

International Network of Young Scientists Dealing with Ethnic Reconciliation in the Western Balkans

Introduction

Despite a decade of reconstruction and reconciliation after violent ethnic conflict, the Western Balkan countries can still be characterized as weak states and ethnically divided societies.¹ A closer look into reform processes in the threefold transition from communist regimes to democratic governance structures – from a formally self-administered, but in reality state and centrally planned economy based on the notion of “socially owned property” to a market economy based on private property, and from parochial, paternalistic and ethnically segmented communities to civil societies and political communities – reveals the complex and interrelated challenges these countries have in common: elections and institution engineering are counter-productive in ethnically divided societies. As the experience of Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina shows, reconstruction of the state and reconciliation of society based on power-sharing or power-dividing institutional models also fail, as they tend to reinforce the ethnic divide within state institutions and preserve mono-ethnic party systems.² This allows ethno-nationalist elites to continue their ethnically segmented monopolies and their stranglehold on state institutions, economic resources and culture, including the media as well as the entire education system.

Empowerment of social science research and tertiary education will strongly contribute to the creation of new functional elites and thus to the ongoing reform processes in politics, economics and culture in the Western Balkans. It is therefore necessary in these countries to establish much better inter-regional cooperation in the fields of research and tertiary education in the social sciences. Moreover, as the research results in the social sciences are particularly important for a full understanding of the reconciliation process,

1 Weak states are defined as those that do not exercise (effective) control over the entire territory within their boundaries. See e.g. Stefan Wolff, *Ethnic Conflict: A Global Perspective*. Oxford University Press 2006, p. 68. See also Džemal Sokolović and Florian Bieber (eds.), *Reconstructing Multiethnic Societies: The Case of Bosnia-Herzegovina*. Aldershot: Ashgate 2001.

2 Florian Bieber, *Pluralism and Complex Power-Sharing in Post-Conflict Societies: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina*. In: Georges Mghames, Akl Kairouz (eds.), *Pluralism and Democracy*. Zouk Mosbeh, Lebanon: Notre Dame University Press 2001, pp. 79-94; Florian Bieber, *Recent Trends in Complex Power-Sharing in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. In: *European Yearbook of Minority Issues* 1 (2001) 2, pp. 269-282; Florian Bieber, *Institucionaliziranje etničnosti: Postignuća i neuspjesi nakon ratova u Bosni i Hercegovini, Kosovu i Makedoniji*. Sarajevo: International Forum Bosnia 2004.

the re-emergence of institutional linkages in the Western Balkan academic sector should contribute to the creation of dynamic but peaceful post-conflict societies.³

Reforms are a necessary precondition for democratic ownership as well as a requirement for the European integration process of the Western Balkan states. Since human capital is the fundamental factor in the development of a knowledge-based society, there is an apparent need for the creation of reform-oriented functional elites in the civil service, the media, education, research and the economy. The experience of the past decades in the Western Balkans shows that post-conflict elections and constitutional engineering or financial aid are insufficient for the emergence of functional elites, i.e. persons who do not necessarily possess executive or political power, but are capable of carrying out reform activities.⁴ Research and the academic sector should therefore be a cradle of the necessary emergence of functional elites. As a result, capacity and institution building in the areas of research and tertiary education should contribute directly to the establishment of “knowledge-based” societies and ownership in the Western Balkans. Through these means, the Western Balkan countries will also be aided in undergoing necessary societal reforms and empowered to compete in the European and global markets.

Nevertheless, many highly gifted researchers have left the region due to the deterioration of working conditions as well as the scientific isolation resulting from the wars in the 1990s. This brain drain, which to this day has not been properly documented and statistically considered, has caused the current lack of research and teaching staff that is a major problem in the whole region.⁵ Despite the willingness of some of the emigrated scientists to return to their countries of origin, the fact that the relevant state institutions lack comprehensive and long-term return strategies presents a major obstacle. For the time being, Croatia is the only country in the region that has initiated a mechanism to attract scholars of Croat origin. Moreover, brain gain also does not take place due to resistance from scholars in the country to accept returnees (either graduates from foreign universities or researchers and academics with international experience) since these are better educated, have better international contacts, are, as a consequence, much more competitive and therefore constitute a (mental) threat to colleagues in the country of origin. In addition, returning scholars are often confronted with an inconvenient research infrastructure and other obstacles that can be overcome only by a substantial increase in investment in research and tertiary education in the Western Balkans.

Although significant legislative changes in the field of research and development have been initiated in all Western Balkan countries, often legislation is not properly implemented “either because of the lack of resources to carry forward the set objectives,

3 Cf. Andrew Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*. New York: Routledge 2005.

4 On functional elites see e.g. T. B. Bottomore, *Elites and Society*. New York: Routledge 1993, pp. 124–142; Suzanne Keller, *Beyond the Ruling Class: Strategic Elites in Modern Society*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers 1991, pp. 76–84.

5 Milica Uvalić, *Science, Technology and Economic Development in South Eastern Europe*. In: UNESCO Science Policy Series (2005).

or because of other government priorities.”⁶ Despite these numerous shortcomings, the research and development potential of the region in terms of excellent scientists and internationally acknowledged institutions has already been detected and recognized.⁷ Milica Uvalić, however, asserts that despite the substantial potential of the Western Balkan research systems, “they are generally characterised by an unfavourable structure, weak interaction with the business sector, insufficient linkages with the education and research systems of other countries, also in the region.”⁸ Increased research cooperation and joint activities of the Western Balkan academic institutions would therefore have an important influence on societal changes in the region, as social research has a direct, unmediated and instrumental impact on actions contemplated by governmental bodies.⁹

EU integration and the role of research and tertiary education

Each of the Western Balkan countries has stated accession to the EU as its top national priority. Apart from the Copenhagen Criteria and the provisions set out in Articles 6 and 49 of the Treaty on the European Union, these countries have only recently emerged from violent ethnic conflicts and are facing additional criteria related to specific objectives detailed in the Stabilization and Association process. Amongst others, these additional criteria include a visible commitment to regional co-operation. No matter that intra-regional economic cooperation has been developing in the past decade, the collaboration of academic institutions is still inadequate if not inexistent.

The Lisbon Strategy, set out by the European Council in Lisbon in March 2000, highlights the importance of research and development in generating economic growth, enhancing social cohesion and creating more and better jobs in Europe. To that end, the establishment of a European Area of Research was integrated into the Lisbon Agenda¹⁰ as a core element and has gained in importance over the past few years. As a consequence, research and tertiary education institutions all over Europe are obliged to unlock their research and teaching potential in order to help increase European competitiveness. One of the main goals of the Strategy is the establishment of a “knowledge-based” society. However, a knowledge-based society should not only contribute to scientific and

6 Milica Uvalić, National Systems of Research and Development in the Western Balkan Countries. In: SEE- ERA. NET-Consortium (2006), p. 20.

7 See New approaches for RTD co-operation in the European Research Area: Regional and European-wide co-operation with Southeast Europe, SEE ERA Net Conference Conclusions, Zagreb, 15-16 December, 2005.

8 Uvalić, National Systems of Research and Development, p. 59.

9 Cf. Mary Kaldor, Vesna Bojičić-Dželilović, Denisa Kostovicova, Social Science in South East Europe Syllabus Handbook. Beograd: Centar za obrazovne politike Alternativne akademske obrazovne mreže 2007; Edvard Kobal, Slavo Radosevic, Modernisation of Science Policy and Management Approaches in Central and South East Europe. NATO Science Series: Science & Technology Policy, Amsterdam: IOS Press 2005. Cf. also other works on the general influence of social research: C. Weiss, Improving the linkage between social research and public policy. In: L. Lynn (ed.) Knowledge and Policy: The Uncertain Connection. Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences 1978, pp. 23-81; John Forester, Critical Theory, Public Policy, and Planning Practice: Toward a Critical Pragmatism. Albany, NY: SUNY Press 1993.

10 European Council, 23-24 March 2000, Presidency Conclusions.

technological progress, economic growth, social cohesion, and better employability, it also represents a prerequisite for the democratic development of any country.

The 2002 Barcelona European Council set the goal of raising overall research investment in the EU from 1.9 % of GDP to around 3 % by 2010.¹¹ Nearly all Member States have set targets which, if met, would bring research investment in the EU to 2.6 % by 2010. However, the overall level of EU research currently is more or less stagnant. The EU itself is still far from reaching the goal, as the investment into research amounts only to 1.84 % of its GDP compared to the 2.59 % invested in 2003 by the United States and 3.15 % in Japan.¹² However, the main difference between the EU and the US does not come from a lack of government spending on R&D, but from much lower R&D investment in Europe's private sector. The Strategy in addition anticipates the improvement of the off-budget and public investment ratio to 2:1. These goals must naturally be reflected in the research and science reform processes of the Western Balkan countries as (potential) candidates for membership. Currently, however, investment in the research sector is mostly below 1 % of GDP (e.g. 0.3 % in Montenegro, 0.5 % in Macedonia, 0.5 % in Kosovo compared to the regional maximum of 1.25 % in Croatia in 2004).¹³ In the Western Balkan countries both the public and the private sector seem to invest too little in R&D.

Obviously, investment in science, research and technological development in the Western Balkan countries is fundamentally inadequate, both in scope and structure, and therefore does not enable progressive change but only the preservation of the relatively inefficient status quo of science and research. Due to continuing insufficient institutional investment into research and tertiary education as well as their specific development in the past two decades, research and tertiary education in the region lag far behind European levels and cannot meet the urgent (developmental) needs of the region or assist in catching up with the EU countries.

The Conference of European Ministers of Education that took place in Vienna in March 2006 during the Austrian Presidency concluded precisely that "the Lisbon Agenda is the main driving force for education reforms in the countries of the Western Balkans." However, this component of the integration process "requires sustainable support and commitment at national, regional and EU levels."¹⁴ As (potential) candidate countries, the Western Balkan countries already have access to Community programs that foster education, science and research, especially the Tempus Programme as well as the Framework Programmes for Research and Technological Development. In this way, the EU is helping the Western Balkan research and academic communities to reach EU standards and to become increasingly integrated into the European Research Area. Nevertheless,

11 European Council 2002, 15–16 March 2002, Presidency Conclusions.

12 European Commission, Key Figures 2005. Towards a European Research Area Science, Technology and Innovation, 2005.

13 Hedwig Kopetz, Josef Marko, Wolfgang Mantl, SEE Towards European Research and Higher Education Area, forthcoming 2009.

14 Austrian Presidency, Ninth Conference of the European Ministers of Education: Strengthening Education in Europe, Vienna, 17 March 2006.

despite participation in these Community programs, overall educational attainment and investment in research and technology in the Western Balkan countries remain relatively low.¹⁵ The social sciences in the Western Balkans have been particularly hit by the isolation, decrease or even interruption of international cooperation caused by the wars and boycotts of the 1990s. The findings of a study carried out by Joanneum Research in Graz, Austria, on research specialization patterns in the Western Balkan region clearly indicate that research results in the social sciences are extremely low in the Western Balkans, particularly in comparison to the EU counterparts, but also compared to the natural sciences in general.¹⁶ Moreover, the social sciences were also overlooked vis-à-vis the natural sciences in communist times and are therefore significantly underrepresented in research outcomes. However, poor performance in the social sciences is not only an issue in the Western Balkan countries. Various studies conducted in Western Europe in the past decades indicate low efficacy of the social sciences as well as deficiencies in cross-national social policy research due to the predominantly inward-looking, domestic preoccupation of social policy.¹⁷ This results in a lack of development of social science knowledge as well as in lower attractiveness of social science disciplines to students and society in general.¹⁸

Throughout the 1990s research and higher education played a marginal role on the regional and domestic political agendas in the Western Balkans.¹⁹ However, exactly these issues are considered fundamental for the general stabilization of the region, along with other priorities such as training necessary for economic entrepreneurship, the democratic education of future functional elites and, last but not least, the strengthening of academic and scientific culture so as to enable the Western Balkan countries to keep and attract young high-potentials instead of fostering considerable brain drain. It is therefore necessary that science and technology, and in particular the social sciences, regain a leading role in the national development strategies of the Western Balkans. Such policies would surely contribute to the integration of these countries into the European Research Area (ERA) and should allow for the emergence of knowledge-based societies. Although the concept of the European Research Area, issued by Commissioner Philippe Busquin in 2000, was intended to raise the global competitiveness of European industry, it has also been used as an instrument for enhancing integration in a political perspective.²⁰

15 Cf. Klaus Schuch, *The Integration of Central Europe into the European System of Research. An empirical study of the participation of Central European Countries in the 4th and 5th European Framework Programmes for RTD*. Vienna 2006.

16 Christian Hartmann, Michael Dinges, *Fakten zu Wirtschaft und Forschung der Westbalkanländer. Vorläufige Studienergebnisse*. Graz: Joanneum Research 2006.

17 Patricia Kennett, *A Handbook of Comparative Social Policy* Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing 2004.

18 Raymond Aron, *Science and consciousness of society*. In: Raymond Aron, *History, Truth, Liberty. Selected Writings of Raymond Aron*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1985, pp. 220–265; Stephen Cole, *Why sociology doesn't make progress like the natural sciences*. In: *Sociological Forum* (1994), pp. 133–154.

19 Nada Švob-Đokic (ed.), *Research and Development Policies in the Southeast European Countries in Transition*. Zagreb: Institute for International Relations 2002.

20 European Commission, *Towards a European Research Area: Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions*: January 2000. Office for Official Publications of the European Communities 2000.

In the context of the start of the 7th EU Research Framework Programme (2007-2013), Commissioner Janez Potočnik announced his intention to re-launch the concept of the European Research Area. In the meantime a Green Paper concerning the ERA has been published, asserting that the ERA should be a core element of the renewed Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs. Potočnik also previously underlined that “research has become an important accession tool” and that he was willing to support the process of integration of South-Eastern Europe into the European Union also by means of enhanced research cooperation.²¹

The International Network of Young Scientists Dealing with Ethnic Reconciliation in the Western Balkans

As indicated above, professional ties between individual academics and research institutions in the region that are at the forefront of attempts to provide scientific insight and practical solutions for the task of reconciliation are grossly inadequate at the moment. Established links between Western European and (some) Western Balkan academic institutions often wrongly create the impression that intra-regional links and networks exist as well. This, however, is not the case: former ties between academics and academic institutions in the Western Balkan countries have been seriously damaged as a result of wars, nationalistic policies pursued by the ministries managing scientific affairs as well as restricted possibilities to travel and become involved in cooperative projects, sometimes even within one and the same country. Young scientists have been particularly hit by such trends, as they did not have the opportunity to get to know colleagues from other research and academic circles in neighboring and other countries before the break-up of Yugoslavia. Apart from depriving young scientists of the benefits of academic dialogue and idea exchange, the fragmentation of cooperation also resulted in limited access to latest academic sources in neighboring and other countries. Emerging literature on history, ethnic conflicts, minority rights, or reconciliation in different languages of the region is often available exclusively at the national level, not translated into English and published merely in local journals.

Believing that the transition countries in the Western Balkan region possess powerful academic capacity and that the true reconciliatory efforts should come from the people of the region itself, the network initiators, the majority of whom originate from the countries of the region, decided to establish the inter@nic network, which was mainly motivated by the inadequacy of professional ties between the region’s research institutions that sometimes pioneer the reconciliatory attempts in their countries’ academic sphere.

The first step, which was also intended to contribute to promoting the network’s establishment, was an international conference entitled “Ethnic Reconciliation in the

²¹ EU Science and Research Commissioner Janez Potočnik, speaking at a policy meeting organised by ‘Friends of Europe’ in Brussels at the beginning of December 2006.

Western Balkans". As the network primarily aims to promote the work of post-graduate students and young scholars with a special interest in the issues of ethnic conflict, history, reconciliation, etc., conference participants were as a rule post-graduate students or young post-doctorates with professional interest in minority rights, post-conflict reconstruction, inter-ethnic reconciliation and dialogue in the Western Balkans, as well as in the role the European Union plays in the settlement of ethnic conflicts and post-conflict reconstruction. The turnout of participants from Western Balkan research and academic institutions was lower than anticipated. Although the network is not supposed to be limited exclusively to young Western Balkan academics and researchers, but is hoped to serve as a forum for the exchange of research results among the Western Balkans and with the rest of the world, the network's initiators did hope to attract more significant numbers of young Western Balkan scholars. Out of twelve panelists whose papers were accepted to be presented, only three came from the region. However, several others, professionally based at Western European, US or Australian universities, also originated from the region. In addition, two Italians, two Germans, and one Israeli, French, Romanian and British researcher each participated in the conference as panelists.

Secondly, the conference was organized with the underlying aim to assess the state of the art of research on the settlement of ethnic conflicts and post-conflict reconstruction in the Western Balkan countries, with particular attention given to the practical role that academics can play in the reconciliation process. In addition, the conference also aimed at fostering and encouraging the creation of collaborative research among network participants.

The first day of the conference was dedicated to two panels of keynote addresses discussing the state of affairs of Balkan nationalism and the role of history in ethnic reconciliation. Several renowned scholars in the field of nationalism (Prof. Dr. Florian Bieber, University of Kent; Prof. Dr. Joseph Marko, University of Graz; Prof. Dr. Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, Hertie School of Governance; Prof. Dr. Duško Sekulić, University of Zagreb; Prof. Dr. Mitja Žagar, University of Ljubljana) and historians and political scientists dealing with the modern history of South-Eastern Europe (Dr. Tove Malloy, European Academy of Bolzano/Bozen; Prof. Dr. Tvrtko Jakovina, University of Zagreb; Prof. Dr. Karl Kaser, University of Graz; Dr. Edith Marko-Stöckl, University of Graz) were invited to offer their perspective on contemporary problems the Western Balkan societies are facing in the post-conflict period. The second day of the conference was structured in four workshops, in which the young academics that had gone through the selection procedure presented their scientific research results related to the conference topic.

A year after its launch, the network continues to serve as a means for the dissemination of up-to-date ethnic reconciliation related research results in various languages from all related disciplines (law, political science, sociology, history, etc.) and as a forum for the exchange of ideas and research findings on recent history as well as on the on-going European integration processes and their implications for today's societies.