

# The Key Role of the Young Generation for the Consolidation of South East Europe

**Predrag Jureković (Ed.)**

Study Group Information



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Study Group Information

Predrag Jureković (Ed.)

# **The Key Role of the Young Generation for the Consolidation of South East Europe**

**42<sup>nd</sup> Workshop of the PfP Consortium Study Group  
“Regional Stability in South East Europe”**

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## Table of Contents

Foreword	
<i>Predrag Jureković</i> .....	5
Abstract.....	7
PART I: The Young Generation in South East Europe: Social and Economic Indicators .....	9
The Young Generation in the Western Balkans: Demographic Perspective <i>Vladimir Nikitović</i> .....	11
Short- and Long-Term Socio-Economic Challenges for the Young Generation in Southeast Europe <i>Mario Holžner</i> .....	27
PART II: The Young Hopefuls: Do They Make a Difference Politically? .....	37
Prospects for Political Change in Serbia and the Western Balkans: Challenges and Obstacles for Young Hopefuls <i>Ana Stevanović</i> .....	39
Alternative Concepts vs Undemocratic and Clientelistic Governance Styles: The Struggle of the Young Politicians <i>Monika Zajkova</i> .....	47
PART III: Cultural and Economic Role Models .....	51
Gender as a Platform for Regional Cooperation <i>Mia Bjelogrić</i> .....	53
Development Model for BiH's Second Post-War Generation <i>Vjekoslav Domljan</i> .....	57
Situation of Youth in the Balkans and Youth Initiative for Human Rights: Kosovo's Work <i>Bjeshkë Guri</i> .....	79

PART IV: International Support.....	89
UN Security Council’s Youth, Peace and Security Agenda: An Opportunity for the Meaningful Participation of Young Women and Men <i>Milena Stošić</i> .....	91
The Soft Power of Democratization and Political Ecology: Opportunities for the WB6 Young Hopefuls <i>Simon Ilse</i> .....	105
PART V: Policy Recommendations.....	113
Policy Recommendations <i>Regional Stability in South East Europe Study Group</i> .....	115
List of Abbreviations.....	125
List of Authors and Editor.....	127

## Foreword

*Predrag Jureković*

This volume is composed of articles from the 42<sup>nd</sup> workshop of the Study Group “Regional Stability in South East Europe”. The workshop was conducted in Reichenau, Austria, from 5 to 8 May, 2022. Under the overarching title “The Key Role of the Young Generation for the Consolidation of South East Europe” experts from the South East European region and other parts of Europe, international organizations and major stake holder nations met under the umbrella of the PfP Consortium of Defence Academies and Security Studies Institutes and the Austrian Ministry of Defence, represented through its National Defence Academy and the Directorate General for Defence Policy.

In South East Europe, and in particular in its Western Balkan region, it seems obvious that established politicians and other decision-makers, whose careers date back at least in part to the wartime or immediate post-war period, are unable or unwilling to positively address the political, social and economic challenges in terms of regional consolidation. The strengthening of kleptocratic, clientelistic and authoritarian power structures is evident.

Under these difficult political conditions and due to critical demographic and other social indicators, what opportunities do representatives of the younger generation have to assert democratic, rule of law and ecological ideas? Do the young hopefuls make a difference politically by developing creative concepts for addressing regional conflict issues and alternative concepts to undemocratic and clientelistic governance styles? Or are such expectations unrealistic because many young people in South East Europe have to “come to terms” with the existing conditions or are disillusioned?

However, what socio-cultural and economic role models already exist in the region to give hope to the young population in the Western Balkans with innovative concepts and also to give impetus to cooperation within the region? Finally, what support is there in this regard from the international side and what should be improved?

These are some of the key questions that the authors of this Study Group Information address in their contributions. In the first part of this publication, two authors analyse the demographic and socio-economic conditions for the young generation in South East Europe. This is followed in the second part by contributions from two young politicians from South East Europe, who take a very critical look at the opportunities for the young generation in the region. After that, follow three contributions that present three concrete role models for enhancing pro-active youth engagement in the field of economics, civil and human rights. The two authors' contributions in the fourth part address the role of international actors in supporting South East European youth. The main focus here is on the issue of implementing international youth conventions and on the role of Western party foundations in South East Europe. The recommendations of the Study Group members are summarized at the end of this publication, in part V.

The editor would like to express his thanks to all authors who contributed papers to this volume of the Study Group Information. He is pleased to present the valued readers the analyses and recommendations and would appreciate if this Study Group Information could contribute to generate positive ideas for supporting the still challenging processes of consolidating peace in South East Europe.

Special thanks go to Sara Milena Schachinger, who supported this publication as facilitating editor.

## **Abstract**

South East Europe has been stagnating for years in the process of peace consolidation and democratic reforms. A generational change therefore seems indispensable in the political and economic spheres, especially in the Western Balkans.

Positive role models already exist among the younger generation, especially in the civil society sector. However, challenging demographic developments and the strong political inertia among the previous political and economic elites of the post-war period make change difficult.

As the publications of this Study Group information show, it is essential to turn a “brain drain” into a “brain gain” as quickly as possible with international assistance and to enable a younger generation in South East Europe to overcome nationalistic and kleptocratic structures in order to create more opportunities for regional cooperation again. In particular, in the field of human and civil rights as well as environmental protection and “green energy”, transnational cooperation between youth in South East Europe is possible as a priority.



**PART I: The Young Generation in South  
East Europe: Social and Economic Indicators**

# **The Young Generation in the Western Balkans: Demographic Perspective**

*Vladimir Nikitović*

This paper briefly sketches three topics on the young population in the Western Balkans (WB) from a demographic perspective: the issues in determining its size and demographic structure due to outdated or incomplete data sources, recent change in migration patterns inducing new types of youth mobility, and future trends based on the adjusted UN population projections.

## **Data Issues: How to Determine the Size of Young Population in the Western Balkans?**

As there is no consensus when it comes to the delineations of youth, we defined it as the population aged 15-34 in this paper, thus aiming to include all possible transitions over the course of life that are relevant for youth migration in the context of WB. The similar approach was chosen in the recent EU funded project on migration of youth in the region of Danube countries (YOUMIG). This is relevant for the considerations in this paper in the way that migration impact is central for the changes in size and demographic structure of the youth. The selected age bracket covers the “Generation Y” or “Millennials” usually described as the generation of choices, communication and individualism. Those factors are assumed to be crucial for changing migration patterns of today’s youth comparing to those of previous generations (Fassmann et al., 2018).

Demographic data related to countries in the region of WB still heavily depend on a single source – the traditional census of population. Accordingly, population estimates based on distant census years regularly underestimate the effect of international migration in case of net emigration countries as those in the region (Nikitović, 2022, p. 169). Given that the highest share of migrants typically relates to those younger than 40, with peaks in the age 20-34 (see Figure 1), it is particularly challenging to get reliable estimate of the

size of young population in this region, which will be demonstrated by comparisons of the data based on different census years. This will be demonstrated by comparisons between two data sources of the age structure of populations in Slovenia, Croatia and North Macedonia in the 2021 census and the estimate based on the 2010 census round by two relevant international agencies – UN and Eurostat (Figures 2-4). The most recent census round was held only in North Macedonia of all the WB populations, while Croatia and Slovenia, both of which historically and socioeconomically deeply tied with WB, were chosen as the contrasting examples of migration patterns in the recent period.

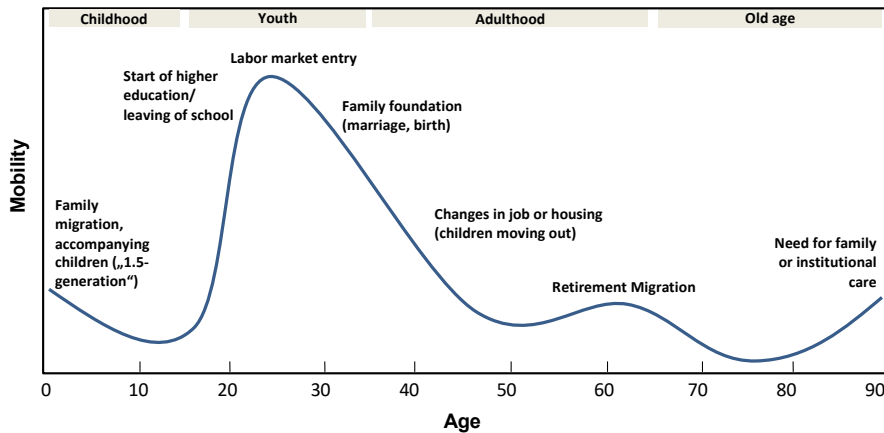


Figure 1: Idealized model of age-specific migration (Source: Fassmann et al., 2018: 27)

The most recent update of the United Nations’ *World Population Prospects* (WPP 2019) was made on the basis of the 2010 population census round. The Eurostat’s counterpart for the EU members – EuroPop 2019, was also relied on the previous census round but on much closer one in case of Slovenia, where the census is register based unlike Croatia. The deviations of the estimates from the census results are mainly resulted from two unforeseeable factors – migration and COVID-19. Other possible sources of deviations are negligible as both estimates were based on most recent data on change in fertility and mortality patterns in these countries except for the unexpected pandemic impact. Given that this unexpected exogenous source of change in mortality has typically hit the oldest population (Goldstein, Lee, 2020), all three figures suggest that the pandemic effect on deviation in pop-

ulation estimates (overestimation) is markedly lower than the effect of un-predicted migration change – underestimation for Croatia and North Macedonia, and overestimation for Slovenia. This finding is in line with known differences between Slovenia as a net immigration country, and Croatia and North Macedonia as net emigration states. Also, this is clear evidence that the impact of migration is the most important for the changes in size and structure of young population.

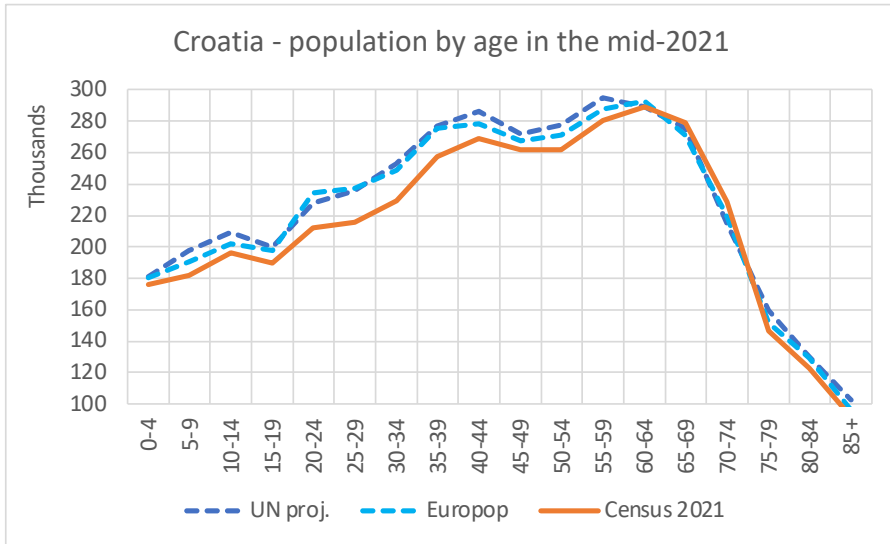


Figure 2: Total population of Croatia in 2021 by five-year age groups according to projections by UN and Eurostat and the 2021 Census (Sources: United Nations, 2019; Eurostat database, 2022; Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2022)

According to the United Nations’ most recent update of the World Population Prospects, there were almost 17.5 million people living in WB in 2020, of which 26% were those aged 15-34 – indicating to younger population on average than the one in the EU-27 (the share of youth was 22.9%). Though, the share of youth across the region varies markedly reflecting differences between countries in the onset and course of demographic transition (Nikitović, 2016). The highest share refers to Kosovo – the youngest European population, and Albania, and the lowest to Serbia excluding Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH), whilst the shares for North Macedonia and Montenegro lie in between. Serbia and BH coincide with Croatia, or the EU-27 average according to this indicator (Table 1 see page no. 15).

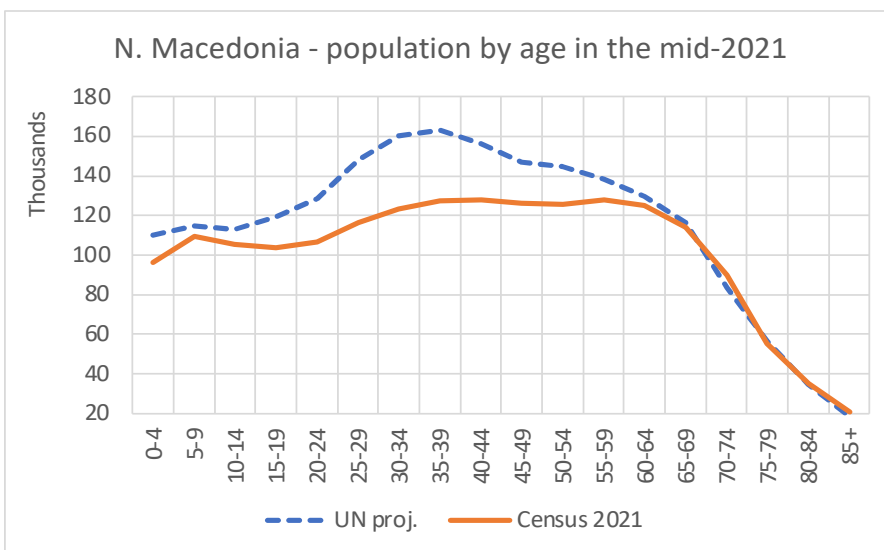


Figure 3: Total population of North Macedonia in 2021 by five-year age groups according to the UN projection and the 2021 Census (Note: There is no Europop 2019 estimate as it only includes the EU members. Sources: United Nations, 2019; Central Bureau of Statistics of North Macedonia, 2022)

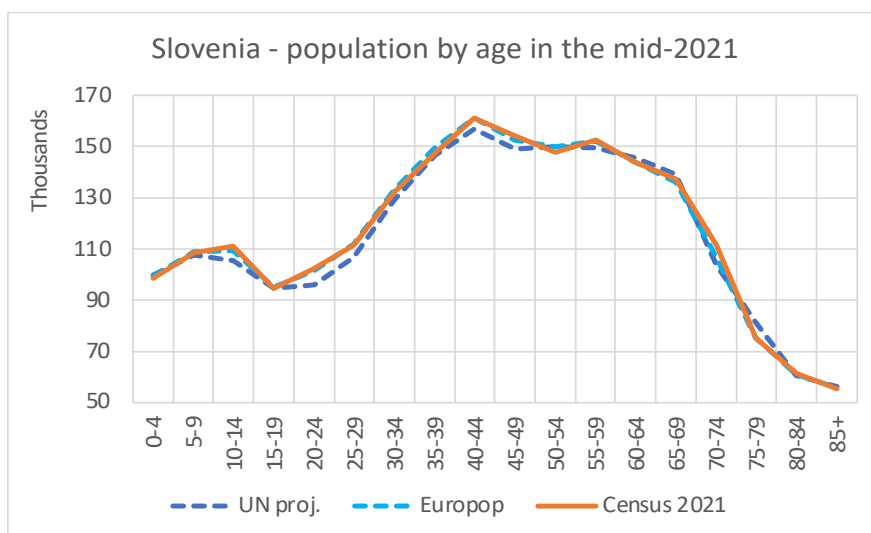


Figure 4: Total population of Slovenia in 2021 by 5-year age groups according to projections by UN and Eurostat and the 2021 Census (Sources: United Nations, 2019; Eurostat, 2022; Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2022)

Countries / Territories	Population density (inh./ sq. km)		Total population		Share of the youth		Human Development Index (HDI)		
	UN	Adjusted	UN	Adjusted	UN	Adjusted	HDI	quartile	world rank
Albania	100.1	88.5	2,877,800	2,544,852	30.3	28.6	0.795	high	69
Bosnia and Herzegovina	64.1	57.1	3,280,815	2,924,088	23.9	21.8	0.780	high	73
Kosovo ( <i>UNSCR 1244/99</i> )	165.7	164.9	1,803,704	1,795,032	33.0	31.5			
Montenegro	45.5	43.2	628,062	596,732	26.2	25.7	0.829	very high	48
North Macedonia	81.0	71.4	2,083,380	1,836,327	28.1	25.0	0.774	high	82
Serbia excl. Kosovo	88.1	86.1	6,824,935	6,671,592	23.0	22.3	0.806*	very high	64
<b>Western Balkans</b>	<b>84.2</b>	<b>78.8</b>	<b>17,498,696</b>	<b>16,368,623</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>24.8</b>			
<i>Slovenia</i>	<i>103.6</i>	<i>103.6</i>	<i>2,100,126</i>		<i>21.3</i>		0.917	very high	22
<i>Croatia</i>	<i>69.1</i>	<i>69.1</i>	<i>3,908,336</i>		<i>23.0</i>		0.851	very high	43
<b>EU-27</b>	<b>105.9</b>	<b>105.9</b>	<b>447,269,340</b>		<b>22.9</b>				

Table 1: Estimates of the population in the Western Balkans – UN based and adjusted for migration impact (Note: Estimates for Kosovo (UNSCR 1244/99) and Serbia excl. Kosovo were separately calculated as the United Nations’ estimates for Serbia include Kosovo. (Sources: United Nations 2019; Eurostat, 2022; national statistical offices; Author’s calculation)

However, if we assume that the pattern of deviations of the UN population estimates for N. Macedonia and Croatia holds in a similar way for other populations in WB where the 2020 census round still has not been held, their total population and especially the youth might be smaller than the UN estimates suggest. Accordingly, we adjusted these estimates, assuming that Albania, Kosovo and BH would follow the pattern of deviation calculated for North Macedonia, and Montenegro and Serbia the pattern for Croatia, given the similarities and differences between the countries in recent demographic and migration trends. The adjusted estimate for WB indicates that the current real size of total population in the region might be smaller by 1.1 million than the estimated by the UN. Similarly, the real share of youth might be considerably lower (Table 1). The main reason would be the underestimation of out-migration from WB, which mainly hits the youth.

Unlike the share of youth, all populations in the region lag behind most European countries in terms of the Human Development Index (HDI). Although Montenegro and Serbia belong to the quartile of very high HDI, both countries are ranked well below the average of 0.898 for countries in this group. Other populations in the WB are positioned even lower, entering only the quartile of high HDI (UNDP, 2020). The region can be considered to be much closer to countries from West Asia and Central America than to its own continent in terms of human development. Two of the three indices

making HDI are particularly relevant for the youth – education index and GNI index. Both induced the WB to be placed very low in terms of HDI comparing to European context, suggesting that gap as a main driver of strong emigration from the region. This implication opens the next section of the paper.

### **Changing Patterns of Recent Migration Inflows from the Western Balkans in Europe**

The addressed data issues in relation to migration from/to WB pointed to the alternative source of data – administrative statistics of residence permits by the Eurostat. It offers a good proxy for estimating changes in migration flows between WB and the EU, as it covers the major European destinations for WB migrants and has the least missing data comparing to other official statistics on migration. In addition, simple indicators based on this source enable making inferences on the intrinsic changes in recent migration patterns across the region.

Table 2 shows the annual ratio between the total migration inflows and migrant stock of Serbian citizens in the EU (including EFTA) in the 2011-2020 period, i.e. between the total first permits issued to them during a year and all valid permits to this citizenship on 31 December of the same year. The flow-to stock ratio for the EU-27 average tripled during the period. However, this rise has been induced mainly by new member states, with their ratios surpassing 25%, while in all old member states, except Germany and Sweden, the ratio is below 5%. In most countries, except in Austria, Switzerland, France, and Italy (almost all traditional destinations for Serbian citizens), the ratio increased between 2011 and 2019, implying the shortening of expected stay of new migrants. In new member states including Germany, the ratio increased by even two to six times. These trends partially reflect the maturity of destinations – old destinations have larger stocks and consequently lower flow-to-stock ratio, while the opposite is true for new destinations. However, much faster growth of the ratio in newer destinations and Germany suggests that the dominant reasons for migration to them might be different compared with old destinations. Table 3 shows the index for Albania, suggesting similar trends in the 2011-2019 period as in Serbia.

	TIME									
GEO (Labels)	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
European Union - 27 countries (from 2020)	<b>0.04</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0.06</b>	<b>0.06</b>	<b>0.08</b>	<b>0.08</b>	<b>0.10</b>	<b>0.12</b>	
European Union - 28 countries (2013-2020)										
Belgium	0.19	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.12	0.10	0.10	0.11	0.09	0.10
Bulgaria	0.38	0.39	0.44	0.19	0.18	0.19	0.25	0.31	0.24	0.14
Czechia	0.07	0.13	0.13	0.10	0.23	0.28	0.20	0.39	0.65	0.19
Denmark										
Germany (until 1990 former territory of the FRG)	0.01	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.07	0.06	0.07	0.09	
Estonia	0.19	0.25	0.32	0.25	0.42	0.29	0.48	0.29	0.23	0.26
Ireland	0.16	0.15	0.18	0.25	0.30	0.38	0.30	0.26	0.25	0.11
Greece	0.07	0.06	0.09	0.09	0.08	0.09	0.07	0.07	0.07	
Spain	0.12	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.12	0.11	0.11	0.12	0.11
France	<b>0.03</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>0.04</b>	<b>0.04</b>	<b>0.04</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0.04</b>	<b>0.04</b>	<b>0.04</b>	<b>0.04</b>
Croatia			0.28	0.30	0.14	0.20	0.27	0.82	1.04	0.66
Italy	0.07	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0.04</b>	<b>0.04</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>0.04</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>0.02</b>
Cyprus	0.16	0.16	0.23	0.27	0.32	0.29	0.27	0.25	0.21	0.20
Latvia	0.43	0.55	0.08	0.50	0.53	0.13	0.58	0.42	0.30	0.31
Lithuania	0.50	0.25	0.43	0.29	0.29	0.24	0.26	0.40	0.70	0.62
Luxembourg	0.04	0.08	0.06	0.06	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.09	0.10	0.07
Hungary	0.07	0.08	0.07	0.27	0.27	0.29	0.58	0.69	0.34	0.27
Malta	0.25	0.34	0.31	0.42	0.43	0.38	0.47	0.38	0.28	0.07
Netherlands	0.45	0.42	0.17	0.13	0.14	0.15	0.14	0.14	0.15	0.11
Austria	<b>0.04</b>	<b>0.04</b>	<b>0.04</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0.04</b>	<b>0.04</b>	<b>0.04</b>	<b>0.03</b>
Poland	0.23	0.15	0.71	0.65	0.67	0.50	0.61	0.66	0.72	0.78
Portugal	0.12	0.29	0.23	0.15	0.19	0.14	0.20	0.17	0.18	0.16
Romania	0.17	0.20	0.22	0.23	0.20	0.22	0.30	0.34	0.35	0.15
Slovenia	0.18	0.16	0.15	0.14	0.17	0.20	0.23	0.29	0.25	0.13
Slovakia	0.14	0.15	0.15	0.18	0.26	0.29	0.41	0.36	0.27	0.15
Finland	0.40	0.29	0.22	0.18	0.29	0.33	0.25	0.19	0.12	0.37
Sweden	0.14	0.17	0.14	0.15	0.14	0.15	0.17	0.18	0.15	
Iceland	0.09	0.09	0.13	0.11	0.12	0.21	0.25	0.17	0.15	
Liechtenstein			0.04	0.04	0.07	0.06	0.05	0.07	0.11	
Norway	0.38	0.45	0.38	0.37	0.40	0.36	0.33	0.19	0.17	0.12
Switzerland		<b>0.02</b>	<b>0.02</b>	<b>0.02</b>	<b>0.02</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>0.02</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>0.02</b>	
United Kingdom		1.10	2.16	0.46	0.52	0.45	0.41	0.33		
Total	<b>0.04</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0.06</b>	<b>0.07</b>	<b>0.08</b>	<b>0.10</b>	<b>0.11</b>	0.13

Table 2: Flow-to-stock ratio for Serbian citizens residing in the EU-27 including EFTA countries (Source: Eurostat, 2022)

The differences in reasons for migration between old and new EU destinations and the rising share of temporary over long-term (and eventually permanent) migration from WB could be understood in light of the concept called ‘New economics of labor migration’ as developed by Stark and Bloom (1985). This approach considers migration of a person as part of their household utility maximization strategy and as typically temporary or circular phenomenon. Contrary to that, migration is implicitly seen as permanent, usually lifetime decision of a person based on pre-calculated positive net present value of migration according to the ‘Neoclassical theory of migration’. Does the reasons for migration happen to change as flow-to-stock ratio indicates, we can check in Table 4 showing the statistics on the reasons for the issuance of first-time residence permits to the migrants from WB.



GEO (Labels)	TIME									
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
European Union - 27 countries (from 2020)										
European Union - 28 countries (2013-2020)										
Belgium	0.12	0.11	0.11	0.12	0.13	0.13	0.16	0.15	0.14	0.13
Bulgaria	0.33	0.50	0.38	0.22	0.21	0.44	0.24	0.36	0.36	0.20
Czechia		0.18	0.14	0.14	0.31	0.37	0.30	0.36	0.50	0.19
Denmark										
Germany (until 1990 former territory of the FRG)										0.26
Estonia	0.50	0.60	0.33	0.43	0.24	0.42	0.17	0.11	0.25	0.18
Ireland	0.10	0.11	0.19	0.14	0.27	0.21	0.17	0.24	0.25	0.17
Greece	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.07	0.08	0.04	0.04	0.04	
Spain	0.10	0.09	0.10	0.10	0.13	0.15	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.21
France			0.17	0.21	0.25	0.26	0.25	0.23	0.22	0.14
Croatia			0.56	0.49	0.29	0.29	1.12	1.22	1.08	0.72
Italy	0.05	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.03
Cyprus					0.23	0.20	0.35	0.42	0.31	0.17
Latvia	0.44	0.30	0.40	0.10	0.57	0.09	0.50	0.15	0.27	0.37
Lithuania	0.12	0.38	0.45	0.34	0.39	0.19	0.43	0.31	0.36	0.17
Luxembourg	0.05		0.15	0.12	0.19	0.18	0.18		0.24	0.19
Hungary			0.76	0.64	0.71	0.56	0.45	0.61	0.46	0.33
Malta										
Netherlands			0.26	0.26	0.25	0.27	0.27	0.24	0.27	0.17
Austria	0.17	0.18	0.14	0.15	0.19	0.19	0.18	0.16	0.16	0.13
Poland	0.23	0.26	0.37	0.31		0.28	0.50	0.77	0.53	0.63
Portugal	0.16	0.08	0.12	0.26	0.29	0.26	0.17	0.18	0.15	0.28
Romania	0.18	0.19	0.24	0.21	0.26	0.22	0.26	0.27	0.25	0.24
Slovenia	0.14	0.30	0.19	0.26	0.21	0.26	0.22	0.41	0.52	0.32
Slovakia	0.19									
Finland										0.26
Sweden	0.30	0.33	0.22	0.30	0.38	0.41	0.21	0.30	0.33	
Iceland	0.18	0.09	0.40	0.50	0.42	0.68	0.43	0.38	0.25	
Liechtenstein				0.00	0.75	0.17	0.55	0.50	0.17	
Norway	0.42	0.45	0.34	0.36	0.50	0.43	0.45	0.30	0.29	0.20
Switzerland		0.10	0.13	0.10	0.16	0.18	0.18	0.16	0.14	
United Kingdom										
Total	0.05	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.06	0.07	0.06	0.08	0.07	0.05

Table 3: Flow-to-stock ratio for Albanian citizens residing in the EU-27 including EFTA countries (Source: Eurostat, 2022)

First residence permit	Family reasons			Education reasons			Remunerated activities reasons			Other		
	2011	2015	2019	2011	2015	2019	2011	2015	2019	2011	2015	2019
Serbia excl. Kosovo	41.5	49.3	26.6	11.9	8.6	3.8	24.0	24.4	51.6	22.7	17.8	18.0
Albania	61.3	57.8	48.1	3.8	3.1	3.8	25.5	4.6	20.9	9.5	34.5	27.2
Bosnia and Herzegovina	50.0	52.0	28.8	7.5	10.1	3.5	31.3	28.1	62.9	11.2	9.8	4.8
North Macedonia	56.4	70.4	39.8	7.3	6.8	4.0	17.5	11.0	40.4	26.7	11.8	15.8
Montenegro	46.8	50.5	31.3	19.3	16.8	8.8	11.7	13.1	34.9	22.2	19.6	25.0
Kosovo (UNSCR 1244/99)	63.9	72.5	42.8	3.5	3.5	2.1	9.7	4.5	36.8	23.0	19.6	18.4

Table 4: First residence permits according to reason (Source: Eurostat, 2022)

Family reunion was the most frequent reason in all WB populations in 2011. Yet, there is a clear declining trend in this reason across the whole region during the period, while its share in the total first-time residence permits drop to just about 25% in 2019 in Serbia and BH. Concurrently, the permits for the reason of work doubled to tripled depending on country, except in Albania. Table 5 provides deeper insight in the change of the ratio between

these two types of first permits issued to Serbian citizens in the EU (including EFTA) in the 2011-2020 period.

GEO (Labels)	TIME	Work/family reunion ratio									
		2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
European Union - 27 countries (from 2020)		0.56	0.52	0.50	0.54	0.49	0.73	1.28	1.76	2.08	
European Union - 28 countries (2013-2020)				0.50	0.54	0.49	0.73	1.27	1.75	2.08	
Belgium		0.09	0.15	0.13	0.15	0.16	0.20	0.28	0.32	0.20	0.22
Bulgaria		0.21	0.42	0.29	0.35	1.38	0.10	2.38	1.01	1.71	1.58
Czechia		0.22	2.12	1.89	1.97	2.59	3.05	3.84	11.31	15.63	6.00
Denmark		0.91	0.88	0.76	1.10	0.82	0.79	1.80	0.88	0.92	0.84
Germany		0.35	0.34	0.29	0.38	0.15	0.53	0.83	0.74	0.62	0.12
Estonia			1.00			1.00	1.00	0.57	2.00	0.40	1.00
Ireland		3.25	2.43	3.00	1.71	1.40	2.31	2.00	1.18	0.64	1.83
Greece		0.45	0.34	0.43	0.37	0.41	0.49	0.42	0.38	0.54	0.63
Spain		0.49	0.52	0.52	0.42	0.83	0.41	0.54	0.60	0.73	0.60
France		0.29	0.28	0.24	0.26	0.24	0.21	0.26	0.29	0.34	0.45
Croatia				0.22	0.20	0.36	1.13	3.01	20.48	22.54	17.75
Italy		0.93	1.10	1.11	0.71	0.45	0.41	0.28	0.42	0.48	0.21
Cyprus		2.28	2.10	1.50	1.29	0.73	1.03	0.45	1.07	0.68	1.22
Latvia		0.50	2.00		1.50	2.33	1.00	0.75	1.17	5.00	2.67
Lithuania		1.00	0.00	1.00		3.00	1.00		9.00	12.67	28.50
Luxembourg		0.18	0.09	0.36	0.13	0.18	0.16	0.23	0.38	0.39	0.51
Hungary		1.73	3.73	2.86	3.00	4.26	5.64	19.40	19.56	35.81	22.04
Malta		6.94	13.62	2.88	4.32	4.00	5.50	9.42	7.44	8.45	4.41
Netherlands		0.46	0.46	0.49	0.57	0.64	0.73	0.68	0.64	0.51	0.44
Austria		0.07	0.10	0.12	0.13	0.09	0.09	0.08	0.11	0.14	0.08
Poland		3.54	2.90	18.18	86.20		39.18	14.14	11.83	9.14	34.29
Portugal		0.75	0.85	0.87	0.67	1.43	1.75	0.62	0.55	1.00	1.19
Romania		0.78	0.63	0.44	0.70	0.42	0.57	1.42	3.08	4.59	1.41
Slovenia		3.17	2.04	2.28	3.06	3.73	4.94	5.52	6.79	5.70	2.47
Slovakia		4.74	2.98	1.15	1.80	2.01	2.33	9.59	9.74	12.90	8.48
Finland		0.91	1.64	1.50	1.32	2.03	3.30	2.04	1.04	2.55	2.69
Sweden		0.26	0.21	0.27	0.23	0.31	0.23	0.28	0.37	0.33	
Iceland		1.14	0.80	2.14	2.25	1.80	0.54	1.29	1.05	1.25	
Liechtenstein				0.00	0.00	0.21	0.11	0.10	0.00	0.05	
Norway		1.25	1.52	1.07	0.99	1.43	1.39	1.28	1.55	1.01	1.35
Switzerland			0.17	0.12	0.00	0.17	0.21	0.24	0.26	0.00	
United Kingdom		1.02	1.68	1.45	1.33	1.02	1.07	0.65	0.70		

Table 5: Work/family reunion ratio for migrants from Serbia excluding Kosovo\* (Source: Eurostat, 2022)

Working permits are far more frequent in new EU member states, while family-related permits are the dominant category for Serbian migrants in old

member states. Generally, older destinations show stagnating or slightly declining total inflow, and their work-to-family ratio is below 0.5 (green numbers in Tables 5 and 6), suggesting that the family reunion reasons dominate. Similar to the previous indicator, Germany is the exception from the rule, with strong rise in the first-time work permits since 2016. This coincided with the introduction of the “Western Balkans regulation” by Germany in January 2016, which notably simplified the procedure for WB migrants without professional qualifications to work in this country. However, the ratio for Germany is still well below the EU average in 2019.

This trend in rising of working permits over family-related residence permits is noticeable across WB countries, although to somewhat lower extent than in Serbia. The only exception refers to the population in Kosovo, where this process seems to be just beginning (Table 6).

Despite the multiple increase in flows and stocks of migrants from WB in the new EU member states during the last decade the potential of these countries for attracting permanent immigration remains very limited. This is induced from both sides. There is no proactive policy towards permanent immigration in these countries, except for foreign nationals who belong to their own ethnicity. New EU member states are not largely recognized as desirable long-term destinations for potential migrants from WB, with partial exception of Slovenia due to its long historical and cultural ties with the region.

If put in the context of the push-pull concept of migration drivers, the shift towards rising share of work migrations and the emergence of new destinations for migrants from WB can be understood as a link in the chain of migration change that takes place in the EU. The recovery of economy in the EU after the 2008 recession induced the demand for labour, most strongly in Germany as the economic locomotive of the EU. This was intensified by the retirement of large baby-boom cohorts coupled with ever smaller young generations entering labour market. The sources of needed labour were found in new EU member states as their nationals face no restrictions in access to jobs in western labour markets unlike the third countries nationals. The new member states responded to the resulting severe labour shortages by introducing policies of importing temporary labour force from low-wage

European regions, especially from Ukraine, but also from the WB. Thus, workers inside the EU move from East to West, while their places are filled by third country nationals from the rim of the EU. However, immigration of WB workers to Western countries, most of which are traditional destinations, still takes place, but mainly through family permits rather than through work permits thanks to the large diasporas of WB countries.

		Work/family reunion ratio									
GEO (Labels)	TIME	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
European Union - 27 countries (from 2020)		0.01	0.02	0.01	0.03	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.13	0.13	0.15
European Union - 28 countries (2013-2020)			0.00	0.17	0.10	0.92	0.30	0.75	0.33	0.56	1.63
Belgium		0.10	0.63	0.36	0.30	0.25	0.35	1.00	1.76	3.01	1.38
Bulgaria		0.04	0.06	0.04	0.02	0.00	0.19	0.05	0.04	0.36	0.35
Czechia		0.01	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.33	0.70	0.50	0.42	0.09
Denmark											
Germany			0.50	0.67	0.75	0.67				17.00	0.00
Estonia		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.67	0.00	1.00	0.33
Ireland											
Greece		0.13	0.12	0.15	0.13	0.08	0.07	0.08	0.10	0.11	0.11
Spain				0.02	0.06	0.04	0.09	1.01	13.09	30.74	34.78
France		0.25	0.22	0.22	0.15	0.07	0.06	0.04	0.03	0.02	0.03
Croatia											
Italy											
Cyprus											
Latvia		0.22	0.08	0.28	0.20	0.20	0.21	0.17	0.21	0.19	0.15
Lithuania		2.65	5.31						5.50	3.86	4.36
Luxembourg								0.17			2.00
Hungary		0.05	0.03	0.09	0.07	0.03	0.03	0.13	0.02	0.13	0.20
Malta		0.01	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.03
Netherlands		2.00	0.29	0.00			9.50	27.93	13.36	14.43	53.00
Austria								0.00	0.00		
Poland											
Portugal		0.30		0.28	0.19	0.23	0.35	0.97	3.14	2.63	1.31
Romania			0.60				0.44	0.33	0.50	0.47	
Slovenia		0.29	0.16			0.22	0.23	0.50	0.38	0.98	0.98
Slovakia		0.13	0.13	0.10	0.13	0.14	0.16	0.21	0.31	0.34	
Finland						0.00			0.17	0.25	
Sweden						0.05	0.07	0.06	0.00	0.00	
Iceland		0.00	0.18	0.14	0.13	0.18	0.09	0.15	0.26	0.45	0.41
Liechtenstein			0.04	0.04	0.00	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.00	
Norway		0.05	0.03	0.05	0.07	1.11	0.13	0.05	0.10		
Switzerland			0.30	0.07	0.00	0.16	0.18	0.22	0.34	0.00	
United Kingdom		1.14	2.00	1.33	0.63	0.50	1.17	0.80	0.40		

Table 6: Work/family reunion ratio for migrants from Kosovo\* (Source: Eurostat, 2022)

These recent trends initiated by the increasing demand for workers in Germany and other Western countries suggest that the nature of migration in the WB might be changing – from long-term, usually permanent emigration to a more flexible pattern of short- to medium-term migration and circular mobility of population. This finding should be acknowledged when defining migration strategies across WB countries as it emphasizes the need for specific policy measures that would target both potential and current migrants, most of whom are young. The measures have to be grounded on the argument that people who move from the country should no longer be perceived as a definite loss of population and human capital but rather as the population that should be actively counted on in the future of the region.

### What Are the Prospects up to 2060?

Table 7 shows the medium variant of the most recent United Nations’ population projections (WPP 2019) for WB adjusted for the effect of migration underestimation (as outlined in the first section) and the estimated COVID-19 impact. The decline in total population of WB will most probably label the next decades, reducing the total population by a quarter in just four decades. This will be the case even in Kosovo – the youngest European population.

	Total	0-14	15-34	35-54	55-64	65+	80+
2020	16,368,623	2,692,620	4,055,840	4,291,576	2,269,720	3,058,869	642,579
2025	15,978,597	2,543,341	3,842,651	4,185,167	2,118,573	3,288,864	615,667
2030	15,536,048	2,333,264	3,680,419	4,033,190	2,018,261	3,470,914	753,084
2035	15,016,680	2,151,643	3,491,580	3,885,713	1,985,505	3,502,240	898,423
2040	14,464,786	1,996,006	3,306,951	3,706,882	1,940,406	3,514,541	985,219
2045	13,930,967	1,890,038	3,109,359	3,525,309	1,896,622	3,509,638	1,051,668
2050	13,421,849	1,818,260	2,868,252	3,392,217	1,823,615	3,519,507	1,065,746
2055	12,927,616	1,749,630	2,672,532	3,229,128	1,750,960	3,525,366	1,102,792
2060	12,418,362	1,668,471	2,509,642	3,067,805	1,671,402	3,501,043	1,124,390

Table 7: Total population and broad age groups in the Western Balkans (2020-2060) according to the most probable future (Source: Author’s calculation based on United Nations, 2019)

Apart from below replacement fertility, the main cause of such an outcome lies in high net emigration, which primarily affects the young population.

Accordingly, the decreasing trend in the size of two youngest age groups – children and youth, is expected to be strongest (about 38% each by 2060).

Those projection results suggest that the transition from the current net emigration pattern of WB populations to a net immigration has to be an ultimate goal of policies aimed to improve demographic structure of the region. That would be in line with the ‘Migration cycle concept’ as developed by Fassmann and Reeger (2012), which supposes that whole Europe will become an immigration continent in decades to come. Current population projections for the EU member states (Europop 2019) implicitly assume the same, predicting a net immigration profile in 15-30 years even in Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania (Eurostat, 2022), whose current migration patterns are pretty much alike those in the Western Balkans’ populations.

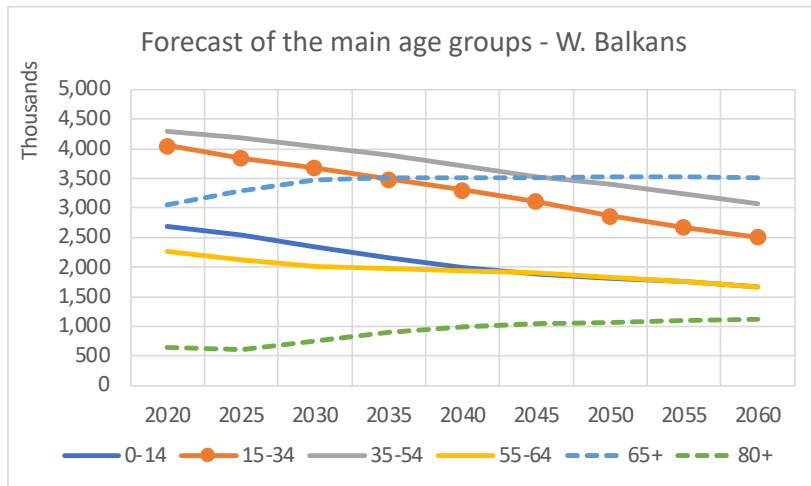


Figure 5: Trajectories of broad age groups in the Western Balkans (2020-2060) according to the most probable future (Source: Author’s calculation based on United Nations, 2019)

## Main Points with Policy Recommendations

In this paper, the main points refer to:

- the data issues due to outdated or incomplete sources of demographic and migration data in the Western Balkans,
- the strong emigration of the youth in the Western Balkans in the last decade,

- the changing nature of international migration in the region – from the long-term, usually permanent emigration to a more flexible patterns of short- to medium-term mobility,
- the need for improving all three dimensions of the UN’s Human Development Index – particularly education and living standard of population and
- reducing net emigration as an immediate policy task and reaching stable net immigration as the ultimate policy goal across the region.

Given the addressed issues, following policy recommendations are ranked according to urgency:

- Although “brain drain” is not negligible in the WB, the main concern of policy makers in this region regarding recent and expected migration outflows from their countries should be focused to reducing the huge wage gap between the sending and receiving countries in lower skilled occupations in high demand in the transport, construction, and health care sectors.
- Improving living standard, the rule of law, political stability, and quality of life as well as giving priority to stimulating own young entrepreneurs over to mainly unsustainable subsidizing of foreign companies across the WB countries could significantly reduce emigration of people of all education levels, and thus induce rise in both human capital and demographic vitality of the region.
- National strategies aimed to improve demographic profiles of their countries, particularly in terms of the share of young population, need to account for strong subnational differentials in human development between centres and periphery, urban and rural areas, and in-migration and out-migration districts.
- Immigration of young people from outside the region as a part of the response to reducing and ageing of the WB societies should be one of short- to medium-term goals in migration strategies of all the WB countries.

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# Short- and Long-Term Socio-Economic Challenges for the Young Generation in Southeast Europe

Mario Holzner

## Pandemic and Putin

Most economies in Central, East and Southeast Europe (CESEE) left the Covid-19-pandemic related slump behind. The average real economic growth between 2019 and 2021 was at above 4% (Figure 1). Compared to Western Europe, in most of CESEE, public health was traded for a better economic outcome. Excess mortality due to the Corona-virus-pandemic was high. Measures against the spread of the virus were only weakly implemented and vaccination coverage is low. Moreover, the countries also had less of an economic slump during the pandemic, due to a more favourable economic structure. The share of the service sector is much smaller than for instance in the West of the continent.

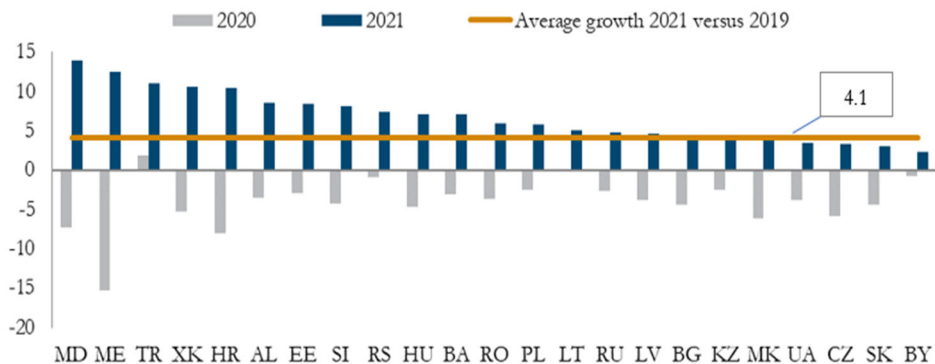


Figure 1: Real GDP growth in %<sup>1</sup>

For some of the countries in Southeast Europe (SEE) this is not the case. Tourism-dependent Montenegro did not recover fully in 2021. Also, those economies, particularly dependent on the automotive sector with its recent

<sup>1</sup> Average growth 2021 versus 2019 is a weighted average over all countries. Source: wiiw Annual Database incorporating national statistics and Eurostat.

disruptions of the value chains, did not recover fully from the pandemic recession. This includes North Macedonia, that is very much connected to the Central-European (i.e. German) industrial core.

Global value chain disruptions were one of the driving forces behind rising prices, more recently. However, inflation was particularly driven by soaring energy and food prices, already before the Russian invasion in Ukraine, and will be so in the months to come. In the spring forecast of the Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies (wiiw) as of 11 April 2022, two scenarios for consumer price inflation in 2022 were generated. A baseline scenario assumes the status quo with regard to the war in Ukraine and the Western sanctions against Russia. An adverse scenario assumes an immediate EU embargo on Russian oil and gas. For the Western parts of CESEE, including SEE, inflation is assumed to remain below 10% for the year 2022 in the baseline scenario and above 10% in the adverse scenario (Figure 2).

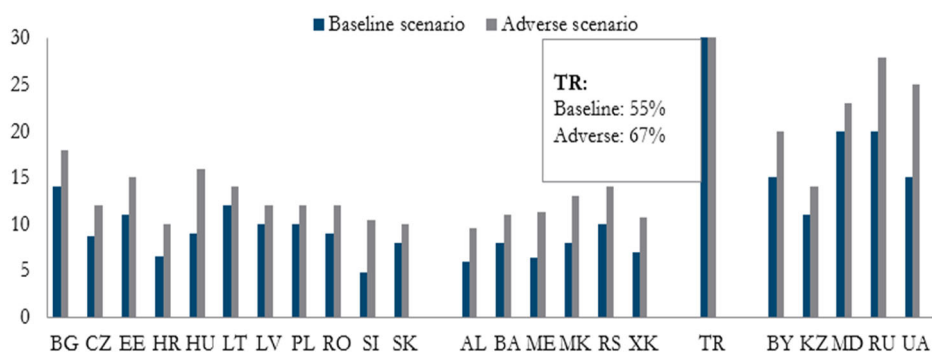


Figure 2: Average CPI inflation in 2022, in %<sup>2</sup>

Strong increases in the prices of food and energy will contribute to reduced economic growth in 2022, as consumers will have less purchasing power available. In the baseline scenario wiiw expects average real GDP growth in SEE of about 3% (Figure 3). In the adverse scenario economic growth in SEE will drop close to stagnation. This latest, in a series of economic crises, will clearly have its negative repercussions on unemployment, the pace of

<sup>2</sup> Baseline scenario: status quo; Adverse scenario: immediate EU embargo on Russian oil and gas. Source: wiiw forecasts as of 11 April 2022.

economic convergence, and the related net migration in the region. But apart from challenges and risks, there are also potential opportunities. The crisis acts as a catalyst of long-term trends and the region might profit e.g. from nearshoring of German foreign active companies.

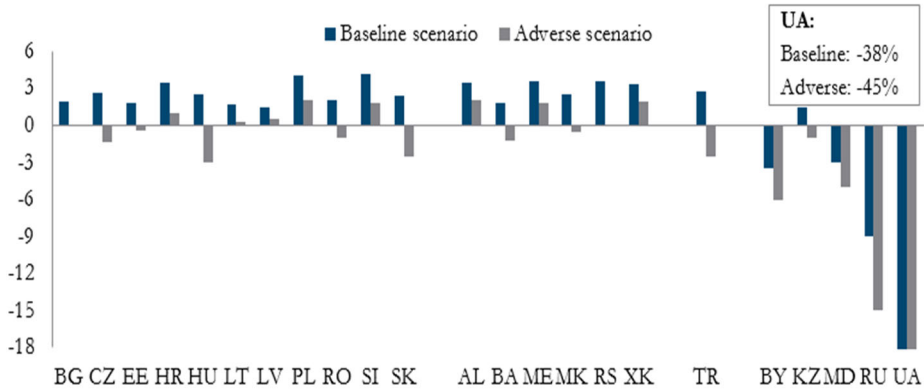


Figure 3: Real GDP growth in 2022, in %<sup>3</sup>

### Crises Effects on Youth Unemployment

However, in the short run, both, the pandemic and Putin will act as a strain on SEE labour markets. While, before the pandemic, overall unemployment rates were decreasing strongly, more recently, they stabilised around values of about 15% (Figure 4). Interestingly, the trend was similar for youth unemployment rates, though at double the level (Figure 5). About a third of the economically active labour force aged between 15 and 24 are unemployed, according to Labour Force Surveys (LFS).

During the pandemic, particularly the “Not in Education, Employment, or Training” (NEETS) rate increased among the young population in SEE (Figure 6). About a fifth of the young population is thus unemployed or inactive and neither in education or training. This has a devastating social effect on

<sup>3</sup> Baseline scenario: status quo; Adverse scenario: immediate EU embargo on Russian oil and gas. Source: wiw forecasts as of 11 April 2022.

the young population and adds to the pool of those who do not see any future at home and seek to emigrate, away from the region. Clearly, this is a call for active labour market policies and longer education.

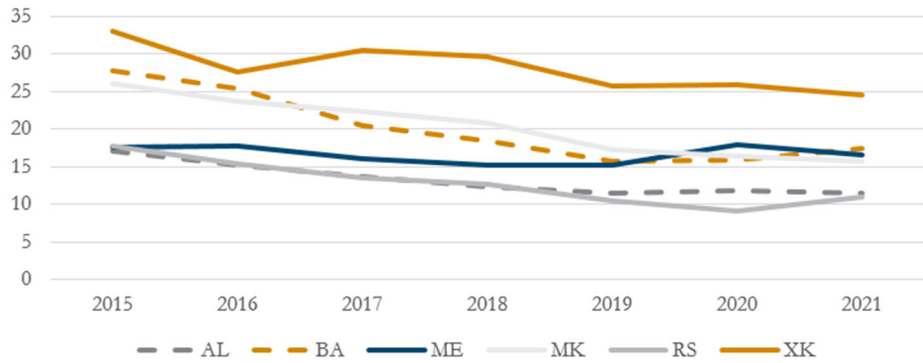


Figure 4: LFS unemployment rate, 15+, in %, 2015-2021<sup>4</sup>

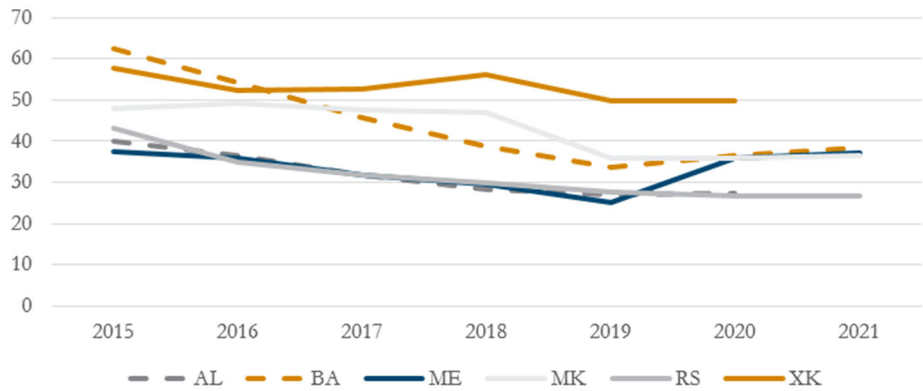


Figure 5: LFS unemployment rate, 15-24, in %, 2015-2021<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Source: wiiw Annual Database, national statistical offices.

<sup>5</sup> Source: wiiw Annual Database, national statistical offices.

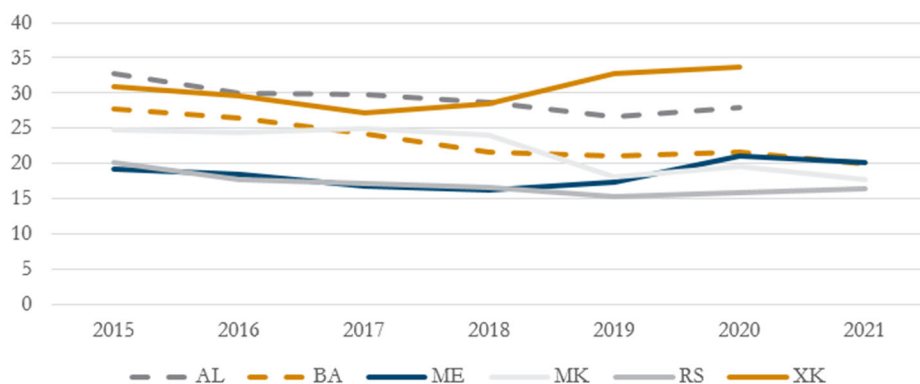


Figure 6: LFS NEETS rate, 15-24, in %, 2015-2021<sup>6</sup>

## Implications for Schooling and Higher Education

Over the last two decades the average number of years of schooling went up in the SEE region (Figure 7). It is now at about 10 to 11 years, up from earlier lower levels of around 7 to 9 years. Nevertheless, over the same period e.g. Slovenia reached levels of more than 12 years and Germany more than 14 years of schooling. Female averages are typically lower than male ones. The difference is particularly strong in some of the SEE countries, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thus raising especially the number of years of schooling for girls is an important policy to upskill the overall population and prepare them for the labour market.

However, it also matters what young people are studying. Given that foreign investors in the manufacturing sector are particularly interested in a skilled labour force with a more technical background, it is interesting to note that more STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) students are graduating in SEE in relative terms over time (Figure 8). Still, there is room for even more of a focus on STEM studies, particularly in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The digital revolution could potentially allow the region leapfrogging in economic development.

<sup>6</sup> Source: wiiw Annual Database, national statistical offices.

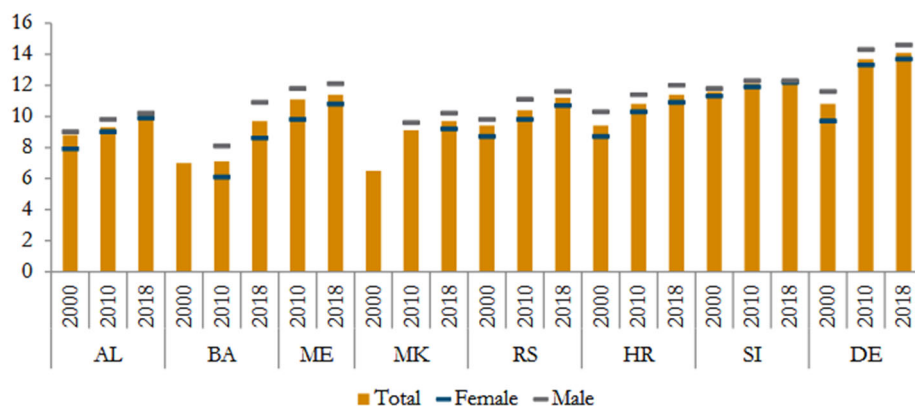


Figure 7: Mean years of schooling, 2000, 2010 and 2018<sup>7</sup>

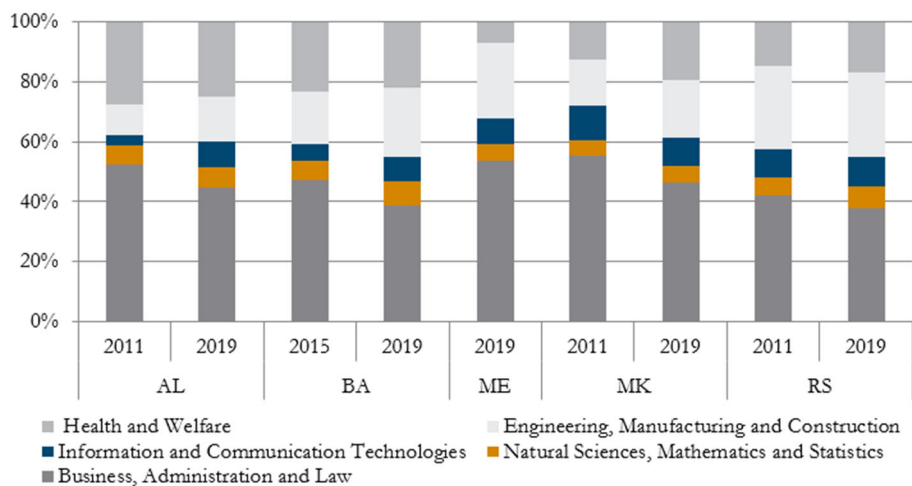


Figure 8: Tertiary education graduates by programme, in %<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Data for Kosovo are not available. 2018 is the latest year available. Mean years of schooling report the average number of completed years of education (including tertiary education) of the country's population, age 25 years and older. Source: UNDP.

<sup>8</sup> Data for Kosovo are not available. Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

## Brain Gain and Brain Drain

One of the reasons for mass emigration in SEE, although certainly not the only one, is the large wage gap with respect to Western Europe. Wage differentials to e.g. German levels are particularly high for professionals and technicians in SEE (Figure 9). In Germany people from SEE can earn 5 to 3 times more than at home. In absolute terms the difference is between 3,000 and 4,500 euros at purchasing power standards (PPS) e.g. for professionals from Serbia or Albania. Thus, there are strong push and pull factors that can explain decades of mass migration from SEE to Western Europe. And there is the legitimate fear that the region is educating people that it loses to the richer economies. However, the overall educational level of the society is improving as well and one of the mechanisms of increasing wages and decreasing unemployment is also net emigration.

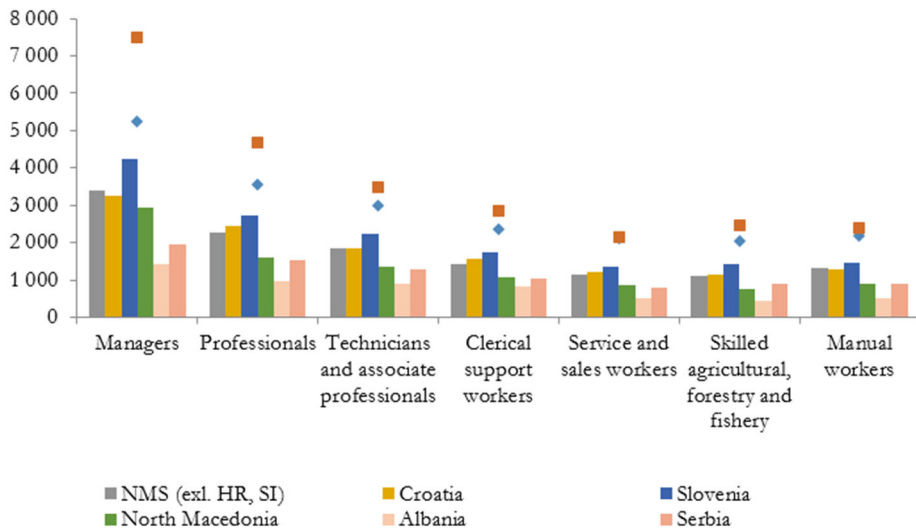


Figure 9: Mean monthly earnings by occupation, EUR (PPS), 2018<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, the dynamics of migration are breathtaking and the massive ageing and the strong decline of the working age population in the coming

<sup>9</sup> Data for Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro are not available. Source: Eurostat. Structure of earnings survey: annual earnings.



decades will be almost impossible to stop. For instance, the number of IT professionals from the region leaving for Germany is increasing at an exponential growth rate over the years (Figure 10). There are now more than 3,500 IT professionals from the six Western Balkan countries (WB6) living in Germany, up from less than 1,500 back in 2015. A return-migration scheme including financial support, especially for IT experts, could be a useful element in an overall digitalisation strategy for the region. However, from anecdotal evidence it is known, that it is not only the financial incentive that makes young people leaving the region. Young parents want to offer their kids better education, a good health care system, green spaces and recreational facilities, a proper public transport and all the other elements that support a good life.

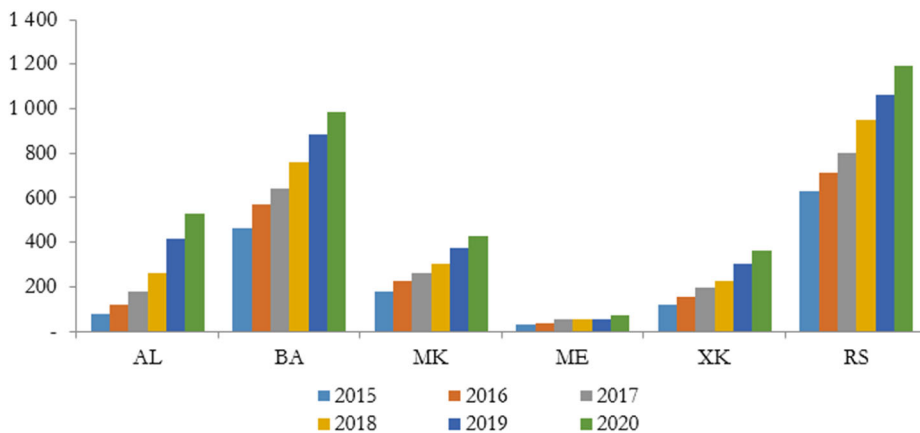


Figure 10: IT professionals from WB6 in Germany, 2015-2020<sup>10</sup>

## Policies for a Good Life

Given the gloomy demographic prospects in SEE, the overall aim must be to keep human capital in the region and in addition to attract new one. This can be achieved by a set of “policies for a good life”. They include massive investment in the areas of i) social housing, ii) comprehensive education, iii) universal health coverage, and iv) public transport. Cross-cutting topics to be focussed on in these investments include both environmental as well

<sup>10</sup> Source: Bundesagentur für Arbeit.

as youth issues. The main investors will need to be sub-national actors at the municipality level – particularly the cities and the sub-urban surroundings. The national level needs to provide them with the respective funding needed.

The main source of these funds, however, should come from the EU. In a staged EU accession process, the WB6 should be granted access particularly to all the economic programmes of the EU, even before official and full political accession. This includes especially a full access to the single market and importantly to EU transfers. Given the negligible size of the WB6 in terms of GDP, EU transfers as a share of the local economic activity in the order of 3%-4% could make a notable difference and help to stabilise the region that is facing multiple and permanent crises, while at the same time being no particular financial burden for the EU. This is not only in the interest of WB6 but foremost of the EU in general and the EU Member States in Southeast Europe, given both geostrategic and geoeconomic considerations.

## **PART II: The Young Hopefuls: Do They Make a Difference Politically?**

# Prospects for Political Change in Serbia and the Western Balkans: Challenges and Obstacles for Young Hopefuls

*Ana Stevanović*

## Introductory Remarks

There are many different challenges that young people in the Western Balkans are facing. For more than thirty years the region of Western Balkan has been known by political and social instability, very fragile democracies, social stratification, but also brain drain and the exodus of educated and professional people from these countries to the European Union and North America. Speaking of Serbia, after the wars of the 1990s and the democratic changes of the early 2000s, Serbia has been lagging behind in the last ten years in establishing effective democratic institutions and the rule of law. During the last ten years human rights violations are evident with a sharp rise in autocracy.

Reports from almost all relevant international organizations, from Reporters Without Borders, Freedom House to the European Commission, have seen Serbia's decline year after year, but also a decline in almost all indexes that examine human rights, democracy, corruption and the situation in the media. These are just frameworks and key points that describe the circumstances in which young people in Serbia live. Unfortunately, due to a certain nuance and specificity that characterizes each of the individual countries of the Western Balkans, the circumstances are similar in the other countries.

Today's government in Serbia is made up of almost the same political actors as in the 1990s. In the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the political situation was such that Serbia was expelled from the world and the international organizations due to the economic and political sanctions. Even today, the same political actors in Serbia are often the creators of insecurity and instability with occasional war rhetoric directed at neighboring countries and peoples.

In addition, narratives glorifying Russia and China are noticeable. This is especially visible in those media that are close to the current government and regime in Serbia, which has been in power for the last ten years. At the same time, narratives are being aimed at reducing support for the European Union. The consequence is that support for Serbia's membership in the European Union is at an all-time lowest level, while the support for Russia and China is growing daily. The consequence of that is that young people but also the elderly ones glorify these two countries and consider them Serbia's greatest friends, and in the same time express skepticism towards Europe, European and democratic values, even though Serbia has been a European country and has always been a part of it and its values.

### **The Growing Influence of China and Russia in Serbia**

A trend that is particularly worrying and that can be followed in the last few years is the rising influence of China and Russia in the Western Balkans and especially in Serbia. The situation in Serbia is particularly worrying because the narratives dominated by the glorification of these two countries have been placed in the media and tabloids controlled by the ruling party in Serbia. In the same media, there is often a slander campaign against the United States and Western Europe. The consequence of this is a fearful turn to the right with the emergence and strengthening of those political movements and political parties that glorify Russia and its values with the emphasis on the alleged "brotherhood" between our two peoples.

The Serbian Orthodox Church, which is one of the institutions that enjoys great trust in Serbia (along with the army), and which also supports this narrative, relying on the "Orthodox Christian heritage" and religion of the Serbian and Russian people, has a big role in this. In addition, in the public and in the media are present those people who base their views on mythomania, distorting historical facts and portraying Serbs as a people and nation who have been victims of other nations interests and obstacles, the enemies that we are allegedly surrounded by. In addition to these narratives, the attitudes of those who relativize the recent past of this area, including the relativization of war crimes and war criminals, are constantly present in our society and media, which is another taboo in this society.

## **Lack of Initiatives for Reconciliation and Dialogue**

The lack of social dialogue on this, along with the huge representation of those who use the media to spread instigator propaganda, as well as the lack of almost no initiatives for reconciliation and dialogue with neighboring nations and countries, has shaped the contemporary political reality in Serbia. Similar, although not identical, aspirations can be found in neighboring countries, with some exceptions. Almost thirty years after the end of the war in the former Yugoslavia and more than 20 years since the end of the conflict in Kosovo\* there is still no positive progress in our society, acknowledging the mistakes of political actors, publicly condemning war criminals and actively advocating for cooperation and reconciliation.

Often, any initiative related to dealing with the past and finding and demanding accountability for the events from the not-so-distant past, as well as initiatives aimed at bringing people closer to reconciliation, are greeted with hostility by the public and regime tabloids. These initiatives most often come from non-governmental organizations, so they are also portrayed and presented in the regime media as treacherous and hostile to the Serbian people and state. Can young hopes and young politicians change this not-so-bright picture and description of the situation in the Western Balkans?

## **Young Politicians in the Western Balkan Countries and the Circumstances that they Are Facing**

Generations of young politicians who have almost never had the opportunity to feel or live in stable democracies are growing up in this atmosphere. The question is how to change this course and adopt policies and narratives that should promote reconciliation in the region, a clear focus and commitment to Europe and the European Union, joint cooperation of the peoples and states of the Western Balkans and awareness of the necessary cooperation.

Growing nationalism in the Western Balkans, especially among young people, is another worrying trend. In addition, the rehabilitation of war criminals and their glorification do not contribute to solving this problem. Although the groups of people who do this are very small and in a large minority, the noise they make about this in public is great. There is no public debate that

would deal with these topics in an objective and professional way, so the problem is only deepening.

In addition to these, a huge problem in almost all countries of the Western Balkans is brain drain and this is a trend that is increasing over the years. According to some data, over fifty thousand educated and professional staff leave Serbia alone every year, and more than half of the current students intend to leave the country after graduation. It is clear that these facts are a warning.

Therefore, the common problems facing young people in the Western Balkans have to do with high unemployment and a lack of prospects, leading to a major brain drain. In addition, nepotism, party employment, clientelism and the poor economic situation, further exacerbated by rising inflation, are also common problems known to young people in the Western Balkans. Growing nationalisms and increasingly war-mongering rhetoric are present in almost all of these countries. The mentioned social and economic situation affects all groups of citizens, but it seems that they have the greatest impact on young people. These are the topics on which young politicians in the Western Balkans need to be more active, but also to cooperate together in order to discuss and find solutions to these problems and propose adequate policies. Often these topics are related and affect each other and therefore joint cooperation is potentially facilitated but also necessary. Do young politicians have the strength and competence for this decisive step that could greatly change the current political course?

### **How to Bring Young Politicians from the Western Balkans Closer Together and how to Get Young People Involved in Politics?**

One of the problems and obstacles to this goal is the lack of almost any cooperation and communication among young people, but also young politicians. With sporadic and occasional initiatives (mostly thanks to the activities of NGOs), there is no cooperation among young people that would result in activities aimed at establishing lasting peace and stability in the Western Balkans.

The economic situation and poverty greatly affect the standard of living, which impacts the ability of young people to travel to other countries and

get to know other people's cultures. According to some statistics, almost more than half of young people under the age of 18 have never left the borders of Serbia. Due to this lack and ignorance of others and the absence of encounters with others, the growing attitudes of right-wing movements are gaining increasing support in this group.

The lack of formal and stronger cooperation between high schools, academies, colleges and universities prevents closer acquaintance and connection of young people. The solution lies in establishing closer cooperation between educational institutions in the Western Balkans. A system of scholarships, integrated educational programs, mobility of pupils and students with mutually facilitated recognition of diplomas would enable a significant step towards establishing contacts among young people and would greatly contribute to raising awareness among future political actors among them. Such a solution would influence the participants of such programs to put pressure "from below" on the current political actors in their countries to support and implement such programs. This is just one of the ways to make changes in our societies, to which, unfortunately, almost no attention has been paid.

Another burning problem in our countries is the huge lack of political and media literacy. Although there is a non-mandatory subject in Serbian school called "Civic Education", which is conceived as a subject where students can learn about democracy, human rights, law, etc. this course has not materialized and its effects are very small. The result is great political illiteracy with a devastating refusal of young people to participate in the country's political life. Many of them do not even take part in the elections, believing that "all politicians are the same" or that one vote cannot change anything. This attitude has been contributed to by the fact that for decades in Serbia political parties have been perceived as a place through which young people can get a job in public companies. These narratives often discourage young people from engaging in politics and participating in political life. The solution to this problem is in the reform of the subject "civic education", which should essentially deal more significantly with these topics, but also to include in its syllabus topics such as reconciliation, regional cooperation, security, as well as recognizing authoritarian aspirations. That there is a need for this is witnessed by the administrative capture of the state we are witnessing in Serbia, the growth of nationalistic movements and right-wing parties, as well as the



growing authoritarianism with the terrible centralization of all branches of government.

How to attract young people to be actively involved in politics? Most political parties in Serbia have a problem with how to address young people, how and where to place key messages, how to get young people interested in participating in political life and how to turn passive observers into active participants or voters. The impression is that most political parties in Serbia do not have a clearly defined strategy on how to attract young people and which channels of communication to use to reach young people. The lack of an effective strategy for the use of social networks through which messages would be placed but also to communicate with young people is what characterizes most political parties. Many do not see the potential in this, and others do not know how to use it effectively. It is these channels that can serve to represent and actively promote the process of reconciliation, mutual dialogue and cooperation between the peoples of the Western Balkans, and all this can contribute to the establishment of security and stability in our region. This is a major challenge, but at the same time one of the ways to cope better and start addressing the security challenges that exist in the Western Balkan countries.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Despite all the above, I believe in the potential of this area and I believe that young politicians can make changes in our societies and countries. The great advantage is that most of them were not even born at a time when there were war conflicts in this area and relations filled with hostilities and the absence of any constructive communication or cooperation. Therefore, young politicians, bearing in mind that they are deprived of political passion that characterized relations between neighboring countries of our region, have the opportunity to introduce new narratives and policies aimed at establishing mutual cooperation between countries in the region, realistic view of the war past, insistence on reconciliation and bringing our peoples closer through closer economic, academic or cultural cooperation and active mobility of pupils and students.

Orientation towards the European Union and Europe, where our country geographically and historically belongs, is also an opportunity for young politicians to profile themselves but also to make key changes that would accelerate the process of accession of all Western Balkan countries to the European Union. It is clear that this is easier said than done, but by pointing out these key issues with a determination to overcome them, it is possible for young politicians to take on key political positions not only in Serbia but also in countries in the region where incumbents are present who are young.

Young politicians in the Western Balkan but even in the entire Europe are facing many challenges today, but the fact that they have the opportunity to resist the burden of the past and move towards the future is one of their great strengths. The Western Balkan region has been a hostage of wrong policies and the promotion of hostilities for three decades, but despite that, there are not so few examples that show that change is possible. By applying and implementing a few of the recommendations I make, the first steps can be established, and change can be sustainable.

## **Recommendations for Young Politicians in the Western Balkans**

### *1. Implementation of the Policies Related to Regional Cooperation in the Field of Education*

Young people living in the countries of the Western Balkans do not know each other because there is almost no formal interstate cooperation aimed at bringing them closer. Therefore, young politicians should advocate, promote and implement policies and solutions that would formalize mutual cooperation and exchange in the field of education. This could be realized by formalizing student mobility and facilitating the recognition of their diplomas. In this way, students, living in countries across the Western Balkans, could create connections and new contacts that form the foundation for future relations.

## *2. Promoting Policies Aimed at Reconciliation among the Peoples of the Western Balkans*

Even after three decades since the end of the war in former Yugoslavia and twenty years since the escalation of conflict between Serbs and Albanians, there has been no real reconciliation between nations in the Western Balkans. Young politicians who do not even remember the experience of wars have the opportunity to build bridges and insist on reconciliation between nations. This should be preceded by an open view of the war past and a clear condemnation of war criminals in their societies. Without this, reconciliation is not possible, and thus the progress of every country in the Western Balkans. That is why it is important to promote the policy of reconciliation, and that is the task of primarily young politicians.

## *3. Establishing Programs of More Intensive Educational and Cultural Exchange as well as Study Visits of Young People from the Western Balkans to the Countries of the European Union*

Due to the growing poverty within the countries of the Western Balkans, the economic power of the population has drastically decreased. The consequence of this is the reduction of costs within families that are set aside for travel and cultural activities. Due to this problem, more than half of those under the age of 18 have never left the borders of Serbia, and the situation in other countries is not much different. Due to the inability to travel and get to know other cultures, young people are becoming increasingly isolated and adopt beliefs and attitudes in line with the views of the far right with growing nationalism. That is why it is important to anticipate and allocate funds for study visits to the countries of the European Union. In this way, young people from the Western Balkans have the opportunity to get to know and experience Europe. So prejudices about Europe can be overcome that have been formed over the years. For the implementation of this policy, the funds that individual countries of the Western Balkans can allocate for this purpose are equally important. Significant support from the countries of the European Union therefore is needed.

## Alternative Concepts vs Undemocratic and Clientelistic Governance Styles: The Struggle of the Young Politicians

*Monika Zajkova*

The key to good governance is **transparency**. Without transparency, you cannot have trust, and without trust of your people you cannot expect them to respect your decisions, meaning you would need to force them to obey, which of course is neither sustainable nor effective, especially in such aggravating circumstances, when the world is facing economic and financial difficulties.

So, the question is, how do we achieve transparency? What steps shall we take to earn and maintain people's trust?

According to my opinion, the **liberal approach** is the right way to go. As the people say: "You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar", it is more effective for the politicians to be in communication with the people all the time, because that is the only way they can get acquainted with the real problems people are facing. The "more casual and informal approach" builds friendships among the parties, makes them feel closer to the people, it strengthens their connection and mutual trust, which is very important for building good policies and proposing good laws.

Nowadays, this is not challenging and hard to accomplish, bearing in mind the advancement of the technology and digital tools, available to each one of us. Compared to the past and the standard governance style, this alternative concept is much more suitable to answer the challenges arising from the evolution of the society.

Unfortunately, in **North Macedonia** we still live in bipolarization, where the public perception, especially of the young population is that all the politicians are the same, giving resistance to every alternative concept we are trying to impose. 70% of the young people in our country are not interested in public policies. The people are losing trust in the institutions, which is alarming and

needs to be addressed immediately, and the best way to do so is by adopting and encouraging more liberal and transparent governance style; introducing new, fresh perspectives, including youngsters in the decision-making process; goals which cannot be achieved without transparency.

If we analyze the current situation, we can say that in the Republic of North Macedonia **significant progress has been made in the context of improving the situation of young people.** Namely, the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies was adopted, which assists young people in their activities. Also, in the Parliament was created the Youth Policy Club as an informal body which works in the interest of young people with a tendency to grow into a Committee on Youth and Youth Affairs as a permanent working body in the Macedonian Parliament. As elected representatives of the citizens in the Parliament, we have a duty to provide everyone with a functional system that will keep them and their children at home and improve their living standards.

**So how do we motivate young people to be more active?** One way is by **using the generational difference to our advantage; making them work hand by hand with the older generation.** The fresh and new perspectives and the energy coming from the young people in combination with the experience and the skills arising from the older generation is definitely a winning combination and a true refreshment nowadays.

This “new approach” helps not only the young people to get involved in politics, to be aware of the power of their voice and the contributions they can make in the society, but also provides more comprehensive approach in addressing the social and economic situations of young people: the decision makers have a front-row seat and a chance to get acquainted from “first hand” with the problems and difficulties that young people are facing, which will result in better strategic planning and policy making and better involvement of the young people in the decision-making process, teaching them responsibilities and making them active instead of passive citizens, with developed ability of critical thinking, praising the good solutions and criticizing the bad ones, when necessary.

Another mechanism for creating proactive young people are the **youth measures and policies.** It is extremely important to give young people a

safe space where they can not only express their views and opinions, but also a space where their voice will be heard, valued and appreciated. This approach is a double victory: on one hand we contribute to their active participation, development of their critical thinking, fighting at the same time against youth apathy, on the other hand.

Young people want a **functional system** with efficient institutions and individual responsibility, a system based on a real principles and values which offers equal opportunities and conditions for education, work, use of youth grants for starting their own businesses or developing youth entrepreneurship, a system that punishes corruption and promotes transparency.

All these are legitimate requests to which we as a state and society are obliged to respond and try to achieve. In that way we invest in the quality of the young people, we make them more attractive on the labor market and at the same time we fight against the youth unemployment which is becoming more and more present all over the world.

That is why it is necessary to invest in the state system, to invest in growth and development, to create a different approach, because in that way we indirectly invest in young people, by creating an environment that will allow them to develop their potential.

The political leaders should prepare the young generations for future leadership; the youngsters of today are the leaders of tomorrow. **We must built progressive generations and stop encouraging nationalist rhetoric.** Without a strong youth movement, there can be no vibrant civil society, and without a strong civil society, democracy suffers. Recognizing the importance of the active involvement of young people in the decision-making process, this is the starting premise of most countries around the world, as an aspiration of every modern society.

The problems are solved only by actualizing them in public, so we should not be afraid to speak in the public about them.

**We owe to our voters and ourselves to be the best possible version we can be.**

We create practices. Therefore, although in the past I was skeptical about active involvement in the policy-making process, I believe now that every young person should be an active actor, which does not mean that he/she must be a member of a political party, but to be part of the civil sector, to speak loudly, to give suggestions. In that way the bad practices of the past will be replaced with equal opportunities, non-selectivity, accessibility, functionality at the same time preparing the ground for creating a more liberal and progressive society.

## **PART III: Cultural and Economic Role Models**



## Gender as a Platform for Regional Cooperation

*Mia Bjelogrić*

Becoming a role model requires significant qualities that differ the person with the title of a role model, compared to others in his/her surroundings. It means that he/she has given a significant level of contribution to the area within which they are operating. Becoming a female role model is even harder, because being a woman in the men's world is hard enough. Becoming a female role model in the Western Balkans, a geographical and political region that is specific due its conservative principles, complex historical and cultural heritage and deeply patriarchal structure of the society, sometimes seems the hardest.

In the Western Balkan countries, all leaders are men. Men are ruling almost all Governments in the Western Balkans, and that is not just a current state of affairs, but a consistency. In Albania, out of 33 prime ministers in the country's history, there have been 0 women. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, out of 32 prime ministers (the title has changed during the past 77 years), there have been 0 women. In Montenegro, out of 7 prime ministers so far, there have been 0 women. In North Macedonia, out of 19 prime ministers, there has been one woman serving as the acting prime minister for 50 days in total. In Kosovo, out of 5 prime ministers since the Declaration of independence, there have been 0 women. Finally, Serbia has appointed its first ever female prime minister in 2017. Ms. Ana Brnabić is still in the Office, but the president of the party she represents, as well as the president of the country is a man, Mr. Aleksandar Vučić.

The situation is quite similar when it comes to the leaders of the opposition parties, the main investors and leaders in the business area. One may conclude that in the Western Balkan countries, men are both decision and opinion makers. Having that considered, it is easy to conclude that being a female role model in countries led by male voices is quite challenging.

Even in everyday life, it is not easy for a woman to be seen as a role model, even in her closest surroundings. In the Balkans we like to praise women,

especially on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March, by saying that women are a bearing pillar of the family, the mothers that gave us life, understanding wives, carrying daughters and loving sisters. Always assessing them by the role they play in someone else's, usually male's life. They are looked at as role players, rather than role models. So, how to create an atmosphere where we could change that?

As a Communication expert, I like to think about achieving gender equality from a communication perspective. We have to think about the ways we communicate gender issues, especially when it comes to Youth as a target group, which is crucial when we talk about behavioural changes, since they are much harder to be implemented among the older population. As a young person, I was unhappy with the lack of education and information that I was noticing when casually discussing gender related issues with ordinary people, despite the huge work that the NGO sector and academia have been doing in the area of gender studies and women empowerment. I realized that those people are not targeted well enough, that no one tried to stand in their shoes and think about the right ways to approach them. I strongly believe that if you want a social and political change to be implemented and then consolidated, that you need to embrace the ones that do not understand you, to find out why and to build communication bridges. The bridge that came to my mind was television, as the most consumed media tool and a format that could be easy to watch, understand and trigger the ones that are used to short media content with a straightforward approach. This is how my docu-series called "She wakes up" was created and I can say that it contributed to the positioning of gender topics in the mainstream arena. All of a sudden it was an interesting topic to all media outlets, people were discussing at their homes, on social media and so on. I believe that we need to find the right way to approach young people, to make controversial topics likable and understandable for them. The series was divided into five short episodes that dealt with five very concrete topics with which all women can identify themselves with.

Finally, I truly believe that women's rights are a meeting point for women's regional cooperation. Additionally, we have to bear in mind that when we talk about women's rights and gender related issues, we are talking about half of our citizens. It is a question of human rights and civic rights. The problems that women face recognize no borders, usually, not even a religion or

specific culture make a substantial difference, it only changes the outcomes and the consequences. All women, no matter where they come from, what job they do, are they mothers or not, single or married, have problems that share the same root from a deep patriarchal society. Their background and level of privileges may make a change in their everyday life and dynamics, but the gender oriented problems they are facing during their childhood, puberty and grown-up life are coming from the same cause.

I would like to give an example of the rising Me Too movement in Serbia, that has spread in the region. In January 2021, 7 young women in Serbia reported their drama teacher for sexual harassment and sexual assaults. Some young, successful, famous and, some would say, privileged women, spoke out publicly about being sexually harassed by a very respectable, notable teacher that mentored children for decades. Since two of the survivors are public figures, the case became a number one topic in Serbian media outlets and public debates. They created a revolution. They testified that after being mentored by him from the age of 7, they have been harassed and raped at the age of 17 and 18. After a few years of complete silence, they went public and started an official process in the court. For the first time in Serbia, in the media and in the general public the discussion on these topics have started. People were talking about what is sexual harassment, how can someone be raped by a person of trust, why are the victims silent, what are they afraid of, why are they ashamed. Soon, the movement called “You are not alone” started to spread.

Women were confessing their own traumas and experiences on social media, universities started to examine their female students, and finally, the movement went regional. Women from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro were making public initiatives on reporting professors, educating young women on social media. So, the Me Too in the Balkans has finally happened. Soon after, in Serbia, a new case arose, a case of sexual harassment in a most prominent science centre “Petnica”, where women confessed on being harassed by one of the professors in the camp for years. Another actress accused her male colleague for rape. Some women in Jagodina, a small city in Serbia, anonymously testified about being trafficked and harassed by the mayor of the city. Some of these cases were processed, some not, but the voices of the silent survivors finally started to create a painful, but significant

noise. Soon after the first case of public confession about the sexual harassment in Serbia, another movement called “I didn’t ask for it” was initiated as a response in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Hundreds of women reported cases of sexual violence in Universities and other surroundings. In both countries, the prosecution started investigative processes.

So what are the important conclusions that the Me Too Balkans has shown us. First, all women can be harassed and abused, no matter how privileged they may seem, how strong they may be, whether they look like a victim that we are used to picture or not. Some young girl from a small village, poor and insecure about her future has a same fate and same feelings when faced with a sexual predator as a future actress, educated and abused in a posh drama school in the capital. They are faced with fear, shame, loss of integrity and dignity and they will remain silent and traumatized in the exact same way. Second, in the same way that different women are connected by the shared gender related problems they face, women from different countries are sharing the exact same experience. When it comes to gender related troubles, borders are not relevant, and the Me Too Balkans has proved that. This is why I think that women’s rights and fight against gender based violence and discrimination have a huge potential for regional cooperation and they could be much more successful if treated in unity among all the women in the Balkans, that share not only gender, but also culture, tradition, history, language which can only help them in understanding each other.

# Development Model for BiH's Second Post-War Generation

*Vjekoslav Domljan*

“Bosnia losing many young people to emigration  
over poor education, work prospects”

*Reuters, November 24, 2021*

“Balking at Balkan babies – The Balkans are getting  
short of people”

*The Economist, August 22, 2020*

## **Abstract**

After 27 post-war years, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has found itself in a “middle income trap”, or rather in the structural transformation trap. In this paper, we examine key ingredients of a development policy for BiH and explain them through a model for BiH's second post-war generation. BiH is in a Catch-22 situation. Its many challenges prompt young people to leave in droves. On the other hand, BiH will not catch up with the high income countries, predominant type of European economies, without young, talented people capable of generating progress and prosperity. In BiH, the population is shrinking and ageing, and unless that is not changed, even more will leave.

Key words: Middle-income trap, supply-side economics, technopolis, Sarajevo Valley

## **Introduction**

Table 1 below is divided in two parts: the past (1996-2021) and the future (2022-2047), demonstrating what kind of development policy is needed for BiH. It provides a simplified characterisation of development policies in BiH for the period of 1995 to 2022 i.e. during the time of the first post-war generation and development polices to be conducted in the period of the second post-war generation i.e. since 2022 to 2047. During that second period, BiH

could carry out what its economic comparators have already implemented. After the fall of the Berlin wall many countries in Central and Eastern Europe managed in one generation's time a complete transition to become EU member countries and what is even more important: to become high income countries and members of an organization of the mostly rich countries i.e. the OECD member countries. In addition, that should be the development vision of the second post war generation in BiH: to become a high income country and an OECD member country. For the time being, BiH is not even a WTO member country.

	<b>First generation 1996 – 2021</b>	<b>Second generation 2022 – 2047</b>
Institutions	- extractive (rent instilling)	- inclusive
Legal order	- lawlessness	- rule of law
Technology base	- technology transfer from abroad	- technology upgrading and technology development
Economic policy	- 'non-existing hand' policy	- invisible hand policy
Job policy	- Subsidising quasi private companies	- creation of high paid jobs
Type of goods production	- tangible goods	- intangible goods
International orientation	- import-oriented	- export-oriented
Key economic sector	- intermediation (trade)	- production (of ideas/knowledge)
Business orientation	- profiteering	- profitability
Economy's drivers	- mass privatisation - public tenders - foreign loans	- mass entrepreneurship - strong value chains - fast bankruptcy

Main accelerators of the economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- public expenditure</li> <li>- remittances</li> <li>- foreign donations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- private investment</li> <li>- export</li> <li>- foreign direct investment</li> </ul>
Key economy's actor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- public companies</li> <li>- tycoons (rent-seeking entrepreneurs)</li> <li>- foreign banks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- private companies</li> <li>- productive entrepreneurs</li> <li>- research institutes</li> </ul>
Use of the economy's resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Low (mass unemployment and inactivity, land and capital not in use)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Full</li> </ul>

Table 1. The development policies in BiH, 1996-2021 and 2022-2047

In the current medium run, BiH is obliged to deal with some urgent economic tasks: building up of an attractive investment environment, developing export forces, setting up myriad of micro firms, introducing productivity and value chain policy, introducing new financial institutions, mechanisms and instruments to increase savings mobilisation, increasing in collecting direct taxes, increasing efficiency of state-owned companies, decreasing public expenditures, activating some mega investment projects, improving utilities (solar and wind energy, water and sewage systems and waste disposal) etc.

The post-war ruling circles in BiH – as well as their predecessors in former Yugoslavia – have not been capable of resource mobilisation. There has been a great number of unemployed, and even more inactive people, a vast amount of non-invested money, idle land, other natural resources unutilised, and hobbyist innovators and innovations without being turned into commercial endeavours.

Moreover, the ethno-cartels do not have ideas, strategies, policies and programmes on how to change the current situation, or even worse; they do not have any interest in changing the status quo. The consequences of such policies are very high resource gaps (savings gaps, foreign exchange gaps, and fiscal gaps) that have obliged the government to turn from time to time to the IMF for standby arrangements.

<b>Variable</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021e</b>
Population Growth (%)	-1.3	-1.0	-0.8	-0.7	-1.2	-0.4
Economic Growth (%)	3.2	3.2	3.7	2.8	-3.1	5.8
Current Account (GNDI-A)	-1.5	-1.6	-1.1	-1.0	-1.3	-1.1
Gross National Savings	5.4	6.2	7.2	7.9	6.6	7.4
Gross National Disposable Income (GNDI)	35.0	36.6	38.7	40.7	38.9	40.6
Secondary Income, net	3.5	3.8	4.0	4.3	3.8	3.1
Gross National Income (GNI)	31.5	32.8	34.7	36.4	35.1	37.6
Primary Income, net	0.0	-0.3	-0.2	-0.1	-0.3	-0.3
Gross Domestic Product (Y)	31.5	33.1	34.9	36.5	35.4	37.9
Final Private Consumption (C)	23.3	24	24.9	25.9	25.2	25.7
Final Government Consumption (G)	6.3	6.4	6.6	6.9	7.1	7.5
Gross Capital Formation (I)	6.9	7.8	8.3	8.9	7.9	8.5
Current Account (S-I)=Borrowing from abroad	-1.5	-1.6	-1.1	-1.0	-1.3	-1.1
Domestic Absorption	36.5	38.2	39.8	41.7	40.2	41.7
Domestic Saving	1.9	2.7	3.4	3.7	3.1	4.7
Net Current Transfers from abroad	3.5	3.8	4	4.3	3.8	3.05
Gross Savings (GNI-A+Tr)	5.4	6.2	7.2	7.9	6.6	7.4
Current Account (Central Bank)	-1.4	-1.5	-1.1	-1	-1.3	-0.7



<b>SAVINGS GAP</b>	<b>-1.5</b>	<b>-1.3</b>	<b>-0.9</b>	<b>-0.9</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>0.35</b>
Export of Goods and Services	10.9	12.8	14.3	14.3	11.8	11.6
Import of Goods and Services	15.8	17.9	19.2	19.5	16.6	-15
<b>RESOURCES GAP i.e. capital inflows</b>	<b>-4.9</b>	<b>-5.1</b>	<b>-4.9</b>	<b>-5.2</b>	<b>-4.8</b>	<b>-3.78</b>
Borrowing from abroad	-1.1	-1.2	-0.8	-0.6	-1	-0.54
Financing Resources Gap	4.6	5	4.8	4.9	4.8	3.59
<b>FISCAL GAP i.e. public revenues minus public expenditures</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>-1.8</b>	<b>-1.4</b>
Private Saving	5	5.7	6.6	7.3	8.7	8.893
Public Saving	0.4	0.8	0.8	0.7	-1.8	-1.4
Gross Fixed Capital Formation	6.2	6.9	7.6	8.1	7.8	8.15
Fixed Capital Consumption	4.1	4.3	4.4	4.7	4.2	5.5
Net Investment	1.3	1.9	2.8	3.2	2.4	1.9
Legal Entities' Gross Fixed Capital Formation	4.5	4.8	5.3	5.4	5.4	
Natural Persons' Gross Fixed Capital Formation	2.4	3	3	3.5	2.5	
Foreign Source of Financing, total	5	5.1	4.9	5.2	4.8	
Foreign Source of Financing – Transfers	3.5	3.8	4	4.3	3.8	
Foreign Source of Financing (borrowing)	1.5	1.3	0.9	0.9	1	

Domestic Sources of Financing	1.9	2.7	3.4	3.7	3.1	
Domestic Public Sources of Financing	0.4	0.8	0.8	0.7	-1.8	

Table 2. Key Economic Indicators, 2016-2021 (in billion KM or %)<sup>1</sup>

## Overcoming the Middle Income Trap

BiH will not be able to achieve high economic growth rates and catch up with high-income countries until it has a clear vision, strategy and development policies. The strategic goal can only be *becoming a high-income country, what is feasible for the second post-war generation i.e. to reach by 2047*.

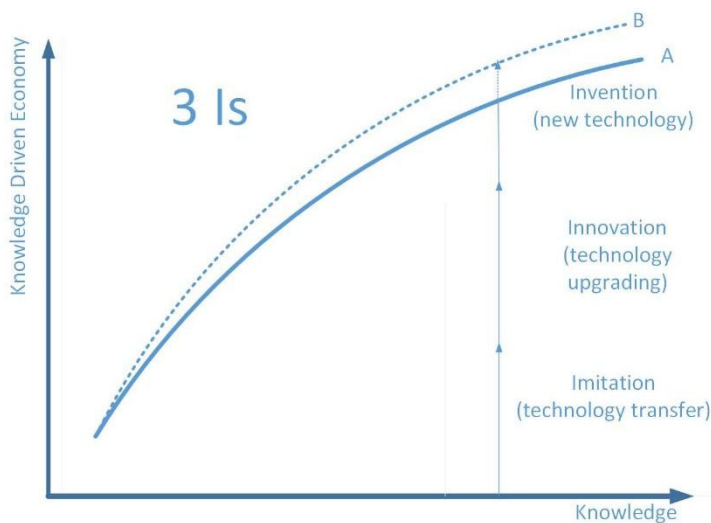
Other goals, such as becoming an EU member could only be operational aims (targets) but not a strategic goal of BiH politics. On that developmental journey BiH does not need to become an EU member country but it must become a high-income country. Therefore, it is important to make a radical turn in development policy.

To escape from the middle-income trap, or rather to convert its companies from imitators to innovators and inventors, BiH desperately needs to develop its technology base or rather to build up its innovative capacity. At the same time, the government's policies are needed to facilitate resources reallocation from lower to higher value-added industries capable of becoming competitive internationally in the mid-term run (see Graph 1).

Being a small country with limited resources available, BiH cannot become a global player developing individual firms but instead using the robust value chain-based approach to economic development. Innovation system and policy are to be introduced in BiH but one of the major challenges to that is to pave the way for increasing the Research & Development (R&D) expenditure and build up the translation infrastructure that will ensure that innovative ideas are turned into products and services.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Author has calculated based on World Bank (2022), Central Bank of BiH (2022) and Agency for Statistics of BiH (2022).



Graph 1. 3Is: Technology Development<sup>2</sup>

Small economies such as BiH cannot be internationally competitive in a larger number of high added-value industries. A selection is to be made among niches of higher value added industries that have the greatest potential in terms of knowledge stock and entrepreneurship/clusterpreneurship skills. That should become a strategic imperative and these niches are to be supported through strategic investment funds (SIFs).

Policy measures envisaged by R&D<sup>3</sup> and innovation policy documents should embrace:

- Establishment of Strategic Innovation Funds (SIFs) at regional/cantonal level;
- Establishment of excellency centres as PPP projects by universities, large business and regional/cantonal authorities in currently or potentially internationally competitive industries;
- Introduction a modern training policy to improve skills;
- Promoting young researchers through master by research programs and the like.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Author's elaboration.

<sup>3</sup> According to data compiled by StockApps.com, Tesla spends \$2,984 on R&D per car produced (see <https://www.assemblymag.com/articles/96955-tesla-leads-the-way-on-rd-spending>) 22 times more than BiH spends on R&D per capita.

It could be useful to identify the list of goods and services produced by the economic comparator countries' companies 10-15 years ago as a reference. Then the list could be reduced to the list of goods and services, which are labour-intensive, have limited economies of scale, and do not require large investments to serve as the targets of industrial upgrading and diversification (Lin and Monga, 2010).

However, the fundamental problem of BiH's economy is that its key economic engine is the public sector while the private and civil sectors are only additional engines and obstructed by the ruling circles through large scale corruption. In a dual economy, the inefficient public sector surpasses the weak private sector as the main and the most prestigious employer in BiH's economy.

The public administration takes half of the country's GDP directly through public expenditure and indirectly through tax expenditure, and spends it primarily on its salaries and socio-administrative expenditures. To be more precise, there is an extensive regulatory power practiced by the ruling circles in a way that tax, concession fees etc. are not collected from the quasi private sector, actually an extended hand of ruling circles. That is why public revenues mainly consist of indirect taxes (Value-Added Taxes/VAT primarily) and social contributions, paid by citizens and workers/employers but not of direct taxes too.

The Lewis model of a dual economy has become increasingly relevant to conditions in BiH. A combination of forces – war, post-war reconstruction, lawlessness, foreign donations, voucher privatisation and de-industrialization that favoured Communist turned to nationalists groups, and declining protections for labour adding it to the precariat – have indeed produced a widening gap between the winners and those who are left far behind. The gap between poor and rich parts of the economy has been increasing, primarily due to non-constrained access to public resources for the first group while the others are obliged to pay. In short, lack of rule of law and corruption widening the gap between the ruling group and the rest of the society. The pre-war middle layer of the society is not turning into the middle class but it is turning into proletariat or precariat, or is obliged to emigrate abroad.

It is necessary to commence deep structural reforms aiming at enhancing the productivity of the economy. As manoeuvring space at the demand side of the economy is very limited due to (i) the currency board regime and inflexible exchange rate and (ii) fragmented and uncoordinated fiscal policy, the supply side of the economy calls even more strongly for its use. There are no other ways of improving productivity, competitiveness and export performances.

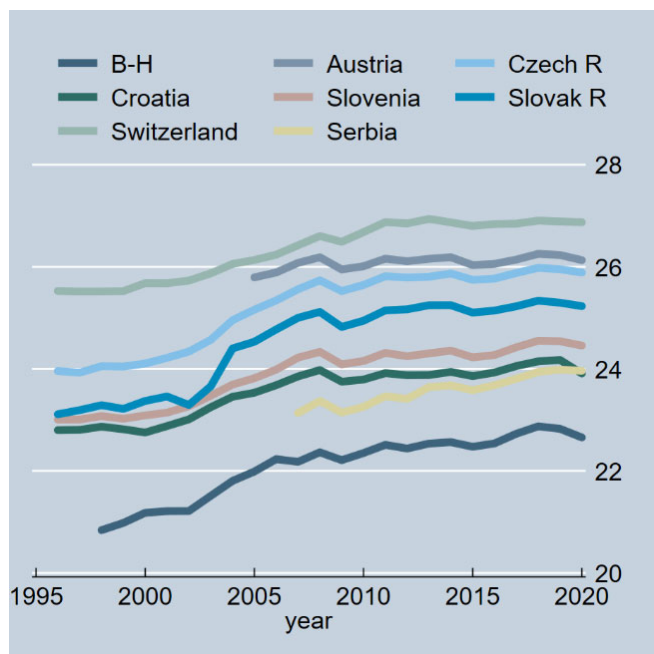
A key challenge for the BiH economy is **supply side failure** i.e. low production levels, particularly for exports. Low ratio of merchandise export to GDP in excess of 21.5 percent of GDP is a clear indicator of the lack of competitiveness. Export structures are only moving slowly toward more skill- and capital-intensive products (Domljan and Domljan, 2020b).

Given the low level of BiH's GDP per capita, its average growth rate of 2.5% during 2000-2020 is very disappointing. The economy suffers from inefficiency – both static inefficiency (poor allocation of existing resources, especially labour) and dynamic inefficiency (low accumulation of capital of all kinds, primarily infrastructure).

Obstacles to economic and exports growth and trade deficits reductions are many but they primarily originate from its dual economy – highly privileged and overstaffed state-owned companies, which can operate even with huge losses and without any consequences due to high inefficiency – and discriminated private companies. Consequently, the private sector is very small and non-competitive, lacking economy of scale and technological leadership. Understandably, exports and GDP per capita are very low (see Graph 2).

When liberal trade policy reform is implemented in an unstable macro economic surrounding, or without sufficient efforts directed at strengthening the relationship of domestic and international institutions, it usually tends to be let down, either by quitting, or trade and income growth is not achieved.

In order for BiH to come out from the middle income trap, a new strategy for the business sector development-is needed. Respective strategies need to state clearly in which areas the regional companies should be globally specialized i.e. **achieve economy of scale** and **technological leadership**.



Graph 2: Export of goods and services; BiH and comparators countries, 1996-2020 (bn US\$) (log scale)<sup>4</sup>

Low competitiveness of the BiH economy can be explained by the low **ap- plicative competitiveness** that is, low coverage of secondary and tertiary education and training of employees of companies, low investment in equip- ment and low governance quality (and of the society and the economy lev- els).

**Cost competitiveness** (or price competitiveness) is based on natural re- sources and cheap labour. As a source of differentiation it is not sustainable. Cost level is gradually increasing in a variety of sectors, adversely affecting the profit rate and potentially reducing the market share.

To enhance its competitiveness, BiH should move upwards in the value chain of creation of goods/services. First of all it should stand up by increas- ing applicative competitiveness.

<sup>4</sup> Source: World Bank Development Indicators (2022).

## **Sarajevo Valley and Industry 4.0**

We live in a time when societies grapple with climate change, ageing, inequality, geopolitical tensions, and the dark side of technology and tech giants. In order to be ‘future-proof’, regions/cantons in BiH should decide that student-centred learning, innovativeness and entrepreneurship are a centrally important part of the experience of their respective universities. Their universities should stimulate fluency of ideas among its students and support ideas translation into commercial outcomes through deep industry partnerships.

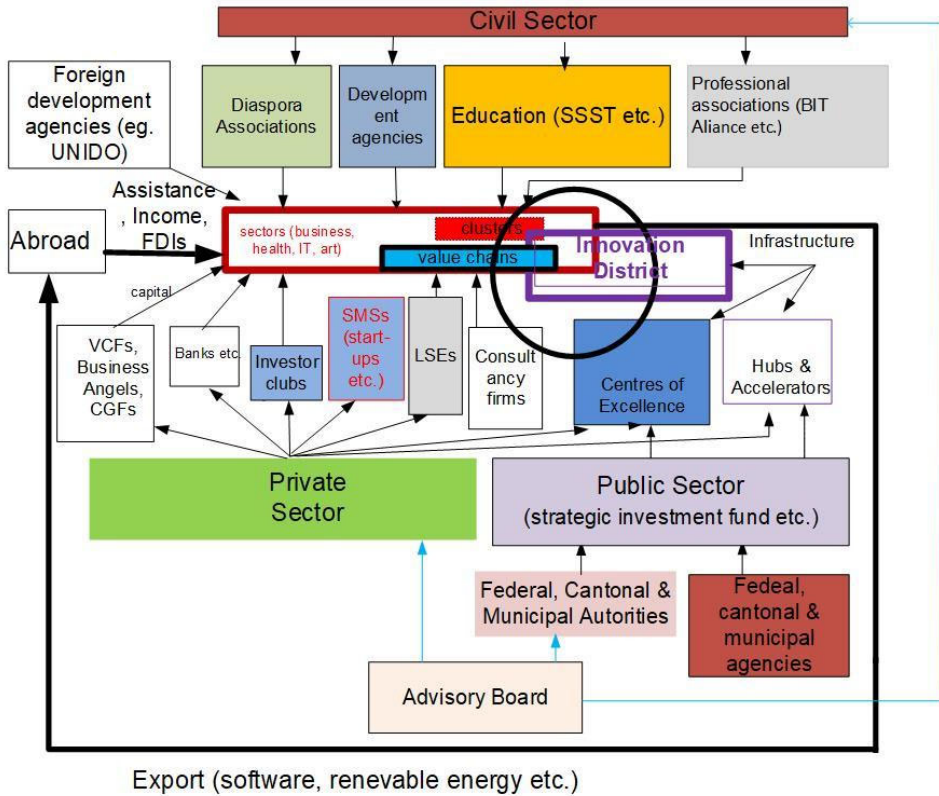
For instance, Sarajevo based universities, in accordance with its strategic plan and cooperation with its partners, could establish several Centres of Excellence in business, IT, health services, art and entertainment to grow into a technopolis Sarajevo Valley later on (see Graph 3).

Software production, as a part of the future Sarajevo Valley, can be an area of a close co-operation of foreign and domestic software producers and institutions in a politically neutral area, and serve as part of a necessary institutional and regulatory base for developing a sound economic environment. As such, the business community and the public could easily and positively accept it.

Partners in setting up the respective excellency centre could be:

- The Sarajevo based software companies;
- Companies outside of the Sarajevo Canton;
- Four cantonal universities (Sarajevo School of Science and Technology/SSST, Sarajevo University, Burch University and International University Sarajevo);
- The Sarajevo Canton and its municipalities;
- International development agencies and the like.

Brand new interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary programmes that promote the essential ‘Medici effect’ that the future requires could be designed in the next several months.



Graph 3. Technopolis Sarajevo Valley<sup>5</sup>

Some major characteristics of the University 4.0 model which could be continually developing include:

- **Digital transformation.** The current context of digital transformations is based on the permanent integration of technology as a learning tool that promotes the development of new innovative learning methods and intelligent environments:
  - Learning Management Systems (management of resources, training paths, learners, trainers, etc.);
  - Mobile Learning (tablets, smartphones, laptop etc.);
  - Interactive and fun content;

<sup>5</sup> Source: Author's elaborations.



- Virtual teaching assistants (chatbots);
  - Digital interactions (clickers).
- **Innovative and Entrepreneurial Transformation:**
    - Introduction of entrepreneurship and business courses into engineering, health, art curricula in order to encourage and mentor all students with business ideas into turning them into profitable firms.
    - Innovation labs and institutes which will bring together and integrate academic staff, alumni and industry partners in providing mentoring, infrastructure and investments to entrepreneurial students.
    - Start-up competitions, hackathons, innovation challenges for SSST students and high school students.
- **Pedagogical Transformation.** The current context of universities is marked by the adoption of new pedagogical approaches to facilitate access to educational content and improve the quality of learning. These approaches include:
    - Active pedagogy (active participation of student in the construction of knowledge, creative thinking, critical thinking);
    - Project-based learning (real life problems, cooperation with industry, product development etc.);
    - Flipped-classroom (Reverse class means giving the students autonomous activities of low cognitive level to be done at home, in order to favour collaborative work and learning tasks of high cognitive level in the classroom);
    - Game-based pedagogy (educational games);
    - Blended learning (combination of face-to-face and online teaching).

In the coming months, universities' management could – in cooperation with cantonal and municipal authorities, academic staff, administrative staff, students, alumni and industry partners – work on the preparation of strategic and operational documents which could serve as a major management tool and guideline for the establishment of Excellency Centres and Sarajevo Valley.

## **Establishment of Excellency Centres (Technology and Skills Transfer Centres)**

Skilled and highly educated members of the diaspora, such as technicians and engineers, can contribute to the innovation and growth of their country of origin if they transfer their knowledge and skills acquired abroad.

The country of emigration i.e. BiH and the country of immigration can develop a bilateral partnership in skills development. Potential employers from the country of immigration can finance the training of BiH staff at the excellency centres, some of whom will emigrate. Foreign employers could also organize short-term academic and scientific exchanges and cooperation programs in the field of the respective sector, enabling bilateral cooperation in the field of innovation and temporary rather than permanent migration of researchers and technicians in the respective sector. The two countries could develop joint accreditation of training programs and competence assessments, as they would achieve the highest possible degree of skills transferability (Clemens, 2017; Gelb and Krishnan, 2018).

The practice followed by Germany and Kosovo is an example of the application of the Global Skills Partnership Model. Germany is funding the training of construction workers in Kosovo. Some of these trainees will emigrate to Germany (the ‘foreign line’) while some will remain in Kosovo (the ‘domestic line’). The respective project offers the greatest benefit to countries of emigration and immigration (Dempster, 2019).

Another example of such a practice in training is a project implemented by Belgium and Morocco. The program was implemented within the Mobility Partnerships Facility (MPF) funded by the European Union and applies to EU countries and partner countries that have signed this program (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Cape Verde, Georgia, Jordan, Morocco, Moldova and Tunisia) or the Joint Agenda on Migration and Mobility (Ethiopia, India and Nigeria). The program amounted to 5.5 million euros and lasted for 35 months, starting from 1.1.2016. The relevant project was implemented by Enable, a Belgian development agency, and the trainees were young unemployed Moroccans who graduated in the field of key Information and Communication (IC) skills. Some of the trainees emigrated to Belgium while others stayed to work in Morocco (Dempster, 2019).

Training centres could be established in BIH as the regional (cantonal) centres as PPP projects. Their founders (and shareholders) could be:

- The public sector's bodies (entity and cantonal governments);
- The private firms (internationally competitive due to the comparative advantage and / or potential economies of scale around which companies would cluster in the value chain or pole of development);
- International entities (public' and/or private sector' bodies).

As the example of the Heimerer Institute in Pristina shows, the cost of training abroad would be around 6,500 KM, of which about half would be language training paid by a foreign partner, while the cost of training abroad would be around 3,200 KM. The amount of training abroad corresponds to the price of illegal transfer of emigrants from Kosovo to Germany (Clemens, Dempster and Gough, 2019).

### **Learning-by-Doing and Joining Global Value Chains**

Regional/Cantonal governments and municipal councils should create an environment that attracts international companies, promote learning/training, technology transfer and development of technology, stimulate the formation of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs), develop institutions that enable and support export, encourage coming and operating of Venture Capital Funds (VCFs), support the development of distribution channels on EU market and the like (Domljan et al, 2000).

Key actors in the competitiveness of value chains should be:

- Companies (ascending/descending up/down the production chain, the companies that have a common interest such as similar types of labour and/or technologies etc, companies that provide shared services: consulting, legal, business, etc.);
- Financial organizations (banks, VCFs, business angels, etc.);
- Public institutions (government of municipalities/cantons, the developmental agencies supportive of economic development, science and technology etc.);
- Universities (faculties, research centres, technology transfer centres, training centres, laboratories, incubators etc.);

- Organizations for cooperation (cluster organizations, professional organizations, formal and informal networks);
- The media (with reports on products, research, consultancy, brands etc.).

Value chain policy should be designed and implemented at the regional/cantonal and local level. Bearing in mind the high fragmentation of political and institutional space of BiH, it turns out that there is no obstacle to the conduct of value chain policies at the regional/cantonal level, particularly since there is no interest in designing and implementing comprehensive policy at the national level.

Aspects of a value chain policy could be:

- Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) policy (e.g. through investment certification of cantons/regions);
- Business links policy;
- Sector-oriented industrial policy;
- Scientific and technological policy;
- Educational and workforce training policy;
- Competition policy and market integration.

It would be very useful if value chain policies were based on the FDI policy as its key ingredient. By doing so, the small and medium-sized domestic companies could cluster around the few foreign strategic investors and their companies. It is of crucial importance that the cantonal/municipal government enhance the influx of FDIs by its policies as much as possible. As it is a long-term process, bearing in mind the unstable political and business situation as well and the lack of rule of law, the process of joining global value chains could get initiated by supporting the linking of domestic and foreign entrepreneurs (Sugar, 1963).

The skills of performing export as well as managerial, technical and organizational skills are encapsulated in individuals. The exchange of skills among entrepreneurs depends on their close contacts. It is widely present in joint ventures among smaller firms, where there is more cooperation among en-

trepreneurs than companies are. Accordingly, there is a very strong possibility that smaller companies from the respective region/Canton can improve their marketing and management skills and technologies through a subcontract with smaller companies from developed countries. For entrepreneurs in a developing country, a Joint Venture (JV) is an injection of knowledge, skills, capital, technology, management and marketing. Accordingly, for this reason JV is the most efficient means of learning for SMEs.

On the side of companies in developed market economies, there is also a potential for cooperation, especially in softer production, manufacturing, tourism etc. where foreign direct investment (FDI) could primarily occur. Experience from high-income countries shows that smaller companies, in relation to the dimensions of the competitors and the market size, tend to use alliances to achieve economies of scale and scope, and when they are big, they tend to avoid these alliances. Accordingly, when small, they are interested in cooperating with small companies from other countries. When one wants to internationalize, forming a supply/value chain could be such an opportunity, because the costs of the internationalization can be shared with local companies.

The experience of transition countries shows that almost all of their most successful businesses have benefited from learning from a variety of contacts with companies from developed market economies, and that many of these successful companies succeeded by developing strategic relationships with companies from developed countries.

Formation of supply/value chain involves an element of technology transfer downward, down the chain, since larger companies are trying to fix a chain performance by raising the technological level of the chain elements. That can stimulate the development of innovative activities in the region/Canton and help small businesses understand that the adoption of new technology and product innovation may become important to them. This is particularly important because smaller businesses make a significant contribution to innovative activities in developed market economies, while in the traditional society they were not important, nor was the environment that develops innovations fostered and developed. It is very unlikely that stronger innovative activities will be developed organically and spontaneously, at least in the short term (Domljan and Domljan, 2020a).

For instance, the Sarajevo Canton could focus on and support at a minimum a leader value chain (software production) and several Marshallian, micro cluster initiatives at the level of municipality.

### **Establishment of Training Centres: A First Step in Building up Regionally Based Technopolises**

Policies combating high long-term unemployment should become a priority in BiH. The costs of unemployment are very high in terms of economic waste (lost output, very narrow tax base of the official sector and accordingly high fiscal pressure upon that), social distress and severe personal hardship.

Basically, government should focus on employment-oriented education and training continuously adjusting it to changes in technological and economic conditions. BiH is particularly thankful for this approach due to its very specific institutional set-up enabling the country to run primarily neutral macro-economic policies.

It could be very useful to establish *training centres (TCs)* based on partnership among key stakeholders in establishing TC:

- Ministry for Health, Labour and Social Affairs of cantons/entities (for resolving the issue of bylaws currently missing);
- Ministries for Education of the BiH entities Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and Republika Srpska (RS) and respective cantons (for giving approval to TCs to issue certificates to trainees);
- Local authorities of respective cities (for providing premises and similar inputs for TCs);
- Youth Council of respective cities (to secure the support of respective municipalities);
- NGOs from respective cities (coordinating processes of establishing TCs by providing technical support);
- International and national development agencies (providing info and referring to various grants, lobbying for the support of various authorities, promoting activities etc.).

Once established, TCs would be catalysts for adopting youth employment action plans at municipal, entity and state level, which would offer analysis

of the problems of youth unemployment and contain various proposals for employment-promoting measures such as:

- Support for the start-up and establishment of new firms by the young people;
- Concrete assistance to companies established by youth, such as help with referral, information, communication and the likes, and with problems regarding the public administration;
- Improvement of the basic framework of conditions for strengthening the competitiveness of local firms;
- Support for cooperation between companies in the region;
- Development of projects with effects on employment, such as support for marketing, finance, innovation, technology transfer or development of small and medium-sized companies;
- Changing the basic framework of local/regional/state conditions, such as “de-bureaucratising” administrative procedures for establishment of companies, investments, export, etc.;
- Improved cooperation with other regions, primarily from the neighbouring countries facing similar employment problems, in order to enter into regular exchanges of experience.

The problem of establishing TCs is the start-up capital, particularly if a for-profit TC is to be established. If the TC is to be registered as not-for-profit organisation, the start-up capital is very small. Furthermore, there are problems of premises and appropriate staff that could be secured through some grants.

## **Conclusions**

The transformation from the public sector-driven economy into the export-driven one is fundamental to BiH economic policy reform. This aim can be reached most quickly and sustainably by building up the sector of exportable high sophisticated manufactured goods. That process may be accelerated through setting up the regional/cantonal excellency centres to be, in time, turned into technology centres and technopolises.

As a promising starting point, we propose connecting domestic export-oriented firms with foreign experienced companies interested in delivering

firm-to-firm tutorials and know-how with the purpose of integrating local firms into their value chains. This would enable both domestic and foreign firms to acquire new markets and increase their income and export through these joint endeavours. This could be facilitated by financing them through seed capital provided by a strategic investment fund operating as a regional capital provider.

A key objective in internationalization of BiH companies should be to achieve high quality results: the acquisition of foreign markets and foreign exchange revenues from a limited number of small and medium enterprises. It necessitates many start-up companies, which need to be supported, among other things, by support packages, based primarily on aptly-organized learning, learning-by-doing.

Through the activities of excellency centres small companies can be offered export development services such as market research, long-term advisory services, training, funding, rapid access to authorities, information technology, information and export partners – all of which they greatly need. Centres can act as a normal export-friendly environment.

Excellency centres or rather technology centres can enable and support incubating small and medium-sized transnational corporations of BiH, foreign trade companies, staff for export companies, transportation companies and other organizations and the nucleus of future international trade networks. This can be achieved through strategic partnerships and joint ventures of domestic and foreign companies.

Export activities of incubators can be used as a means of providing guidance to the authorities of BiH in the detection of economic potential of BiH, the business community preferences, the direction of development of the industrial portfolio of BiH, acquisition of certain ideas about economic development in BiH etc.

Evaluating the effectiveness of this type of foreign trade benefit is easy to determine. Test of the success is the export performance – specifically, increased international competitiveness and value added, and ultimately, sales in foreign markets.



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# Situation of Youth in the Balkans and Youth Initiative for Human Rights: Kosovo's Work

*Bjeshkë Guri*

## Introduction

The Balkans is home to one of the youngest populations in Europe. Youth hold the key to the future, yet in the Balkans, young people face many challenges, social, political, and economic, that need to be addressed for the region to advance forward and ensure quality livelihoods for all members of society. Challenges vary in each country's context but across the region youth are faced with economic challenges due to high levels of unemployment and outdated education systems, political challenges in terms of lack of meaningful opportunities to participate, and social challenges due to the impacts of war and conflict and regional stereotypes. Further challenging the region is emigration and the youth "brain drain" as young people seek to leave the Balkans in search of better opportunities elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

Young people are the future of the region and an important resource for progress and development especially as the Balkans is undergoing a political and economic transition and seeking further integration within the European Union.

## Youth in the Balkan Region

In the decades since the war and conflicts that plagued the Balkan region during the 1990s, a new generation of youth have grown up with the lasting impacts of these conflicts during a period of profound transformation. As the region has transitioned from a conflict to post conflict setting, governments and institutions have pursued a diverse range of societal reforms, re-

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<sup>1</sup> Lilyanova, V. (2017, September). *Briefing: Youth Challenges and Opportunities in the Western Balkans*. European Parliamentary Research Service. Retrieved from: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/608683/EPRS\\_BRI\(2017\)608683\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/608683/EPRS_BRI(2017)608683_EN.pdf).

gional collaborations, and policies designed to advance EU accession. Despite the transformation that has occurred, challenges to peace, democracy, and regional stability remain and have particular impact on the young people of the region.

### *Economic Situation*

The economic situation in the Balkans remains poor with high levels of youth unemployment and a scarcity of meaningful job opportunities. Unemployment and poverty are the two most critical problems ranked by young people in most Balkan countries.<sup>2</sup> Youth unemployment has fallen in the Balkans to an average of 30.4% in 2020 but it remains twice as high as the EU average with more than one fifth of young people not in employment, education, or training.<sup>3</sup>

Young people view lack of finances and financial constraints as the largest obstacle to their mobility in the Balkans.<sup>4</sup> Even when employed, young people tend to receive low wages in both the business sector and public sector.<sup>5</sup> Further exacerbating this situation is the weak education system which has been slow to adapt to the changing labour market, leaving many educated youth lacking critical skills needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce.<sup>6</sup>

In a study conducted by the Balkan Regional Platform for Youth Participation and Dialogue, over half of the respondents believed that young people in their country do not have enough opportunities for a quality life and most respondents thought that young people could have a better life in another country as other countries would have better wages, more job opportunities,

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<sup>2</sup> Petkovic, S., & Rodic, M. (2015, December). *Policy and Legislative Framework for Youth Participation in the Balkans*. Connecting Youth. Retrieved from: [https://connecting-youth.org/single\\_document.php?id=1](https://connecting-youth.org/single_document.php?id=1).

<sup>3</sup> World Bank Group. (2020, March). *Western Balkans Labor Market Trends 2020*. Retrieved from: <https://wiiw.ac.at/western-balkans-labor-market-trends-2020-dlp-5300.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Popovic, M., & Gligorovic, A. (2016, December). *Youth Mobility in the Western Balkans the Present Challenges and Future Perspectives: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo\*, Serbia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*. Connecting Youth. Retrieved from: <https://www.connecting-youth.org/publications/publikim17.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Lilyanova, V.

more career progression, and better formal education.<sup>7</sup> This is leading to a “brain drain” in the region with hundreds of thousands of young people leaving the Balkans in search of opportunities elsewhere.<sup>8</sup>

The harsh socio-economic conditions that Balkan youth face also make it difficult for young people to meaningfully participate in social and civic activities.<sup>9</sup>

### *Political/Social Situation*

Many young people in the Balkans feel alienated from meaningful engagement with political and civil society. While most Balkan countries have youth policies and relevant legislative and institutional frameworks, these mechanisms are not always effectively implemented<sup>10</sup> and many of them do not encourage youth participation and activism.<sup>11</sup>

The lack of national frameworks along with poorly performing state institutions and rampant corruption have left many youth feeling a lack of trust in political processes and cynicism in the future and some even turning towards radicalism as has been the case in Albania, BiH, and Kosovo.<sup>12</sup>

Many youth feel distrust, dissatisfaction, and alienation from political and civil processes which is concerning as youth participation is a fundamental principle of youth development.<sup>13</sup> Many young people in the Balkans do not view participation in civil society, community, or political activities as important and many are dissatisfied with the state of democracy in their countries.<sup>14</sup> In fact, only around 19.5% of youth in the region participate in civic

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<sup>7</sup> Popovic, M., & Gligorovic, A.

<sup>8</sup> Jukic, E. M. (2013, August 1). *Youth Emigration Causing Balkan 'Brain Drain'*. Balkan Insight. Retrieved from: <https://balkaninsight.com/2013/08/01/young-people-leave-serbia-bosnia-the-most/>.

<sup>9</sup> Petkovic, S., & Rodic, M.

<sup>10</sup> Lilyanova, V.

<sup>11</sup> Vejseli, A. (2019, May). *Civil Society and Youth Engagement in the Western Balkans*. Civil Society Forum of the Western Balkans. Retrieved from: <https://epi.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/CSF-PB-05-19-full-6.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Lilyanova, V.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

activities.<sup>15</sup> Most young people do not feel represented in politics and therefore do not feel a need to participate.<sup>16</sup> Youth also lack trust in state institutions and their active participation is not widely supported or recognized by governments.<sup>17</sup> In terms of civic participation, youth tend to lack information about what civic engagement is and about how to participate in civil society.<sup>18</sup> This is due to the lack of civic education in the education system, a shrinking civic space with limited opportunities to speak out and promote democratic values, and limited funding for civil society organizations which reduces opportunities to participate in civic activities.<sup>19</sup>

In terms of diversity, there is concerning data that youth in the Balkans “have a limited potential for building social capital and extending their social networks,” especially in regards to bridging religious and political divides.<sup>20</sup> Entrenched ethnic stereotypes and divisions between different social groups have created social distance between different groups among youth with Roma people, members of the LGBTQI+ community, and contextually “opposed” ethnic groups facing the most alienation from their peers.<sup>21</sup> A concerning number of young people still say they are unwilling to forgive past deeds in terms of past conflicts and wars in the region demonstrating a need to better engage youth in dealing with the past processes.<sup>22</sup> These prejudices and the consequences of war are viewed by youth as major barriers to their mobility in society.<sup>23</sup>

Hate speech is the most reported form of violence or discrimination, especially online, and hate crimes are a relatively high concern among young

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<sup>15</sup> Dakash, S., Prelec, M., Cehajic-Clancy, S., & Stanojevic, D. (2021). *Shared Futures: Youth Perceptions on Peace in the Western Balkans*. United Nations Development Programme. Retrieved from: <https://shared-futures.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Shared-Futures-Youth-Perceptions-on-Peace-in-the-Western-Balkans.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Komar, O. (2018, August). *What we Already Know about Young People in the Region – RYCO*. Retrieved from: <https://www.rycowb.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/RYCO-Desk-Research.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Petkovic, S., & Rodic, M.

<sup>18</sup> Vejseli, A.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Komar, O.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Dakash, S., Prelec, M., Cehajic-Clancy, S., & Stanojevic, D.

<sup>23</sup> Popovic, M., & Gligorovic, A.

people across the region.<sup>24</sup> Discrimination based on age, political affiliation, or ethnicity are frequently reported but only 17% of victims of discrimination or violence report it to anyone, signalling the need for better justice mechanisms.<sup>25</sup> Change needs to occur at both the political and societal level in order for these challenges facing young people to be addressed. Without meaningful opportunities to participate in political and civic life and effective processes for dealing with the past, youth will remain alienated from political and social life in the Balkan region.

### *Covid-19 Situation*

While the exact impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the situation of youth in the Balkans is not yet fully clear, it is understood that the pandemic and its consequences have further worsened the economic and political situation facing youth across the Balkan region. Young people have been disproportionately impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic due to their already precarious employment conditions and due to the pandemic's impact on poorly prepared education systems. The pandemic has worsened another issue impacting young people in the Balkans: mental health. For example, in Kosovo alone, most youth express concerns about coping with stress and perceive that mental health problems are not adequately addressed or acknowledged in Kosovo.<sup>26</sup> A worsening economic situation, barriers to accessing education, and isolation due to the Covid-19 pandemic have taken a toll on mental health, an issue that cannot be ignored as the region seeks to address the impacts of the pandemic.

### *Positives*

Despite the challenging economic and political conditions that young people in the Balkans face, they also remain resilient and hopeful for the future. Their hopes and values across the region are generally aligned and many of

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<sup>24</sup> Dakash, S., Prelec, M., Cehajic-Clancy, S., & Stanojevic, D.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> UNDP Kosovo. (2021, January). *Youth Challenges and Perspectives in Kosovo*. Retrieved from: [https://kosovoteam.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/YouthChallengesandPerspectivesinKosovoENG\\_0.pdf](https://kosovoteam.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/YouthChallengesandPerspectivesinKosovoENG_0.pdf).

them are confident that they can be a positive influence for change in their society and the region.<sup>27</sup>

Many youth in the region are interested in being more involved with civic and political activities, this interest just needs to be harnessed with increased opportunities for meaningful engagement and participation.<sup>28</sup> Young people are interested in helping the poor and marginalized, democracy and human rights, and building peace and reconciliation as social causes, an interest that should be leveraged by institutions to help foster peace and inclusion.<sup>29</sup>

The more contact youth have with different groups and the more education they have, the less prone they are to radical or discriminatory beliefs which underscores the importance of having activities that bring together youth of different communities.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, despite the region's past conflicts and wars, many young people express interest and openness to friendships with members of different groups and more young people are optimistic than not about peace and improved relations in the region.<sup>31</sup>

Realizing youth potential and capacities are essential for creating stable, democratic, and cohesive societies. The development of youth goes hand in hand with the development of a country and society as a whole. Young people in the Balkans are experiencing many challenges that need to be addressed so that they can lead prosperous lives. Young people are ready for change and they are ready to be changemakers in society, they just need the opportunities and resources to do so. The development and empowerment of young people is what the Youth Initiative for Human Rights Kosovo seeks to do everyday through our mission and programming activities in Kosovo and the Balkan region.

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<sup>27</sup> Dakash, S., Prelec, M., Cehajic-Clancy, S., & Stanojevic, D.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Komar, O.

<sup>31</sup> Dakash, S., Prelec, M., Cehajic-Clancy, S., & Stanojevic, D.



## **YIHR's Work in Kosovo**

Youth Initiative for Human Rights Kosovo (YIHR KS) is part of the larger regional Youth Initiative for Human Rights non-governmental organization network. For over 17 years, YIHR KS has successfully worked to protect and promote human rights and democratic values in Kosovo and the Balkans region. YIHR KS's work strives to build a free, equal, and just society where all people can realize their full potential. We promote, protect, and advocate for human rights, dealing with the past, rule of law, and civic values as the core foundations of a free, responsible, and progressive society. Our main programmatic areas are dealing with the past, human rights and rule of law, and youth empowerment.

### *Youth Situation in Kosovo*

Youth in Kosovo face similar challenges present in the Balkan region from high levels of unemployment to lack of meaningful political and civic engagement which YIHR KS seeks to address through our activities.

According to a study by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Kosovo, the main challenges young people in Kosovo face are the lack of job opportunities, poverty and poor economic situation, and nepotism and corruption with other challenges including the general political situation and the low quality of education.<sup>32</sup> Concerningly, more than half of the young people interviewed in this study felt that Kosovo was going in the wrong direction in 2020.

In terms of the economic situation, Kosovo has the highest level of youth unemployment in the Balkan region at 46% which has led to increased emigration, restricted opportunities to participate in social and political life, and reduced quality of life.<sup>33</sup> In terms of inter-ethnic relations, young people in Kosovo tend to view relations between Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbians as tense due to the impact of conflict memories and the influence from older generations.<sup>34</sup> Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serbian youth still often

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<sup>32</sup> UNDP Kosovo.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

do not interact with each other due to deeply rooted stereotypes and the lack of a common language.<sup>35</sup> However, youth believe in the power of increasing tolerance and understanding for one another and participating in joint activities as ways to improve inter-ethnic relations.<sup>36</sup>

While many Kosovo youth are sceptical of a better future, many also remain hopeful which is why engaging and empowering young people is vital work for progressing Kosovo society as well as the wider Balkans.

### *YIHR KS's Work*

At YIHR KS, we believe in the power of young people to be responsible and active citizens in building a just, equal, and peaceful society. Therefore, the goals of this program are to empower young people to become active participants in social and political life at the local, national, regional, and global level through formal and non-formal education and to strengthen youth capacities in engaging, protecting, and advocating for human rights for all and in engaging with dealing with the past processes. We strive to engage youth in all our programming areas and in all of our activities, we work to ensure that youth have a space to be active and engaged participants.

Last year, we had several Youth Empowerment programs to promote reconciliation and trust between Kosovo's youth and increase youth education opportunities. In our "Fostering New Approaches to Youth Reconciliation" project we implemented our first Storytelling Workshops in which youth from different communities learned more about dealing with the past and the importance of activism and storytelling. We also engaged in an anti-bullying and discrimination virtual campaign as part of our "Champion Schools for Social Change" project.

We focus on empowering youth in our activities for our Dealing with the Past and Human Rights and Rule of Law programs as well. In our Kosovo Youth Dialogue project we empower young people to actively participate in dealing with the past and reconciliation processes in Kosovo by encouraging

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

inter-ethnic communication, interaction, and cooperation, addressing common interests, building confidence, and promoting mutual understanding and positive attitudes. In our Youth Exchange Program, youth from Albanian and Serbian communities learned about dealing with the past and reconciliation through activities such as visiting memorials and using different art forms for dialogue and cooperation. We host World Cafes with decision makers so young people can have the opportunity to talk with decision-makers as well as discuss their ideas and express their needs in order to encourage youth to be more engaged with civil and political society. We organize Living Libraries where young people can enhance their knowledge on human rights and activism by listening to activists speak about their work. Last year we engaged young people in our Youth for Justice project which empowers young people in Kosovo to be active in the justice sector through our My Rights Platform, training law students, holding justice lectures, local mock trials, open court days, and an internship program.

Through our programming and activities and collaboration with state, international, and NGO actors in Kosovo, we hope to empower young people of all communities to be active in human rights and peace processes by providing them with the resources, knowledge, and social connections to do so.

## **Conclusion**

Young people need to be engaged and empowered in all sectors of society if society is to develop and advance. A new generation needs to be empowered so they can find the solutions to challenges and create a new peaceful and sustainable future. This is what we work to do at YIHR KS with the activities, opportunities, and resources we provide for young people in Kosovo and the region. Youth in the Balkans face a range of challenges, political, economic, and social. Despite these challenges, young people remain resilient and passionate about building a better future for themselves, their communities, their countries, and the region as a whole. The active and meaningful participation of young people in all areas of society is essential for building peace and stability in the Balkans.

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## **PART IV: International Support**

# **UN Security Council's Youth, Peace and Security Agenda: An Opportunity for the Meaningful Participation of Young Women and Men**

*Milena Stojić*

The emergence of the UN Security Council's Women, Peace and Security (WPS) paved the way for the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda in the new millennium, with both being seen as revolutionary in claiming a seat at the table for those historically excluded in the peace and security context. The UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security was adopted in 2015, with the subsequent resolutions 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020) focused on youth in conflict prevention and resolution, referred to as the YPS agenda. YPS is an opportunity to challenge the narratives of young women being primarily passive victims, and young men being primarily considered as perpetrators of violent extremism (and thus a security threat), by repositioning them as 'active' and/or 'positive' *agents* of sustainable peace and security. Such a shift cannot happen in vacuum, but is rather dependent on both parallel and synergized efforts of scholars, international relations practitioners, policy decision-makers and civil society stakeholders. Institutional embrace of YPS on a national level is an opportunity to enable meaningful contribution of youth not only to political and peace processes, but across different policy sectors, in line with the human security premises. With so far only Finland adopting a National Action Plan (NAP) on YPS in Europe, processes of country-level operationalization seems to be taking their time, and South East Europe (SEE) is no exception. However, youth-led organizations in some of the countries are pushing the tempo, and lessons learned based on the two decades of WPS implementation could be of help in accelerating YPS localization.

## **Why All the Fuss around the YPS?**

Understanding YPS relevance from the perspective of a non-youth stakeholder might be challenging without fast rewind to the broader context within which we are invited to reflect: who is 'youth'?

Same as gender is a social construct, notion of youth is also “an idea that has been created and accepted by the people in a society”.<sup>1</sup> Thus, who is identified as ‘youth’ will differ across geographies and political actors. For instance, for statistical purposes UN defines youth within the range of 15 to 24 years old. Nevertheless, number of UN entities, regional organizations and instruments may use different scope, such as 15 to 32 (UN Habitat/Youth Fund), 15 to 35 (African Youth Charter) or 18 to 29 (UN Security Council).<sup>2</sup> On a national level, this can also differ, depending on demographic, economic and socio-cultural settings and overall political approach. For instance, in Bulgaria and Hungary youth is defined as 15 to 29, in Austria 14 to 24, in Montenegro and Slovenia 15 to 29, while Serbian Law on youth defines the category as 15 to 30 years old.<sup>3</sup> What is important though is that this is still a very heterogeneous group of people within the range of, in some cases twenty years, whose needs, aspirations, identities and life circumstances may significantly vary. At the same time, policy and cultural practices may demonstrate discrepancy. For example, Nepalis are considered youth until the age of 39 years, yet culturally a young woman in rural areas would often be considered an adult after her first menstrual period, as observed by the International Alert (Myrntinen et al, 2014). Sometimes, the phenomenon of prolonged youthhood is observed in relation to the culturally conditioned ability of a young man to marry, subjected to his capacities to provide for the family (as young women might be easier seen in a domestic sphere).

The age range choice is more than a random number – it implies political, social and economic assumptions, expectations and measures for the people within its scope. This can mean policies such as access to health insurance, discounted public transportation, housing or other types of support. Minimum age legislation has especially been researched, and qualified as “contentious, contextual and contradictory” (Ehmke and Farrow 2014, 4), often justified in the name of protection of young people. One of the major debates concerning the minimum age is about limitations to full citizenship, such as in terms of voting rights and eligibility to run for the office. For example, in

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<sup>1</sup> “Social construct.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/social%20construct>.

<sup>2</sup> As per UNDESA factsheet, <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/factsheets/youth-definition.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> As per data of [youthpolicy.org](http://youthpolicy.org).

regard to the latter, based on data from 148 parliamentary chambers in 118 countries, Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) concludes that there is a correlation between age and gender, i.e. that gender equality is greater in younger parliaments (IPU 2021, 21). Knowing that gender equality is one of the important predictors of peace, this may be also indicative of the relevance of youth political participation.

On the other hand, the UN also acknowledges, in a more qualitative manner, that youth is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence. More broadly, qualitative definition in answering who is 'youth' could be that it is a "diverse group, in the life phase of transition from childhood to adulthood, whose members deserve special attention to the fulfilment of their potential and the enjoyment of their rights, and who have the potential to positively contribute with their perspective on security (...)" (Hess & Stosic 2021, 16).

Saying that youth deserve special attention is twofold. Namely, on one side there are specifics innate to this age period if observed as part of life in which humans tend to make foundational life choices and decisions, such as vocational path or system of values or parenthood, setting the ground for further personal and political build up in the following life phases. Beyond the specifics observable from the common-sense perspective, youth as a life phase can also be characterized with specific vulnerabilities. Here is an illustrative snapshot:

- According to the American Psychiatry Association (APA), three-quarters of mental illness begins by age 24;<sup>4</sup>
- 43% of all homicide victims are aged 15-29, whereas intimate partner/family-related homicide disproportionately affects women: two thirds of its victims globally are female, but 79% of all homicide victims globally are male. Moreover, some 95% of homicide perpetrators at the global level are also male (UNODC 2013, 13);
- while access to quality education for refugees is critical for safety, social-cohesion, peace-building and stability, only 31% of refugee

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<sup>4</sup> <https://psychiatry.org/patients-families/warning-signs-of-mental-illness>.



youth accesses secondary education, and a mere 3% accesses tertiary opportunities (World Bank and UNHCR 2021, 13).

Despite the fact that they are the age cohort marked as traditionally displaying low levels of political participation, such as in terms of voter turnout, there is a number of historical examples showcasing youth agency in political movements for social change, from Vietnam war protests, through Arab Spring, to the global climate movement 'Fridays for Future' (FFF). Beyond organized youth, history is also reminding us of the extraordinary achievements of young women and men in terms of advancing and transforming the way we live: Alexander Graham Bell was 29 when the telephone was patented, Louis Braille was under 20 when he invented now famous tactile writing system, or if we want to go further in the past – we could recall of military achievements of under 20 years old Joan of Arc. In the tech world, this list is quite long, starting from Facebook and Mozilla Firefox founders, to name a few.

With that being said, special attention to be given to youth is translated through national level youth policies across the globe. Nevertheless, although there is a certain tendency to think of young people in terms of protection and/or prevention, paradoxically there is no international instrument addressing specifically youth rights. Namely, in recognition of additional barriers and challenges faced by certain demographics, there are human rights treaties such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child or Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. While the former can potentially cover one portion of 'youth', it is still limited to persons under the age of 18.

However, barriers to the access to rights by young people are becoming more acknowledged. WHO's Global Report on Ageism (2021) is stating that ageism against younger populations occurs in institutions such as the workplace and the legal and political systems, and in Europe it appears to be more prevalent than ageism against older people. This report also notes that a risk factor for being a target of ageism against younger people is being female. European Network of Equality Bodies (EQUINET) also maps other areas where equality bodies identify cases of discrimination against young people, such as: arbitrary age limits, restrictions and discrimination in education, access to affordable housing and financial services, access to social protection,

access to decision making, hate speech etc. (EQUINET 2021). The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) published a report on youth and human rights in 2018 (A/HRC/39/33), which also documents challenges faced by young migrants including asylum seekers and refugees, young people in conflict with the law and youth with disabilities, as well in relation to right to conscientious objection to military service in some states. Among others, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development ((OECD) 2021) also takes note of the fact that the COVID-19 crisis has further exacerbated inequalities among young people and between different age cohorts, raising questions about intergenerational justice.

Comparatively, the SEE region is not insensitive to such data either. For example, in 2019 Commissioner for Protection of Equality (CfPE) in Serbia conducted a survey among local self-governments aiming to map youth political participation trends and analysed barriers young women and men face in accessing different rights. As that report concluded that youth participation is low and that it “can lead to dissatisfaction and be one of the reasons for migration of young people and their departure from the local community and the country”,<sup>5</sup> this independent institution issued a formal recommendation to all municipalities and cities to take measures and activities toward ensuring improved participation of young people in all spheres of political and public decision-making at the local level.<sup>6</sup>

Having such context in mind, relevance of the UNSC Resolution 2250 becomes even broader than understanding it in a strictly conflict-resolution and countering violent extremism context. The YPS Agenda aims to address power-imbalances in decision-making caused by age-based discriminatory structures and beliefs (Tanghø and Scarpelini 2020, 25). In the current absence of a dedicated international instrument on youth rights, YPS agenda also represents an international (legally binding) policy that can address some of the existing gaps, if implemented comprehensively.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://antidiskriminacija.rs/preporuka-mera-za-ostvarivanje-ravnopravnosti-lokalnim-samoupravama-za-zene-i-mlade/>.

<sup>6</sup> <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/rs/saopstenje-povodom-preporuke-za-ostvarivanje-ravnopravnosti-zena-i-mladih-na-lokalnom-nivou/>.

## Promises of Participation in YPS Agenda

Aspects that limit young people's equal footing in a contemporary world can be theorized from the perspective of the modern understanding of human security, referring to "creating political, social, environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity" (UN Commission on Human Security 2003, 4). UNDP's Report on Human Development already three decades ago recognized that human security "is concerned with how people live and breathe in a society, how freely they exercise their many choices, how much access they have to market and social opportunities – and whether they live in conflict or in peace" (UNDP, 1994). Thus, the task of the people-centered modern human security system is not only to protect but also to facilitate greater participation of women and men in communities in which they live (Skakun, 2013, 121). This new paradigm via UN Security Council opened the door to young people to assume active roles in peace and security contexts through public policy on such a scale, as political subjects with agency to positively impact societies, which up until UNSC Resolution 2250 on YPS (2015) was not the case. They were rather perceived as either passive victims (young women) or security risk (young men). Human security framework is thus suggesting that ignoring challenging circumstances that youth often face on the labour market, or in terms of educational opportunities, or in relation to barriers to political participation or access to other rights, is conducive to wider security liabilities. However, these links are not black and white and it should not be automatically generalized that, for instance, protracted unemployment leads to criminal behaviours.

Important shift in global politics focusing on peace and security, took place with the emergence of the WPS agenda, following the plea to move from state-centric to human security approach. Both WPS and YPS must be observed in regard to their existence being closely tied to the mobilization of women's civil society organizations around the issues of peace and security (Sjoberg 2010) and in the case of YPS to the advocacy of young people<sup>7</sup> (Berents and Prelis 2020), as main drivers of human security approach.

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<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to notice how organized youth is often referred as 'youth', while the essentialist notion of 'women' is rather rarely used to describe advocacy of women's civil society organisations.

The UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security was adopted in 2015, under the leadership of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, with the subsequent resolutions 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020) focused on youth in conflict prevention and resolution, referred to as the YPS agenda. Same as in WPS agenda, the inaugural resolution has three pillars of action: participation, protection, and prevention, and additional focus on disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and partnerships. In relation to partnerships, it is insightful to notice that WPS agenda is dominantly institutionalized in synergy of theory (academic work) and activism whereas scholars often are also activists or at least identify themselves as feminists.<sup>8</sup> To the contrary, or at least to the significantly less extent are youth and youth policy researchers at the same time necessarily activists for youth rights, and certainly due to the temporality of this category, they cease to belong to the community they are researching. Not to mention that youth policy per se is much less formally studied, in comparison to political implications tabled by feminist scholarship. Such circumstances also frame the positionality and perspectives of YPS agenda.

In regard to the Participation pillar that is in focus here, member states are urged to: “consider establishing integrated mechanisms for meaningful participation of youth in peace processes and dispute-resolution”; to include youth perceptions “when negotiating and implementing peace agreements”; and Security Council’s Missions should “take into account youth-related considerations” through “consultation with local and international youth groups”. However, all these notions are framed with the “*as appropriate*” disclaimer (See Participation pillar of 2250). Berents also notices this conditionality in the recent topical debate of the Australian National University’s Gender Institute (2021) and asserts:

Leadership of youth and especially young women are often not recognized, stereotypes (which are also very gendered) that dominate minimize ways in which young people are able to participate and be included, and even well-

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<sup>8</sup> This notion is rather primarily in comparison to YPS, as there is another angle to it. Scholars also argue that “there are too few links between gender advocates inside mainstreaming institutions and feminist activists and scholars ‘on the outside.’” (True 2003, 387).

meaning stakeholders can reinforce some of these frameworks and assumptions.<sup>9</sup>

However, in subsequent resolutions 2419 and 2535, the narrative is somewhat expanded. Both are reaffirming recognition that youth “marginalization is detrimental to building sustainable peace”, as well as that youth contribution is “a key aspect of the sustainability, inclusiveness, and success of peacekeeping and peace building efforts” and “key to advancing national peacebuilding processes and objectives”. In this regard, intersectional intention is also applied, with the notion that full and effective participation of youth must not make distinctions “of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status”. Resolution 2535 recognizes the challenges, too, “including structural barriers that limit the participation and capacity of young people”, and this is especially underlined in relation to young women and their influence on decision-making.

Important are notions of YPS agenda which are stressing necessity of social and economic development, i.e. right to education (including non-formal education), access to justice, employment opportunities, and “constructive political engagement” (2419), evidencing that peace must be seen in the context of wider societal insecurities. Thus, sport and culture are also named as venues for promotion of peace and tolerance. Youth participation in decision-making is likewise encouraged in humanitarian planning and in response to public health challenges, such as COVID-19 pandemic and digital spaces are acknowledged as providers of innovative participation opportunities (2535).

YPS agenda identifies a wide range of stakeholders relevant to its implementation. Beyond marking ‘youth’ in an essentialist notion, it also enlists: youth activists, young women, youth groups, youth-led and youth-focused civil society. Other relevant actors entail also private sector, academia, think tanks, media, and cultural, educational and religious leaders (2419, 2535). Regional and subregional bodies are particularly urged to facilitate constructive engagement of youth, including within the work of the UN, peacekeeping and special political missions. Nevertheless, Member states are the first called upon to allocate funding for YPS agenda implementation and coordinate

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<sup>9</sup> As transcribed by M. Stošić.

with other entities, while enabling meaningful partnership with youth, including through accessible resourcing of youth organizations. This is especially relevant in the light of findings of the Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security which was requested by the UN Secretary-General in response to Security Council resolution 2250, which found that 399 examined youth-led peacebuilding organizations, operated on less than US\$ 5,000 per year, with only 11% having annual budgets that exceed US\$ 100,000 (Simpson et al. 2018). To that end, Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth (OSGEY) published in early 2022 a guide for public officials to assist in implementing the YPS agenda at country-level (Global Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security 2022).

### **Reality Check and the Way Forward**

Looking at the WPS agenda pathway, Member states operationalized this policy mostly through national action plans (NAPs). In the case of WPS more than 80 countries developed one so far at least once, and these mechanisms are also adopted on a wider scale, such as of EU, League of Arab States and NATO (PeaceWomen n.d.). When it comes to SEE, first NAPs were adopted around ten years after adoption of 1325, such as in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia. In some countries of the region first remains also the only NAP insofar, such as in Montenegro (2017), Albania (2018) and Bulgaria (2020).

First NAPs appeared in cases of both agendas five years after the adoption of first resolutions, in Denmark and Finland respectively, with the latter currently being the only country with YPS NAP in Europe. Ambiguous impact of NAPs as WPS mechanism led to the ongoing doubt of some, in regard to YPS replication of this policy path, whereas institutional commitment that seldom foresees funding<sup>10</sup> is seen as more rhetorical than real:

What we have learned from the experience of WPS is that not all NAPs are created equal. (...) There is a well-founded suspicion that pushing for a NAP could plausibly lead to young people's alienation from their own agenda,

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<sup>10</sup> Concretely, the NAPs of only 35 Member States (36%) include an allocated budget for implementation (PeaceWomen n.d.).

since at best they will be ‘consulted’, possibly tokenized and probably marginalized throughout the process” (Fortune 2021).

Nevertheless, WPS implementation offers an example of a participatory and innovative approach as applied in the case of Netherlands’ WPS NAP 2016-2019. This NAP is promoting co-management between the state and civil society, from policy conception to shared accountability (Hamilton et al. 2020, 10). That may be an inspiring practice for future YPS NAPs development, which could reflect ‘walking the talk’ on 2250 by acknowledging youth agency beyond (usual) consultative role. Co-management though is not foreign to youth policy practitioners and researchers, nor to youth organizations, as well-known Roger Hart’s Ladder of youth participation (1992) is framing it among highest forms of participation which assumes youth-adult partnership. Nevertheless, so far beyond Council of Europe’s youth sector and governance model within Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), co-management is rarely applied in institutional practice, thus YPS agenda implementation could be a new venue to further it. In spite of the justified scepticism, an analysis of two decades of WPS implementation shows that the participation pillar has proved the most influential over time in NAPs over the globe (Hamilton et al. 2020, 5). Such an outcome may as well mean that NAPs offer customization space where possible limitations of UNSC resolutions can be rectified.

In the seventh year since the 2250 adoption, no YPS NAPs were yet developed in South East Europe. Nevertheless, it does not mean that YPS is not a policy topic, as there are youth civil society actors taking a strong interest in it. For example, already in 2017, in North Macedonia a conference titled “Youth, peace and security” was organized by youth organization Y-PEER, aiming to introduce young participants with the resolution 2250 and with the role of youth as key actors in peacebuilding and reconciliation.<sup>11</sup> Cooperation with institutions was assessed as crucial and at-the-time Minister of Defence also addressed participants, whose presence may indicated interest in such co-operation. Followed the adoption of 2250 resolution, UN Mission in Kosovo<sup>12</sup> initiated production of the “Kosovo Roadmap on Youth, Peace and

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<sup>11</sup> <https://youthpeer.org.mk/mladi-mir-i-bezbednost/>.

<sup>12</sup> Reference to Kosovo is understood in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

Security”<sup>13</sup> whereas participation of youth, who comprise two thirds of the population, is elaborated in fifteen recommendations as formulated by young women and men. In early 2022, the year of Albania starting its mandate as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, National Youth Congress of Albania and United Nations Association Albania signed Memorandum of Understanding, committing to create a national network for youth, peace and security and to co-design the roadmap for YPS. Initial steps of the youth sector in this context can also be mapped in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Individual programs within organizations though will not be enough to attain the goals of the YPS agenda, as warned by the Swedish Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA): “To do so, it will be necessary to move beyond the implementation of ad-hoc and siloed youth initiatives and start mainstreaming a youth perspective in all aspects of organizations’ mandates, structures, and operations” (Tanghø and Scarpelini 2021, 3). In addition, there is a need “for the creation of a dynamic, on-line and peer-reviewed repository of data, case studies and good practices regarding all aspects of young people and peace-building” (UN Women 2018, 26), which, needless to say, should be gender-sensitive. Perhaps this is the first step toward country-level operationalization of YPS in SEE, and the one to be jointly taken with young women and men. Many of them want to be engaged – for example, 19.5 percent of youth in Western Balkans participate in civic activities, while over 65 percent across the region report interest in being more actively involved (UNDP 2021, 13). In the meanwhile, there are already numerous concrete and well-evidenced lessons steaming from WPS’ two decades of existence and from the much longer feminist work that stakeholders can try to incorporate towards meaningful implementation of the YPS agenda – starting, as SEE concerns, from not waiting entire decade or two to start localizing it.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://unmik.unmissions.org/kosovo-roadmap-youth-peace-and-security-2017-english>.



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# The Soft Power of Democratization and Political Ecology: Opportunities for the WB6 Young Hopefuls

*Simon Ilse*

## The German Stiftungen: Vehicles of Soft Power

The worlds of political foundations and defense academies do not cross paths every day. Usually the worlds of “soft” and “hard” power stay somewhat disconnected. Hard power is commonly referred to as military and economic instruments of states. Soft power represents the ability to persuade other actors to develop the same political will and consequently pursue the same goals as oneself. It is hence a new way for political actors to assert its interests.<sup>1</sup> The key is persuasion and attraction, not pressure or coercion. Diplomacy makes use of both worlds. When looking at international relations today in an interconnected world knitted together by a multitude of media, civil society, economic and other non-state actors, it appears evident that a strict enforcement of the principle of “domestic affairs” or non-interference into internal matters as outlined in the UN Charta is increasingly complex and challenging.

Building furthermore on the political science theorem of “waves of democracy”,<sup>2</sup> events around what is now commonly referred to as the *Color Revolutions* and the *Arab Spring* shed light on the impressive relevance and power of self-organized citizenry, non-governmental organizations and political initiatives for social and political change. Important to note in this context is that popular uprisings in East and Southeast Europe as well as North Africa and the Middle East varied of course in tactics, tools as well as the sustainability of their successes. Also, citizens were generally motivated by a rejection of

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<sup>1</sup> See amongst others “Bound to lead: the changing nature of American power” (Nye, 1990) and Suzanne Nossel on “Smart power”; <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/01/26/smart-power>.

<sup>2</sup> See Samuel P. Huntington’s “The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century” and Seva Gunitsky’s 2018 study in *Perspectives on Politics*. Gunitsky’s main criterion is rejection of absolute rule. By contrast, Huntington used the much narrower criterion of voting rights for the majority of men.

authoritarian rule, corruption and economic hardship than by a particular model of e.g. US-American inspired liberal democracy. Nevertheless, these dynamics gave unquestionable support to the concept of soft power and the world of Western NGO support that some 10 years after the Arab Spring is similarly employed by states like China, Russia or Turkey.

The German political foundations are vehicles of German and European soft power *sui generis*. They can be understood as being in between the worlds of political parties, parliament, the executive and civil society; their history stems from Germany's unique post-war democratic construction. Originally intended as domestic civic education institutes, all German foundations developed international cooperation departments and foreign offices worldwide as early as in the 1970s. As an expression of the German *Grundgesetz* Art. 21, which foresees that “*The parties participate in the formation of the political will of the people.*”, each German political party having won representation twice in the German Bundestag can expect state funding for its political foundation. Funding is allocated proportionally to seats in parliament of the respective affiliated party based on negotiations and framed by the Constitutional Court Judgment of 1986,<sup>3</sup> which regulates the foundation's financial and legal distance to its affiliated parties and the state. Currently, 7 German foundations are registered and affiliated to their respective sister parties. The 2021 established government coalition between Social-Democrats, Greens and Liberals foresees in its coalition agreement to secure work and funding of the political foundations by improving its legal frame, among other reasons caused by reasonable doubt that the AfD-affiliated foundation acts in accordance with constitutional principles.<sup>4</sup> The total budget allocation from the federal budget stood at ca. 550 Mio. € in 2020. Heinrich Böll Stiftung (hbs), affiliated to the German Green Party, will see the biggest budget increase in the coming years and is currently in a unique position to shape German foreign policy. The foundation, whose main tenets are ecology, democracy and human rights has currently 34 offices worldwide with an overall budget of ca. 70 Mio. € annually.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The so-called “Foundations Judgment” by the *Bundesverfassungsgericht* in Karlsruhe is accessible in German here: <https://www.servat.unibe.ch/dfr/bv073001.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Koalitionsvertrag 2021-2025 “Mehr Fortschritt wagen”, p. 11; <https://cms.gruene.de/uploads/documents/Koalitionsvertrag-SPD-GRUENE-FDP-2021-2025.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Annual Report 2020 of Heinrich Böll Stiftung, p.3; <https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/2021-10/Jahresbericht2020.pdf>.

Hbs understands itself as a catalyst and think tank for green visions and projects and acts as an international political network. In a sort of “Societal Foreign Policy”, it funds and facilitates projects and partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and initiatives as partners. Main instruments are communication and advocacy, shadowing of government practice and the production of public recommendations and reports, platforming – essentially transfer of knowledge and value-based networking. The foundation’s core discipline, political education, has its roots in political science, history and pedagogy. Its goal is to recognize connections in political events, to convey and strengthen tolerance and critical faculties, and thus to contribute to the formation and further development of active citizenship, social participation and political involvement.<sup>6</sup>

The choice of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) as hbs’ traditional main allies is based on the conviction that it is the various forms of collective action in the public sphere, between the established institutions and the private sphere, that can power social and political change. Civil society is therefore also often referred to as the intermediate/third sector or buffer between government and ordinary citizens. As the basic task of political foundations usually include political education, i.e. imparting basic political knowledge as well as political advice, it is often about the power of interpretation in a “multipolar discourse process” – working out the political nature of a given topic e.g. distributional effects/gender political relevance of environmental or energy policy decisions.

## **WB6 Youth between Insecurity, Conservatism and Climate Awareness**

In a survey on value orientations of Serbian high-school students by the Helsinki Committee of Human Rights, researcher Marija Radoman found that despite more tolerant views towards the Roma community and views in favor of women’s equality, more conservative values on abortion (e.g. more than 45% of respondents believe that abortion is a sin), nationalism (32%) and homophobia (only 24% of respondents support LGBT rights) prevail. The

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<sup>6</sup> Klaus Linsenmeier, Seminar an der Universität Rostock, Sommersemester 2022, Modul: International vergleichende bildungswissenschaftliche Evaluationsforschung.

survey was conducted with an equal set of questions in 2011 and 2019.<sup>7</sup> However, it also indicated an increased awareness of environmental topics and climate change among high-school students.

This seems to be part of a larger societal trend confirmed by a representative survey conducted by the Serbian polling institute “Ipsos” in cooperation with the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and Heinrich Böll Stiftung Belgrade in November 2021. When asked in an open-ended question which are the three areas in Serbia most important to the respondents personally, 24% mention environmental protection raising it to become the fourth national priority after socio-economic concerns such as employment and healthcare. When asked for the most important local topic, environmental concerns such as pollution, waste management, sewage and traffic emerge as the predominant local issue. Specifically young persons between 18 and 39 years old are concerned with general pollution and air pollution in particular in today’s Serbia. Another observation worth mentioning is that concerns about climate change and the state of the environment cuts through all demographics. In other words, people are concerned no matter their age, educational background, the political party they vote for or the media they consume. The latter is particularly interesting given the strong influence of the media on the public’s perception of topics in Serbia and supports the hypothesis that environmental topics are so close to people’s reality making them somewhat immune to any media spin.<sup>8</sup>

The most comprehensive youth study in Southeast Europe to date, comparable to the *Shell Jugendstudie* in Germany, has been coordinated and supported by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) in 2018/19.<sup>9</sup> Gathering data from 10 countries of 10.000 young people between the age of 14 and 29, the authors conclude that the youth lives in a “political economy of insecurity”, with little perspective for a better life in their countries. A sad but strong indicator to underline this conclusion are annual emigration statistics from

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<sup>7</sup> Summary of results accessible here: <https://www.serbianmonitor.com/en/survey-high-school-students-in-serbia-homophobic-and-anti-abortion/>.

<sup>8</sup> Main results of the survey can be downloaded from the website of Heinrich Böll Stiftung Belgrade office, accessible here: <https://rs.boell.org/en/2021/12/17/opinion-poll-environmental-issues-perceptions>.

<sup>9</sup> All results of the study and policy papers are publicly accessible here: <https://soe.fes.de/features/youth-studies>.

Southeast Europe with tens of thousands of the young and educated migrating to Western and Northern Europe every year. Generally, youth remains pro-European (in Serbia the least) but rejects traditional party politics to get politically engaged. A clear motivation however is visible with regards to unconventional political participation, through new formats such as petitions, movements, issue-based protests, community-organizing etc. Similarly to the study by the Helsinki Committee, the FES study observes that conservative-nationalist attitudes are passed on into the new generation.

Even though still largely overrepresented in today's politics in former Yugoslavia, the elites of the 1990s with their burdened war past are slowly fading, opening space for a new generation of politicians and perhaps even more important, new approaches to shaping politics. Albin Kurti in Kosovo, Dritan Abazović in Montenegro, new mayors in Banja Luka and Sarajevo, Tomislav Tomašević in Zagreb as the first green mayor in the region, the citizens initiative and electoral alliance "Ne Davimo Beograd / Moramo" and most recently Robert Golob in Slovenia are all examples of this trend that seems to take hold. The question is: *what to expect from the new generation?* In the next section, I will shortly attempt to describe some of the ideas and ideologies that have shaped programmatic evolution and developments in Serbia and Montenegro.

### **Which Opportunities Do the Young Hopefuls Develop?**

Roughly since 2019, the topics of air quality and the protection of rivers against the environmentally destructive development of small hydro power plants have emerged as new, regional issues mobilizing thousands of people beyond country and ethnic boundaries. Initially limited to single-issue protests and blockades, the public debate evolved into politicizing these topics, linking them e.g. to the economic development model or energy policy choices (coal power plants, polluting household heating and cooking devices) favored by the government. Key in facilitating this evolution is a multitude of NGOs and alliances releasing public information and advocacy material online.<sup>10</sup> Reasons for the successful mass appeal and mobilization potential

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<sup>10</sup> Two examples of such organizations from Serbia are the *RES Foundation* and the *Renewable Energy Regulatory Institute (RERI)*, the latter using environmental strategic litigation as principal instrument.



of these topics are diverse and its politicization is certainly a process still ongoing. An open question remains which actors will politically be able to benefit from the evolution of these new topics in the mid- and long-term and if the ecological movement also represents an opportunity for a cosmopolitan, pro-European outlook for the region.

It is however palpable that a new scene or spectrum of liberal, open-minded, pro-European organizations, initiatives, parties and individuals, almost all born after 1980 emerges. They are the young hopefuls. They develop alternative concepts to the predominant clientelistic governance model that has ravaged their countries, from energy to housing to digital rights. Commonalities are their commitment to ecology, participatory democracy, community organizing, alternative culture<sup>11</sup> and inspiration from Yugoslav self-management models. They come together in new ways. For example the *Coalition 27* is an alliance of 10 environmental organizations in Serbia shadowing the government's lack of progress in chapter 27 of the EU accession process, formulating recommendations and tirelessly demanding accountability and rule of law. Additionally, the youth platforms *Green Academy* on the Croatian island Vis and the *Terrestrial Forum* in Sremski Karlovaci, Serbia have become important meeting points for exchange and training.

Socio-cultural and economic role models include municipalism, commoning and cooperatives.<sup>12</sup> Similar to other European local political organizations like *Barcelona en comun / Podemos*, a starting point can often be traced back to housing questions and struggles around public space. Real estate development with links to corrupt or kleptocratic elites clashes with urban activists of "spatial justice". An overarching question is often how publicly owned companies and services can be more democratically and effectively organized for citizens. To that end, the Serbian organization *New Planning Practise* developed a guide to interactive urbanism, educating and empowering citizens

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<sup>11</sup> Important breeding grounds for Belgrade's alternative culture out of which the city political movement "Ne Davimo Beograd" was born are the cultural centers *magacin* or *Ulična galerija* amongst others.

<sup>12</sup> The first Serbian energy cooperative "Elektropionir" has strong European links and its members are also organized in the Eastern European housing cooperative "MOBA", a registered European cooperative.

on urban planning insights and ways to participate.<sup>13</sup> Finally, as a Southeast European response to the TINA (“There is no alternative”) paradigm, Belgrade based *Ministry of Space* collective published a reader with case studies on urban commons in Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo.<sup>14</sup> It impressively illustrates how much of the new thinking, a novel approach to politics has already become reality.

To conclude, the Russian aggression on Ukraine reveals what authoritarian states fear the most: the democratic, emancipatory energy of citizens. People striving for a self-determined, dignified life and prosperous, healthy environment for their children. Europe should not disappoint the young hopefuls in the Western Balkans Six – they are our partners and allies for a democratic, unified and climate-neutral continent.

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<sup>13</sup> The guide and all online resources can be accessed here: <http://interaktivniurbani-zam.com/towards-collaborative-governance-research/>.

<sup>14</sup> “Spaces of Commoning, Urban Commons in the Ex-Yu Region” by Iva Čukić, Jovana Timotijević, Božena Stojić, Njomza Dragusha, Orbis Rexha, Sonja Dragović and Tatjana Rajić, 2020; [https://rs.boell.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/FINAL\\_web\\_COMMONS%20ExYU%20-%20spreads.pdf](https://rs.boell.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/FINAL_web_COMMONS%20ExYU%20-%20spreads.pdf).

## **PART V: Policy Recommendations**

## Policy Recommendations

*Regional Stability in South East Europe Study Group*

### Executive Summary of Recommendations

*With Regard to Strategic Goals*

- **EU:** The WB-6 should be offered a staged accession process with the full access to the single EU market and EU transfers before full membership.
- **EU:** Against the backdrop of the current geopolitical crisis the strategic cooperation with the WB should be intensified, in particular with regard to the “Energy Community”.

*With a View to Supporting the Young Generation in the WB*

- **WB governments:** To keep human capital in the region “policies for a good life” are necessary, including trustworthy and functional institutions, investments in housing, education, health care and public transport.
- **WB governments/EU MS:** To reduce the gap between “brain drain” and “brain gain” a flexible common labour market and the recognition of qualifications are required.
- **WB governments/EU:** Establish “Diaspora Investment Funds”, “Research and Development Centres” and “Translation Infrastructure” to increase opportunities for high-skilled youth jobs in the WB.
- **EU:** Oppose stabilitocracies in the WB, as they hinder emancipated democratic engagement.
- **EU/WB governments:** Facilitate the exchange of students within the region and between the EU and the WB.
- **WB governments:** Include youth issues into policy making through a Regulatory Impact Analysis.

## Situation Analysis

Recent developments in South East Europe (SEE), in particular in its Western Balkan (WB) region, have been characterized by regression rather than progress in improving socioeconomic conditions and promoting democratization as well as the rule of law. Regional relations continue to be strained by unresolved legacies from the wars of the 1990s and current conflicts over political status issues. The latter are manifested above all in the separatist aspirations of the Bosnia and Herzegovina entity Republika Srpska. Furthermore, conflict potential is indicated by the lack of progress in the normalization dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina and by the dissatisfaction of the Croatian national party in Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding the political status of its ethnic group, which has also led to a deterioration in relations between Zagreb and Sarajevo.

Additionally, the new European and global security situation resulting from the intensification of Russia's war against Ukraine since February 2022 could decisively influence the consolidation of SEE and, inevitably, the general security situation in the region. Geopolitical conflicts between the West and Russia are also becoming more tangible in the WB. As a result, it is increasingly difficult for regional politicians to sit on several chairs in terms of foreign and security policy, which is particularly true for Serbia.

It seems obvious that established politicians and other decision makers, whose careers date back at least in part to the wartime or immediate post-war period, are unable or unwilling to positively address the political, social and economic challenges in terms of regional consolidation. The strengthening of kleptocratic, clientelistic and authoritarian power structures is evident.

Against this backdrop, hopes for positive social and political change rest on the young generation in the WB. According to UN data from 2020, the age group of 15-34 years constitutes about 26 % of the approx. 17.5 million inhabitants of the WB. This indicates a younger population than in the EU-27 (22.9 % on average). However, the greatest demographic changes in the WB are also taking place in this age group.

In response to the non-improving living conditions, hundreds of thousands of mostly well-qualified and young citizens have left the WB countries in the past ten years, mainly for the West. Some countries in the WB are more affected by population loss, whereas the population in other WB states stagnates in terms of numbers. There, lower emigration movements can be observed at present. However, the general regional trend shows shrinking populations.

## Albania

**Population by age group, 2002 and 2020**

(% of total population, 1 January)

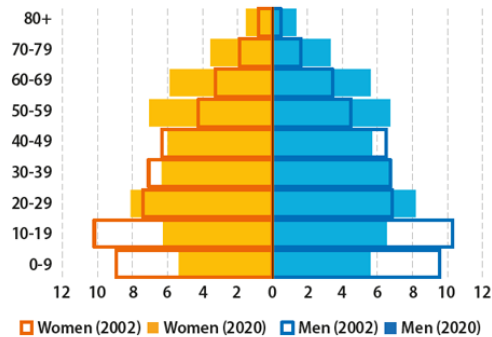


Figure 1: European Union, “Demographic developments in the Western Balkans and Turkey – factsheets” (2021 ed.).

## Montenegro

**Population by age group, 2000 and 2020**

(% of total population, 1 January)

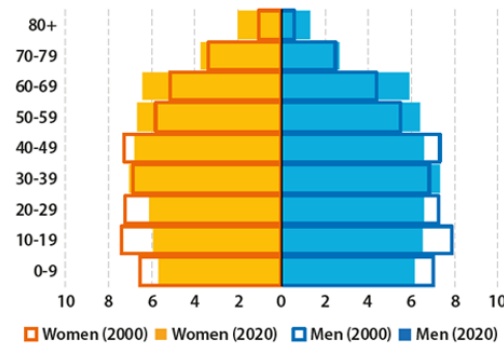


Figure 2: European Union, “Demographic developments in the Western Balkans and Turkey – factsheets” (2021 ed.).

# North Macedonia

## Population by age group, 2000 and 2020

(% of total population, 1 January)

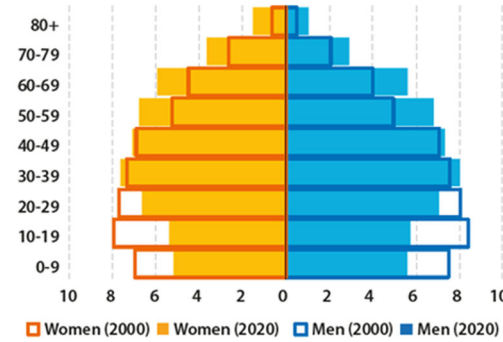


Figure 3: European Union, “Demographic developments in the Western Balkans and Turkey – factsheets” (2021 ed.).

# Serbia

## Population by age group, 2000 and 2020

(% of total population, 1 January)

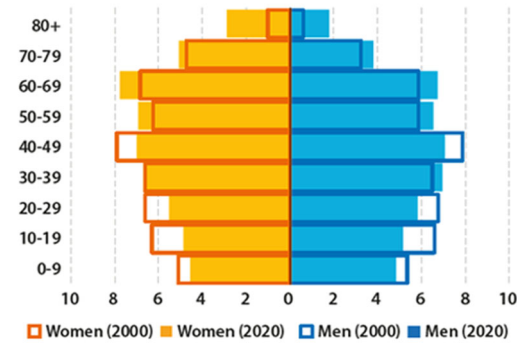


Figure 4: European Union, “Demographic developments in the Western Balkans and Turkey – factsheets” (2021 ed.).

In order to slow down youth emigration and promote return migration it is necessary to improve the general living conditions. However, this will be difficult in the context of the expected recession in Europe as a result of the Russian attacks on Ukraine, as it will particularly affect the economically weaker, unstable countries like in the WB.

The primary requirements to motivate the WB-6 youth to stay in (or return to) their home countries are European standard educational levels and qualified jobs with a sufficient income. The reduction of travel and work barriers as well as a close exchange in the field of education are also important elements in order to reduce negative prejudices and to establish cooperation. In Serbia, more than half of the under 18-years old have never crossed the state borders, and the situation in the other WB countries is not much different. Due to the inability to travel, young people are becoming increasingly isolated and adopt beliefs and attitudes in line with the views of the political extremes with growing nationalism.

On the other hand, experience in recent years has shown that close cross-border cooperation between young citizens in the WB is possible, especially on environmental and human rights issues as well as in connection with the culture of remembrance of the victims of the Yugoslav disintegration wars.

Young citizens are represented in the political structures, but partly they follow patronage interests of established politicians. There is a need for stronger political support in the WB for the genuine concerns of young people (housing shortage, etc.). The implementation of UN's "Youth, Peace and Security Agenda" from the year 2015 in the WB countries would be an important step towards the implementation of such a proactive youth policy.

## **Policy Recommendations**

### *With Reference to the EU Integration Process*

- **EU:** The WB-6 should be offered a staged accession process taking into account their progress. This would mean, above all, access to all economic programs of the EU, even before official and full political accession. In particular, a full access to the single EU market and more importantly to EU transfers would be included here.
- **EU:** Given the negligible size of the WB in terms of GDP, EU transfers as a share of the local economic activity in the order of 3-4 % could make a notable difference and help to stabilize the region that is facing multiple



and permanent crises, while at the same time imposing no particular financial burden on the EU. This is in the interest of both the WB as well as the EU, given both geostrategic and geo-economic considerations.

- **EU:** Against the background of the new geopolitical crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine the EU should consider intensifying integration of the WB in as many areas of EU-wide strategic cooperation for dealing with the expected economic and social setbacks as possible. One important area is energy security, which is on the agenda of the “Energy Community” since 2006 but has become a “Sleeping Beauty”.
- **EU:** Early integration measures in administrative terms should be implemented in order to include the WB-6 in various programs, initiatives, frameworks, agencies and institutions of the EU as observers. This will help to prepare for membership by getting accustomed to operations and procedures as well as gaining access to public policy cycles and will thus improve policy planning within the accession process and alignment with EU legislation and functional practices.

*With Reference to Demographic Developments*

- **WB governments:** Given the gloomy demographic prospects in the WB, the overall aim must be to keep human capital in the region and in addition to attract new one. Besides a guaranteed rule of law and political stability, this can be achieved by a set of “policies for a good life”. They include substantial investments in the areas of i) social housing, ii) comprehensive education, iii) universal health coverage, and iv) public transport.
- **WB governments and EU:** Cross-cutting topics focussing on in these investments should include both environmental as well as youth issues. The main investors will need to be sub-national actors at the municipality level – particularly the cities and the suburban surroundings. The national level needs to provide them with the respective funding needed. The main source of these funds, however, should come from the EU.

- ***WB governments:*** National strategies aimed to improve demographic profiles of their countries, particularly in terms of the share of young need to account for strong subnational differences in human development between urban and rural areas, and in-migration and out-migration districts.
- ***WB governments:*** Although “brain drain” is not negligible in the WB, the main concern of policy makers in this region regarding recent and expected migration outflows from their countries should be focused on reducing the huge wage gap in particularly sought-after but rather poorly paid professions between the sending and receiving countries.
- ***WB governments and EU MS:*** The gap between “brain drain” and “brain gain” can be reduced by a flexible common labour market of the EU and the WB. Facilitating the recognition of qualifications and diplomas would be an important step in this direction. Furthermore, this should include mutual co-operation in job mobility. In this regard, the visa liberalization for Kosovo which has been recommended by the EU Commission since 2018 should finally be implemented.
- ***WB governments and EU:*** By establishing “Research and Development Centres” and “Translation Infrastructure” (for turning business ideas into commercial products) the environmental conditions for the creation of new youth jobs could be substantially improved.
- ***WB governments:*** In addition to financial incentives the removal of administrative and informal obstacles (e.g. recognition of diplomas, clientelistic preference for internal job candidates etc.) is key for the return of the academic diaspora and their employment in the higher education and research sector.
- ***EU Commission:*** A comprehensive study should be commissioned to examine the root causes of youth migration from the WB-6 beyond education and jobs (e.g. absence of true democracy/state capture, clientelism, dysfunctional institutions etc.). This could help the EU Commission to better adjust their projects directed toward the WB youth.

*With Reference to the Political Inclusion of the Young Generation*

- **EU:** In order to enable democratic progress by the young generation, European policy-makers should put an end to what academics and experts have called “stabilitocracy”, the prioritization of stability and trade at the expense of democratization and the rule of law. To achieve this, European policy-makers should cooperate more closely and visibly with the proven supporters of a liberal-democratic development and EU accession.
- **WB governments:** Political parties should establish internal policies promoting a culture of dialogue, tolerance and antidiscrimination, promote the rule of law and democratic practices, good governance as well as implement anti-corruption preventive measures. In addition, particular attention must be focused on elimination of patronage systems and cronyism practices when it comes to promotions.
- **IC:** Political foundations, bilateral donors, international development agencies and relevant international organisations (e.g. Council of Europe, Inter-Parliamentary Union) are encouraged to support the commitment of youth in political processes and organizations.
- **WB governments:** Political institutions in the WB countries are encouraged to enable the full inclusion of youth representatives in political processes, thus ensuring that youth interests are properly considered, e.g. on official websites and media platforms.

*With Reference to International and Regional Initiatives*

- **EU, US and WB governments:** Improving mobility among the youth in the region is of utmost importance to overcome narrow-minded nationalistic thinking. The EU and US should consider a two-track scholarship program to facilitate the exchange of students among WB universities as well as possibilities to study at universities in the EU and US.

The respective scholarships for studying in the EU should concentrate on disciplines of major importance for the region such as technical, economic, law and medical studies.

A well-balanced offer of grants and credits, combined with return obligations to the respective home countries in case of financing study opportunities in the EU, will have positive effects for target-oriented flexible migration and improvement of educational standards.

- ***WB governments:*** In order to promote reconciliation in the WB and to prevent new generations from growing up with negative stereotypes about their neighbours, the educational curricula should be renewed in order to establish a multi-perspective approach towards history. The young generation should thereby be encouraged to reflect more critically on their common past and shared future.
- ***WB governments:*** Consider operationalising the “Youth, Peace and Security” agenda, established by UNSCR 2250 (2015), on a national and regional level and promote youth participation in the peace and security context, thus further supporting existing regional initiatives such as the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO).
- ***WB governments:*** Consider integrating youth issues into policy making through a Regulatory Impact Analysis, such as “Austrian Jugendcheck”. Youth checks provide a tool to tailor policy outcomes to youth concerns, anticipate possible negative implications, hence, reduce the risk of unwanted effects and ultimately foster more youth-friendly societies and economies.
- ***WB governments and IOs:*** Invest in and enable more research and evidence gathering on the role of young women and men in peacebuilding and conflict resolution.
- ***Bilateral donors and IOs:*** Consider increasing funding the work on active citizenship as well as the organisational development of youth-led and youth-serving civil society organisations (CSOs).

- ***EU:*** CSOs led by young people are frequently natural allies of the EU in supporting a European and WB Green Deal. This important issue is of pan-regional significance and should be promoted in the WB, also with the aim of intensifying areas of regional cooperation. Therefore, encourage the political commitment of WB youth, e.g. through projects linked to a necessary WB Green Deal, human rights issues and democratic challenges.

## List of Abbreviations

BHAS	Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina
BiH/BH	Bosna i Hercegovina / Bosnia and Herzegovina
CBBiH	Central Bank of Bosnia and Herzegovina
CESEE	Central, East and Southeast Europe
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EQUINET	European Network of Equality Bodies
EU	European Union
FBiH	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FES	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
hbs	Heinrich Böll Stiftung
HDI	Human Development Index
IC	Information and Communication
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
JV	Joint Venture
KM	Convertible Mark (BiH)
LFS	Labour Force Surveys
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersexual, +
NAP	National Action Plan
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NEETS	“Not in Education, Employment, or Training”
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPP	Public Private Partnership
PPS	Purchasing Power Standards
R&D	Research & Development
RS	Republika Srpska
SEE	Southeast Europe
SIFs	Strategic Investment Funds
SMEs	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
SSST	Sarajevo School of Science and Technology

TC	Training Centre
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
VAT	Value-Added Tax
VCF	Venture Capital Funds
WB	Western Balkans
WPP	World Population Prospects
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
WTO	World Trade Organization
YIHR KS	Youth Initiative for Human Rights - Kosovo
YPS	Youth, Peace and Security

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More than twenty years after the end of the war, the Western Balkans still face very difficult challenges and unresolved conflicts. Trust in the politicians who dominated after the war is low. Some of them are accused of kleptocracy, authoritarian behavior and the revival of nationalism.

Hopes are pinned on the younger generation, which is more likely to bring about democratic change and improve regional relations. However, these emigrate in ever greater numbers to Western Europe. The articles in this publication focus primarily on positive role models in the Western Balkans, but also on the obstacles the young generation faces in bringing about positive change.

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