

CURBING POLITICAL INFLUENCE ON INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

September 3-6, 2018 | Skopje

In cooperation with:



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of
the Republic of Macedonia

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*Accommodation and Conference venue:
Park Hotel Skopje
1732 street no. 4, Skopje 1000, Macedonia*

Monday, September 3, 2018

Arrival of Participants during the Day

20:00

Welcome Dinner hosted by H.E. Foreign Minister Nikola Dimitrov
Venue: Hotel Park Skopje, Restaurant

Tuesday, September 4, 2018

09:30 – 10:15

Welcoming Remarks

Rüdiger Lentz, Executive Director, Aspen Institute Germany
Sabine Stöhr, Head of Western Balkans Division Federal Foreign Office
H.E. Foreign Minister Nikola Dimitrov

10:15 – 11:45

Session I:

Current Perspectives on Political Interference in Different Sectors of Society in the Western Balkans

The European Commission states in its latest EU enlargement strategy that all Western Balkans countries show “clear elements of state capture (...) as well as strong entanglement of public and private interests.” The impact of this influence on the rule of law and democracy in general is seen as one of the most pressing issues in the Western Balkans. The first session will therefore take a general look at the current state of political interference and will focus on the following questions: What is the current situation regarding political influence on independent institutions? What impact can the EU enlargement strategy and the Commission’s upcoming flagship initiative have within the reform processes on curbing the misuse of political influence? What measures and initiatives could work as best practices, and on the contrary, what has already been tried and has not worked in this respect?

Introduction: Jelena Budak, *Rule of Law and Good Governance in Focus: Brief on Croatia after Five Years of EU Membership*

Moderation: Rüdiger Lentz

11:45 – 12:15

Coffee break

12:15 – 13:45**Session II:****How to Strengthen Governance at all Levels through Public Administration Reform: Transparency, Efficiency, Responsiveness, Quality**

A well-functioning public administration and integrity of state institutions is considered key to democratic governance and economic development. Moreover, citizens expect their governments to ensure an effective, professional and accountable public administration to deliver services to their citizens. However, in most Western Balkan countries public administration remains weak, with limited administrative capacity, high levels of politicization and a lack of transparency. What are the key priorities when it comes to public administration reform? How can the quality and the accountability of public services be improved? How can transparency, depoliticization, and professionalization be enhanced, in particular with regard to the organization's recruitment and dismissal of staff? How can digitalization and e-governance help to foster functional state institutions and improve the effectiveness and services for citizens of public administration? What can the EU and other external actors do to further support these processes? How can these aspects be further strengthened in the countries' reform agendas?

Introduction: Ramadan Ilazi, *Challenges and Opportunities of the Public Administration Reform Process in the Western Balkans: Good Governance, Democratic Systems, and Public Service Delivery*

Moderation: Edith Harxhi

13:45 – 15:15

Lunch

15:30**Departure (walking) to City Center for Afternoon Program**

Meeting Point: Hotel Reception

16:00 – 17:00**Meeting and Discussion with H.E. Prime Minister Zoran Zaev**

Bulevar Ilindenska BB, Skopje 1000

17:15 – 18:15**Guided tour through Skopje (voluntary)**

Meeting Point: In front of Government building,

Bulevar Ilindenska BB, Skopje 1000

18:30**Departure (by bus) to German Ambassador's residence**

Meeting Point: In front of Government building,

Bulevar Ilindenska BB, Skopje 1000

19:00**Cocktail Reception hosted by German Ambassador Thomas Gerberich**

Wednesday, September 5, 2018

09:30 – 11:00

Session III:

Strengthening the Independence of the Media and Freedom of Speech

Media is considered the fourth estate essential to the functioning of a democracy. However, in the Western Balkans “extensive political interference in and control of the media”, as stated by the European Commission in its latest enlargement strategy, is challenging the independence and transparency of media. In the Reporters Without Borders media freedom index, countries of the region also rank fairly low. What is the impact of a lack of media independence on the political landscape and freedom of speech in general? What does this mean for a young democracy and its public discourse? How can the ability of citizens to make informed decisions be enhanced? How can political interference be addressed to safeguard the freedom of expression and independence of media as a pillar of democracy? How can a more pluralistic media environment be created? What role does the internet play? What is the role of the EU and how can the EU better support these essential freedoms?

Introduction: Marko Milosavljević, *Curbing Political Influence on Independent Institutions in the Western Balkans*

Remzi Lani, *Relationship between media and democracy in the Balkans today: questioning the usual assumptions*

Moderation: Adnan Ćerimagić

11:00 – 11:30

Coffee Break

11:30 – 13:00

Session IV:

Political Influence on the Judiciary, Ombudsmen, and Anti-Corruption Agencies

The establishment of an independent judiciary and the fight against corruption are key reform priorities in the EU accession processes of the Western Balkans. Chapters relating to the judiciary and fundamental rights are prioritized throughout the accession process. Anti-corruption funding has gone to strengthening institutions, developing capacities, systems and tools, as well as to awareness-raising. Nonetheless, although the legal and institutional framework is largely in place throughout the region, legal systems continue to be politicized and faced with corruption. How can interference and corruption be curbed in a sustainable way? What is the role of the EU and how can the EU support the fight against political influence in this matter? How can ombudsmen and anti-corruption agencies be further strengthened? How can their independence be guaranteed?

Introduction: Sotirag Hroni, *Curbing Political Influence on Anti-Corruption Agencies: The Case of Albania*

Vujo Ilić, *Turning the Tide: Political Influence and Independent Institutions in Serbia*

Moderation: Valeska Esch

13:00 – 14:15

Lunch

14:15 – 15:45**Session V:****Disentangling Business and Politics: How to Strengthen the Private Sector**

Almost a decade after the global financial crisis, employment has recovered to pre-2008 levels in all Western Balkan countries. The region is expanding its economies faster than in recent years. In 2018-2020 the Western Balkan countries are expected to reach economic growth of over 3%. However, making full use of this growth potential will strongly depend on how quickly countries can tackle the problems that hold back the region's private sector, including the political and legal frameworks in the country and unfair competition by entanglement of politics and business. What does this entanglement currently look like? How can it be detected and addressed? What can the private sector do and what needs to be done on the policy-side in order to protect private business from political interference? What is the role of the EU and how can the EU support the fight against political influence?

Introduction: Blerim Reka, *De-politicized Economy Through Post-Corruptive Transformation*

Comment: Blagoj Hristov, *Views from the private sector regarding "Disentangling Business and Politics"*

Moderation: Ana Trišić-Babić

16:15**Departure (by bus) for Cultural Program**

Meeting Point: In front of Hotel Park (Main entrance)
Dress code casual

17:00**Boat tour through Matka Canyon****18:45****Walk through Vineyard and Wine tasting at Hunter's Lodge "Kamnik"****19:45****Farewell Dinner at Hunter's Lodge "Kamnik"****Thursday, September 6, 2018**

Departure of participants

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

List of Participants

Dritan Abazović

Josip Brkić

Jelena Budak

Gent Cakaj

Adnan Ćerimagić

Iilir Deda

Nikola Dimitrov

Victor Dimovski

Thomas Gerberich

Edith Harxhi

Fatmir Haxholli

Christian Hellbach

Andi Hoxhaj

Blagoj Hristov

Sotiraq Hroni

Ramadan Ilazi

Vujo Ilić

Zoran Ilioski

Beti Jaceva

Remzi Lani

Srđan Majstorović

Žarko Mićin

Marko Milosavljević

Tanja Mišćević

Thomas Mühlmann

Andrew Page

Genc Pollo

Nikola Poposki

Anja Quiring

Blerim Reka

Konstantin Samofalov

Korab Sejdiu

Ruslan Stefanov

Sabine Stöhr

Tamara Tripić

Ana Trišić-Babić

Ivana Tufegdjic

Ivan Vujović

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Program Assistant

Rüdiger Lentz
Executive Director

David Mills
Rapporteur

Olga van Zijverden
Program Officer

PARTICIPANTS' BIOGRAPHIES

Dritan Abazović



Dritan Abazović is the President of the political party URA (United Reform Action) and a Member of Parliament of Montenegro. He was born on 25.12.1985 in Ulcinj, Montenegro. He graduated from the Faculty of Political Sciences at the University of Sarajevo, where he was awarded the “Golden Badge” and “Golden Charter” of the University. He received his Master’s degree in 2008 from the Faculty of Political Sciences at the University of Montenegro. Currently, he is a doctoral candidate at the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Sarajevo. Mr. Abazović is a longtime associate of non-governmental organizations in the field of human rights, the Euro-Atlantic and civic activism and has engaged in projects related to the promotion of multiculturalism in post-conflict areas of the former Yugoslavia. He participated in several international programs, conferences and seminars and specializes in several study programs. From 2005 to 2007 he was an assistant at the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Sarajevo. In 2009, he completed Study of Peace (Peace Research) at the University of Oslo. At the same University, he completed a seminar for professional development (Professional Development). In 2011, he resided in the United States while participating in the State Department IVLP program in Washington D.C. From 2010 to 2012, he was the Executive Director of the local broadcasting company Teuta (Ulcinj, Montenegro). From 2010 to 2012, he was Executive Director of the NGO Mogul in Ulcinj. In 2010, he published his first book “Cosmopolitan culture and global justice”. Since 2010, he has worked as a high school teacher in Ulcinj, teaching the sociology of Culture, Communication and the history of religion. He also teaches Social psychology at University level. In 2012 Mr. Abazović was one of the founders of the political party “Positive Montenegro”. Since 2012, he has been the youngest MP in the Parliament of Montenegro. In 2014, he was one of the founders of a political project Civic Movement URA (United Reform Action). He speaks English and Albanian.

Josip Brkić



Josip Brkić was appointed Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina in April 2015. He also chairs the Commission for the NATO-integration process of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Until his appointment to the Council of Ministers he worked at the Herzegovina University in Mostar. Mr. Brkić was Ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Kingdom of Spain and Morocco from 2004 to 2008. Previously, he held several senior positions at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 2004 to 2008, Ministry of European Integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina from 2000 – April 2003 and Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of the Western Herzegovina County in 2000. His professional involvement includes several years in the business sector, from 2009 to 2015 holding a management position. Since 2015 Mr. Brkić is the international secretary of HDZ BiH - the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina and a member of the Main Board of HNS – Croatian National Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Mr. Brkić was born in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in 1974 where he finished elementary and high school. He holds a law degree from the Faculty of Law at the University of Mostar and Master’s Degree in European Study from the University of Sarajevo and University of Bologna. He is a Ph.D. candidate in Public International Law at the Faculty of Law – University of Mostar. Mr. Brkić is married and has three sons. He speaks fluent English and Spanish. In 2015 Mr. Brkić was awarded with the Royal Order of Isabella the Catholic by the King of Spain.

Jelena Budak



Jelena Budak is senior research fellow with the Institute of Economics, Zagreb. She had participated in research projects on various aspects of Croatia's accession to the EU, such as institutional convergence, public sector policies and regional development issues. Her research interests are institutions and applied institutional analysis, socio-economic assessments of transition, and most recent publications are in economics of corruption and privacy issues. She is leading two major research projects: Extended Model of Online Privacy Concern (PRICON) and Illegal Trade of Tobacco Products: Smuggling as Experienced along the Balkan Route (BalkanSmugg).

Gent Cakaj



Gent Cakaj serves as Deputy Minister of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of the Government of the Republic of Albania. He has previously worked as a political advisor to the Prime Minister of Albania, Mr. Edi Rama. He has also worked for several civil society organizations as a legal advisor, consultant and analyst. Gent Cakaj has been educated in Kosovo, Belgium and Hungary. He holds bachelor degree in philosophy from the University of Prishtina (2012) and a degree in law from AAB University in Prishtina (2015). He holds a Master of Arts in philosophy from the University of Leuven (2014), a Master of Arts in political science from the Central European University (2015) and a Research Master of Philosophy from the University of Leuven (2017). Gent is engaged as a lecturer at the European University of Tirana.

Adnan Ćerimagić



Adnan Ćerimagić is from Bosnia and Herzegovina and works as an Analyst for a think tank called European Stability Initiative (ESI) in Berlin. He studied law at the University of Graz and EU International Relations and Diplomacy at the College of Europe in Bruges. Adnan did a traineeship in the Secretariat of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee in Brussels and Strasbourg, worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo and the Mission of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the EU in Brussels. He is interested in EU enlargement policy, human rights, rule of law and foreign policy. He is fluent in English and German. At ESI, he is researching EU enlargement policy, the Western Balkans' EU integration process and Turkey.

Iilir Deda



Iilir Deda has over a decade and a half of experience of working in national and international public and non-governmental institutions. His work has influenced decision-making and policy development both at national and international level regarding Kosovo. He has extensive knowledge of national, regional, and international affairs, governance, security and institution building. Iilir Deda is a Member of Parliament of Kosovo, second term, from the liberal-democratic Alternativa party, which he cofounded. He is also a lecturer at the University of Business and Technology in Pristina, teaching Public Policy. Iilir Deda was Executive Director of Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED). He served as the Chief of Staff and Senior Political Advisor to President Atifete Jahjaga. Deda worked with KIPRED since 2008, first as the Research Director, and afterwards as the Executive Director. He also worked as a policy specialist for UNDP HQ in New York; researcher at the Graduate Program in International Affairs of the New School; researcher at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy; was a political advisor to the first Kosovo Prime Minister (Bajram Rexhepi); and was an Analyst for the International Crisis Group in Kosovo. He is also the author of 2008/09/10 Kosovo reports of Freedom Houses' Nations in Transit annual publications. Iilir Deda has a Master of Arts from The New School University (New York City) and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science. He has also published over a dozen papers both in Kosovo and abroad.

Nikola Dimitrov



Nikola Dimitrov has been Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia since June 2017. Prior to his political career, Minister Dimitrov had a long and distinguished diplomatic career spanning two decades. He served as Ambassador of Macedonia to the Netherlands from 2009 to 2014 and Ambassador to the United States from 2001 to 2006, as well as Deputy Foreign Minister in 2000. In 2014, he was appointed a Distinguished Fellow at the Hague Institute for Global Justice. Dimitrov is an expert on Balkan issues, foreign and security policy, international dispute settlement and conflict resolution, and EU and NATO integration. He received his LL.B at Ss Cyril and Methodius in Skopje in 1996 and his LL.M from King's College at the University of Cambridge in 1998.

Viktor Dimovski

Ambassador Viktor Dimovski is the State Secretary at the Macedonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Previously he served as the Director of the Intelligence Agency. He also held positions as Ambassador to the State of Israel, and Serbia and Montenegro. Mr. Dimovski holds a PhD degree from the Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research at the “SS. Cyril and Methodius” University, Skopje.

Valeska Esch

Valeska works as Acting Deputy Director and Program Director for Europe with the Aspen Institute Germany. She is responsible for Aspen Germany’s activities on Southeast Europe, the Visegrad and Eastern Partnership countries. Valeska has a longstanding experience working on the Western Balkans and has published on the Western Balkan policies of the EU and Germany. She joined Aspen in February 2009. She holds an M.A. in Political Science and International and European Law with a focus on European politics and Southeast Europe, for which she studied at the Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn and the University of Birmingham. Prior to joining Aspen, she worked for an event management firm and the United Nations University’s Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNUEHS) in Bonn.

Thomas Gerberich

Thomas Gerberich was appointed German Ambassador in Skopje in 2017. From 2013 until 2017 he acted as Head of the Counter-Terrorism Policy Division at the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin. After working at the United Nations Department at the German Federal Foreign Office, Mr. Gerberich was the Deputy Head of the UN Policy Unit from 2011 until 2013. He spent 2008 and 2009 at the German Embassy in Beijing, as the Head of the Political Department. From 2006 until 2008 he held the position of Deputy Head of the East Asia Division at the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin. Prior to that Mr. Gerberich was the Consul General in Chengdu, China, and the Deputy Head of Mission of the Embassy in Pyongyang. From 1998 until 2002 he worked within the United Nations Department of the Federal Foreign Office in Bonn and Berlin. In 1995 Thomas Gerberich worked as Consulate General within the Economics Department in Hong Kong, and until 1998 in Canton, China, as the Deputy Consul General. Mr. Gerberich entered the Federal Foreign Office (Bonn) in 1992 into the economics department. He graduated from Humboldt University in Berlin in 1981.

Edith Harxhi

Ms. Edith Harxhi is the Executive Director of the Albanian Policy Center, a think tank that deals with policy advice, analysis and research in Albania and the Balkans. Prior to this, from December 2005 to September 2013, she served as the Principal Deputy Foreign Minister of the Republic of Albania. While serving on this post Ms. Harxhi was responsible for Albania’s bilateral relations, multilateral diplomacy, NATO and EU integration processes and specifically dealt with Albania’s relations with Southeast European countries, the Western Balkans and Albanians living in the region. Ms. Harxhi served for many years as a Special Envoy of the Albanian Government for the recognition of Kosovo’s Independence, where she visited many world capitals and international organizations lobbying for Kosovo’s independence. She led numerous Albanian delegations abroad and represented Albania in dozens of international events and high-level conferences. Ms. Harxhi has also worked extensively on energy issues and oversaw the political negotiating team for the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline from 2006 until the successful decision on TAP. Prior to her appointment as Deputy Foreign Minister, Ms. Harxhi worked with the United Nations, and served as an advisor to the Deputy Special Representative of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo where she covered police and justice as well as minorities and gender affairs. Ms. Harxhi received a Master’s Degree with Honors in Political Science and International Relations from the University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom. She has been actively involved in the academic and political debate on the question of Kosovo and is specialized in politics and society in the Balkans. She is currently working on the completion of her Ph.D. thesis entitled: “The Ethnic Conflicts and the Albanian disorder in the Balkans”. Ms. Harxhi is fluent in Albanian, English, Turkish and Italian, and has an intermediate-level understanding of French.

Fatmir Haxholli



Fatmir Haxholli graduated from University of Prishtina in the field of Political Science, and attained his MA in Contemporary European Studies at the University of Sussex, Brighton, UK. For about 15 years, Mr. Haxholli worked as a national expert for international organizations in Kosovo, such as UNDP, GiZ, DFID, as well as a researcher for non-government organizations as the Kosovo Centre for Security Studies, Kosovo Local Government Institute, etc. Fatmir Haxholli worked for the Government of the Republic of Kosovo, in advisory capacity from 2014. Currently, Mr. Haxholli is a Political Advisor to the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kosovo. Fatmir was awarded with scholarships from the University of Prishtina, the Konrad

Adenauer Stiftung and EU Young Cell Scheme. Topics of interest for Mr. Haxholli relate to: democratization, rule of law, cultural and security studies, civic activism. Fatmir is quite interested to take part in sport activities.

Christian Hellbach



Dr. Christian Hellbach studied law at the University of Konstanz from 1979 to 1985. Afterwards, he worked there as an Assistant Professor for four years. In 1989, he received his Ph.D. in Constitutional Law and was certified as attorney-at-law. From 1990 to 1992, he worked at the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety as Desk Officer and completed a traineeship at the Federal Foreign Office from 1992 to 1993. From 1994 to 2000, he worked at the German Embassy in Tashkent, at the Directorate-General Legal Affairs at the Foreign Office, and the Permanent Mission of Germany to the International Organizations in Geneva and the Directorate-

General for Europe at the Foreign Office. Dr. Hellbach was Deputy Head of Mission at the German Embassy in Belgrade from 2000 to 2003, and served in the Directorate-General Political Affairs at the Foreign Office from 2003 to 2007. He worked as Deputy Head of Mission at the German Embassy in Bogotá from 2007 to 2010. Between 2014 and 2016, he was the German Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina. He has been Special Envoy for South-Eastern Europe, Turkey and the EFTA-States at the Federal Foreign Office since August 2016. Dr. Hellbach was born on 20 July 1959 in Mexico City.

Andi Hoxhaj



Dr. Andi Hoxhaj is a Teaching Fellow in Law at the University of Warwick. His research focuses on corruption, the rule of law, and the EU integration of the Western Balkans. His work was referred by the UK Parliament 2018 Report on 'The UK and the future of the Western Balkans' on issues related to corruption, rule of law, and the role of international donors. He was awarded his PhD in March 2017 at the University of Warwick and his thesis was on 'Anti-Corruption Policy in the EU and Reflexive Governance'. Dr. Hoxhaj is currently transforming his thesis into a book for publication in 2019 with Routledge. In April 2018, he was awarded the 'British Academy Rising Star Engagement Award' by the British Academy for Social Science and Humanity.

Blagoj Hristov



Blagoj Hristov is working as Senior Regulatory Affairs Manager for Makedonski Telekom. He has been in charge of regulatory relations since November 2003. Previously he gained experience at the Commission for Protection of Competition, GeoNet and Link Telekom. Since 2010 he has been the President of the Association for ICT in the Economic chamber of Macedonia and in 2015 he has been appointed Member of the Managing Board of Economic Chamber of Macedonia. Blagoj Hristov holds a Bachelor of Economics /Manager from State University "St. Cyril and Methodius" Skopje, Faculty of Economics / Management. He has gained international certificates from USAID and from the "Institute for International Business Officials". Blagoj Hristov speaks English as well as Serbian,

Croatian and Bulgarian. He is married and father of two children.

Sotirag Hroni

development priorities.

Sotirag Hroni, former Albanian diplomat, and adviser to Albanian Prime Minister 1997 and President of the Republic until end of 1999, is the founder and executive director of the Institute for Democracy and Mediation, non-profit organization in Albania. His main responsibilities have been overall management and development of the organization that is actually operating in three departments, CESA, LGID and RDC. He has also led organization's efforts to build efficient cooperation and partnerships with public and private institutions, networking and fundraising. His continuous commitments stand with offering relevance to IDM's strategic development in line with country's

Ramadan Ilazi

Ramadan (Dani) Ilazi is a lecturer of peace and conflict studies at the UBT College and a senior expert at the Novus Consulting Company, working with the public administration reform process in Kosovo. From 2015 until 2016 he served as Deputy Minister for European Integration in the Government of Kosovo, where he was actively engaged in the process of Stabilization and Association Agreement, European Reform Agenda and the Visa Liberalization dialogue. Dani was an active member of civil society in Kosovo, serving as executive director of the Initiative for Progress (INPO) from 2005 until 2008, of the FOL Movement from 2008 until 2011 and of the Kosovo Institute of Peace (KIP) from 2012 until 2014. In 2012, he co-authored the paper "A Peace Treaty for Sustainable Peace: a new beginning for Kosovo and Serbia" and most recently the Aspen Institute Germany published his paper on the impact of the growing support for the far-right parties in the EU for the European perspective of the Western Balkans. Dani holds a Master of Letters degree from the University of St. Andrews and is currently a PhD Candidate in Politics and International Relations at the Dublin City University (DCU) in Ireland. His research interests include Statebuilding, Civil Society, Enlargement Policy and the EU's Foreign & Security Policy.

Vujo Ilić

Vujo Ilić joined Belgrade-based Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability (CRTA) in May 2018 as a lead researcher. He is a final stage doctoral student of Comparative Politics and Social Science Methodology at the Central European University in Budapest. He holds an MA degree in Nationalism Studies from the Central European University, an MA and a BA in Political Science and International Relations from the University of Belgrade. Prior to joining CRTA, he worked at the Yale University's MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies, and Faculty of Political Science, Center for Peace Studies at the University of Belgrade, and participated in several research projects dealing with ethnic stereotypes, political identity, foreign policy strategy, and development cooperation.

Beti Jacheva

Beti Jacheva is a career diplomat at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia. She joined the Ministry in 1996 as a junior diplomat and worked in different departments at the Ministry, including the International Law Department. Recently she was appointed as Director of the Directorate for the European Union. Before that, she was Deputy Director at the same Directorate and was twice posted in the Macedonian Mission to the EU in Brussels. During her first posting (2006-2010), she was Justice and Home Affairs Counselor, dealing primarily with the visa liberalization process; in her second posting (2013-2016) she was Deputy Head of Mission. Throughout her career she was a member of a number of working groups at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, such as the negotiating team for different bilateral treaties, drafting the Law on Foreign Affairs. Among her current tasks is being the focal point for the Berlin Process. Furthermore, she is a member of the inter-institutional working group on Plan 3-6-9, which was the main reform document of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia and will be superseded with Plan 18.

Isabelle Kues



Isabelle Kues is Program Assistant in the Aspen Institute's Southeast Europe Program. She attained her B.A. in Ethnology and Political Science at the Ruprecht-Karls University Heidelberg in 2016, with a semester abroad at the Gajah Mada University Yogyakarta, Indonesia. During the time of her study, she completed internships at the Institute for the Advancement of Education and Integration in Mainz, and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development in Bonn. Isabelle started her M.A. study program National and International Administration and Policy, at the University of Potsdam, in the fall of 2016. She gained further work experience at the Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations in New York in the winter of 2017.

Remzi Lani



Remzi Lani is currently working as the Executive Director of the Albanian Media Institute. As a graduate of Tirana University, from the Faculty of Philosophy, he has been a correspondent of the Spanish newspaper "El Mundo" from 1991 to 1993, the "Zeri" newspaper in Pristina from 1993-1995, before becoming editor of Alternative Information Network in Tirana (1995-2002) and co-editor of the Albanian edition of Foreign Policy Magazine (2009-2011). He has worked as a guest lecturer at Klagenfurt University (Austria), Ottawa University (Canada), Windhoek Politechnic (Namibia). Remzi is a member of the European Council for Foreign Relations, the Steering Committee of GFMD (Global Forum for Media Development), the Board of WAN (World Association of Newspapers) and the Selection Committee of BIRN Fellowship for Excellence in Journalism. He is a media freedom expert in Yemen, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Botswana, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Armenia and others. Furthermore, Remzi is a founding member of the first Human Rights Group in Albania (The Forum for Human Rights), from December 1990 and works for different Institutes as collaborator in projects on Balkan issues and functions as expert for the Bertelsmann Transformation Index BTI.

Rüdiger Lentz



Rüdiger Lentz is the Executive Director of the Aspen Institute Germany. Previously he served as the Executive Director of the German-American Heritage Foundation and Museum in Washington from 2009 until 2013. From November 1998 until December 2009, he was the Washington Bureau Chief and Senior Diplomatic Correspondent for Deutsche Welle. Prior to his assignment in Washington, he served as Deutsche Welle's Brussels Bureau Chief. Before joining Deutsche Welle, Lentz worked as a correspondent for the German news magazine Der Spiegel, after having served in the German Armed Forces for eight years and as a TV commentator and reporter at ARD/WDR, Germany's largest public TV and radio station. Lentz has also held various positions including that of Editor in Chief at RIAS-TV Berlin from 1990-1992. As the Executive Director of German TV from 2002-2005 he was responsible for the branding and market entrance plan of German TV in the US. He has been a Visiting Lecturer at Harvard University, the School of Foreign Service in Washington and a regular guest on CNN and C-Span. Lentz was born in 1947 and studied international relations, history and economics at the University of Hamburg. He is a long-time member of the Atlantik-Brücke and a founding member of the German American Business Council (GABC) in Washington D.C.

Srdan Majstorović

Mr. Srdjan Majstorovic has been the Chairman of the Governing Board of the European Policy Centre (CEP) since October 2017. He graduated from the Faculty of Political Sciences of the University of Belgrade, Department of International Relations, and received his Masters degree at the University of Graz, Karl-Franzens Faculty of Law, Department of European Integration and Regionalism. Since December 2017, he is a member of the Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG). He was coordinator of the preparation of the Declaration of a European Balkans Partnership which was published in April 2018. Mr. Majstorovic was employed in the Serbian European Integration Office since its founding in 2004 and performed the role of Deputy Director between 2005 and 2017. Prior to this nomination, he also worked in the Department for European Integration of the Ministry of International Economic Relations of the Republic of Serbia (2003-2004), as well as in the Department for European Integration and Multilateral Cooperation in the Region with the former Federal Ministry of International Economic Relations of the FRY (2001-2003) where he was responsible for regional cooperation initiatives and organizations. In 2015, Mr. Majstorovic was appointed as a member of the Negotiating Team for Accession of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union. Within the Negotiating Team, he was responsible for issues pertaining to fulfilling political criteria for accession and chapters 23 - Judiciary and fundamental rights and 24 - Justice, freedom and security. During his career in the public administration, Mr. Majstorovic was also a member of the negotiating team of the Government of the Republic of Serbia and hence participated in the negotiations on the conclusion of Stabilization and Association Agreement between the Republic of Serbia and the EU. He was actively involved in the preparations of the institutional framework and procedures for coordinating the negotiation process for Serbia's accession to the EU.

Žarko Mićin

Žarko Mićin was born in 1982 in Novi Sad, Serbia. He studied law at the University of Novi Sad (Faculty of Law) and graduated in 2007. On the 21st of June 2017 he passed the Bar exam. From 2008 until 2010 he worked at a private law office after which he was employed as a legal assistant at NS INVEST LLC and the Director of International Business Investment LLC Novi Sad. From 2010 until February 2018 he was the Chairman of the Supervising Board at the Hotel Prag Belgrade. In 2012 he became the Executive Director in the public enterprise for city construction and development „JP Zavod za igradnju grada“, and from 2013 General Manager of the sports center „SPC Vojvodina“. In 2014 he was elected as a member of parliament of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia. From 2014 until 2017 he was employed as the Executive Director in public enterprise for urban development „JP Urbanizam zavod za urbanizam“. In 2014 he successfully completed the 2014 cycle of the Council of Europe school of political studies and participated in the Third Forum for Democracy of the Council of Europe. The same year, he successfully completed the program of the Regional Academy for Democracy „Human and Minority Rights 2014“ by the Council of Europe. He was involved in several high priority investment projects, and since 2015 he has officially been Project Manager for a high priority investment by the city of Novi Sad. At the 2016 parliamentary elections he was re-elected as a member of parliament and became a member of the European Integration, Judiciary and Local Self-Government Committee. He is a member of the delegation of the National Assembly to NATO PA and to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Since 2018 he has been working as an Attorney at law.

David Mills

Born and raised in Victoria, Canada, for the past three years David has made Berlin home while completing a Master of Public Policy at the Hertie School of Governance. Prior to this, he spent many a happy year bouncing around between Montréal, Glasgow, the Kootenays, and Vancouver, merrily failing at every attempt to pick up the local dialect. His professional background is in local government, and he has most recently been working to model zero-emissions vehicle sales in Massachusetts. Other interests include urban and social policy, quality management, and eating cheese. On any given day, he can be found tootling around Berlin on his bicycle, or bobbing about in one lake or another.

Marko Milosavljević


Marko Milosavljević is Associate Professor at the Chair of Journalism at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana and a member of the Core Experts Group (EENCA) for Media and Culture, advising European Commission. Additionally, he functions as vice-president of ECREAs Communication Law and Policy section and is a regular partner of international institutions including European University Institute (Center for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom) Florence, Open Society Institute London, European Journalism Centre Maastricht, and South East European Network for Professionalization of Media. Marko was a regular lecturer of courses at University of Novi Sad in Serbia, University of Dubrovnik in Croatia, and postgraduate programme at Media Plan in Sarajevo in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He worked on different market analysis and consultations for regional broadcasting authorities, broadcasting and telecommunications companies, and legacy media. Among others, he worked as the chairman of National Fund for Pluralization at the Ministry of Culture, was a member of the National Committee for Information Society, and as an adviser to the Slovenian Ministry of Culture for National Strategy on Media Development. His research examines the role of media and journalism within the wider political, regulatory and economic framework, particularly the economic sustainability, digital disruption, and political and policy interventions.

Tanja Mišćević


Prof. Tanja Mišćević, PhD is Head of the Negotiating Team for the Accession of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union from September 2013 and full Professor at the Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade. Previously, prof. Mišćević was Special Advisor to the Deputy Prime Minister responsible for Foreign Trade in the Serbian Government. From December 2010 to July 2012, prof. Mišćević was State Secretary for Defence Policy at the Ministry of Defence. From 2009 to 2010 she was Vice-President and a member of the Board of the Anti-Corruption Agency. From 2005 to 2009 she was Director of the European Integration Office of the Government of Serbia. Prof. Mišćević teaches International Organizations, UN System, EU Enlargement Policy, and History of European Integration. From 2004 to 2012, she was Head of the International Organizations course at the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia. She is Vice-President of the European Movement in Serbia.

Thomas Mühlmann


Thomas Mühlmann currently serves as Deputy Director for South-East Europe and EU Enlargement and Head of the Unit for Southeast Europe at the Austrian Foreign Ministry. Previous assignments in the Ministry included Head of Unit for the Austrian Candidature for a Non-Permanent Seat in the UN Security Council (2006-08), Deputy Representative to the Political and Security Committee in the EU during the Austrian EU Presidency (2005-2006) as well as Head of the Austrian Office in Kosovo (1999-2001). He also served as Chief Political Advisor to the EU Police Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2003-2005), Advisor to the EU Delegation to the African Union (2008-2010) and Chief of Staff of EULEX KOSOVO (2010-2015). He studied International Economics and Political Sciences.

Andrew Page

Andrew was the Western Balkans Summit Coordinator at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) from October 2017 to July 2018, where he led a team of 15 to prepare the policy initiatives and logistics for the 2018 London Summit under the Berlin Process. After the Summit, he was appointed Western Balkans Director for the FCO in London, starting in September 2018. He was British Ambassador to Slovenia in 2009-13. Andrew started in the FCO in 1990, after graduating in Classics from Cambridge University and working in the City (1987-90) as an Investment Analyst. As a diplomat, he has specialized largely in the Slavic world. His first posting was in Ukraine in 1993-96. He served in Paris in 2000-04, where he spent a year on secondment to the Quai d'Orsay (2000-01) before moving to the British Embassy, working on the Middle East (esp. Iraq War) and Afghanistan. He has done various policy jobs in London, including FCO Spokesman for Middle East (1996-98), Head of Section for South Africa (1998-2000), and Deputy Director for Russia, South Caucasus & Central Asia (2004-08). As Ambassador to Slovenia, he led on Western Balkans policy and Slovenia-Croatia relations at a sensitive time, culminating in Croatia's EU accession in 2013. After Ljubljana, he was seconded to PwC in London (2014-17) as a Senior Adviser, providing PwC Partners with strategic and policy advice, first on European banking, then on Programme Management in the FCO and Whitehall. This led to his appointment as Western Balkans Summit Coordinator on return to the FCO in 2017.

Genc Pollo

Genc Pollo is Member of Parliament from the Democratic Party of Albania; he chairs the Parliamentary Committee on European Integration since 2017. 2013 until September 2017 he chaired the Parliamentary Committee on Education and the Media. He served in government as Education Minister (2005-2008), Deputy Prime Minister (2008-2009) and Minister for Telecommunications and IT (2009-2013). In the late eighties Genc Pollo was active in anti Communist networks and cooperated with European human rights organizations interested in Albania. In 1990 he was a co founder of the Democratic Party, the first non communist party to be established which opted for freedom, market democracy and the Euro Atlantic path. In the nineties he served in the Presidential Office, later was elected MP chairing shortly the Subcommittee on European Integration and the Parliamentary Committee on External Affairs. He had leading functions in the DP and led the Reform Movement. He led the newly founded New Democratic Party as the third force in Parliament to coalition and union with the Democratic Party. Genc Pollo was born in 1963 in Tirana, Albania. In 1986 he graduated in History Sciences at the University of Tirana; 1988-1990 he conducted post graduate studies in the University of Vienna (scholarship of the Austrian government). He was scientific researcher in the Academy of Sciences before engaging in full political activity.

Nikola Poposki

Nikola Poposki was born on 24 October 1977 in Skopje, Republic of Macedonia. He received his bachelor's degree in economics from the Universities of Skopje and Nice in 2002. In 2004 he completed his master's degree in languages and international trade in the EU from the Universities of Rennes and Skopje, before adding a Master of Arts in European Economic Studies at the College of Europe in Bruges, in 2005. Mr. Poposki started his career in foreign affairs as Secretary at the Embassy of the French Republic to the Republic of Macedonia. He later worked at a joint research center from the European Commission and subsequently assumed the position of Ambassador at the Mission of the Republic of Macedonia to the EU. From 2011 to 2017 he served as Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia. Mr. Poposki was Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Macedonia from 2016 to 2017, has since been a member of parliament and presides the National Council for European Integration as President. Mr. Poposki speaks fluent French and English, he has knowledge of Italian, Dutch, and Croatian. Throughout his political career he has been honored with the Order of the Star of Italy (Grand Officer) and the Excellence Award for Contribution to the EU's Western Balkan Policy by the European Commission. Before his diplomatic career, Mr Poposki has been working with the British Royal Engineers, Depfa Bank and Rouen Port Authorities.

Anja Quiring



Since September 2007 Ms. Quiring has been working as Regional Director South Eastern Europe at the German Eastern Business Association. After finishing her Political Science Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin in December 2003, she started her professional career at the Consultant Flemming & Partner in January 2004 and joined Axel Springer Russia in July 2006, where she worked in Moscow as New Business Development Manager.

Blerim Reka



Prof. Dr. Blerim Reka has been Vice-Rector for International Relations at the South East European University since 2014; Vice-Rector for Research (2010-2014), Dean of Law Faculty (2015-2016) and Dean of Faculty of Political Science and Public Administration (203-2005). He served as Ambassador of the Republic of Macedonia to the EU in Brussels (2006-2010). His academic work brought him to University of Southern California, Los Angeles, as a Fulbright senior fellow (2003), and to Harvard University as fellow at Executive Education program on “Global Governance in 21st Century”, at Kennedy School for Governance (2005). He lectured: International Public Law and international relations, not just in the Western Balkans, but also at different foreign Universities (USFSP, Florida, Bologna University, Gent University, Calabria University, University Catholique de Louven, LUM University Bari), and oversaw a wide range of research projects as a researcher as well as the project director (with: Columbia University, Indiana University, Antwerp University). Blerim He gained different positions in various international organizations, at the Government of the Republic of Macedonia and as a Legal Expert for Kosovo in the fields of legal expertise, legal consultancy and drafting. Prior, Blerim worked for the Civil Society/NGO Sector for several years. He was the founder and editor of the Euro-Atlantic Review and the Kosova Law Review. Since 2014, he is expert/author for Western Balkans at Geopolitical Intelligence Service of Prince Michael von Liechtenstein. Reka is the author of 19 books.

Konstantin Samofalov



Konstantin Samofalov was born in 1982 in Belgrade and graduated from the Law School of the University of Belgrade in 2007. He served as an elected member of the Belgrade City Assembly from 2004 until 2008 and was elected to the Parliament of Serbia in 2007, 2008, and 2012. During his seven years in Parliament, he served on the defense and security committee and as a member of the Serbian delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. In 2009, he spent three weeks in the USA attending the State Department’s International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP). He has also participated in the Senior Executive Seminar at the George C. Marshall Center for European Security Studies in Garmisch-Partenkirchen on “Countering narcotics trafficking”. In 2011, Konstantin served voluntarily in the Serbian armed forces as part of the infantry unit. In 2012, he graduated in “Advanced defense and security studies” at the Serbian Military academy. In 2014, Konstantin joined the newly established Social Democratic Party (SDS) of former President Boris Tadić. Since June 2014, he serves as Spokesperson of the SDS and Chairman of the SDS Defense Committee. He is currently a Master Candidate at the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Belgrade.

Korab Sejdiu

Korab R. Sejdiu is a Member of the Parliament of the Republic of Kosovo and serves in the Legislative Committee of that same institution. Mr. Sejdiu is also one of the founding partners of the law firm Sejdiu & Qerkini, L.L.C. He is licensed to practice law in the United States (NY, NJ, and PA), as well as Kosovo. He serves as an Arbitrator at the ADR Center of the American Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo. Mr. Sejdiu received his Bachelor of Science degree at The College of New Jersey in 2001, majoring in International Business and Economics. In 2004, he received his Juris Doctor degree from Widener University in Delaware, U.S.A, where he was also a Wolcott Fellow and a Managing Editor of the Delaware Journal of Corporate Law. He also holds an LLM in Banking and Financial Law from the University of Boston School of Law. Mr. Sejdiu returned to Kosovo at the end of 2007 and served as a Legal Advisor to the President of the Republic of Kosovo, and thereafter returned to private practice with his own law firm. He has also taught law on regular basis, in universities in Kosovo and abroad, including but not limited to University of Prishtina, Imperial College London and American University in Kosovo. He currently teaches in the area of business law, corporate governance, and financial services law at the prestigious Swiss School of Economics. Mr. Sejdiu has been published in the areas of commercial, international, and constitutional law. He has served in the past as member of the Board of Directors of the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society and was also Chairman of the Board of the Civil Rights Program / Kosovo. Until his term as an MP began, he also served as a member of the Board of Directors of KEP Trust, a leading microfinance institution in Kosovo. Apart from Albanian, he also speaks English and Serbian. He is married and has two beautiful children.

Ruslan Stefanov

Ruslan Stefanov is the Director of the Economic Program of the Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD), a premier European think-tank in the area of good governance and anti-corruption, based in Sofia, Bulgaria. He is the coordinator of the Southeast European Leadership for Development and Integrity (SELDI.net), the largest regional anticorruption civil society network in the Western Balkans and Turkey. Ruslan is project co-director and co-author of the Kremlin Playbook: Understanding Russian Influence in Central and Eastern Europe. Ruslan Stefanov has more than 15 years of experience in research and civil society action in good governance and anticorruption. He is a member of the Local Research Correspondents Network on Anticorruption of the European Commission, was part of the largest ever European Union research project on anticorruption—ANTICORRP.eu, and has participated in the work of the UNODC Expert Group for Anti-Corruption Coordination.

Sabine Stöhr

Ms. Sabine Stöhr is Head of Division 209 – Western Balkans of the Federal Foreign Office, Germany. She studied Slavonic Studies, History of Eastern Europe, Social Sciences and Journalism and worked as a freelance journalist and author. In 1995, Sabine Stöhr started her diplomatic training at the Diplomatic Academy at the Federal Foreign Office in Bonn. She worked in State Protocol (1997-2000), as Officer for Press and Political affairs at the German Embassy Kiev (2000-2003), Spokesperson for Europe, Turkey, Western Balkans of the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin (2003-2005), Senior Political Advisor to the EUSR for Moldova (2005/06), Political Officer at the German Permanent Mission to the OSCE in Vienna (2006 to 2009), Deputy Head of the Diplomatic Academy of the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin (2009-2013), Deputy Head of the Political Department at the German Embassy Moscow (2013/14) and Deputy Head of the German Permanent Mission to the OSCE in Vienna during the German OSCE Chairmanship 2016. Ms. Sabine Stöhr speaks English, French, Russian, Ukrainian, and has basic knowledge of Serbian.

Tamara Tripić



Tamara Tripić is Member of Parliament of Serbia and since 2017 a Board member of the CEE Gender Network. Since mid-2018 she was Vice President of the Democratic Party Serbia. Previously, she had served as a Member of the Vračar Borough Council in the city of Belgrade (2014 - 2016), and as a Member of Parliament in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia (2012 - 2014). Before that, Ms. Tripić was Secretary General of the Democratic Party, Secretary to the Presidency of the Republic of Serbia and of the Political Programs Council of the Democratic Party. Tamara Tripić holds a Bachelor of Law from the Faculty of Law at the University of Belgrade. She has training and draws expertise in European Union Law, Political Marketing, and Election Campaign Management from various institutions, including the Regional Academy for Democracy (RAD), National Endowment for Democracy (NDI), and the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence.

Ana Trišić-Babić



Ana Trišić-Babić is the founder and head of the Executive Board of Centre for Policy Development. The Centre is supported by a team of activists, politicians, investigative journalists and entrepreneurs from Southeast Europe, motivated by the need to act, and challenge the status quo. Previously Trišić-Babić served as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Holding her BA in Law and MA in Management, she started her career as a journalist with Radio Free Europe. In the post-war period, Ana contributed to peacebuilding efforts through her work with USAID-OTI, where she acted as the Project Leader, and the Office of the High Representative where she was Assistant Head of OHR Political Adviser for International Relations. Her political and diplomatic career intertwined when she served as Foreign Affairs Advisor in the Government of Republic of Srpska. Trišić-Babić then worked as Assistant Minister for Bilateral Relations for six years, during which period she was also the Head of Work Group I for Stabilization and Accession Agreement. While dedicated to her position of Deputy Minister, she was also the President of BiH Council of Minister's NATO Coordination Team. Trišić-Babić assured to continually develop her security and state-building expertise academically. She is alumna of distinguished institutions worldwide, such as Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. Throughout her career, Trišić-Babić was working hard to empower women as a part of peacebuilding and society development process. Her efforts were acknowledged when she was Bosnia and Herzegovina's candidate for CEDAW. Trišić-Babić now works as a political analyst and consultant and is still actively focused on women and youth empowerment.

Ivana Tufegdžik



Ivana Tufegdžik was born on 11th of February 1993. She has Bachelor Degree from Faculty of Law "Iustinianus Primus" Skopje at the University "SS Cyril and Methodious" Department of Political Science. She is finishing her Master's on Constitutional Law with the field of interest Parliamentary Law and Procedures. She has been an intern at Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia in 2011 and 2016, also has worked as intern in Parliamentary and Presidential Campaigns for SDSM. She is an advocate of the youth civil society in Republic of Macedonia and one of the founders of the biggest student movement in the history of the country "Student Plenum" and has been an activist in the struggle of establishing a country and a society ruled by the Law, which will subsequently contribute to credible democratic and responsible institutions that meet the standards of the European Union. Her candidacy for the Early Parliamentary Elections in December 2016 was from the "Citizens Coalition" that came along with the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) as a political party. She has been a Member of Parliament since 2016, currently in his first term, elected as youngest MP. As an MP, Ivana Tufegdžik is coordinator of the Youth Caucus, Vice President of the National Council for EU Integration, member of the Committees for Foreign Policy and Committee for Appointments, deputy member in the Committees for European Affairs and Education and Science. She has been a very active MP in the policies for Youth and Education.

Olga van Zijverden

Olga van Zijverden works as Program Officer with the Aspen Institute Germany's Southeast Europe Program. Olga joined Aspen in February 2018. She holds an MA in European Studies focusing on Central and Eastern Europe from the University of Leipzig and the Kliment Ohridski University in Sofia. In her Bachelor's she pursued a French-German Degree on International Economics. Previous to Aspen, Olga worked at the policy research institute Rand Europe in Brussels on diverse projects for European institutions. Later she managed a European Commission's project at TÜV Rheinland Consulting in the field of digitalization. Olga speaks German, English and French.

Ivan Vujovic

Ivan Vujovic was born on February 17th in 1977. He received a law degree from the University of Podgorica in 2000 with a focus on international relations. Additionally, he has numerous certificates in informal education. Mr. Vujovic served as UNDP Project Coordinator and later as Deputy Secretary for Culture and Education in the City of Podgorica. Between 2010 and 2016, he served as Advisor for International Relations in the Cabinet of the President of the Parliament of Montenegro and subsequently as Head of the Cabinet of the President of the Parliament. Currently, Mr. Vujovic is the Head of the Communication Department of the Socialdemocratic Party of Montenegro (SDPM). Within this party, he functioned as Member of the Presidency and the Local Board of SDPM in Podgorica. Further, he worked in both local and national election campaigns, in 2016 as Head of the Operative Election Headquarter. Mr. Vujovic has experience in the NGO sector and is fluent in English and Italian.

RULE OF LAW AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN FOCUS: BRIEF ON CROATIA AFTER FIVE YEARS OF EU MEMBERSHIP

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In February 2018 the European Commission published the EU Enlargement Strategy for the Western Balkans, stressing that “addressing reforms in the area of rule of law, fundamental rights and good governance remains the most pressing issue”¹.

The current situation in the Western Balkans presented by the Rule of Law Index 2017-2018² clearly shows the region is lagging behind the EU average in terms of the rule of law, particularly in some of its associated domains. Selected results presented for four Western Balkan nations place the countries in the process of EU accession from the mid-range to near the bottom of global rankings (Table 1). The aggregate score of sampled countries on the Rule of Law Index is slightly above 0.5 on a scale from 0 (poor rule of law) to 1 (full adherence to the rule of law). Croatia, as the only EU member state, performs better when compared to other countries observed in the sample. However, in some components of the main index, namely ‘Constraints of Government Powers’ and in particular ‘Sanctions for Official Misconduct’, all countries, including Croatia, are low performers. These statistics illustrate that formal regulations related to the rule of law are in place and enforced by the EU accession process, but also show that the informal soft rules that govern implementation still stand as a huge problem both in Croatia and across the entire region.

Table 1: Rule of Law Index, 2018

Country	Global rank (out of 113)	Rule of Law Index	Constraints of Government Powers	Sanctions f. Official Misconduct
Croatia	35	0.67	0.59	0.45
BiH	56	0.53	0.46	0.35
Macedonia	57	0.53	0.45	0.34
Serbia	76	0.50	0.42	0.29
Montenegro	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Albania	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Note: Scores range from 0 to 1, with 1 indicating the strongest adherence to the rule of law. Green scores denote performance 0.5 and higher, or position in the upper half of the global ranking list. Red scores denote scores below 0.5, or position in the lower half of the global ranking list. Data for Montenegro and Albania are not available. Source: The World Justice Project (2018), Rule of Law Index 2017–2018.³

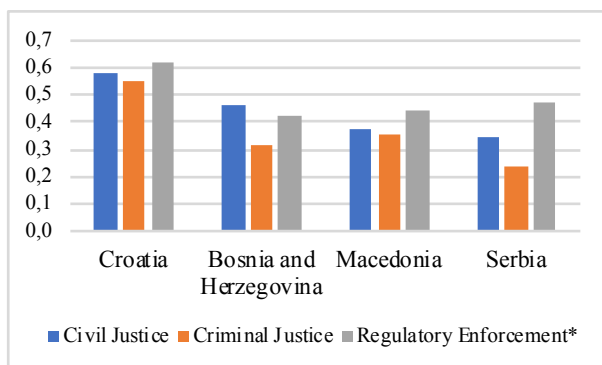
¹ European Commission (2018), A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans, COM(2018) 65 final, 6.2.2018. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf (Accessed: 10 August 2018).

² The World Justice Project (2018), Rule of Law Index 2017–2018. Available at: https://worldjusticeproject.org/sites/default/files/documents/WJP-ROLI-2018-June-Online-Edition_0.pdf. (Accessed: 10 August 2018).

³ Available at https://worldjusticeproject.org/sites/default/files/documents/WJP-ROLI-2018-June-Online-Edition_0.pdf.

Observed countries also have poor scores on the ‘No Improper Government Influence’ variable. This is a measure of government influence in civil justice and criminal justice as well as influence over regulatory enforcement (Figure 1), and it serves as a proxy for influence on judicial institutions and independent regulatory bodies. In all observed countries in the Western Balkans, the most affected domain is criminal justice, while regulatory enforcement stands as less exposed to influence. While government influence over the judiciary is evidently a problem, the external pressure on regulation being imposed by government is not so prevalent. This might indicate that, for example, lobbying or private sector obstruction of regulatory norms is not a problem in the region, or conversely that such malpractice is not captured by the ‘No Improper Government Influence’ variable.

Figure 1: No Improper Government Influence, 2018



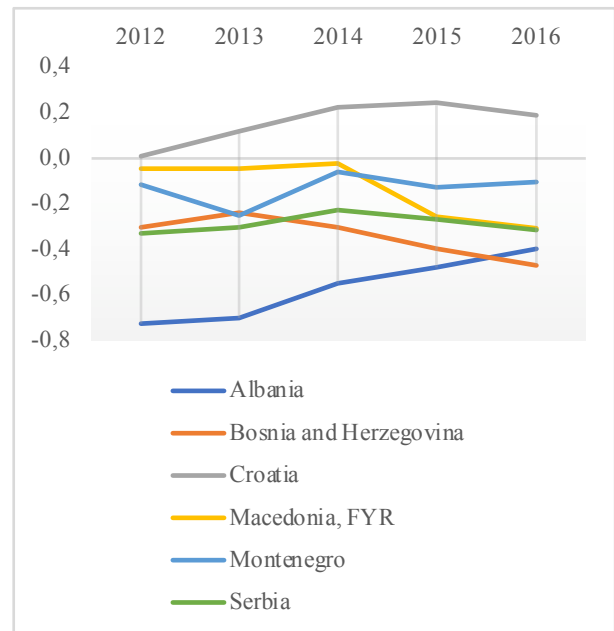
*No improper influence.

Note: Scores range from 0 to 1, with 1 indicating there is no improper (Government) influence at all.

Source: The World Justice Project (2018), Rule of Law Index 2017–2018.

Such indices are soft indicators of enforcement of the rule of law. Political influence is hard to measure precisely. However, economic theories of corruption and empirical studies provide evidence that state capture and political corruption are often intertwined.⁴ Therefore, the ‘World Governance Indicator Control of Corruption’ ‘captures perceptions of the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including both petty and grand forms of corruption, as well as ‘capture’ of the state by elites and private interests’⁵. Since 2012, Control of Corruption is, at best, improving in Albania, yet it has not reached the more advanced countries in the region. Although the whole region has a corruption problem, Croatia did manage to establish firmer control of corruption both during the EU accession process and in the two years immediately following (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Control of Corruption



Estimate gives each country's score in aggregate, in units of a standard normal distribution, i.e. ranging from approximately -2.5 to 2.5. Source: World Bank, Worldwide Governance Indicators.⁶

Political interference has many facets and all of them are very difficult to empirically assess and confirm. Taking the example of Croatia, there are several studies as well as anecdotal evidence (cases brought up by media) of conflict of interest, cronyism and other types of favoritism, and other corrupt practices that endanger the proper functioning of independent institutions.

Croatia became an EU member on July 1, 2013 after a long accession period during which the government had to provide evidence it was implementing anti-corruption policy measures both in its practices and by producing concrete results. This effort faded out and corrupt practices are still present, but in different, more sophisticated or less evident ways. A job in the public sector is today one of the most valuable means of corruption; it serves well for establishing large and complex networks of patronage throughout the entire public sector. And vice versa: private companies and corporations regularly engage ex-politicians or members of their families and friends. An ex-governor of the Croatian National Bank, immediately upon completing his mandate was employed in, what was at the time, the largest private corporation in Croatia. On the other hand, the current Minister of Finance used to be a highly positioned employee of the very same company. Croatia is a small country and expert networks are naturally overlapping, so the issue of conflict of interest is often brought up by NGOs and media in Croatia. The

⁴ See for example Rose-Ackerman, (1999), Corruption and Government, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

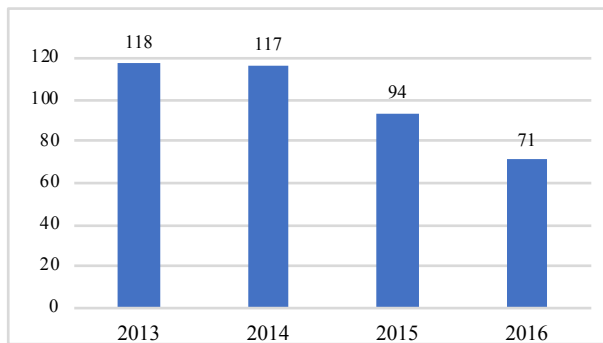
⁵ Kaufmann, D., Kraay, A., and Mastruzzi, M. (2010), The Worldwide Governance Indicators: Methodology and Analytical Issues, World

Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 5430. Available at: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1682130 (Accessed: 10 August 2018).

⁶ Available at: <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/#home>.

Commission for Conflict of Interest appointed by the Croatian Parliament is seen in public as one of the most independent and trustful institutions in Croatia. The number of proceedings initiated by the Commission for actions prohibited by the Conflict of Interest Law is decreasing (Figure 3.) This indicates some higher standards for avoiding conflicts of interest have been set.

Figure 3: Conflict of Interest Proceedings Initiated in Croatia



Source: *Povjerenstvo za odlučivanje o sukobu interesa, Republika Hrvatska (Commission for Conflict of Interest, Republic of Croatia)*. Available at: <https://www.sukobinteresa.hr/hr/annual-report-of-the-commission>

In some aspects, the accession process and EU membership has helped to curb political interference in Croatia. For example, corruption in large investment projects is prevented if these projects are EU-funded, and therefore managed under the strict control procedures that govern how EU funds are spent.

On the other hand, fraudulent public procurement procedures at the local government level are widespread. Recent studies show that the political party in power at the national level uses the state budget to fund local politicians and to ensure success in the next national elections.⁷ Vuković argues that in Croatia “systemic corruption is indeed supported by an environment in which institutional and legal frameworks are personalized”⁸. Political interference, corruption and lack of transparency in local budgets⁹ are still prevalent in Croatia, and public procurement remains one of the most vulnerable sectors.

Here, except for the previously mentioned EU-funded projects, EU membership did not contribute to fighting corruption in public procurement in Croatia. Anti-corruption momentum waned after accession, and an

effective suppression of specific corruption risks in Croatia is not guaranteed by the principles of public procurement and EU regulations. Croatian voters never sanctioned the corrupt misbehavior of politicians.¹⁰ This finding is supported by the arguments of North on the institutional change needed where both formal and informal institutions play key roles in changing the attitudes and behavior of individuals in society.¹¹ Formal institutional changes introduced by adopting EU legislation are not efficient enough in suppressing conflicts of interest, crony capitalism, clientelism and corruption in its different, often disguised forms. In the Croatian context, and probably in the entire Western Balkans region as well, there is still a long road ahead to change the mindset that everybody would be better off if strict moral rules were applied and a strong institutional framework was established. The role of the EU is to further control the implementation of higher standards in the public arena of EU member states and candidate countries.

In their future efforts to implement EU standards related to the rule of law, the European Commission and its agencies should be more focused on public procurement.

The EU Enlargement Strategy for the Western Balkans, Section on Public Procurement¹² states:

More transparency is needed in the management of public funds especially at all stages in public procurement, an area particularly prone to corruption.

There have been several examples in the Western Balkans of confidential procedures for procuring goods and some major contracts have been awarded without a public tender. There have been allegations of politically connected local subcontractors being favoured and of illicit payments. Countries should substantially increase the transparency, competitiveness and fairness of public procurement tenders, limit the use of confidential procedures and introduce safeguards excluding political influence on bidders.

The use of transparent, publicly accessible e-procurement should be fully rolled out. This should enable citizens to see clearly how their taxes are spent, from the initial tender to final execution of contracts. Managerial accountability and an internal control culture in public institutions are also crucial.

One study on the obstacles for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to access to public procurements¹³

⁷ Glaurdić, J., and Vuković, V. (2017), Granting votes: Exposing the political bias of intergovernmental grants using the within-between specification for panel data, *Public Choice*, 171(1), pp. 223-241.

⁸ Vuković, V. (2017), The political economy of local government in Croatia: winning coalitions, corruption, and taxes, *Public Sector Economics*, 41(4), pp. 387- 420.

⁹ For more information on transparency of state and local budgets in Croatia see: www.ijf.hr.

¹⁰ Budak, J. (2016), Korupcija u javnoj nabavi: trebamo li novi model istraživanja za Hrvatsku?, *Ekonomski Pregled*, 67(4), pp. 306-327.

¹¹ North, D. (1990), *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

¹² European Commission (2018), *A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans*.

¹³ Budak, J., Slijepčević, S., and Rajh, E. (2017), *Small and Medium Enterprises' obstacles to public procurement: lessons learned for*

showed that “despite introducing EU standards in public procurement (at least in terms of regulatory framework) Croatian companies still experience irregularities and lack confidence in the national public procurement system”¹⁴. Comparing real experiences of firms in Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina showed that the most pressing problem in Bosnia and Herzegovina is corruption risk in public procurement, while in Croatia small and medium enterprises consider that tenders lack transparency as a process (Table 2).

Table 2: Issues SMEs are Facing in Public Procurement in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia

Issues	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Croatia
Transparency of tenders	84.7%	87.3%
Conflict of interest in public procurement	71.2%	40.8%
Trust in the system	47.5%	17.0%
Corruption risk in public procurement	90.8%	82.8%
Public contract awarded under the influence of corruption	60.1%	28.0%

Note: percentage of SMEs answering “Yes” Source: Budak, Slijepčević, and Rajh (2017), based on the SMEs survey data, n=725

It is difficult to prescribe remedies that will work for all countries since “one-size-fits-all” policies do not work. Therefore, instead of the formal legislative prescription of EU regulations, which may never be fully implemented, customized policies should be set up for every country, local government or type of public investment. However, the high standards established through EU practices should stand as a higher rule in terms of the rational allocation of public resources. Policy recommendations might be different for micro, small and medium-sized companies in the post-transition phase.

In conclusion, Croatia, as the one EU member state in the sample of Western Balkan countries, had a significant problem with corruption before the EU accession process was intensified, so it is intuitive to conclude that in the advanced stages of EU accession other countries in the region will overcome their current problems with corruption. Nations in the process of accession would resolve similar issues that Croatia faced in the past. One could assume that the Western Balkans will attain a higher level of transparency, more competent public procurers, less corruption and, in general, enforced rule of law. Instead of blank, “one-size-fits-all

recommendations, the EU should design context-specific supporting policies to improve organizational culture and strategies for implementing efficient public procurement practices.

Balkans, World Review of Entrepreneurship, Management and Sustainable Development, 13 (2/3), pp. 178-193.

¹⁴ Budak, J., Slijepčević, S., and Rajh, E. (2017), Small and Medium Enterprises’ obstacles to public procurement: lessons learned for

Balkans, World Review of Entrepreneurship, Management and Sustainable Development, 13 (2/3), pp. 178-193.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM PROCESS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: GOOD GOVERNANCE, DEMOCRATIC SYSTEMS, AND PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY

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“To take a stand, to be passionate... is the politician’s element, ... indeed, exactly the opposite principle of responsibility from that of the civil servant. The honor of the civil servant is vested in his ability to execute conscientiously the order of the superior authorities.... Without this moral discipline and self-denial, in the highest sense, the whole apparatus would fall to pieces.”

Max Weber¹

Public administration reform (PAR) is, at least declaratively, one of the key priority reform areas for all six governments in the Western Balkans (WB). PAR is recognized as a crucial reform agenda to deal with the increasingly complex challenges and trends in the region, including the eroding relations between the citizen and the state, systemic corruption and abuse, democratic functioning of institutions, and economic growth. A well-functioning public administration is key for effective governance and the democratic system, and an essential pillar of the European integration process for the WB.²

The EU enlargement strategy published in February this year states that:

“Public administration reform is paramount to strengthening governance at all levels. This includes improving the quality and accountability of administration, increasing professionalism, depoliticization and transparency, also in recruitment and dismissals, more transparent management of public finances, and better services for citizens”.³

Furthermore, SIGMA provides an elegant summary of why PAR matters:

“A well-functioning public administration is a prerequisite for transparent and effective democratic governance. It is the foundation for the functioning of the state, determining a government’s ability to provide public services and foster competitiveness and growth. It also plays a fundamental role in the European integration process by enabling the implementation of crucial reforms and efficient accession dialogue with the European Union (EU).”⁴

This paper offers some food for thought on how to strengthen governance at all levels in the WB6 through a public administration reform process focused on some key areas of PAR, such as rationalization of state administrations, recruitment and salary in the civil service. The paper begins by setting a brief context with a discussion of the general state of play and PAR priorities in the WB6. It then continues with a section on

¹ Weber, M. (1946), Politics as a vocation, in Max Weber, Gerth, H.H. and Mills, C.W., New York, Oxford University Press, page 95.

² SIGMA (2016), Functioning of the Centres of Government in the Western Balkans, Paris, OECD/SIGMA. Available at: [http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=GOV/SIGMA\(2017\)1&docLanguage=En](http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=GOV/SIGMA(2017)1&docLanguage=En) (Accessed: August 2018).

³ European Commission (2018), A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans,

Brussels. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/com_munication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf (Accessed: July 2018).

⁴ SIGMA (2017), Principles of Public Administration – 2017 Edition, Paris, OECD/SIGMA. Available at: http://www.sigmaweb.org/publications/Principles-of-Public-Administration_Edition-2017_ENG.pdf (Accessed: July 2018).

the quality and accountability of public services and how digitalization and e-governance can help to improve them, a section on how we can further transparency, depoliticization, and professionalization in the public administration, in particular with regard to recruitment and dismissal of staff, and concludes with a section on what the EU can do to further support PAR efforts. Kosovo is used as a primary case study to illustrate arguments and other points of information in this paper.

Context: 'Variable Geometry'

As Lorenzo Casini notes, there is not one definition of the notion of public administration, but it can best be "interpreted as an institute of 'variable geometry'"⁵. James P. Pfiffner outlines two main models of public administration: the classical, monocratic model, and the new public management model.⁶ He further argues that the classic model of the public administration is heavily influenced by the work of Max Weber and emphasizes a top-down approach to public administration, where there is a clear rules-based hierarchy with everyone reporting to someone and where the "role of the bureaucrat is strictly subordinate to the political superior".⁷ Key features of this model include the dichotomy between politics and public administration, as well as hierarchy, stability, permanence, institutionalized civil service, etc..⁸ The new public management model is a policy response meant to address the challenges inherent in the classic model. It emphasizes the enhancement of performance, deregulation, rationalization, and reforming the structures and institutions of the classic model in order to be compatible with the developments of the current era, in which information systems are essential.

Like in EU and OECD countries, the organization of public administration in the WB6 varies. For example, in the case of Albania and Kosovo the ministerial system is organized as a monocratic hierarchy, in which every ministry has one chief administrative officer (Secretary General) who is solely accountable to the political level (Minister). In the case of Serbia and Montenegro there is a functional system of governance. While there is no unique model or approach to public administration in the

WB6, all countries have committed themselves to implementing a comprehensive public administration reform agenda. The PAR strategic framework, in the case of Kosovo, consists of: Strategy for Modernization of Public Administration 2015-2020;⁹ Better Regulation Strategy 2017-2021;¹⁰ Strategy for Improving Policy Planning and Coordination in Kosovo 2017-2021;¹¹ and Public Finance Management Reform Strategy 2016-2020.¹² In addition to these, there are other important strategies that serve the PAR process in Kosovo, such as the Strategy for Training of Civil Servants, Strategy for Cooperation with Civil Society, and the Interoperability Framework and E-Governance Strategy. Although the four strategies together comprise the PAR strategic framework, one can easily note that their timeframes are not aligned, proving the criticism of weak planning on the part of SIGMA and the EU while also creating practical problems for the government.

These strategies reflect the SIGMA/OECD Principles of Public Administration (developed in 2014 and revised in 2017) that were developed to support the EU's approach to PAR in the WB6 within the framework of the enlargement process. The Principles "define what good public governance entails in practice and outline the main requirements to be followed by during EU integration"¹³. SIGMA/OECD monitoring reports on PAR for the WB6 focus on six key areas of reform: 1) a strategic framework for public administration reform; 2) policy development and co-ordination; 3) public service and human resource development; 4) accountability; 5) service delivery; and 6) public financial management, including public procurement and external auditing. SIGMA's monitoring reports provide the most comprehensive and detailed picture of the state of play in the WB6 concerning the PAR agenda and serve as a guideline for the government to formulate interventions and focus priorities. The reports provide specific assessments for each country and place them in a regional context so each country can see if they are doing better or worse than the regional average.

Based on the SIGMA reports of 2017 and the European Commission (EC) Country Reports of 2018 we can identify some common denominators in the PAR challenges facing the WB6. The first and most

⁵ Casini, L. (2007), Models of public administration: comparative analysis of administrative organization, Centre for Administration Innovation in the Euro-Mediterranean Region (C.A.I.M.E.D.). Available at: <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/CAIMED/UNPAN028187.pdf> (Accessed: August 2018).

⁶ Pfiffner, J.P. (1999), Traditional Public Administration versus the New Public Management: Accountability versus Efficiency. Available at: <http://mason.gmu.edu/~pubp502/pfiffner-readings-npm.htm> (Accessed: August 2018).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Peters, G., in Pfiffner, J.P. (1999).

⁹ Government of Kosovo (2015), Strategy for Modernization of Public Administration, Prishtina. Available at: <http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Strategy-for-Modernization-of-PA-2015-2020.pdf> (Accessed: August 2018).

¹⁰ Government of Kosovo (2017), Strategy on Better Regulation 2017-2021, Prishtina. Available at: http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Better_Regulation_Strategy_2_0_for_Kosovo_-_ENGLISH.pdf (Accessed: August 2018).

¹¹ Government of Kosovo (2017), Strategy for Improving Policy Planning and Coordination 2017-2021, Prishtina. Available at: http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Strategy_for_Improving_Policy_Planning_and_Coordination_in_Kosovo_2017-2021.pdf (Accessed: August 2018).

¹² Government of Kosovo (2016), Public Finance Management Strategy 2016-2020, Prishtina. Available at: http://kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Public_Finance_%20Management_Reform_Strategy2016-2020.pdf (Accessed: August 2018).

¹³ SIGMA (2017), Principles of Public Administration – 2017 Edition.

significant challenge has for some time now been the de-politicization of the public administration, ensuring a merit-based process of recruitment of public employees and ending impunity for violations of ethics and anti-corruption legislation from within the public administration. The efforts of the EU and the focus of the PAR process in the WB6 has generally focused on developing a professional and non-partisan civil service: Reforming human resource management within the public administration, rationalization of processes and structures, capacity development of the civil service, and defragmentation of public service delivery. In the Country Reports of the EC, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is considered to be at an early stage, while Kosovo is thought to have achieved some level of preparation. The rest of the countries are all considered as moderately prepared. BiH is yet to adopt a PAR strategy that is applicable to the entire country.

Other common denominators include a weakness or lack of the political will and commitment necessary to support reforms that would result in a public administration that is professional, politically neutral, has continuity, and ensures a merit-based management of the human resources. Recruitment and advancement in the civil service, especially for senior management appointments, are subject to political interference across the WB6. De-politicization of the public administration is an essential pre-condition for all of the reforms. However, this is easier said than done, considering that across the WB6 public administration is viewed and used as the main employment platform for party loyalists and supporters, often with total disregard to the professional background and qualifications of such individuals.

Improving Public Services

The results of the Regional Cooperation Council's (RCC) Balkan Barometer for 2017 show that the citizens in the WB6 "feel they are not getting their money's worth when it comes to government performance and public service delivery"¹⁴. How can the quality and the accountability of public services be improved? There are two dimensions to this question: the quality and accountability of the delivery system and approach, and the quality and accountability of the system that designs and provides public services.

Concerning the first dimension, improving public services means improving accessibility, delivery, and affordability. As such, this process has become synonymous with e-governance as the best platform to effectively deliver on all three principles. Using a digital

channel to provide public services is also the preferred option for citizens across the WB6 according to the RCC's Balkan Barometer 2017.¹⁵ Digitalization of public services is essential for good governance, including efficiency, transparency and accountability. Implementing this in practice means, first and foremost, developing a platform of interoperability where different government systems, such as tax administration and civil registries, are linked and communicate with each other. This is vital for the next stage in the digitalization of public services: offering services via an online platform. In addition, another piece of technology that is important for offering public services to citizens is Public Key Infrastructure (PKI). PKI refers to the necessary hardware, software, the policies and procedures concerning digital certificates that allow citizens and government officials secure and verified access to the public services. In other words it is about instituting keys for citizens to be able to access public services. In the case of Kosovo, the government has developed with the support of Microsoft an interoperability platform, and plans are for 40 systems to be linked to this platform by the end of 2020.

In the context of the digitalization of public services one example we can look to is Albania, which has digitized a number of public services now offered through the *e-albania* portal. A quick count shows that there are up to 90 services offered by a host of institutions.¹⁶ This includes such services as application for a construction permit, initial registration of a business, property certificates, etc. In addition to delivering services via an online platform, another important undertaking is the establishment of one-stop shops for public services. Without an interoperability platform, creating a one-stop shop would be very difficult if not impossible. In Albania, public services via one-stop shops are provided by the Agency for the Delivery of Integrated Services Albania (ADISA) which operates under the Prime Minister's Office.¹⁷ The ADISA Centre in the town of Fier offers 343 different public services to citizens, including property registration, social security, declaration and certification of taxes, business registration, etc.

On another note, according to the RCC's Balkan Barometer 2017 the cost of public services in Albania is considered the worst in the region. E-governance provides a unique opportunity to address the issue of affordability of public services for citizens and government. Using online platforms to offer services to citizens can reduce financial burden on citizens and the government. For example in Serbia, the government report on PAR implementation for 2017 states that the

¹⁴ Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) (2017), Balkan Barometer 2017, Sarajevo, RCC, page 115. Available at: https://www.rcc.int/seeds/files/RCC_Balkan_Barometer_Public_Opinion_2017.pdf (Accessed: August 2018).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, page 47.

¹⁶ For more information please visit <https://e-albania.al>.

¹⁷ For more information please visit <http://www.adisa.gov.al/>.

implementation of e-ZUP (the Serbian government's online information system) will save citizens five million hours they would normally spend in queues for services, and one million working hours for civil servants.¹⁸ In addition to this, the report states that digitalization of public services has saved citizens RSD 750 million (6.3 million Euros) as a result of the removal of various service fees, presumably since the start of the service in 2017. An important note in this context is that these estimates and data are based on government sources, and independent assessments of the impact of e-ZUP were not available.

In regards to the quality of the services, one of the most suitable options for monitoring quality, and for subsequently making the necessary improvements, is creating tools with which citizens can provide an assessment of public services from within the very institutions that offer them. Governments should institute a permanent approach to measuring citizen satisfaction with public services and for answering the feedback that is received. In Kosovo, the government has installed at various service points the e-kutia (e-box), an iPad-like tool that provides citizens with a quick way of expressing their satisfaction with services. While this is a good option, the problem has been the lack of a policy in place on how to answer feedback, and it is not clear if the feedback is even collected. With the support of the EU, the Ministry of Public Administration is in the process of developing a policy paper on measuring citizen satisfaction with public services, and it has committed itself in the Action Plan for implementation of the PAMS (Public Administration Modernisation Strategy) to institute four different mechanisms by 2020, besides the e-box that will allow citizens to express their satisfaction with the services provided.

Concerning the second dimension, the quality and accountability of the system that designs and provides public services, there are a number of issues that present a challenge across the WB6 (six countries in the Western Balkans). Some are basic, such as job descriptions within the public service, the lack of a unified salary system for public employees, and performance assessments. Others are more challenging, such as the rationalization of the state administration. These factors all contribute to unprofessional, unmotivated and unaccountable public administration, which in return affects delivery of public services to citizens.

There are currently a number of jobs in the public administration that lack a basic job description, including important elements such as the purpose of the position, or accountability and reporting lines. Job descriptions

tend to be unclear and generalized, and sometimes are prepared on an ad-hoc basis without clear descriptions of the competences, responsibilities, or required qualifications. This situation is further fuelled by political interference, when jobs have to be 'invented' to accommodate individuals within the public administration. There are also problems with the catalogue of job classifications, which contains the job titles, codes and job ranks, qualification levels, and minimum required working experience of every job in the civil service.

Other practical problems relate to the salary system in the public administration. For example, there are 82,000 people working in the public sector in Kosovo, and they cost the national budget approximately 500 million Euros annually. Out of this figure, there are a little over 18,000 civil servants. The regulatory framework for the recruitment, advancement, salary, performance assessment, and accountability for the employees of the public sector is fragmented. In Kosovo there are currently two models of payment for the public sector: a) a coefficient based system (a scale system from 4 to 20 coefficients, with each coefficient corresponding to a financial amount e.g. 1 coefficient = 200 Euros) and b) a system based on fixed-salaries (monthly salaries from 232 Euros to 4,633 Euros). The coefficient based system is primarily used for the 18,000 civil servants, while the rest of the public sector uses the fixed-salary based system. This approach has created a number of problems in the public administration, including a significant gap in the base-salary for equivalent positions in the public administration. For example, when we examine the base-salary for the position of the chief administrative officers of public institutions we find that the base-salary of the General Secretary in any government ministry is coefficient-based, so it is 1,126 Euros/month, while the salary of the Director of the Kosovo Privatization Agency, which is a fixed-salary, is 4,633 Euros/month.¹⁹

In the case of Serbia, in 2016 Parliament adopted the Law on the Salary System in the Public Sector, affecting the entire public sector, which is comprised of 510,000 employees. By doing so, it has addressed the problem with "considerable variations in salaries for similar jobs throughout the public service"²⁰. However, as the report notes, the new salary system is still not being implemented and additional actions are required, including the creation of comprehensive job catalogues.

In general, all countries of the WB6 face the challenge of big state administrations, and its rationalization is an important reform for modernising the public

¹⁸ Ministry for Public Administration and Local Self Government (MPALSG) (2018), Report on Public Administration Reform 2015-2018, Belgrade, MPALSG, page 19. Available at: http://www.mduls.gov.rs/doc/PARReport_eng_mar2018.pdf (Accessed: August 2018).

¹⁹ Ministry of Public Administration (MPA) (2018), The Report on the State of the Civil Service of Kosovo for 2017, Prishtina, MPA.

²⁰ SIGMA (2017), Monitoring Report 2017 for Serbia. Available at: <http://www.sigmaweb.org/publications/Monitoring-Report-2017-Serbia.pdf> (Accessed: August 2018).

administration. Legislation in the region often does not provide adequate definitions for the establishment, internal organization, accountability, governance, etc. of public administration bodies. There are often no proper rules for the ministerial system, both in typology and accountability, just as there is not adequate regulation for the institutions providing public services directly to citizens, such as the healthcare and education sectors. A particular challenge in this context has been the growing number of independent and executive agencies. Most WB6 countries in the SIGMA Monitoring Reports for 2017 are required to implement some degree of rationalization. For example, Montenegro is required to rationalise the organization of its state administration, and Macedonia is to “consider the rationalization of the large number of first-level budget organizations”²¹ And this is not only a problem for the WB6, Ireland has been facing similar problems.²²

In June 2018, Kosovo adopted the Action Plan for Rationalization of Agencies in line with its obligations under the Sector Reform Contract for PAR and the European Reform Agenda (ERA). In 2016, a report by the Ministry of Public Administration found that Kosovo’s Assembly had established more than 30 independent regulatory and executive institutions and agencies, while the Government had established 46 agencies/bodies under the umbrella of various ministries.²³ This lack of cohesion in the public administration leads to an inability and lack of capacity to serve the citizens, creates unnecessary red-tape, and creates a financial burden for the national budget.

(De)Politicization of Public Administration

Across the WB6 there is a wide-spread public perception of nepotism and political interference in the process of recruitment and advancement of personnel within the public administration. This perception is backed by the findings of the EC Country Reports and the monitoring reports of SIGMA. Every election cycle in the region inflates the size of the public administration. This situation creates unprofessionalism and instability in the civil service, hinders career development of civil servants and affects the ability of institutions to develop proper personnel planning.

In the case of Kosovo, inflating the civil service with party loyalists is done primarily through the so-called

Kontrata mbi Vepër, which roughly translates as ‘service contract’. Service contracts can be signed for up to six months (although in practice they are always extended) to employ personnel without a competition, allowing the chief administrative officer in the institution to hire anyone they please. According to the 2017 Report on the State of the Civil Service in Kosovo, employment in the civil service through service contracts is higher than the number of employees recruited using the proper procedures: there were 991 service contracts compared to 723 contracts based on the regular procedures. Service contracts lack transparency, are not merit-based and ignore professional requirements while violating the principles of impartiality and equal opportunity. These kinds of formalized and, to a certain degree, legalized practices that influence the civil service are present across the WB6.

How to solve these problems? Before creating the necessary policies for preventing further politicization of the public administration, there is an even bigger question of what to do with the people who occupy important positions in the public administration without the necessary qualifications? One option is implementing a civil service-wide assessment to determine the compatibility of the personnel (e.g. educational and professional qualifications) vis-à-vis their position’s job catalogue entry and job description. Something like this was introduced in Kosovo’s Action Plan 2018–2020 for Public Modernisation Strategy²⁴ that has been recently approved by the Government, but it remains to be seen if there will be sufficient political will for its proper implementation. Implementing this technically will not be as challenging as deciding what to do or how to implement the findings. Equally important in this context are performance assessments of civil servants. While this mechanism is in place across the WB6 it has not been implemented seriously, and most civil servants, in the case of Kosovo, receive marks in the range of fours and fives where five is the maximum score. In another example from Kosovo, to prevent political interference in the recruitment process an international company was invited to manage the process of recruitment of senior managers in public institutions, and it was done in cooperation with the UK Embassy in Kosovo.²⁵ While well intentioned, the success of this exercise has been limited. The company would send a list of interviewed candidates ranked based on their scores, with the hope that the highest ranking candidate would be picked for the job. In practice, some institutions still

²¹ SIGMA (2017), Monitoring Report, Paris, SIGMA, page 134. Available at: <http://www.sigmaxweb.org/publications/Monitoring-Report-2017-the-former-Yugoslav-Republic-of-Macedonia.pdf> (Accessed: August, 2018).

²² Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) (2014), Report on the Implementation of the Agency Rationalisation Programme, Dublin, DPER.

²³ Ministry of Public Administration (MPA) (2016), Report on the Review of the Independent Institutions and Agencies, Prishtina, MPA. Available at: <https://map.rksgov.net/Dokumentet/Rishikimi>

[_i_institucioneve_dhe_agjencive_te_pavaru.aspx/](#) (Accessed: August 2018).

²⁴ You can download the draft action plan from the online public consultation platform of the government. Available here: <http://konsultimet.rks-gov.net/view/Consult.php?ConsultationID=40344>.

²⁵ British Embassy Pristina (2016) Ambassador O’Connell launches project with Assembly and Government of Kosovo. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ambassador-oconnell-launches-project-with-assembly-and-government-of-kosovo> (Accessed: August, 2018).

selected the candidate with political backing, even though he or she had scored poorly.²⁶

In regards to preventing the further politicization and degradation of the public administration, one option is reforming the procedures for recruitment of the public employees with the following four proposals: first, centralize the recruitment for all public administration; second, invite members of civil society or external experts to participate in selection committees; third, change the approach from position-based recruitment to job-family recruitment; and finally, implement the recruitment process through a transparent and digital based platform. In addition to these proposals, introduce strong safeguards to protect civil servants from being fired by political actors for political reasons. Taken together, this is largely how the European Commission implements recruitment for its civil service, for example.

A central-unit would be established to manage recruitment for the entire public administration, with permanent, professional committees that interview and rank candidates. This would make it much harder for political actors to interfere in the process. Special attention and regulation should be given to human resource management units in order to transform their role from a mere secretariat for implementation of political decisions to units that have the capacity to manage a merit-based recruitment process, implement merit-based advancement, assert an active role in matters concerning discipline, ethics and anti-corruption violations, and that constantly support capacity development within the public administration.

Instead of recruiting for every position that becomes available in the civil service, which allows for interference and is often costly, time consuming and ineffective, develop job-families for both general administration and special administration positions. In practice, there would be around 15 to 20 job-families. For example, legal experts could be one job-family. The competition would not be about getting a certain position in the civil service, (e.g. senior legal analyst in a certain department). Instead, it would be to score as high as possible during the recruitment process then enter onto a waiting list for the respective job-family. When job opportunities become available, those with the highest scores will have the choice of which public institution he or she would like to work in. Also introduce a timeframe for announcing competitions to enter public service (e.g. every 2 years). This is the period when the list would be refreshed. For senior management positions (e.g. Secretary General or director of a department), competitions should be open only to civil servants.

Another very important aspect of increasing transparency and accountability in the public service is the human resource management in public institutions and this is also another opportunity to discuss the benefits of using IT. In Kosovo, since January 2015, the Ministry of Public Administration has used the Human Resource Management Information System (HRMIS). This platform basically allows the human resources units in every institution to manage an electronic dossiers of all the employees in the respective institution. This enables better opportunities for monitoring and tracking public service. The system can be modified to be used for the recruitment process and advancement of the public officials and as such can be an opportunity for addressing existing shortcomings in the performance assessment. HR units can update information for every official in the system, including the trainings received, qualifications, etc. Using this system enables greater transparency and accountability and would provide a much more accurate picture of the state of the civil service. The Department for Civil Service Administration in the MPA has access to the system thus providing some level of oversight. However, the system is not used to its full capacity, and the lack of necessary legislative regulations that would oblige institutions to use the system hinders its implementation. A potential innovative idea in this context is linking HRMIS with the salary payment system into one major platform, which would provide additional opportunities for quality assurance in the civil service.

The EU's Role

The EU is engaged and supports the PAR agenda in the region in different levels and through different political and technical mechanisms. Through IPA funding and Twinning projects technical assistance for institutions is provided. In the case of Kosovo, key PAR issues have been integrated also in the European Reform Agenda (ERA). Twice a year the representatives from the government and the European Commission meet in the format called the Special Group on PAR which represents the highest forum of exchange between the country and the EU on PAR. In every meeting joint conclusions are issued that address the most pressing issues for the PAR agenda. These conclusions are also used by the media and civil society for added credibility in their work when addressing PAR issues. It is worth noting that when it comes to PAR, there are fewer civil society organizations that are actively engaged with the process, compared to other sectors and also the capacities of the NGO-s are limited to have an active participation, and sometimes they depend on government officials for their publication on PAR related issues.²⁷

²⁶ Example: Popova, E., (2018) Pa Pëlqimin Britanik Emërohet Sekretari i MASHT-it. Available at <https://kallxo.com/pa-pelqimin-britanik-emerohet-sekretari-masht/> (Accessed: August, 2018).

²⁷ For example see INDEP report (2018) Review of Independent Agencies in order to rationalize functions and enhance performance. Available at <http://indep.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/INDEP>

Recently the EU has began a new approach, through Sector Reform Contracts (SRC) for Public Administration Reform (PAR), to support and incentivizing PAR-related reforms in the WB6. This is the right approach that holds a great potential for pushing the governments in the region for the right decisions on PAR and offering civil society a new platform to come together and pressure the decision-making process in the right direction. Albania,²⁸ Kosovo²⁹ and Serbia³⁰ have already signed SRCs for PAR. Through an SRC, the European Commission transfers financial resources directly to the recipient country's national budget, but the transfers are conditional on the fulfilment of concrete indicators, jointly agreed upon and identified from the existing national PAR strategic framework. The SRC for PAR for Kosovo was signed in 2017 and the country is set to receive 22 million Euros for fiscal years 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021. The SRC for PAR for Kosovo aims to achieve the following results: improve policy and legislative planning, coordination, and monitoring; promote an evidence based approach to making policy and drafting legislation; improve public access to government documents; increase professionalism and improve management of human resources in public administration; improve services for citizens and businesses and reduce red tape; and promote rationalization of the public administration by improving accountability lines and access to administrative justice. The SRC for PAR uses an advanced system of incentivizing the government to implement the necessary measures leading to these results.

SRC establishes two sets of instalments: the fixed tranche and the variable tranche. The fixed tranche (5.5 million Euros) is requested upon signature of the SRC and transferred when there is a generally satisfactory assessment of the implementation of the PAR strategic framework, especially concerning public financial management. The process of putting forward the request for the fixed tranche provides an additional opportunity for conditionality on the part of the EU, and in the case of Kosovo this has been used to push forward three key decisions: 1) government approval of the law on state administration, the law on salaries, and the law on public officials; 2) amending the regulation on senior management; and 3) implementation of the action plan on rationalization of agencies and adopting a more realistic action plan for implementation of the Strategy for Modernization of the Public Administration.

The request for the variable instalment is more complicated. As the title suggests, there are a number of indicators, and how much the government receives in financial support depends on the fulfilment of each

indicator. In the case of Kosovo, there are eight separate indicators for each of the years 2018, 2019, and 2020. The indicators are very clear and concrete, including specifications for verification of their implementation. Each instalment is approximately 5.5 million Euros annually, if all indicators are achieved in full. Each indicator has a certain percentage weight vis-à-vis the financial resources made available. All indicators are extracted from existing strategies adopted by the government.

Departing from the conventional consultancy based support through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) (which is often ineffective), the Sector Reform Contract for PAR is a results-focused approach that provides clarity and ensures ownership and accountability. This approach also helps streamline government and EU efforts to implement their PAR agendas, provides a platform for coordination, and boosts implementation of the key priorities in the European integration process, such as implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreements.

This approach needs to be further strengthened. First, there is limited information about SRCs for PAR among the general public and civil society and this needs to be addressed in partnership between the government and the EU through an awareness raising campaign and training opportunities. Secondly, the meetings of the Special Group on PAR should have dedicated sessions on the agenda that fully focus on the implementation of the SRC for PAR.

The EU can do better in elevating the significance of the PAR process in the public discourse and public interactions with the WB6 governments. While PAR is recognized as an essential process for fighting abuse and corruption, in the public debates these priorities are seen separately and they should be presented in tandem. The conversation can shift more to the solutions rather than diagnosis.

In Lieu of a Conclusion: the Small Windows and the Entrenched Bureaucracy

How to strengthen governance at all levels through public administration reform? It can be done. The answers on how to do it are not complicated and some options have been elaborated in this paper. The current system of recruitment and advancement in the civil service does not work as it is not merit based. Also, performance evaluations are not working. We have problems with job catalogues and we have people

²⁷ [Rishikimi-i-Agjencive-te-pavarura-ne-Kosove.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighborhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/rishikimi-i-agjencive-te-pavarura-ne-kosove.pdf) (Accessed: August, 2018).

²⁸ See <https://ec.europa.eu/neighborhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/albania/ipa/2015/ipa-2015-038715.01-al-sector-reform-contract-for-public.pdf>.

²⁹ See https://ec.europa.eu/neighborhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/ipa2016_ks_action_programme_part_ii_annex.docx.pdf.

³⁰ See https://ec.europa.eu/neighborhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/serbia/ipa/2015/pf_04_sector_reform_contract_for_public_administration_reform.pdf.

holding important positions in the public administration without proper qualifications. In addition, the agencification³¹ process has resulted in large and unsustainable public administrations across WB6. The entrenched bureaucracy in the WB6 is hindering EU reforms and efforts for modernization of the public administration. Centralized recruitment, recruitment for job families and not for specific positions, using online platforms for recruitment and management of human resources in public administration are some of the solutions that some in the WB6 are making efforts to implement and some, like Kosovo, are planning to introduce.

At the same time, rationalization of the state administration is essential for reducing red tape and building an effective state administration. Decisions on implementing these measures are straightforward but difficult because the political will is weak as public administration in our region has been the primary employment agency for the political parties. Because of this, changing the rules of recruitment and advancement in the civil service would prevent or at least make it harder for political parties to exercise influence, just as reducing the number of agencies would result in important political actors losing big pay-checks and prestigious positions as members and chairs of the boards of these agencies.

This brings us to another equally important aspect of the PAR agenda and the transformation process, but one often ignored, the 'mentality transition'. One of the key features that previously defined public administration in the region was the 'small windows' in public institutions that enabled the citizens to communicate with a public official when using a public service. These small windows were also positioned in such a way that you always needed to bend down in order to reach the window. This was done intentionally to send a clear message to the citizen of who was in charge in that system. The citizen had to bow before the state and they were treated with a condescending approach by the officials. The state officials were anything but servants to the citizens.

While the institutional transformation, the reform of structures, policies and rules, has been on a successful path largely thanks to support from the EU, the mentality of those working in public administration is still a challenge. Even more importantly, the mentality of the political elite is similarly not conducive to the general idea of the PAR process. In public administration, the mentality transition has to do with the principle of accountability and the difficulty of public officials in embracing both their status as 'civil servants' and the

conceptual shift in what defines public administration as a service provider for the citizens and business community.

³¹ Agencification refers to the establishment of new agencies or expanding the autonomy of the existing ones. This is often driven by the argument that policy development should be done by the

Ministries while implementation by agencies. Often agencification process has been incentivized on the premise that it further strengthens the independence and effectiveness of the administration.

CURBING POLITICAL INFLUENCE ON INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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For most of the media in the Western Balkans, and Central and Eastern Europe as a whole, the promises of a new era of market dominance and market-based economy that followed the democratic changes of the late 1980s, early 1990s, which were supposed to overthrow the political paternalistic model of financing media of the 1980s and earlier, have remained unfulfilled. The economic crisis on one hand and digital disruption on the other have shown the fragility of the media market across the wider region, and emphasized the important role of the state and state interventionism.

When looking at the market characteristics and potential of a particular market, we usually analyze a number of factors: size of the national market; gross domestic product (GDP); advertising market and shares and trends within specific market segments, such as television, digital, print; size/reach of the national language and scale of emigration; and the state of existing infrastructure, including high-speed internet penetration, that influence consumption patterns and market potential.

Unfortunately, in all of these aspects countries in the Western Balkans and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) – which were not included in any of the categories in key classifications such as those by Hallin & Mancini (2004)² – do not show much potential. Although the term “Balkanization” has a historical and political dimension, in the case of the media it provides the exact definition of the key issue in the region: small, fragmented markets lacking the economies of scale that allow media companies to offer high-quality products and remain economically viable.

Digitization, Fragmentation and Pauperization

New technological developments offer even more reasons for concern. The digitization of media has led to an abundance of choice and media channels in many countries, and caused problems even in markets that are stronger in terms of GDP and population. This fragmentation of the media landscape is, however, even more devastating for smaller countries – in Finland for example, “the restricted size of the market makes it more difficult to introduce fresh products to the market” (Lehtisaari et al, 2012: 46).³ The problem is even greater in smaller countries with weak GDPs, including all of

¹ Author's note: This is an edited and updated version of a paper for Media Observatory, Sarajevo, published at: <http://mediaobservatory.net/radar/financing-media-south-east-europe>.

² Hallin, D.C., and Mancini, P. (2004), *Comparing Media Systems. Three Models of Media and Politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

³ Lehtisaari, K., Karppinen, K., Harjuniemi, T., Grönlund, M., Lindén, C.G., Nieminen, H., and Viljakainen, A. (2012), *Media Convergence and Business Models: Responses of Finnish Daily Newspapers*, Helsinki, Communication Research Centre CRC, Department of Social Research, University of Helsinki.

CEE.⁴ In all of these countries, the size of the market had been, in previous decades, the main obstacle for media development and specialization, even before digital media when only a handful of media were present. Today, the fragmented landscape is presenting further obstacles for the development and survival of new businesses in media.

Warnings about the limited market potential of these small markets were already expressed at the beginning of digitization. “Digitization will lower certain broadcasting costs, but this does not mean that there will suddenly be 200 channels in Slovenia, as there are in Britain or France or Germany”; and “there will never be 200 or more channels that will cover all the niche audiences” (Milosavljević and Bašić-Hrvatín, 2000: 254 and 258).⁵

Today, there may still not be 200 channels in Slovenian, but the regular package offered by cable providers includes between 120 and 180 channels, among those 45 Slovenian-language channels and 40 channels with Slovenian subtitles (and mostly with Slovenian advertising).⁶

An additional issue for countries in the region is the reduced use and circulation of their national languages internationally, hampering the economic potential of local media enterprises. Unlike other small European countries such as Austria or Ireland, for most of the countries in the region there is no other space where editorial products may be exported – except, in some cases, within the (economically weak) region. For example, although figures regarding the penetration of newspapers and magazines show these are frequently higher in Slovenia than in many other wealthier European countries, the total number (circulation) is much smaller, ultimately posing a significant challenge for Slovenian media companies.

This fragmentation is also causing concern for advertisers: “The market is so small that the economy of simply does not function. Investments in specific channels are, compared to the results, simply too large. In the time of mass media, for example television, this was still possible. It is true that the reach was small, but media buying and production were cheap as well. With everything that is brought by modern communication this is sadly not the case. And it does not matter if it is about mobile apps or guerrilla outdoor advertising. The costs of app development or the creation of a giant puppet are, in Slovenia, very similar to those in much bigger countries, except that here they are seen by a

much smaller number of people,” wrote Slovenian advertiser Gal Erbežnik in 2013.

Technological development enabled the multiplication of media channels (radio, television, online); however, economic development could not keep up with the pace of this fragmentation. The economic crisis in 2008 further endangered the survival of new media outlets: revenue from advertising (which represents the majority of broadcasting and online revenue) has decreased while the number of channels has increased. This means a larger number of actors must share a shrinking pool of revenues, leading to the pauperization of an increasingly fragmented market.

New channels are therefore often developed not because of their market potential but in order to prevent the development of new competition, and/or to simply re-use existing content in an attempt to maximize the return on investment. The increase in the number of channels thus does not correspond with an increase in the quality or diversity of this content.

This was also one of the main reasons for the failure of a pay television project by the TV company Pro Plus in Slovenia. The company owns the two most popular commercial channels, Pop TV and Kanal A, and launched a pay TV service called “Pop Non Stop” in September 2011. The service included six channels: Kino and Kino 2 (movie channels), Fani (a sit-com channel), Brio (a channel oriented towards women), Oto (a kids channel) and Spot (a music channel), all offered as a package through existing cable providers. However, in March 2013 the company decided to close down the project due to a lack of success. The programming was mostly composed of repeat content already purchased and broadcast on Pop TV and Kanal A. There was also an attempt to use less-attractive content, purchased in packages from studios, that did not fit into the schedules of Pop TV and Kanal A. The lack of prime, original content was perceived as one of the main reasons for the service’s failure (however, starting in April 2013 channels Kino, Brio and Oto continued to be offered by cable operators).

Low Level of Internet Penetration and the Growth of Mobile

Other important issues are the level of internet penetration, users’ habits, and their related spending habits. In most countries in the CEE region, including those that are members of the European Union (EU), internet penetration remains low compared to the EU

⁴ Apart from weak GDPs, most of the countries in the region have relatively low economic/purchasing power – defined by Eurostat as GDP per capita in Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) – and have evidenced a decrease of investments over the last five years.

⁵ Milosavljević, M., and Bašić-Hrvatín, S. (2000), Who will control the controllers?, in Lees, T., Ralph, S., and Brown, J.L. (eds.), Is

regulation still an option in a digital universe? (current debates in broadcasting, no. 9), Luton, University of Luton Press, pp. 253-257.

⁶ See, for example, Telemach: <http://www.telemach.si/sl/zasebni-upo-rabniki/paketna-ponudba/paketi-gold-trojka/gold-extra-trojka>.

average. It is most often concentrated in larger urban areas. Furthermore, better educated populations, living in cities and with greater spending power, are more interesting for advertisers, service providers, or producers of different media-related products.

However, in most CEE countries this means their already small markets become even smaller and more fragmented, and thus less relevant and less interesting for service providers, advertisers, media companies and media producers. The fragmentation of small national markets due to the digital divide and its underlying demographic characteristics thus has serious economic consequences for the potential development of new services and products, not to mention the potential survival of legacy media and services.

At the same time, the lack of economies of scale is also seen in digital markets. Media publishers need to work hard at developing the UX and UI (User eXperience and User Interface) of their offerings. However, this is only possible (i.e. economically viable) in markets that offer high enough potential returns, and small markets lack the economies of scale needed for the development of particular digital UX and UIs. This is already an issue in economically stronger countries such as Finland. “As a small market and a small linguistic area, Finland also places its own restrictions when it comes to pioneering applications and ideas. (...) The small linguistic area means that innovations do not have the same user potential as they would get in a larger area.” (Lehtisaari et al, 2012: 46)

The patterns of media consumption will, of course, develop and change with the proliferation of new platforms, devices and technologies. However, certain patterns and habits will only change over many years, not overnight.

The New Role of (Media) Policy and Politics

Past research has shown that market-based media financing is sustainable only in larger countries (for example, Lowenstein and Merrill, 1990),⁷ and even countries with a strong GDP, positive trends in advertising revenue, and technologically advanced infrastructure face important market limitations (e.g. small populations and language barriers) with scepticism and concern (see Lehtisaari et al, 2012). In CEE, where most of the factors listed at the beginning of this chapter severely limit the economic potential of (new) media projects and entrepreneurship, it seems that a market-based model for media is even less sustainable. It is, for the most part, only sustainable in catch-all media

such as general television channels with national reach, strong investments, and stable ownership (for example, Pop TV in Slovenia). However, these same media are also blamed and attacked as “the biggest evil in the Slovenian media market”,⁸ mostly because of their market power.

Most of the other media, including previously very profitable major newspapers (such as Delo and Dnevnik, in Slovenia), have in the last few years seen dramatic falls in circulation and profitability. Furthermore, web-only sites that are not connected to any legacy media have so far not reached the kind of revenues that would provide them with a stable financial footing. Mergers are one of the classic responses: see, for example, the recent takeover of Nova TV in Croatia by telecom group United Group / KKR (which is also attempting to take over the largest Slovenian commercial broadcaster Pro Plus / Pop TV / Kanal A), or the merger between the two Slovenian regional daily newspapers Dnevnik and Večer in July 2018.

It seems, therefore, that market-only media will have an increasingly difficult time in the following years to maintain their levels of production and employment. As such, they will need financial support, be it private or public, to stay viable.

As for support coming from the private sector, in the Western Balkans and CEE this is still very scarce. Regional millionaires are often not willing to invest in the media. Perhaps they are not aware of the public interest or, conversely, they are aware of the importance and influence of the media but then view and use media ownership as a tool to pursue personal business interests and/or help political friends and allies. Philanthropic investments in the media as a public responsibility for the richest members of society – as frequently seen in Western Europe or the United States – is not as common in the region.

On the other hand, foreign donors are not as interested in the region as some parts have already joined the EU, and others are either in the process of accession or are seen as less relevant or urgent than other parts of Eastern Europe or the world. Foreign donors are largely shifting their assistance from CEE towards the Middle East or other areas (such as South Sudan). At the same time, the region is not seen as adequately influential or prestigious to be relevant to, for example, the Russian, Indian or Chinese billionaires who sometimes invest in media in other, more ‘prestigious’ countries, such as the United Kingdom, in order to enhance their public profile. The interest from such investors is mostly geo-political: see,

⁷ Lowenstein, R.L., and Merrill, J.C. (1990), *Macromedia: Mission, Message, and Morality*, New York, Longman.

⁸ Biščak, J. (2015), *Zakaj je POP TV največje zlo na medijskem trgu* (Why POP TV is the biggest evil on the media market), Reporter, 21

June 2015. Available at: <http://www.reporter.si/iz-tiskane-izdaje/zakaj-je-pop-tv-najvecje-zlo-na-medijskem-trgu/53269>. (Accessed: 22 June 2015).

for example, the 2017 purchase by Chinese investors of a regional television station in Maribor, Slovenia called RTS24; and by Hungarian investors in politically-backed Slovenian television station Nova24 and magazines *Demokracija* and *Skandal24* in 2018.⁹

At the same time, there is no strong push to develop alternative models of financing, such as charitable foundations or consortiums founded by workers. A specific, small-scale example of such a consortium emerged in Slovenia when a free daily newspaper, *Žurnal24*, folded in May 2014. After years of losses, Austrian owner Styria decided to close down all of its editions: daily, weekly and online. However after a few months a group of former employees and contributors decided to try again, this time with only a website, and has – with permission from Styria – revived *Žurnal24* online. They are now attempting to maintain enough web traffic to attract sufficient advertising revenue and ensure their survival.

However, this is a rare example of such an endeavour. Again, the situation in the region is not entirely unique when compared to, for example, Western Europe. In many countries new models of financing are only slowly starting to take-off or develop, and still largely lack the long-term results that would prove their viability. Once again, there are similarities to other, smaller countries, particularly in Scandinavia; in Finland, for example, many local experts and professionals “do not seem to believe that foundations could be a vital model for financing Finnish journalism, since they do not think that Finnish foundations could secure the basics of independent journalism” (Lehtisaari et al, 2012: 51).

On the other hand, for most of the media in the region, the promises of a new era of market dominance and market-based economy, which was supposed to overthrow the political paternalistic model of financing media of the 1980s and earlier, have remained unfulfilled. The 2008 economic crisis on one hand and digital disruption on the other have demonstrated the fragility of media markets in CEE, and emphasize the important role of the state and state interventionism as the only possible solution for maintaining a relatively diverse media environment. The return of the state, however, also severely limits the potential of the media in the region to become at least approximately independent in terms of political pressure and political influence. State intervention will probably help maintain a larger number of media companies in each country – however, this doesn’t necessarily help to maintain the independence, plurality and diversity of views and content in those media that survive. In this regard, the

important role of (party) politics in sustaining the media ecosystem remains relevant in much the same way that it was in the Western Balkans more than 130 years ago.¹⁰

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⁹ Kingsley, P. (4 June 2018), *Safe in Hungary, Viktor Orban Pushes his Message Across Europe*, The New York Times. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/04/world/europe/viktor-orban-media-slovenia.html> (Accessed: 11 August 2018).

¹⁰ Jesenko, J. (1884), *Časnikarstvo in naši časniki (Newspapership and our newspapers)*, Ljubljana, Narodna Tiskarna.

CURBING POLITICAL INFLUENCE ON ANTI-CORRUPTION AGENCIES: THE CASE OF ALBANIA

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National Context

There is a general understanding among the Albanian public as well as national and international institutions that corruption remains endemic in Albania's governance and socio-political culture.

Regrettably, no genuine efforts have been made to date to mitigate corruption risks. Rather, the tendency to control all government and anti-corruption institutions has increased during the last decade by dictating the appointment of their leaders. Public discourse on corruption has always been either fully dominated by politics or met with social indifference and passivity because of a lack of trust in governance and institutions.

Corruption and fraud undermine the potential impact of any reform and, ultimately, the efficient use of public resources for effective service delivery to citizens. Weaknesses exist in the overall institutional set-up, a highly complex legislative framework, deficient human resources and managerial accountability, and in the lack of cooperation among law enforcement agencies. The high level of corruption results in a low level of public trust in public administration and the judiciary.

In a study on Albania, Harald W. Mathisen argues that "the international community is faced with many endemically corrupt societies where anti-corruption strategies fail to bring any meaningful progress as they do not address the fundamental problem, i.e. the lack of political will of senior government officials in corrupt networks"¹. This conclusion is shared by each and every one of us – either in the government or civil society, employed or jobless, rich or poor. For a considerable number of people, including the youth, widespread corruption often becomes a substantiated argument for leaving the country.

The handling of charges for corruption and misuse of public funds by political leaders follow a well-known formula. Political leaders or groups substantiate their arguments against these charges by citing similar charges previously brought against their political opponents. The justice system has failed to arrest any 'big fish'. No serious policies or actions have been undertaken to date to adequately, comprehensively, and sustainably respond to the challenges of strengthening the institutional framework to prevent and fight corruption.

A lack of trust in political parties, the judiciary, parliament and government, as well as the politically dominated anti-corruption institutions and instruments in place at the national and local levels, do not allow for participatory, citizen-driven anti-corruption processes.

¹ Mathisen, H.W. (2003), Donor roles in face of endemic corruption-Albania in the policy debate, Bergen, U4 Reports. Available at:

<http://www.cmi.no/publications/file/2960-donor-roles-in-face-of-endem-ic-corruption-albania.pdf> (Accessed: 15 August 2018).

Record-low public trust is one of the main implications of the meager results produced by current anti-corruption efforts. The level of trust in the ability to effectively fight corruption in Albania is the lowest in the region. Consequently citizens, civil society actors, and the business community are generally inactive and have limited interaction with public institutions.

Experiences and Challenges – Legislation, Institutions, Implementation

Governments of various political coalitions have made efforts to develop policies and set up relevant institutions to fight corruption since 2005. The 2007-2013 and 2015-2020 anti-corruption strategies, and their corresponding action plans, were developed with international assistance.

In 2009, an Internal Control and Anti-Corruption Department was established within the Prime Minister's Office to address corruption in public institutions. This structure is still operational, although it has been downsized to a unit with inadequate human resources. In September 2013, the new Socialist Party-led coalition government assigned the duties of the National Coordinator against Corruption (NCAC) to the Minister of State for Local Issues. This duty was then transferred again in September 2017, this time to the Minister of Justice.

Some common characteristics of all the national anti-corruption authorities include scarce human resources (1-5 staff) and insufficient financial means to carry out their duties. Placed under the leadership of different ministries, the technical staff of the office of the NCAC are often assigned several other additional duties unrelated to their anti-corruption mandate. In such circumstances, it is next to impossible to speak of institutional legitimacy, since the office of the NCAC does not feature any of the preconditions of legitimacy, such as broad political support, powers, resources, independence, and accountability.

Indeed, it is debatable whether the NCAC can be properly called an institution. Anti-corruption has rather been one of several functions of the Minister of State for Local Affairs or Minister of Justice. To date, no political or public discussions of how an anti-corruption authority could better serve its purpose have ever been observed in the country. The fight against corruption has been treated as a priority linked with the executive authority of the head of the government. This is becoming more and more visible (as seen with a recent Government

Decision, explained below) because all government anti-corruption structures and institutions are controlled and accountable to the Prime Minister alone.

It is interesting to compare the experience of the Albanian NCAC with the experiences of other Western Balkan (WB) countries. Each of these countries employ different models, but they do have some core elements in common: independence from the executive branch, in some cases a system of checks and balances on powers to ensure independence, etc. The Albanian model is the outlier when compared with other WB anti-corruption authorities, and lags behind its peers in terms of human and financial resources.

Vested with the NCAC's powers, the Minister of Justice is currently leading two other central government structures established in April 2018 by a Decision of the Council of Ministers:

- 1) The Coordination Committee for the Implementation of the National Cross-Cutting Strategy against Corruption 2015-2020; Deputy ministers are members of this committee.
- 2) The Anti-Corruption Task Force, established with the purpose of conducting inter-institutional inspections according to the Action Plan 2018-2020. This task force is composed of senior level officials from four different departments within the Office of the Prime Minister.

This Council of Ministers' Decision requires the Agency for Dialogue and Co-Governance established within the Prime Minister's Office, as well as the Internal Auditing Units (IAU) of each governmental institution, to support the work of the Anti-Corruption Task Force.

Apparently, this makes the implementation of their legislation more complex and adds to the existing challenges currently confronting the Internal Auditing Units. In one of its policy briefs, the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM) pointed out that "malpractices and corruption go unobserved mainly because, in practice, IAUs are not independent"².

This system of overregulated governmental structures is often burdened with duplicate and overlapping tasks and responsibilities among government institutions and agencies, resulting in a vagueness and incoherence in their anti-corruption policies and efforts.³ On the other hand, the NCAC's task to coordinate with other independent institutions of the sector does not seem to be relatively easy given its ability and capacity.

² Qirjazi, R. (2017), Fighting Corruption in Albania: Improving the Efficiency of Internal Auditing, Institute for Democracy and Mediation. Available at: <http://idmalbania.org/fighting-corruption-in-albania-improving-the-efficiency-of-internal-auditing/> (Accessed 16 August 2018).

³ Transparency International (2016), National Integrity System Assessment Albania 2016. Available at: https://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/national_integrity_system_assessment_albania_2016 (Accessed: 16 August 2018).

In addition, by possessing a majority in Parliament, the government has managed to maintain control of its own ‘supervisors’ by appointing heads of oversight and independent institutions through a simple majority vote. The General Prosecutor, the Inspector General of the High Inspectorate for the Declaration and Audit of Assets and Conflict of Interest (now amended, see below), the Head of the Supreme Audit Institution (SAI), even the President of the Republic, are voted into office by a simple majority vote. In this way, the law rarely guarantees the full independence of these institutions to check and balance political powers.

The legislation governing the Supreme Audit Institution is adopted using qualified majority voting, and provides for the SAI’s operational independence. However, the SAI’s credibility is often questioned by various government authorities any time they have to challenge SAI audit reports. Thus, the Supreme Audit Institution is constantly exposed to political pressure, and its recommendations or sanctions are only ever partially considered. According to Transparency International, the Supreme Audit Institution lacks the capacity to force audited public institutions to enforce its recommendations.⁴

Although there is no evidence yet of the efficiency of Parliamentary Decision No. 49/2017 “for the establishment of systematic monitoring and implementing mechanism of independent constitutional institutions”, there are expectations that the parliament will take a more proactive role which in turn would enhance the credibility and performance of the SAI. The Supreme Audit Institution has requested that Parliament take a number of measures to improve its access and authority to audit various sensitive sectors. This request seems to have fallen on deaf ears, as Parliament has failed to respond to another SAI request to set up an audit mission on SAI performance. This may quite well be an indication of the parliamentary majority’s agenda to marginalize the SAI’s professional performance.

In April 2017 the Parliament approved an important legal amendment to elect the Inspector General of the High Inspectorate of the Declaration and Audit of Assets and Conflict of Interest (HIDAACI) through qualified majority voting for a nonrenewable seven-year office term. This comes after the adoption of the justice reform package in which an important role in the vetting process was assigned to HIDAACI. This legal amendment may be considered an important development in ensuring more independence from political interference, because in local political culture the role of the individual leading an institution is often a “stronger determinant of independence than legal provisions”⁵.

HIDAACI is the main institution responsible for the implementation of the Law on Whistleblowers adopted in 2016. While it expanded the normative framework of anti-corruption as a preventive tool for alleged acts/practices of corruption in the public and private sectors, implementation of this law will nevertheless remain a challenge.

Because of its mandate as an independent institution charged with the audit of asset declarations and the conflicts of interest of elected and other officials, HIDAACI might be in a better position to perform as an overall multi-purpose anti-corruption agency, and better able to coordinate and avoid a fragmentation of institutions in the fight against corruption.

The Parliament of Albania has adopted international conventions and a considerable number of laws related to the fight against corruption and good governance. The quality and enforceability of legislation, together with a guarantee of institutional independence and the durability of the institutions in the sector, should become top priorities for each political grouping within Parliament. Civil society will also have to enhance its communication with the Parliament regarding these priorities.

If it seeks to demonstrate that it is not under tight control of the government, Parliament should make better use of the work of independent institutions, such as the SAI, HIDAACI, and the Ombudsman, to hold the government to account and ameliorate the entire system to improve governance. This would also uphold the role of the Parliament in assessing the integrity of anti-corruption legislation. It should be noted, however, that the entire national practice of an anti-corruption institution contrasts with the generally accepted principles of good governance for Anti-Corruption Agencies (ACA):

- *A broad and clear mandate:* ACAs should have a clear mandate to tackle corruption through prevention, education, raising awareness, investigation, and prosecution.
- *Legally guaranteed permanence:* established through a stable legal framework, such as a constitution or special law, to ensure the permanence of the institution.
- *Neutral appointment of ACA heads:* through a process that ensures their independence, impartiality, neutrality, integrity, apolitical stance, and competence.
- *Removal of ACA heads and leadership continuity:* their heads should have security of tenure, and may

⁴ Transparency International (2016).

⁵ Transparency International (2016).

only be dismissed through a procedure established by law.

- *Ethical conduct and governance*: ACAs ought to adopt codes of conduct that set high standards of ethical conduct for their employees and have a robust and enforceable compliance regime.

It should become clear to all decision makers in the country, including the opposition, that the continuing lack of a specialized, independent anti-corruption institution with sufficient human and independent financial resources will render it difficult for the country to meet the required standards and challenges.

Even comprehensive institutional efforts against corruption are prone to fail without the active involvement of civil society and the private sector, which together seem to be quite skeptical of any progress in the fight against corruption. To illustrate this, I would like to quote several contributors from the NGO sector, saying that “ours is a society where you can hardly find one single model to lead any sector that can serve as an example for the others”⁶.

An IDM assessment in 2016 gathered the feedback of close to 300 contributors from civil society and the business sector nationally. It rationalized that the current structure of the NCAC is in a conflict of interest, given that this structure is part of the executive branch and therefore politically controlled at the national and local levels. This contributes to the lack of trust on the part of the society in the anti-corruption processes.⁷

Support and Role of the EU

There is no doubt that the role of the international community is very important for Albania as long as the country demonstrates a full commitment towards EU accession. In April 2018, the EU Commission recommended that accession negotiations be opened with Albania, while the Council underlined the critical need for Albania to deliver further tangible results in the fight against corruption at all levels. Nevertheless, advancement along the membership process remains conditional upon maintaining and deepening progress on key priorities, including fighting corruption.

But, evidence shows that reports do not say much to Albanians. Every time, either through EU Progress Reports or some other international instrument that assesses the country’s performance, they look upon such

reports as each party doing its share, i.e. internationals mentioning some progress and issuing a to-do list. Locals, on the other hand, would read the same report through the lens of party politics. This lasts for a few days and then everyone goes back to the same daily routine.

It should be interesting to assess the progress (if any), judging upon the European Commission 2015 Progress Report for Albania. This report identified “a number of remaining challenges, such as increasing the independence of institutions in charge of the fight against corruption, which are still vulnerable to political pressure and other undue influence, and ensuring a solid track record of investigations, prosecutions and convictions”⁸.

According to a 2016 report drafted by EU Court of Auditors, Albania has performed poorly in implementing the EU Assistance Program. This report states that EU anti-corruption projects implemented in Albania failed to deliver any results: “Not only did it fail to deliver on measurable targets, but its sustainability was also affected by the fact that the national anti-corruption coordinator was not independent and coordinated policies at national and local level without adequate budget or staff”⁹.

Although none of these findings were addressed, the EU has continued financial assistance to the country for anti-corruption projects. In November of the same year (2016), the Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations Director General announced in Albania another “€10 million of financial support in the pipeline for the implementation of the cross-cutting strategy against corruption.”¹⁰

Recommendations

The challenge of fighting corruption in Albania should acquire greater importance and be made the responsibility of Parliament. This would ensure a more inclusive approach by putting participatory anti-corruption mechanisms in place to make the Albanian society more sensitive, contributive and supportive of anti-corruption efforts.

Most countries have established Anti-Corruption Agencies based on national priorities, legislation, context, and other performance indicators. This paper is not opting for a particular model, but mostly promoting the need to rigidly apply globally accepted principles of good governance to an effective anti-corruption agency.

⁶ Report on Local Forum Consultations with CSOs and Business Community, 2016 IDM (unpublished).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ European Commission (2015), Albania 2015 Report, Brussels, Chapter 32 (Financial Control).

⁹ European Court of Auditors (2016), EU pre-accession assistance for strengthening administrative capacity in the Western Balkans. At: https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR16_21/SR_WESTERN-BALKANS_EN.pdf (Accessed: 17 August 2018).

¹⁰ NEAR’s Director General Christian Danielsson on anti-corruption at Tirana Uninvestij. 16/11/2016.

The recommendations provided below reflect IDM's opinions of what might work in Albania.

The role of the Parliament in ensuring the independence and integrity of an effective National Anti-Corruption Authority is indispensable. An Anti-Corruption Agency should have legally guaranteed independence and permanence and be established on a solid legal framework adopted by qualified majority. It is quite advisable, for all the reasons mentioned in this paper, that such an agency might also be a constitutional institution. The Parliament should also consider a comprehensive review of all anti-corruption legislation in order to overcome fragmentation and improve cooperation among different institutions.

HIDAACI is closer than any other authority to being transformed into an Anti-Corruption Agency. In order to move in this direction, this institution should achieve the main requirements of legitimacy, especially as it is performing at a national scale and trying to involve citizens as much as possible. Public accountability, communication, and oversight are all important elements of citizen outreach.

The government should support a national anti-corruption authority that is independent and has sound institutional and financial capacities. The National Anti-Corruption Authority should have a clear mission and a mandate to tackle corruption through prevention, education, raising awareness, investigation, and prosecution.

The office of the Anti-Corruption Authority should be ensured independence, permanence, and financial and human resources that enable smooth operational performance, even if a model linked with the executive branch is employed (as is currently the case of Albania). In this case, a system of checks and balances should be established to ensure the neutral appointment and dismissal of the head of this office. The head of the Anti-Corruption Authority should have a secured tenure, and can only be dismissed through a procedure established by law.

In both cases, it is advisable that the Parliament establish a special and permanent anti-corruption structure led by Members of Parliament, civil society, academia, unions, and other private sector interest groups. These should by all means constitute a majority of this structure. Its mission should include monitoring implementation, commissioning research, assessing cooperation among independent anti-corruption agencies, and formulating policy recommendations for Parliament and other institutions. This structure should also include objectives to ensure convergence of the fragmented work of different anti-corruption and law enforcement agencies.

International bodies, including the EU but also its member states, might have been taught that the most effective language for the Albanian local politics is calling things by their name.

Otherwise, both Albania and the EU will lose more time and opportunity trying to adjust their programs to fit with Albania's existing governance models, which are far removed from the principles of good governance. The EU must highlight all democratic deficiencies and deviations from good practice, otherwise assistance will seem like a ticking-the-box exercise. I find it difficult to understand the impact of the expertise and knowhow provided by international experts given that, in Albania, the legislative framework of the anti-corruption office is politically dominated and controlled, and are operating with exceptionally limited human and financial resources. The approval of the Anti-Corruption Action Plan 2018-2020 by the Government of Albania in April 2018 without any prior consultation with other groups, including civil society, is the most recent example of an anti-corruption process dominated and controlled by the government.

The EU should clearly outline steps and benchmarks that Albania should meet to reform its legal and institutional infrastructure in the fight against corruption, rather than simply adjusting its financial and knowhow to Albania's existing anti-corruption framework. This would not serve the purposes and goals of the EU, and even less so those of Albania.

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TURNING THE TIDE: POLITICAL INFLUENCE AND INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS IN SERBIA

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The countries of Central and Eastern Europe have been experiencing democratic backsliding in recent years. Democratically elected governments are increasingly centralizing power and dismantling systems of checks and balances. This is especially true for the judiciary and other independent institutions. The latter have been introduced in the past decades in order to limit the power of the executive in emerging democracies. However, as executive branches increasingly act to weaken external controls, the values that independent institutions were meant to protect – from human rights to transparency and freedom of the press – are also becoming more vulnerable, which in turn is enabling state capture in many of these countries. This is why the centralization of power in the executive is increasingly a threat to democracy itself, and warrants our utmost attention.

In this paper we analyze the state of independent institutions in Serbia, hoping it will shed light on shared problems and offer some solutions for the region. Independent institutions and regulatory bodies have proliferated in Serbia since 2000. They were designed as key partners of Parliament in exercising control over executive power and administrative bodies. Most of these institutional innovations were direct consequences of European Union leverage. For example, the 2009 founding of the Anti-Corruption Agency was encouraged by the EU and tied to the introduction of a visa-free regime for Serbian citizens, which was hailed as a big success by the Serbian government.²

However there has always been some friction between the formal assertion of independence and the informal attempts of the government to maintain control over these bodies. This is perhaps best illustrated by the case of the Serbian Broadcasting Agency. Formed early on, in 2003, in order to remove regulation of the media from the executive, it was immediately struck with the resignations of three Board members, nominated by non-governmental actors, citing the government's attempts to ensure the loyalty of a majority of the Board.³

The struggle of these institutions to establish their independence from the executive has been constant. However, it seems that the period of proliferation ended in 2012 when the ruling Democratic Party was replaced by the Serbian Progressive Party, which then started a slow trend of suppressing institutional independence. In this paper we rely on the evidence produced by these institutions to test if this assumption holds.

¹ This paper presents evidence collected through a larger project "The Map of Power and Governance" funded by the Kingdom of Netherlands within the "Who is in My Government – Citizens in Power" project, implemented by the Centre for Research, Transparency and Accountability (CRTA) between December 2017 and August 2018. The team responsible for data collection, analysis, peer-review, and quality control were: Aleksandra Ivanković, Ivan

Radojević, Tamara Branković, Tara Tepavac, Vladana Jaraković and Vujo Ilić. The complete study will be available by the end of 2018 at www.crt.rs.

² B92 (30 November 2009), EU lifts visa restrictions for Serbia. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2nOUkLs> (Accessed: 22 August 2018).

³ The agency transformed into the Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media in 2014 and is analyzed in more detail further in the text.

Research Design

Political influence is notoriously hard to explore, one could say that it is one of the “black boxes” of the social sciences. We treated political influence as a constraining factor on the independence of these institutions, and we approached it in the following way. We selected six independent institutions, based on our assessment of their importance for the democratic process, three institutions headed by a single official: the Ombudsman, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, and the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection; and three run by collective bodies: the State Audit Institution, the Anti-Corruption Agency, and the Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media.

Since for this phase of our research we treated political influence as a “black box”, we collected data on what can be observed: longitudinal data from official sources on the inputs and outputs of these institutions, namely the appointments, funding, and endorsements of their reports by the National Assembly (Parliament) on the one hand, and their activities on the other. As we could follow the changes over time, we wanted to see whether there is any relationship between the inputs and the outputs, and if there is, then could this change be related to political influence. Finally, it should be noted that there are significant differences between these six institutions, and in no point in this paper do we try to compare them. What we do compare though, is their outputs across different points in time.

Findings – Inputs

The Serbian Constitution recognizes only two of these independent institutions: the Ombudsman and the State Audit Institution.⁴ Parliament not only has wide influence on all aspects of the work of the six independent institutions considered here, but in the case of the four institutions not defined by the Constitution, it can also vote to dissolve the institutions at any time. For all six institutions, Parliament appoints members of their overseeing entities, decides on the scope and instruments of their activity, endorses their findings and monitors the implementation of their recommendations by the government.

Appointments

The way officials are appointed, as well as their tenure, differs from one institution to another. In some cases, they are appointed upon the nomination of a parliamentary committee, whereas in others the

nominations are shared between governmental and non-governmental bodies. The length of the tenure also differs, ranging from four to seven years. Different establishing years and tenure length has led to different lengths of time in which officials appointed before 2012 were still in office after the change of the parliamentary majority.

Members of the State Audit Institution Council were re-appointed as early as 2012; the Anti-Corruption Agency Board had five members appointed in 2013, but a clear new majority was established only in 2015; the new Commissioner for Protection of Equality was appointed in 2015; the majority on the Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media Board changed in 2011; the new Ombudsman was appointed in 2017; and the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection is the only official appointed before 2012 still in office, until the end of 2018. During these periods, the officials appointed by the previous government and were supposed to oversee the work of another, which means that at least in this aspect the political influence could have been absent from their work.

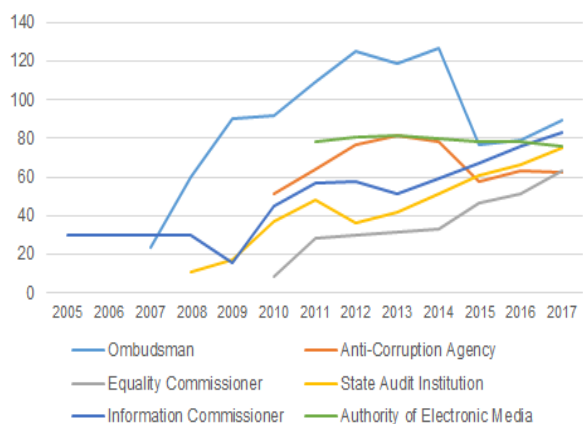
Number of Employees

Parliament decides on the means the independent institutions can rely upon in pursuing their objectives. Almost all of the institutions had problems with office space, insufficient budgets, and the number of employees. However, we chose to look at the number of employees per year as an indicator comparable both across time and across institutions. We were interested in how many employees institutions had in each year, compared to how many employees were expected based on the systematization plan agreed on by Parliament. With a single exception of the Ombudsman between 2011 and 2014, no independent institution has ever reached its planned number of employees.⁵ Graph 1 shows a general trend of increases before 2012, stagnation between 2012 and 2014, and a slow rise from 2015 when most of the officials were re-appointed by the new government.

⁴ The Constitution also defines the roles of the Governor of the National Bank, the High Judicial Council and the Public Prosecutor as independent bodies.

⁵ The increased number of employees in the Ombudsman’s office was the result of temporary hires intended to deal with an increase in the number of incoming cases.

Graph 1: Ratio of actual versus planned employment for the six institutions (percent)



Plenary Session Discussions

The institutions send annual reports to Parliament which can discuss them in committees and in plenary sessions. Parliament discussed the reports of five out of six institutions only in the years 2011, 2013 and 2014, while reports from the Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media were never discussed in a plenary session.⁶ In all other years, if the reports were discussed, they were discussed only in the committees.

In 2013 and 2014 Parliament requested that the government implement the independent institutions' recommendations, and to regularly report back on its progress.⁷ In 2014 the government set up reporting mechanisms in accordance with this request,⁸ but as far as we have been informed, the report was never made public and Parliament never again discussed the report of any independent institution in a plenary session.

What we can conclude from this brief overview is that independent institutions in general lack the means and support necessary to efficiently execute their tasks. This was especially the case in the first years after the 2012 change of government, when an increased workload for the institutions was not followed by increases in the workforce. However, in several cases an increase in the number of employees followed appointments at the head of the institutions.

The oversight roles of both Parliament and the independent institutions depend on their mutual cooperation, partly resting on the endorsement of recommendations, which are regulated by the rules of

⁶ REM has published annual reports since its founding, but only after the adoption of the new Law on Electronic Media in 2014 was it also obliged to submit these to Parliament. Nevertheless, as with all other reports since then REM reports have still not been discussed in a plenary session.

procedure.⁹ This mechanism was working to some extent within a very short period of time, between 2011 and 2014, with a gap during the 2012 election year. The discussion of the reports in the plenary sessions in 2013-2014 shows us that the newly formed majority in Parliament wanted to signal that it would conform to democratic standards. Perhaps they even wanted to show that they were 'more democratic' than the previous majority. However, this short term enthusiasm ended after 2014, and Parliament became a stage for debates in which independent institutions were undermined instead of supported.¹⁰

Finally, and this will be discussed in more detail in the next passages, the appointment of key figures in the independent institutions stopped being consensual after 2012, as indicated by voting patterns. Parliament also deliberately prolonged appointments of non-governmental nominees and was far quicker in appointing government nominated officials. In the following part of the paper we will show how these inputs are related to the activities of the institutions.

Findings – Outputs

Here we will present our main findings about the work of the institutions, by taking a separate look at each, as every institution has a different set of outputs. We will start with the institutions headed by individual officials and continue with the collectively-led bodies.

Ombudsman

The Protector of Citizens (Ombudsman) is an independent institution introduced in 2005, with its status confirmed by the 2006 Constitution. The role of Ombudsman was designed to safeguard and promote citizens' rights and to control the legality and regularity of the state administration. The first Ombudsman, Saša Janković, was appointed after the Constitution was enacted, in 2007, and reappointed in 2012 with a large margin of votes (167 out of 170 present). Towards the end of his tenure he resigned in order to run in the 2017 presidential elections. After his resignation, a new Ombudsman, Zoran Pašalić, was appointed in 2017 (with 142 votes for and 20 votes against).

Analyzing data from annual reports, we established that there was a steady increase in the number of cases brought before the Ombudsman, right until his political role became more prominent and he entered into

⁷ Conclusions of the National Assembly (1 July 2013), RS-36; and (5 June 2014), RS-39.

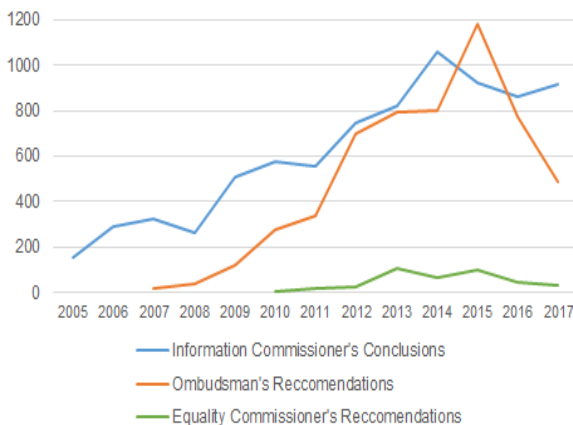
⁸ Conclusion of the Government (18 July 2014), 021-7728/2014.

⁹ National Assembly Rules of Procedure, Article 238.

¹⁰ European Commission (2015), Serbia 2015 Report, Brussels. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2nRE7oU> (Accessed: 22 August 2018)

confrontation with the executive. This rise of cases was followed by an increase in the number of recommendations released by the Ombudsman. The recommendations almost doubled in 2015 compared to 2012 (Graph 2). However, the number of recommendations sharply declined in 2016 and 2017, falling to a pre-2012 level in coincidence with the change of officials.

Graph 2: Main outputs of three independent institutions



Commissioner for Protection of Equality

The Commissioner for Protection of Equality is an independent authority established in 2009 on the basis of the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, with the aim of preventing discrimination and protecting the equality of citizens. The first Commissioner, Nevena Petrušić, was appointed in 2010 for a five year term, after some debate about her nomination.¹¹ Even though she was entitled to, she did not put up a nomination for a second term, so a new Commissioner, Brankica Janković, was appointed in 2015 after a 151-7 vote in the Parliament.

The Commissioner needed some time to establish its practice, and activity then peaked in the 2013-2015 period with a threefold number of recommendations compared to 2012. However, after the new Commissioner was appointed activity declined and returned to 2012 levels (Graph 2). We also registered that the primary angle of the institution under the new Commissioner changed, from producing specific recommendations based on complaints, to producing hundreds of general recommendations to state institutions.

Commissioner for Information of Public Importance

The Commissioner's mandate to protect and promote free access to information of public importance was established by the 2004 law, and extended to personal data protection by another law in 2008. The Commissioner, Rodoljub Šabić, was appointed by Parliament in 2004 for a seven year term. His position was then verified after the new constitution was ratified, and he was reelected to another seven year term in 2011, all three times without a single "no" vote in Parliament.

The Commissioner remains the only institution out of the six still headed by the official appointed before 2012. What we can observe is a constant rise in both citizen involvement with the Commissioner and his activity towards government institutions, which peaks around the period when the other two previously discussed institutions were experiencing declines. In 2017 citizens brought twice as many cases before the Commissioner compared to 2012. As well, the Commissioner's position in relation to government organs worsened. As the Commissioner has no legal instruments to enforce his conclusions in cases of non-compliance he is entitled to request enforcement from the government. In the first three years after 2012 the Commissioner made 30 such requests, but in the next three years he made 128. There is no data available to suggest that the government has ever fulfilled any of these requests.

State Audit Institution

The State Audit Institution (SAI) is an independent state authority responsible for auditing the use of public funds. It was founded in 2005 by law and further established through the Constitution. The institution is run by a five-member council which appoints the director. Council members are appointed for a five-year period, by a majority vote in Parliament, upon nomination by the Committee for Finances and Budget Control. The council was first established in 2007, and their terms ended right after the 2012 elections. Two members, including the President of the Council, were re-appointed as consensus candidates, and three new members were appointed by the new ruling coalition.

The SAI is organized into departments which audit, respectively: the state budget, local self-government, public enterprises, health and social services, and the National Bank and other public funds beneficiaries. Each year, the institution selects a sample of beneficiaries in each group and audits their financial reports. We wanted to see if there is any political bias in the selection of beneficiaries, and whether it changes over time. For this

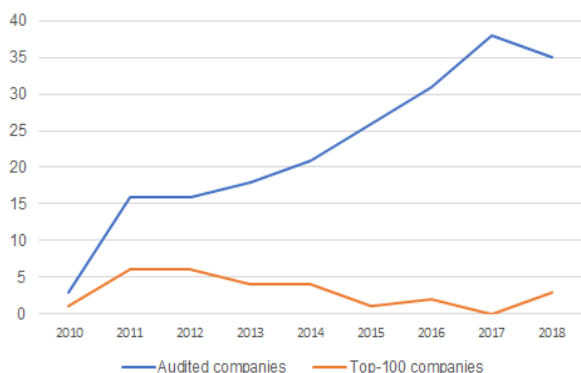
¹¹ The civil society organizations considered her to be a less qualified candidate than Goran Miletić, who had been nominated by the oppositional Liberal Democratic Party.

we analyzed the sampling in the departments responsible for local -self-government and public enterprises.

The first thing we found is that the selection of local self-government does not suffer from any political bias. We collected data on the political control of municipalities, and then we calculated the probabilities of a municipality being selected for audit if it is controlled by a party other than the ruling one. We found that the odds were always practically the same, and that the findings of the audits are not harsher for the oppositional municipalities.

We also wanted to see if the SAI is avoiding politically sensitive public enterprises. We compared the public enterprises they sampled for audit since 2010 to the Business Registers Agency annual lists of “top 100” companies.¹² We found that even though the SAI audits more enterprises each year, the numbers of top-100 companies is falling, both in absolute and relative terms (Graph 3). This is especially true for top 20 companies, which the SAI audited 16 times between 2011 and 2014 but then only twice in the period between 2015 and 2018.

Graph 3: State Audit Institution’s sample of public enterprises



Anti-Corruption Agency of Serbia

The Anti-Corruption Agency of Serbia (ACAS) was established in 2009 as an independent state authority, with the aim to tackle and prevent corruption.¹³ The establishment of the Agency removed this responsibility from the executive government. However, the ACAS was ultimately designed to have a strong preventive role, and to rely significantly on cooperation with other public authorities.

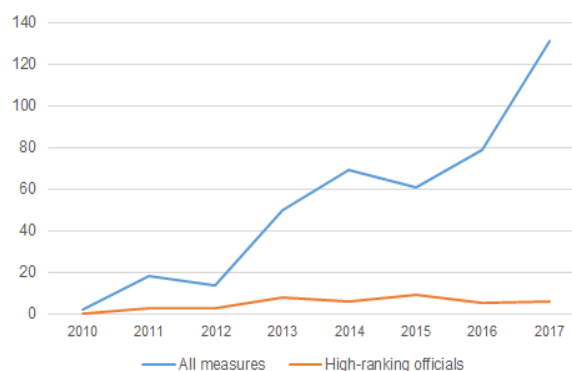
The ACAS is headed by a board of nine members, nominated by different branches of the government and

¹² We coded any company that was in the top 100 in one of the six categories: capital, income, net gain, net loss, total loss, and assets. The data for 2017 and 2018 is based on the most recent list of companies, from 2016.

non-governmental bodies. The board has almost never worked at full capacity, to the point that it operated with only two members in 2017. This was mostly due to Parliament, which was reacting with urgency when appointing members nominated by government bodies, while delaying appointments of members nominated by non-governmental bodies. The Agency got five new members in 2013, but only after the end of the term of the member jointly nominated by the Ombudsman and Commissioner and with the appointment of a member nominated by the government in 2015 was there a clear majority of members who could have been politically influenced by the new majority.

We wanted to see if there were any changes in the work of the Agency in this period. We focused on the prevention of conflicts of interest, and two measures the Agency can take against these officials: the public announcement of violations of the law, and the public announcement of recommendations for dismissal.

Graph 4: Anti-Corruption Agency public measures regarding conflict of interest



The first thing our data shows is a rise in a number of measures. However, once we dug deeper, we found that a majority of public announcements relate to officials in education and at the local level of government (2/3 of announcements of violations of the law and 3/4 of all recommendations for dismissal). Only 10% of announcements of a violation, and as low as 3% of recommendations for dismissal, were directed at officials in the executive, legislative, judicial, or independent branches. When we further disaggregated the data, we established that both measures directed at officials on the national level had peaked before 2015, with only one recommendation for dismissal of an official at the national level in the last three years (Graph 4). Furthermore, when we looked at the time periods when

¹³ ACAS was not the first institution in this field. The Anti-Corruption Council was founded in 2001 as an expert, advisory body of the Government, which caused some friction regarding the overlap of the competencies.

these individuals were in office, we found that most of these officials were not appointed by the current ruling party or elected on their lists. Even though the number of measures is on the rise, the number of high ranking public officials with ties to the ruling party that were targeted by the Agency for conflicts of interest is very low, with a tendency of decline.

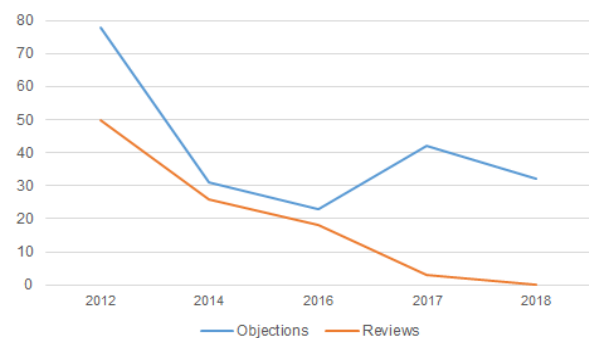
Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media

The Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media (REM) was established in 2002 as an independent regulatory body, with the aim to improve broadcasting policy and to ensure efficient implementation of broadcasting regulations. It was given wide authority, and its enabling legislation intended it to have functional independence. The idea was to remove the power to regulate media from the legislative or executive branches, and this was primarily to be done by setting up the REM Council.

Just like ACAS, the REM is also headed by a nine-member council which appoints the director. The council is appointed by Parliament, upon the nomination by different bodies and organizations, for the length of four years.¹⁴ Until 2016 the majority of REM council members were appointed by the previous government. That year started with the end of terms for three members. This led to a 2:4 ratio of new to pre-existing members, which towards the end of the year had become 5:4. When the three additional members' terms ended in early 2017, they were not replaced, and together with the reelection of one member, this led to a 6:0 ratio for newly appointed members.

An important role of the REM is monitoring of electoral campaigns in order to ensure equal representation in the media. To do this, the REM was monitoring the campaigns for the 2008 and 2012 presidential, parliamentary and local election, and the 2014 parliamentary and Belgrade local elections. For these elections, the REM was publishing periodic reports during the campaign, as well as final reports. However the REM ceased publishing any reports for the 2016 parliamentary elections, the following 2017 presidential election, and 2018 Belgrade local elections. Another observable trend is the decline in the number of objections received during the campaign that the REM had reviewed (Graph 5). Since 2016, very few objections have been taken into consideration. The REM has issued only one measure based on these objections in 2016, and none since.

Graph 5: Review of objections received by the REM during election campaigns



Conclusions

The oversight activities of the Ombudsman, the Commissioner for Protection of Equality, and the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance were increasing for several years. But after the new appointments, the numbers for the first and the second on this list started declining, indicating that the intensity of their scrutiny of the government was decreasing. The Commissioner for Information of Public Importance, however, continued to work with relatively unchanged intensity.

The Anti-Corruption Agency's public announcements about officials caught in conflicts of interest are increasingly directed against officials at the lower levels of government, and their targeting of highly ranked officials is getting increasingly rare. The Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media had stopped monitoring an increasingly important aspect of democratic elections - equal media representation. We did not find political bias in the State Audit Institution's sampling of municipalities, but it seems that over time it is increasingly avoiding audits of large public companies that employ many voters of the current government.

We found that in most cases these changes were either simultaneous or followed new appointments in these institutions. This, coupled with the lack of resources allocated to the institutions, and the lack of cooperation and endorsement by Parliament and the government, leads us to a conclusion that the ruling majority in Serbia acts in many ways similar to other countries going through a phase of democratic backsliding: it is actively trying to make independent institution as harmless to their political agenda as possible, effectively removing constraints to the power of the executive.

¹⁴ Before the introduction of the new law, the tenure length varied depending on the nominating bodies. The tenure of council members nominated by the Parliament was the longest – six years; those nominated by the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, university

rectors, and religious communities was five years; and the tenure of the remaining council members, those nominated by associations of media outlets and non-governmental organizations working on freedom of speech, was the shortest – four years.

In 2018, there will be a final new appointment at the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance, and we expect to see more of what we identified in this paper. However, we still hope there is a chance that the tide could be turned and that independent institutions could be brought back into the game. In order for that to happen, we offer several recommendations we identify as critical points that might safeguard the institutions' autonomy and independence.

Recommendations

- 1) The existence of the most important independent institutions should be regulated by the Constitution. No simple parliamentary majority should be able to change the fundamental setup of the institutions.
- 2) Independent institutions' findings and recommendations should be discussed and promoted by the parliament, and the government should automatically and regularly report to the parliament about their implementation.
- 3) Appointment procedures should become more challenging than a simple parliamentary majority, ideally with a form of qualified majority which would lead to consensus candidates.
- 4) The nominations, for both individual and collective bodies, should be moved away from political parties and closer to civil society. Members of collective bodies nominated by actors further away from the executive and legislative bodies should have longer terms, not the other way around.
- 5) Officials appointed to run the institutions should be protected by the same immunity provisions as MPs, and should have longer tenures than MPs. The members of the collective bodies could be divided into groups which would be re-appointed at different times, so that a ruling majority cannot influence the appointment of all members at once.
- 6) Independent institutions should have predictable funding that automatically increases with the workload and cannot be easily reduced by either a parliamentary majority or the Ministry of Finance.

DE-POLITICIZED ECONOMY THROUGH POST-CORRUPTIVE TRANSFORMATION

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Two decades after the end of the Balkan wars, the Euro-Atlantic stabilization approach to the region has prevented new conflicts, but also brought neither democratic governance nor economic prosperity. The region experiences fragile peace, fragile governments and fragile economies.

Good governance and accountability is still missing in the region. That is why, last year, state capture was noted by the EU, urging all Balkans countries towards more reform.

State capture does not only mean capture by the state of the judiciary and state administrations, but of the economy as well. The private sector is still depending heavily on the state, and business suffers from political interference.

Constitutionally, economic freedom is guaranteed, and legally the state's influence in private business is prohibited. However, in reality public tenders still remain a hidden instrument of institutional corruption. If in one country of the region misuse of tenders is approaching 20%, it shows how much Balkan "inventiveness" has bypassed Brussels' procurement rules.

In a situation where, regionally, the state is the biggest employer and the key financial source for big business projects, the private sector remains dependent on politics. Unfortunately, this influences the mentality of young generations, who if not able to find a job in public administration, leave the country. Every third young respondent in all surveys in the region declared that they will leave the country. Further, in all surveys with our students about their future plans, a majority of them declared the state administration as their preferred employer; only very few of them want to find a job in the private sector.

In Macedonia, this is due to a decade of politically dominated economy, because of a combination of interventionist policy, and preferable/discriminatory measures. Hopefully the new government, led by a Prime Minister who comes from the private sector, will change this practice and avoid two phenomena of political interference in business:

1. "Party's business"
 2. Protected oligarchs
-
1. The phenomenon of "party's business" is well known in the Balkans, where a change of government means a change of position of companies in the market. With new governments come new companies with

privileged status. Not to mention the worst cases: privileged positions for companies owned by a state's high officials. Through this, party's business violates market freedom by protecting monopoly positions and un-fair competition against other non-party's businesses.

2. Next is the regional phenomenon of protected oligarchs, who – protected by politicians – dominate the market. Some of them are local, others regional, even part of larger international networks of organized crime. They are above the state. Each country in the world has a mafia. I'm afraid that in the Balkans we are near to a situation where the mafia has the state.

Both forms of political interference happen due to widespread corruption, which remains as not only the most significant economic issue, but also poses security risks for the whole region. The absence of the rule of law is exactly what non-Euro Atlantic players with authoritarian regimes dream of as they look for similar local authoritarian regimes in the region to partner with.

The key “entrance door” for such suspected foreign companies with dirty cash is through money laundering. The Council of Europe, through GRECCO warned some of the Balkans countries of insufficient results in the fight against money laundering.

Foreign regimes which have a surplus of cash but a democratic deficit can, because of corruptive deals with authoritarian state elites in the Western Balkans, achieve not only their lucrative interests but also their strategic goals: preventing the region from becoming part of Euro-Atlantic community. For regional authoritarian regimes, it is just what they like: to be out of Brussels' radar. We had that experience in Macedonia for the past ten years, and a repetition of the same should be prevented in the region.

Fears that this fragile region could fall into new wars lead the EU to avoid stronger policies against authoritarian state elites in the Balkans. Inside, they continue to control cash and trade. Outside, they misuse geopolitical risks, blackmailing with “other strategic alternatives”.

Three decades of post-communist transition in the region show us that countries themselves cannot fight corruption and organized crime, without international support. Special Prosecutors, Vetting, or Special Courts were internal attempts to fight state corruption and organized crime, because of the non-existence of an independent judiciary.

A politicized judiciary can neither fight a politicized economy nor corrupted politicians who control the

private sector. Independence of private businesses cannot be achieved in the Balkans without a strong international enforcement mechanism.

One concrete step would be the establishment of an International Anti-Corruptive Tribunal for the Western Balkans (IACTWB), which would investigate all state corruptive scandals in all countries of the region. Waiting for local authorities to liberalize economies through politics, separating the private sector from the state, is just wishful thinking.

Now the region needs further transformation in three directions: from post-conflict towards post- corruptive societies; from stabilization to democratization; and from poor countries with rich politicians to welfare states with accountable statesmen.

Unfortunately, the actual state of play in the Balkans is poor states with rich statesmen. It is time for the EU to shift away from their current approach of stabilocracy towards real democracy in the Western Balkans.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACA	Anti-Corruption Agencies
ACAS	Anti-Corruption Agency of Serbia
ADISA	Agency for the Delivery of Integrated Services Albania
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CRTA	Centre for Research, Transparency and Accountability
EC	European Commission
ERA	European Reform Agenda
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIDAACI	High Inspectorate of the Declaration and Audit of Assets and Conflict of Interest
HRMIS	Human Resource Management Information System
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
IAU	Internal Auditing Units
IDM	Institute for Democracy and Mediation
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCAC	National Coordinator against Corruption
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PAMS	Public Administration Modernization Strategy
PAR	Public Administration Reform
PKI	Public Key Infrastructure
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
REM	Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media
SAI	State Audit Institution
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SRC	Sector Reform Contracts
UI	User Interface
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States
USA	United States of America
UX	User eXperience
WB	Western Balkans
WB6	Western Balkan Six (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia)



**CURBING POLITICAL
INFLUENCE ON INDEPENDENT
INSTITUTIONS IN THE
WESTERN BALKANS**
