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## YOUTH AS A (FUTURE) (RE)SOURCE – PREPARATORY EVENT

BACKGROUND AND AGENDA

V4 and WB, Sarajevo, 5. – 6. August 2019



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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 and image of youth ‘as a problem’ prevails in periods of economic crisis, instability. Project participants will prove youth is a valuable resource in several ways, not solely as potential contributors to society, but also in their present status as youth, contributing with innovative ideas and thinking out of the box. Strong, committed and inclusive democratic youth leadership is of crucial importance for the process of democratization and European integration. In our efforts to build a structured regional cooperation we must therefore bring young leaders on board in order to build tighter ties among the civil societies, offer room for youth-to-youth exchanges, and enable a continuous flow of information and knowledge among EU and non-EU countries.

Youth, being the essential cornerstone of dynamic civil societies, should be given a chance to:

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

Strong civil society plays a significant role in supporting democracy and therefore the rule of law. At the same time, dynamic civil society makes the state accountable. Vital role in this process has to be played by a strong civil society (not only by the control of the power of the state), civil society should lobby for access to information, promote political participation and help to develop other values of democratic life, where youth is most often left out of this activities. Through effective communication channels, awareness of the general public should rise about the EU integration process. Active and dynamic civil society can be built only on a strengthened people-to-people contacts and that is a crucial part of our activity. All activities

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are oriented towards better regional cooperation, implementation of possible macro regional synergies, mobility, networking and exchange of ideas and visions.

Special emphasis at the event will be given to cross-regional cooperation. Participants will demonstrate such cooperation is not only necessary, but inevitable for positive next steps in democratization, human rights, sustainable development, EU integrations of WB, climate change and other cross-border topics. Young leaders have to learn from their peers from different regions, share their knowledge, ideas and know-how. Sustainable regional cooperation programs are therefore 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, project will in one place join experts from leading institutions in V4 and WB6, as well as leading youth organizations.

In light of all this, the Centre for European Perspective partnering with Bosnia and Herzegovina Association for United Nations, is opening the floor to youth and civil society of the Western Balkans, V4 and EU, giving them a chance to discuss their concerns, challenges, ideas and prospects with policy makers and experts.

You are therefore cordially invited to take part in a preparatory event in Sarajevo, leading to Young BSF 2019. Please RSVP at <http://bit.ly/2Srr4ZS> by 1st of August 2019.

5<sup>th</sup> August 2019, Monday, Hotel Europe

Dress Code: Smart Casual

### 16.00 Welcome Addresses

Amer Kapetanović, Head of Political Department, Regional Cooperation Council

### 16.20 - 18.00 Youth and Euro-Atlantic Integrations of Western Balkans and the role of V4

Speakers:

Katja Geršak, Director, Centre for European Perspective (CEP)

Jan Zlatan Kulenović, CEO, Social Innovation Incubator MUNJA

Dr Filip Radunović, Sector Fund Manager, Open Regional Fund Southeastern Europe - EU Integration, GIZ Sarajevo

Anna Orosz, Research fellow, Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade (IFAT)

Vladimír Bartovic, Director, EUROPEUM

Moderator: Jasmina Banjalučkić, Secretary General, Youth Council of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Background: Youth that is committed to European values and that can participate in voicing its views is crucial for the development of a responsive and resilient civil society. The first step comes through educating youth, which is an obligation that each state should undertake to achieve to its largest possible extent. This is in the interest of a society at large as it is through investments in networks and structures of education that it is possible to foster the

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human capital of each individual. Only through this accumulation of knowledge and understanding can awareness grow within the new generations in order to take on leadership roles that can help navigate the V4 and Western Balkans towards greater normative and political integration of states around democratic and just causes. With current high youth unemployment rate and facing a challenge of matching the academic offer to the needs of the market, EU and WB have to set to create closer links between formal education, non-formal and informal learning. Additionally, in the rise of extremism and intolerance in Europe, it has become increasingly important to foster social and civic competences and encouraging active citizenship in youth, therefore, a strong emphasis has to be put on the youth work and youth participation. With this round-table we wish to explore the experience of EU, V4 and WB in better involvement of youth, as well as their role in Euro-Atlantic integrations of WB.

## **18.00 – 18.30 Coffee break**

## **18.30 – 20.00 Let's talk about Cross-Regional Cooperation: WB6, V4 and EU**

### Participants:

H.E Jakub Skalník, Ambassador of the Czech Republic

Ms Ágnes Angyal Chargé d'Affaires, Embassy of Hungary

H.E Jarosław Lindenber, Ambassador of the Republic of Poland

Mr Attila Szép, Counsellor, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of the Slovak Republic

Borut Valenčič, Charge d'affaires, Embassy of the Republic of Slovenia

### Moderator:

Mak Selimović, President, Bosnia and Herzegovina Association for United Nations

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Background: Regional cooperation is a multilateral approach of increasing collaboration, enhancing interconnectivity of societies, as well as boosting economic and social development. In theoretical framework, the concept of regional cooperation, especially the one built on cherishing democratic values, is designed to boost cooperation of societies in resolving common objectives by sharing a common vision and best practices – all in order to resolve complex transnational matters. In practice, however, this cooperation results in forming a stronger sense of mutual understanding and respect, followed up by a subtle creation of a common, regional identity. Relevant and successful examples of this cooperation are nowadays visible throughout the world, with the European Union as a leading example. Therefore, it comes with no surprise that the European Union is calling upon countries of the Western Balkans to increase engagement in regional cooperation of the WB6, both as a means of finding solutions to common problems, as well as boost interconnectivity intra WB6.

However, the question that this panel will seek to answer why is cross-regional cooperation important in the SEE region and whether or not the-already-existing cross-regional cooperation between Visegrad 4 and Western Balkans 6 can be further developed in resolving complex matters of common interest. Finally, this round table will serve as an occasion to asses cross-regional opportunities, threats and obstacles in cooperation.

## 20.00 – 22.00 Reception



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6<sup>th</sup> August 2019, Tuesday, Hotel Europe

Dress Code: Smart Casual

## 9.00 – 11.30 Visegrad Café

### Format Description

World Café (or Visegrad Café in our case) is an interactive form of discussion. The room will be set up in a café style. Each table (4 tables) will cover one topic and each table will have project representatives who moderate and facilitate the discussion. Two project partner representatives are together responsible for one pre-assigned topic, moderation and encouraging the discussion, posing additional questions and keeping the notes of the main points of the discussion.

Public will contribute to the discussion on each of the topics and support it with a pre-prepared set of data, research conclusions and materials.

Participants switch tables after 30 minutes to converse with a new mix of participants. Once all rounds of conversation are complete, project partner representatives will present the main conclusions of each discussion.

Topics (further descriptions will be sent to applicants)

- Democratization, European Integrations, Corruption, Political Rhetoric, Freedom of the press - disinformation, role of media; influence of foreign actors (China, Russia,...) Security in the region, Border control, Hybrid Threats [IFAT + SFPA]
- Human rights, Minorities, Women Empowerment [BETA Poland, Model UN Prague]

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- SDGs, Sustainability, Climate change, Economy, Youth Inequality, Entrepreneurship, Technology, Emigration, Brain drain, Migrations – [V4SDGS + BHA UN]
- Regional cooperation, Development, Reconciliation (and role of youth) and mobility of youth – [EUROPEUM + CEP]

## 11.30 – 12.00 Coffee Break

**12.00 – 13.00 Public Debate:** Presentation of conclusions from Visegrad Café and Q&A

Format Description:

Moderator introduces the topic. The floor is given to each of the topic groups: democratization, human rights, SDGs and reconciliation. Each group has to present the overview of the topic, burning issues, examples of good practices and policy recommendations in 5 minutes. Afterwards we open the floor for discussion and Q&A with the public.

Participants:

**Anna Korienieva**, Secretary-General, Model United Nations Prague z.s.

**Rafal Fabianowicz**, V4 External Relations Officer, V4SDG

**Jana Juzová**, Research Fellow, EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy

**Juraj Hajko**, Project Manager/Analyst, Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA)

Moderator: **Meliha Muherina**, Project Manager, Centre for European Perspective (CEP)

## 13.00 – 14.00 Lunch

## ANNEX I – BACKGROUND FOR VISEGRAD CAFÉ

### 1. Impacts of European integration and other external actors (state of democratization, security issues), prepared by IFAT and SFPA

#### Introduction

As part of the Young BSF, the participants will have the chance to exchange their views about the challenges and the opportunities of the Western Balkans, among others, the Euro-Atlantic/European integration process as the main reform agenda setting framework for the countries of the region as well as the consequences of the presence and activities of other external actors like Russia, China, Turkey, etc.

The participants will analyse the state of democratic standards in the region, including regional cooperation, resolution of bilateral disputes, the level of corruption, political rhetoric, the state of the freedom of the press. The EU is fostering developments in these areas but despite these efforts there are many signs of backsliding. On the other hand, there are also positive examples like in case of North Macedonia which managed to resolve its disputes with Greece and Bulgaria and whose government managed to build better cooperation with the civil society. Albania and Montenegro successfully joined NATO, while accession protocol of North Macedonia is under ratification. The participants will discuss the root causes of these tendencies and think about the factors that facilitate positive changes.

Furthermore, security issues will be on the agenda that can pose further challenges for the countries and their transformation. Political and economic agenda of other external actors like Russia and China can provide incentives to local decision-makers to deviate from the agenda set through the EU and NATO integration process. What tools are at the disposal of pro-EU/NATO actors and these organizations which could strengthen their leverage and foster reforms?

#### Main issues

The Western Balkan countries have defined the European integration process as their strategic priority and strengthened their political and economic relations with the European Union and its Member States. The reform process has managed to bring some results in the beginning but as the accession process is prolonging, the impacts and the political leverage of the EU seem to diminish or at least weaken in couple of areas.

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The EU is encouraging the resolution of bilateral disputes among the Western Balkan countries as it is vital for the region's development. It managed to launch the dialogue between Belgrade and Prishtina but in the last few years relations between Kosovo and Serbia deteriorated seriously. Serbia strongly lobbies against membership of Kosovo in any international organization, while Kosovo started to transform its security forces into an army and raised tariffs for the products from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Instead of searching for solution through the dialogue, other solutions like land swap, demarcation change were raised that might have serious consequences for the whole region. The positive example – to the contrary – is the Prespa Agreement between Greece and North Macedonia, and the agreement between Bulgaria and North Macedonia. Both were inevitable for Skopje to be able to return to Euro-Atlantic integration path. Without the political will on the side of these countries and concentration on the better future, these agreements could not have been reached. It was hoped that North Macedonia – together with Albania – would be given green lights in June and accession talks can start. But due French attitude and short period of time available to assess the progress reports prepared by the European Commission, this did not happen, but the decision was postponed to October. Promoters of EU enlargement raise alarm that this way EU can jeopardize the credibility of the accession process and undermine incentives for reconciliation.

Meanwhile consolidation of democratic institutions and practices suffers. Role of national parliaments were undermined by either by political boycotts or widespread use of urgent procedures. Reports of ombudsmen and independent institutions are regularly neglected while many dominant political actors abuse their positions to directly or indirectly downgrade democratic institutions (often by playing by the rules). Meanwhile political rhetoric is getting harsher and there is a lack of political will to work on compromises. In Albania this led to a serious political crisis level while in Bosnia and Herzegovina it harms the operation of the state through a constant political stalemate.

Freedom of the press is undermined by strong political influence and pressure on independent media actors. This influence often carried out through the ownership or financial promotion of the given media outlet and the distribution of state funds and promotion. Corruption and state capture are also prevalent in the region that hinder the reform processes at almost all levels of the state and in various segment of the economy. The Nations in Transit index of the Freedom House show that in both areas (media, corruption) there were either hardly any development or backsliding. This raised many concerns regarding the normative power of the European Union. The reform process is further harmed by the internal debate of the EU and similar backsliding tendencies in some EU countries like Hungary and Poland.

The picture is even more complicated if other challenges and security issues are considered. From the security point of view, the migration crisis that had erupted in 2015 represents a game-changer. While stability aspects



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in the Western Balkans were also on the agenda, the increased role of the Western Balkan states in the management of the Balkan migration route through which hundreds of thousands of people tried to reach the EU changed priorities for the EU too. Strengthening cooperation in border control and management of migration flows became a dominant issue for the EU-Western Balkan cooperation. And although it is not in the spotlight at the moment, countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina face serious problems how to handle the situation on its borders with Croatia.

The transformation process in the region is further complicated by the presence and aspirations of some other external actors. Russia, especially since the conflict in Ukraine strengthened its efforts to challenge the model of the EU and NATO in the region by questioning reconciliation processes and Western values through its propaganda and disinformation channels and advocates among academia, civil society, clerics and political actors. Its political influence is also enhanced by its dominance in the energy sector in the region. It is particularly strong in Serbia which takes advantage from the veto power of Russia in the UN Security Council. (Kosovar leaders recently stated that if EU fails to change the stalemate in the Kosovo-Serbia conflict, USA needs to be incorporated in the talks. That would seriously undermine the prestige of the EU as facilitator of the solution.) However, it is to be added that Russia has not managed to block any countries accession to NATO so far that was willing to join.

China tries to apply its economic interests in the Balkans through its loans that are less connected to democratic conditionality like EU funds. This makes these funds very attractive for local political actors who are not willing to meet the EU requirements. On the other hand, these loans might lead to serious indebtedness towards China which can increase Beijing's political influence in the future.

## Conclusions

In the last few years we experienced a serious deterioration of EU leverage in the Western Balkan region which has both internal and external causes. As a consequence of many internal problems of the EU, the Member States' readiness to accept new members became very low and unwillingness to meet its own promises harms the credibility of the enlargement process. In parallel with this process, the political will of local political actors in the region to carry out reforms decreased and try to take advantage of the competition of various actors in the Balkans, including Russia, China, and the United States.

North Macedonia was a refreshing positive example for the region that could demonstrate the possibility of resolving hard and long-lasting political disputes with its neighbours in a peaceful manner. The next step

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should be taken by the European Union to prove that it is a trustworthy partner and to demonstrate its real engagement towards the reform process in North Macedonia and the wider Western Balkan region.

## Questions

- Could we draw on the reconciliation between Northern Macedonia and Greece? What type of solution could be arranged between Serbia and Kosovo? Federica Mogherini will be probably replaced by Spaniard Josep Borrell who is in line with Madrid's denial of Kosovo recognition. Should we therefore expect freezing of the current state of Kosovo-Serbia conflict for five years?
- What should we expect from the new EU diplomacy chief Josep Borrell regarding the Kosovo-Serbia issue?
- What steps should we adopt to avoid apathy from postponing of opening of accession talks to EU? How could the Visegrad countries help the region?
- Do we have tools to help with Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina with their internal political crisis?
- Is the opening of the accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia likely to happen later this year? What can be done to tackle political instability in Albania? How should EU respond, keeping in mind France's disapproval of the enlargement in the short term?
- How to strengthen media freedom in the region? V4 countries also have a worsening record in this regard, though they still perform better than the Western Balkan states in general. What can be done to stop this trend?
- How to handle the growing influence of China in Balkans? Do we have to consider Russia's role crucial in the region or not anymore? How to make EU more attractive and its funds more available?

## 2. Human Rights, prepared by BETA Poland and Model UN Prague

### Introduction

Nowadays, human rights are understood as a set of norms and moral principles inherent to all of human beings regardless of gender, race, nationality, religion or any other status. The concept as we know today, dates back to the European Enlightenment. Back then some of so-called natural rights (such as life, liberty and property) were recognised as a backbone of good society. Consequently, in the late 18th century human rights were first incorporated to constitutional texts in France and in newly born United States of America. Despite their claimed universality, these early human rights declarations did not secure the rights of minorities such as black population, women or factory workers. Yet throughout the 19th century, simultaneously to industrial revolution new groups claimed ‘privileges’ in order to be treated equally (cf. suffragettes, labour unions and broad phenomenon of humanitarian movements).

After the atrocities of both world wars, representatives of states assembled in United Nations, agreed that there is a need for reaffirmation of faith in fundamental rights of individuals. As a result, in 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was accepted by the United Nations’ General Assembly. Declaration is not a binding law for UN members, but most of the states integrated main ideas into their legal system. UDHR lays the basis for modern international human rights law, influencing the understanding of what human rights are and how to protect them. Existing mechanisms addressing violations of human rights on the international arena are weak as the Declaration is not a binding international treaty and United Nations are not able to force any state to change its internal policy.

### Challenges

The main concept standing behind recognition of human rights was to secure the rights of minorities and underprivileged groups of people, so that the majority and authorities would face restrictions on their actions. However, human rights are constantly evolving together with society to much views and definitions what the basic human rights should be.

The cornerstone of UDHR is the idea that every single human being is entitled to the same rights and freedoms. In 30 articles, Declaration is recognising basic principles of non-discrimination, right to live and freedom, civil and political liberties, followed by economic, social and cultural rights. All recognised freedoms and rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent, which means that none of them should be perceived as more important than others. They are also often perceived as essentials for modern society and democracy,

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with pillars such as freedom of speech (cornerstone of protection of all other freedoms) and right to equal treatment under the law.

However, at the same time, we are often hearing news that some people around the world face violence and inequality on daily basis where codified rights does not sufficiently secure their rights. We want to limit our discussion to two dimensions: protection of minorities, with a special regard to women and to re-interpretation of the term ‘privacy’ in the modern world.

- **PRIVACY**

In times of the internet and social media, we should discuss where is the new frontier in what is private and what is public and to reinterpret the right to privacy. Each internet user is exposed to the risk of profiling, identity threat and various personal data breach. Companies may gain financial gains from high level profiling of users thanks to data mining or from sharing user's personal details to third-party tools/applications. Of course, data mining technology based on information shared by internet users, is able to provide better customer service i.e. through recommendation of potential purchases for ecommerce users. As citizens we should find the appropriate balance between proportionate and lawful surveillance (by governments and by companies) and personal privacy.

- **MINORITIES**

In social sciences, minority is described as a certain group of people that differs from members of dominant social group. Additionally, such distinction is based on differences in various observable characteristics as race, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity or disability. Very often people from minorities are experiencing diverse barriers to basic services (education, reliable health care) and are subjected to discrimination, stigmatisation and violence including tortures or executions.

Currently, many human rights organisations are advocating for laws and policies that will protect everyone’s dignity. They lobby for more equal treatment of minorities and elimination of various restrictions imposed on them.

- **WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

Now-famous saying goes: “women’s rights are human rights”. Women’s rights belong to the fundamental human rights that were enshrined by the United Nations for every human being on the planet nearly 70 years ago. Being seemingly on the right track, the global community still struggles with numerous issues in this area, namely sexual and other forms of violence, holding higher managerial positions, equal pay and many others.

The Global Gender Gap Index introduced by the World Economic Forum in 2006 captures the magnitude of gender-based disparities and tracking their progress over time. According to it to date there is still a 32.0%

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average gender gap that remains to be closed. Across the four subindexes the largest gender disparity is present in Political Empowerment. Economic Participation and Opportunity gap is the second-largest, while Educational Attainment together with Health and Survival gaps are significantly lower..

Women's empowerment is highly discussed topic at this moment. The situation is especially critical in countries with authoritarian regimes based on gender subordination and ideologies of male dominance. Empowerment, however, is also an issue in the Western World. The largest comprehensive study of the state of women in corporate America conducted by McKinsey & Company showed that for every 100 men promoted to manager, just 79 women are promoted.

## Summary

From the perspective of a person surrounded by all the comforts and conveniences of modern life it is easy to be lured by the thought that all people have equal access to all necessary sources to live decent lives. As above mentioned introduction of the topic shows we are still far from globally distributed merit of human rights to each and every person at the same extent. Therefore, as representatives of young generation we bear this responsibility for better future on our shoulders. We cannot stay silent, we have to know, we have to speak up and we have to deal with those issues.

While better education and information access could greatly improve current situation in privacy debate, minorities' rights as well as greater women's participation in all spheres of life can only be ensured through more complex and fundamental change in the society social construction of those terms. Both public and private sectors should be more involved in creation of better conditions for equal treatment for all groups of people.

## Questions

1. Should we limit human rights to abolition of discrimination or push forward affirmative action?
2. Re-interpretation of human rights: right to privacy in the time of the internet
3. Equality as a pillar of human rights?
4. What are the ways to close gender gap in male-dominated societies like the Middle East?
5. How should violence against women be tackled?

### **3. Multi-dimensional perspectives in Central and Eastern European countries (CEE) with a particular focus on sustainable development, prepared by V4SDG and BHA UN**

This preparation paper touches mainly on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, sustainability, climate change, economy, youth inequality, technology, emigration and brain drain within the CEE region. The structure includes background information, current issues, potential solutions, and possible questions for the debate at the Bled Forum.

#### Introduction

According to recent research, the majority of the CEE region belongs to the so-called emerging markets. Those countries have gone through different stages of transformation after the fall of the iron curtain and experienced what some would define as "lower levels of socioeconomic development compared to Western European countries, historical events primarily including the period of the so-called 'people's democracy, neglected infrastructure, and geographical location". Some of those states have already joined the European Union (EU), which has increased their performance in terms of democracy, rule of law, economy, and sustainable development, while the majority of Western Balkans countries are currently negotiating accession into the EU.

In summary, relevant experts would argue that the situation in relation to the problem of sustainable development in the CEE countries is showing gradual improvement and a positive trend for the future. However, as for now, none of the analysed countries are included in the group characterized by a favourable situation in this area.

#### Current hopes and fears within the CEE countries

Out of 10 countries of the WB6 and V4, the Czech Republic has scored a rank seven on the Sustainable Development Report (2019), and thus the best score among the observed countries. This is a remarkable success for an emerging market region (for comparison purposes, Hungary is ranked 25th, Serbia is ranked 44th, Bosnia and Herzegovina 69th, and Montenegro 87th). Despite this encouraging news coming from the V4 countries, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, and Poland blocked a final agreement on a joint EU deal systematically tackle climate change.

This controversial trend shows the current status quo in the region: the CEE area lacks a coherent policy. Several CEE countries say emerging market and its subsequent regions cannot afford this kind of change, at least at the moment. More than 10 EU countries, mostly from the CEE region, depend on coal in their energy

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mix. Investing in innovation without a budget, while closing the coal industry by losing jobs and profits seems to be a deal breaker for the CEE region.

On the other hand, recent reports show that „Annual emissions from the 16 plants (16 GW) in the Western Balkans are almost as high as from the 296 existing plants (156 GW) in the EU-28”. That being said, although that the majority of countries of the Western Balkans remain to be large air pollution emitters, specifically of sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>), many governments of the Western Balkans see a further expansion of coal power plants as a means of increasing energy independency -- at the expense of further increasing their air pollution toxic output.

However, according to the Paris Agreement we need to transform whole systems through innovative approach in order to build resilience and decarbonize at a rate fast enough to reach the 1.5° target reduction and net-zero emissions in Europe and the world. Otherwise, we face extreme forms of nature, which are going to let us "live "in "unliveable "circumstances. The CEE region has to overcome a complex task with weaker conditions than their Western European fellows in a "must accomplish situation "of a greater good setting.

Next, to the critical findings concerning climate change and sustainability, the CEE region faces different inequalities, e.g., affecting youth. Paring youth inequality with deficits in sustainability, we are facing a generational danger. According to Signorelli (2017), youth in transition economies (for example Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia) experience two- or three-times higher unemployment rates than adults and are more unlikely to find employment in recessions than seniors. "In contrast to planned economies, transition and market economies have much higher and unstable unemployment rates, especially when it comes to youth unemployment”.

Besides impressive research results in Eastern European countries, the World Bank (2016) has published a report about youth unemployment in South-Eastern Europe (SEE). According to this paper, the SEE region faces high youth unemployment, higher immigration rates towards e.g., Western Europe, gender barriers, higher vulnerability towards an economic decrease in comparison to adults (while economic growth impacts youth quicker), high labour taxation for low-wage and part-time workers (where youth is over-represented) and a lack of access to finance/land and connections.

## Potential Solutions

By a "just transition," all actors in society such as unions, industry, public administration, governments, civil society try to find "what is best for their regions and communities, from creating good quality jobs to identifying sustainable alternatives.”. In that respect, just transition is a multilateral and collective approach entailing several governments as well as societies at large, to tackle complex challenges as mentioned above,

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which transforms society and tackles not only climate change, but also increases employment, entrepreneurship, and technology, ideally targeting the creation of smart and clean cities as an overall aim. Just transition is not only a theoretical construct. Crucial conclusions by the ILO – shows that the so-called green economy can create 24 million jobs by 2030. „Some regions are expected to benefit more than others in the transition. Asia and the Pacific, the Americas, and Europe, are set for net gains of 14 million, 3 million, and 2 million jobs respectively “.

Currently, we experience new multilateral developments in the region:

1. The new V4 presidency led by the Czech Republic (Ministry, 2019) has added a specifically dedicated paragraph on the Agenda 2030 to their program. Therefore, we can identify an increase in regional political support for sustainable solutions. Regional support is a reliable indicator for a positive future considering the EU is instead advocating sustainability in the V4 and WB6 regions.
2. Under the Romanian presidency of the Council of the European Union, an increasing awareness on environmental policy has been achieved by organizing hearings of the environmental council, which had under consideration its responsibility under the Paris Agreement, Agenda 2030, biodiversity and water management.

## Questions for debate

- How can citizens support just transition in the CEE region?
- In the framework of just transition, all actors of society can support these exemplary projects by supporting their governments with inputs and ideas. For people interested, but not sure, how to issue their opinions, you can find a little workshop by French professor Alberto Alemanno how to conduct "citizen lobbying „<https://ideas.ted.com/you-yes-you-can-use-your-skills-ideas-and-energy-to-fix-democracy/>. We could create a 10 steps manual for citizen activities concerning just transition.
- How to minimize the costs of just transition?
- What areas or aspects of the just transitions should be tackled first in the CEE region?
- How could entrepreneurship and technology eliminate youth inequalities in the region?
- What are the main barriers of the region concerning joint action for sustainable development?

## 4. Reconciliation, prepared by EUROPEUM and CEP

### Introduction

Reconciliation, regional cooperation and good neighborly relations are one of the key factors for Western Balkan countries' democratization and European integration. The wars in the 1990s among the successor states after the dissolution of Yugoslavia left the region economically, politically and socially devastated and the Western Balkan countries are still dealing with their consequences. The societies are vulnerable to abuse of nationalist and inflammatory rhetoric by their political leaders and the nationalist sentiments are still running high in the region. Corrupt and autocratic politicians engage in efforts focused on enhancing the reconciliation process and regional cooperation as well as solving bilateral disputes with their neighbors mainly only on a declaratory level when appeasing the external actors and main donors, i.e. the EU and USA and any real commitment and implementation is often lacking. In reality, societies in the Western Balkan countries remain deeply divided along ethnic lines and carry on the mutual ethnic prejudices and grievances created during the past conflicts.

These factors create special circumstances for the EU enlargement to the Western Balkans in comparison to previous enlargements in the past and regional cooperation and good neighborly relations are included among the membership conditions for the Western Balkan countries although this was not the case for any of the previous enlargements. However, really sustainable and successful regional cooperation and good relations with neighboring countries cannot be achieved without a real dedication to reconciliation at the level of governments but neither without involvement of civil society, local communities, improved education countering the negative nationalistic narratives etc.

### Challenges

The support from the EU to the reconciliation process in the Western Balkans has normative grounds rooted in the history of European integration itself building upon rapprochement between post-WWII France and Germany. The European Coal and Steel Community, first result of the European integration project, was based on the idea of uniting former enemies in the pursuit of shared interests and engaging them in constructive and pragmatic cooperation. The same logic and approach is applied by the EU to the Western Balkan countries with the Franco-German rapprochement serving sometimes as an inspiration for the promotion of reconciliation in the Western Balkans.

In February 2018, the European Commission released the Strategy for the Western Balkans titled "A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans" and reconciliation has a strong place in it. The Strategy identifies the aspects of reconciliation where more efforts are needed –

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strengthening of regional cooperation initiatives (mainly focused on youth – RYCO); progress in the process of transitional justice - fate of missing persons, refugees and IDPs (support to RECOM and similar initiatives); cultural exchange and protection of cultural heritage (e.g. the EU-WB Heritage Route which is already in place); education towards greater tolerance, European values and strengthening the cohesion of society; solution to border disputes and any other open bilateral issues before EU integration; and last but not least, constructive and responsible rhetoric by the leaders of the region and the discourse they create.

What should also be strived towards in trying to overcome cultural and historical barriers is to foster experiences of bilateral education for youth. This would come under a form similar to that of the EU's Erasmus program that exemplifies the use of common funds towards providing students the opportunity to travel, learn new didactic methods and encounter new people through intellectual dialogue. If the seeds of comprehension, connection and dialogue with the “perceived other” can be planted in each individual at youth then greater are the chances for forming adults with open mentalities. This means extending the opportunities of education to all students and not principally city-dwelling ones. Large part of nationalist discontent and from where most historical grievances remain come from the rural country side.

Reconciliation and regional cooperation are supported not only by the European Commission but also through platforms led by some EU member states – the Berlin Process and to some extent also the Visegrad Group. With the launch of the Berlin Process in 2014, a new momentum for regional cooperation in the Western Balkans was created, stressing the role and importance of achieving reconciliation and inter-societal dialogue in the region. The focus of the Berlin Process lies mainly on practical cooperation, resolution of remaining disputes in a pragmatic way with shared interests and joint progress in mind and on advancement of reconciliation as a stepping stone for sustainable economic development in the entire region.

The Visegrad countries, sharing with the Western Balkans a similar experience with communist past and painful transformation, Euro-Atlantic integration, sometimes difficult inter-ethnic relations, bilateral disputes and in the case of Czech Republic and Slovakia also dissolution of joint state, openly support development of regional cooperation and the European perspective for the region, especially since their own accession to the EU in 2004. The activities of the civil society organizations focused on democratic governance and institutions and role of civil society as an active player in the region's democratic transition, improvements in education and mobility programs focused mainly on young people, as well as interconnecting the region on the level of local communities and civil societies, are supported by the Visegrad governments especially through the International Visegrad Fund and its Visegrad+ program focused on support to neighboring regions (Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership countries). The International Visegrad Fund also served as a model for the establishment of the Western Balkans Fund in 2017, with financial assistance by the Visegrad countries,

# • Visegrad Fund

which is supposed to enhance cooperation and ties between the Western Balkan countries namely on the level of civil society and local communities.

## Questions of Discussion:

1. Have WB Balkan countries been doing enough for reconciliation?
2. Should Balkan countries strive for integration with the EU, even if there is no clear roadmap for their integration by the EU?
3. Is EU enlargement an inherent good both for those already part of it and those seeking to access?
4. How important would creating a security architecture common to the WB be, beyond NATO?
5. How important is judicial reform for a country aiming for economic and social development?
6. What can be the tangible effects of bottom up intra-state project cooperation?