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**Political Crisis in Western Balkans:
Challenges and Perspectives the Day
After**

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Political Crisis in Western Balkans: Challenges and Perspectives the Day After

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Abstract

In this paper, we describe the actual political situation in the region, by analyzing the reasons and consequences for the existence of the political crisis. We will present the remaining from the past and the dynamics of changes after the fall of Berlin wall, as well as the leadership that requires a vision and courage for overcoming the differences and misunderstandings that are present with ages in the area.

We will present evidence on the political paradox of the integration of the entire region in the Euro-Atlantic structures, followed by the huge difference between the declarations and the actual work from the actors in the decisions making processes during the transition process.

In addition, in this paper we will try to explain and give answer to the many questions related to the factors that have impact over the creation of the political crisis, rather than focusing on the economic crisis as a main concern for overcoming the difficulties that the citizens face and reaching their expectations from the governments they elect. The alternative is the present danger that deems over the region because of the many not resolved problems for a long period now.

In the end of the paper, we will give our recommendations regarding the political changes and the cultural identity of people as one of the ways for reaching harmony in the troubled Balkan region. The culture of fear and humiliation, preinstalled in the present societies, should change and be replaced by hope and mutual understanding of future generations. In addition to this, by using contemporary methodology and techniques, we will present the findings from the research survey conducted with university students from the country.

Keywords: Crisis, Differences, Challenges, Integration, Perspectives.

Introduction

The Balkans has always been in the center of world politics and in the interest of the world powers, mainly because of the complexity of its constellations and the latest developments in the sphere of politics, economy and the strategic orientation of the region. As a result, Europe closely follows all political developments in Balkans with particular interest since it has made it clear that aims to secure stable, prosperous and well-functioning democratic societies on a steady path towards EU integration.¹ This pathway is continuously being blocked by the many political crisis that gain momentum and tie the region with its troubled past, reviewing the nationalism between the different nations, thus creating further divisions and unsafe future.

Regarding the political crisis in the Balkan region, especially after the break-up of Yugoslavia and the eruption of violence across the southeast Europe, many studies analyze the causes and the consequences in our societies and their reflection in the politics. Isak Adizes in his book *Insights on policy* treats the political crisis in many countries, especially in the Balkan region and the countries in transition. In the end of the book, referring on the nationalistic politics the countries in the region apply, he concludes that every future crisis in the region will be worse and more comprehensive from the previous one, until the point when the elites gather courage to change political philosophy and system of values that had driven until now our decision-making process². When it comes to the political elites in the ex Yugoslavia, they clearly defended the idea of preserving and liberalizing the Yugoslav society and turning it towards the West.³ However, if we look back at the events that took place in the end of XX and the beginning of XXI century and the violence that broke in former Yugoslavia countries, we see that the political leaders undermined the power of nationalism, that in an instance destroyed the cohabitation between different nations in this region.

In addition, I find very interesting and in the line with our paper, the conclusions from the study titled *Macedonia - A country in crisis*⁴, written by Erwan Fouere, European Union Special Representative and Ambassador, as well as Head of Delegation in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Based on this study and the presented facts, Macedonia is set to be a country in deep trouble, with a climate of mistrust between all the political parties, increased intolerance of minority groups and generated fear by the all-pervasive control of the main governing party.

Our study aims to give a clear picture on the political crisis in the region, which gets fuel by the existing nationalism in order to hide the real problem and constant danger that deems over the entire region, and that is the economic crisis. This will prove the inability of the governments to find proper solutions

¹http://eeas.europa.eu/western_balkans/index_en.htm

²Ichak Kalderon Adizes, *Insights on policy*, 2012 Beograd

³Marija Risteska, *Mapping the leaders in Macedonia and Albania: can elites promote positive social change?*, p.126, Center for research and policy making, Skopje 2011

⁴<http://www.ceps.eu/book/macedonia-country-crisis>

for developing the economy and fighting the increased poverty, which makes them turn towards the past, as the only solution that will improve their popularity. In addition, we will give a different approach to the political problems that occupy the region including the conflict resolution and offering possible solutions for prevention of further divisions and hostility in the region.

The New “Postcommunist” Era

"The Iron Curtain" for many years symbolized Moscow's dictatorship towards other Eastern European countries but at the same time appeared as protector from the Western economic intervention. The collapse of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, symbolized the physical removal of every barrier that divided Europe into two parts, east and west.¹ This changed the world power balance and the politics of the Cold War was over. Davutoglu in his book *Global Crisis* on this issue notes that after the fall of the Berlin Wall, in order to build the infrastructure of a sustainable and equitable world order, the competition areas of the regional tensions were constantly provoked.² Even today, we can still feel the division of people on ethnic, religious and cultural grounds followed with continuous discrimination and quiet fight for territories.

Professor Dimitar Mirchev, a political analyst and former ambassador thinks that the prevailing conception based on Marxist definition is crucial to the nation's historical, territorial, economic, linguistic and cultural community. He says that if it is not exactly like that, it will become such. Consequently, there is the fight for territory, population and demography, history, assimilation or expulsion of members of other nations. Therefore, there are genocides, brutal armed conflicts as in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Croatia; that is why there are ethnic cleansing, interreligious conflicts, ethno-mobilization, ethno-politicization, proclaiming the ethos of the only real community. The Macedonian armed amplitude of the Balkan conflicts in 2001 was not an exception to that development also.³

Another approach from a different aspect shares Urs Altermatt, Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Freiburg. He says that the economic, social and political conflicts since earlier burdened the ethnic and linguistic, religious and cultural opposites. This is not a new phenomenon. New are the frequency and severity of emerging ethnic issues in the end of the 20th century.⁴

These remain the main challenges that the new Western Balkan countries have to face in order to establish functional states that will look forward towards building partnerships and safe and secure environment for domestic

¹Ndryshimet sociale dhe tranzicioni, Jonuz Abdullai, 2008 Tetovë, f.23

²Ahmet Davutoglu, "Krizë globale", LogosA Shkup, 2005, f.17

³Malcinstvata vo demokratijata, Dimitar Mirchev, f.84, Fondacija Konrad Adenauer 2005, Skopje

⁴(Urs Altermatt, Etnonacionalizam u Evropi f.108, Sarajevo 1997)

and foreign investors, especially in countries and regions where differences in culture, religion, history and languages prevail.

The democratic transition and consolidation includes the movement from a non-democratic to a democratic regime. However, specific policies can vary greatly in terms of the available paths for the transition of the unfinished obligations that the new democracy must face before consolidation.¹

Political Crisis

As mentioned in one of our previous publications, there are several types of internal causes, that include the leadership and which can generate political crisis.² Among those, most common are:

- Inadequate and incompetent leadership
- Immoral leadership
- Inefficient action of the political leaders
- The lack of dialog, etc.

In this paper, we will focus in some of these elements as reasons that contribute for constant generation of tensions and crisis in the specified region. If we turn to our recent past, we will note that these leaderships usually create dictators that destroy the hard-achieved harmony between nations in the multicultural and multiethnic environment of Balkans.

Social scientists have drawn an appropriate and important distinction between regimes and traditional nondemocratic authoritarian systems.³ Therefore, we refer to Robert Dahl's perspective in which he stresses that the power or the influence does not make sense, until the area in which the influence is exercised is not specified. Dahl's division between prominent people in the economy, society and politics reflects the known division between wealth, position and power.⁴

Euro-Atlantic Integration of the Region - A Challenge to Take

The EU officials in several occasions repeatedly declare that the aim of the Union is to integrate the entire Balkan region in order to establish a long-term stability and economic prosperity. We are witnessing that this process is going slow and with many obstacles, giving this way more space to the extreme elements in our society. Based on the study published by Konrad Adenauer

¹(Huan H. Linc, Alfred Stepan, Problemita na demokratskata tranzicija i konsolidacija, Skopje 2009, F.69)

²Jonuz Abdullai, The Political Crisis in Macedonia and the Future Challenges, <http://cis01.central.ucv.ro/revistadestiintepolitice/files/revistadestiintepolitice37.pdf> (141-146)

³Samuel P. Huntington, The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late 20th Century, p.12

⁴Elitat politike – Geraint Parry, 2010 Tirane, f.166-167

Foundation, the new threats to our security arise from within: our free democratic constitutional state, the norms and values that are threatened, for example by left and right-wing extremists, fundamentalists who tend towards violence, terrorism and organized crime.¹

Considering the weak economic growth of the entire region, we can better understand the reason for stagnation. The economic instability brings governments to a point where they have to step down ahead of the large amount of dissatisfaction regarding the unpopular economic measures. The best example of the political instability during economic crisis in the region is Greece. Despite the fact that is a member of the European Union, the country had to undergo several election processes in order to consolidate a stable government. Below we will give an example to illustrate the strength of the economic impact on the political life.

The dramatic decline in support for PASOK indicates the public's disapproval of the way the government has handled the crisis and particularly the measures it has adopted to reduce the public debt and deficit, which have had a severe impact on jobs, wages and standards of living.²

Table 1. *Percentage of the Vote Obtained by PASOK and New Democracy in the 2009 General Election and in a Recent Poll by Public Issue Political Barometer (October 2011)*

Parties	October 2009	October 2011	Variation
PASOK	43.9%	22.5%	-21.4%
New Democracy	33.4%	31.5%	-1.9%

Different impact on the political life and internal stability of the country presents the euro-integration process and the influence Brussels has towards the new EU members and member candidates. In several cases, acting along a particular policy can be a tough process that can bring a huge discomfort internally as well as internationally. For example, the international relations of the European Union and its view on Ukrainian crisis have a clear impact on the political life almost in every Balkan country.

In the wake of Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula, Bulgaria and Montenegro broke ranks and sided with the EU in condemning the move and imposing sanctions. Bulgaria, an EU and NATO member, joined the initial wave of sanctions on Moscow but opposed stronger measures. Serbia however, has steadfastly refused to turn its back on Moscow. Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic stated that Belgrade will continue to pursue its own interests by

¹CDU principles of freedom and security for Germany, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 2007, p.19

²“The Greek Crisis and the Politics of Uncertainty”, NICK MALKOUTZIS, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2011, p.1

stating that no sanctions will be imposed to Moscow.¹ Officially, Montenegro still supports the resolution of the European Commission, which means supporting the sanctions against Russia. Montenegro as a candidate for membership has an obligation to follow EU's decisions.²

This shows the difficulties each candidate state has to undergo in order to fulfill the expected obligation towards the EU.

A different issue regarding the euro-integration processes faces Macedonia. Since the name issue has become one of the main conditions for advancing the integration processes, 77% of ethnic Macedonians support the EU membership, but without concessions to the name, while 75% of ethnic Albanians are "for" membership in the European family, even if this means changing the name. These are the results of the research titled "Perceptions about the situation of the conflict of interest and assessment of Macedonia's progress in European integration", conducted by the Institute for Democracy Societas Civilis Skopje.³ In this regard, the name issue beside that appears to be a problem for the government in international level with the Union and Greece, it also has an effect and empowers divisions within the country between different ethnic groups, who do not share the same opinion on the concrete issue.

Resolution of Disputes in Western Balkans

A different approach toward the political crisis between nations in western Balkans shows that majority of the candidate states have reached bilateral or multilateral agreements, the fulfillment of which has become a precondition for EU membership.

In the latest normalization talks between Serbian and Kosovo authorities facilitated by the EU, the vice president of the Serbian government for European Integration - Suzana Grubjeshic, said that both sides will have to make certain compromises without including the recognition of Kosovo's independence from Serbia.⁴ In the other side, the deputy prime minister of Kosovo – Edita Tahiri declared that this agreement is of great importance for Kosovo because supports the integration of Serbs in the state of Kosovo, i.e. Kosovo's institutions. This agreement also foresees dissolution of Serbian illegal structures that have operated in the northern part of the country since the end of the war. In addition, under this agreement, Serbia cannot stop Kosovo

¹<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/international/serbia-sides-with-russia-rather-than-eu-over-ukraine-crisis/article6017197.ece>

²<http://www.balkan.eu.com/ukrainian-crisis-montenegro-nato-russia/>

³<http://a1on.mk/wordpress/archives/335001>

⁴Daily newspaper Politika, Belgrade 12.09.2012 "Normalization does not include recognition of Kosovo," p.6

on its path to European integration.¹ The achievement and implementation of this agreement, in fact, opens the European future for both countries.

Although Croatia became an EU member, problems associated to Croatian nationalism still take place when it comes to relations with Serbs. The bilingual information panels on Vukovar state institutions were removed by former Croatian soldiers, which fought Serbs during the Croatian-Serb conflict 1991-1995. In addition, Vukovar defenders have launched an initiative for a referendum that would enable constitutional law changes. By these changes, the minorities can get right for official use of their own language only if they reach more than 50 percent of the total population in the municipality they live.² This situation made the Croatian government to intervene against its former soldiers and risk the internal political crisis, in order to fulfill the international obligations toward the normalization of the disputes with its neighbors and protecting its minorities and human rights.

Bilateral disputes between member states and countries candidate for EU and NATO membership, beside the fact that they present a problem in Euro-Atlantic integration, they also present security implications on regional stability. Disputes do not contribute to the strengthening of cooperation in dealing with transnational and cross-border crime. Bilateral disputes based on historic relationships and based on a specific doctrine, have a powerful propaganda that emphasize nationalists and due to the passiveness of the international community, they gain international support.³

The Ohrid Framework Agreement, not implemented and forgotten, is blocking the Euro-Atlantic integration processes and can become a starting point for another escalation of discontent between the two major communities Macedonia. The abovementioned situation corresponds to the statement given by the late politician Arbën Xhaferi who said that Macedonia's example proves that multi-ethnic societies cannot produce proper states.⁴ In this context, the political crisis in Macedonia mainly exist because of the rising nationalism between the major ethnic groups, as a result of poor governance and the lack of functional democracy.

The Survey

In the context of this paper, we present the results from the survey conducted in March 2014 among students and employees at the South East European University in Tetovo and Skopje. The students and employees were randomly select based on their ID number, by the University registry office.

¹<http://lajmifundit.al/2013/12/tahiri-serbia-nuk-mund-ta-pengoje-kosoven-ne-rrugen-drejt-integrimit-evropian/>

²<http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/vukovar-ponovno-razbijene-dvojezicne-ploce>

³Building security policy: The case of the Republic of Macedonia, Rade Rajkovcevski, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Skopje, p.53

⁴<http://www.telegrafi.com/lajme/shoqeria-shumetnike-nuk-prodhon-shtet-te-mirefillte-2-20244.html>

Below we present the questions and the answers given by 320 students and employees from both major ethnicities in Macedonia (Albanian and Macedonian).

In the question presented below regarding Macedonia's relations with its neighbors, the majority of the respondents qualify them as tense and cold, a result that illustrates the incapability of Macedonian government to normalize the bilateral relations with its neighbors.

Table 2. *What are Macedonia's Relations with its Neighbors?*

	Albanian	Macedonian	Grand Total
Bad	1.98%	0.00%	1.67%
Cold	33.66%	5.88%	29.17%
Good	25.74%	35.29%	26.67%
Tense	38.61%	58.82%	42.50%

The Euro integration process and the name issue, make the biggest division in ethnic ground in Macedonia based on the results of our survey. Majority of Albanians (81.19%) wants continuation of Euro-integration process regardless of the outcome on the name dispute, comparing to 47.06% of Macedonians who are willing not to enter the EU and NATO because of changing the name.

Table 3. *Do you Think that Macedonia Should Change its Name on the Account of Euro-Integrations?*

	Albanian	Macedonian	Grand Total
It should be integrated with its existing name	11.88%	29.41%	14.17%
No	6.93%	47.06%	12.50%
Yes	81.19%	23.53%	73.33%

The below results clearly support our thesis about the existence of political crisis in Macedonia and reflects the incapability of the government in solving this issue.

Table 4. *Do you Think there is a Political Crisis in Macedonia?*

	Albanian	Macedonian	Grand Total
No	7.92%	29.41%	11.67%
Yes	92.08%	70.59%	88.33%

The results from the last question should bring attention on the entire democratic process in the country. The result shows the level of mistrust between the government and the people when it comes to the election process.

Table 5. *Do you think that Election Processes in Macedonia are Credible, i.e. Fair and Democratic?*

	Albanian	Macedonian	Grand Total
No	82.18%	64.71%	79.17%
Yes	17.82%	35.29%	20.83%

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the material presented in this paper, we point out that the political crisis in the Western Balkans exists for several years now. The existing nationalism undermines the efforts for creating stability and prosperity in the region as well as normalizing the relations between different nations.

Some countries did well their commitments and obligations towards the international communities and became NATO members, such as Croatia and Albania, who established the required political stability. However, the other Balkan countries are still weak and failed to improve. In this context, we refer to Macedonia, Kosovo, Bosnia, Montenegro and Serbia.

The resolution of dispute attempts which took place in Western Balkans in the last two decades, left many open space for appearance of grievances that occurred as result of the difficulties in their implementation. The delay of agreements or current short-term solutions can result with other unpredicted problems that can motivate extremists and enable them to seize opportunity of reluctance and to present a permanent danger to the democratic development of the society.

The crisis in the system of governance is a signal for existence of state problems, which later reflect international positions and relations. In the case of Macedonia, the consecutive early elections that are repeatedly organized do not produce solutions to the many problems the country faces, nationally and internationally. This "disease" is widespread throughout the region, so now we can see early elections in Kosovo, Serbia, Macedonia, Bulgaria, as well as in Greece. On the other hand, deterioration of inter-ethnic relations produces extra pressure on finding solutions and reducing tensions.

Institutional democratization and the rule of law must be the basis of building a healthy and functional society. According to recent data of the European Commission, regarding recent elections in Macedonia, we conclude that they are not conduct in a democratic manner and they do not really represent the free will of the population. A similar opinion have expressed the surveyed students and University employees, 80% out of which think the election process in Macedonia is not fair and democratic. Moreover, conducting early elections postpone the much needed euro-integration processes and give a false hope for change, since they result in deterioration of the situation and are used for gerrymandering. Separating the state from the electoral campaign should be the first step in improving the electoral process.

Enforcing tolerance, cooperation, resolution of disputes and their improvement where needed, replacement of dysfunctional agreements with new agreements in the framework of crisis prevention, without waiting for their escalation into new conflicts should be the priority of the international community and government bodies in Balkan region. Introducing preventive diplomacy and implementing good practices in policy-making is very important for developing functional democracy and cooperation between Balkan states.

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