

“Challenges and Perspectives of Citizenship Education in Central and South Eastern Europe”  
11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> September 2009, Zagreb, Croatia

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# Keynote

## “How can Citizenship Education Contribute to the Sustainability of Democracy?”

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The American diplomat Richard Holbrooke pondered a problem on the eve of the September 1996 elections in Bosnia, which were meant to restore civic life to that ravaged country. “Suppose the election was declared free and fair,” he said, and those elected are “racists, fascists, separatists, who are publicly opposed to [peace and reintegration]. That is the dilemma.” And this is the issue that Fareed Zacharia points out in his famous article “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy” (FA, 1997). “It has been difficult to recognize this problem because for almost a century in the West, democracy has meant liberal democracy – a political system marked not only by free and fair elections, but also by the rule of law, a separation of powers, and the protection of basic liberties of speech, assembly, religion, and property”. So the recipe that Zakaria – and many from the West, in the Central and Eastern part of Europe prescribed after the fall of the illiberal regimes, was simple: build institutions. (Zacharia: constitutional liberalism).

Today, almost 15 years after those first free elections in Bosnia, 20 years after the fall of the Wall, new societies, elites, rules have been fostered in SEE. From a region torn apart in the mid-1990s, a new one has indeed emerged with the “push” of NATO and ESDP missions and the “pull” of Euro-Atlantic accession. One country (Slovenia) in the former Yugoslavia already is inside the EU, while another (Croatia) is – hopefully – on its way. In Serbia's capital Belgrade, from where so much of the region's destruction was planned, Boris Tadic's government is keen to foster greater EU links. Albania and Croatia were invited to become NATO members and Serbia together with Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) officially joined NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) Programme. But these successes – these seemingly robust anchoring in the Euro-Atlantic framework – may be more fragile than many diplomats think. Getting the internationally-run protectorates in Bosnia and Kosovo to produce a self-sustaining kind of statehood in both countries will be particularly difficult. But to focus on these unique cases tends to overlook the problems elsewhere in the region.

For across the Balkans, Euro-Atlantic integration has not produced fully-fledged democracies; instead, an illiberal form of democratic rule remains the norm. From Montenegro and Albania and further inland to Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia a new post-1990s generation of political leaders has emerged. To varying degrees, they have sought to centralize powers and to provide benefits to a close-knit group of followers, be they family, clan or party members. Patrimonial behaviour – politics based on family and clan – pervades the region. According to Transparency International, Albania is ranked as 85th of a total of 180 countries. In a letter, the NGO wrote to Prime Minister Berisha about various forms of corruption allegedly being committed by his government. The same could have been written to a number of Balkan leaders. Though contemporary Balkan leaders for the most part eschew the vitriol and nationalistic language of their predecessors, many of them still tend to do their politics through fear of the “other”. Though originally hailing from an anti-nationalist background, Milorad Dodik, the leader of Bosnia's Serb-dominated Republika Srpska entity, often

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counts on the fear of the "other" – in this case Bosnian Muslims – and is happy to conjure up a state of siege, much like Slobodan Milosevic used to do. And this week's visit of Serbian president Tadic to RS, without meeting any of the BH officials, falls into the same category. The message: Bosnian Serbs do not belong to Bosnia.

Further south, Macedonia's Nikola Gruevski has orchestrated similar stunts to fashion an election-winning form of Slav Macedonian nationalism. Skopje's football stadium was recently renamed in honour of Philip II of Macedon, who ruled in the 4th century BC. Macedonia's airport and the highway to Greece are already named after Philip's son, Alexander the Great. Statues of Hellenistic heroes are being erected across the capital city. Even in Albania, with only few minorities and fewer sectarian tensions, the recent parliamentary election saw nationalist references trotted out. Nationalist stunts, however, only work if they are reported uncritically in the press. Several Balkan governments have therefore maintained an illiberal attitude towards the Fourth Estate. Freedom House said the biggest drop in press freedom in 2009 occurred in Central and Eastern Europe with journalists murdered in Croatia and assaulted in Bosnia. In Macedonia, the government has been quick to brand any coverage, which deems critical as "antipatriotic" and which, according to the US State Department, "impacted freedom of the press." In 2008 Albania's National Council on Radio and Television fined TV News 24, an outlet known for its criticism of the government, a large fee for broadcasting a television spot ridiculing Prime Minister Berisha. In Serbia, a new law was passed allowing the government to prosecute any journalistic investigation under the suspicion of 'circulating slander, false or libellous information'. In Montenegro, courts often award significant penalties against media for defamation.

As the illiberal playbook also requires the silencing of alternative voices, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) often get pressured by the authorities. On a scale of 1-7, with 1 representing the least favourable conditions for NGOs, Freedom House gives Serbia a meagre 2.75, Albania a 3 and Macedonia a 3.25. When the Albanian government changed the legal framework that regulates civil society organizations, few NGOs dared to speak up. In Montenegro, Freedom House says the NGO sector "continues to exist in a precarious and competitive environment". But the fact that we have to acknowledge is that the populist illiberals enjoy enough support to get re-elected (despite of some deficiencies in the electoral process). So what is wrong with the societies that elect them? Are they stupid? No, they are angry.

Václav Havel wrote about the ordinary eastern bloc citizen in a 1978 essay, "The Power of the Powerless." Havel imagined a greengrocer who places a sign in the window of the shop where he works. The sign says: "Workers of the world, unite!" Yet, Havel argues, the greengrocer doesn't care about the proletariat and its unity. The slogan was a declaration of loyalty to those in power, and a plea to be left alone by them.

In an essay, Ivan Krastev recently speculated about the idea of what happened with the greengrocer after 1989. "More probably he failed to take control of the shop. If it was in a desirable location, it probably has been privatised by his boss. Subsequently, the greengrocer may have lost his job, and therefore his social status and his financial security. It is quite likely that the greengrocer's son left the country to work in Western Europe, and that his daughter's children received a poor education in the local school. One of his neighbours probably got rich and loves to complain about the ineffectiveness of the state. Perhaps a newly arrived supermarket took away his customers. The chances are the greengrocer is haunted by the spectre of comparisons: comparing his lot with how he lived before, or how his peers live in Western Europe. He may live a life of anxiety and disappointment." This picture is not exaggerated. According to a Bulgarian study from 2003, only 15-20 per cent of people had

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benefited from the transition from communism, measured in terms of income, social mobility and consumption. Only 5 per cent of the people identified themselves as winners of the transition.

According to the 2008 GALLUP Balkan Monitor survey, more than 4 respondents out of 10 were dissatisfied with their lives. Except from Croatia and Kosovo, more than half of the Balkan citizens said they were dissatisfied with their standard of living (two-thirds in Macedonia and Serbia) – and the financial crisis is going to exacerbate that picture. Across the Western Balkan countries, only Kosovo and Montenegro had the majority (around 60%) thinking that things were going in the right direction, while the rest were worried about their future. Their attitudes towards politics show that they do not see any source of change there: Most of them do not pay attention to political affairs and most feel unrepresented (70% in Serbia and Bosnia). The Balkan political parties are the institutions most distrusted. And so is the judicial system.

The other finding is that the Balkan nations have become very sceptical both of their perspective to join the EU and about the positive impact the EU integration would have on their societies – Croatia and Bosnia being at the bottom with 49% and 38% believing EU membership would benefit those who were already financially on the top. **The EU is obviously more and more seen as a way to keep the status quo, not to reform it.**

So the only way for disenchanted Balkan citizens, who feel to have been left alone by self-sufficient elites, is to vote for populist illiberal leaders and symbolic politics, instead of reformist politics and EU integration. These self-sufficient elites as they see them should also feel threatened by a strong-handed man on the top. **Not institutions but personalities are being looked for.** And here is the role of civic education: to point out that values can be sustained only through rules and institutions. It is also true that the EU has its narratives as well, its sense of direction. In an essay published in 2007, Timothy Garton Ash claims that “Europe has lost the plot.” European identity, Ash argues, should not be established through the negative stereotyping of an enemy or the “other”. “Europe’s only defining ‘other’ is its own previous self: more specifically, the unhappy, self-destructive, at times downright barbaric chapters in the history of European civilisation. With the wars of the Yugoslav succession and the attempted genocide in Kosovo, that unhappy history stretches into the very last year of the century. This is no distant past.”

But today, five years after the last enlargement, Europe still has not found its common narrative. And one collateral damage caused by that is the lack of a clear membership perspective for the Western Balkans. Blocking the accession of the Balkans to the EU would likely result in more back-sliding on reforms. But continuing on the current trajectory may snatch the EU from one of its only successes in foreign policy and the people of the Western Balkans from a truly democratic future. Turning the Balkans into a EU protectorate without legitimacy for the EU leverage (the EU has not even reached unity about recognizing Kosovo) will lead to a process, which we see in a simplified form on the streets of Kosovo these days: the un-free who are attacking the oppressor. Was this what we hoped for two decades ago?