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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

IMPACTS OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION;
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR CENTRAL AND
EASTERN EUROPEAN REGION;
RECONCILIATION AS A PRECONDITION TO REGIONAL
COOPERATION;
HUMAN RIGHTS

Young Bled Strategic Forum, Ljubljana, Slovenia

31 August – 2 September 2019

INTRODUCTION

Centre for European Perspective, has in cooperation with following Project Partners:

- Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Hungary (<http://www.kki.hu/>)
- Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Slovakia (<http://www.sfpa.sk/>)
- EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy; Czech Republic (<http://www.europeum.org/>)
- Bosnia and Herzegovina Association for United Nations, Bosnia and Herzegovina (<https://www.unabih.org/>)
- Tomorrow Youth Foundation for Sustainability, Hungary (<http://www.v4sdg.com/>)
- BETA-Europe, Poland (<http://www.meu-warsaw.pl/>)
- PragueMUN, Czech Republic (<http://www.praguemun.cz/>)

and with support of International Visegrad Fund (<https://www.visegradfund.org/>), developed and executed a project, titled *YOUNG BSF: YOUTH AS A (FUTURE) (RE)SOURCE*. Project consisted of various online meetings, one preparatory meeting held in Sarajevo, main event held alongside Bled Strategic Forum, with final product being writing of policy recommendations. Topics that the project dealt with, have been chosen during the applications procedure for participants, where all the applicants had to answer a question on what do they deem the most important issue pertaining to their country, or their region, and what are some of the solutions for it. Through quantitative and qualitative analysis, following four topics have been chosen as those mentioned most commonly by participants from all over the world:

- Impacts of the European integration;
- Sustainable development for Central and Eastern European region;
- Reconciliation as a precondition to regional cooperation;
- Human rights.

About Young BSF and background of the project

The Young Bled Strategic Forum (Young BSF) is an annual conference bringing together young leaders to engage in lively discussion and develop out-of-the-box solutions to some of the most pressing world issues. The Young BSF model has been growing and changing and has become a unique meeting place for a diverse

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array of young leaders, entrepreneurs, influencers, thinkers and social activists and thus, offering them a platform to share their visions, exchange ideas and connect with one-another.

Young BSF 2019 has reflected on the topics of the Bled Strategic Forum (BSF) and focused on sources and resources of (in)stability and looked at young people as a (re)source for the future. Recently, the European Commission's DG for Education and Culture carried out a study on "State of young people and youth policy in Europe". The study argues there are two dominant discourses pertaining to the youth, namely: the image of 'Youth as a Resource' and 'Youth as a Problem'. Typically, the image of 'youth as a resource' prevails in periods of stability, economic growth and social reforms, while the image of youth 'as a problem' prevails in periods of economic crisis, of political instability. At such times, the media is portraying the youth as 'dangerous', 'deviant', 'criminal', and 'violent'. Project participants will prove youth is a valuable resource in several ways. Young people are not solely valued as potential contributors to society, in their status as adults-to-be, but also in their present status as youth, whereby they contribute to society for the very reason that they are young, full of innovative ideas and able of thinking out of the box. Young people will prove they are capable of acting as agents, by being both responsible for and capable of participation in the on-going construction of the reality and the future of themselves and of society.

Special emphasis at the Young Bled Strategic Forum was given to the cross-regional cooperation. A new generation of leaders has demonstrate that such cooperation is not only necessary, but rather inevitable for positive next steps in democratization, advancement of human rights, sustainable development, women empowerment, Euro-Atlantic integrations of Western Balkans, counter-terrorism, climate change and other cross-border topics. To do this effectively, young leaders had a possibility to learn from their peers from different regions, share their knowledge, ideas and know-how. Sustainable regional cooperation programs are the key towards a comprehensive, inclusive, and innovative approach that engages youth and prepares agents for change.

In order to strengthen the regional cooperation and know-how exchange between V4, WB6, EU and beyond, this project has in one place joined experts, coming from leading think tank institutions in V4 and WB6, as well as leading youth organizations, widely experienced in youth affairs. Participants have through preparatory meetings produce, discuss, develop and build upon topics, relevant for all the actors involved. Knowledge gained and experience exchanged has shed a light on the role of youth in resolving salient, cross-border matters. Topics chosen have then further been debated through a 3-day final conference, held in Ljubljana Bled, where comprehensive Policy Recommendations have been produced. All the participants have afterwards joined a leading international conference in the South-East Europe, Bled Strategic Forum, where



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they got a chance to debate those topics with leading figures in the politics, economy, academia and NGO sectors.

Strong, committed and inclusive democratic youth leadership has proven to be of crucial importance for the process of democratization, conscientious Euro-Atlantic integrations and future EU expansion in general. In our efforts to build a structured regional cooperation we have realized we must therefore bring young leaders on board in order to build tighter ties among civil societies, offer room for youth-to-youth exchanges, and enable a continuous flow of information and knowledge among the EU member states and non-EU states.

We have followed the notion that youth, being the essential cornerstone of dynamic civil societies, should be given an opportunity to:

- Contribute to the regional integration,
- Be the herald of European values and democratic leadership with dedication and perseverance,
- Identify topics of common interest and tackle issues of shared concern for communities in the region.

Young leaders have also been selected to participate as speakers at the main event, Bled Strategic Forum. This practice has proven its worth in past editions and to the benefit of the BSF, as it brought innovative solutions and shed a light on youth perspectives. Youth has through active participation received an opportunity to meet the leaders from the governmental, business and non-governmental sectors and join them in discussions addressing salient issues. This document is the final result of the project, policy recommendations based on discussion held through online and in-person meetings.

Impacts of European integration

Prepared by IFAT and SFPA

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

As part of the Young Bled Strategic Forum (Young BSF), participants had the chance to exchange their views about the European integration process of the Western Balkans. Throughout roundtable discussions, participants identified numerous challenges that can negatively impact the European project of the region. As a result, five policy recommendations had been formulated with the aim of giving a fresh incentive to the EU enlargement.

Main issues discussed

Participants covered various topics that include regional cooperation, the effectiveness and visibility of the EU and its strategic documents as well as the presence of external actors in the region. A common ground has been set for the discussions: for the Western Balkan countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia – there is no other option than the European integration process. Similarly, the region has a strategic importance for the EU. Being the strongest supporter/promoter (both politically and economically) of the region, its full engagement is inevitable. The fear of losing its normative power and the attractiveness of becoming a Member State must be tackled with immediate changes. Thus, we offer five recommendations that must be taken into consideration within the Western Balkans as well as on the EU-level.

Policy recommendations

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Participants formulated five policy recommendations based on their discussions about the European integration process of the Western Balkans. The recommendations encompass the regional and European levels/aspects too. Moreover, they also stress the importance of multi-level cooperation and active involvement of the state and non-state actors.

1. Stronger regional cooperation among the Western Balkan countries

A stronger cross- and intra-regional cooperation is the key for economic and social growth. The whole region can benefit from the strengthened political, economic, societal and environmental ties. The creation of the Regional Economic Area (REA) during the Trieste Summit (2017) is a good initiative but it must be expanded to other fields of cooperation. Interconnectedness can also contribute to the creation of a common identity in a long run.

The example of the Visegrad countries – Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia – can serve as a source of inspiration for the region. The extended and stronger cooperation among these Central European countries before their EU accession (in 2004) can function as an example to be followed by the Western Balkan countries.

2. Internal problems of the EU cannot be a reason for stopping the enlargement

Although the EU faces different challenges (Brexit, migration, enlargement fatigue), those problems cannot serve as excuses for stopping/prolonging the enlargement procedure. We identified three reasons that confirm our statement:

- throughout its history, the European Economic Community (EEC)/EU always had to deal with internal challenges; however, those obstacles did not stop the widening aspect and the EU managed to evolve through further rounds of enlargement;
- we cannot argue that the enlargement itself is the source of internal problems and potential (institutional) instability;
- in terms of territory, population and economy, the Western Balkans is a relatively small region; thus, the region's impact upon accession must not be overestimated.

3. The EU should stimulate reforms using its soft power and be transparent

The role of the EU to initiate and stimulate change in the Western Balkans must be reinforced. By using soft power to strengthen its normative power in the region, the EU must also focus on the sub-state level.

Moreover, a clear timetable for the enlargement process must be created and made public. This well-defined schedule would clarify the steps/dates for enlargement and would serve as a roadmap for the Western Balkan countries. Even if the timetable does not foresee a date for accession soon, the fact that there is a structure is beneficial for the candidate countries and for the EU too. We can thus avoid the decrease of the EU perspective, give credible promises and motivate the countries to execute reforms in a timely manner.

4. Intensified visibility of the EU – internally and externally

The importance of visibility and strategic communication must be realized by the EU. To combat the influence of external actors (Russia, China and Turkey) as well as the rise of anti-EU voices within the region, the EU must apply an extended communication and visibility campaign.

The visibility strategy is twofold with its internal and external dimension:

- internal dimension: promoting the Western Balkans' integration process among EU institutions and Member States;
- external dimension: using local advocates from the Western Balkan countries to promote the deeds and the necessity of EU accession.

5. Direct and technical EU strategic documents

Official documents from EU institutions (e.g. annual progress reports) ought to be clearer in addressing direct messages. Furthermore, these documents must focus on the technical side of the enlargement and put aside the political aspects as much as possible. These changes would allow the Western Balkan countries to rightfully assess and evaluate their respective situation as well as to identify and solve their problems.

In this regard, *a credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans* by the European Commission (published on 6 February 2018) brought a significant change. The document

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used a new approach by naming country-specific issues in a clearer way. All documents from the EU should follow this pattern.

Conclusion

The Young BSF served as an excellent opportunity to discuss the future of the EU enlargement towards the Western Balkans. The five recommendations that participants jointly came up with are aiming at identifying the flaws of the current enlargement tendencies as well as at offering credible solutions to overcome those obstacles. We must realize the need for change in order to keep the European project towards the Western Balkans alive.

Sustainable Development for the Central and Eastern European region

Prepared by V4SDG and BHA UN

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction and Main Topics Discussed

As part of the Young Bled Strategic Forum (Young BSF), participants had the chance to exchange their views about the European integration process of the Western Balkans (WB). Throughout roundtable discussions, participants identified numerous challenges that can negatively impact the integration process of the region.

This policy paper elaborates on the sustainable development for the CEE regions. During the discussions, our focus gathered around five main areas, namely i) the civil society and its role in sustainable development, ii) the policy making process including the role of the European Union (EU), a possible institutional reform and supervision and implementation of the adopted proposals, iii) the role of the private sector, iv) the linkage between the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region, education and human rights, and finally v) the topics of employment, innovation and research.

Policy recommendations

Our table formulated five policy recommendations based on our discussions about the European integration process of the Western Balkans and the sustainable development perspective thereof. The recommendations encompass the regional and European levels/aspects and they also stress the importance of multi-level cooperation and active involvement of the state and non-state actors.

1. The civil society and its role in sustainable development

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The importance of fostering and securing the role of civil society is inevitable as they are the one who can serve as a basis for awareness-raising, who can have the power of lobbying on governmental levels and who can represent the “demand” and “support” side of the coin: the whole society.

2. An overview of the policy making process

The EU – considering its power and position – is a great facilitator for sustainability. Therefore, the EU enlargement and the presence of the WB countries in the Union in the future would mean also a better implementation of the SDGs on a European level.

We urge decision-makers to:

- Implement laws to speed up the accession process and to eliminate the unnecessary, sometimes so-called “bureaucratic” steps as well as to facilitate the cooperation between the EU and WB countries;
- Adopt an institutional reform, where a “sustainability post” would be created in each ministry to safeguard the principles laid down with the SDGs;
- Set up an agency responsible for supervising the implementation process of the SDGs as a multidisciplinary task force;
- Foster trans regional-cooperation – especially between the V4 and the WB countries, where the V4 group could serve as facilitator;
- Foster awareness and strengthen multilateralism and;
- Foster awareness/ Implement laws regarding a “just transition”, a process which engages all actors in society such as unions, industry, public administration, the actors of the governments and civil society.

3. The role of the private sector

We emphasize the importance of the equal roles of the public and private sector in the promotion and safeguarding of the sustainable development of the region.

Hereby, we recommend:

- The removal of public subsidies for fossil fuels;
- The promotion of green energy;
- Tax increase on unnecessary packaging;
- Tax cut and increase of public subsidies for methods of green packaging systems;
- Granting subsidies for companies, provided they aim to use net-zero carbon technologies and;
- Fostering Public-Private Partnership for effective and efficient cooperation towards sustainability.

4. Education and Human Rights

We highlight the importance of the gender mainstream, recognising that gender equality can contribute in great length to the implementation of all other SDGs.

Also, we promote the utmost importance of education as a key component of sustainable development. More awareness-raising campaigns are necessary, especially for children and younger generations to get familiar with the notion and aims of the SDGs, its relevance and impact for a sustainable development.

5. Employment, Innovation and Research

As discussed during the event, the unemployment rate, especially among the young generation is extremely high in the region, thus we allocated a recommendation to this issue, *where we encourage decision-makers to:*

- Improve general access to labour market for young people;
- In order to support just transition – create green jobs;
- Invest in research projects about the relations between the WB countries and the EU, that can serve as a firm basis for the future cooperation and;
- Invest into solving the challenge of transition from old industries such as coal into alternative employment.

Conclusion

Sustainable development can be discussed from a wide variety of aspects ranging from individual to policy-making levels. During Young BSF, we got the chance to discuss the questions on SDGs from the point of view of the pressing issue of the EU enlargement and the situation of the WB countries.

Reconciliation as a precondition to regional cooperation

Prepared by EUROPEUM and CEP

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

During the Young Bled Strategic Forum (Young BSF), the topic of reconciliation in the Western Balkans was discussed in a roundtable discussion by the participants. Despite the topic which lacks any clear definition and includes not only reconciliation among states but also on the level of societies and different communities, it was met with deep interest and proactivity from the participants' side. Several key issues were discussed during this session and recommendations for the relevant stakeholders were formulated.

Main issues discussed

The participants stressed the importance of reconciliation as a necessary condition for the whole region to be able to leave the legacy of the past behind and progress forward. While they appreciated the fact that there are many NGO and EU-driven initiatives in place which deal with the topic of reconciliation and try to facilitate connections among people from different ethnic and religious groups, more efforts were deemed necessary, especially in the area of youth mobility. According to the participants, there is a significant and widening gap between young people from bigger cities and with university education and those from rural areas who remain outside of these initiatives and frameworks. In the same time, the main obstacles to the reconciliation process were identified at the national political level, in the irresponsible political leadership, which is abusing these deep resentments among communities, keeping them open and much alive. As more political will is needed for the reconciliation process to bring any results, the EU was identified as the key player who can influence the political environment in the region.

Conclusions and recommendations

From the discussion with the participants, it is clear that more efforts in the reconciliation process are seen as necessary at all levels. Politicians need to start taking responsibility and be called to do so, more initiatives

should be aimed at the youth living further from urban centres and the youth mobility programs need to be supported further. While the success of the process is dependent entirely on the Western Balkan citizens, the EU is the key driver and any real progress is seen as hardly achievable without its strong support. This is most important especially for the deeper engagement of the Western Balkan political elites in the process. The reconciliatory nature of the origins of European integration itself should serve as an inspiration and model for the reconciliation process in the Western Balkans.

1. Reconciliation must be an integral part of the EU integration process

Reconciliation and the need for real efforts and progress in the process needs to be stressed more by the EU institutions. Concrete strategies and tools supporting the reconciliation process should be formulated (building on the inclusion of reconciliation and good neighbourly relations among the six flagship initiatives) including monitoring and evaluation. It must be made clear by the EU representatives that the current hostility, inflammatory rhetoric and tensions should have no place in today's EU.

2. The influence of the EP political groups on Western Balkan political parties must be used in promotion of the importance of reconciliation

The leaders and members of EP political groups need to exercise their influence over their counterparts from the Western Balkan region in communicating the importance of progress on reconciliation as well as other key issues of the integration process. Together with a greater involvement of national parliaments in the process this can support the actions of the governments which are very often insufficient or even harmful to regional reconciliation.

3. More programs focused on youth mobility are needed, especially those reaching to the usually excluded youth

The mobility programs for youth were recognized as a very important and successful tool in promoting reconciliation across the region. However, increased funding is still needed. Any future initiatives also need to focus more on young people living outside the most urbanized areas and with lower education. These groups usually remain excluded from these programs and in the same time are the ones most vulnerable to nationalist rhetoric.

4. Education system in each of the countries must be changed, countering the promotion of different historical narratives

The discussion concluded and strongly emphasised that moving forward is not possible without a fundamental change in the education systems in the region. As long as the biased historical narratives, igniting mutual prejudices and grievances, are taught in schools, any real progress on reconciliation is not possible, even hindering the effect of other existing initiatives and programs. Schools and families are the places where opinions of young people are shaped and responsible education towards a joint future based on cooperation instead of separation and mutual hatred is desperately needed in the region.

5. National political bodies have to be more involved and active in the existing initiatives supporting reconciliation

The current initiatives struggle with lack of interest and involvement from politicians, limiting thus their impact. All relevant political institutions need to be more engaged in the work of the regional organizations and initiatives, such as RYCO, RECOM or WBF. Reports from these initiatives should be read and discussed in the parliaments, participation by government representatives in relevant meetings needs to be strengthened and communication with the governments need to be intensified.

6. Symbolic reconciling gestures play an important role

While concrete practical policies and initiatives are crucial, symbolic gestures support the reconciliation process significantly. These should come ideally as a form of recognition of crimes committed by one own's nation and public apology by the political elites, however, there are also positive examples from other countries of reconciliatory gestures coming directly from the communities (e.g. memorials for the other group's victims built by the locals). The recognition of the past crimes is an integral part for the healing process in all affected communities.

Human rights

Prepared by MUN Prague and BETA Polska

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The year of 2018 was marked as 70th anniversary since General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Over 70 years ago human rights were globally acknowledged. Today, however, it seems like they are not as “universal” as the idea behind the Declaration was. Existing mechanisms addressing violations of human rights in the international arena are weak as the Declaration is not a binding international treaty and the United Nations are not able to force any state to change its internal policy.

Participants of YBSF 2019 were ambitious enough to discuss possibilities of improving human rights with special emphasis on minorities’ and women’s rights. Heated debate proved great passion and concern of younger generation representatives for this topic.

Main issues discussed

The participants have shared problems with regard to their home countries, which were mostly Western Balkan countries but also other countries. It was agreed, that among the most pressing issues for the region of Western Balkans was discrimination against minorities. In Bosnia authorities continuously fail to end structural and political discrimination against Jews, Roma, and other minorities. Such mistreatment of minorities stretches also beyond Bosnia and occurs in other countries across the region. In most Balkan countries LGBTQ people face hate speech and all kinds of harassment, ranging from anonymous and public threats to physical violence.

Another problem widely discussed was violence against women and gender inequality. There is a low number of shelters, a lack of accessible legal support and justice. Underrepresentation of women in the labor market is still significant. Female entrepreneurship is also low and women have limited access to financial loans.

Limited progress in closing the gap between human rights obligations and its practice requires stronger cross-regional cooperation, as well as stronger EU involvement.

Policy recommendations

The discussions have resulted in the following policy recommendations on how to overcome identified problems in the region.

1. Enable better monitoring of the human rights

This step would enable access to data of a better quality concerning the human rights situation across the region. It is highly important to improve monitoring capacities of the human rights protection in the region. This could be achieved through better cross-regional cooperation, as it will enlarge the pool of available resources as well as expertise.

Although, there are numerous small projects conducted by the EU to support better monitoring of human rights, a more complex strategy should be set by the EU countries. The strategy should promote communication and cooperation between the institutions, community servants and the media under EU supervision.

2. Ensure more humane and stronger protection for the most vulnerable citizens

Protections of minorities should be addressed through improved systems of social protection and inclusion. This requires core reforms of existing systems. The best way to implement change would be to consult with expert groups created from representatives of the countries with heterogeneous societies as well local experts to better adjust practices to national particularities.

3. The EU accession process as a key mechanism for reforms

Prospect of accession, coupled with human rights conditionality, can serve as sufficient incentive for authorities and as a result help drive reform. Long-lasting stability can be achieved only with presence of strong democratic institutions that are capable of responding to and protecting the needs of citizens. The EU should use every opportunity to urge the relevant authorities to stimulate the change towards better human rights situation.

Clear conditions and timetable for the enlargement process is a key to motivating reform implementation in the region. This is a mutually beneficial development for both sides.

4. Education and exposure

Important role in human rights plays with no doubt education. In this regard, it is highly necessary to develop human rights education in all levels of education in the Western Balkans – starting from kindergartens and up to the university curriculum.

Better understanding of human rights will create a fruitful soil for better acceptance of minorities. It should also be intertwined with exposure of minorities to ensure their inclusion in society.

It is also recommended to conduct workshops for students and establish cross-cultural dialogs within single countries as well as across the region. This should teach students of all ages how to be more tolerant and embrace diversity. Additionally, in order to strengthen education process, similar workshops should be also conducted for trainers and various types of civil servants. It would raise awareness about most pressing issues and help to understand the context of existing cultural norms.

5. Political determination by the government to implement existing laws on gender equality

The governments should address reforms to promote gender equality. Authorities should create greater pressure on political parties to increase their commitment to gender parity. Greater involvement of the government resulted in legislation supporting gender parity would also create favorable conditions for cultural changes and demolish major barrier to gender equality.

6. Hate speech and the role of mass media

Hate speech is present especially in the internet and other mass media, and minorities (i.e. ethnic groups, LGBTQ people). In order to tackle it, it is crucial to open the discussion about the introduction of regulations against hate speech. It will allow the whole society to take part in extensive consultation process and find the best way to find the best solution to fight the problem. One of the ideas proposed by participants was to introduce national institutions overseeing public media in order to prevent structured hate speech against minorities.

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Conclusion

Human rights is a big topic, which should be tackled by small but firm steps. Those steps, however, should not come too slowly. Participants of the Young BSF are well aware, that reaching absolute human rights rule in all spheres of life is a long process requiring huge efforts, strong will, and dedication. They are, however, full of good hope and worked out aforementioned policy recommendations to make their contribution in the resolution of the discussed issues. For that they also express greatest gratitude to the Young BSF and all involved in making that event happen for that great opportunity to share their experience and their young voices to be heard.