

UNIVERSITY

DEBATES

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Policy

Recommendations

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FIGHTING AGAINST HOAXES AND FAKE NEWS DURING PANDEMICS/CRISES IN THE EU

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RECOMMENDATION 1 (EDUCATION)

“Should explain to the students the basic principles of checking information on the Internet”

Firstly, the higher the quality of education, the less is the society influenced by fake news and hoaxes. However, in a situation with a corona virus pandemic, there is a shortage of funds. This is why global changes in the education system should not be expected. Moreover, the results of the changes in the educational system will show up only after some time. Here are some recommendations how to get changes faster:

1) Ministries of education could issue a recommendation for secondary schools to set up a conversation with students about misinformation on the web. They should explain to the students the basic principles of checking information on the Internet. This will help at least a bit to reduce the trustfulness of youth to doubtful news sources.

2) Across all the member states of the EU, advertising should be made for a youth web site, which would contain disclosures of nowadays-fake news (Europol, for example). Besides websites, there are a lot of mobile applications, which help in checking the information.

RECOMMENDATION 2 (INTERNAL POLICY)

Even though the governments have a wide range of tools to stop spreading fake-news, sometimes they are tied up with the freedom of speech. In order to avoid violations of human rights, governments have to be resourceful. Here are some recommendations:

1) Creation of a black list of advertisers and media outlets. Banning them could be considered a violation of freedom of speech. As an alternative, this black list could have a recommendatory nature. Moreover, there should be criteria, which clearly define the distributors of fake news. According to these criteria, advertisers and media outlets could be put on a black list.

2) Governments should engage with digital platforms more actively. Social networks like Twitter or Facebook, or a search engine like Google could incorporate in their news feeds and search queries the possibility of launching a real-time fact-checking powered by their own companies, by a selected third party, or even by roster of possible providers.

RECOMMENDATION 3 (INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION)

“We consider it to be very pivotal for countries and governments to cooperate within this realm”

Governments alone are not strong enough to stop the spreading of the fake news and hoaxes throughout the whole world. That is why we consider it to be very pivotal for countries and governments to cooperate within this realm. Here are some recommendations:

1) Countries should start by establishing social media accounts/web pages, where they would name biggest websites that are spreading hoaxes and fake news. States could start cooperating with their neighbours/regional blocks (BENELUX, V4...)

2) The governments should expose concrete fake news, explain why it is deceiving and post a link to the relevant source which states the facts. Then they should do whatever they can to spread these informations on Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms.

EUROPEAN UNION ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

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Interviewed persons: Jelica Stefanović Štambuk, Ministry of European Integration, Goran Čabradi, Member of National Assembly of Serbia and Green Party (Zelena stranka), Tatjana Macura, Party of Modern Serbia, Member of Environmental Committee in National Assembly of Serbia (Stranka moderne Srbije)

NATIONAL POSITION

At the beginning of the year, Serbia handed over negotiating position for Chapter 27 - Environment in the accession process with the EU. Bearing in mind the existing framework within the EU, European Green New Deal, and goals for environmental change during the interviews we identified the usage of renewable sources as a common goal for both the EU and the Western Balkan countries. One of possible solutions, mentioned during the interview, was the usage of energy through mini hydropower plants. Mini hydropower plants were invented as one of the ways to make clean and sustainable energy. Both Mr. Cabradi and Ms. Stefanović-Štambuk mentioned that many EU countries have installed these plants but few of them are experiencing some negative effects that they could potentially have. Some environmental areas are experiencing negative effects on freshwater biodiversity. As previously mentioned, the construction of mini hydropower plants can lead to environmental degradation, destruction of natural resources and limitation of local populations' access to clean water.

In Serbia, we faced serious backlash in the construction and usage of these power plants. In particular there could be another way for exploitation of resources without serious disruption of biodiversity, ecosystem - the power from mini hydropower projects could be exceeded with other renewable sources, particularly solar and wind, but also

biomass and geothermal energy. Maybe mini hydropower plants provide a cheaper and easier way to meet EU expectations, but investing in larger clean energy projects can be beneficial for a long term period.

In order to try to meet renewable targets as a part of effort to join the European Union, Serbia decided to grant permissions for making mini hydropower plants. Serbia mainly relies on coal for its electricity, but hydropower is an important fraction of energy. Mini hydropower plants, on the other hand, would provide a tiny fraction of energy, but could have devastating effects on nature and local communities. One of the biggest problems is breaking the law and regulations in this field. The state power company EPS offers subsidies, it offers 50% higher price for the electricity produced by these hydropower plants than the market rate. This has become a way to earn “easy” money by inexperienced individuals and companies. We can see that benefits are very small and only for certain people and that the damage is huge for our biodiversity, our citizens (they are the ones who are paying for this through their bills) and that we are still far away from sufficient energy efficiency. The corruption activities are further deepened by not following the procedures for getting the licence and often skipping terrain investigation for making sure the plant is safe for nature and biodiversity. There is a great number of these plants built in protected areas which is (or should be) strictly against the law in Serbia. In general, if all of the mini hydropower plants get built it would mean that about 2400 kilometres of rivers in the most vulnerable regions will be put into tubes. Many villages are using the water from these rivers for irrigation, cattle breeding, building local tourism and some rivers serve for production of clean water used for ordinary activities. Also, it has a lot of damage for the living world near the rivers. Local communities in Serbia have been fighting against building mini hydropower plants for more than two years. The situation escalated in some local areas and turned into protests even in Belgrade. We can make the conclusion that the major problem is the fact that we only transcribed a model from other countries and tried to make it work for Serbia. That is not possible because Serbia has its own differences and we have to make a model that will work for us. That’s why we decided to analyze the potential in this area by recognizing

the problems, but also looking for possible solutions. Both for the EU and the Western Balkan countries.

This is also a problem which includes all neighbouring countries, both EU members and non-EU states. We must find possible ways to make some regional cooperation in this field that could provide a possible solution of this problem, bearing in mind that the water is one of the most important resource for human beings. We must also think that way, especially because Western Balkans has high potential for the use of renewable sources of energy, and together we can make bigger progress than by doing it individually.

RECOMMENDATION 1

“It must be ensured that power plants do not interfere with the agricultural production and daily life”

The EU should provide a more solid monitoring for Serbia’s (and other WB countries) implementation of recommendations close to Chapter 27 of the accession process.

Necessary measures should be taken to control and prevent negative impact of mini hydropower plants on the environment and the living world in rivers. These measures would consider the detailed control of building permits, and also carry out detailed tests on the conservation of endemic species of plants and animals in the vicinity of the rivers where mini hydropower plants are installed. What matters most is to provide environmentally sustainable flow of the river, everywhere where mini hydropower plants are built. It is also important to pay attention to the opinion of the engagement of local community to the construction and usage of power plants, which can be achieved by educating them about the positive and negative impacts, as well as the benefits they bring. It must be ensured that power plants do not interfere with the agricultural production and daily life of the people around them. The importance of EU action is reflected in the fact that the population would have the additional assurance that the

construction of power plants is beneficial and safe for them and their habitat and that all necessary measures have been taken to protect biodiversity. The EU as a security factor would allow the power plants to be built in the best possible way and their energy utilized to its full potential.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The EU could use its role in the Western Balkans and motivate Serbia to make a model that will work with its differences and potentially include the usage of other renewable sources such as solar energy, bioenergy, biomass, water, wind.

Apart from the fact that this could be cheaper and with more benefits, making this kind of model that will use only renewable sources can be an ideal solution for both the EU and not only Serbia, but for the entire Western Balkans (for example making windmills, solar power plants...). We will have more energy efficiency, it will be cheaper and there will be no harm for our nature, protected areas, living world in our rivers and for our citizens and local communities. Also, increasing the use of renewable sources of energy increases energy sustainability of our country. We identify this as one of common goals both for the EU and Member States. Bearing in mind all the incentives for better usage of the renewable resources we find this area with a growing potential for creating not only the EU but also the WB area as climate neutral space. This would allow the EU to push for both better implementation but also higher percent of renewable sources usage in producing electricity etc.

RECOMMENDATION 3

“The EU should take steps to encourage countries to create joint projects”

A possible alternative for the use of full potential of renewable energy is through regional cooperation.

This implies that the EU should take steps to encourage countries to create joint projects such as the construction of wind farms, solar, hydro and geothermal power plants. This makes it possible to share renewable (alternative) energy sources without obstacles. If we use these sources together, we can ensure greater energy efficiency. The Balkan region has very high potentials for the use of alternative energy sources, but individual states are unable to take steps on their own to exploit these potentials, because of financial, technological and other reasons. Through regional cooperation, energy would be more rationally distributed and any state with a surplus in production could divert it to surrounding countries, leading to a significant reduction in the use of fossil fuels and other harmful sources, but also creating greater possibilities for economic cooperation. The ultimate outcome of regional cooperation would be greater energy security and energy independence not only for the individual states but the entire region, also it would lead to significant reduction in the pollution rate.

ACCESSION PROCESS, CHINESE INVESTMENTS AND SOFT POWER, EDUCATION

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Two MPs of the Slovak Parliament and one representative of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs were interviewed.

ACCESSION PROCESS

We have asked two members of Parliament and one representative of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs what they think about accession processes within the recent Covid-19 pandemic and ongoing economic crisis. Should the EU still accept the countries, which are not able to fulfill Copenhagen criteria even before these two crises? All those interviewed answered that accession process of the Western Balkan countries is important for Slovakia, not only because we are long lasting partners, but there is also a Slovak diaspora living in Serbia. One of the MPs was eager to accept at least 2 countries despite the economic crisis and the outburst of the Covid-19 pandemic because he thought that this step could help the economies of those countries and will make a positive narrative about the EU. The other two representatives were more skeptical about the accession process within this period of time. According to them, if the countries are not able to fulfill even basic economic criteria anchored in Copenhagen criteria, the EU cannot really accept them during the upcoming economic crisis, because our own economy would devaluate, which could mean a weaker euro. However, all those interviewed noted that there is a great importance in demonstrating to these countries that the EU does care about them, because it could end same as in Serbia, where there are more and more pro-Russian feelings even though the EU is the biggest economic partner. One of the MPs also said, that the early accession of these countries could mean a massive increase of migration to V4 countries, because of cultural familiarity and at times of an economic crisis, this would be actually bad for Slovakia, because the crisis

already started by less work positions available and it would continue because of the focus of our country on automotive sector.

CHINESE INVESTMENTS AND SOFT POWER

In the last years, all V4 countries experienced Chinese foreign direct investments mainly because China was less hit by the economic crisis of 2008-2010. In the last years, however, we can see that these direct investments are here together with the soft power of the Chinese government. What could be done to address this issue? According to all three interviewed persons, China is not spending as much money in Slovakia as in the Czech Republic or in Hungary. However, two of them mentioned that in the last years, China was trying to get to Slovakia by several contracts and acquisition of some enterprises. Even though we were able to resist China's endeavors, we really have to think about the future, because after this crisis, China will be a winner again. According to one person, there will be a lot of FDIs that China would invest here after the crisis, but we would have to accept Chinese ways of doing things and also don't address the issues like Tibet, Taiwan or Uighurs.

EDUCATION

We were also asking our interlocutors about the educational system, if they thought that more federative model of education within the EU was a good idea to challenge propaganda and conspiracy issues. Two of the three interviewed persons were supportive of the concept of a more federative education system, only one opposed this idea.

ACCESSION PROCESS OF THE COUNTRIES OF WESTERN BALKAN

Only one MP was actually for accession process of Western Balkan countries under the Covid-19 pandemic and economic crisis. National position is though not as clear but it is against accession processes. We would agree with this statements and we would advise the EU to not start the processes until economic crisis will be overcome. We all can see the importance of accession processes for these countries and for democratic politicians who are advocating pro-European issues and politics within those countries. However, the economic crisis would hit several European countries really hard, Slovakia including. Since Slovakia started to focus on automotive industry decades ago, we ended up as the car production country for the EU. But through the economic crisis, people would buy less cars and that would mean a massive downfall of our economy, which would lead into a higher unemployment rate. And since because of Covid-19 pandemic more Slovaks came home from abroad and are not planning to go back, we would need any job reserved for our own population. Economic crisis and Covid-19 pandemic together with the accession into the EU would mean a massive move of people from the Western Balkan countries not only to the V4 countries but also to other European countries. This could and also would be another source for decrease of pro-European positions in the countries of the EU (mainly in the V4 countries, we have less educated population - according to them, most of the good things are because of Slovakia or Russia but all the bad things are because of EU - of course populism of our politicians for last decade could have helped this perception).

CHINESE INFLUENCE AND SOFT POWER WITH FDIS

“China succeeded mostly by focusing all their money on infrastructure projects”

We would agree with the national position on this issue. After the last economic crisis, China was able to recover faster than any other country in the world. China succeeded mostly by focusing all their money on infrastructure projects, which gave people work and also to invest into their own country and tourism. After this crisis, we saw some countries refusing help from IMF (as for example Hungary) and they accepted massive financial help from China. China went to Hungary, made some green-field investment projects and also acquired some of the big Hungarian enterprises in several sectors. They even built their European bases for Lenovo and Huawei in Hungary, because of conditions they received by the Hungarian government. By this step, China was able to dump the prices of many items because of Schengen and also was able to made items with the mark "made in Europe". This is the problem we will face after the crisis- that the Chinese are again focusing on infrastructure projects and even cancelling some investments in Africa or Europe. And since a lot of EU countries will be weakened by the crisis, we would not be able to refuse Chinese money, unless we will be strong as before the crisis. In our opinion, a great step would be to allocate even more money from structural and cohesion funds to stop people from losing their jobs. If the EU can do this step and focus solely on their weakest countries, we would be probably able to not only stop Chinese influence but also to increase the public image of the European Union in Slovakia. It would, however, need also massive campaign, because Chinese companies are doing it a lot. They not only use Confucius institutes but also their Embassies and Honorary Consulates and even are paying some public figures. This step would not stop only the Chinese influence but also the Russian influence, which is really strong in Slovakia, using our conspiracy media and other ways.

HOW TO ADDRESS THE RISE OF CONSPIRACY MEDIA AND RISE OF EXTREMIST TENDENCIES?

“Solution to this situation is to make education as a mix of competencies between the EU and national state where the national state would add the cultural and language pieces, however all the other things would be done by the EU to increase the quality”

In our opinion, the key to everything is the education. As we can see on Finnish case, their people are almost immune to the Russian propaganda, and there is causality in this issue. The most important step to fight against propaganda and conspiracy media is to increase the quality of our schools. But as we could see in the last decades, all Slovak politicians are aware of the complexity of this question. That means that almost nothing were done in the last years to address this issue. This is why we think, the best (and also the only) solution to this situation is to make education as a mix of competencies between the EU and national state where the national state would add the cultural and language pieces, however all the other things would be done by the EU to increase the quality. We need to get rid of the system, which is injustice, where young people from Finland are much more able to not only recognize what is propaganda or conspiracy and what is not but also to face the challenges of the new modern world.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING MUTUAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE EU AND MOLDOVA AND FOSTERING THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION PROCESS

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RECOMMENDATION 1

Improving the competitiveness of SMEs is one of the 11 thematic objectives for Cohesion Policy in 2014-2020. Small and medium-size enterprises are vital for the EU's economy, accounting for more than 99% of European businesses and two thirds of private sector jobs.

Therefore, for our national economy of the Republic of Moldova it is important to support the entrepreneurial environment as being of preparing for integration.

As we have noticed, during the COVID-19 pandemic a lot of enterprises could not deal with the hit of the crisis and are not as liquid as other larger ones, even in terms of basic economic indicators and as a consequence they were forced to shut down. As a recommendation: to set priorities when adjusting the financial help from the EU on the principle of Cohesion Policy inside the EU – to target solvable companies, companies with potential in growth and competitiveness, but which need help the most at the moment.

It is vital to have a meticulous control of these financial means, considering the high rate of corruption in our country also considering and adopting more the strategy of a direct help rather than through some state institutions.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Despite the pandemic situation which affected our economy, we are now facing natural hazards in terms of floods, landslides and hails which covered a big part of our country.

As we export most of the products from the agriculture and food industry and are more specialized in this sector, it is important now to give that leverage and priority to farmers from our countries and producers from this sector so that we could avoid the double hit.

RECOMMENDATION 3

“It would be beneficial for future cooperation to carry out more technical assistance projects, including a number of training and information sessions, study visits and workshops”

It would be beneficial for future cooperation to carry out more technical assistance projects, including a number of training and information sessions, study visits and workshops for participants from Moldova with the overall aim of strengthening bilateral co-operation by offering participants a source of reference when further developing their policy strategies and actions in order to promote better cross-border cooperation.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Speaking about smaller businesses which tend to be more flexible and quick to change than larger corporations, they are much more vulnerable to deterioration in the business environment especially in terms of pandemic. They are also more sensitive to harassment from government institutions and have fewer resources to draw on when times are hard.

The partnership with the EU institutions is key to SMEs success and helps to keep their work relevant. Only through an individual approach to each SMEs, by offering different grants, special credits and other forms of financial support, will overcome the current economic crisis may be overcome.

RECOMMENDATION 5

We recommend that the EU should contribute in the context of COVID-19 crisis besides the fact that Republic of Moldova does not comply with all the regulations. The main priority should be put on the people of the country and not on the political games.

RECOMMENDATION 6

**“The EU finds a way to connect to the people first,
in order to get other types of leverage”**

Does the EU have any leverage on Moldova besides the economic one?

We recommend that the EU finds a way to connect to the people first, in order to get other types of leverage besides the obvious economic one. When people will care enough, Republic of Moldova will make the steps to reach EU.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Why is the EU even interested in such a small developing country?

We suggest that the EU should focus on sending the message of WHY. Why do you care about us? It is shady to contribute and expect us to believe that it is because of your good heart.

MEDIA FINANCING AND MEDIA COMPETITIONS

Team Novi Sad, University of Novi Sad, Novi Sad, Serbia - Marko Apostolović, Stefan Dmitrašinović, Sanja Đorđević, Marko Lazić, Jelena Pavić

For the purpose of this research we contacted five government offices and two independent media representatives who participated in creating the current media strategy which is being improved right now. The current media strategy dates to 2014 and it changed the ways of funding media in Serbia. The strategy recommended competitions which turned out to be a good and easy way to cheat and give the money to the media who promote the government and whose owners are close to the ruling party.

CONCLUSIONS

“The new strategy will be a simple reflection of the old one”

1. Representatives of independent media want to change the strategy, while the authorities have no visible desire to really change anything. Dinko Gruhonjić, one of the representatives of independent media who participated in creating the current strategy explained: *Although we have good laws, money for local media which do their job consciously and with quality is not distributing properly by government, rather it is distributed to the “regime” media whose journalists praise the state authorities, or is given to the nonlocal Belgrade tabloid media who violate the Code of journalists of Serbia at the speed of light. There is no use of legislation if it is being used as a flexible way to “discipline” the media.*

2. Adoption of a new strategy gives the impression of masking real problems and the desire to silence the media. The new strategy will be a simple reflection of the old one and many Independent media representatives decided not to participate in drafting. Dubravka Valić Nedeljković, the other media representative says: *Serbian documents*

*(laws) are harmonised with so-called *acquis communautaire* of the EU and there are no special doubts because, after all, the EU approved all our laws, including the legislation of media. We are more concerned with a "creative" interpretation of legal provisions in Serbia that is always in line with the requirements of the ruling political and economic elites and not the public interest.*

3. Nobody from the executive and legislative power wants to talk about this topic, nevertheless they avoid the topic with standardized answers. This demonstrates the power of our government and their impact on the media and general public. On that topic, the State Secretary of the Ministry of Culture and Information **Aleksandar Gajović** gave a typically protocolar statement: *We didn't have a strategy before 2016. And it is really good that we have the current strategy now as a platform for new, better and more modern laws. But we already have good laws, so, in that way, Strategy (will) contain amended legal provisions. Strategy is a visionary platform that will help to make already existing laws better. On the other side, there is no perfect document, so of course that hat not everyone will be satisfied.*

When asked about the problem of law enforcement, Gajevic again said a general vague statement that all those who break the law should be punished, but that valid court procedures are needed before that.

RECOMMENDATION 1

“The EU representatives who are participating in the drafting should be educated about the problems of the media in Serbia and to insist on their solutions”

The EU representatives who are participating in the drafting should be educated about the problems of the media in Serbia and to insist on their solutions when drafting the strategy.

RECOMMENDATION 2

We note and recommend to Serbian government definition of the law in order to avoid such violations and abuses as funding government praising media.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Institutions should become more open so that every citizen has access to information of public importance, without excuses that elections are underway or statements that the person in charge is on a holiday. This happened with all of the parties involved who were contacted. When we contacted Public Investment Management Office and Commission for Protection of Competition whose representatives are involved in creating the Strategy, they told us that they do not expect anything groundbreaking when it comes to the new strategy. Also, they were not eager to talk about the situation regarding the media in Serbia, insisting that we e-mail them and ask for permission to impose questions. They never answered any of our requests stating that we are in the middle of elections and that they are understaffed because of the holidays. We persisted and only got a quote about their expectations which can be summarized in one sentence - The new strategy will be a reflection in the mirror of the old one.

FUTURE OF THE EU AND THE QUESTION OF MONTENEGRO BECOMING A FUTURE PART OF THE UNION

Team Podgorica, University of Montenegro, Montenegro - Aleksandra Simoni, Milena Mitrović, Kristina Šćepanović, Anđela Džaković, Sara Đoković

Interviewed persons: Andrija Popović – President of the Liberal Party of Montenegro and part of the Parliament of Montenegro; Draginja Vuksanović – Member of the Parliament of Montenegro for the Social Democratic Party; Adrijan Vuksanović – Member of the Parliament of Montenegro for the Croatian Civic Initiative and co-founder of the Montenegrin Pan – European Union

NATIONAL POSITION

“One of the biggest challenges on Montenegro's path towards the EU is certainly the regulation of media freedoms.”

Montenegro, as a transitional democracy has had the goal of achieving EU membership for more than two decades now. We have witnessed liberalization of Montenegro through domestic and foreign policy strategies, within the above mentioned time frame, but we cannot say for sure that democracy has been consolidated in Montenegro, as it is not yet the „the only game in town“. Thus, following the more experienced and reliable future partners, within the EU and its member states, remains one of the main goals in Montenegro's politics. The aim is to make the country stronger and more competitive, in a way that makes Montenegro more appealing to young, educated experts both domestic and foreign. We would like to build an image of a place where the future of the world wants to go, or stay - in the area of domestic population – in order to avoid human capital flights, the one way ones. In those processes Montenegro sees entry in the European

Union as the best possible way of achieving everything mentioned, and we hope that the EU sees us as prosperous future partner, considering all of the chapters are opened and screened, and we may even say that our country is the leader in the region, when it comes to integration process.

However, Montenegro still has a lot of issues in fields such as corruption prevention, nepotism, the implementation of the rule of law and the monitoring of the implementation of the protection of human rights, and citizens are aware of them. These issues must be dealt with prior to membership in the EU, as we see the EU as a new home, where all members take care of each other, not as asylum, or a safe house where we want to run away to, because we are facing problems in our own front lawn. One of the biggest challenges on Montenegro's path towards the EU is certainly the regulation of media freedoms. The reports of, per stance, the European Commission and the US State Department continue to underline that we need to do a lot more in this field. Attacks on investigative journalists, position of the public broadcaster, funding are some of the burning issues which are yet to be solved. The present struggles may, however, give us great amount of experience in order to be competitive with other countries when we finally join the alliance, as we have shown, for example, quick and effective responses to the current COVID19 crisis. Montenegro was, as you know, the last country in Eastern Europe struck by COVID19 cases, and the first to take so many serious precautionary measures, before the first official case of the virus appeared, with the result of being the first COVID19 safe country, with 0 active cases in Europe.

We are proud to say that Montenegro is on a good way of completing the negotiation process soon, we may conclude that the country is well committed to its European future, considering that two most difficult chapters are opened (23 and 24) and two of the chapters are provisionally closed (25 and 26). Changes that our country is going through are noticeable and we are every day a step closer to the standards of the countries in the alliance. We have come a long way, and we have a long way to go, because improving life standards in the country is a never ending process, but we are highly motivated, more with each passing day.

RECOMMENDATION 1: ENLARGEMENT OF THE EU

“The EU needs to make sure that it is ready for new member states”

The EU political system has not suffered from enlargement. We can see that the political integration of the Central and Eastern European countries (CEEC) has not undermined the EU's capacity to adopt and implement the EU law. The process of institutional EU enlargement has progressed slowly but steadily. In spite of strong fluctuations in enlargement events from year to year, new members have generally been able to integrate further, e.g. in the Euro and Schengen areas. Candidate countries have moved closer to membership or deepened their integration with the EU. However, the EU needs to make sure that it is ready for new member states. On the other hand, Eastern enlargement has not deepened economic divergence between old and new members. The way the EU has managed the economic integration has helped to bring in the buoyant market economies from Central and Eastern Europe afloat into the strongest regional market in the globe, and to turn their markets into important export destinations and production platforms for EU insiders. With populism, Brexit and external influence the EU needs to be prepared to overcome such serious threats. The EU's enlargement policy, in the candidate countries should provide channels for citizen's participation. Civil society programs and instruments, such as the ones used in the context of the Western Balkans, are useful and important. Above all, one of the main tasks for the EU should be seeking tools for empowering citizens in their push for reforming their own governments. Consultations and negotiations on difficult reforms should include citizens' representatives with their opinion and NGOs as equal partners rather than in optional consultation after the fact. In the member states, the EU should inform the population and civil society better about the rationale and progress of enlargement negotiations. This should be above all the task of member state governments, which are and will remain key veto players in enlargement negotiations. The information campaign and debates on

enlargement should not be left for the last moment when accession treaties have already been prepared. Instead, governments should inform the public of key decisions.

RECOMMENDATION 2: QUESTION OF SIMPLIFYING THE CRITERIA FOR JOINING THE EUROPEAN UNION AND PROCESS OF DEVELOPING THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

“The EU should not derogate its criteria for the sake of faster progress of the candidate states”

“The integration process is helping our country to modernize and to develop”

We strongly believe that the integration process is helping our country to modernize and to develop, but that view should be universally accepted by our general public, and currently, it is certainly not. The EU should also push the states to enhance transparency regarding their relations with the EU. The prospect of membership is a powerful stimulus for democratic and economic reforms in countries that want to become EU members. The EU should not derogate its criteria for the sake of faster progress of the candidate states. It must not let itself lose the power of the successful integration process by removing the tasks it is founded on. However, it should financially and institutionally support the countries in the process of fulfilling the criteria, especially after they have been hit by crisis such as COVID19. Additionally, the monitoring of the accession process should be more universal and thorough, but even though it already is, sometimes it seems like nothing is happening, and that should change.

“The EU should invest in exchange programs, national education systems, and continue to develop a universal education framework which could work for every member, candidate, and potential candidate states.”

The European Union needs to put education as its foremost priority in the years to come. Populism and extremism of any kind are partly the result of low-quality education, combined with various external effects. Since time immemorial, through the ages of World Wars and Cold War, up to the modern populism, those who didn't have a lot of education, or had a low-quality education, were mostly prone to accepting questionable messages addressed by the populists and extremists. The EU should invest in exchange programs, national education systems, and continue to develop a universal education framework which could work for every member, candidate, and potential candidate states. For instance, the Bologna system needs to be redefined and redesigned, the education systems should be more adjusted to the labor market across the EU. Education certainly determines the quality of an individual's life, it improves one's knowledge, skills and develops the personality and attitude. Most noteworthy, education affects the chances of employment for people. A highly educated individual is probably very likely to get a good job, possibly in the EU and make a positive influence on its development, and that is why the Union needs to foster this policy in particular.

RECOMMENDATION 3: THE ADOPTION OF THE EU LEGISLATION AND INTERNET REGULATION

Croatia is often cited as an example of a country which became an EU member but is "doing badly" and facing large waves of emigration. However, we tend to overlook an extremely important aspect, which is the national jurisdiction of every country, including Croatia. Montenegro, if it is to become a member state, cannot possibly turn into a powerful and wealthy state after a short period of time. The EU needs to keep pushing every state, especially its member states, to adopt legislation which corresponds with the

one of the EU. Sometimes it seems as though the screening process did not happen. Furthermore, the implementation of the legislation, especially in candidate and potential candidate states, is on a very low level. That is a field on which the EU needs to work as hard as possible. As a supranational organization it cannot let its members undermine it by not implementing its policies adequately.

Regulation of the internet should also be prioritised by the EU legislators. Furthermore, a particular field which we want to emphasize in this area is the issue of fake news, anti-EU propaganda and social media missuse. All of these have been a great danger to the European democracy, which is still not dealt with in the way it should be. Strong partnerships, transatlantic cooperation, coordination with social media gigants (such as Facebook) should be a top priority. While respecting the rights to privacy and freedom of expression, the EU should strictly limit the effects of propaganda and fake news.

FOREIGN & SECURITY POLICY

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Interviewed persons:

Edita Velić (Chairman of the Bosnian-Podrinje Cantonal Assembly), Šemsudin Mehmedović (MP of the House of Representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina), Mirsad Žuga (Deputy of the Minister of Finance in Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina), Mirsad Hadžikadić (2018 Presidential candidate, Founder of the party Platform for Progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina)

NATIONAL POSITION

The Dayton Peace Agreement was signed based on the Dayton Proximity Talks that were held during 1st - 21st November, 1995 at Wright-Patterson Airforce base in Ohio, USA. It ended Bosnian and Herzegovinian conflicts with aggressors and shaped what citizens of BiH had thought would be a basis for peace and bright future. However, most important issues-elections and electoral system for states based on democracy- have not met international legal standards.

Considering Dayton Peace Agreement was based on negotiations between sides, one of the products that is now the Bosnian electoral system, has been under a spotlight for a long time. Furthermore, current law has caused issues with electoral rights of Bosnian population in both kinds of elections. Numerous cases that serve as evidence still wait for their trials' decisions to be implemented, of course this is because certain sides or politicians simply go against it and additionally that Dayton Peace Agreement hardly allows for any changes.

What's more is that politicians have no interest in pursuing changes in the laws for the greater good. In case of Zornić v. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ms Zornić was denied for election to the House of Peoples and the Presidency of BiH because she wasn't affiliated

with any ethnic group, instead has declared herself as a citizen of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Additionally, in case of *Pilav v. Bosnia and Herzegovina*, where Mr. Pilav was denied rights to be elected due to ethnic discrimination and legal rights that follow Dayton Agreement. Similarly, *Baralija v. Bosnia and Herzegovina* where Ms Irma Baralija was also denied election rights in Mostar, and one of the highlights that is still waiting for decision making is *Sejdić Finci v. Bosnia and Herzegovina* due to legal reasons that don't allow minorities to be elected by electoral policy. Up to this date no action has been taken, which urges for changes considering violations of human rights and general rights of constitutive citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹

The rule of law is not the only one of the basic values that European Union is founded on, but also a basic principle of the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina and it's citizens. The Constitution of BiH states following: "BiH shall be a democratic state, which shall operate under the rule of law...", however fundamental problem is that there is a lack of commitment to this statement which also coincides with the BiH's path to becoming a member state of the EU.

On 29/05/2019 the European Commission has highlighted many instances in area of rule of law and in order for negotiations to be opened between the EU and BiH, "the necessary degree of compliance with the membership criteria of institutions guaranteeing notably democracy and the rule of law" must be achieved. Further stating that BiH "will need to fundamentally improve its legislative and institutional framework to ensure it meets" a certain amount of key priorities, considerable amount of them which ought improve overall rule of law situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.² Finally, the EU has made an initiative to enhance monitoring of the rule of law in Bosnia and Herzegovina which should improve overall state.

Main strategy of Foreign Policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina is based on "transparency, equality, security and promotion of core constitutional rights and considering that, accepting and respecting constitutional principles of constitution, sovereignty and

¹ https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/CP_Bosnia_and_Herzegovina_ENG.pdf

² <http://europa.ba/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/ExpertReportonRuleofLawissuesinBosniaandHerzegovina.pdf>

territorial integrity in all aspects of relationships with international partners, with respect of all interests.” Bosnia and Herzegovina seeks interests in being members of the EU and NATO which should greatly improve position of the country in both security policies and foreign policies. However, even though Dayton Agreement was a treaty that created peace and common security and defensive system, as well as adoption and establishment of common security policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Unfortunately, this is yet a problem which remains unsolved because BiH does not have a complete system of national security and it leads to the structure of the state and security sector it contains. Enforcing security policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina requires full participation and involvement of all state members and resources, and this presents a problem because certain sides block each other in order to gain leverage in political senses. Integration with the members of the European Union would allow Bosnia and Herzegovina to also become a member of NATO and NATO’s program for peace, but also full membership of NATO pact.³

RECOMMENDATION 1: THE EU SHOULD ADVOCATE AN INTRODUCTION OF A NEW VOTING SYSTEM TO HELP TO REDUCE THE ABUSE OF DEMOCRATIC STATE

“It is no secret that voting results are often subject to manipulation”

It is no secret that voting results are often subject to manipulation when you take a look at the Balkans. One of the more morbid and painfully obvious vote frauds that people have noticed is that their deceased family members or acquaintances are still on the registry of voters, whose signatures have been replicated by certain individuals to disrupt the balance of the democratic voting system. Such instances pave the way for manipulation and disbalance the fragile state in which the Balkan countries are in. During

³ http://www.mod.gov.ba/slike2014/02.28.20_1_Sigurnosna%20politika%20BiH.pdf

the 2018 Bosnian general elections around 500.000 votes were deemed invalid, which is an unusually high count for invalid votes.

The other present issue, besides manipulation and abuse, is the negligence of the people that decide not to vote, according to the statement of the CIK President Branko Petrić during a press conference, voter participation was at a low 37.2 percent. Because many people do not devote their time to casting their vote, they ultimately hinder the progress of the country because the votes they have not given might be falsely claimed, which could turn the tide in favor of a political party that would unrightfully claim victory at the end of the elections. Although there have been attempts to correct things and to prosecute those who interfere with the electoral results, we can clearly see that it is not enough and that the country has not solved the lingering problem.

A solution that might help in this situation is the implementation of a new system, a great example would be the case of Estonia, which is a member of the European Union. Estonia has implemented a system of e-voting (electronic voting) which has been proven as less expensive and has stimulated the general public to participate as it is a simple and efficient way to gather the votes of the residents of the country. Nearly one third of Estonian votes in the 2014 & 2015 elections were cast online using e-voting. Since each citizen has an electronic ID card it makes the manipulation and abuse of the system much more difficult.

According to a study conducted in Switzerland in 2020, besides the question of credible votes, such a system could help prevent invalid votes by helping the voters avoid possible mistakes that tend to happen when casting ballots. Given that functional systems exist, with this being only a single example, with the help of the European Union we can surely find at least one suitable system to implement in Bosnia & Herzegovina to hopefully resolve the existing issues with the current system. Overall, this could be a huge improvement in the Balkan political scene, bringing forth a more stable and genuine representation of Bosnia & Herzegovina.

RECOMMENDATION 2: THE EU AND NATO SHOULD ENFORCE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CRUCIAL DECISIONS BY BOSNIAN POLITICIANS

“The EU should advocate for decreasing the separation amongst the people of B&H”

The situation after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina has led to the segregation of three constitutive nationality groups, Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats. Efforts to make these groups work together were made from the start but in the past decade the situation seems like that they grew apart from each other more than ever. This has made the politicians of all three sides passive in developing any concrete decisions when it comes to implementing actions. This made political scene in Bosnia and Herzegovina dependant on the actions and support of other foreign countries like the USA, Russia and the EU.

The whole situation seems like the political leaders of the country do not have the commitment it takes to make these decisions, or that they are unwilling to make them. Because most of the Bosnian population are striving for B&H to receive the EU candidate status and eventually become its member country it is crucial for the EU to pressure the Bosnian politician in cooperative work and advocate for the implementation of major decisions that are set by the EU.

Furthermore, the EU should advocate for decreasing the separation amongst the people of B&H as that has been one of the crucial problems in the past few years. The ruling parties on the other hand would like to keep this distance as they are strengthening national interests of their national group and party. The EU has already stated on a number of occasions that politicians should adapt to each other but these warnings from Brussels have been in most part ignored. This shows that the EU is aware of the situation and the problems that B&H is facing at the moment, but also that the political structures in B&H are far from developing necessary progress in achieving common goals. Forcing more concrete sanctions on B&H should help pressure the political structures in working together and should prevent them in sabotaging the progress of B&H on the path of EU.

RECOMMENDATION 3: COMBATING SECURITY ISSUES WITHIN BIH BORDERS WITH EU AND NATO ASSISTANCE

“Cooperation between Council of Ministers and Council of Europe Office in Sarajevo together with the OHR could work on developing strategies for combating this crisis”

Bosnia and Herzegovina has been combating corruption and organized crime in a very delicate way, that is- it failed to prosecute some of the major actors of large affairs that were stealing property and rights from people. This sends a very despairing message to the institutions of the EU in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In an attempt to help to change this situation, the EU and B&H should work together on establishing closer cooperation with agencies like Interpol and Europol, as they can help in combating these issues.

Furthermore, there is a problem of migrant crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as in the EU. Because B&H represents the major crossing ground for the migrants coming from the east, strengthening the relationships between Diplomatic and Consular offices is of crucial importance. Cooperation between Council of Ministers and Council of Europe Office in Sarajevo together with the OHR could work on developing strategies for combating this crisis in the most adequate way. The techniques of UN Security Council and the Council of Europe should be enforced in B&H as they provide a reliable solution to the crisis problems such as combating organized crime, terrorism and migrant crisis.

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