narrow nationalistic and populist interests have a very strong influence.<sup>7</sup> The political polarization of today reflects the shallow roots of the political culture of dialogue, tolerance and compromise in much of the Balkan area.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Domestically driven political polarization*

The political atmosphere has been volatile and conflictual and the political scene is completely dominated by power struggles, not just between political parties but also within them. We find a very tense political atmosphere and increased polarization and intolerance, especially in the pre-election periods. Even after elections, the political parties in power have no respect for the 'rules of the game' and the legitimacy of the political opponents. In the highly-charged atmosphere of Balkan politics, opponents are considered more as 'enemies' than as legitimate political opponents. On the one hand, governments tend to exclude the opposition parties from the policy process. On the other hand, the opposition

<sup>5</sup> The polarization over the Serbia-Kosovo dialog has been evidenced in the clear divergent official position of the government vis a vis that of the President. See: Bandović, I and Vujačić, M (2014) "The European Question in Serbia's Party Politics", in *EU integration and party politics in the Balkans*, Corina Stratulat (ed.), EPC Issue Paper No.77, p.54, 62.

<sup>6</sup> International Commission on the Balkans (1996) *Unfinished Peace*, Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

<sup>7</sup> Gligorov, V.; Holzner, M., and Landesmann, M. (2003) *Prospects for Further (South) Eastern EU Enlargement: Form Divergence to Convergence?*, Global Development Network Southeast Europe (GDN-SEE), Vienna, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Bugajski, J. (2001) *Facing the Future: The Balkans to the Year 2010*, ZEI Discussion Papers: 2001, C 86, p. 9.



has been weak and hardly developing constructive and coherent opposition. The attitude of the opposition has simply been to oppose rather than to offer clear, convincing and better sets of alternative policies, since they are seeking absolute power. The favorite mechanisms of the opposition have mainly been to boycott (e.g. Albania) or to hold street protests (e.g. Macedonia), which sometimes lead to violent conflicts. The increased political polarization can be evidenced in the rhetoric and public speaking of different political actors communicating their own conflictual views to the general public. The increased political polarization has most likely been reflected in public opinion polls or surveys, the election results and through continuous protests. Increased polarization has gone hand in hand with citizens' loss of trust in national politics, from both the sides of government and that of opposition.<sup>9</sup>

#### *The EU's (indirect) impact on political consensus*

The EU accession process in Central Europe encouraged some degree of political cooperation, through either depoliticizing certain issues, such as *acquis communautaire*, leaving little to no room for domestic autonomous politics or through the censure and marginalization of more radical parties.<sup>10</sup> The EU adaptive pressures considerably reduced the scope of public policy debate and had a tendency to generate domestic political competition around the question of which party was more committed to and more competent to guide the country to EU accession. Yet some of the political criteria that touch upon nationally sensitive matters and unresolved post-conflict issues – such as cooperation with the ICTY, return of refugees, state reform in Bosnia Herzegovina, constitutional compliance in Macedonia, or the Serbia-Kosovo dialog – have generated a sense of injustice and domestic polarization in most Western Balkan countries, making it difficult to reach internal consensus over the legitimacy of EU political conditionality.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the political polarization is in-

creasing with the more challenges there are over Europe and the distancing enlargement. The argument here is that, especially in countries where European integration is a far-reaching objective, it may produce more divisions within and between the parties. The EU membership (the carrot) has been higher for those countries, once the benefit (EU membership) is disappearing then the political will to comply is less and thus resulting in increasing of the domestic polarization and radicalization.

In addition, the political fallout from the European integration process, which culminated with the Commissioner Declaration that no EU enlargement is envisioned for this mandate, has significantly increased skepticism among politicians. Such a delayed enlargement fatigue has increasingly split even the mainstream political parties into pro- and anti-Europeans, leaving both sides of the political spectrum open/raised to the extremes to be exploited for their own purposes.

#### **What Has Political Polarization Brought to the Region So Far?**

As a result of such polarized behaviors from the party (or mostly from individuals) in power, the countries in the Western Balkans went into institutional or political crisis. All these disturbances have limited the ability of countries to push forward reforms, leaving the region a step behind in the process of catching up with European integration. The highly polarized and confrontational political climate among domestic political parties, as well as their incapability to resolve their divergences through negotiations and consensus, has shifted the role of the international community from that of a mediator to that of an arbitrator party, undermining the democratic institution building processes. The political culture that has been developed in the region is that of a polarized political scene unable to avoid strong confrontation. Due to a strong political polarization, discrimination on the basis of ethnic relations or political affiliation deteriorates the functions of the democratic institutions and norms and presents a huge impediment to employment in the public sector. Furthermore, polarization between the ruling majority and opposition are diverting political attention away from the necessary/needed reforms and the required EU policy reforms. Increased polarization of the political climate throughout the region has benefited nationalist parties who are winning more electorates and ground.

Compared to the previous conflictual political culture in the region, today the region's difficult economic situation, the distant EU integration process, and the high level of corruption and civil political irritation and discontent are leading to tremendous party polarization. The risk of such persistent political polarization is that it may lead to radicalization. A more collective response in the context of intergroup conflict is rooted in fear and frustration about group-based feelings of social exclu-

<sup>9</sup> This can be concluded due to the continuous falling number of party members; the no massive gatherings in the elections campaigns; and the lower participation in elections. When asked to say who they trust, most citizens from the Balkans have little faith in their national institutions. See: survey results of Gallup Balkan Monitor (2010) *Insights and Perceptions: Voices of the Balkans*. Summary of Findings.

<sup>10</sup> Studies in post-communist member states finds the European integration process to have been able to strengthen the position of some parties and weaken others, by either influencing coalition-making strategies through creating disincentives to form coalitions with extremist parties or through facilitating the ideological reorientation of certain parties towards transnational European party families. For a summary of the argument with further references See: Lewis, P. G., (2008) "Changes in the party politics of the new EU member states in Central Europe: patterns of Europeanization and democratization", *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, 10(2): p. 157; and Ladrech, R (2009) "Europeanization and political parties", *Living Reviews in European Governance* 4(1).

<sup>11</sup> Anastasakis, Othon (2008) "The EU's political conditionality in the Western Balkans: towards a more pragmatic Approach", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 8:4, p. 366, 374.

sion and perceived threats.<sup>12</sup> The consequences of further radicalization of the situations may be irreversible, as previously experienced in the region (the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina 1993-1995, the disorder in Albania 1997, the Kosovo crises 1999, the conflict in Macedonia 2001).

### Conclusions

Over the last years, countries in the region have persistently undergone different strong political polarization. Consensus on the objectives of democracy, market economies and European integration is weakening in the Balkans as the region is faced with a lack of accession prospects and inherited conflictual domestic politics. The political style is characterized by harsh political confrontation and uncivilized political behavior, especially during election campaigns and public debates, and by a lack of substantial political dialog and spirit of cooperation. The situation snapshot suggests that political polarization in the short run, if moderate, is becoming increasingly unlikely to be problematic. Yet in the long run, given the increased polarization of political views in the region, it is likely that the European future will be problematic and the viability and desirability of the state at stake.

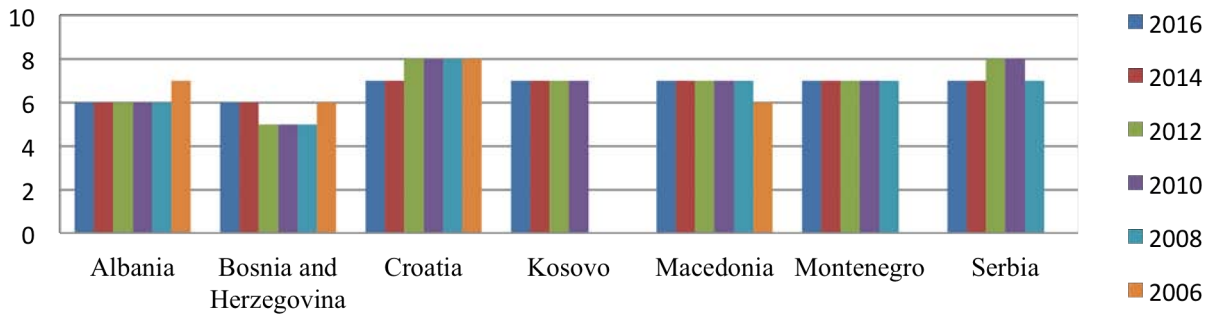
How can political polarization be avoided and democratic consensus can be built? To answer this, we need to consider mechanisms, which foster inclusion instead of the winner-takes-all logic and create a dynamic constructivist conversation between domestic political actors on all sides, including interest groups and civil society, for a more consensus-seeking process. Domestic political will and civic pressure can make a political arrangement work under new political behavior and the liberal democratic power-sharing formula. Second, the EU needs to keep up the integration momentum and exert further political pressure on all political sides, influencing coalition-making strategies and facilitating settlements of ideological and political divergences.

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<sup>12</sup> Berting, P. (2010) "Two routes to anger: Perceived threat and social exclusion as predictors of radicalization", Unpublished MA thesis, Free University, Amsterdam.

**Appendix**

### The Level of Polarization



Source: Bertelsmann Transformation Index

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# POLITICAL POLARIZATION ON THE RISE: THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND BEYOND

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Europe's refugee crisis triggered changes in politics all across Europe. While German Chancellor Angela Merkel continued with the politics of accepting asylum seekers and asked for the relocation scheme, Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, together with Polish leaders, embraced the language of nationalist parties and called against Muslim immigration. Czech President Miloš Zeman, meanwhile, used the uncontrolled influx of refugees into Europe to start to stir up latent conflicts, laying the groundwork for upcoming presidential elections.

Zeman has constantly created a cleavage between the so called Prague Café (*Pražská kavárna*)<sup>2</sup>, representing the *lazy intellectuals*, and the *hard working people represented by himself, as he is the president of a lower ten thousand people who talk about naïve politicians welcoming refugees who do not deserve compassion, as nobody invited them*<sup>3</sup>. Zeman uses populist techniques<sup>4</sup>, dirty language<sup>5</sup> and blue jokes to spread fear and stir up emotions to give the impression that he is not the elite, but that he belongs to the normal people: "There are no racist[s], no xenophobes and no fascist[s] in my meeting[s]. There are people who are afraid [of the] migration crisis, having healthy self-preservation instinct [be]cause they see what is going on in neighboring states and do not share the naïve opinion of unnamed Czech politicians that the migration crisis will avoid our country."<sup>6</sup> The arguments are not only about his position towards immigration (Zeman calling immigrants the Trojan Horse in Europe, triggering fear of the Muslim invasion<sup>7</sup>). The Czech President also departed from the common EU line on the Israel/Palestine conflict, Russia generally, the Ukraine conflict the relationships with China, stirring up emotions against the EU and its political correctness and spreading fear of foreign rule

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<sup>2</sup> Zeman came up with this term to label intellectuals, quite often leftist, with multiculturalist points of view, who stand against his politics. Another term used in this context is *Sluníčkáři* (literally translated devotees to the sun) or *Pravdoláskaři* (literally translated as the devotees to truth and love), which usually refers to the followers of Václav Havel ideas.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Miloš Zeman, 22. 1. 2016 Blesk TV. <http://tv.blesk.cz/video/2394504/zeman-vzkazal-uprchlikum-3-vey-nikdo-vas-nezval.html>.

<sup>4</sup> C.f. Canovan's conceptualisation of populism: a kind of revolt against established structures (elites) in the name of (the) people using simple, direct style and simple solutions very understandable to "everyone" (Canovan 1999) with Paul Taggart's six characteristics of populism: hostility towards the representative politics, heartland and the people, lack of core values, sense of extreme crisis, non-political nature of populist movements and charismatic leader, chameleonic nature (Taggart 2004:66).

<sup>5</sup> *Fucked up law* (about changes in newly approved service law), *Cunt here and there* (about texts of Pussy Riot). Live interview with Miloš Zeman for Radiožurnál 2.11.2014.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Miloš Zeman, 30. 1. 2016, Deník. <http://milos.chytrak.cz/2016/20160130-denik.php>.

<sup>7</sup> Zeman was known for his Islamophobia even before the refugee crisis.

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<sup>1</sup> This article was written as part of the research project: 'Current Issues in Political Science' (MUNI/A/1342/2014), undertaken at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University.

among people. He openly stands against the Czech Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka (leader of the Czech Social Democratic Party) and his newly introduced policies (among others inclusion of mentally handicapped pupils in the basic school system). Zeman also stirred emotions when he acknowledged the good work of the police after the visit of Chinese president for “*defending displays of behavior of people out of mind*” (meaning those who were waving the Tibetan flag). The second pole of the polarized society and politics is represented mainly by the young, well-educated liberals from the cities and some members and supporters of the social democrats, led by Prime Minister Sobotka, who believe in solidarity in the European Union, the need to redistribute refugees, who are not fond of authoritarian regimes (like Zeman is) and believe in democratic values. Nevertheless, the president profits from creating the cleavage from *working smart people vs. lazy stupid intelligentsia*, as more people claim to trust him in the surveys: 55% confidence in March 2015 rose up to 63% in February 2016, making him the most trusted political institution in the country (confidence in government 40%, Parliament 36%, Senate 3%)<sup>8</sup>.

Zeman is surrounded by extremists and radicals. A journalist from Parliamentary Papers (*Parlamentní listy*), Radim Panenka, who used to be member of the far right party, National Party (*Národní strana*), gets exclusive interviews with the president. Hard-line supporter of Miloš Zeman (as well as Vladimir Putin), Jelena Vičanová organized a demonstration on November 17, 2015, where Zeman stood next to her, extremist Martin Konvička, and other far right/far left adherents (Miroslav Lidinský, Marek Černoš, Martin Nejedlý, Adam B. Bartoš, Petr Cvalín).

As voters in the Czech Republic face an electoral marathon in the upcoming years<sup>9</sup> it is not only the president of the republic who is triggering political polarization, but also other subjects hoping to gain the biggest portion of the pie after the elections. The opposition leader Petr Fiala from the Civic Democratic Party also sharpens his language by talking about sealing the borders while the Czech Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Secretary, the oligarch Andrej Babiš, talks about sending the army against the migrants.<sup>10</sup> Martin Konvička, entomologist and senior lecturer at the South Bohemian University, emerged as a new anti-Islamic leader in 2014 (leader of the movement *We don't want Islam in*

*the Czech Republic and of Dawn-National Coalition Úsvit-Národní koalice*)<sup>11</sup> for the upcoming elections. The cooperation of Dawn and the National Coalition only lasted until the beginning of May 2016, when people around Konvička announced the formation of a new party, Alternative for Czech Republic (*Alternativa pro Česko*), following the successful model of its German counterpart, Alternative for Germany (AfD – *Alternativa für Deutschland*). Konvička became well known for his strongly anti-Islamic statements in his Facebook profile, which talked about concentration camps for Muslims, and was indicted for hate speech by State Attorney Josef Richter in April 2016. The foundation of aforementioned party, Alternative for Czech Republic, is also supported by former Czech President and Prime Minister Václav Klaus.

It is not only radical and extremist political parties on the rise, but also newly emerged anti-Islamic movements such as Angry Mothers (*Naštvané matky*)<sup>12</sup>, whose members use their maternity to spread fear and hostility among people and mix anti-Islamic topics with maternity issues (childbirth, vaccination etc.), or the anti-Islamic No Pasarán<sup>13</sup> community. With both, the common denominator is the internet – it has never been so easy to share ideas via blog or the Facebook community.

Similar processes are taking place in other Visegrád countries. Since the 2005 elections, Polish society has been deeply divided into two camps with regard to traditions, the position of church and what the state should look. The same has occurred in Hungary, where society and politics have been divided into two hegemonic camps. **So why is political polarization on the rise?** The variables, which influence the formations of the extreme and radical positions of the political axis, are political<sup>14</sup>, social<sup>15</sup>, economic<sup>16</sup>, cultural<sup>17</sup> and intercultur-

<sup>8</sup> STEM Survey. In: *Zemanovi důvěřuje stále víc Čechů. Vláda, Sněmovna I Senát si pohoršily*. 8.3.2016. [http://zpravy.idnes.cz/duvera-v-politicke-institute-zeman-unor-2016-stem-f5b-domaci.aspx?c=A160308\\_113733\\_domaci\\_hro](http://zpravy.idnes.cz/duvera-v-politicke-institute-zeman-unor-2016-stem-f5b-domaci.aspx?c=A160308_113733_domaci_hro).

<sup>9</sup> The elections for senate and regional governments (*Kraje*) are expected in 2016, for parliament in 2017 and for president in 2018. If there are no early election, the next year without elections could be as late as 2027.

<sup>10</sup> *Czech president Miloš Zeman repeats the mantra „about illegal immigrants who should be deported to where they came from“*. In *Britské listy* 14.9.2015. <http://blisty.cz/art/78991.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Short Dawn, formerly (from June 2014 to August 2015) Dawn of Direct Democracy (*Úsvit přímé demokracie*) or (from June 2013 to June 2014) Tomio Okamura's Dawn of Direct Democracy (*Úsvit přímé demokracie Tomia Okamury*). The party was originally founded by Tomio Okamura before the parliamentary elections in 2013, in which it obtained 6.88% and gained 14 seats in the parliament. In 2015, several party members set up a new party independent of Tomio Okamura. Okamura then set up the movement Freedom and Direct Democracy, striving for direct democracy, referendum about EU membership, stricter immigration laws etc.

<sup>12</sup> <http://hrindova.blog.idnes.cz/blog.aspx?c=447138>.

<sup>13</sup> <http://no-pasaran.cz/>.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. political discontent, convergence/polarization/fragmentation of the party system, PR electoral system, emergence of the opposite extreme formations, referenda that cut across the old party cleavages, creation of a new state, perceived internal/external threats, the political expression of nationalism, regime change, political culture, elite behavior.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. dissolution of established identities, middle class discontent, existence of social tension or conflict.

<sup>16</sup> E.g. post-industrial economy, rising unemployment, economic cuts in the welfare sphere, economic crisis, war, foreign domination, economic transition.

<sup>17</sup> E.g. fragmentation of the culture, demography and multiculturalization, impact of globalization, reaction to the influx of racially and

al<sup>18</sup>. While every case is unique, it is always a set of variables which matters (Stojarová 2013). A reason to include the political variable is that the political right and left move to the center and unite in their political stance, offering no alternative to the voters and providing space for extreme right/extreme left political formations (c.f. e.g. Eastwell 2003). This is also the case in Czech politics, as Czech politicians refrained from learning political culture from their counterparts in Western Europe and the parties instead became private clubs for only invited people. Political players refuse to assume responsibility and then leave the party only when facing serious indictments, resulting in only a recycling of politicians and no elite change.

The parties also fail in the articulation and concentration of group interests (Hloušek-Kopeček 2014). Application of the lustration law has been quite lax and so the collaborators of the previous regime and the political players from the communist period still belong to the political elite of the country, refusing to accept new blood into their ranks. The malaise with the politics, such as restricted access to the existing political parties, also makes the voter look for new alternatives and leads to the acceptance of simple and fast populist solutions. Social variables are important in our rapidly changing, interconnected world – it is much easier for the discontent voter to start a group of his supporters on Facebook (FB), sign a petition or write his own blog and thereby spread his ideas and reach thousands of people immediately via the internet. What is striking is that hate speech on FB is such a common phenomenon that it becomes part of daily life. To write anti-ideas is much faster than the process of their deletion or indictment of the person responsible. Political parties have lost their privileged position of making politics in this interconnected world. Cultural variables, such as the migration crisis, then act as triggers for further polarization of the society and politics. Media and its sensation hunters are also to be blamed<sup>19</sup> as they contribute to the fake news and polarization of society. Quality of media in the Czech Republic has fallen sharply and most media outlets refer to the public in tabloid manner.

Populism can be perceived as a threat or a challenge to democracy. If not addressed properly it can destroy the democratic system, however it can also give way to some new impulses and refresh democratic stability. As Benjamin Ardití, Paraguayan political scientist from Mexico University once argued, populism can be like a

guest who comes late and drunk to dinner, does not behave with respect and manners and instead spells out the painful troubles of the group (Arditi 2005). Similarly, polarization brings new topics to the discussion and becomes a threat to democracy when not observed and treated carefully. The Weimar Republic, the French Fourth Republic, the Austrian democracy in the 1930s and the Chilean democracy failed because of the vast ideological differences between the parties, which made governing together problematic. One could argue if we can limit polarization, we might be able to make democracy more sustainable. Low polarization also has an impact on economic growth while higher polarization might lead to higher electoral turnout (Ladner 2014). Viktor Orbán or Jaroslav Kaczyński<sup>20</sup> are examples of leaders who are changing the institutional settings of their countries enormously and thus threatening democracy and stability in their countries. **So how should polarization be approached?**

As already mentioned, every case is unique. For some countries, change in the electoral system (less proportional, more majoritarian components) limiting the role of anti-system players might make sense to avoid further polarization. Other proposals include the strengthening of the role of the prime minister and the government and introducing constructive votes of non-confidence for system stabilization (Kubát 2013). These proposals however, might also seem like threats to the current democratic systems in the light of Polish and Hungarian examples and strengthening one player might present a danger for the future and stability of the system if occupied by a politician with authoritarian tendencies. The system of checks and balances must be balanced so that no player is able to revert the democratic system, while still making sure that no player becomes a significant veto player and obstacle to the legislative process. Constitutions may sometimes be quite vague and can be interpreted as an argument for a strong prime minister, or, in the case of the Czech Republic, the president feels the temptation to push the limits provided by the Constitution. Again, we return to the need for elite change and political culture. Political parties should not refuse responsibility and become open to their sympathizers and voters, as they would constitute a fertile and stable ground for them and would not easily be distracted by newly emerged populist players. The constitutional and democratic president should become president for all people and should not be one who creates cleavages, but rather one who unites. Politicians should be able to communicate and explain their decisions to the public so that voters do not succumb easily to new populist and polarizing formations.

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culturally different members of the population, popular xenophobia and racism, religion vs. secularization, one's own ethnicity living outside the borders of a mother state.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. state humiliation, desire for higher status, position towards the competing project e.g. EU.

<sup>19</sup> One of the latest examples is the Prima TV report about the Iraqi refugees who, according to the TV interpreter, said that they were allocated to a re-painted cowshed. The NGO Generation 2, which is taking care of the refugees, claims the translation from Arab language was misleading and incorrect.

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<sup>20</sup> E.g. new laws that bring public media and the Constitutional Court under government control in Poland or laws regulating media in Hungary.

Another potential threat or challenge may arise when the polarizing actor enjoys a landslide victory and enters a government. The Austrian Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) is a typical example – it helped to break the ÖVP-SPÖ cartel in Austria when a horrified Europe refused to shake hands with Austrian cabinet members after the landslide victory of FPÖ in 1999 and the concluded coalition of FPÖ and ÖVP. However, after two years in the government, the party's support dropped back to its previous ten percent. This may also be the most likely outcome for the governmental coalition in Slovakia, composed *inter alia* of nationalists, and in the past the anti-Hungarian Slovakian National Party (SNS) and the Hungarian ethnic party Bridge (Most-Híd).

Other proposals to eliminate populist players include participatory democracy. The idea is that giving people more meaningful opportunities to participate in their own self-governance and to practice working together to solve tractable problems can help to reinforce their wider perceptions of the legitimacy of the democratic system. Experience with the practicalities of governance and decision-making in complex communities also has the potential to increase the public's understanding of complex problems, including the trade-offs and necessary compromises inherent in all political decision making and public respect for informed decision-making (Johnson 2014). However, again, the example of the Swiss People's Party and its popularity in the last two decades comes into mind in the milieu of the participatory democracy per excellence. Some might argue in this context that too many referenda might make people more relaxed about the issues, creating more dichotomies and perceptions of the world as black and white, without looking at the additional info. A similar example in this context is the popular election of the Czech president – without additional multiple choice options the dichotomies of yes or no, black or white or two options lead to simplification and also polarization. The first direct presidential elections were the building block for the current polarization of the Czech society: liberals vs. nonliberal supporters of President Miloš Zeman, who loves to create conflicts, divide and rule and usurp more power from the vaguely written constitution. Similarly, the second round of presidential elections in Austria, scheduled for May 22, 2016, could also become a basis for the polarization of the Austrian society.

Being quite aware of the fact that academics have little impact on politicians and that politics is a constant fight for power, let me conclude with some final remarks. It is necessary to think about platforms that can unite people with different opinions, of different ethnicities, beliefs, social strata, ages or sex. As political parties play a crucial role in pluralist democracies, they should not only be able to explain their decisions (however not in the way “*we do it cause EU wants us to do it*”), but also to listen to the *vox populi* and enter into dialog with them, as those people who feel unheard and underrepresented are most likely to be captivated by populist can-

didates. Schools should provide pupils with more civic and political education so they can lead discussions and communicate with politicians. Political parties should build their bases of voters and supporters and work with social movements. Politicians should also use the Internet and new technologies to foster dialogue and discussions with the public. They should create and share a narrative that would mobilize the people and create a collective identity with their political projects. Otherwise, only people with similar ideas will unite in the social media, thereby strengthening social bubbles and contributing to further polarization. The Czech president should stay apolitical and unite people rather than divide while Czech politicians should learn the political culture from their Western counterparts and become accountable for their deeds. Last but not least, I'd like to recall a piece of advice from Belgian political scientist Chantal Mouffe to the EU: The EU as well as state institutions should become more accountable and more representative and this should be the objective towards which parties and social movements need to work together. The goal should be to create a European project that people can identify with, to enter into debate with people in order to know what kind of Europe they want while fostering a European identity so that people become interested again and identify with the European project.<sup>21</sup> The aim should also be to overcome the cleavage of old member states vs. new member states (or more precisely Visegrád countries) in order to live up to its motto *United in diversity*.

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<sup>21</sup> *Populism is a necessity*. Conversation by Julia Korbik with Chantal Mouffe. In: The European 15.1.2014. Available online at <http://en.theeuropean.eu/chantal-mouffe--3/7859-fighting-right-wing-populism-in-europe>.

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# ETHNIC POLITICS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: THE STATE OF PLAY AND WAYS FORWARD

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## Introduction

Ethnicity is defined as a feeling of belonging shared by members of a certain community based on assumed shared ancestry, history, language, religion, race, territory or descent.<sup>1</sup> While ethnicity per se is not a generator of instability and violence, its manifestation in political life within a multi-ethnic society can be used as a ground for group polarization and enmity. Therefore, politicized ethnicity or ethno-nationalism in multi-ethnic societies is seen as a source of political polarization across ethnicities and an obstacle to social cohesion and national integration.

With the exception of Albania, in the last 25 years all six Balkan states have experienced violent conflicts where ethnicity has been often invoked as a primary cause. Many accounts of the break-up of Yugoslavia have explained the eruption of ethnic violence in the former Yugoslavia with the role of self-seeking politicians like Slobodan Milošević, Franjo Tuđman, and Alija Izetbegović by exploiting the common insecurities following the demise of the multinational federation and politicizing ethnicity. In fact, the initial root causes of the Yugoslav conflict may have not been ethnic at all, but the wide spread violence along ethnic lines reinforced ethnic cleavages within all communities.

The intervention of the EU, U.S., NATO, and the UN was crucial to ending the ethnic violence in Bosnia, Macedonia, and Kosovo and establishing peace plans and agreements, which have been largely successful to preserve the ethnic peace and avoid a relapse in full scale violent conflicts. The region has not seen widespread armed conflicts since the Albanian armed insurgency in Macedonia in 2001, but peace consolidation remains a challenging task in Bosnia, Macedonia, and Kosovo.

Twenty-five years after the break-up of Yugoslavia, most Western Balkans societies are still recovering from armed conflict and widespread violence. Milošević, Tuđman and Izetbegović have all gone but the ethnically charged political environment has created conditions for old and new political actors across the Balkans to play the nationalist card to the detriment of democratic accountability and rule of law. Most countries have had to struggle simultaneously with competing processes of state-building and nation-building similar to “building a ship while sailing”. The power sharing solutions implemented have predominantly been guided by the dynamics of ethnic conflict on the

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<sup>1</sup> V.P. Gagnon (2004) *The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s*. Cornell University Press. pp.217; Bunce, V. (1999) *Peaceful versus Violent State Dismemberment: A Comparison of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia*, *Politics & Society*, 27, pp. 217-237; Posen, B. (1993): “The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict,” *Survival*, 35, pp. 27-47.

ground and consequently the constitutional frameworks established are conducive to the long term politicization of ethnicity.<sup>2</sup>

Kosovo's riots of March 2004, the frequent skirmishes in the Northern part of Kosovo, and volatile inter-ethnic relations in Bosnia and Macedonia are strong reminders that ethno-nationalist issues still have the potential to be important triggers of conflicts with broader security implications for the region and Europe. As a result, ethnicity continues to be a salient and polarizing factor in most societies in the Western Balkans and ethnic parties claiming to represent ethnic communities have become the rule rather than the exception in the post-conflict situation. Particularly in Bosnia and Macedonia, political parties using the ethno-nationalist card have entrenched a system of ethnic patronage that is hard to dismantle with constitutional and democratic means.

So what does this mean for the future of the region? Are ethnic politics turning polarization between ethnic groups into a permanent feature of the political system? Is the "ethnification of politics" indefinitely going to hamper the necessary state-building and consolidation reforms required to join the EU? Are we going to see a shift from ethnic politics into post-ethnic "normal politics" without external intervention?

This brief paper revisits some of the assumptions on the role ethnicity and ethnic parties in multi-ethnic societies by looking at the empirical record in the Western Balkans, focusing primarily on Bosnia and Macedonia. The next section looks at the impact of ethnicity in post-conflict societies and how ethnicity affects political party strategies. The third section focuses on the record of ethnic politics in Western Balkans, focusing on Bosnia and Macedonia. Section 4 concludes with some ideas on de-ethnicizing politics across the region.

#### **Ethnicity as a Political Resource in Divided Societies**

An ethnic party is defined as a political party which either declaratively or practically advocates for the rights of a certain ethnic group, by explicitly or implicitly referring to the ethnic group in party manifestos and electoral programs and defending and advancing its interest when in power.<sup>3</sup> Ethnic parties are generally expected to represent the interests of minority communities but there are exceptions to this rule depending on the number and demographic size of the politically mobilized ethnic groups and the degree to which ethnicity is sali-

ent in electoral politics. Thus in certain countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina or Macedonia – although Bosnian and Macedonian communities constitute a relative majority in relation to other groups (Serbs and Croats in Bosnia and Albanians in Macedonia) given the size, territorial patterns, and organizational capacities of other non-dominant groups – Bosnian and Macedonian parties operate in a framework where political representation is ethnically framed and is generally viewed as ethnic or ethno-nationalist parties.

Once ethnicity becomes a political resource, ethnic parties and politicians can use a number of strategies for mobilizing voters on ethnic grounds, accessing power and consolidating their electoral success. The most widely known strategy is that of "ethnic outbidding" when political parties take more extreme positions on issues involving ethnic and national identity to outcompete other forces within the same ethnic group. Ethnic outbidding efforts translate into aggressive political programs, campaign language, and political strategies between and within ethnic blocs.<sup>4</sup> This spiraling process of intra-ethnic competition relegates other important issues that have a cross-ethnic appeal such as unemployment, corruption, social justice, and environment into the background of political campaigns, preventing debates on programmatic issues.

When the ethnic outbidding pressure recedes and two or more ethnic parties largely cover the field of ethnic politics by emphasizing ethnic issues over other social issues, ethnic parties can also gradually become "ethnic tribune parties" and are largely perceived as the most effective advocates in their respective communities.<sup>5</sup> Due to the expectation that votes for other parties will be wasted, voters are inclined to keep voting for these parties because of their reputations as tribune parties and because they indirectly expect them to channel power and resources to the community. In large part, the long term coalition of the VMRO and DUI in Macedonia illustrates this situation where parties have managed to project themselves as the "guardian" of their respective Macedonian and Albanian communities and have squeezed the middle ground for other less moderate parties. Both parties have shown a tendency to provoke or heighten ethnic tensions, either prior to elections or when they want to divert the attention from non-ethnic issues and governing failures to ethnic problems and consolidating their voters against potential rivals. "Controlled incidents" with ethnic background are then used to reassure their respective ethnic constituencies that VMRO and DUI are the most ardent defenders against the rival ethnic group.

<sup>2</sup> Dayton Peace Accords (1996), Ohrid Framework Agreement (2001), Ahtisaari Plan for Kosovo's final status (2007).

<sup>3</sup> Chandra, K (2007), *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed: Patronage and Ethnic Head Counts in India*, Cambridge University Press. Chandra also adds that ethnic parties are expected to draw a disproportionate amount of members, leaders, and votes exclusively from a certain ethnic community and frequently in a certain geographical area considered as its electoral stronghold.

<sup>4</sup> Horowitz, D. L. (1985). *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

<sup>5</sup> Mitchell, P, Geoffrey E. and O'Leary B. (2009) 'Extremist Outbidding in Ethnic Party Systems is not Inevitable: Tribune Parties in Northern Ireland', *Political Studies* 57: 397–421.

When a framework of intra-ethnic competition is stabilized with two main parties turning into “ethnic tribune parties”, rival parties or newcomers involved in intra-bloc competition are often forced to pursue a more moderate political campaign in order to discredit the established nationalist parties through a strategy of “ethnic underbidding”.<sup>6</sup> An underbidding ethnic party continues to appeal to its own ethnic community but adopts a more moderate stance toward the dominant ethnic group. This strategy is usually provisional and is abandoned once initial success to out-compete traditional parties is achieved. For example, initially the SNSD led by Milorad Dodik was able to attract support from the international community by projecting a more moderate stance on the future of the Serb community in Bosnia relative to the SDS party founded by Karadzic. Once this strategy helped him break ground amongst moderate voters he abandoned the ethnic underbidding strategy and started making nationalist appeals, threatening with complete secession of Republika Srpska from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

A less successful strategy is that of counterbidding, employed by parties which seek to move away from ethnic issues in order to appeal to a more moderate middle ground that cares about ethnic issues but is also concerned about other cross-ethnic issues such as economic prosperity, rule of law, openness and transparency in government.<sup>7</sup> To a certain extent this strategy has been tried by new parties in Bosnia like Naša Stranka, but they have hardly been able to garner more than 5% of the vote. The middle ground parties can be quite successful in times of sustained ethnic peace when ethnic identity, ethnic discrimination and other issues recede in importance. However, once ethnic tensions are renewed, counter-bidding or cross-ethnic political parties are usually squeezed by traditional ethnic parties, which often orchestrate ethnic tensions in order to keep the ethnic polarization high and fend off counterbidding efforts of non-ethnic parties.

The strategies of ethnic parties differ significantly based on the status of the party (traditional or new), overall ethnic climate (ethnic tension versus ethnic peace) and party position (governing or opposition) and election cycles (before and after elections).<sup>8</sup> Traditional parties have a tendency to keep their ethnic rhetoric high but in the long run may even moderate their stances unless presented with outbidding pressures from newcomers. When ethnic tensions are low, newcomers do not always embark upon outbidding pressure but may well be

strategic about the electoral terrain available and run on a program that combines ethnic cleavages with broader social issues resonating with large segments of populations. Also parties that have access to power are expected to moderate their position on ethnic issues and continue “business as usual” once elections are over whereas opposition parties tend to radicalize their position on ethnic issues and portray the incumbents as “too weak” or “sold out” before elections.

#### **Ethnic Parties in the Western Balkans: The State of Play in Bosnia and Macedonia**

A large number of political organizations in all the Western Balkan states are ethnic or minority parties and a large part of them compete in elections. The post-Dayton Bosnia is viewed as a typical case of consociationalism where Bosniak, Serb and Croat ethnic groups share power at all levels of government. The Ohrid Framework Agreement does not mandate power sharing in the government between Macedonian and Albanian parties, it provides for local autonomy, equitable representation and veto powers on issues of vital interest to the Albanian community. The Ahtisaari Plan, which was incorporated into Kosovo’s constitution, provides asymmetrical representation and veto power on issues of vital interest to the Serb community at the central level, a high degree of autonomy at local level, and the right of Serbia to provide financial and technical support to Serb municipalities.

Cursory research on the political parties in the region shows that of the more than 400 parties registered in the six Western Balkan countries, more than 120 claim to represent a certain ethnic community and a large part of them are actively participating in elections.<sup>9</sup> The legacies of the conflict and the constitutional frameworks have created a framework of ethnic representation where political fragmentation is very rampant across ethnic groups and within the same ethnic group. For example, in Kosovo where non-Albanian communities constitute less than 10% of the population of two million there are about 28 minority parties claiming to represent the Serb, Turkish, Bosniak, Gorani, Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities, thus competing for less than 150,000 votes. The largest of the Serbian parties, Lista Srpska, received less than 40,000 votes in the last elections of June 2014, but due to reserved parliamentary seats and ethnic quotas it currently has nine MPs, one Deputy Prime Minister, two ministers and five deputy ministers at the central level and at the local level it runs nine out of the ten municipalities where the Serb community is in majority.

<sup>6</sup> Coakley, J (2008) ‘Ethnic Competition and the Logic of Party System Transformation’, *European Journal of Political Research* 47: 766–93.

<sup>7</sup> Coakley, J (2008) ‘Ethnic Competition and the Logic of Party System Transformation’, *European Journal of Political Research* 47: 766–93.

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<sup>9</sup> For example, in Serbia out of 75 parties about 42 claim to represent Hungarian, Bosniak, Croat, Albanian, Roma and other communities. In Albania, 8 parties claim to represent the Greek, Macedonian and Roma communities. In Kosovo more than 30 ethnic parties representing the Serb, Bosniak, Turk, Roma, Gorani and Croat communities. In Montenegro about 30.

Lista Srpska was created in 2014 and is to a large extent controlled by Belgrade and in a very short time managed to render the other well established Serb parties in Kosovo politically irrelevant. As the future of the Serb community in Kosovo is still being negotiated in the EU facilitated dialog between Kosovo and Serbia, in the next section we look at the record of ethnic politics in Bosnia and Macedonia, where due to the consociational nature of the Dayton and Ohrid agreements, ethnic politics has taken place for more than 20 years.<sup>10</sup>

#### The Entrenchment of the “Sextet” in Bosnian Politics

The Dayton Accord, which ended the war in Bosnia in 1996, created an ethno-federal state of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) between two loosely connected entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where Muslim and Croat populations are predominant, and the Republika Srpska, with a large Serb majority, and the jointly shared autonomous district of Brčko. The Constitution recognized BiH as the shared state of the three constituent peoples: Bosniaks (48%), Serbs (37%) and Croats (14%) and other undesignated groups (1%). Consistent with the requirement of the consociational approach, this system has incentivized the establishment of ethnic parties, which focus their political programs on ethnic issues, and main parties from the dominant ethnic groups. Since no Bosniak, Serb or Croat parties can garner the required number of seats to form the government, parties from the three communities share power at the federal level in proportion with their vote share and established ethnic quotas. Ethnic parties are then represented in the collective federal presidency, a two chamber parliament, and a government where each minister has two deputies from other ethnic communities. The ethnic representation extends to all levels of government and civil service at the municipal, cantonal and state level.

Notwithstanding the variations in their political programs, most parties claiming to represent their respective Bosniak, Serb, and Croat communities focus on ethnic issues. Broadly speaking, Bosniak parties demand a strong federal state with reduced powers for the two entities, Serb parties are interested in maintaining the highest level of self-rule for the Republika Srpska and, if possible, complete independence from BiH, and Croat parties are interested in the re-organization of the state in order to get their own Croat entity outside of the Bosniak/Muslim dominance.

The first post-Dayton elections represented the first opportunity to move away from ethnic politics in favor of multi-ethnic parties. In order to prevent ethnic parties from government, the international community invested

a lot in the Unified List, a cross-ethnic coalition of Bosniak, Croat and Serb political organizations. The results of the first elections were disappointing and ethnic parties took more than 70% of the popular vote.

When the European Union and international actors have tried to support multi-ethnic parties, the results have been limited and short lived. Ever since 1996, the political scene has been dominated by 6 or 7 major political parties representing the three communities.<sup>11</sup> The vote share for the nationalist parties has increased to 85%, leaving very little ground (about 15%) to other smaller parties with cross-ethnic or non-ethnic electoral programs. Despite the international intervention to create a more viable centralized state at the federal level, ethnic issues dominate the agenda of political parties, which hardly dedicate the time and energy to finding solutions for cross-ethnic problems of poverty, corruption, unemployment, or economic growth.

The only time that traditional nationalist parties were left out of the government at both the federal and state levels was in 2000-2002 when the SDP led a large multi-ethnic eleven party coalition called the Alliance for Change. The SDP led coalition received substantial support before and after elections from the international community, which was also instrumental in forging a post-election coalition that left the traditional ethnic parties (SDA, HDZ, and SDS) out of office. The multi-ethnic parties Social Democratic Party of BiH (SDP), Naša Stranka and United Front have managed to a certain degree to have a multi-ethnic membership and political platforms but their electoral success is hampered by the entrenched nature of ethnic politics.

On the Serb political camp in 1997, the international community rallied to support Milorad Dodik as prime minister of the Republika Srpska (RS), although the DSD had only two seats in the RS parliament. Dodik was seen as a moderate leader with little or no direct connection to the wartime establishment and represented a viable alternative to the SDS, which was formerly led by Karadzic. Dodik initially committed to work on reconciliation and an untied Bosnia for all communities but once in power, he gradually shifted and stepped up his nationalist rhetoric, outbidding the SDS and turning himself into a nationalist by publicly announcing that the RS had the right to declare impendence from BiH. The combination of nationalism and populism has now turned him into one of the most powerful politicians in the country.

Although ethno-nationalist parties are unable or unwilling to strike compromise on most policies, a group of six parties and their leaders referred to euphemistically as the “Sextet” has been taking turns in government for

<sup>10</sup> McEvoy, J. O’Leary, B (2013) “Power Sharing in Deeply Divided Places”, University of Pennsylvania Press.

<sup>11</sup> Bosniak parties include SDA, SBiH, SDP, Serb parties are SNSD, SDS, and Croat parties HDZ and HDZ-1990.

almost 20 years.<sup>12</sup> These parties describe themselves as strong advocates of their ethnic community while continuously sharing the spoils of power with ethnic rivals. They have built an extensive system of patronage by channeling resources, jobs, privatization deals, concessions, government public work tenders, and through informal rules and practices ensure a division of turf and benefits along ethnic lines. Twenty years after Dayton, the Sextet practically presides over a system of ethnocracy where democracy has been transformed into a hegemony of ethnic parties from each community.<sup>13</sup>

Party democracy and debate are stifled and main decisions are made by a handful of leaders from each community. Although frustration with government inefficiency, corruption, and clientelism is very high across the ethnic groups, civil society remains organized along ethnic lines and a limited number of multi-ethnic civil society organizations are weak and disorganized. As voters widely regard politics as “dirty business”, political frustration is high but political participation and election turnout very low. Occasional outbursts of frustration with bad governance, nepotism, patronage, and corruption similar to the multi-ethnic youth riots of 2014 in many BiH cities is stifled and isolated through sustained media campaigns, coercion or co-option of leaders, and activists in networks of ethnic patronage.

The EU integration and constitutional and state reforms are hampered, as conflicting goals of ethnic powerbrokers have become permanent sources of decision-making deadlocks and crises. The international community and particularly the EU, who were once seen as necessary but transitional peace guarantors, have become constant deadlock-breakers of the ethnic politics and a permanent feature of peace agreements. Ethnic politics shows no signs of abating and ethnic leaders and communities continue to amass resources and power for their own communities as if they were preparing for the next ethnic confrontation.

#### **Macedonia: A Bi-National Oligarchy**

Macedonia had a less violent and more promising start than other regional neighbors after it declared independence in 1991. In the post-independence period, all ethnic communities mobilized politically in their own political parties and ethnic tensions between Macedonian and Albanian communities have been a recurring feature of Macedonia’s society since 1991. Initial contention of the Albanian community focused on provisions of the Constitution of Macedonia, which defined Macedonia as a state of Macedonians and other communities. Albanian community representatives viewed

the constitutional status as a setback compared to the 1974 constitution, which recognized Albanians and Turks nominally as nationalities.

Twenty-five years later, Albanian parties claim that the Albanian community is discriminated against and have continuously demanded changes in the constitutional framework to enhance Albanian community rights, whereas Macedonian parties emphasize the fact that the Macedonian community is the largest national group and generally consider the Albanian demands for more rights with suspicion and distrust.

The Albanian political camp has gone through several changes since 1991 as a result of a series of successful “ethnic outbidding” efforts. Following the initial boycotts and an unrecognized referendum on territorial autonomy, the Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP), as the largest Albanian political party in Macedonia, participated in post-independent parliaments and governments in Macedonia. After some initial success in advancing the rights of the Albanian community, the PDP soon splintered and was outflanked by the Democratic Party of Albanians, a new party bringing together various political activists presumably dissatisfied with the poor record of the PDP in defending the Albanian community.

DPA initially projected itself as a more aggressive defender of Albanian interest and was advocating for consociational solutions for Macedonia. It dominated the Albanian political scene until 2001 but rapidly lost support once the National Liberation Army (NLA) launched a short-lived insurgency against the Macedonian security forces. After the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA), the NLA leadership established the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), which since 2002 has become the dominant Albanian party. DUI runs on a nationalist program demanding full implementation of the OFA and touts its successful war credentials anytime it is criticized. DUI has been the dominant Albanian party in Macedonia, winning all central and local elections since 2002. For almost 15 years at the central level, DUI has been a junior coalition member in four governments and led the largest Macedonian parties.

On the Macedonian political establishment, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Democratic Party of Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) and the League of Social Democrats of Macedonia (LSDM) have been taking turns as ruling parties since 2001. Widely viewed as a more nationalist and populist party, the VMRO, which led the government at the outbreak of the armed conflict in 2001, lost power to the LSDM in the first elections held in 2002 after the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA). After initial progress with the implementation of the OFA and a controversial decentralization of local self-government, LSDM suffered criticism of being unable to stand up to Albanian

<sup>12</sup> Bosnia’s Future Europe Report N°232 – International Crisis Group, 10 July 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Bosnia’s Future Europe Report N°232 – International Crisis Group, 10 July 2014.

pressures and since 2006 VMRO has continuously won all central and local elections.

Since 2008, as the prospects of NATO and EU accession became unattainable due to the Greek veto over Macedonia's state name, VMRO led by Nikola Gruevski increasingly embarked upon a nationalist and populist program emphasizing the ancient roots of the Macedonian nation. Although VMRO shares power with DUI, the implementation of a 600 million Euro Skopje 2014 project to promote an exclusively Macedonian identity as well as allegations of unfair treatment of Albanians have strained inter-ethnic relations.

The intra-Macedonian political polarization reached its peak in February 2015 after the LSDM released transcripts of a government-led wiretapping scandal that revealed the direct involvement of VMRO and DUI senior officials in government corruption, election fraud, and undue influence over judiciary, media, and civil society. An EU commission expert team confirmed serious symptoms of state capture at all levels of society, finding amongst other things:

“apparent direct involvement of senior government and party officials in illegal activities including electoral fraud, corruption, abuse of power and authority, conflict of interest, blackmail, extortion (pressure on public employees to vote for a certain party with the threat to be fired), criminal damage, severe procurement procedure infringements aimed at gaining an illicit profit, nepotism and cronyism; ... unacceptable political interference in the nomination/appointment of judges as well as interference with other supposedly independent institutions for either personal or party advantage.”<sup>14</sup>

Both VMRO and DUI have significantly increased their vote shares since they first joined the coalition in 2008, whereas the second largest parties in both communities, LSDM and DPA, have halved. As the wiretapping scandal has shown, both the VMRO and BDI are presiding a system of bi-national oligarchy where they project themselves as the guardians of their respective communities but otherwise pursue very similar non-ethnic and instrumentalist goals of expanding their resources for themselves and their families in clear disregard of the rules of a democratic system.<sup>15</sup> They have now created a system of government, which is hard to dismantle by constitutional means.

Despite the success in the implementation of the OFA, the Albanian community's discontent with DUI has increased rapidly due to the alleged inability of the DUI to defend the Albanian interest against an aggressive nationalist VMRO. Ironically, the VMRO's position as an “ethnic tribune party” amongst Macedonian voters is pushing the LSDM to appeal for support in the Albanian

community in order to become a dominant party of the Macedonian community. However, as ethnicity is heavily politicized across communities, bridging the ethnic gap and attracting Albanian voters appears to be an uphill battle for LSDM. The opposition and civil society groups are constantly holding demonstrations, but so far it has been difficult to create a cross-ethnic coalition with the critical mass to reform the system. The links with VMRO run too deep to allow any cross-ethnic coalition to emerge and they will together continue to use nationalist scaremongering and end of the world scenarios, like the Kumanovo armed incident, in order to keep their political fiefdoms intact.

As in the Bosnian case, the country's Euro-Atlantic integration and democracy have stagnated and the tension is very high within Macedonian and Albanian communities and between them. The overall post-independence experience of Macedonia shows that political space will continue to be organized along ethnic lines in the years to come. Although Macedonian and Albanian communities may be equally dissatisfied with the chronic crisis, ethnic distrust prevents cross-ethnic political processes. Multi-ethnic initiatives to reform the political system and the state are proving difficult to build and sustain.

On the Albanian side, newcomers into the political scene are trying to capitalize on the Albanian discontent with DUI, hoping to mount an “ethnic outbidding” effort. However, new Albanian parties appear to be more interested in dethroning DUI than fixing the many problems of Macedonia which are there to stay and will not disappear with DUI's electoral defeat. While it is still unknown how long it will take to replace DUI, it is clear that the next wave of Albanian political demands will focus on re-configuration of the state along ethnic lines beyond the arrangements offered by OFA.

#### **Ways Forward: Are Post-Ethnic Politics Desirable or Possible in the Future?**

The brief overview of ethnic politics in the Western Balkans shows that once ethnicity is politicized and ethnic parties are created, state-building may suffer perpetually as “ethnification of politics” makes the political system heavily dependent on ethnic loyalty and thus less conducive to political compromises and national cohesion. So far, nationalist parties in Macedonia have been able to provide a certain level of predictability in politics, which resonates with the expectations of large numbers of ethnic voters from the rival communities in BiH and Macedonia and serves the international interest of putting stability before democratic accountability. Also the international community, by emphasizing stability, has become increasingly dependent on ethnic power brokers who can maintain local peace, to the detriment of democracy and rule of law. However, in the long run, disagreements about who runs the state and

<sup>14</sup> Recommendations of the Senior Experts' Group on systemic Rule of Law issues relating to the communications interception revealed in Spring 2015, Brussels 8 June 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Macedonia: Defusing the Bombs - International Crisis Group, 9 July 2015.

how should the state be organized may threaten the relative peace between ethnic groups.

To be fair, ethnicity is far from being the source of all evils in the Western Balkans and you only need to look at Albania to understand that consolidating democratic stability and rule of law can be a daunting challenge, even when ethnic diversity is not a problem. Bad governance, stalled reforms, rampant corruption, entanglement of politics and organized crime do not take place only in multi-ethnic societies. Autocrats who coerce the media, suppress the opposition and consolidate their grip to power with seemingly legitimate, free and fair elections can flourish even in ethnically homogenous societies in the Western Balkans and beyond.

The key difference is that while in Albania extreme polarization and state-building failures remain immense, political change may gradually come from within and as the political system matures, a new generation of politicians may be able to complete the democratization and rule of law reforms. On the other hand, in Bosnia, Macedonia, Kosovo, ethnic groups do not agree on the fundamental nature of the state and its direction, so de-ethnicizing the political processes without external intervention seems impossible. Ethnic politics has displayed lock-in tendencies, which are enforced by collective memories of ethnic violence, the constitutional frameworks established, the political enterprises of ethnic leaders, and the expectations of ethnic voters. The framework of intra-ethnic competition is also reinforced by kin-states, external influences of global actors and processes.

Assuming that “constrained change” is a key property of ethnic identity and ethnic communities are not going to disappear in the near future, what can the international community do to help the de-ethnicization of politics in the Western Balkans? How can the constitutional frameworks, electoral law, and political party regulations be reformed in order to reduce the salience of ethnicity in political processes?

The first approach to reduce the salience of ethnicity in favor of multi-ethnicity is a top down approach where the international community forces dramatic changes in the constitutional frameworks, electoral system and political party laws in order to outlaw ethnic parties. This is both anti-democratic and probably impossible to achieve in Bosnia and Macedonia due to the powerful role of local leaders in resisting change that affects their grip on power. Short of this drastic and probably counterproductive intervention, it is possible to introduce rules and procedures that encourage multi-ethnicity for the establishment, registration, and participation in elections.<sup>16</sup> These rules make it difficult for ethnic parties to

compete by requiring cross-ethnic membership, leadership and national presence for competing in elections. The downside of setting cross regional or cross-ethnic composition as a pre-condition for competing in elections is that it may disproportionately affect parties from small ethnic communities which may fail to attract support and establish their presence outside their region and turn them into political outcasts. Restricting ethnic parties may have an adverse effect on the democratic process as it forces such outcast groups to venture into anti-constitutional activities, potentially mobilizing supporters for an armed struggle against a government.

Another suggestion is to employ a bottom up approach that makes the current system more transparent by increasing pressure for change from within. One alternative to challenge the “business as usual” approach to ethnic politics may be to make the current system more open and transparent by building aggressive multi-ethnic civil society groups that monitor the electoral performance based on the state-building and good governance indicators and not judging parties based on ethnic performance. In addition, encouraging underrepresented groups from all ethnic groups to enter politics can increase the pressure points on the entrenched ethnic parties from youth, women and emerging middle classes.

While this appears as a “more of the same” prescription, the recent intra-group polarization between insiders and outsiders of the political establishment in Kosovo, Macedonia, Bosnia, and Montenegro show that even within dominant ethnic groups, generational and class differences are becoming more expressed and may lead to political projects that pose a threat to ethnic politics in the longer run. However, it is hard for new political initiatives to break ground into the closed political landscape of traditional parties maintained through patronage networks in business and media sectors. Therefore, one area of intervention is to reform the current system with newcomers but at the same time make the party recruitment, financing and decision-making processes more open to public scrutiny.

<sup>16</sup> Reilly, B (2001); *Democracy in Divided Societies: Electoral Engineering for Conflict Management*, Cambridge University Press.

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# CASTLES MADE OF SAND AND STONE: POLITICAL PARTIES IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

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## Introduction

Crisis appears to be the new normal. Sources of news whether Internet, television or print bombard us with events labeled crises: the Eurozone crisis, the migration crisis, the Ukraine crisis, the Brexit crisis, the Syria crisis etc.<sup>2</sup> Many of these are acute crises. They tend to cause the most pain and thereby catch our attention. But there are a deeper set of chronic crises or challenges tied to demography, competitiveness and linkage that will not destroy us tomorrow or next week, but rather gradually weaken and undermine the foundations of our political and economic systems in Europe. Doctors and patients often focus on the acute challenges, but it is the chronic ones that arguably deserve more attention.

I am not a geographer nor an economist, so I will not focus on the first two challenges in this short contribution, although I would underline their importance. Rather as a political scientist I will focus on the third issue of democratic linkage. Central to the linkage between ordinary citizens and those who govern over them in modern representative democracies are political parties. To that end I begin with some brief remarks on the role of political parties, followed by a discussion of new parties and the reasons why some parties endure, before returning more explicitly back to linkage in the concluding section.

This conference is focused on the Western Balkans, but I claim no great knowledge of the region. Most of my work has been on political parties in the Central and East European states that joined the EU in 2004 or 2007 and European party politics more broadly. Acutely aware of the strengths and weaknesses of comparative politics and the limitations of drawing lessons and insights from different parts of the continent, I hope to help stimulate debate and discussion and help identify similarities and differences between processes in the Western Balkans and the rest of the European continent.

## Recruitment, Representation, and Linkage: the Functions of Political Parties

Political parties play important roles in democratic and non-democratic political systems. In democracies, political parties are central to the process of recruitment and selection of personnel for office, the formation of governments, but also to representing socially or cultural significant interests and ‘aggregating’ their sometimes contradictory preferences and structuring an otherwise bewildering array of choices available to voters. The

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<sup>1</sup> This short contribution draws on work as part of a larger book project, *Perishable Goods: Accelerating Cycles of Party Birth and Death in Central Europe and Beyond* co-authored with Kevin Deegan-Krause.

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<sup>2</sup> Tanja Börzel, ‘The JCMS Annual Review Lecture. From EU Governance of Crisis to Crisis of EU Governance: Regulatory Failure, Redistributive Conflict and Eurosceptic Publics’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 54 No. s1, (2016, forthcoming).



key role of political parties is linkage: forging and maintaining links between ordinary citizens and those who govern over them.

In established democracies across the globe, fuelled in part by the post-2008 economic crisis and the austerity-induced measures introduced to tackle the problems, there is a strong sense of disconnect between ordinary citizens and those who wield power allied to a belief the existing system is working for the benefit of an elite few rather than the many. The rise of Donald Trump and the popularity of Bernie Sanders in the United States, the electoral success and support for parties like the 5 Star Movement in Italy, the *Alternative für Deutschland* and indeed the strength of the leave side in the Brexit debate is intimately linked to the fraying of bonds between citizens and the decision-making process. Many new entrants into politics have tapped into the sentiment that established parties have failed in their linkage role and have eschewed use of the word ‘party’ in their names. Instead they offer calls to action (e.g. *Podemos*: ‘We can’), statements of hope (*Verjamen*: I believe) and appeals to the social media generation (*Siet*: network).

#### Novel Appeal

The past decade and a half has seen the emergence of an array of new entrants into party politics across Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).<sup>3</sup> Although, as Tolstoy might have put it, each unhappy party system is unhappy in its own way, we can identify several reasons why we have seen the emergence of so many new parties. Before outlining these, it is worth underlining that many of the existing frameworks for explaining party politics across CEE commonly used in the literature stressing such factors as communist legacies, the manner of exit from communism, institutional frameworks, cleavages and the power of the European Union to a greater or lesser extent may have been significant in the 1990s, but they have far less explanatory power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>4</sup>

The breakthroughs of parties such as the New Simeon II Movement in Bulgaria, the Action of Dissatisfied Citizens in the Czech Republic or the Party of Miro Cerar in Slovenia<sup>5</sup> have done much to contribute to what have been dubbed as earthquake elections and the instability of party politics. These parties have played on the ‘appeal of newness’<sup>6</sup>, anti-establishment sentiments and the attributes of the leader. Core to the appeal of many new

breakthrough parties are anti-corruption appeals. Tapping into a deep sense of discontent with the existing menu of parties, new entrants have sought to tempt voters away with promises of cleanliness and good governance. There is nothing wrong with a pitch to voters promising non-corrupt good governance. Indeed, who could be against such a motherhood and apple pie appeal? The problem, however, lies in the fact that new parties have often raised expectations and hopes, but they invariably fail to live up to such promises. Not only does new party plus anti-corruption appeal plus entry into government tend to equal a toxic cocktail inducing an early death for the party, but voters who have cast their ballots for new parties tend to develop a habit and vote for the next wave of new parties in subsequent elections thereby causing a new party subsystem or switch off democratic engagement all together.<sup>7</sup>

I am not seeking to argue that new party emergence is necessarily a bad thing. Indeed, the emergence and success of new parties may help citizens reengage with politics and encourage the long-established parties to be more responsive to the demands of voters. But party system instability becomes a problem when it keeps parties from doing what they need to do well: allowing voters to hold leaders accountable, and allowing leaders to create enduring majorities. Moreover, it can produce a new wave of leaders who focus on short-term vote gains at the expense of long-term policy. In the best-case scenario, new parties not only breathe life into the political system, but introduce competitive incentives that causes long-established parties to listen to voters and curtail their own rent-seeking. In the worst case scenario, party systems become divided between ineffectual newcomers whose voters do not expect them to survive to the next election and sclerotic old parties whose supporters vote simply out of habit (and who will join the ranks of new parties when their existing choice falls apart).

In systemic terms, therefore, a degree of instability is to be welcomed and can be beneficial. In the same way that competition makes a market economy work better so competition in the electoral market place helps to invigorate the system and forces existing parties to raise their game. Nonetheless, accountability mechanisms and linkage require at least some of the established parties to cope with the ebb and flow of the tides of politics. For that they need to ensure their castles are built of stone and not sand.

<sup>3</sup> Defined here as the ten states from the region that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007.

<sup>4</sup> I have discussed these arguments in greater detail in ‘Exit, Choice and Legacy: Explaining the Patterns of Party Politics in Post-Communist Slovakia’, *East European Politics*, Vol. 30 No. 2 (2014) pp. 210-229.

<sup>5</sup> Subsequently renamed the Party of the Modern Centre.

<sup>6</sup> Allan Sikk, ‘Newness as a winning formula for new political parties’, *Party Politics*, Vol. 18 No. 4, (2012) pp. 465-486.

<sup>7</sup> Discussed in more detail in Tim Houghton and Kevin Deegan-Krause ‘Hurricane Season: Systems of Instability in Central and East European Party Politics’, *East European Politics and Societies* Vol. 29 No. 1 (2015), pp. 61-80.

**The Ephemeral and the Durable: Castles Made of Sand and Stone**

The “secret sauce” for party survival lies in a combination of three factors: a well-developed organizational structure which facilitates entrenchment and cushions electoral downturns; becoming and remaining the standard bearer on one of the main issue divides of programmatic competition; and whilst decisive leadership decision-making at moments of crises can be crucial, the ability to replace leaders who have become liabilities is key. The argument here echoes Peter Mair’s stress on appeals, organization and leadership in his study of the vulnerability of parties in Western Europe two and a half decades ago, which suggests the sauce is not so secret.<sup>8</sup>

*Organize to survive*

A glance at CEE suggests that organization does not appear to be necessary for *short* term success. Indeed, the electorally most successful new party breakthrough in CEE, Bulgaria’s New Simeon II Movement (NDSV) in 2001, was achieved by an organization that was not even registered as a party until after the election.<sup>9</sup> In more recent times the role played by the internet, especially social networking websites, in galvanizing electoral support for new parties suggests that an extensive party organization – indeed anything more than a shell – may not be necessary in 21st century electoral politics.

As the work of Spirova<sup>10</sup>, Ibenskas<sup>11</sup> and especially Tavits<sup>12</sup> has cogently argued, however, there is a direct connection between party organization and party longevity. A large membership, an extensive network of local branches (even if relatively inactive) and professional staff are important in helping to mobilize voters, provide visibility for a party, marshal activists and run professional campaigns. Whilst blogs, Facebook and Twitter might mobilize the young, they appear to have less impact on older voters (who tend to be the most loyal) for whom personal contacts and interaction are important. Evidence from CEE suggests that a developed party organization is at its most significant when the party suffers an electoral defeat. A party with an extensive organization is better able to weather those political storms. As with certain aspects of political leadership (see below), organization is not only about attracting voters but also – perhaps more importantly –

about recuperation and transition during political difficulties.

One qualifier and one intensifier are worthy of mention at this point. Firstly, strong organization *per se* is not a panacea for survival. As the case of Slovakia shows well, the two parties with the largest membership and most extensive party organizations over the first two post-communist decades, the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) and the Party of the Democratic Left both bit the dust. Secondly, we need to mention the intensifying role of government participation. Entry into government – even as a junior partner – is extremely demanding of party resources, especially of human resources, drawing the party’s best and brightest into governmental and support roles in various ministries. Prioritizing government at the expense of party organization has an immediate logic, but it weakens the party in the long-term.

*Leadership Choices and the Choices of Leader*

In explaining the endurance of parties three elements related to leadership need to be disaggregated. Firstly, strong powerful leaders (often endowed with vote-grabbing charisma) can be a major source of voters’ support for parties and can help explain endurance in the short to medium term. It is difficult, for instance, to disaggregate the support for a party like Fidesz from the appeal of Viktor Orbán. Secondly, leaders play a crucial role in two sets of decisions: the ability to move a party’s program in a new direction whilst in opposition and the ability to cope with intra-party crisis. In terms of the former, Orbán’s reorientation of his party from liberalism towards an appeal based on nationally inclined cultural conservatism<sup>13</sup>, was critical for the party’s long-term success. In terms of the latter, although mired in financial scandal, weakened by party defection and with the shine coming off Václav Klaus’s Czech economic miracle his Civic Democratic Party (ODS) triumphed in the summer 1998 elections thanks in no small part to Klaus’s rallying call encapsulated in the slogan, ‘To the Left or With Klaus’, in which he portrayed himself and his party as the only bulwark against a left-leaning government. Both of these examples highlight the importance of appeals to which I return below.

Both the appeal of strong long-standing leaders and key decision-making at moments of crisis are crucial and may ensure endurance in the short and medium term (and this medium term may last a couple of decades or more), but these elements can be weaknesses in the long-term. The survival of leader-driven parties is inextricably linked to the political mortality of the individual at the helm and to a party’s ability to manage an or-

<sup>8</sup> Peter Mair, ‘Continuity, Change and the Vulnerability of Party’, *West European Politics*, Vol. 12 No. 4 (1989), pp. 169-187.

<sup>9</sup> Maria Spirova, *Political Parties in Post-Communist Societies: Formation, Persistence and Change*, New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan (2007).

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Raimondas Ibenskas, Activists or money? Explaining the electoral success and persistence of political parties in Lithuania, *Party Politics*, Vol 20, No. 6, (2014), pp. 879-889.

<sup>12</sup> Margit Tavits, *Post-Communist Democracies and Party Organization*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2013).

<sup>13</sup> Zsolt Enyedi, ‘The role of agency in cleavage formation’, *European Journal of Political Research* Vol. 44 No. 5 (2005), pp. 697-720.

derly succession to a new leader. This ability is admittedly difficult to pin down and measure. All parties in Central and Eastern Europe tend to have in their party statutes arrangements for regular (re-)elections at party congress every couple of years, so it is not enough to point to the formal mechanisms being in place for passing power from one leader to another; the phenomenon only seems to be identifiable in a post-hoc manner i.e. the litmus test of whether a party *can* do that is when a party *does* do that.

### *Appeals and their Shelf Life*

Organization and leadership are important elements in party survival, but I suggest a third (and perhaps more important) element is central to a party's ability to endure and deliver significant success over the long-term: appeals i.e. the pitch it makes to the electorate.

The argument here is based on three propositions related to the durability of appeals, the identification and association of appeals in the minds of the electorate, and campaigning. Firstly, certain appeals have a longer shelf life than others. An appeal to the new may be effective in the short-term, but novelty does not last forever. Moreover, as mentioned above many of the new parties have tended to play the anti-corruption card often wrapped up in a broader "law and order" appeal. The particular problem of playing the anti-corruption card is that if this appeal is a springboard into power it makes that particular party much more susceptible when – as night follows day – that party is hit by a corruption scandal of some sort.

In contrast to these ephemeral appeals others are much more permanent. Perhaps the most permanent appeal is one based on ethnicity. In contrast to the perishability of a novelty appeal, an ethnic based appeal is something far less perishable, more akin to the love/hate of Marmite that can remain on the shelves for ages. Ethnically based parties may have numerous drawbacks in terms of reinforcing rather than transcending divisions, but they do tend to contribute to stability.

Between these two extremes of appeals lie the more traditional divisions of political contestation: a left-right distinction over the role of the state in the economy and the liberal versus conservative values appeal. What matters here is for a party to come to be seen as the standard bearer of an electorally significant position (enough to cross the electoral threshold) on one of the salient issue divides. In order to achieve that status three simple things are required. Firstly, a significant proportion of voters position themselves in that part of the spectrum. Secondly, the party places itself in that broad space as well. Thirdly, voters identify the party as representing those issues and eschew alternatives.

### **Linking to Linkage and Tying to Performance**

This contribution sought to highlight both the linkage role of political parties between citizens and those who govern, but also the reasons behind the fluidity of party politics across CEE. Two linked points are worth stressing in conclusion: the corrosive effect of corruption and performance. Politicians disappoint. Elected on a campaign of poetry they tend to govern in (very) bad prose, especially if they have used anti-corruption appeals to propel them into office. Democratic systems work best when they are not just fair, but seen to be fair by their electorate. Moreover, the right blend of appeals, organization and leadership may allow your party to endure and ensure a more stable pattern of party politics, but ultimately a party's success will be tied to its ability to deliver the goods, especially economic well-being.

The chronic challenge of frayed linkage between ordinary citizens and those who govern can be tackled by building party structures and offering appeals that will endure. In addition, parties need to demonstrate competence in governing and resist the temptations of low-hanging fruit. Recipes in politics are sometimes very simple, but they require talented and committed chefs.

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# BALKAN MEDIA: A COMPLEX AND UNFINISHED STORY

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## 1. Between Stagnation and Decline

Issues of freedom of expression in general and those of freedom of the media in particular in Balkan countries keep becoming more and more complex.

A black and white view of them would be counter-productive. An analysis solely from the *angle of democracy*, as often happens, would be insufficient. The media is certainly one of the pillars of democracy, but the media is also *one of the industries of capitalist development* of our countries. This is often underestimated, if not forgotten altogether. As a matter of fact, issues of freedom of the media today, to a large extent, are issues of the media markets, if we could use this term.

Different reports about freedom of expression indicate that **freedom of the media in the Balkans oscillates between stagnation and decline**. According to the 2015 annual country reports by the European Commission, when it comes to freedom of expression, the candidate and potential candidate countries for EU membership made “no progress” (Montenegro, Kosovo, Serbia); backslid (Bosnia); or “continued to backslide” (Macedonia). The sole exception is Albania, which made “some progress.”

Should we refer to the report by Reporters sans Frontières, we would see that Serbia ranks 59<sup>th</sup>, BiH ranks 68<sup>th</sup>, Albania 82<sup>nd</sup>, Kosovo 90<sup>th</sup>, Montenegro 106<sup>th</sup>, and Macedonia ranks 118<sup>th</sup>. The report underscores some progress in Serbia and Montenegro, a decline in BiH, Macedonia and Kosovo, and stagnation in Albania.

Should we refer to the Freedom House ranking, the Western Balkan countries continue to be considered as countries with “partly free press,” with the exception of Macedonia, which has dropped down to the category of countries with “not free” press. Montenegro ranks 80<sup>th</sup>, Serbia is 87<sup>th</sup>, Kosovo is 96<sup>th</sup>, BiH is 104<sup>th</sup>, Albania is 106<sup>th</sup> and Macedonia is 136<sup>th</sup>.

Last, according to freedom of speech indicators of the IREX Media Sustainability Index 2016, Macedonia (1.47 out of 4) and Serbia (1.89) rank in the group of countries with an “unsustainable mixed system,” while Kosovo (2.37), Montenegro (2.41), Bosnia (2.46), and Albania (2.92) rank in the group of countries with “near sustainability”.

As may be seen, although a general consensus is lacking and there are several differences in the evaluations of these organizations for different countries of the region, what may be said is that the **problems and difficulties that media freedom encounters in the Balkans are the same, but the degree of their display or aggravation varies from one country to the other**. Of course, the situation appears more serious in Macedonia, where an anti-media regime has already been installed.

A number of historical, political, economic and other factors exert considerable impact on the development of the media in the Balkan region.

It is clear that **tradition** is not a helpful force when it comes to free speech. Under communism, what was labeled information was in fact propaganda. After the fall of communism, nationalist propaganda took the place of communist propaganda in the countries of the former Yugoslavia. The media was as much a victim of war as it was its instigator. Balkan societies have not detached themselves clearly and definitely either from the remote communist past, or the near past of nationalist conflicts. Without a doubt, these factors have an impact on the development of the media and its freedom.

The Balkans of today is the region of hybrid democracies, where the tendencies to illiberalism are becoming increasingly dominant. Illiberal threats to Balkan democracies are **religious extremism**, which not so rarely is media extremism, or cyber-extremism; **populism**, which in the Balkans appears in the form of nationalistic populism, pro-Europeanist populism, anti-Europeanist populism and in many other forms; nevertheless, in all cases, it is demagogic and anti-liberal and, after all, uses the media as a tribune of political demagoguery; **new nationalism**, a virus that has affected precisely those groups that, in theory, were considered the most immune to nationalist disease: youth, and is increasingly appearing in the form of cyber-nationalism.

Unfortunately, all syndromes and threats to liberal democracy that have emerged in the countries surrounding our region, from the Orban Syndrome to the Berlusconi Syndrome, have been replicated in one form or another in the countries of the Balkans, thus harming their democratic progress. These features have without a doubt had a clear impact on the freedom of the media.

Third, **the severe economic crisis** that the region is experiencing has had a direct impact on the media landscape, leading to a climate of fear and insecurity among journalists. Journalists are losing jobs and their salaries are not being paid regularly. It would not be a mistake to say that a media proletariat exists today in all countries of the Balkans.

## 2. When Clientelism Becomes a Norm

The fall of the authoritarian regimes in the Balkans in the early 2000s led to an improvement in the situation of media freedom. However, this did not last long. Gradually, **independent media was replaced by clientelistic media; repression was replaced by pressure; censorship was replaced by self-censorship; and open control was replaced by hidden influences.**

Although the countries of the Balkans have adopted media legislation that is generally positive, especially the one related to defamation and access to information,

the implementation of this legislation remains problematic. Laws are written according to European standards and are implemented according to Balkan standards.

Furthermore, there is no lack of attempts to slide back, such as the proposal of the Albanian Government last fall to recriminalize defamation, or the latest decision of the Constitutional Court of Albania to abrogate anti-monopoly and anti-concentration provisions in the broadcast law, which opens the path to narrower pluralism in the Albanian media.

All the countries of the region have adopted Freedom of Information (FOI) laws, which have been in force for more than a decade. In some of the countries, FOI laws are under revision and are being amended in order to better fit the new context of development of the internet and new technologies, aiming for a more proactive approach in offering information to the public. However, **there is a stark discrepancy between the generally high standards of the FOI laws and their implementation.** There is a general consensus that what most countries have in common is that public officials do not respect the law and intentionally delay its implementation, with the aim of discouraging journalists and citizens. In all countries, FOI laws stipulate a penalty for officials who hinder or refuse to release information. However, these penalties, even though low, in most cases are not implemented.

For years now, when I have tried to provide a snapshot description of the media situation in the Balkans, I have referred to the comment that a number of authors have used in characterizing the media situation in post-communist societies: **“The press became pluralistic, but not independent” or “The press became free, but not independent”.**

Independence is in fact the main challenge of today's Balkan media. Clientelism is the key word that we could use to characterize the situation. Instead of serving the public, the media is now at the service of the interests of business and politics. In a sense, Balkan media is sandwiched between business and politics. **The media appears on the one hand as an extension of politics and, on the other, as an annex of the different businesses.**

As a recent report of the European Parliament (“Media freedom in the Balkans: state of play”) notes, “the host of outstanding media-related issues includes political interference; problematic financial dependency; the significant share of state aid and its arbitrary distribution; dwindling media revenues; intimidation of journalists; poor working conditions; and under funded public broadcasters that are directly or indirectly controlled by governments and affiliated interest groups, among others.”

Although we continue to use the term “media markets,” it would be more accurate to talk about “media scenes.” As a matter of fact, it seems that in the Balkans, we are still in a *pre-market phase*, for the simple reason that no economic logic, or no market logic, could justify the existence of overcrowded media landscapes that we have in all of the Balkan countries. Just to provide an example, Albania holds the first place in Europe in terms of number of daily papers per capita (22 of them, in a country with a population of roughly 3 million), but it ranks last in Europe when it comes to the circulation of daily newspapers per capita, because altogether these 26 dailies produce less than 70,000 copies.

Although much has been said on *transparency of media ownership and of media finances*, progress in this field has been limited. Legal amendments have not resulted in the improvement of the situation in practice. The business of media can hardly be considered transparent in the Balkans. **Who owns what? Who are the owners? Who pays whom? And who owns the owners?** These are questions that are still lacking answers.

In their latest research study “Financial engineering for state and media capture,” Brankica Patkovic and Sandra B. Hrvatin underscore that, “in most countries, media are instrumentalized for political purposes, while the media market is merely an euphemism for state oriented advertising.” To provide another example – the Government of Macedonia continues to be the biggest advertiser in the country, channeling public funds permanently to pro-government media, while also influencing and directing private advertisers to the same media outlets.

### 3. The Challenge of Illiberal Threats

Though the positive role of the media in the democratization process is usually taken for granted, in fact, the matter is much more complex. Huntington warned long ago that **just as it is an ‘instrument of democracy,’ the media may also be an ‘instrument for the reduction of democracy.’**

The truth is that during the period of the post-communist transition, including the present moment, politics has influenced and modeled the media more than the media has influenced and modeled politics.

What we notice at present is that politics has turned into “*tele-politics*,” or rather, increasingly more into “*cyber-politics*.” The mediatization of politics (and even its Facebook-ization) is certainly a normal and global phenomenon. However, as I have noted on other occasions, it seems that instead of the mediatization of politics, in fact we see “*the political clientelization of the media*.” Since it shifts the focus of the media from the public to politics, it serves politics instead of serving the public. What one notices in the Balkans today are the **use, misuse and abuse of the media** by politicians.

The most serious form of political clientelism is found in public broadcasters, which remain unreformed old-fashioned institutions. For a long time, the Albanian Public Television has not been able to carry out its mission and has lost significant ground to private television. Its audience is less than 3 percent in the capital. Controlled by the previous government and ignored by the current one, PBS in Albania has been and remains a victim of the permanent political conflict in the country. A negative effect is that, after a quarter of a century of endeavors to transform and reform public televisions, the public has lost trust in the very idea of public media, an idea that currently seems almost discredited. In a sense, it can be said that **we have transitioned from a state sector media monopoly of communism to a private sector media monopoly of post-communism.**

Partisanship in Balkan media is still in high dosages, and even in extreme forms, as is the case of the media in Montenegro. New Balkan democracies are a variant of “*contested democracies*,” with a high degree of political polarization. Unfortunately, the phenomenon of polarization also appears as media polarization. What we notice today is polarization along ethnic lines in BiH, polarization along political lines in Albania, polarization along political and commercial lines in Montenegro and polarization along political and ethnic lines in Macedonia.

The fact that Balkan media does not maintain the necessary distance from political groups, but on the contrary, identifies with them, has led to a situation whereby the decline in the credibility of politics has been inevitably associated with the decline in the credibility of the media. For part of the public in the Balkans today, it is difficult to make a clear distinction between politicians and journalists.

The quick development of online and social media in all countries (Albania currently only has about 1.45 million accounts on Facebook) is increasingly shifting the gravity center online. Blogs, portals, discussion fora and other tools have significantly democratized journalism, while at the same time rendering it more complex. While the internet, new media and new technologies have certainly provided more opportunities for freedom of expression, for civic journalism and for the enhancement of democracy in general, this freedom has also given rise to new concerns, such as the spreading of gossip, baseless accusations, undue criticism, and in more extreme cases, hate speech and cyber-nationalism. The reaction of the Albanian blogosphere (as well as Serbian blogosphere) after the events in the Belgrade stadium, when the two countries were involved in a cyber war, or media war, testifies to the fact that challenges are large and unfamiliar.

The general social-political context on the one hand and the speedy development of the social media on the other have led to a new situation whereby illiberal, anti-

liberal media has moved from the margins to the center of the stage. Conspiracy theories are blooming online and offline. Along EU and West-supported civil society, there is the emergence of *uncivil society*, one with radical, anti-liberal, and anti-European tendencies, supported by some of the governments of the region, Russia, Turkey or business groups. The same is happening with the media.

As was underscored in the beginning of this text, religious extremism, populism, and new nationalism have appeared first and foremost as media phenomena. This is one more reason to turn more attention toward the situation of the media, the inclinations and tendencies of its development and undoubtedly its impact on the democratic process.

#### 4. EU Accession and Media Freedom

The EU integration process has been a transforming force of former communist societies in general. However, it has not been such a force when it comes to media systems and particularly to freedom of expression.

*“Reversed transitions”* in Hungary and Poland and *“frozen transitions”* in most of the Balkan countries demonstrate that we are all in the same boat. The situation of freedom of expression in Budapest, Sofia or Warsaw does not appear to be any better than in Tirana, Belgrade or Sarajevo. Negative developments in Eastern European countries, without a doubt, have a negative influence on the countries of the Balkans and, above all, demonstrate that we have not yet reached what might be considered the *point of irreversibility*.

As Petkovic and Hrvatin write, “the EU is increasingly relegating its media policy to the realm of economic competition as opposed to the protection of basic human rights...” This approach, as well as the lack of a specific EU policy toward media in the Western Balkans, allow for a lot of room for political leaders when it comes to limiting or infringing upon freedom of the media.

Some recent positive developments such as the Speak-Up Conferences, the drafting of Guidelines for EU support to media freedom and media integrity, should be accompanied by a strict monitoring process, clear conditionality and serious assistance. Above all, the unequivocal message that **freedom of expression is non-negotiable** should be rendered clearly.

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# ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION PRACTICE IN MACEDONIA AND HOW TO MOVE FORWARD

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## Abstract

From previous studies we have read about the historical aspect and social factors related to gender equality, the legal basis for gender representation in political life, the responsibilities of institutions and strategies regarding the representation of women in politics. However, many other issues regarding gender representation in political life in Macedonia remain to be discussed.

The framework of this paper will analyze the following issues: the challenges of women in political life; the role of women in parliament; how to improve gender representation in politics; distrust and disengagement of women in politics; what political parties can do regarding gender representation and the role of women as voters.

Besides the above-mentioned circumstances, I will analyze current activities and strategies planned by the competent authorities in order to improve the situation and suggest steps to promote the equal involvement of women and men in politics.

## Introduction

Macedonia has made notable advancements and achieved visible results in the efforts to establish balanced gender participation in politics (NAPGE, 2007:22). Many legislative improvements have been made and various legal mechanisms exist, but their implementation has been unsatisfactory.

The table in the attachment shows how women have been represented in politics during election cycles.

After the parliamentary elections of 1990, women's associations pointed out that there is not enough time to wait for gender equality to happen naturally, since it may take many decades until the real emancipation of society takes place. Special measures were adopted with the introduction of the 30% quota for female members of Parliament in 2002. It proved that political parties put women at the bottom of their lists, as the 30% was not reached. Thus, later changes were made to ensure that at least every third person on the list is a woman. Since women who were selected as MPs resigned in favor of male candidates who ranged behind them, recent legal changes (in 2014) provide that if women resign, they will be replaced by the next woman on the list.



### 1. What Are the Major Challenges Women in Politics Are Facing?

The political obstacles that women face include:

- *The spread of “male model” in politics.* Political life is organized according to male views about politics and is often based on the idea of “winners and losers”, competition and confrontation. Women tend to give priority to societal concerns, such as social security, national health care and children’s issues (Shvedova, 2002:36);
- *The lack of party support in the financing of women candidates and lack of financial resources.* As making an effective campaign carries a great cost, this presents a serious obstacle for women. Inheritance legislation is gender neutral, but it has not supported a change in traditions and women still are excluded from inheritance. Currently, between 11-13% of women own land or property (Reactor, 2012). Discrimination of women is a general occurrence, but some groups are more affected than others. Examples are Roma, Albanian women, and women from rural areas. Most Roma women and girls face double discrimination: gender and racial (Progress Report: 2013), and around 89% of Albanian women and 64% of Roma women are not economically active (Mojskoska-Blazevski, 2011);
- *Women’s political engagement represents the next challenge.* Another obstacle is the dual role of women: as mothers/women who will take care of the housework and also perform their professions (lawyer, doctor, teacher etc.). Political activities appear as a third challenge, which may adversely affect family and professional careers. More than half of the women felt that their household obligations limit their freedom (Statistical Office, 2011). However, this should not be so. Instead, women should see their lives as a continuum. They must set priorities for what they want to achieve in life and work in chronological order to achieve them (to become women, mothers, professionals, or deputies).
- *Women’s lack of self-confidence* as a result of self-perception that politics is a “dirty game”; but also low confidence of men in women to be involved in politics (as a result of obedience to social roles for women and men); presentation of women by the media as “the weaker sex” and others.

From what has been mentioned above, we can conclude that the obstacles to the participation of women in politics are not only legally and systematically enshrined in the state, but are also related to a number of other factors that determine the level of emancipation of society.

### 2. What Role Do Female Members of Parliament Play?

In the last parliamentary composition (2014) in the Macedonian Parliament were 42 women of a total of 123 MPs.<sup>1</sup> Parliament had 3 vice-presidents, of whom only one was female.

The Parliament has 21 permanent working bodies (of which 6 had female presidents), and other bodies where women were represented with 9 members, of a total of 45.

Parliament has 3 councils (women were presidents of 2 councils), which included 15 women members of the total of 68 members.

Parliament has 9 delegations, on top of which were 3 female presidents, and one vice-chairman.

Parliament has 46 parliamentary groups for cooperation with other countries, in which there were only 11 female presidents.

### 3. How Can Gender Equality in Politics Be Better Promoted?

Equal participation in public life can be achieved if it is within the legal system and political culture and there are secured measures for equality in power sharing and active participation in policy-making at all levels. In this regard, the Government of Macedonia formed a group composed of representatives of the competent ministries<sup>2</sup> and representatives of civil society organizations working in the field of gender equal opportunities. This working group had the authorization to create a National Action Plan for Gender Equality (2007-2012).<sup>3</sup>

Macedonia has established institutional mechanisms for equal opportunities for women and men at the national<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Parliament was dissolved on April 6, while the next elections are expected to be held on June 5, 2016 if the preliminary conditions are met as determined by the political parties in “The Agreement of Przino”.

<sup>2</sup> Certain institutions were responsible: MLSP, local governments, political parties and civil sector.

<sup>3</sup> To achieve strategic objective II (Essential Representation of Women in the Executive, Legislative and Judicial Authority) and strategic objective III (Raising Awareness of Women and Men for the Importance of Women in the Political and Public Life and in the Processes of Decision-making) activities and indicators were provided. *For more see:* <http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/dokumenti.nsp>.

<sup>4</sup> At the national level the following are responsible: Department for Equal Opportunities (DEO) and the State Advisor for Equal Opportunities within the MLSP. DEO examines the cases reported (from the public and private sector entities) for unequal treatment based on sex and is responsible for developing a procedure for the protection against gender-based discrimination. In all ministries a coordinator and deputy coordinator for equal opportunities were appointed. They are responsible for the introduction of a gender perspective, implementing the Strategy for Gender Equality and must submit an annual report to the MLSP for actions taken. The Commission on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in parliament and the Club of Deputies represent the mechanisms for the implementa-

and local levels<sup>5</sup>. Also, in February 2013, Parliament approved the 2013-2020 Strategy on Gender Equality<sup>6</sup> as a continuation of the previous strategy. The new strategy provides the framework and sets out the basic steps and specific guidance for the full achievement of gender equality, through the undertaking of short-term and medium-term actions that will be implemented through operational programs.

Under the framework of MLSP, an operational plan was prepared for the implementation of an efficient system for achieving gender equality through functional mechanisms for harmonization and measurement of indicators on progress in gender equality.<sup>7</sup>

The results<sup>8</sup> showed that the recognition of the role of women in policy-making is changing in a positive direction and the opening of political parties and greater involvement of women in the executive bodies of parties and activities towards the adaptation of professional and family life have had a positive impact (Annual report, 2014: 6).

The effect of the strategy remains to be seen in the upcoming parliamentary elections in June 2016 and other election cycles.

#### 4. What Are the Chances of Gender Equality Regarding Distrust and Political Disengagement of Society?

The level of women's involvement in the decision making processes and especially politics is dependent on multiple factors, from the traditional distribution of household activities to societal gender stereotypes that push women out of public spaces and result in a lack of free time to engage in decision making (Risteska, Lazarevski, Mickovska-Raleva, 2012: 67). The biggest obstacles to the growth of women's political participation

tion of gender mainstreaming in the highest representative body of policy and decision-making.

<sup>5</sup> Gender mechanisms in local governance within the institutions consist of the following structures: Committees for Equal Opportunities of Women and Men (within the councils of local government, composed of counselors for a period of 4 years) and Coordinators for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (civil servants, employees of the local government unit).

<sup>6</sup> Official Journal of the Republic of Macedonia Nr.07-1001/1, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> The operating plan provides defined time activities, changes in legal regulations and other activities, reporting the results of the institutions involved, obligations and duties of the competent institutions, research and measurement of results, and budget plan. *For more see:* National Action Plan for Gender Equality 2013-2016, MLSP operational plan 2015 for the implementation of the strategy for gender equality 2013-2020, March 2015.

<sup>8</sup> According to an analysis by the Department for Equal Opportunities in the MLSP, in the 2013 local elections for municipal adviser women won 30% of seats, which means an increase in the participation of women by 2.8% compared to the previous composition of municipal councils. Compared with previous elections for local government, when there was no woman elected for mayor of the 85 municipalities, while in the 2013 elections women had gained 4 positions of mayor (or 4.9%) in the municipalities of Kisela Voda, Tetovo, Gradsko, and Bogdanci.

are not legal, but cultural and behavioral, as the continuation of rigid gender roles and stereotypes hinder women in their career choices.<sup>9</sup> Gender stereotypes continue to be present in society, so further measures to combat discrimination against women, especially in rural areas, Roma women etc.<sup>10</sup> are still necessary.

There are several areas, which require attention regarding the political participation of women:

- Increased awareness among women as voters through information campaigns (eg. for Albanian women to understand the importance of the fact that the vote is free and independent; that Roma women must be registered on the voting list; that women should be among the observers during the election process);
- Design of educational programs and the opening of centers that will prepare women for political careers and provide training for women candidates to learn about the legislative process, such as drafting legislation and voting;
- Media coverage of women as successful leaders (Greenberg, McDonald, 2000: 18-19).

Empowering women in the public sphere is a long process that cannot succeed without creating a positive climate in society. In an environment dominated by traditional patriarchal values, it is assumed that legal measures cannot have effect. For example, commissions for equal opportunities have not been established in all municipalities, while in those where they are established they have not performed any activities. Therefore, it is necessary to work on a long-term plan to eliminate gender stereotypes and prejudices in textbooks at all levels of education (UNDP, 2009: 4).

#### 5. How Does the Organization of Political Parties Affect Women's Political Participation?

In the past years of independence in the country, political parties have changed attitudes towards issues related to the engagement of women in the political process (Stojanovic-Djordjevic, 2016: 31). Nevertheless, their programs have not taken into account gender interests. Neutral gender policies which were offered political parties have not had an impact on changing the status of women in society, while commitments to gender equality in political parties' programs have been largely de-

<sup>9</sup> The Macedonian labor market puts women at disadvantage; they receive lower salaries and are generally employed in lower-paid professions. A significant number of women work in traditionally female professions such as housekeeping, cleaning, childcare, and care of elderly people.

<sup>10</sup> Commission staff working document the FYR of Macedonia Report 2015, Brussels, 10.11.2015, p.59.

clarative, as they do not recognize gender-specific needs in their programs.

There are several key factors that hinder gender equality in politics:

- Political parties discriminate against women within the party, as they include only those women who are proven professionals, employees and have a high level of education on the electoral list, while this does not happen to men;
- Gender equality is still seen as an issue of 'women' (men in general, are not included in the reforms; they do not appear in commissions for gender equality in local and national level).

Apart from that, political parties must find appropriate measures for the promotion of women in their structure to increase intra-party democracy, transparency, accountability, and legitimacy. Political parties must assess the skills, capacities and merits of their political candidates and should not only apply these criteria to eliminate women from political processes.<sup>11</sup>

Political parties, in the context of their activities, should work to improve women's political participation through:

- Implementation of women's equal participation and representation within the party, the administrative and official positions in key political structures (e.g., mayors, deputies, ministers, directors etc.).
- Inclusion of mechanisms for improving women's participation in political programs, such as: providing the necessary human, financial and material support;
- Capacity building of women through specific programs and strategies for improving confidence for women to get involved with public affairs.

## 6. What Role Do Female Voters Play?

In Macedonia, young women tend to follow political news less than young men. While just over half of young men rarely or never follow politics, this is the case for 70% of young women. On the other hand, one in every four young men constantly or regularly follows political news compared to only 14% of young women (Korunovska & Maleska, 2011). Women are less likely to follow political events (Kostavska, Mickovska & Nikolovski, 2009) or participate in civic initiatives (Korunovska & Ilikj, 2015).

In Macedonia women exert the right to vote, although in practice there are some deviations, such as:

- *Family voting* is a practice that should be prevented. Although most women think that nobody has the right to use their right to vote, there are those who believe that their male family members may vote for them.
- *Lack of autonomy through voting.* Women, before the vote, usually consult with their father in law, husband or brother and in the end will vote as they were told or independently.
- *Non-participation in elections.* Several factors combined affect voting rights, such as: tradition, lack of interest in voting, non-belief that things can be changed by a vote, low level of education among women and the impossibility of exercising the right to vote.

Most of the women in Macedonia do not participate in public life. That is, they are not members and do not volunteer for an organization that represents their involvement in public social life. Of those participating, most are members of political parties, then NGOs, religious organizations and trade unions.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Women remain significantly underrepresented in Macedonian political life. The country's democratic journey is characterized by low levels of women's representation in political parties, on electoral lists and in decision-making bodies.

It is recommended that in the future the state needs to:

- strengthen gender equality policies, institutional frameworks and should allocate sufficient financial resources to improve efficiency;
- introduce gender specific measures in institutions where they do not exist (especially in government, parliament and diplomatic service);
- review the legal basis of 30% to 50% of the quota for women's participation in all decision-making positions;
- introduce of special measures (quotas) for decision-making bodies at all levels and in all organizational structures of political parties;
- review recruitment procedures for positions in the electoral list to identify discriminatory practices and to ensure that women are selected according to criteria equal to men;

<sup>11</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Roundtable on Political Party Funding and Women's Participation in Political Life, Tbilisi, 12.03.2013, p.3.

- hold campaigns to promote women leaders and encourage more young women to get involved in politics and create and support measures for encouraging such participation;
- develop a regular monitoring plan for the implementation of gender equality policies, etc.

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**Appendix**

<b>Women elected in parliamentary election</b>							
Before quotas						After quotas	
1990-1994	1994-1998	1998-2002	2002-2006	2006-2008	2008-2011	2011-2014	2014-2016
4 %	3.3%	7.5%	17.5%	27.5%	28.3%	27.6%	34%
<b>Women in municipality election<sup>12</sup></b>							
			1996	2000	2005	2009	2013
Women mayors			-	2.4%	3.5%	-	4.7%
Women councillors			6.2%	8.4%	22.4%	26.7%	30.2%

Source: <http://women.uclg.org/2013/06/women-in-politics.html>

<sup>12</sup> The percentage of women in the municipality has a great disparity from one municipality to another. Namely, in 3 municipalities the percentage of women is more than 41%; in 25 municipalities the participation of women is more than 30%; in 32 municipalities' participation of women ranges from 20-30% and in 25 municipalities the percentage of women is under 20%.





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## **COUNTERING RADICALIZATION, NATIONALISM, AND DIVISION: HOW TO BETTER PROMOTE INCLUSIVE, MULTI-ETHNIC, LIBERAL SOCIETIES**

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**September 5-8, 2016 | Alt Madlitz**

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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 2016 through the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

## **Monday, September 5, 2016**

*Arrival of participants during the day*

*Accommodation and conference venue: Gut Klostermühle, Mühlenstr. 11, 15518 Madlitz-Wilmersdorf (Alt Madlitz)*

**20:00**

### **Reception and Welcome Dinner**

**Dinner speech by Dr. Joachim Bertele, Head of Directorate 21, German Federal Chancellery**

## **Tuesday, September 6, 2016**

**09:00 – 09:30**

### **Welcoming remarks**

Rüdiger Lentz, *Executive Director, Aspen Institute Germany*  
Hans-Ulrich Südbeck, *Head of Division 209 Western Balkans, German Federal Foreign Office*

**09:30 – 11:00**

### **Session I:**

#### **Ethnic and Nationalist Politics – The Current State of Play**

Despite progress in regional cooperation and regular regional meetings on the highest political levels, ethnic and nationalist politics remain a common phenomenon throughout the region. While the most prominent examples include the ethnic division of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia, the contested status of Kosovo and its implications, and regular spats between Serbia and Croatia, there seems to be a general trend of re-nationalization along with illiberal trends throughout the region. How should these trends be met? Why does nationalist rhetoric remain successful? Why are people so susceptible to nationalist positions? How can the political rapprochement between Serbia and Albania trickle down more effectively? How can compromises like those reached in the Belgrade-Pristina Dialog or in the border demarcation agreement between Kosovo and Montenegro be better explained to the public? To what extent does the political crisis in Macedonia run the risk of escalating into an ethnic conflict and how can this risk be minimized? How should the two-pronged approach of some political leaders regarding their rhetoric and appearance on the international and national stages be responded to? Why are declarations signed and deals agreed upon, such as commitments from the Belgrade-Pristina Dialog or the commitment to abstain from misusing outstanding issues in the EU accession process of the Vienna summit not sufficiently implemented? What role should external actors, in particular the EU and its member states play?

Moderator: Helge Tolksdorf

Introduction: James Ker-Lindsay, *Brexit, the EU, and Stability in the Western Balkans*



**11:00 – 11:30** Coffee break

**11:30 – 13:00**

**Session II:**

**Rethinking Regional Relations beyond Political and Economic Cooperation**

Aside from numerous regional organizations, the past years have seen the rise of additional regional initiatives such as the Berlin Process or the WB6 Initiative. However, these processes remain elite-driven processes with a very limited number of actors actively included. Despite public gestures like the football match at the Vienna Summit, it so far does not seem to have trickled down throughout society and while the establishment of a Regional Youth Cooperation Office of the Western Balkans is an important step, there seems to be a need for further initiatives to reach all levels of society. What could be done to further support a regional exchange on various levels of societies? Which actors would be the right actors to promote new initiatives in this regard? What should be the focus? Is there a need for a rethinking from an acknowledgement of the need for technical, political cooperation and a genuine interest in improving regional relations, not only between but also within divided countries? What role should political leaders in the region play? What role should external actors, in particular the EU and its member states play?

Moderator: Gordana Čomić

Introductions: Sanja Bogatinovska, *Western Balkans Regional Cooperation Reshaped: From Styrofoam Peace to Genuine Grass-Roots Inter-Ethnic Relations*  
Dane Taleski, *Regional Cooperation in Southeast Europe: A Dead-End or a New Avenue?*

**13:00 – 14:00** Lunch

**14:30** Departure to Berlin

**16:00 – 17:00** **Visit of Holocaust Memorial Center**

**17:30 – 19:00** **Meeting and Discussion with State Minister for Europe Michael Roth**

**19:00 Reception and Dinner with Members of the German Parliament****Confirmed MPs:**

Stefan Albani, CDU/CSU	Jürgen Klimke, CDU/CSU
Luise Amtsberg, Green Party	Steffen Claudio Lemme, SPD
Marieluise Beck, Green Party	Omid Nouripour, Green Party
Peter Beyer, CDU/CSU	Ewald Schurer, SPD
Thorsten Frei, CDU/CSU	Dorothee Schlegel, SPD
Metin Hakverdi, SPD	Johannes Selle, CDU/CSU
Josip Juratovic, SPD	Johann Wadephul, CDU/CSU

**21:00 Visit of the roof terrace and dome of the Reichstag Building****Wednesday, September 7, 2016****09:00 – 10:30****Session III:****Responding to Radicalization in the Western Balkans**

Radicalization has become a growing concern in the region over the past years. Aside from relatively high numbers of foreign fighters in the Middle East, at least given the size of countries in the region, and a growing concern of Islamic radicalization sponsored by external actors in some countries, we have also witnessed non-Islamic radicalization and foreign fighters that left to fight on the pro-Russian side in Ukraine. While countries have responded, for example by adapting their criminal codes permitting the recruitment and participation of their nationals in armed conflicts abroad, the poor economic situation, especially among the youth, and the still pervasive ethnic division in the region further contribute to a fertile ground for radicalization. What can political leaders in the region do to further respond to the threat of radicalization? What roles do external actors play and how can their influence be mediated? How can the EU and the U.S. better support the region addressing these concerns? What is needed for security organizations in the region to be better prepared to address these threats? Beyond security institutions, how can further recruitment and radicalization be prevented?

Moderator: Ioannis Armakolas

Introductions: Marko Babić, *Radicalization in the Western Balkans A.D. 2016: Challenges and Suggestions*  
Florian Qehaja, *Preventing Violent Extremism Through Community Engagement in the Western Balkans*

**10:30 – 11:00**

Coffee break

**11:00 – 12:00**      **Discussion with Roland Jahn, Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records**

**12:00 – 13:00**      Lunch

**14:30 – 16:00**      **Session IV:  
The Role of Reconciliation in the Region**

Every war-time anniversary, ICTY indictment or verdict, or erection of a monument demonstrates that the Western Balkan countries are still far from reconciling with one another or their history. At the same time, different national or ethnic versions of history persist and still play an important role in an ethnic or national narrative. Could reconciliation therefore contribute to the disenchantment of ethno-nationalist rhetoric or even radicalization? What role does mutual trust play in the everyday relations between or within countries? How can existing initiatives for reconciliation be better supported? Is there a need for new initiatives? How should they look? Which role can the Berlin process and its addressing of bilateral issues play? What are the lessons learned from the reconciliation processes in Western and Central Europe? Which role does transitional justice play? How can countries work together on a common idea of their history? What role does the EU integration process play? Does the EU's insistence on good neighborly relations and its support suffice or is there a need to rethink this approach?

Moderator:            Anna Kuchenbecker

Introductions:        Christian Costamagna, *Some Observations about the Weaknesses in the Reconciliation Process(es) in the Former Yugoslavia*  
Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinović, *Peace-less Reconciliation in BiH: Interplay Between Politicians, Grassroots Initiatives, and Peoples' Attitudes*

**16:00 – 16:30**      Coffee break

**16:30 – 17:30**      **Discussion with Frank Morawietz, Special Envoy of the Franco-German Youth Office for Southeast Europe**

**18:00**                **Barbecue on the shore of Madlitz lake**

**Thursday, September 8, 2016**

*Departure of participants during the day*

Dritan Abazović

Hans-Ulrich Südbeck

Nora Aliti

Edita Tahiri

Ioannis Armakolas

Dane Taleski

Marko Babić

Helge Tolksdorf

Odeta Barbullushi

Ana Trišić-Babić

Sanja Bogatinovska

Hoyt Yee

Gordana Čomić

Christian Costamagna

**The Aspen Institute Germany**

Ilir Deda

Valeska Esch  
*Senior Program Officer*

Maja Gasal-Vražalica

Anna Kuchenbecker  
*Deputy Director*

Philipp Glaser

Inga Landgrebe  
*Program Assistant*

Edith Harxhi

Ramadan Ilazi

Rüdiger Lentz  
*Executive Director*

Marina Jovičević

James Ker-Lindsay

Dragana Kiprijanovska

Dragan Krapović

Matthias Lüttenberg

Saša Magazinović

Jani Makraduli

Žarko Mićin

Aleksandar Andrija Pejović

Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinović

Florian Qehaja

Konstantin Samofalov

Senada Šelo-Šabić

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# CONFERENCE REPORT: COUNTERING RADICALIZATION, NATIONALISM, AND DIVISION. HOW TO BETTER PROMOTE INCLUSIVE, MULTI-ETHNIC, LIBERAL SOCIETIES?

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**Nicola MacColl**  
Master of Public Policy candidate  
Hertie School of Governance

The Aspen Institute's conference 'Countering radicalization, nationalism, and division: how to better promote inclusive, multi-ethnic, liberal societies?' took place in Alt Madlitz, Germany from September 5-8, 2016. The event brought together 33 select decision makers from the Western Balkans (WB), Germany, the European Union (EU) and the United States (U.S.), with professional backgrounds in government, international and civil society organizations, academia, the security sector, and the Foreign Service. The conference had four main sessions, which covered the rise of nationalism, the importance of regional cooperation, the issue of radicalization, and the role of reconciliation. In addition there were three discussions: the first with the German State Minister for Europe; the second with the German Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records; and the third with the Special Envoy of the Franco-German Youth Office for Southeast Europe.

## **Session I: Ethnic and Nationalist Policies – The Current State of Play**

The session initially discussed the effect of Brexit on the WB, in particular, the effect on EU enlargement. It was raised that there are two forces at play with regard to EU enlargement: one is that the EU should not take in any new members until it has resolved its internal issues and dealt with the fall out of Brexit; the other is that it should hasten to bring in the WB countries to ensure that nationalism and radicalization in those countries does not spread and become a threat to the EU.

Participants discussed whether the EU Commission should have played a greater role in the Brexit campaign to counter false arguments being spread by the media. The general opinion was that it was good that the EU Commission did not become involved as this would have only fuelled the 'leave' camp further. Experts noted that Britain, by its history and geography, has always seen itself somewhat apart from Europe and the rise of nationalism allowed this sentiment to grow.

Experts raised that the trigger for Brexit was not just nationalism but the effect of globalization, particularly on employment, for example, with the increasing number of zero-hour contracts. It was noted that, in general, the areas in Britain with the highest number of zero-hour contracts are also the areas expressing the most extreme nationalistic trends. Therefore, addressing employment issues, such as job security, is an essential part of preventing the rise of nationalism.

The role of the media in the Brexit campaign was also highlighted as a crucial reason for the 'leave' result. Murdoch-owned media, which represents a significant

proportion of media outlets in Britain, took an openly biased ‘leave’ position in the Brexit debate and clearly influenced a large number of people to vote ‘leave’. This ability for free media to shape political debates in such a significant way was raised as a worrying development.

Participants noted that a key problem the EU needs to deal with is how it communicates to the public. For Brexit, the lack of effective communication on the part of the EU and the ‘remain’ camp was highlighted as a significant contributing factor. EU advocates in Britain were unable to communicate to the general public what role the EU plays and what benefits it brings. The disconnect between the EU and the people of Europe, perceived or real, needs to be addressed in order to avoid further ‘Brexit’s’. The EU needs to identify what it is the people really want and work out how to deliver it.

The discussion moved on to the impact of Brexit in the WB and the need for renewed pressure from the EU in the region to ensure that reforms continue to be made. It was noted that if the accession process for the WB countries is not sped up then there will likely be a rise in nationalism and radicalization with potentially tragic consequences for the region and the EU. The policy approach of strategic patience, that has been employed by the EU in the past, was raised by some participants as being highly detrimental to WB economies and societies. While there might be some ‘enlargement fatigue’ in the EU, there is certainly ‘waiting fatigue’ in the WB.

Importantly, if the EU is not playing a role in the WB it will create a vacuum and allow other international actors space to enter, namely Russia and Turkey. If the EU considers SEE of strategic importance, then it needs to show that by continuing the accession talks and providing more support to the region.

There is a fear that if populism can take over in Britain then it can also take over in WB countries. The WB is a fragile region and some participants noted that tensions in their countries have been increasing which, with the fall-out of Brexit, could result in significant problems.

The Berlin Process was also discussed. There were mixed opinions on the value of this process with some raising that it was an important tool for reform, while others raised that it should be driven by internal actors, not EU actors, and that without some ownership of the process no real change would be achieved. The role of leaders in the region was an important part of this discussion as many of the political elites have been around since the 1990s, often preventing positive reforms from taking place and also limiting public trust in politicians as they see the same old faces in power.

### **Session II: Rethinking Regional Relations beyond Political and Economic Cooperation**

The session began with discussions on the need for regional cooperation at the civil society level as well as the need for bottom-up, not just top-down, approaches. Participants also raised that while the Berlin Process was useful, it should not just be a one-way process – the region needs to take responsibility for regional cooperation itself otherwise there will be no progress. Already, many initiatives have not been implemented, or have not been implemented effectively, which could be due to this lack of ownership and accountability.

So far, there has been little initiative from within the region to effectively cooperate with one another. There are few fora between universities and academics, for example, or opportunities for young people to interact across the region. This needs to change if there is to be real regional cooperation. It is also important for SEE countries to identify what their young people want because currently it seems there is little understanding of their wants and needs. Some countries, for example, do not even have a youth policy.

It was also suggested that rather than focus on regional cooperation as a separate initiative, more effort should be put into developing a strong economy, strong civil society institutions, strong educational institutions, free media, and a credible rule of law. Doing this, in the first instance, would subsequently help foster regional cooperation. There is also a need for more women’s organizations or women’s focused initiatives as this is an area that is not given much attention at the moment.

The discussion turned to the importance of dealing with the past in order to make progress in the present. Without this, there would be little hope of achieving much regional cooperation. Participants noted that conferences such as this were essential to provide the opportunity for different actors in the region to come together and discuss their issues.

### **Session III: Responding to Radicalization in the Western Balkans**

The third session examined the rise of radicalization in the WB and possible ways for addressing it. Firstly, it was highlighted that the reasons for the rise of radicalization need to be identified.

Participants raised, for example, that young people seem disenchanted with the education system and so instead turn to madrassas, which seemingly fulfill their needs better. This failure of the education system to engage young people must be addressed.

Economic development, or lack thereof, was also raised as a key reason for the rise of radicalism.

Another factor contributing to the rise of radicalization is the role Russia and Turkey play in the region. However, the Turkish influence and the support Turkey provides to the existing Muslim community should not always be seen as a threat. Many participants noted that radicalism in the WB is not exclusively Islamic radicalism but rather nationalist radicalism, and in fact, the nationalist radicalism is probably greater and more worrying.

Some participants noted that the Turkish influence and also large Turkish immigrant populations in their countries was more relevant with regards to how it will affect their demographic, and, over time, lead to a political focus that is more pro-Turkey than pro-EU.

It was noted that Russia's influence in the region is likely fuelling nationalist tendencies, and its influence is growing. But most participants agreed that this is more of an anti-EU/anti-American sentiment than a real pro-Russian sentiment. Nevertheless, it was highlighted that Russia's soft power should not be underestimated.

Some participants raised that radicalism poses a threat to the region because there is little regional security cooperation, which means that it is difficult to deal with problems that arise. It was also noted, however, that security should not be achieved at the expense of human rights and democracy. The EU and U.S. have a tendency to pursue stability in the region at the expense of democracy, which helps explain why there are still so many problems. Equally there needs to be a balance between economic development and protecting human rights and freedoms. While economic development may help address radicalization, this should not mean human rights are sacrificed.

The discussion turned to Kosovo and how, without visa liberalization, there is a very real risk of radicalization. Already, it is easier for Kosovar youth to study in Turkey than in the EU. This trend will only continue without visa liberalization and more support from the EU. Young people in Kosovo want opportunities and if they do not get them then they will 'vote with their feet'. Participants noted that governments in the region need to understand this and respond to it (as it is not only happening in Kosovo) in order to avoid further brain drain and the rise of radicalism.

Participants discussed that the rise of radicalization is also possible because of the weak institutions and corrupt political elites that characterize the WB. However, to some extent the West allows this situation to continue because it only deals with elected officials, regardless of how corrupt the elections are and how captured the institutions. Some participants suggested that if the West continues to prioritize stability, over democracy, there will be few opportunities for effectively addressing radicalization and radicalism.

#### Session IV: The Role of Reconciliation in the Region

The fourth session examined reconciliation, or lack thereof, in the WB. The discussion began with comments about the many barriers to reconciliation. For example, people in the WB involved in reconciliation initiatives are often badged as traitors. This is detrimental to reconciliation and needs to be addressed if reconciliation efforts are to be achieved.

It was raised that the missing people from past conflicts need to be found. This would provide some closure for families of those victims and allow the process of bringing justice to begin. It would also provide an opportunity for wider discussions about the fact that all sides had victims, which needs to be acknowledged in order for societies to move forward. However, it was mentioned that there was a risk that bringing justice would threaten peaceful relations between the countries. It was crucial that the WB did not have to choose between justice and peace because neither option offered a positive future.

The political elites, who represent the past, are also a clear obstacle to reconciliation. It was noted that every time they bring up something from the past, society moves a step backwards not forwards. Similarly, while inter-ethnic relations are clearly very fragile, there is also a need for intra-ethnic reconciliation, for example, between those who participated in the wars and those who did not. If these unresolved issues are allowed to persist, radicalization will likely increase.

As was mentioned in previous sessions, participants highlighted the importance of economic development and particularly providing jobs as a means of reconciliation. If people's standards of living were raised then other issues from the past would become less prevalent in their lives.

During the discussion, it was highlighted that reconciliation efforts need to be made from inside the WB countries and not simply be enforced by external actors. WB countries have to want to reconcile or there will be no progress. WB countries need to decide what they want their future to look like and to help build it. Participants raised that while there need to be changes at the institutional level, there also needs to be grassroots action for reconciliation.

Participants discussed how the EU should deal with all SEE countries equally, noting that there was still resentment about the fact that Croatia, Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria had all been accepted into the EU while the rest of the region had not. Similarly, within the WB countries, all actors need to be treated equally and every voice needs to be heard and respected.

The discussion concluded by reflecting on Germany's successful reconciliation with France and how that had taken many years. It was also noted that Germany's efforts to commemorate its victims was an important part

of the process. Participants discussed that perhaps the WB countries could learn from this and think about commemorating their victims.

**Discussion with the German State Minister for Europe Michael Roth**

Participants were invited to a discussion with the German State Minister for Europe Michael Roth. The discussion centered around EU enlargement. State Minister Roth reiterated the German Government's support for the WB and its desire to see all WB countries as part of the EU at some point. However, recent developments, including Brexit, the economic crisis and the migrant crisis, have placed significant pressure on the EU. The core tenet of the EU – providing liberal, inclusive societies – is being attacked and the EU's current focus is defending this concept and addressing its internal issues.

**Discussion with the German Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records Roland Jahn**

The Commissioner provided an overview of the role of the Commission for the Stasi Records and its importance in providing a mechanism for reconciliation since the collapse of East Germany. So far, the records have been accessed by over 2 million people. Apart from individuals wishing to read their own files, they are used to vet people for senior public administration positions to ensure that ex-Stasi do not again hold positions of power. They can also be used for pension compensation, for example, if someone was prevented from studying in East Germany and therefore could not pursue a certain career, this can be compensated for in the pension system. Participants discussed how the German approach to reconciling with the past could be useful in WB societies.

**Discussion with the Special Envoy of the Franco-German Youth Office for Southeast Europe Frank Morawietz**

Frank Morawietz gave an overview of the role and purpose of the Franco-German Youth Office, in particular, how successful it has been in establishing a dialog between French and German youth. Since 1963, over 8 million people have been involved in exchanges or collaborated on initiatives together between the two countries.

Mr. Morawietz also spoke about the development of a new youth office, the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) for the WB. This is still in the process of being set up, with its headquarters in Tirana, Albania. It is envisaged that it will play a similar role in the WB to the role the Franco-German Youth Office has played in France and Germany, although obviously reflecting the specific context of the WB.



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# BREXIT, THE EU AND STABILITY IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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**Dr. James Ker-Lindsay**  
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European Institute  
The London School of Economics and Political Science

On June 23, 2016, the United Kingdom (UK) voted to leave the European Union (EU). The result sent shockwaves around the world. Few could really believe that the British people (in reality, the people of England and Wales) had decided to turn their back on their 43-year relationship with the EU. Needless to say, the impact of this event is going to be felt for many years to come. One area where it is likely to be felt particularly strongly is in the Western Balkans.

The United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union will be felt in the Western Balkans in at least three distinct ways. In the first instance, Britain will no longer be a central actor in the region. This is likely to be felt most acutely in Bosnia and Kosovo. However, and perhaps contrary to perceived wisdom, its effects on enlargement might actually be rather less pronounced than many believe. Of course, Britain will try to ensure that its role in the region will be maintained through other avenues. These are likely to be very poor substitutes. Secondly, Brexit is likely to change the wider debate about enlargement. As the EU digests the consequences of Britain's departure, the question many are now asking is whether the process of expansion will speed up, as the EU attempts to reinforce the European project, or slow down, as it confronts the need for fundamental changes internally. Indeed, will we perhaps see other countries follow the UK thereby weakening the EU even further? Thirdly, there is the wider question about growing populism across Europe. Brexit may well have been a product of specific circumstances present in the United Kingdom. However, we cannot ignore the fact that it also appears to have wider origins. Again, this could well be felt in the Western Balkans. Then there is the question about the reaction from the region. Will Brexit see a growth in Eurosceptic sentiment in the Western Balkans?

## **Brexit and British Foreign Policy**

The decision to leave the European Union will have a huge impact on Britain's foreign policy. Across the world, the first signs of this are already being felt. But perhaps nowhere will the decision to leave the European Union be more keenly felt in foreign policy terms than with regard to Britain's engagement with the Western Balkans. One can argue that nowhere is British foreign policy more inextricably interlinked with its European Union membership. The very centerpiece of British efforts to help bring peace and stability to the region has been the quest to bring the region into the EU. It is from this one overarching policy that almost all other policy initiatives have flowed. The decision to exit the European Union means that Britain will now be advocating a strategic course for the region that it has itself decided to abandon. It leaves British officials in the region facing the incredibly uncomfortable question:

‘if the European Union is so good, then why do you want to leave?’ As many officials will readily point out in private, there is no easy or convincing answer.

In real terms, Britain’s departure is likely to be felt most keenly in two places. The first is Bosnia and Herzegovina. The United Kingdom has taken a keen interest in Bosnia over the past few years. This was seen most recently, and most clearly, in the 2014 initiative undertaken by Britain and Germany, and now adopted by the European Union, to refocus the reform effort in the country.<sup>1</sup> The second major area is Kosovo. Britain was instrumental in securing Kosovo’s independence from Serbia in 2008. Since then, London has worked hard to secure its bilateral recognition by other states and ensure its membership in a number of international organizations. At the same time, British officials within the European Union, notably Sir Robert Cooper and Baroness Ashton, were at the forefront of efforts to secure the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. Finally, again alongside Germany, Britain has been actively pressuring Serbia to accept Kosovo’s statehood as a reality. With Brexit, London’s ability to continue applying this pressure will obviously disappear.

Another area where the consequences of Brexit will be felt is with regard to Britain’s support for enlargement. However, the effect may not be as strong as one might suspect. Although it is true that the United Kingdom has traditionally been at the forefront of calls for EU enlargement, this has been changing in recent years.<sup>2</sup> As concerns over immigration have grown, so Britain has sounded a lot less enthusiastic in its support for further EU expansion. This was very pronounced during the referendum campaign. Indeed, there is actually a good case to say that had Britain voted to remain it would have in fact adopted an even tougher approach towards enlargement in the future. Be that as it may, as Britain’s commitment to enlargement has seemingly waned and its estrangement from the EU has become increasingly evident, London gradually ceased to be a first port of call for the region’s officials.

For the past few years, the center of power on enlargement issues has been Germany. Officials from the region now see Berlin as the most important focus for lobbying efforts as they pursue their membership aspirations, and more importantly, this has also been recognized by the German Government. The establishment of

the Berlin Process is the clearest evidence of this.<sup>3</sup> Most remarkably, this initiative, which has now expanded to bring in other EU members, has not included Britain, for reasons that are not entirely clear. Nevertheless, this has amounted to the firmest evidence thus far that Britain’s place as a central actor in the region has been waning. With the Brexit decision, it seems likely that its influence will now decline further.

Of course, British officials are keen to emphasize that Brexit does not mean that the United Kingdom will disengage from the Balkans. As they point out, the UK remains a core member of a number of other key European organizations. For example, it is a leading member of NATO. It is also a member of the Council of Europe and the OSCE, and London hosts the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), which is playing a major role in economic development in the region. On top of this, Britain will retain its seat as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. While all of this will undoubtedly mean that Britain will try to present the image that it remains committed to, and engaged in, the Balkans, the reality is likely to be rather different. Already, officials privately acknowledge that the region will slide right down the list of priorities for the British Government. In addition to the stresses and pressures of trying to negotiate the terms of Britain’s exit from the European Union, the Foreign Office will also be taking the lead in trying to enhance the United Kingdom’s relationships with the wider world. Much of this will be focused on developing new trading relations and on building ties to countries that offer the most immediate benefits to Britain. On this note, it is also important to emphasize that there are relatively few other ties that are likely to keep the United Kingdom engaged in the Western Balkans. For example, Britain does very little trade with the region. In fact, only Macedonia (number 46) features in top 50 export destinations for Britain.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, Britain actually has rather limited links to the region through diaspora communities. According to most recent estimates, the entire community of those originating from the Western Balkans, which includes Britain’s Albanian population, is in the region of 70-80,000 people.<sup>5</sup> This is tiny. To put it in perspective, the most recent census indicated that there are around 180,000 U.S. citizens residing in Britain. Recent estimates suggest that there are over a million Poles now living in the country.

<sup>1</sup> ‘Bosnia & Herzegovina - a new strategic approach’, Speech delivered by the British Foreign Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 5 November 2014. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/bosnia-herzegovina-a-new-strategic-approach>.

<sup>2</sup> See James Ker-Lindsay, ‘The United Kingdom’, in Rosa Balfour and Corina Stratulat (editors), *EU Member States and Enlargement towards the Balkans* (Brussels: European Policy Centre (EPC), 2015), pp. 53-62. [http://epc.eu/documents/uploads/pub\\_5832\\_eu\\_balkans\\_-\\_issue\\_paper.pdf](http://epc.eu/documents/uploads/pub_5832_eu_balkans_-_issue_paper.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of the Berlin Process see, ‘Briefing: The Western Balkans’ Berlin Process: A New Impulse for Regional Cooperation’, European Parliament, 4 July 2016. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/586602/EPRS\\_BRI\(2016\)586602\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/586602/EPRS_BRI(2016)586602_EN.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> ‘UK Trade: May 2016’ Office for National Statistics, 8 July 2016. <http://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/balanceofpayments/bulletins/uktrade/may2016/pdf> (last accessed on 25 July 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Immigration Patterns of Non-UK Born Populations in England and Wales in 2011, Office for National Statistics, 17 December 2013, pp.17 and 18.

### Brexit, Enlargement, and the Development of the EU

The second major question concerns the implications that Brexit will have on the further development of the European Union. There are very real concerns being expressed about the way in which Brexit will affect the EU's commitment to further enlargement. At present, there appear to be two predominant schools of thought on this issue. On the one hand, there are those who believe that Brexit presents the EU with an opportunity to press ahead with enlargement. In the face of an existential challenge by Britain's departure, the EU must respond by showing that the process of expansion, and the whole European project, remains on track. While there is a logic to this, it seems unlikely that this will lead to an expedited accession process for the Western Balkans. Ultimately, no one would want to see the integrity of the EU further damaged by taking in new members that are evidently unprepared to meet the burdens of membership. For this reason, any renewed commitment to enlargement in the wake of the Brexit decision is likely to mean increased help and support, rather than a fast track accession process. In contrast, the second school of thought suggests that the EU must now concentrate on its own internal situation before looking to take on any new members. It must fix the problems before expanding. Under this model, enlargement must necessarily take a back seat. Either way, from the current perspective, it seems unlikely that Brexit will lead to a hastened accession process for the Western Balkans.

However, it is not just the question of the European Union's commitment towards enlargement that needs to be considered. Brexit also poses a challenge in so far as it will be watched with considerable interest by Eurosceptic and anti-European forces across the region. Up until now, the general view has been that there is considerable support, if not a political consensus, in favor of European Union membership. However, this now appears to be changing. To take a prominent example, in Macedonia hostility towards the European Union has been growing in recent years. The inability of the European Union to be able to offer the country a formal start of accession talks after it was granted candidacy a decade ago has been nothing short of disastrous. The steadfast resistance by Greece to allow negotiations on membership to begin saw the government steadily move away from its reformist agenda. Deprived of a serious EU perspective, the country's leadership fell into corruption and self-preservation. The country is now a hollow shell of a democracy. There is, it would seem, no better warning as to the dangers of not maintaining a credible EU accession path than the case of Macedonia. Elsewhere, we have also seen a much greater prominence of Eurosceptic attitudes. For example, in Serbia, the last parliament was wholly pro-EU membership. However, following the last elections, held in April this year, two

parties that are either sceptical about EU membership or oppose it altogether are now represented in parliament.<sup>6</sup>

### The Wider Impact of Brexit

Finally, Brexit provides some important insights into the way in which European politics appear to be evolving. To some observers, the Brexit vote has raised the concern that the EU project may be doomed in the longer term. Prior to the referendum, there were claims that if the United Kingdom left, then it would serve as a catalyst for others to consider leaving.<sup>7</sup> Such fears have died down significantly in the immediate aftermath of the vote. In fact, there appears to have been a very substantial rise in support for EU membership in a number of countries. This has been particularly marked in Denmark, which has long been seen as the most Eurosceptic member state after the United Kingdom.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, some have suggested that EU decision making is already proving to be easier as British influence is already starting to wane. Although Britain officially remains a full member, with full voting powers, until such time as it leaves, there is already anecdotal evidence that its officials are being side-lined in discussions.<sup>9</sup> Within the EU, there are many who have long believed that once Britain leaves the EU will naturally become more cohesive and collegiate.

This would seem to give grounds for hope that the European Union may in fact weather the current crisis. However, the situation is not perhaps as stable as many may think. Although Britain has undoubtedly been an awkward member of the EU for a long time, it has also provided an important voice of moderation in many areas. Officials from across the EU member states, as well as those within the institutions, have often commented on the way that Britain has actually served as an important balance between members, most notably France and Germany, as well as between the 'old' and 'new' members of the Union. To this extent, while the EU might experience an initial relief at the departure of the British, in the longer term it may in fact remove an important pressure valve that prevented other tensions from building up. This will need to be addressed.

Lastly, as many have noted, Brexit was in many ways a revolt. It marked the moment that many people, who felt that they had been let down by the system, took their chance to rebel. Brexit is actually rather little to do with the European Union. Rather, the referendum provided an opportunity for people to cast a protest vote against a whole range of things that they feel distinctly

<sup>6</sup> Marko Stojić, 'The 2016 Serbian Elections: The Triumph of 'Europe' or Eurosceptic Backlash', EPERN, 23 June 2016.

<sup>7</sup> 'EU faces Brexit 'contagion' as populist parties across Europe call for referendums', *The Telegraph*, 24 June 2016.

<sup>8</sup> 'EU membership support surges in Denmark after Brexit vote', *Independent*, 5 July 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Comment to the author, British official, July 2016.

unhappy about, such as economic inequality, declining public services and growing levels of immigration. This has brought to the fore the growing uneasiness about the growth of intolerance and ‘illiberal democracy’. At the same time, real worries are emerging about the increasing presence of far-right parties across the continent, such as Golden Dawn in Greece. The growth in xenophobia and nationalism is worrying wherever it occurs. It is particularly worrying in the context of the Western Balkans.

### **Conclusion**

On a number of levels, Brexit represents a very real challenge in the context of the Western Balkans. For Britain, it means the loss of its influence in the region. Whatever British officials might like to suggest, the reality is that the United Kingdom’s credibility in the region has now been undermined. Having lost the ability to shape the process of EU accession, it is going to be very hard for British officials to make their voice heard in the region, let alone be given the significance they currently enjoy. Of course, the UK will not completely disengage from the region. It will seek to use other forms of leverage. However, none of these will approximate to anything that even approaches the importance the country had while in the European Union. Meanwhile, the European Union will now face increasing questions about its future policies towards the region. Enlargement will necessarily feature in these debates. On balance, it seems that while we will see a far stronger commitment to expansion now, this will not in fact lead to a faster process of integration. Meanwhile, the EU faces difficulties arising from increasing Euroscepticism in the region. Without a credible accession prospect, there is a very real danger that Euroscepticism will grow. Finally, the rising tide of populism and illiberal democracy seen in many parts of the EU, and prevalent in the Brexit campaign in Britain, represent a challenge to peace and stability across the continent, including in the Western Balkans.

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# WESTERN BALKANS REGIONAL COOPERATION RESHAPED: FROM STYROFOAM PEACE TO GENUINE GRASS-ROOTS INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS

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“If you want to go fast – go alone,  
if you want to go far – go together.”  
*African Proverb*

A quarter of a century after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the development of regional cooperation in the Western Balkans seems to be an important precondition, and crucial catalyst, for the region’s path towards European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Taking into consideration the shared past, the rise of nationalism, authoritarianism and radicalism (all of which may set ‘ethnic traps’), as well as the worsening standards and quality of living, the need for strengthening multilateral ties in the Western Balkans is even more important. Nonetheless, without underestimating the success of greater connectivity and closeness compared to the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Western Balkans has fallen short of developing genuine cooperation. Evidently, Khaleda Zia, the second female Prime Minister in the Muslim world, was right in saying that some of the factors affecting effective regional cooperation are people’s mind-sets and perceptions emanating from the past. It appears that the ghosts of the past are haunting the present, depriving the Western Balkans of any chance to find a way out of the Yugoslav chaos. As such, for the Western Balkans to develop effective regional cooperation and emerge as promoters of inclusive, multi-ethnic, liberal societies, there is an urgent need for a serious rethinking of within and between country relations. In fact, for the Western Balkans to face forwards, the state at play demands a regional cooperation that extends beyond the political and economic spheres, and rather goes into decoding the old warring sides and developing inter-ethnic cooperation within and between societies, beyond the high political levels.

The aim of this paper is to draw the attention of relevant stakeholders to the importance of reviving the ‘inter-ethnic’ debate given the rise of non-democratic powers, and to suggest grass-roots level measures for genuine inter-ethnic cooperation. Initially, I provide a brief overview on the need for rethinking regional cooperation through the inclusion of an inter-ethnic dimension. By relying on the Macedonian case, I reflect on the effects of selectively approaching post-conflict situations and not engaging the wider society. Finally, keeping in mind the circumstances in the region, I suggest an initiative, which if implemented effectively, will complement the efforts being made to develop regional cooperation.

## **Need for Rethinking Regional Cooperation to Include an Inter-Ethnic Dimension**

Having buried the hatchets, the Western Balkans have embarked on revitalizing the multilateral ties and developing regional cooperation, which appear to be of immense importance, given their shared perspectives for the future. In fact, the Western Balkans has seen the rise of numerous intergovernmental initiatives focused on

promoting and improving cooperation in various areas such as economic development, energy and infrastructure, media, civil society, security, and many others, always linking them to European and Euro-Atlantic integration. While these initiatives certainly help develop regional cooperation, two issues hinder these efforts.

*First*, most of these initiatives are only implemented at high political levels, driven by elites, with limited to no inclusion of the lowest level actors, and in most cases, with little to no effects and benefit to the people. If one was to run a simple survey on people's familiarity with these initiatives and their effects on the societies in which they live, one would most probably be faced with negative results.

*Second*, while all of these initiatives revolve around issues that are of crucial importance to development within and between countries, it seems that they rest on the assumption that 'we need to go forwards without looking backwards', bypassing the development of programs exclusively related to improving inter-ethnic cooperation within and between countries. Numerous everyday examples may be utilized to showcase that the wounds from the decennial inter-ethnic conflicts and warfare, which ultimately led to the deaths of tens of thousands of people and the displacement of many more, are still far from being healed, and require proper and systematic treatment.

Despite the absence of open wars, the relative peace may easily be disturbed with the gust of challenges that are currently on the rise in the region, further emphasizing the importance of working on inter-ethnic cooperation. On the one hand, the idea of finally building their own nations and maintaining power has been more attractive to decision-makers than the creation of inclusive, multi-ethnic and liberal societies, which is evident in political party patronage, clientelism, corruption, devastated economies, ceiling unemployment and political crises, and provides fertile ground for the awakening of repressed inter-ethnic animosities. On the other hand, the rise of right-wing governments, nationalism, authoritarianism and the abuse of religion through the radicalization of certain groups, creates appropriate conditions for unburying the hatchets.

That being said, it becomes evident that reshaping the regional cooperation agenda, one that will go beyond political and economic cooperation, is a necessary step. For it to be effective, one has to go backwards into reviving the long-time forgotten debates on inter-ethnic cooperation, while simultaneously diving into inter-ethnic cooperation on the field through engagement with grass-roots actors.

### **Lessons of the Past: The Effects of Post-Conflict Deeds and Non-Deeds**

The outbreak of ethnic conflicts in post-Yugoslav countries interrupted the straightforward transition towards liberal democracies and market economies, turning the focus towards post-war regenerations. Through the case of Macedonia, this section brings to light the effects of the measures undertaken to overcome the conflicting situation. It emphasizes that the focus on institutional adaptations and the insensitivity to intangible issues related to adversaries' psychological needs, seem to have been, in the words of Dyrstad et al., inappropriate heuristics for tapping the progress of peaceful processes among the masses.<sup>1</sup>

To begin with, a closer look at the instruments utilized by respective authorities in Macedonia in the aftermath of the armed conflict in 2001 shows that formal and institutional processes have been tackled. Anticipating the devastating consequences in the event of a protracted conflict, the international community assured the quick ending of the conflict pressuring both Macedonian and Albanian political parties<sup>2</sup> to sign the Ohrid Framework Agreement (hereinafter: OFA). Clearly, with the obligation to 'disarm the rebels', socialize them and develop a law on amnesty, OFA minimized the post-conflict tensions. Even more, it ensured group-specific rights to the ethnic communities, simultaneously responding to Albanian demands for improving their status as "second class citizens"<sup>3</sup>. In accordance with OFA, sixteen constitutional amendments and a series of changes to the existing laws have been made, including the development of decentralized government bodies, the redrawing of municipality borders to fit their ethnic structure, non-discrimination and equitable representation in public administration, a double majority voting system on national and local levels for issues of special concern to ethnic communities, and the teaching in primary and secondary schools in the languages spoken by more than 20% of the population.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dyrstad, Karin, Halvard Buhaug, Kristen Ringdal, Albert Simkus, and Ola Listhaug. 2011. "Microfoundations of Civil Conflict Reconciliation: Ethnicity and Context." *International Interactions* 37 (4): 363–87. doi:10.1080/03050629.2011.622627.

<sup>2</sup> Maleska, Mirjana. 2013. "Multiethnic Democracy in Macedonia: Political Analysis and Emerging Scenarios." *New Balkan Politics*, no. 13: 1–27. And Vankovska, Biljana. 2006. "The Role of the Ohrid Framework Agreement and the Peace Process in Macedonia." *Regional Cooperation and Peace Enforcement and the Role of the Treaties in the Balkans*, 41–63.

<sup>3</sup> Vasilev, George. 2013. "Multiculturalism in Post-Ohrid Macedonia: Some Philosophical Reflections." *East European Politics and Societies* 27 (October). And Risteska, Marija, and Zhidas Daskalovski, eds. 2011. *One Decade after the Ohrid Framework Agreement: Lessons (to Be) Learned from the Macedonian Experience*. Skopje: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung & Center for Research and Policy Making.

<sup>4</sup> Ilievski, Zoran, and Stefan Wolff. 2011. "Consociationalism, Centripetalism and Macedonia." In *Lessons Learned and Challenges Ahead*, 2:31–44. Crossroads: The Macedonian Foreign Policy Journal. P. 32.

Seemingly, systematic mechanisms for grass-roots reconciliation, which would have assisted in the establishment of genuine peaceful inter-ethnic relations and healing the wounds between grass-roots actors,<sup>5</sup> have been completely absent from the agendas of state authorities. Indeed, formal terminations of conflicts are a determinative starting point<sup>6</sup> and a crucial catalyst.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, reconciliation differs from all other conflict-handling mechanisms in that it is a process – not a goal,<sup>8</sup> entailing a voluntary initiative of the parties to engage in a pursuit of changing identity, values, attitudes and patterns of interaction,<sup>9</sup> and securing the continuous orchestration of top-level and grass-roots post-war regeneration processes.<sup>10</sup>

A 2014 research study,<sup>11</sup> that identified the absence of such mechanisms, the negative effects over time, and the rising illiberal and non-democratic currents, asserts that it is of paramount importance that debates on inter-ethnic cooperation are revitalized, and more importantly, appropriate means are undertaken to achieve them, albeit in a delayed manner. Based on a socio-psychological understanding of inter- and intra-group relations in overcoming intra-state conflicts in divided societies, and following a sequential, mixed methodology, the study explored perceptions of reconciliation within and between Macedonians and Albanians, within and across nine multi-ethnic municipalities.

While the study has come to several conclusions of particular relevance to this paper, one of them cuts across all others findings. In assessing how the process of reconciliation is perceived within and between Macedonians and Albanians, within and across municipalities, the research found that the differences in perceptions are more pronounced between municipalities than within municipalities. Practically, Macedonians and Albanians residing in the same municipality generally have con-

vergent views, that is, it matters much more if an individual is a resident of Struga or Kumanovo, than if she is of Macedonian or Albanian descent. While this is in line with scholarly notions of greater in-group than out-group heterogeneity,<sup>12</sup> it also pinpoints the possibility for certain environments within both communities that may be susceptible to the influence of rising illiberal and nationalistic movements. To illustrate this, Kumanovo municipality appeared to be the least reconciled of the nine municipalities investigated, which incidentally coincides with the 2015 deadly clashes between the Macedonian police forces and a group allegedly part of the National Liberation Army.

In assessing what explains the different levels of reconciliation through a comparison of the least and the most reconciled municipalities – Kumanovo and Struga – the study came to three conclusions relevant to this paper.

*First*, it revealed a striking difference in the perceptions of the interviewees on primary socialization – that is, parents' behavior and the image they present to their children, is what initially lays the foundations for their inter-ethnic relations. For example, the confession of Kumanovo children that there have been times when their parents advised them to keep away from the out-group children so as to avoid conflicts, confirms the existence of trans-generational stereotyping, which ultimately hinders cooperation in a region comprised of multi-ethnic societies.

*Second*, it found that Kumanovo interviewees, contrary to those from Struga, consider separation of schools on an ethnic basis, as a “good protective measure against inter-ethnic clashes”<sup>13</sup>. This indicates potential problems of citizens living parallel lives and raises concerns over the prospects of being able to create a shared future.

*Third*, interviewees' perceptions of national identity yielded differences between the perceptions of Kumanovo interviewees from the post-conflict institutional model adopted. The claim of Kumanovo interviewees that Macedonia belongs to them and not their respective out-group, which has attempted to take over their parts of the municipality, seems to contain nascent nationalist views that could be easily instrumentalized. Eventually, the role of the authorities in implementing the OFA provisions in practice has taken its toll.

Taking into consideration that the design of the methodology of this study is not bounded to a particular culture, it can be used to analyze other divided societies. In

<sup>5</sup> Frckoski, Ljubomir D. 2011. “Reconciliation and Transitional Justice in Macedonia, Ten Years Later.” *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 2 (3): 43–51. doi:10.5901/mjss.2011.v2n3p43.

<sup>6</sup> Hjort, Hanna. 2004. *Ethnic Identity and Reconciliation: Two Main Tasks for the Young in Bosnia-Herzegovina*. Working Paper No. 11. Department of Psychology/Social Anthropology Göteborg University.

<sup>7</sup> Bar-Tal, Daniel. 2000a. “From Intractable Conflict through Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation: Psychological Analysis.” *Political Psychology* 21 (2): 351–65.

<sup>8</sup> Ross, Marc Howard, and T Hermann. 2004. “Ritual and the Politics of Reconciliation.” In *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, edited by Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov. Oxford University Press.

<sup>9</sup> Merwe, Hugo van der. 1999. *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Community Reconciliation: An Analysis of Competing Strategies and Conceptualizations*. George Mason University.

<sup>10</sup> Beč-Neumann, Janja. 2007. *Darkness at Noon: War Crimes, Genocides and Memories Course*. Center for Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Studies, University of Sarajevo. And Lederach, John Paul. 1997. *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*.

<sup>11</sup> Bogatinovska, Sanja. 2014. *Grass-Root Level Perceptions on the Process of Reconciliation in the Multi-Ethnic Municipalities in Macedonia*. Master Thesis. Department of Political Science. Central European University. Budapest.

<sup>12</sup> Phinney, Jean S. 1996. “When We Talk about American Ethnic Groups, What Do We Mean?” *American Psychologist* 51 (9): 918–27.

<sup>13</sup> UNICEF. 2009. *Progress Report on Support for UNICEF's Education in Emergencies and Post-Crisis Transition Programme*. Prepared for the Government of Netherlands by UNICEF the former Republic of Macedonia. p. 14.

conducting such a study in the entire Western Balkans region, one could very well expect similar results to be found, especially bearing in mind the common heritage.

Finally, the research has come to striking conclusions which highlight the idea that working on inter-ethnic cooperation within and between countries complements existing efforts, and remains to be the only way towards developing inclusive, liberal and multi-ethnic societies that can bear the challenges of present times.

#### **The Time is Now? [Returning Back] Grass-Roots Inter-Ethnic Cooperation on the Regional Agenda**

From today's point of view, with exceptions and some degree of improvement, generally speaking, the countries in the Balkans seem to be in a state that is well explained by Galtung's concept of negative peace,<sup>14</sup> that is, the absence of war or conflict, but not mutual understanding and crossing of ethnic lines. Taking into consideration that the 'preoccupation' with institutional design and system effects has resulted in "too little concern for how the post-conflict processes affect people",<sup>15</sup> the current situation on identity group relations in the Balkans becomes clear. That notwithstanding, discussions regarding grass-roots interethnic cooperation seem to have faded away from the public discourse a long time ago. Simultaneously, the public discourse is increasingly being loaded with nationalistic and ethnocentric rhetoric, putting the unresolved inter-ethnic relations at stake and hampering the Western Balkans' way towards EU enlargement.

To overcome these challenges, and for the Western Balkans to achieve effective and comprehensive regional cooperation, the creation of an initiative exclusively about grass-roots inter-ethnic cooperation is essential. More precisely, the establishment of a Regional Office for Grass-Roots Inter-Ethnic Cooperation between the Western Balkan countries would mark a huge step forwards and complement efforts to complete the measures undertaken in post-war regenerations. Its aim would be to promote and strengthen within and between countries' ties, between people across ethnic lines, by employing appropriate mechanisms.

Building upon lessons from the past, the selection of stakeholders that would drive the initiative forwards is of paramount importance. In the aftermath of the post-Yugoslav wars, the political elites have failed to demonstrate sufficient political will to recover the social fabric. While it is necessary for the 'national' political

elites and power center to come to terms with each other in embarking on such a journey and declare their clear agreement on the establishment of such a structure, their lethargy on this issue leads me to believe that only if the process is being led and guaranteed by external actors will it not be doomed to fail. In fact, the lead by the EU or Germany and France, may serve as an additional source of inspiration for the benefit of such initiatives, while at the same time lending credibility to any real actions it undertakes. More so, while civil society has been weak and decision-makers were the ones with the threads in their hands after the post-Yugoslav war, the genuine inclusion and involvement of members of civil society who will be tasked to coordinate the grass-roots work, ensures that the initiative will be driven by values rather than national and political interests. The strict 'focus' of this initiative of the people being the main beneficiaries, rests upon Lederach's reasoning<sup>16</sup> that the attention shall be on building new and better relationships between former enemies, as it is the relationships that are both the root-cause and the long-term solution of conflict. As Saunders states "only governments can write peace treaties, but only human beings – citizens outside government – can transform conflictive relationships into peaceful relationships"<sup>17</sup>.

The areas of cooperation within the framework of this initiative shall revolve around the elements of a peace-making process through which societies move from a divided past to a shared future.<sup>18</sup> Given that a secure future cooperation cannot take place without 'looking backwards',<sup>19</sup> one stream of cooperation shall be tasked to work on issues such as acknowledging and dealing with the past,<sup>20</sup> personal healing of the directly affected,<sup>21</sup> legitimization of the 'other's' truth, and viability of the solution to the conflicts at the time. Another stream shall look into intergroup emotions, feelings of hate, fear, and loathing, views of the other as dangerous and subhuman, desire for revenge and retribution,<sup>22</sup> tol-

<sup>14</sup> Galtung, J. 1967. Theories of Peace. A Synthetic Approach to Peace Thinking. International Peace Research Institute. Oslo. p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> Chapman, Audrey R., and David Backer. 2009. "Cross-National Comparative Analysis." In *Assessing the Impact of Transitional Justice: Challenges for Empirical Research*, edited by Hugo Van der Merwe and Victoria Baxter, 23-89. U.S. Institute of Peace Press. p. 66.

<sup>16</sup> Lederach, John Paul. 1997. *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. p. 30.

<sup>17</sup> Clark, Mary E. 2005. *In Search of Human Nature*. Routledge. p. 339.

<sup>18</sup> Bloomfield, David, Teresa Barnes, and Luc Huyse. 2003. "Reconciliation After Violent Conflict. A Handbook". Stockholm: International IDEA. 12-21.

<sup>19</sup> Cox, Michael, Adrian Guelke, and Fiona Stephen. 2006. *A Farewell to Arms? Beyond the Good Friday Agreement, Second Edition*. Manchester University Press.

<sup>20</sup> Kelman, Herbert C. 2010. "Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation: A Social-Psychological Perspective on Ending Violent Conflict between Identity Groups." *Landscapes of Violence* 1 (1): 5; And Romocea, Cristian G. 2003. "A Strategy for Social Reconciliation in the Ethnic Conflict in Transylvania." *Religion in Eastern Europe* 23 (5): 1-30.

<sup>21</sup> Staub, Ervin, and Laurie Anne Pearlman. 2005. "Healing, Reconciliation, Forgiving and the Prevention of Violence after Genocide or Mass Killing: An Intervention and Its Experimental Evaluation in Rwanda." *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology - J SOC CLIN PSYCHOL* 24 (3): 297-334. doi:10.1521/jsoc.24.3.297.656.17.

<sup>22</sup> Kriesberg, Louise. 1998. "Coexistence and the Reconciliation of Communal Conflicts." In *The Handbook of Interethnic Coexist-*



erance,<sup>23</sup> and trust in the ‘other’.<sup>24</sup> Finally, the framework shall encompass issues that ‘face forwards’ into developing a shared vision of a shared future, willingness for collaboration and willingness to forgive.<sup>25</sup>

To complement the above activities, the establishment of an office as a center from which to devise programs tailored by the situation in the field is essential. With the aim of advancing the efforts of the initiative, the center will be tasked with periodically exploring how inter-ethnic cooperation between and within countries’ societies is made and unmade in everyday interactions, provide recommendations for the modification of programs, and evaluate their success against set goals.

### Concluding Remarks

The aim of this paper was to propose a rethinking of regional cooperation within and between Western Balkan countries by moving beyond political and economic cooperation to put inter-ethnic cooperation on the political agenda and focus on the development of an initiative exclusively created to deal with developing inter-ethnic cooperation at the grass-roots level. The shortcomings of existing initiatives on the one hand, and the anomalies of incomprehensive and selective employment of conflict-handling mechanisms on the other against the background of current trends, may, with little effort, awaken the ghosts of the past, and disrupt the efforts made so far. For this to be avoided, the establishment of a regional office for grass-roots inter-ethnic Cooperation between the Western Balkan countries seems to be a ticket towards effective and complete regional cooperation.

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ence, edited by Eugene Weiner and Alan B. Slifka. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group. p. 84.

<sup>23</sup> Shnabel, Nurit, and Arie Nadler. 2008. “A Needs-Based Model of Reconciliation: Satisfying the Differential Emotional Needs of Victim and Perpetrator as a Key to Promoting Reconciliation.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 94 (1): 116–32. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.94.1.116.

<sup>24</sup> Gibson, James. 2004a. “Does Truth Lead to Reconciliation? Testing the Causal Assumptions of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Process.” *American Journal of Political Science* 48 (2): 201–17. p. 202.

<sup>25</sup> Bar-Tal, Daniel. 2000. “From Intractable Conflict through Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation: Psychological Analysis.” *Political Psychology* 21 (2): 351–65, p. 358.

# REGIONAL COOPERATION IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE: A DEAD-END OR A NEW AVENUE?

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## Introduction

Regional cooperation in Southeast Europe<sup>2</sup> is moderately institutionalized under the umbrella of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC).

RCC's reports provide a concise overview of the state of regional cooperation, but do not offer in depth analysis of the weaknesses and strengths of the process. There is lack of up to date comprehensive studies about regional cooperation in Southeast Europe (SEE).

Some previous research in assessing the state of regional cooperation is outdated.<sup>3</sup> Other research has a very narrow focus, looking only at a single issue,<sup>4</sup> or tries to conceptualize the process of transnationalism in SEE.<sup>5</sup> Some authors put forward the importance of international actors, notably the EU, in fostering regional cooperation in SEE,<sup>6</sup> while others look at how national institutions across the Western Balkan countries implement regional cooperation initiatives.<sup>7</sup> There is an increasing understanding that regional cooperation in SEE is both a multi-actor and multi-level process.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, the geographical understanding of Southeast Europe includes the countries of former Yugoslavia, minus Slovenia and plus Albania, which is synonymous and interchangeable with the social and politically constructed Western Balkans region.

<sup>3</sup> Anastasakis, Othon and Bojicic, Dzelilovic, Vesna (2002): *Balkan Regional Cooperation & European Integration*. London: London School of Economic and Political Science. Grupe, Claudia and Kušić, Siniša (2005): Intra-regional Cooperation in the Western Balkans: Under Which Conditions Does it Foster Economic Progress?, in: *Discussion Paper 37, Centre for the Study of Global Governance*. London: LSE. Delevic, Milica (2007): Regional Cooperation in the Western Balkans, in: *Chaillot Paper No104*. Paris: Institute for Security Studies.

<sup>4</sup> Stubos, George and Tsikripis, Ioannis (2008): Regional Integration Challenges in South East Europe: Banking Sector Trends, in: *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 7:1, 57-81. London: Routledge; available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14683850701189329>.

<sup>5</sup> Oktem, Kerem and Bechev, Dimitar (2006): (Trans)Nationalism in Southeast Europe: Constructing, Transcending and Reinforcing Borders, in: *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 6:4, 479-482. London: Routledge; available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14683850601016341>.

<sup>6</sup> Bechev, Dimitar (2006): Carrots, Sticks and Norms: The EU and Regional Cooperation in Southeast Europe, in: *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans Online*, 8:1, 27-43. London: Routledge; available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14613190600595515>. Bastian, Jens (2008): 'Cry Wolf' No More: External Anchors and Internal Dynamics in the Western Balkans, in: *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 8:4, 325-344. London: Routledge; available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14683850802556368>. Bastian, Jens (2011): Cross-border Cooperation in the Western Balkans – Roadblocks and Prospects, in: *TransConflict Online* (16.03.2011), available at: <http://www.transconflict.com/2011/03/cbc-wb-roadblocks-prospects-163/> (last accessed on 22.04.2012).

<sup>7</sup> Dehnert, Stefan and Taleski, Dane (eds.) (2013): *Monitoring Regional Cooperation in Southeast Europe*, Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

<sup>8</sup> Stubbs, Paul and Solioz, Christophe (eds.) (2012): Towards Open Regionalism in South East Europe, in: *Southeast European Integration Perspectives*, vol. 6. Baden-Baden: Nomos.

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### Mapping the Field

It has been argued that regional cooperation in SEE is driven by external and local motivations as well as top-down and bottom-up approaches.<sup>9</sup> The argument is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Motivations and approaches to regional cooperation in SEE

	External	Local
Top-down	Stability Pact, Berlin Process	SEECF
Bottom-up	CEFTA, Energy Community, MARRI	Igman initiative, RECOM

The argument is that regional cooperation in SEE was initiated by external actors (i.e. the EU and the U.S.) and was driven by security concerns in the 1990s. Euro-Atlantic integration was a strong impetus for regional cooperation. As a result, regional cooperation is most advanced in policy areas that are interlinked with EU and NATO integration, for example, in security and justice, and home affairs. However, over time, the focus of regional cooperation shifted to economic, infrastructure, and social development. The Berlin Process, the most recent impetus for regional cooperation, again comes as an external top-down initiative. Top-down approaches (i.e. national government’s initiatives) created a multitude of new initiatives, but they lack commitment. On the other hand, bottom-up approaches (i.e. civil society initiatives) based on common goals and interests (e.g. reconciliation) show genuine enthusiasm and sufficient capacity to advance regional cooperation.

### Mapping the Stakeholders

In general, there are three types of stakeholders: governments, business, and civil society. The governments are the main actors in the process of regional cooperation. The EU and the RCC are inter-governmental organizations in charge of coordination of regional cooperation initiatives (this is especially true for the RCC). Regional cooperation between governments is developed in different policy dimensions. Regional cooperation between business actors is interest driven, mainly in trade and investments and usually does not receive the highest public and media attention. Regional cooperation between civil society actors encompasses different social development areas (e.g. education, reconciliation, EU integration, culture, youth, environment) and is based on growing vibrant regional civil society organization (CSO) networks.

Notwithstanding that businesses have a significant underutilized potential to advance regional cooperation, it is civil society actors who seem most dedicated to enhancing regional cooperation in SEE. In addition, regional cooperation between civil society actors contributes toward building a shared regional identity. This directly contributes toward amassing political will to alleviate outstanding impediments to regional cooperation (e.g. bilateral disputes) and to sustain and increase regional cooperation.

### Mapping the Issues

A plethora of regional initiatives span a range of issues under the RCC umbrella. These initiatives tackle security and the rule of law, trade and economic cooperation, energy and infrastructure, humanitarian relief and disaster management, education, culture, and tourism and all have a significant parliamentary dimension. Most recently, the RCC, with the promotion of the “SEE 2020” strategy, has tried to focus regional cooperation on economic growth and development. However, the multitude of regional cooperation initiatives did not necessarily create a tangible outcome or produce structured and institutionalized cooperation. Ruling elites in SEE, have been criticized for failing to commit to regional cooperation initiatives, doing no more than paying lip service to them in order to meet their accession obligations. At the same time, national governments do not have the necessary capacities to implement the various regional cooperation initiatives. Even though it seemed that regional ownership was growing and the scope of cooperation was expanding, in reality more needs to be done to feel the benefits.

A strong external motivation to advance regional cooperation came from the “Berlin Process” in 2014. The German Government initiated a summit meeting between high-level officials from the Western Balkans, EU institutions and some EU member states to maintain the EU integration momentum in the region, improve regional cooperation and good governance, and promote sustainable economic growth.<sup>10</sup> A follow-up meeting was organized in Vienna in August 2015. It resulted in the creation of concrete projects in infrastructure and connectivity in transport and energy, regional cooperation, and youth exchange.<sup>11</sup> At the Vienna summit, Ministers of Foreign Affairs from the Western Balkans signed a declaration that they will work together to solve the outstanding issues and that they will not allow the remaining bilateral disputes to obstruct the process of EU enlargement and regional cooperation. The declaration was prepared by experts from the Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG) at the initiative

<sup>9</sup> Bechev, Dimitar, Ejduš, Filip and Taleski, Dane (2015): “Culture of regional cooperation in Southeast Europe”, Analytical Paper, Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG), Belgrade: European Fund for the Balkans.

<sup>10</sup> “Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans”, 08/28/2014, <http://bit.ly/1Ww305Z>.

<sup>11</sup> For more see the Federal Ministry for European Integration and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Austria, <http://bit.ly/1Lyf2Hc>.

of the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The signing of the declaration was more of a symbolic gesture. Little has been done to uphold the declaration in practice.

The last of the Western Balkans summit series was held in Paris in July 2016. It brought new issues to the table, such as migration, green growth, and the environment. Migration was a very topical and important issue. The migrant/refugee crisis showed that the Western Balkan countries are an integral part of the European security infrastructure. The Western Balkan countries, with very limited capacities and resources, played a key role in managing the transit of migrants/refugees. In that respect, the lack of a common EU policy about how to handle the migrant/refugee crisis and the diverging member states' approaches were not at all helpful. The capacities and practices that have been developed between the EU and Western Balkan countries to manage the crisis need to be sustained and improved. The final declaration of the Paris summit reiterated this point, but fell short of providing policy guidance to operationalize it.<sup>12</sup>

The summit in Paris further advanced the agreed infrastructure connectivity agenda and announced three new railway projects. More investments to improve energy efficiency infrastructure and to explore the hydropower potential of the region were also announced. A major outcome of the Paris summit was the official establishment of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), with its headquarters in Tirana. RYCO's aim is to advance youth mobility in the region. It is built on the experience of the Franco-German youth cooperation, and it is seen as an important element for reconciliation and long-term confidence building.

One should note that efforts have been made to make the Berlin Process more inclusive. At the Vienna summit, a Civil Society Forum was held that called the governments of the Western Balkans to accept civil society as an equal partner in the EU integration process. Civil society organizations expressed a willingness to contribute to regional cooperation by dealing with the past and building confidence in the region. They offered their networks to serve as pillars of regional cooperation and to push for EU reforms. A second Civil Society Forum was held in Paris, which offered support in dealing with migration, solving bilateral disputes, supporting regional youth cooperation, promoting green growth, and reinforcing democratization. Parallel business and youth forums were also held in Paris, however, there was little interaction between the official summit and the forums. The structures of cooperation between civil

society representatives and governing officials remain unclear, and so does the impact of the former in the official policy making process – both at the national and regional level.

### The Challenges

EU enlargement fatigue: EU enlargement has not been a popular topic in the past several years. It is not an important policy priority for EU member states and not even for EU institutions. The President of the EU Commission was explicit that there are no expectations for enlargement in the near future, and the downsizing of the European Commission's enlargement directorate reinforced this statement. The attention of the EU was caught in the financial and institutional crisis and in managing the Greek financial collapse. The recent, most unfortunate, Brexit will make things even worse. The UK was one of the few enlargement proponents and its leaving the Union does not convey a good message for enlargement policy. As a consequence of enlargement fatigue, political leaders across SEE countries have lost the appetite to promote and enhance regional cooperation. A major risk is that the Berlin Process may become a "paper tiger".

Erosion of democracy in SEE: People have low trust in all public institutions, and especially elected ones (i.e. parliament, government, presidents), while political parties are the lowest trusted institutions.<sup>13</sup> Freedom House's "Nations in Transit 2015" report shows that democracy is either in decline or is stagnating in individual countries.<sup>14</sup> The Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2016 labels countries in the region as defective democracies.<sup>15</sup> The report says that in these countries it is the hour of populists, there is oligarchization of politics, and the democratic consensus is in danger. In addition, as democracy erodes across SEE, the main political initiatives to advance regional cooperation become technocratic and policy specific. The democratization of SEE was supposed to be sustained through the advancement of regional cooperation. Now, while SEE politicians pay lip service to Brussels, the vision and mission of regional cooperation risks becoming an empty vessel.

Bilateral disputes: Remaining bilateral disputes impede regional cooperation. In 2015, the European Commission pointed out that there are pending problems with border demarcation, and historical and political (i.e. minorities) issues that overshadow EU membership prospects. At the Vienna summit efforts were made to

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<sup>12</sup> For more see "Final Declaration by the Chair of the Paris Western Balkans Summit" (4 July 2016), France Diplomatie – French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development (available at <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/countryfiles/balkans/events/article/finaldeclarationbythechairofthepariswesternbalkanssummit0406-16>).

<sup>13</sup> Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). *Balkan Barometer 2015*. Public Opinion Survey, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Freedom House, *Nations in Transit 2015* (available at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/nations-transit-2015-.WGpesxTEJW9>).

<sup>15</sup> Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2016 (available at <http://www.bti-project.org/en/home/>).

overcome some bilateral disputes. For example, Montenegro and Kosovo signed a border demarcation agreement. In addition, there was a breakthrough in negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo, and an agreement was reached to allow the Association of Serbian municipalities to be formed in Kosovo. However, there has been strong and violent opposition in Kosovo against implementation of the agreement. Thus, bilateral disputes remain a great challenge – it is a challenge not only to agree to resolve any disputes, but also to actually implement the agreement, as the Kosovo example shows. An especially difficult challenge are bilateral disputes between EU member states and accession countries, due to the asymmetry of power. There is a need for greater engagement, creativity, and a lot of good will to overcome the present situation.

Lack of inclusion: Regional cooperation needs long-term commitments and political elites have short-term priorities. Some elites may be tempted to obstruct the advancement of regional cooperation if they consider that it will maximize their electoral support. There is not only the case of the opposition in Kosovo, governments across the Western Balkan countries are oftentimes more inclined to engage in nationalistic discourses and practices than they are willing to invest in good neighborly relations. The advancement of regional cooperation cannot be left only as a task for the political elite.

It is essential to broaden the scope of actors that can develop and promote regional cooperation activities. Business entities have strong incentives and interests to advance regional cooperation. They need a more inviting regulatory framework and more opportunities to assume stronger leadership in advancing regional cooperation. In addition, there is a lack of support for civil society activities and civil society networks that support regional cooperation. Civil society organizations are not accepted as equal partners in policy making, especially on the national level in SEE countries, and they have scarce funding.

### The Opportunities

Citizens' expectations: People in SEE want to see the advancement of regional cooperation and have high expectations from it. According to the Regional Cooperation Council's Balkan Barometer 2015, 60% of citizens in the region want to see more regional cooperation and 76% believe that improved regional cooperation can positively affect the economy.<sup>16</sup> An agenda that seeks to overcome the existing bilateral disputes, promotes regional cooperation, and offers a credible perspective for development in the future is likely to find high public support. It is not to say the political elites will stop us-

ing nationalism, protectionism, and introvert policy orientations to perpetuate the status quo, or that their perpetuating messages will diminish in importance in the public view. However, citizens are tired of the same messages, and in a situation where their standard of living is stagnating and their life chances are not improving, they probably want to change the tune.

The Berlin Process: The initiative reinvigorated the momentum for EU accession and regional cooperation. It created a process and raised expectations. It also provided a list of priorities and a road map to the aspired outcomes. Further, tools to address concrete issues and specific projects have been developed along the way. The Berlin Process brought a new quality in regional cooperation. The previous efforts to advance regional cooperation created an elaborate institutional framework to facilitate regional cooperation. Now, the Berlin Process is facilitating the production of tangible outcomes that are beneficial for all.

However, the Berlin Process needs to move the focus beyond technical issues. Across the region, there is a need to improve good governance and strengthen the rule of law. This is indispensable to ensure the commitments made to improve transport and infrastructure can be implemented. Further, it would be beneficial if the EU can create incentives for SEE governments to commit to implementation of Berlin Process' projects and if the EU can develop instruments to monitor their implementation. For example, if the countries in the region are allowed to integrate in the EU sectorally, say in transport and energy, then this would increase their commitment to the Berlin Process' projects and would give the European Commission a way for it to monitor their behavior.

In addition, the renewed interest in regional cooperation creates opportunities for business entities and civil society organizations to contribute. They can act as a "second track" to advance regional cooperation. However, relevant processes and structures of cooperation need to be developed on the regional and national level to utilize bottom-up regional cooperation.

Experience and networks: Bottom-up regional cooperation, based mainly on initiatives from civil society organizations, is thriving. It is based on common interests and goals, and is fostering a shared culture and sense of belonging. In addition, there is a multitude of regional civil society networks, both cross-cutting and policy-related networks. However, these resources are not being fully utilized in official policy making. There is a need to create greater interactions between civil society's regional cooperation initiatives, including business ones, and government-led regional cooperation initiatives. The aim should not be to synergize the efforts, but rather to strengthen the sustainability of regional cooperation so that the effects trickle down to everyday life.

<sup>16</sup> Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). "Balkan Barometer 2015," <http://bit.ly/1DVJcKF>.

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# RADICALIZATION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS A.D. 2016: CHALLENGES AND SUGGESTIONS.

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**R**adicalism and radicalization in the Western Balkans are multifaceted phenomena and should be treated as such. They can be observed in politics, faith/religion, culture, and social relations. Although every aspect of radicalism is different, as a whole, it causes political and social destabilization. The nature and scope of this short paper do not allow for a comprehensive review of the issues. Therefore, just a few aspects will be considered, but this does not mean that other issues are less relevant.

Since the early 1990s, the Western Balkans has been fertile ground for various types of radicalism. In this context, for example, religion in the region remains a significant political concern. People do not live spiritually in political life, but politically in spiritual life! In addition, nationalist resentment absorbs and abuses the emotions and memories of believers. However, radicalism has not always had religious connotations. Political myths, as nothing more than a mixture of half-truths and superstition (Hannah Arendt), are also a means of radicalization of politics and restoration of disturbed social identity. We know that new identities are born when an existing historical environment collapses. They blossom in the social vacuum that is created.

Since the early 1990s, the new states that emerged from the ruins of former Yugoslavia have been treated merely as objects not subjects of international politics and international relations. Often this has been the case also in the states' internal policies. The last 25 years of "Europeanization" in the region can be viewed as a prioritization of stabilization at the cost of democratization. Because of the belief that the situation in the region has been fragile in many ways, there was (and still is) a tendency to tolerate many undemocratic social phenomena, immaturity and irresponsibility of the political elite in the region. This especially applies to the cases of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Kosovo. So far, the "soft" Western approach has legitimized and reinforced this. The European principles of compromise and consensus, due to a sui generis erosion of criteria and conditionality, seem to be devoid of content. In the societies of the Western Balkans there is no awareness of EU accession as a historical process that involves complex changes to society. The fault partly lies with the EU and its policies in the region. Because of changes in priorities, a crisis of its own identity, an unclear vision of development, and errors in judgment and activities in the region, the EU has failed to present itself as the preferred provider of development assistance in the same way as it did in the 1990s.

Therefore, today we can speak of radicalization tendencies in both religious and political terms, as they are two sides of the same coin. In general, our times are times of strictly defined nation-states serving as fertile ground for an exclusive political constitution and a growing pressure of religious feelings and historical resentments.

In the case of the Western Balkans, we have a reductionist conception of religion as an instrument of ethnic mobilization and power that shapes political discourse; very small (if any) awareness of political state patriotism (especially in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina); and last but not least, stronger than ever identification with outer “protectors”, all of which can serve as fuel for radicalization. The last however seems to be particularly interesting: old geostrategic appetites in the world are guided increasingly to the East but also in the direction of the Balkans. Currently, the region is a subject of at least four geopolitical concepts: Atlanticism with the USA and NATO, Continentalism (especially with its German middle-European version), Putin’s Euroasianism and Erdogan’s Neo-Ottomanism. The first two are related to Euro-Atlantic integration processes. The latter two are good examples of mythological conceptions of mutual, centuries old, Serbian-Russian or Bosniak-Turkish, relations. This not only explains, at first glance, the incomprehensible popularity of Putin and Russia among Serbs, and the similar popularity of Erdogan and Turkey among Bosniaks. The phenomenon indirectly proves the political impotency of local political actors to authentically change and improve the lives of ordinary people. Connected with the above-mentioned weaknesses of the EU and “Europeanization”, it is no wonder that there is a general willingness for political, religious and cultural identification with the two powers.

Regarding Islamic radicalization in the region, it should be noted that this phenomenon is strictly related to the issue of Muslim identity in the context of the interaction of religious, ethnic and national identity within the complex ethnic and religious networks in the Balkans. After years of relative isolation within the Communist system, the Balkans’ Muslims were unprepared to deal with a variety of Islamic ideas, ideologies, sects and other social phenomena introduced to them during the early 1990s. If we add to it poor socio-economic conditions of the newly born post-Yugoslav countries (unemployment and poverty, inadequate infrastructure, migration from rural to urban areas [especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia], and demographic growth within the Muslim population), then we have favorable conditions for rebel, political and religious radicalization. In this context, the influence of the Salafi movement (also called the Wahhabis) in the region should not be underestimated in any case. Sources sponsoring this type of radical Islam, such as various Islamic transnational associations, are mostly the same in the entire region. There is a problem with Islamic radicalism in the region through the number of supporters fighting in Syria for ISIS (officially 330 from BiH, 70 from southern Serbian province of Raška/Sandžak mainly inhabited by Muslims, 100-150 from Kosovo, 15 from Macedonia, and 90 from Albania). Islamic Community officials officially distance themselves from the actions of Islamic terrorism but do not condemn Wahhabism as such. Even some Islamic religious

teachers give them tacit support. I am afraid that the ISIL and other extremist Islamic groups that are active in recruiting fighters for Syria by aggressive religious indoctrination are aware that there is no serious security system that can oppose them. This particularly applies to such countries as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia. At the same time, there are no signs of any kind of de-radicalization processes within Muslim populations. I do not notice any serious public appearances of Muslim religious and political leaders who would instigate the process of de-radicalization.

Nevertheless, there is no serious threat of large-scale organized military action from the ISIL branch in the region. The real threat remains in terrorist actions of so-called “lone wolves” that could strike at any time and any place in the region, which is completely in accordance with the new phase of global terrorism. Doubtless, it is a problem various security agencies in the Western Balkan countries will cope with in the upcoming years.

Another phenomenon should be noted when it comes to radical Islam in the region. Although still “showy”, most actors with even the faintest connection to transnational Arab Islamic networks and Salafi forms of Islam are being slowly but progressively “squeezed out” of the Balkans. This operation has not been done with particular solicitude, but it seems that the “glorious days” of such movements have gone. Generally speaking, Wahhabis and other Islamic radicals constitute a small minority, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is not the Islamic Neo-fundamentalism that we are dealing with in Western Europe, where second or third generation young Muslims experience this feeling of being “born again”. In places where religion stays in close connection with its native culture (as in Bosnia and Herzegovina), the situation is much more stable and under control. It is quite the opposite when religion is separated from its native culture as it can then create the “abstract” Islam alleged to “global umma”, where “born again” Muslims quickly pass Sharia courses in Mosques and overnight become fighters for “Islam” anywhere around the world. Therefore, some<sup>1</sup> even talk about “Wahhabi intermezzo” in the history of Islam in the region.

Today Turkey enters the scene as a political and economic regional power. Regardless of the specific influence and penetration of Wahhabi (Arabic) and Iranian Shia Islam in the Balkans during and after the wars in the former Yugoslavia, Turkey remained the “first to call” neighbor in the Islamic world to the Balkan Muslims. It is viewed, not only by its American and European allies but also states with major Muslim population such as Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and (partly)

<sup>1</sup> Kerem Öktem, “New Islamic Actors After the Wahhabi Intermezzo: Turkey’s Return to the Muslim Balkans”, University of Oxford Press 2010.

Macedonia, as a country capable of promoting a ‘European-type’ ‘moderate Islam’ in the region. This is completely in compliance with the Turkish Neo-Ottomanism geostrategic concept, particularly after the political turmoil in that country in July 2016.

In my opinion, the biggest and most serious challenge we face today in the Western Balkans is the radicalization of politics. There are (already mentioned) three “hot-spots” in the region where even military conflicts cannot be dismissed: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Macedonia. While after 2000, we witnessed a ‘wave of democratization’ in the region, I am afraid that currently we are seeing the process reversed. Hidden, but chauvinist, ignorant nationalism smolders on in the Balkans waiting only for blinkered politicians to fan it into a blaze. There are two components the international community should apply in its policy towards the Western Balkans. Unfortunately, the first one remains the security-military component. Its main role is to prevent any military conflicts, illegal activities and act against any kind of terrorism. Its purpose is to give a sense of security and system stability for the people in the region. The second one is a political component, which must be used by the international community to convince people, in their currently pretty shaken faith, that Euro-Atlantic perspectives are realistic and a better and prosperous life is possible. Another dimension of fundamental significance is a strategic shift in the West’s approach to the Western Balkans’ political problems. The strategy “First peace and prosperous life, then status” turned out to be wrong and fruitless. Based on the historical experience of the peoples of the Western Balkans, status issues are extremely important and should be a priority. If we want the Western Balkans to be a stable and prosperous region, we must stop supporting the agony of a forced and inefficient coexistence. The strategy of forcing too many different ethnic groups into a single political framework should be replaced by a strategy of greater respect for the principle of self-determination. In the case of Kosovo, it would be necessary to establish autonomy (and internationally control it) for the Community of Serb Municipalities without changing Kosovo’s borders. In the case of Macedonia, the only reasonable solution would be a sui generis federal concept. It would be necessary to find a balance between the principle of self-determination and a principle of immutability of borders. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, each of the three ethnic groups should have a high degree of autonomy within the country.

If destiny is, in the words of Hegel, the necessity that was not understood, then the geo-historical destiny of the Western Balkans has not only been a consequence of its geographical and geopolitical location, it has been a result of many factors, both external and internal. These include: the unique features of the development of geo-cultures, the deeply rooted collective psychology of the Balkan peoples, their contemporary cultural orientation, their chosen development strategy as well as

the activities of their elites in power.<sup>2</sup> The main issue is that the myths, which too often have had a decisive role in politics in the Western Balkans, would have ceased to play a key role if the policy of the international community was strong, well-structured and persistent. Another suggestion is that the experiences shared by people in other regions with different cultural traditions cannot be replicated in the Western Balkans. This is a mistake that various empires in distant history and socialism in the recent past have repeated. And the international community has done the same today. If we want a lasting and stable peace with political stabilization in this region, we must take into account the specificities that would elsewhere be irrelevant.

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<sup>2</sup> Marko Babić, *Dylematy tożsamości jako źródła (nie)porozumienia. Balkany i Unia Europejska*, in: Borkowski, Paweł, Gołębowski, Franciszek, (eds.), *My i Oni, Problemy tożsamości w jednoczącej się Europie*, Katedra Europeistyki, Wydział Dziennikarstwa i Nauk Politycznych, Uniwersytet Warszawski 2011.



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# PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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## Introduction

The doctrinal shift from classical anti-terrorism measures to countering violent extremism is gradually being embraced in the policy-making circles of the Western Balkans. To recall, this conceptual shift was introduced – at least nominally – at the Obama Summit on Countering Violent Extremism in 2015. The Summit concluded that coercive means and typical anti-terrorism measures are only some of the tools to counter the rise of extremism and terrorism around the globe. This is a shift towards a more holistic approach to preventing the spread of extremism with an increasing role for civil society and moderate religious leaders. This approach by no means excludes the role of law enforcement agencies but their role is rather to maintain a level of readiness and observe individuals that have the potential to use force as means to reach certain political or ideological goals. This holistic approach to prevention across the region – usually known as Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) or Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) – is being recognized in the legal and policy framework of Western Balkan<sup>1</sup> (WB) countries. The problem is that all of these countries, including their elites, continue to be observers and followers of international policies and play a fairly passive role.

While there is a broader reference to violent extremism, which implies any kind of extremism leading to terrorism, it is true that the main social and security concern relates to Islamic extremism. The traditional practice of Islam in the Balkans, based on (largely) the Hanafi School of Thought, has been hampered in recent years by a new wave of individuals who have come with the doctrines of conservative Islam. This has fragmented the population because the practitioners of Islam in the region, despite being nominally Sunni, never felt any hostility towards other denominations of Islam, namely the Shia and Alawite communities, an experience considered destructive and long lasting among the Muslim communities in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.<sup>2</sup>

According to risk and threat assessments, the region does not represent a direct security target for terrorist organizations, though the potential for returned foreign fighters to engage in the use of force individually should not be overlooked. The importance of the Western Balkans is based on its unique geographical location, linking the European Union (EU) with the MENA

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<sup>1</sup> The term includes countries such as: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia.

<sup>2</sup> F.Qehaja. Beyond Gornje Maoce and Osve: Radicalisation in the Western Balkans. in Varvelli Arturo. Jihadists Hotbeds: Understanding Local Radicalisation Processes, 2016, pp. 76.

region. According to reports, the region was extensively used as a recruiting zone for two of the most notorious terrorist organizations: the Islamic State (IS) and Jabat al-Nusra. There are estimates that around 1,000 citizens from the WB region have joined these terrorist organizations to date,<sup>3</sup> with thousands of supporters also residing within the region. The supporters of Islamic extremism and conservative ideologies represent a robust and organized minority within these predominantly secular societies. Their role, however, was ignored for years, perhaps due to other major social and security challenges, and also because of the lack of knowledge about the real intentions of these individuals. This trend started to change in 2014 when some individuals from the region appeared in social media from conflict zones, Syria and Iraq, beheading young people and calling upon their “Muslim brothers to kill the unbelievers” in their countries.

In this paper I argue that there is a political willingness among the elites in the region to counteract the rise of extremism but there is a lack of understanding about how to do so and how to contribute to the prevention of further extremism among the population. The international community in turn, is nearly repeating the mistakes of again using a donor-driven approach and “air-dropping in consultants” in order to quickly “fix” the problems, therefore failing to acknowledge the involvement of local communities and specific societal groups that could foster prevention. Hence, I will exclusively touch upon the need for community ownership as a precondition for potential success in preventing extremism in the Western Balkans.

#### **Why Locals Matter More Than Ever in PVE?**

Local ownership should be ensured in all processes of PVE. By local ownership, one has in mind a definition in which the local actors (in a broader sense) retain the final authority to act for the purpose of solving a problem.<sup>4</sup> In summarizing the existing definition, local ownership connotes the extent to which local constituencies and elected representatives of the target country exercise ownership over the processes of development. In the previous post-conflict processes, the findings showed that local ownership remained in the margins of the donor “logframe” by often disregarding local “buy-in” in the processes. A general recommendation to the international community is to ensure that it should not undertake PVE in partner countries, but should instead focus on supporting local actors willing to undertake PVE.<sup>5</sup>

Truly, the international community has the chance to rectify past mistakes in terms of development and assistance. The Western Balkans absorbed massive post-conflict assistance, especially in the field of reconciliation, however, results have been limited. In the context of donor support to PVE, it is absolutely necessary that the international community stays in the backseat. This means only providing development assistance and playing an advisory role in order to ensure that the holistic approach to prevention and de-radicalization is undertaken by local governments. The international community should ensure that governments in the region endorse community involvement in PVE. While the WB countries appear to have completed the legal and policy framework in PVE<sup>6</sup>, it is pivotal to ensure that its implementation is done with the broader involvement of civil society, the Islamic community, and community leaders.

In particular, the adoption of the Strategies on PVE and Terrorism did not reflect broader consultation with communities and religious institutions. It did not differ from the standardized approach of “ticking the box”, in which governments had to deliver completed policy documents to meet the conditions of the international community rather than local demand. In the case of Kosovo, for example, the adoption of the Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism<sup>7</sup> was a pressing issue in 2015 because the Government had to report on completion of the policy framework to the international community at the expense of broader consultation with communities. Indeed, the increased extremism and radicalization has been one of the security challenges, after corruption and political disputes, but it seems that this topic has now become paramount. It is important that the prioritization of PVE does not overshadow other important issues nor should it be used as a means to overcome the weakness of political elites across the region.

When briefly mapping international involvement in the region, the role of the United States (U.S.) is prominent and unavoidable. It is not because the U.S. has been involved for many years in countering international terrorism, but because it has the comparative advantage of community engagement – a strategy that is now considered to be among the most suitable to PVE. It is not only the Western Balkans that can benefit from U.S. experience but the European Union (EU) Member States as well. The prospective contribution by the EU – albeit late – should fill the gap in the broader framework of PVE and should be tailored to existing development assistance under the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA). All of the international community donors should be

<sup>3</sup> The Soufan Group, *Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq*, New York, The Soufan Group, 2015, pp.8.

<sup>4</sup> F.Qehaja, *Security Sector Development and the Problem of Local Ownership: Case of Kosovo*, 2016, pp. 40.

<sup>5</sup> L. Nathan, *No Ownership, No Commitment: A Guide to Local Ownership of Security Sector Reform*, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> V.Azinovic and M.Jusic, *The New Lure of the Syrian War – The Foreign Fighters Bosnian Contingent*, 2016, pp. 93-188.

<sup>7</sup> For more on Kosovo Strategy please see the link here [http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/STRATEGY\\_paran\\_dalim\\_-\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/STRATEGY_paran_dalim_-_ENG.pdf).

subject to a coordination strategy: in turn, failure to channel the development assistance into a coordinated body would make the efforts to PVE a complex experimental process.

Generally speaking, the tools to prevent further extremism should be seen from a developmental perspective. The causes of extremism, albeit individually driven, are rooted in a set of social problems such as: lack of perspective, unemployment, isolation, and poor education. As such, international assistance should be tailored to identify the general social needs and make direct contributions to long-term investments, refraining therefore from short-term interventions and the desire for quick results. Investments in, for example, classical seminars or presentations from international experts should be kept at minimum simply because they will only marginally contribute to the PVE efforts. The donor community, when willing to provide funding for de-radicalization programs or projects, should refrain from taking the lead, since such attempts will more often result in failure to achieve the main purposes of such projects.<sup>8</sup>

First, and following the experience of the organization that I lead – the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) – it is pivotal to ensure that local researchers and individuals are involved in order to identify the causes of increased extremism. This can be done by involving the native people who possess not only the local knowledge but also “speak the language” of the recruiters and those subject to extremism. The language here does not solely imply the *lingua franca* but the ability to rather understand the ideology and patterns of behavior. The case of Kosovo and the “Report Inquiring into Causes and Consequences Kosovo Citizens Involvement as Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq” provides a successful example of full local ownership in identifying the cause and later on facilitating government involvement in the process of prevention.<sup>9</sup>

Second, the local dialog should be ensured by the involvement of the most influential local stakeholders, be it religious leaders, civil society activists or municipal officials. In this way, the discussion should be focused on creating a counter-message to the extremist ideology. This would mainly need to target young people and high school students. In this way, the dialog would involve the majority of the community, who has been surprisingly overshadowed by the activities of minority groups characterized by the Salafij and Takfiri ideologies. The role of the international community in this regard would be to support governmental efforts, monitor the performance of community involvement and facili-

tate more discussion at the local level. To date, with the limited involvement of external actors on the ground, the results are certainly visible with increased awareness among families and communities producing its first results within the last year. This is especially identifiable in the case of Kosovo.

Third, the “battle” in the digital space is one of the biggest challenges. Emotionally appealing videos posted online by ISIS propaganda tools have impacted a number of victims in the Balkans, resulting in many leaving their homes to join the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, including those who previously practiced a more liberal form of Islam.<sup>10</sup> The online videos referring to the conspiracy of the creation of ISIS represents one of the tools to brainwash young individuals across the region.<sup>11</sup> It is important that civil society and local activities are active on online platforms to disseminate counter-messages in local languages, namely Albanian and Bosnian. The battlefield that is the digital world should ensure that resources are available, but it is impossible to do so without local knowledge. Local knowledge would proactively counteract ISIS propaganda in the local languages and defeat the new terrorist brand being (successfully) served to young people across the region.<sup>12</sup>

Fourth, the efforts to drastically minimize the potential for radicalization can be ensured only when there are genuine efforts to strengthen the secular system. For example, the education system should be sufficiently credible so that people do not find Islamic conservatism and some Imams more attractive than their schools and teachers. There should be investment into major reforms of the education system and development of critical thinking and extra-curricular activities. This, of course, implies investment that can only be acquired through international development assistance. Prospective investments in community areas should also be carefully undertaken so as to avoid “CVE fatigue”, which may occur if too much emphasis is put on this issue to the exclusion of other pressing social issues.<sup>13</sup>

## Conclusions

The rise of conservative and extremist Islam poses a challenge to the secular order in the Western Balkans. Furthermore, it has attempted to fragment the Islamic community itself, by often considering traditional practitioners as unbelievers (*kufar*). In particular, the “mushrooming” of groups and organizations promoting extremism and hate speech went unnoticed for years. It

<sup>8</sup> Sh.Kursani, Report Inquiring into Causes and Consequences of Kosovo Citizens Involvement as Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq, Prishtina, Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS), 2015, pp.15.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp.13.

<sup>11</sup> From the project “Tale of two cities” organized by KCSS.

<sup>12</sup> A.Speckhard and A.Yayla, The New Normal? Homegrown ISIS Inspired and Directed Terror Attacks, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> V. Perry, Initiatives to Prevent/Counter Violent Extremism in South East Europe: A Survey of Regional Issues, Initiatives and Opportunities, 2015, pp.6.

was only in the last few years that governments of the region and citizens have been made more aware of the risks deriving from these groups. The participation of a significant number of citizens from across the region in terrorist activities in Syria and Iraq came as shocking news for these secular societies.

The political willingness among the elites was not only driven by a desire to promote a secular order in the region, but also due to the pressing agenda of PVE towards regional governments and, obviously, towards other regions in the world as well. The holistic approach to prevent violent extremism cannot be ensured by direct involvement of international consultants or activities, but only by the engagement of local activists. Each of the countries and communities has its own specificity and context that requires the involvement of people speaking the language of those subject to extremist ideology. The international community should refrain from repeating the mistakes of the past, of attempting to invest in PVE by “air-dropping” international staffers into the affected community areas. Instead, the focus should be on preparing government and civil society actors to holistically approach PVE and decrease the potential of further radicalization.

Finally, the upcoming efforts in PVE should make sure to foster dialog at the community level. This can be ensured only through the participation of local governance structures, religious leaders, and civil society activists. The preparation of young individuals to disseminate counter-messages through social media will substantially complement PVE efforts. On top of all this, investments to strengthen the existing education system will make a significant difference in strategically minimizing the potential for increased radicalization.

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# SOME OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE WEAKNESSES IN THE RECONCILIATION PROCESS(ES) IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REGION

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## Introduction

In the past century, the peoples of the Balkans region have experienced multiple episodes of war and conflict, followed by various forms of reconciliation or lack thereof. The most recent episodes of open conflict and war are those that characterized the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia. Since then, an astonishing number of initiatives and efforts, particularly from Western Europe and North America, have been put in place all over the region in order to help start a process of peace keeping, nation building, and reconciliation among the former warring parties.

With regard to reconciliation, it is particularly evident that a large number of (high quality) projects have been managed by NGOs, and have generally received financial support from state and non-state actors. Some of the most outstanding initiatives include the Humanitarian Law Center – Belgrade,<sup>1</sup> Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia – Belgrade,<sup>2</sup> the Open Society Foundations,<sup>3</sup> the Regional Commission for the Establishment of Facts about War Crimes and Other Serious Violations of Human Rights (RECOM),<sup>4</sup> and, in the news field, also Balkan Transitional Justice,<sup>5</sup> and the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network,<sup>6</sup> just to mention a few.

Reconciliation in the Balkans is a deliberate policy of the European Union, and because of that Europe is investing resources to finance projects in this sector.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, since reconciliation is largely about dealing with the past, there have been various initiatives that have engaged historians, both from the Balkans and the rest of the world, such as the South-East Europe Textbook Network – *Dijalog povjesnicara – istoricara*,<sup>8</sup> The Scholars' Initiative: Confronting the Yugoslav Controversies,<sup>9</sup> or the Center for History, Democracy and Reconciliation.<sup>10</sup> The reconciliation topic led also to the creation of *ad hoc* institutes, such as the Balkan Institute for Conflict Resolution, Responsibility and Recon-

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.hlc-rdc.org/?lang=de>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.helsinki.org.rs/>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/reports/building-open-society-western-balkans-1991-2011>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.recom.link/>.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/page/balkan-transitional-justice-home>.

<sup>6</sup> <http://birn.eu.com/en/page/home>.

<sup>7</sup> <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/europeaid/online-services/index.cfm?do=publi.welcome&nbPubliList=15&orderby=upd&orderbyad=Desc&searchtype=RS&aofr=135428&userlanguage=en>.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.ffzg.unizg.hr/seetn/news/dijalog%20povjesnicara.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.cla.purdue.edu/si/>.

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.centerforhistory.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=29&Itemid=55](http://www.centerforhistory.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=29&Itemid=55).

ciliation at the Sarajevo School of Science and Technology.<sup>11</sup>

Encouragement for reconciliation in the Western Balkans came, and still comes, from various institutions in Europe, stretching from the Council of Europe<sup>12</sup> to the European Commission.<sup>13</sup> Of course there are also reconciliation efforts from various universities, fora, think tanks, and NGOs across Europe, such as the Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso,<sup>14</sup> or the Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group.<sup>15</sup> Obviously this list is far from complete.

Reconciliation initiatives in the Balkans are multifaceted and can take the form of international conferences,<sup>16</sup> or public diplomacy<sup>17</sup> such as the visit last spring of Prince Charles to the region.<sup>18</sup> Politicians in the region, for example in Serbia, often receive messages in support of reconciliation in the Balkans,<sup>19</sup> and some of them mention it directly in their speeches.<sup>20</sup> However, the lack of progress with regard to reconciliation in the Balkans is also used by certain segments of the civil society who want to criticize a government's policies in the region.<sup>21</sup> It goes almost without saying, that this topic is also an important academic field.<sup>22</sup>

Notwithstanding the great effort, particularly from the European Union and the United States of America, to achieve reconciliation in the Balkans, 21 years after the end of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, and 17 years after the end of the crisis in Kosovo, the situation in the region is (well) below expectations of the international community. For example, last year, on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Dayton peace agreements (that ended the war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina), the insufficient level of reconcilia-

tion was stressed on various occasions.<sup>23</sup> What tends to overshadow the progress made in the past two decades are reports about persisting ethnic divisions,<sup>24</sup> revealing an increase in nationalistic rhetoric in mass media<sup>25</sup> and even the possibility of new inter-ethnic clashes in the future.<sup>26</sup> In other words, after almost a quarter of a century, and a myriad of concrete efforts, there is still room for gloomy scenarios.<sup>27</sup> It may therefore be a legitimate question to ask how long the process of reconciliation should last and what perhaps went wrong, and how, pragmatically, the process could be changed.

Reconciliation in the Balkans, as a concept, seems to be framed in (and derived from) the Western narrative, instead of being rooted in the region of the former Yugoslavia. Indeed, when looking for the term reconciliation in the main search engines in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian languages (“*pomirenje na Balkanu*” or just “*pomirenje*” and “*Balkan*”), the results are linked to Western-sponsored websites, NGOs, or news related to Western diplomats or other sources.

While this assumption has no scientific or statistical value or meaning, it is an impression that is also reinforced when reading the comments of some online regional newspapers.<sup>28</sup> That is, some readers apparently do not share the same *forma mentis*, ideology or narrative projected from the West about the reconciliation process and its solutions. Put simply, the EU's (and its allies') deliberate policy of pressing the Balkans toward a certain model of reconciliation, is perceived as a sort of neocolonialism, or external imposition.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the concept of “reconciliation in the Balkans”, is often coupled with the “path toward the EU”. From an historical point of view, this mirrors two important slogans of

<sup>11</sup> <http://ssst.edu.ba/static-page/balkan-institute-for-conflict-resolution-responsibility-and-reconciliation>.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.coe.int/hu/web/commissioner/-/justice-and-reconciliation-long-overdue-in-the-balkans-1>.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.tanjug.rs/full-view.aspx?izb=261182>.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Italy/Dealing-with-the-Past-and-Reconciliation-with-the-Balkans-43963>.

<sup>15</sup> <http://balkanfund.org/2014/12/balkans-in-europe-policy-advisory-group-biepag-presents-its-activities-and-plans/>.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.srbijadanas.com/clanak/pocela-medunarodna-konferencija-za-pomirenje-i-bezbednost-na-balkanu-24-10-2014>.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/pomirenje-francuske-i-nemacke-uzor-za-balkan/24880659.html>.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.rferl.org/content/britain-prince-charles-urges-reconciliation-balkans-serbia/27620596.html>.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/politika/aktuelno.289.html:555295-Vilhelm-Odlazak-Vučića-u-Srebrenicu-bi-bio-jako-dobar-gest-za-region-i-pomirenje>.

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2015&mm=07&dd=22&nav\\_category=11&nav\\_id=1018724](http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2015&mm=07&dd=22&nav_category=11&nav_id=1018724).

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.balkaninsight.com/rs/article/politiciari-na-balkanu-ne-bave-se-ozbiljno-pomirenjem-11-16-2015>.

<sup>22</sup> For example, on jstor.org, the keywords “reconciliation” and “Balkans”, amount to around 4.000 results, while on scholar.google.com it amounts to even more than 30.000 results, as of August 2016.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/balkans-still-far-from-reconciliation-09-29-2015>.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/ethnic-divisions-set-in-stone>.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.democratizationpolicy.org/uimages/AI-DPC-BiH-Security-Risk-Analysis-Paper-Series-1-Hate-Speech.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.democratizationpolicy.org/uimages/AI-DPC-BiH-Security-Risk-Analysis-Paper-Series-3-EUFOR-The-West's-Potential-Deterrent.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/southeastern-europe/2015-05-10/balkans-interrupted>.

<sup>28</sup> See for example: <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/politika/aktuelno.289.html:530167-Vilhelm-i-Moro-Pomirenje-na-Balkanu-pozorur-na-Nemacku-i-Francusku> or <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/politika/aktuelno.289.html:555295-Vilhelm-Odlazak-Vučića-u-Srebrenicu-bi-bio-jako-dobar-gest-za-region-i-pomirenje>.

<sup>29</sup> Probably it is not a coincidence that a so-called “non conformist” philosopher such as Slavoj Žižek suggested in an interview that in the Balkans, “The beginning of good relations is that everyone has the right to hate the others, we can't moralize here”. Moreover he talked explicitly about “Western racism” in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Kosovo, affirming that “That billboard, one dog and one cat together, in one chair and then the caption as those two can peacefully live together – and you too can. This is the Western ideology. You [Balkan people] are like unrestrained children, you can't [alone], we [the West] will civilize you”. See <http://www.nezavisne.com/novosti/intervju/Slavoj-Zizek-Balkanu-treba-postovanje-a-ne-pomirenje/162696>.

the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the “brotherhood and unity” (*bratstvo i jedinstvo*) and the “after Tito – Tito” (*I posle Tita – Tito*). The concept of “brotherhood and unity” was meant to express the idea of brotherhood among the various peoples/nations of Yugoslavia, while the second one, “after Tito – Tito”, pointed to the fact that after the death of Marshall Josip Broz in 1980, the politics of the regime would not change (almost an oath of allegiance). Nevertheless, by the mid of the 1980s, and in particular in the subsequent years, those regime slogans, because of the internal conditions of the country (high inflation, social and economic crisis, falling legitimacy of the political elites, growing nationalism and tensions etc.) barely had any real meaning.

Bearing in mind this specific example, it would be advisable, both for the EU and the political elites in the Balkans, to maintain a degree of consistency between the concept of “reconciliation” and its effective implementation (as with other connected concepts, such as “reforms” or “path toward the EU”).

#### The Past as a Weapon

When discussing reconciliation in the former Yugoslavia, as already suggested above, it is very important to consider some specific dynamics that led to the conflict and the dissolution of the common state in 1991. Indeed, the reconciliation the EU and other actors are sponsoring in the Western Balkans is a solution to the trauma of the conflict(s) that emerged in the 1980s.

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was a country with a socialist regime independent from the Soviet Union.<sup>30</sup> Compared to the Eastern bloc, it was much more “liberal” because of the introduction of elements of the market economy, consumerism, the possibility for the Yugoslav citizens to travel and work abroad, and the opening of its own borders to foreign tourists. However, the regime (or political oligarchy) led by Tito maintained the typical characteristic of an authoritarian regime, with a monopoly of the political power, a strong security apparatus (various security services), and repression of free speech, in particular about topics that were considered taboo. Among the taboos, there was the myth of the Second World War and the heroic battles fought by the communist partisans against the Nazi-fascists forces. It was strictly forbidden to challenge the official narrative about the partisan war and the role of Tito. After the death of the Marshall in 1980, a growing number of pamphlets or essays started

to appear that violated exactly that rule, and started questioning, directly or indirectly, Tito, the partisans and the myth of “brotherhood and unity”. In a phase of acute socio-economic crisis, with a political class incapable of offering solutions, the public visibility of “non conformist” intellectuals was gaining strength (especially in Serbia and, partly, in Slovenia), with their novels and theories that exalted the virtues of particularistic and virulent nationalism.

The prohibition of an open discussion of the Second World War during the socialist regime, including censorship and repressive measures against certain intellectuals (trials, imprisonments – as happened to Franjo Tuđman, Alija Izetbegović, Vojislav Šešelj, etc.), did not bring much reconciliation among the Yugoslav nations. On the contrary, in a moment of deep crisis and political disillusionment, the unaddressed and unresolved issues of the Second World War became a pretext to pressure the regime. The nationalist myths and narratives were essentially based on decades of unfinished reconciliation. This historical experience should also warn current policy makers dealing with issues related to post-war societies, the quest for justice, and reconciliation. It must be said that without the successive adoption by the political elites of such nationalistic rhetoric, the evolution of the Yugoslav crisis would have been different. But it is reasonable to assume that nationalism was close to the mindsets of the more conservative in society.

The last decade of socialist Yugoslavia may be considered as a negative model for the present. There are also other examples that could be illuminating, to a certain extent. For instance, the adoption of the term “genocide” by the Serbian (and Yugoslav) political elites, in order to describe the alleged discrimination of Serbs and Montenegrins in Kosovo (perpetrated by the local Albanian population)<sup>31</sup> contributed to the radicalization of the political discourse. Indeed, even before Slobodan Milošević became the President of the Presidency of the League of Communists of Serbia (1986), the climate was already problematic and the distrust toward authorities in the Province, and the tense inter-ethnic relations, reinforced each other in a negative spiral. The growing distrust and escalation of violence, thanks to a repressive Serbian nationalist policy that culminated in the next decade, led to more dramatic events in 1998 and 1999.

In a very different context and historical background, in today’s Bosnia and Herzegovina, the President of *Republika Srpska* (a political entity of Bosnia and Herze-

<sup>30</sup> For a general background about the history of Yugoslavia, see for example: Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias. State-Building and Legitimation, 1918-2005*, Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Washington D.C., and Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2006. See also: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2016/04/11/dealing-with-the-past-necessary-for-reconciliation-in-the-western-balkans/>.

<sup>31</sup> The ethnic conflict, and its dramatization, deteriorated after the 1981 riots in Kosovo. See Julie A. Mertus, *Kosovo: how Myths and Truths started a War*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1999, pp. 17-55.

govina) has not recognized the genocide of Srebrenica<sup>32</sup> (in 2007 the International Court of Justice found that in Srebrenica in 1995 a genocide was committed against the Muslim population<sup>33</sup> by the military forces of the Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina). At the same time, as a reaction to an apparently never ending dispute, *Republika Srpska* has been publicly accused by the “Anti-Dayton Group” of being built on genocide.<sup>34</sup> While the legitimation of the Serbian Republic (*Republika Srpska*) as one of the two entities of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina was part of the Dayton peace accords, the strong criticism toward this entity (and the Dayton agreements) could be labeled as an example of incomplete reconciliation, and could create a climate of mutual distrust among the citizens and society.<sup>35</sup>

### The Present and Its Faults

The recent Yugoslav past may offer some insights into the causes of the conflicts, their (mis)management, and the need for reconciliation, and thus help the Western Balkans in their bid for accession to the European Union. Nevertheless, there are several other categories and dimensions of reconciliation that make it a complex issue. I will mention just some of them.

First of all, in the field of historiography, there is no consensus about the destruction of Yugoslavia, among the regional academics (and others, of course).<sup>36</sup> In general terms, it is possible to assume that outside Serbia the prevailing view is that Yugoslavia was destroyed by internal factors, and primarily by the Serbian nationalist politics, while within Serbia it is still popular belief that the destruction was caused by external powers (Germany, Austria, Vatican etc.).<sup>37</sup> Of course this scientific disagreement *per se* has not necessarily had a direct impact on the reconciliation process, but it is a clear signal that, despite the quantity and quality of evidence and sources made available in the past 25 years, it is still not possible to reach a consensus over such a significant historical and paradigmatic event. This may be considered reflective of the divisions among the societies in the Western Balkans.

Secondly, there is the key role of transitional justice. Take, for example, the verdict of Vojislav Šešelj at the ICTY,<sup>38</sup> with his highly controversial acquittal, and especially considering the contradictions between Šešelj’s acquittal and the previous verdicts of the same Tribunal,<sup>39</sup> it is legitimate to ask how this is contributing to the process of reconciliation in the region.

Thirdly, reconciliation in the Western Balkans is not just a matter of inter-ethnic relations, or relations between states. There are also fractures and divisions within individual nations, among politicians, and in particular between the heirs of the communists and the political heirs of former fascist political parties and movements. From lustration<sup>40</sup>, to the rehabilitation of fascist collaborators<sup>41</sup>, the post-Yugoslav societies are dealing with a dissonant heritage.<sup>42</sup>

Fourthly, the very fact that a state is a full member of the EU does not mean that it would help facilitate the dialog and overcome a difficult past with its neighbors. For instance, the celebration of the Operation *Oluja*<sup>43</sup> (Storm) in Croatia is an example of another uncompleted process of reconciliation.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, it is possible to add a further problematic dimension, concerning the commemoration of the so-called Kosovo war (1999). It was a conflict that encompassed not only Serbia and Montenegro (at the time, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), Serbs and Albanians, but also NATO and its members (some of whom are also members of the EU). According to a survey conducted in Serbia last July, 82% of the respondents said that they are against Serbia’s membership to NATO<sup>45</sup>. We may infer that the majority of the Serbian population, after 17 years, has not reconciled with that traumatic event of its recent past. Moreover, from the point of view of reconciliation and the use of history and memory in the public discourse, it is relevant to note that, on the occasion of the 17<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NATO bombing (24 March 2016), Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić made a speech that was quite critical of the military intervention, but did not mention the formal reasons that led to that action. Among other things, Vučić said “They [NATO] killed people trying to kill Serbia”, adding that it was “a war in which just death had won”, and that the war was “meaningless, unneces-

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.blic.rs/vesti/republika-srpska/dodik-srbi-nece-priznati-genocid-u-srebrenici-jer-se-nije-ni-desio/73f9491>.

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/index.php?sum=667&code=bhy&p1=3&p2=3&case=91&k=f4&p3=5>.

<sup>34</sup> <http://vijesti.ba/clanak/316638/postavljena-instalacija-u-obliku-republike-srpske>.

<sup>35</sup> <http://etrebinje.com/vijesti-sve/arhiva-tekstova-po-kategorijama/bo-sna-i-hercegovina/14360-udpb-naljede-reagovanje-na-instalaciju-anti-dejton-grupe>.

<sup>36</sup> [http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?filename=2&article=1027&context=purduepress\\_ebooks&type=additional](http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?filename=2&article=1027&context=purduepress_ebooks&type=additional).

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Slobodan Vuković, *Razbijanje druge Jugoslavije* uvod u “humanitarne” intervencije, in Branislava Knezić, Jovan Ćirić (eds.), *20 godina od razbijanja SFRJ*, Belgrade, Institut za Uppredno pravo, 2011, pp. 131-142.

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.balkanicaucaso.org/Media/Files/Pdf/Seselj-la-sentenza-di-primo-grado-Aprile-2016>.

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.jurist.org/forum/2016/04/gregory-gordon-seselj-acquittal.php>.

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.kvf.org.mk/index.php/mk/>.

<sup>41</sup> [http://www.helsinki.org.rs/press\\_t58.html](http://www.helsinki.org.rs/press_t58.html).

<sup>42</sup> <https://costamagna.wordpress.com/2015/03/27/yugoslaviast-contested-memories/>.

<sup>43</sup> <https://costamagna.wordpress.com/2015/08/21/oluja-un-capitolo-drammatico-di-una-tragedia-evitabile/>.

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/croatian-politicians-praise-operation-storm-victory-08-05-2016>.

<sup>45</sup> [http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2016&mm=07&dd=28&nav\\_id=1160004](http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2016&mm=07&dd=28&nav_id=1160004).



sary, a massacre that destroyed everything, but did not solve anything”.<sup>46</sup> It should also be noted that last year, NATO’s Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, expressed his deep regrets for the 1999 victims.<sup>47</sup> In the meantime, last July, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia, Ivica Dačić, said that the “responsibility and justification” of the NATO intervention against Belgrade in 1999 should be questioned.<sup>48</sup> The former director of the Humanitarian Law Center criticized Dačić’s statement, complaining about the lack of reconciliation.<sup>49</sup>

#### Instead of Conclusions

After this general analysis, it is clear that in the former Yugoslav region, reconciliation has not been achieved but is still an important goal. What can be done to achieve it?

- Avoid any form of paternalism and orientalism toward the Western Balkans
- Deter any form of radicalization in the public discourse and abuse of victimhood
- Is it acceptable that the top leadership of an EU member state, or of an aspiring member, delivers speeches that do not contribute to reconciliation in the region?
- The re-legitimation of ideologies suppressed during the socialist regimes cannot lead to the open apology of individuals of the past that collaborated with Nazi and Fascist regimes
- The lack of punishment of war criminals may create room for claims in the future
- The wealth of knowledge produced about the most controversial issues should reach a wider public, with more impact, with the active involvement of schools and universities

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<sup>46</sup> <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/125/drustvo/2256454/obelezena-17-godisnjica-nato-agresije-u-varvarinu.html>.

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.newsweek.rs/svet/51063-sef-nato-a-duboko-zalim-zbog-zrtava-bombardovanja-srj.html>.

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.intermagazin.rs/napokon-ispituje-se-odgovornost-za-bombardovanje-jugoslavije/>.

<sup>49</sup> [http://www.danas.rs/politika.56.html?news\\_id=324099&title=I%20SPS%20snosi%20odgovornost%20za%20bombardovanje](http://www.danas.rs/politika.56.html?news_id=324099&title=I%20SPS%20snosi%20odgovornost%20za%20bombardovanje).

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# PEACE-LESS RECONCILIATION IN BIH: INTERPLAY BETWEEN POLITICIANS, GRASSROOTS INITIATIVES, AND PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES

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## I Introduction

The notion of reconciliation is an issue that is very often used, but also abused and misinterpreted, in the context of the BiH postwar society. Although BiH yearns for reconciliation, there are a lot of obstacles on this path. One of the problems is that reconciliation is not interpreted as a process where different actors and issues are involved, but as an ideological notion that does not give (appropriate) homage to victims. As Wilkes et al. warn, it is often equated as a simple amnesty for perpetrators (Wilkes et al, 2013: 10). As one Lebanese woman said, reconciliation is a method or a euphemism to offend victims (Mallay-Morisson et al, 2013: 73) – this feeling is also present in BiH. Nevertheless, peace and reconciliation have a specific meaning in BiH, and therefore it is better to interpret them in a contextual way without referring to some other examples and theoretical insights.

As for peace, it may be the result of reconciliation processes but we should bear in mind that there are different notions of peace and different interplays between peace and reconciliation. Peace, for example, can be “signed” without a reconciliation process happening beforehand. In BiH, we have peace under a contract (Dayton Peace Agreement), where peace is interpreted and equated with the seize of firearms (Whitakker, 2002: 7)<sup>2</sup>. Such a notion is in accordance with the idea of so-called negative peace and is in opposition to the idea of positive peace that involves more democratic participation, identity shift, openness, common initiatives and projects, and not purely the absence of armed conflict (Clagget-Borne, 2013: 16; Long & Brecke, 2003: 66). Perhaps that is the reason why some intellectuals and activists reject such a notion of peace but at the same time reject the very idea of reconciliation.

In order not to establish a new theory, nor to oppose such trends, we claim that different reconciliation activities started before and during the war (e.g. with some grassroots civic initiatives) in BiH, and that the notion of reconciliation should not be rejected so easily. As Prof. Nerzuk Ćurak noted, the term can be understood and contextualized in different ways.<sup>3</sup> Taking into account its complexity, it is a challenge for both researchers and different stakeholders. Brzinski, in his work about so-called peace-less reconciliation,<sup>4</sup> started from

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<sup>2</sup> Such interpretations are an object to different forms of public critics. One of the best is perhaps theatre-play “Samo da se ne puca” (Just that there is no shooting). This phrase can often be heard among ordinary people.

<sup>3</sup> Informal conversation with professor Nerzuk Ćurak during the conference at the Catholic Faculty in Sarajevo *Evil of Violence in Ethnic Conflicts*, in September 2015.

<sup>4</sup> His notion of so-called peace-less reconciliation is also used for the title of this paper. It is often claimed that in BiH we have peace

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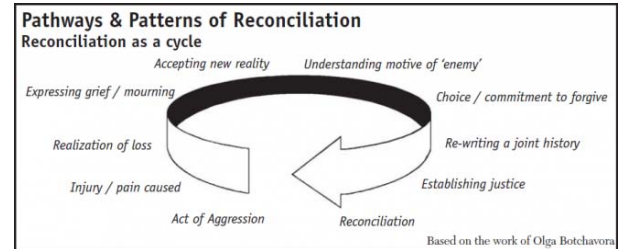
<sup>1</sup> zlatiborka.popov.momcinovic@ffuis.edu.ba

Wittgenstein's position claiming that all social phenomena must be contextualized. This is also the starting point of this paper, but also it is presumed that some strands can be used as a framework for BiH particularly. According to Brzinski, some aspects of reconciliation as a process can start before and during the conflict (Brzinski, 2013: 33), and such an assumption has an important meaning in the context of former Yugoslavia and the conflict in BiH, where reconciliation activities started before and during the conflict.

It should be presumed as well that the battle for the term reconciliation has been won,<sup>5</sup> largely because in the 1990s when in scientific discourse, the media, politicians' speeches, and everyday life, words such as culture of remembrance etc. became very present (Assman, 2012: 56), and "mit neuem Wort kam auch eine neue Einstellung in die Welt" (ibid.), taking into account that reconciliation stays in opposition to denial. Denial is not only offensive to victims, but also an obstacle to some aspects of reconciliation (such as forgiveness, identity shift, justice...).

## II The Notion(s)

One of the starting points of this paper is that reconciliation is a complex process, not a rigid state, and that it involves different aspects, some of which are presented in Picture No. 1. We also agree with Brzinski that this process is not necessarily linear, although it can be. People in general and different groups or stakeholders may be involved in one aspect of reconciliation and not in others. Also, reconciliation has both horizontal and vertical dimensions. The first involves relations between populations and the last among the population's representatives (Wilkes et al, 2013: 10). Reconciliation is therefore a multifaceted strategy (Clagget- Borne, 2013: 14). Yet, the problem is that the elites in BiH, thriving in the ruins of a multicultural and complex society, have strived to establish some sort of monocultural parallel community and to erase the BiH culture of acceptance of difference and co-existence. Such a strategy is not a suitable framework for reconciliation, yet it can be challenged by different reconciliation activities. For example, people may simply adjust to that, or can build their own parallel stories and initiatives in line with Havel's notion of an ethical civic society living in truth. Therefore, it is very useful to get deeper insights into the interplays between different stakeholders in BiH.



Picture 1. For a full-sized picture, please see in the appendix to this paper.

## III.1 Institutions and/or Politicians

Political institutions in BiH are, according many authors, co-opted by political elites. In BiH, there exists a so-called consensual model of democracy, which always highlights the roles of the elite in making political decisions through negotiation and agreement. Also, BiH is to a high extent a non-functional state – the institutions are more developed at the entity level<sup>6</sup> than at the state level, which puts the country in an odd position. "It cannot be the state authentically, but at the same time cannot stop to be the state" (Ćurak, 2016: 67). Research proves that every second family in BiH in some way depends upon the political elites (Tolimir-Hözl, 2014: 103), which in the Marxist sense, and his critics of bureaucracy, treat the state as private property. Therefore, many people must follow blindly the political elites and, taking this into account, it is more important for the purpose of this paper to address the role of politicians in reconciliation processes, without omitting some institutional aspects.

According to some authors, so-called truth and/or public truth telling is very important for reconciliation processes. Every part of the reconciliation process presented in Picture No. 1 is somehow connected with the notion of truth. Truth, according to de Gauchy, does not have only a forensic (objective) dimension, but also narrative (personal), dialogical (social), and restorative (healing) dimensions (Knežević, 2013: 111). In BiH, politicians place particular emphasis on the first dimension, but mostly highlight their "own" victims for the sake of staying in power and for legitimacy – to be the only, true protectors of the so-called national interests. Politicians from the so-called Bosniak side insist that victims should be acknowledged and "collected", but the way this is taking place is actually leading to a new dehumanization and instrumentalization of victims, despite the fact that forensic truth is an important part of the reconciliation process. Politicians from the Republic of Srpska to some extent admit that Bosniaks were the most numerous victims in the last war, but avoid the word genocide (in case of Srebrenica) and in public speaking and mass gatherings pay tribute mostly to their

without reconciliation, taking into account that reconciliation activities are frozen by so-called peace under contract. In this paper it is therefore claimed that we have reconciliation activities at different levels but no true peace, in the positive sense.

<sup>5</sup> The famous theologian Miroslav Volf claims that the battle for remembering has been won (Volf, 2012: 37).

<sup>6</sup> Although entities (Republika Srpska and Federation of BiH) are not defined in the constitution as federal units *de jure*, they function as *de facto* federal units.

own victims. They often claim that Bosniaks abuse the fact that they were the most numerous victims in the last war to legitimize their own dominance and so-called surplus of (moral) legitimacy. However there are some variations depending on the politician – for example, Sulejman Tihić, who used to be member of the Presidency, used to stress that Bosniaks must step aside from their own victimization. The former President of the Republic of Srpska, Dragan Čavić, used to send subtle messages of recognition. After that, the rhetoric against it became stronger. For example, when Haris Silajdžić, known for his public statement that the entire Republic of Srpska is a mass graveyard, became a Bosniak member of the Presidency, he was in constant quarrel with Milorad Dodik (who became President of the RS after Čavić). Today, the rhetoric of the Bosniak side is more polished, due to Bakir Izetbegović, the new Bosniak member of the Presidency, but it seems that Izetbegović gave up establishing a true dialogue with the Serbian side in BiH and turned more to Serbia and its Prime Minister, Aleksandar Vučić. What is clear in this interplay is that the Serbian political elite from BiH is not only the least flexible, for example in issues dealing with changes of constitution and the extreme right (Gavrić, 2011: 263), but also with regard to issues dealing with reconciliation.

Although it is not quite clear how to remember wrongs rightly (Volf, 2012: 37), it is often stressed that, collectively, amnesia leads to the recurrence of the past and the endless repetition of crimes (Knežević, 2013: 110). We may claim that politicians in BiH are stuck at the 4<sup>th</sup> phase of the reconciliation cycle. They do not accept the new reality. Bosniak politicians mostly equate reconciliation with conciliation although they very often use the term reconciliation, while Serbian politicians use the term much less and show no true interest in acknowledging the victims of the other side(s). In such a situation, it is no wonder that all efforts to establish a BiH Commission for Truth and Reconciliation at the state level failed. According to a former member of the Parliamentary Assembly in the Federation of BiH, Besima Borić<sup>7</sup> (also a member of the working group for establishing of the commission), there was no political will or genuine support for such efforts although it was *de jure* created by the Parliamentary Assembly. Therefore, the working group turned more to NGOs and other stakeholders but it was not enough and establishment of the Commission finally failed, as did attempts to change the constitution within the so-called April package of constitutional reforms (2006). Abused by politicians, victims are being victimized again but they should remember wrongs “*as forgiven*” rather than to be avenged, as Volf highlighted (Volf, 2012: 40).

Therefore, it is no wonder that the level of trust in politicians both in BiH and the region is very low (Gallup Balkan Monitor). This is also the case for reconciliation processes, although people in BiH, regardless of their ethnicity, think that politicians are important for this process (Wilkes et al, 2013: 23). According to some comparative research, the role of politicians is more important for inter-state conflicts (Whitaker, 2002) than intra-state conflicts. Yet, in BiH there is a dispute regarding the very nature of war. The Bosniak side claims that the war was an aggression of neighboring Serbia, and to some extent Croatia, while the Serbian side insists that it was a civil war. In such situations, the role of politicians is not easy to define. Yet, some optimism regarding politicians can be found. For example in the PRO Budućnost project, which aims to establish cooperation at the local level as politicians seem to be more positively involved in these processes in numerous BiH municipalities<sup>8</sup>.

### III.2 Grassroots Initiatives

In order to support the thesis of Peace-less Reconciliation,<sup>9</sup> it should be noted that before and during the war many grassroots initiatives emerged in opposition to the conflict and its numerous consequences, but there were also discourses that tried to legitimize the conflict. For example during the war, since Bosnian activists tended to deal with current problems and were exposed so-called civic elaborations from the EU and neighboring countries that did not experience this level of inter-ethnic violence (Helms, 2003: 80), they built their own strategies to oppose to the political elites. On the other hand, in the post-war period, due to the fact that the international community indirectly acknowledged the “former” political elites as important to the process of peace-making, reconciliation initiatives were obliged to cooperate with politicians. Despite that, there were civic initiatives established for humanitarian reasons that were in opposition to the “values” and goals of political elites. As one activist noted, “we, [the] ‘ordinary people’, want to socialize with each other” (Thomasson, 2008: 27). Such initiatives provided the space for an identity-shift, and a more holistic approach to the notion of reconciliation. Although the elites tried to impose so-called fixed identities, different initiatives opposed such trends, particularly civic and feminist groups.

One of the striking points is that, for example, war-veteran associations acknowledged their disagreement with the politics of ethnic-national elites. Although it is often claimed that through the false notion of heroism, a culture of violence is still prevalent in BiH (Ćurak,

<sup>7</sup> Informal conversation after the introductory speech of Besima Borić at the public city meeting in Sarajevo, within the CEIR/Edinburgh project.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.nezavisne.com/novosti/drustvo/Potpisani-sporazumi-na-projektu-PRO-buducnost/238016>, <https://www.facebook.com/pr.obuducnost.bih/>.

<sup>9</sup> Peace-less in the framework of the idea of positive peace, considering, as already noted that peace in BiH is mostly equated with the seizure of firearms.

2016: 188), many war-veterans oppose such trends. Their work is some sort of “a crossroads between the demand for guarantees of fundamental human rights, and the widely discussed question of the recognition of particular (collective) rights of different groups“ (Sekulić, 2005: 82). In one research study, war-veterans were among the most proactive groups that were supporting different reconciliation activities, together with women and pensioners (Wilkes et al, 2013: 8). And among the population, support for war-veterans discussions was very strong (ibid, 22). Sekulić's qualitative research showed that war-veterans and war-migrant associations often oppose ethno-nationalistic policies (Sekulić, 2005: 87). War-veterans also launched different activities with each other, despite of the fact that they used to fight on different sides of the conflict.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, together with the women's organizations, they seem to have some aspects of identity shift in their work, which escapes the imposed fixed identities. Identity shifts transcend narrow roles and “understandings“ of the conflict and offer new relations (Long & Brecke, 2003: 36), important for reconciliation processes. Women's groups and organizations, that during the war were most concerned with humanitarian aid, started to become more feminist oriented, to challenge ethnopolitics from that perspective, and to build bridges, not only among women in BiH whatever their ethnicity, but also to challenge the (imposed) roles of women in both war and peace (Popov Momčinić, 2013).

Such activities are not often acknowledged by institutions and are not given enough space in the media, yet they are essential to prevent the distortion of humanity. What is sure is that grassroots initiatives are involved in different aspects of the reconciliation process, presented in Picture No. 1. One of the problems is that such initiatives, to a large extent, depend on foreign aid and support, and considering that the country has an unemployment rate of 50%, they cannot be sustainable on a voluntary basis. Yet, the problem is that foreign support imposes specific agendas and in such cases, no firm and stable framework for reconciliation can be defined. Yet, civil society operates to ask so-called dangerous questions, omitted by politicians' and other discourses, and, as Verdeja notes, to address fundamental issues and challenges (Verdeja, 2009: 136). It promotes, what is also the case in BiH, moral and mutual recognition among citizens (ibid, 137).

### III.3 People's Attitudes

As for people's attitudes, different research shows different results. This is the consequence of different methodologies and the very aim of the research. But what is sure is that research regarding reconciliation is

pretty rare in BiH, although there has been some research somewhat connected to the notion (e.g. research about social distance, stereotypes, and content analysis of media...). For example, considering the importance of religion in the public sphere in BiH, one longitudinal content analysis of religious media showed that negligible space has been provided for reconciliation (Lasić, 2013), despite the fact that it is often claimed that reconciliation has a religious dimension. Further, numerous research shows a high level of social distance between populations from different ethnic backgrounds. Yet, what is encouraging is that people are ready to be, for example, friends with people from different ethnic backgrounds, but on the other hand are not supportive of some other relations such as the head of the firm, state, and cousins' relations including marriage (Puhalo, 2013: 183).

In CEIR/Edinburgh research, people were supportive of reconciliation processes, regardless of their ethnicity. They were more oriented toward the future (such as reforming education) than toward the past (such as building memorials). Although there are some differences depending on age, gender, religion, and employment status, people in general showed great support for different reconciliation activities (Wilkes et al, 2013). The research shows that young people are the most ambivalent and that more work should be done with them on this issue. Women, pensioners, and war-veterans were more positive and this fact should be further elaborated on with more research and accompanying activities and public speaking events. Yet, such research should not be taken for granted and must be put in the context of the complex analytic framework of post-war Bosnian society.

Also, in this complicated BiH framework, and taking into account that justice is an important part of reconciliation, different research has confirmed that people do respect peace and are satisfied with at least a limited realization of justice (Long & Brecke, 2003: 70). In BiH, unfortunately, justice still looks like a far-off ideal. But the fact that the population perceives justice in a broader, non-ethnic way (such as support for minorities, returnees) shows the sensibility of the population and support of this important part of reconciliation (Wilkes et al, 2013), which transcends the narrow rhetoric of political elites.

### IV Recommendations

As Carl Bildt noted, “Reconciliation will be possible when there is a common perception that justice for all will be created when the energies and efforts of the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina are concentrated less on the legacies of the bitter past than on the promise of a common future“ (Whitaker, 2002: 106). Yet, this does not mean that we should leave the past behind, but rather that we should dedicate more energy to issues regarding our common future, and from that position, we

<sup>10</sup> E.g. within the project „Djeca rata djeci mira“ (Children of war to the children of peace). Visit <https://www.facebook.com/groups/498171257023498/?fref=ts>.

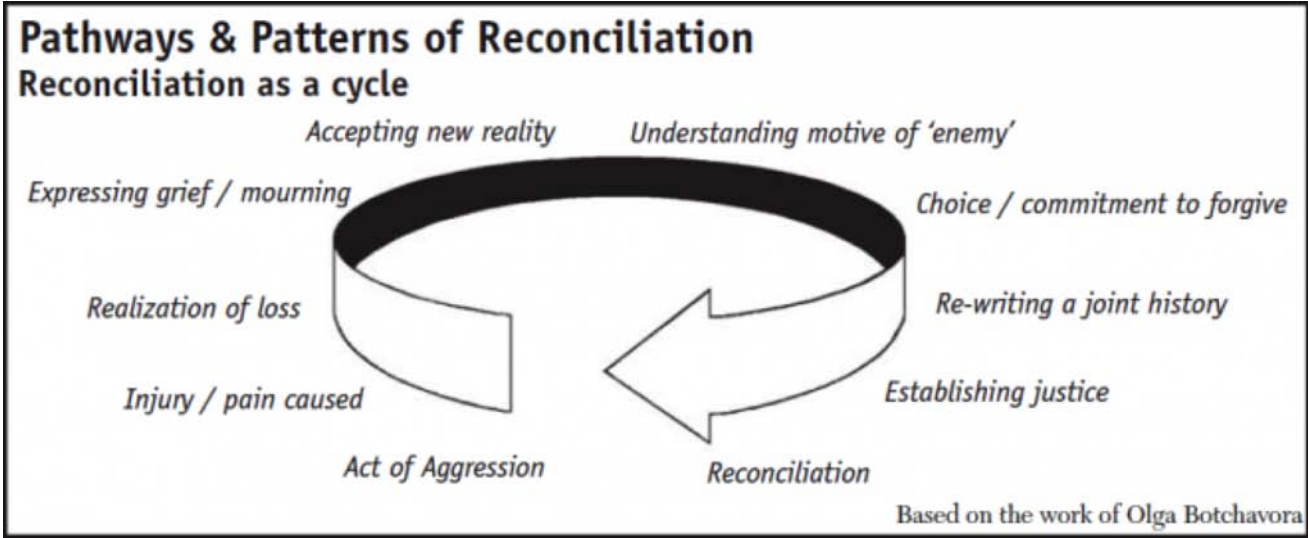
will be able to reflect differently on the past. Taking into account that the past is abused by political elites with many of them referring almost every day to the past in a way that affirms social divisions, activities and rhetoric oriented toward the future must be more present and visible in public and at the same time address the past from the perspective of recognition and redefinition.

The different activities of youth groups, women's organizations and war-veterans should be more supported, especially considering that their attitudes and initiatives are not easily co-opted by nationalistic rhetoric. Youth activities are especially important due to their ambivalent attitudes and marginal position in society, whereas women and war-veterans tend to have more positive attitudes towards reconciliation and different initiatives in this regard. Initiatives from these groups can therefore create a more solid and firm basis for challenging politicians and their accompanying messages. Also, the very notion of reconciliation must be promoted in a better way (in media, science etc.) for it seems that it is contaminated with the imposed meaning referred to above. Political elites use the term in an *ad hoc* way, but people are aware of the importance of politicians in these processes. Considering that politicians at the local level are dealing more with the very needs of populations, and are involved in different peace-activities, their work should be better supported and made more visible. This needs to be done in order not to have *only* negative peace, but to (re)build it on fruitful reconciliation activities and to escape from so-called peace-less reconciliation, where reconciliation initiatives do not bring clear, *positive* results. Therefore, the different interplay between the actors addressed in this paper should be promoted, based on the lessons from the past as well as current activities and the experiences of other countries.

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Appendix









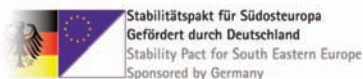
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## **ASPEN WORKING GROUP SOUTHEAST EUROPE**

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**November 30 – December 1, 2016 | 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 2016 through the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

## **November 30, 2016**

*Arrival of the participants in Berlin during the day*

**20:00**

### **Welcome Dinner**

*Venue: Ermelerhaus, art'otel Berlin Mitte, Wallstrasse 70-73 10179 Berlin*

## **December 1, 2015**

### **Working Group**

*Venue: Ermelerhaus, art'otel Berlin Mitte, Wallstrasse 70-73 10179 Berlin*

**09:30 – 11:00**

### **Democratization of Political Processes**

**11:00 – 11:30**

Coffee break

**11:30 – 13:00**

### **Countering Radicalization, Nationalism, and Division**

**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 between**

*Dr. Andreas Ernst, Correspondent of Neue Zürcher Zeitung in Belgrade,*

*Ambassador Christian Hellbach, Special Envoy for South-Eastern Europe, Turkey, and the EFTA States in the German Federal Foreign Office, and*

*Hoyt Brian Yee, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, on*

**“A Europe Whole and Free? The Future of EU Enlargement and the Role of the Western Balkans in Times of Crises”**

Odeta Barbullushi

Josip Brkić

Andreas Ernst

Metin Hakverdi

Lejla Haveric

Christian Hellbach (tbc)

Christiane Hullmann

Ramadan Ilazi

Ilija Isajlovski

Marina Jovićević

Sonja Licht

Hedvig Morvai

Aleksandar Andrija Pejović

Manuel Sarrazin

Helge Tolksdorf

Dirk Vöpel

Hoyt B. Yee

**Aspen Institute Germany**

Valeska Esch  
*Senior Program Officer*

Anna Kuchenbecker  
*Deputy Director*

Inga Landgrebe  
*Program Assistant*

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# CONFERENCE REPORT: ASPEN WORKING GROUP SOUTHEAST EUROPE

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**NicolaMacColl**  
Master of Public Policy candidate  
Hertie School of Governance, Berlin

The Aspen Institute's Working Group on Southeast Europe was convened in Berlin on December 1, 2016. The meeting brought together 13 select decision-makers from the Western Balkans, Germany, the European Union (EU) and the United States (U.S.), with professional backgrounds in government, international and civil society organizations, and the Foreign Service. The workshop focused on democratic governance, countering nationalism and radicalization, EU enlargement, and regional cooperation.

## **Democratization of Political Processes**

It is essential that the democratization of political processes continues but external support from the EU for this needs to be maintained. Any perceived withdrawal of the EU from the enlargement process will affect democratization. In fact, renewed support and open support from the EU would greatly help Western Balkans countries, particularly to counter the rise of anti-EU sentiment.

Countries in the region also need to take more responsibility and become more powerful actors to ensure the reform process continues. This includes a greater focus on monitoring the state of democracy and empowering actors to fight for democracy.

Another issue raised was that while there has been progress in democratization across the Western Balkans, there is an increasing level of competition between the countries and absolute levels of progress no longer matter as much as relative levels. Also, the closer some countries get to accession, the more difficult undertaking reforms at the domestic level can become. For example, getting the support of opposition parties to pursue particular reforms has become increasingly difficult in some countries.

The role of women in helping the democratization process was raised as an essential component. Women tend to set harder targets and are prepared to risk more to achieve them. For example, women politicians were much more outspoken in refusing any kind of narrative that would push the region back into conflict. Women already working in politics should be better supported and more women should be encouraged into the profession.

## **Countering Radicalization, Nationalism, and Division**

Western Balkans countries need to focus internally as a region on how to better counter the rise of nationalism. The possibility of a collapse of the EU cannot be ignored and it would be sensible to think now about what impact that would have on the region. This situation is aggravated by the media, particularly by the rise of

Russian and Turkish media, which provides a flood of negative news about the EU.

It was raised that the best way to deal with issues of division and nationalism was to engage young people. More could be done within universities to mobilize students to help counter these tendencies. Young people are generally creative, good with social media and are the future leaders so they should be involved in finding a solution.

The EU could also do more to recognize the efforts of countries in the region in response to the migrant crisis. Some countries feel that they are not being treated fairly compared to EU countries, but the problem is shared and needs to be dealt with by all countries in Europe not just EU countries.

### EU Enlargement

The prospect of EU membership is a driving force for sustainable economic development and stability in the Western Balkans. However, the issue many countries are now facing is that citizens perceive the enlargement process as useless. They believe that their governments are wasting time and energy on a goal that is no longer achievable. Western Balkan governments need to work to convince their citizens that this is not true and that it is still worthwhile to be part of the EU. On the other hand, presenting a positive image of the EU to the people is becoming harder and harder since Brexit. One way of challenging this anti-EU sentiment is to speed up the accession process, not delay it. People need to feel like progress is being made.

Many countries in the region feel that there is a lack of consistency from the EU in their dealings with each country. This provides unnecessary uncertainty and competition. The demands of each country should be same and the targets should not move the closer you get to them. This stems from the sentiment that there is not a unified approach to enlargement coming from the EU.

It seems that there is a disconnect in the expectations of each side regarding enlargement. One suggestion to improve this was to involve politicians at the highest levels more in the dialog. This would give clearer impetus for what is happening and what local parliaments need to do. Another way of making some tangible progress would be to try and expand EU programs into the region now, without waiting for membership, for example, Erasmus+. This would provide tangible benefits to the people and show that efforts are being made, both by local governments and the EU. Communicating these kinds of initiatives, should they be implemented, will be an essential part of this.

Implementing programs such as these also offer a way of showing the EU that the region is committed to the reform process. Essentially, by improving regional co-

operation, the attractiveness of the region to the EU and the prospect of enlargement are likely to increase.

### Regional Cooperation

There is a need for regional cooperation both within the Balkans and between the Balkans and the EU. There is however currently a lack of political will among the countries for a major ongoing improvement in regional cooperation. This may be because regional cooperation is seen as in competition to EU integration and not as providing added value. Interactions between countries in the region need to be 'normalized' to address this issue.

The Berlin Process has led to some positive outcomes for regional cooperation, but the process should become a stronger and more political process. It should be expanded beyond transport and energy to include as many key areas as possible. The Berlin Process has lost some momentum and this needs to be reinserted.

It was discussed that the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) should be strengthened and become part of the Berlin Process. The region lacks a culture of cooperation and the RCC could help build this. However, it was also noted that the challenge with the RCC is how much governments of the region are willing to support an RCC with more power.

Another way to support regional cooperation is to harmonize as much as possible regional cooperation mechanisms with EU mechanisms. Otherwise, there risks being even more fragmentation in the region when some countries become members of the EU but others do not.

It was raised that regional cooperation is the one thing that really will have an impact on the ground, much more so than EU accession, especially considering the current crisis in the EU. This needs to be recognized and governments need to take more responsibility for creating a positive future.

RYCO is a very important initiative that will hopefully have a significant impact and serves as a great platform for youth mobility. Other initiatives for regional cooperation that should be continued/implemented include an exchange of civil servants and involving professional associations to work on regional initiatives.

The involvement of professional associations and other civil society organizations is the key to ensure a trickling down of regional cooperation, but it requires a commitment on the part of governments to meaningfully include civil society. Civil society should not just be critics of government initiatives but should be engaged in solving the issues.

It would also be useful if the EU could make more financial mechanisms available to the region, for exam-

ple, for research and innovation, and make these mechanisms highly visible. This would support regional cooperation.

One major issue with regional cooperation is the ineffectiveness of communicating successful initiatives and events with the public. This needs to be addressed in order to make real progress. It was also raised that the EU could make more effort to recognize regional cooperation successes in the region.

Reconciliation is a key component of regional cooperation but this will take a long time. Importantly, reconciliation means not just looking forward, but dealing with the past, which many in the political elite are not yet ready to do.

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# ACRONYMS USED

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AfD	Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany)
BDI	Democratic Union for Integration
BiEPAG	Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BTI	Bertelsmann Transformation Index
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CEIR	The Center for the Empirical Researches of Religion
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
DEO	Department for Equal Opportunities
DPA	Democratic Party of Albanians
DUI	Democratic Union for Integration
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ECE	East-Central Europe
EU	European Union
EPC	European Policy Centre
FB	Facebook
FOI	Freedom of Information
FPÖ	Freedom Party of Austria
GDN-SEE	Global Development Network Southeast Europe
HDZ	Croatian Democratic Union
HND	Croatian Independent Democrats
HZDS	Movement for a Democratic Slovakia
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession
IS	Islamic State
ISIL	The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
KCSS	Kosovar Centre for Security Studies
LSDM	League of Social Democrats of Macedonia
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MLSP	Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Macedonia
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDSV	National Movement for Stability and Progress, known as National Movement Simeon II
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NLA	National Liberation Army
ODS	Civic Democratic Party
OFA	Ohrid Framework Agreement
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
ÖVP	Austrian People's Party
ÖVP-SPÖ	Austrian People's Party – Social Democratic Party of Austria
PBS	Public Broadcasting System
PDP	Party for Democratic Prosperity
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
RECOM	Regional Commission for the Establishment of Facts about War Crimes and Other Serious Violations of Human Rights
RS	Republika Srpska
RYCO	Regional Youth Cooperation Office
SBiH	Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina
SDA	Party of Democratic Action (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
SDP	Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina

SDS	Serb Democratic Party (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
SEE	Southeast Europe/Southeast European
SIZ	Self-managed interest communities
SMD	Single-member district
SNS	Slovakian National Party
SNSD	Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
U.S.	United States
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VMRO	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization
VMRO-DPMNE	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party of Macedonian National Unity
WB	Western Balkan
WWII	World War II
ZAVNOH	Anti-Fascist Council of the People’s Liberation of Croatia



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# ABOUT ASPEN

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**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 focused on ‘value-based leadership’. With its 60-year tradition in the U.S., it is the most prestigious trademark of the Aspen Institute and the secret behind its success. It embodies the Aspen philosophy by promoting values-based leadership among decision makers from all over the world through offering them a platform for an open and critical discourse on fundamental philosophical questions of human existence.

In this unique seminar, away from the hectic everyday life, in an inspiring natural environment, executives have the opportunity to critically discuss classical and modern philosophical body of thought. The seminar program consists of sessions organized around six themes: Human Nature, Individual Rights and Liberty, Property and Productivity, Equality and Social Welfare. Excerpts of various classical and modern texts about universal values written by important thinkers shape the foundation for reflection and dialog on the fundamental questions of our present and future: What are the current challenges our society has to meet? How will your organization as well as you yourself have to adjust to these challenges and which humanistic values are relevant in this process?

## **Policy Program**

Aspen Policy Programs openly address current policy challenges. In closed-door conferences and seminars on complex political and social developments, decision makers analyze common challenges in confidence and develop viable solutions. Kickoff presentations by international experts set the ground for focused debates with policy makers in search for an international consensus among politicians, diplomats, and experts from academia, business, and media. In the course of discussions, constructive suggestions and policy recommendations are developed and later on published.

## Berlin Transatlantic Forum

In 2014, on the occasion of its 40th anniversary, Aspen Germany launched its Berlin Transatlantic Forum to address the most pressing challenges jointly facing Europe and the United States. Each fall, the Institute hosts a conference bringing together renowned experts and decision-makers from both sides of the Atlantic to exchange ideas and seek answers to important questions in the fields of security, energy, and trade, and also to discuss issues pertaining to our shared foundation of Western values. The annual conference is preceded by a workshop in late spring, during which a small group of experts from Germany, Europe, and the U.S. gathers for an in-depth discussion of key topics of transatlantic concern.

The Berlin Transatlantic Forum marks a continuation of the Institute’s close ties to the city of Berlin. In 1974, in the midst of the Cold War, the Institute was founded as a symbol of transatlantic solidarity. Since then, Aspen Germany has attracted high level guests to Berlin to strengthen Euro-Atlantic cooperation.

## German-American Dialog

The unique relationship between Germany and the United States remains key for addressing political challenges in the multi-polar world of the 21st century. While government relations, particular when it comes to finding a response to global crises, remain close, inter-parliamentarian and civil society ties have lost much of their traditional vibrancy. It appears as if the transatlantic discourse suffers from a growing sense of mistrust, caused by divergent views on intelligence and security issues, the transatlantic free trade agreement, how to counter domestic and international terrorism, and energy and environmental issues. At the same time, decision-makers on either side of the Atlantic are confronted with similar developments and obstacles, in the fields of economy, education, employment, migration and integration, health and demographic developments, the environment, and renewable energies.

Against this background, a forum bringing together legislators and civil-society representatives from both sides of the Atlantic to learn about and from each other seems more important than ever. In the coming years, the Aspen German-American Dialog will thus invite members of the U.S. Congress and the German Bundestag, together with each a group of civil-society representatives, to meet in Germany to send a strong signal of cooperation as well as to further foster and develop the transatlantic relationship. Beyond discussions on foreign and security policy questions, the dialog aims at sharing experiences and learning with one another on the national and communal level, thereby experiencing and benefiting from German-American friendship.

### Staffers Exchange Program

At the beginning of the 21st century, the Euro-Atlantic community of values faces numerous challenges, both from within and from outside. What had seemed inseparable during the Cold War appears to have lost much of its cohesion since the proclaimed "End of History" in 1989. In the multi-polar, globalized world that followed the era of bi-polarity, the once unanimous West appears to be in search of a new joint narrative suitable for competition in a world order marked by complexity. The gradual erosion of the special Euro-Atlantic relationship has been most visible in the German-American friendship. The oft-hailed special relationship appears to have eroded ever since the beginning of the second war in Iraq. Diverging views on the use of military force, the gathering of intelligence within alliances, recovery from the economic and financial crises, the role of the European Union, and the rights and responsibilities of the state to balance personal freedoms and security all point to a growing lack of understanding for each other's views, systems, and political cultures. Concurrent with these developments is a generational shift. Future leaders on both sides of the Atlantic will have little personal experience of what made this relationship so important and unique.

The Aspen Institute Germany, with the support of the Transatlantic Program of the Federal Republic of Germany with funds from the European Recovery Program of the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy, has thus designed an exchange program for staffers of Congress and the Bundestag to foster dialog on the transatlantic relations among future political leaders. Participating staffers engage in intense debates on the most pressing concerns facing the transatlantic community in addition to meeting decision-makers, experts, and practitioners. Site visits in Berlin and cultural events promoting mutual understanding are an integral part of the program.

### Southeast Europe Program

The Aspen Institute Germany has had a focus on the developments in Southeast Europe since the early 1990s. In cooperation with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Aspen's former Executive Director David Anderson initiated the International Commission on the Balkans in 1995 under the leadership of former Belgian Prime Minister Leo Tindemans, which in 1996 published the report "Unfinished Peace", an analysis of the causes of the Balkan conflicts and an independent assessment of the European, American, and UN responses. This high-level international commission was followed by a young leaders study group on the future of the Balkans as well as several other events with a focus on this region.

Since 2008, one of the Policy Program's main focuses has again been on the countries of former Yugoslavia and Albania, the so-called Western Balkans. In its closed-door meetings, the Aspen Institute Germany facilitates an

open and honest high-level exchange between former conflict parties in support of regional cooperation and dialog and the region's agenda of Euro-Atlantic integration including the transformation processes this entails. The goal of this exchange is to openly address achievements and progress as well as remaining problems and conflict issues between decision-makers of the region. In pursuit of this goal, the Aspen Institute Germany's Southeast Europe Program has two different formats, the Aspen Southeast Europe Foreign Ministers' Conferences and the so-called Sub-cabinet Meetings.

### **Public Program**

The Aspen Institute Germany's Public Program is designed for a broader, invited public audience. It serves as a forum for discourse, where new ideas can be discussed in a productive environment of interested and informed individuals. The central focus of the Public Program is values-based leadership – the underlying mission of the Institute – and discussions focus on how leaders can find new ways to deal with the political and economic challenges of our time.

The Public Program consists of three different formats. The first is the Aspen Forum, a series of evening events for no more than 50 guests. They are invited to listen to the ideas of a guest speaker either in an exclusive interview setting or in a brief lecture. Some of these events are hosted in cooperation with Deutschlandradio Kultur. While Deutschlandradio Kultur broadcasts the first part of the event, the second part is an intimate, off-the-record discussion for and with our invited guests only. The second format is the Aspen Brown Bag Lunch series, aiming at constructive dialog on current political, economic and social issues. Two to four experts provide short introductory statements before the discussion is opened to twenty to thirty selected guests. Finally, the Public Program includes major events such as the annual summer party, the President's Night in 2012, and the celebration of 40 Years Aspen Germany. Members of the "Verein der Freunde des Aspen Instituts" (association of Friends of the Aspen Institute) enjoy privileged access to all Public Program events.





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# **DEMOCRATIZATION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS**

**PROMOTING MULTI-ETHNIC OPEN SOCIETIES TO  
COUNTER RADICALIZATION AND POLARIZATION**

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