The Role of Higher Education in National Development

South-Eastern Europe and Reconstruction of the Western Balkans

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Introduction: the Complexity of the Balkans

In this essay we focus on a European region that puzzles the uninformed observer with its huge diversity. This is South-Eastern Europe (SEE), also referred to as the Balkan Peninsula or simply the Balkans. The word 'Balkan' comes from Turkish, meaning a mountain chain. It is the name of a 600 km-long mountain range in the central part of the peninsula extending from Serbia across Bulgaria to the Black Sea. In geographical terms, the Balkans ends in the north at the banks of the Danube and Sava rivers and on the slopes of the Alps, while its coasts in the south are lapped by the waves of the Adriatic, Ionian, Aegean and Black Seas. The territories of some countries fit totally within this area (Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro), while others have larger, smaller and symbolic shares (Croatia, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia and Turkey, and a small slice of land around Trieste in Italy), or they only touch its borders (Moldova).

Definitions seem clear in geography textbooks, yet it is not easy to outline the region in cultural and political terms. Mutually comprehensible as well as incomprehensible languages are spoken, various scripts are used in writing and various religions are practised. Aboriginal tribes, the ancient Greeks and Romans, migrating hordes of the mid-first millennium, the Habsburgs and Ottomans, the armies of the First and Second World Wars—all have left their traces in the region.

Indeed, a purely geographic definition does not help much when discussing the region's politics and culture in general, or education in particular. In recent times, particularly during and after the wars of the 1990s, the phrase '*to balkanize*' (already coined in local languages before then) was introduced into English. Within the region it became 'politically correct' to break with the Balkans—and to '*Europeanize* '. However, the paths taken by, for example, Bulgaria and Serbia at the start of the 1990s were very different: while the former was negotiating to join the European Union (EU), the latter was experiencing North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) bombing. The Balkans entered the third millennium perhaps even more diverse and divided than it was after the Second World War. Due to the negative connotations of 'the Balkans', the term 'South-Eastern Europe' started to be used more frequently. Yet this was deemed inadequate and so an additional name, in broad use today, came into being, again a 'politically correct' way of addressing that part of the region that

suffered most and lost most in the transformations of the last two decades. It is the 'Western Balkans': the western part of SEE or the central part of the 'real' Balkans.

The focus here now narrows somewhat and we need a little more context. The Western Balkans is today usually understood to include Albania and the former Yugoslavia, but not Slovenia. With Albania as an exception, the remaining countries of the Western Balkans shared a considerable part of 20th-century political history and the heritage of a common state, Yugoslavia. Its roots only started to grow after the First World War in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians. Following the Second World War, the Federal Socialist Yugoslavia, as 'neither an Eastern—nor a Western' country, was quite decentralized and after the mid-1960s it was more connected to the West (with 1m. workers abroad), than to the East. Albania to the south-west side of the peninsula was (self-)isolated up until the 1990s. Looking at the Balkans in a broader framework, Bulgaria and Romania belonged to the Soviet bloc, while Moldova was an integral part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). To the south of the Balkans, Greece was, politically speaking, the frontier to the West.

It is not difficult to realize that such diverse contexts have also influenced the huge diversity seen in the region's higher education systems. The political context makes it easy to understand that after the Second World War Greek higher education took a very different path than that of other countries in the region. However, if these countries are simply put under the common label of 'communism', most of the elements that are important for understanding the transition and reconstruction during the last two decades are lost. Between 1945 and 1990 three different (and occasionally even hostile) political systems were confronted in this region: the countries of the Soviet bloc, the 'non-aligned' Yugoslavia and the 'autarchic' Albania. To discuss the role of higher education in recent social reconstruction it is necessary to set out the background, and therefore we start with a very brief outline of the regional history of higher education.

REGIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION IN AN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Before 1500 there were no institutions of higher learning in the region. The closest universities were, for example, in Padua (established in 1222), Vienna (1365) and Pécs (1367). The division between the Habsburg Empire and the Ottoman Empire was not only political and economic, it had a deep cultural impact. In the period of the Counter-Reformation, the first colleges were established on the western and north-eastern edges of the region, and it is here that the history of its higher education began.

In the north-east, a Jesuit college was already founded in 1581 in Kolozsvár, Transylvania, today's Cluj in western Romania, but it was later closed. During the Enlightenment period a university was founded in Romania (in 1776), and its heritage and tradition of teaching in the Romanian and Hungarian languages belong today to the well-known Babeş-Bolyai University. Old roots can also be found in the city of Iaşi, on the eastern edges of today's Romania, right at the border with Moldova, where the Princely Academy was founded in 1642. In 1694 a similar institution was founded in Bucharest. The Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iaşi was established in 1860 as the first Romanian university, followed by the University of Bucharest in 1864.

To the west, the study of philosophy was provided at a Jesuit college in Ljubljana (in today's Slovenia) from 1595 onwards, and at another in Zagreb (in today's Croatia) after 1662. By 1669 the latter already had been granted the status and privileges of a university. The Jesuit order was dissolved in 1773 and this was the end of the early history of universities in the region. The second half of the 19th century, marked by growing industrialization and rising awareness among the nations of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, promoted the idea of national universities. Today's University of Zagreb dates back to 1874. Calls to establish a university in Ljubljana also appeared at that time, but were only realized after the First World War, in 1919.

In the central part of the region, which belonged to the Ottoman Empire, developments were quite different. Specific forms of higher learning were known here and were quite different from those in the 'Christian' parts of Europe. Thus, a *hanikah*, or higher school of *Sufi* philosophy was established in Sarajevo in 1531, followed

by a *medresa*, or Islamic higher school. The region was outside the direct influence of the Counter-Reformation or Enlightenment, although the cultural and political ideas that had started to spread right across Europe during the Age of Romanticism also found their way here and were embraced, particularly among Serbs. In the revolutionary Serbia that had rebelled against the Ottomans, the Belgrade Higher School (*velika škola*) was founded in 1808 and developed further over the following decades. Another step was taken with the foundation of the Lyceum in Kragujevac in 1838 and its close cooperation with Belgrade schools. The University of Belgrade was officially recognized by a royal charter from 1905. After the First World War, within the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, the universities of Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana formed a weak but important higher education infrastructure for the new common state.

As we can see, universities started to grow in the central part of the Balkans after the early 19th century—during the wars against the Ottoman regime and for national independence. The oldest university was the Othonian University, founded in 1837, in the early period of the independent, modern Greece (today's University of Athens). In Bulgaria, the St Clement of Ohrid University of Sofia was the first, established in 1888. The Ottoman Empire disappeared in the early 20th century and, between the First and Second World Wars, universities were operating in all new countries of the region, except Albania.

The Second World War erupted in the region in 1941. In Greece it ended with the arrival of the British and US armies, while in eastern parts of the region it involved the arrival of the Red Army. The new division of Europe was reflected in the region's higher education. In Bulgaria and Romania, radical alterations were made to follow the Soviet example: some professors were removed and some newly introduced, 'political' chairs were created, some former departments seceded to form separate institutions, and new ones were established, mainly in 'productive sectors' to strengthen 'the building of socialism'. Traditional academic cooperation with universities abroad was minimized and eastern, rather than Western, influence was reinforced. This was characteristic of the following decades: higher education institutions were a strong factor of the countries' development, but strong measures were always taken to silence any dissonant voices of a critical intelligentsia. However, many students and professors played important roles in the events leading up to and during 1989.

The immediate post-war situation was similar in Yugoslavia, but only to a certain degree. As fascism had been defeated independently of the Red Army, processes ran differently here, particularly after a quarrel with Stalin (Iosif Dzhugashvili) in 1947. At the end of the war, the three pre-war universities, two new universities that were soon established (Sarajevo and Skopje, both in 1949) and a few specialized colleges were involved in the reconstruction. They were institutions of federal units: one university in each of five of the six People's Republics (the University of Montenegro was only established in 1974). Their mission was to train 'highly qualified specialists in the various branches of study, of whom the country stands in need', as we can read in one of the earliest documents written for the international public (Uvalić, 1952: 13).

Yugoslavia had to search for its own identity and its own model—different from the Soviet one. In internal politics this was the so-called 'self-governmental socialism', and in foreign politics it was 'non-aligned movement'. Of course, this also had an effect on the education system. On the one hand, it was decentralized: quite a lot of responsibilities belonged to the Republics. On the other hand, it was much more open to international academic cooperation than the Soviet bloc, in particular after the 'liberal' reforms of 1965. There were also many students from non-aligned countries (Africa and Asia) in this period. Despite periodic repression, universities remained centres of critical thought, social protest and political activism (e.g. the 'Praxis group', student movements in 1968 and later, independent journals, 'alternative' art production, etc.).

During the period of the country's 'socialist self-governmental development', new higher education institutions were growing up. As a first step, almost as a rule, self-standing (independent) faculties or higher schools were set up, which then associated to form a university. Between the late 1960s and mid-1980s a dozen new universities were established in all six Republics and in both Autonomous Provinces (Vojvodina and Kosovo within Serbia). In half a century higher education had changed its face totally. While in the 10 years of

1930–39 'from all universities in the country, 19,383 students graduated' (and 'of these only 1,288 were engineers'), in 1950 there was already a 'total of 52,480 students enrolled' and in 1960 '9,974 students graduated from Yugoslav universities' (Uvalić, 1952; Crvenkovski, 1962). Upon the disintegration of the federal Yugoslavia in 1990 (with a total population of 21m.), higher education was being provided 'through the existing 19 universities, made up of a total of 220 institutions (faculties and art academies). A total of 341,341 students (of whom 261,161 were regular full-time students) were enrolled in the academic year 1989–90' (Uvalić Trumbić, 1990: 399).

The development of higher education in Albania is a rather more unusual case. During the Ottoman period, use of the Albanian language in schools was totally prohibited and illiteracy remained extremely high far into the 20th century. In 1946 the illiteracy rate was estimated at 85% of the population. Albania became an independent country in 1912, but due to historic circumstances the development of a unified national education system only started after the First World War. Weak attempts at modernization were again stopped by the outbreak of the Second World War. In the post-war period Albania relied on Soviet and Yugoslav support, but had already broken contact with the 'Yugoslavian revisionists' in 1947. The impact of the Soviet model was strong up until 1960 when Albania also severed ties with the Soviets and started to build its own educational model.

The further development of communist Albania—bordering only with Yugoslavia, Greece and Italy across the sea, but not with the Eastern bloc—was autarchic. Nevertheless, education was an important item on the agenda. The weak and interrupted pre-war traditions in higher learning were reinforced by some new institutes established after the war, mainly according to the Soviet model. The state University of Tirana, also the leading higher education institution today, was founded in 1957 as the first Albanian university by combining five existing institutes, of which the oldest one—the Institute of Sciences—was founded in 1947. This remained the only Albanian university up until 1990, although some new institutes or their branches (e.g. in agriculture, teacher training, etc.) were also established during this period. It was crucial for a country that was closed to foreign influences to train its own human resources. It seems that this was quite a paradoxical endeavour. Nevertheless, by the late 1980s illiteracy was practically eliminated, there were already around 40,000 teachers in the country (with a total population of 3.1m.) and the proportion of youngsters continuing with secondary education had increased beyond two-thirds. However, the real growth and expansion of the higher education sector only started after the changes of 1989–90.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS DURING THE TRANSITION PERIOD

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the countries of the Soviet bloc lost their 'tutor' and were suddenly free to decide where to go. For all of them, this period was extremely complex, painful and turbulent; however, the transition was mainly perceived as 'internal affairs', as the countries' borders did not change. The only two exceptions were Czechoslovakia, which decided to disintegrate peacefully and consensually into two independent countries, and the former German Democratic Republic (East Germany), which was integrated in the same peaceful way into the *Bundesrepublik*. Whereas a Third World War had been expected with great fear during the previous decades, the story now seemed to have reached a happy end. In the mid-1990s these countries were already associated with the EU and they joined the EU in 2004.

In Albania the political transition also remained within national borders, but it was quite another story. It started with the collapse of the autarchic regime and was followed by chaotic processes and social implosion. At the beginning of the 1990s the country entered an economic and political crisis which escalated into a breakdown of public order and mass vandalism. The education system suffered huge damage; it is reported that one-third of schools were ransacked. Many teachers left their schools in villages and migrated to cities or abroad. Normal life was gradually re-established, however, and over the next few years, supported by

important international aid, the country started social reconstruction that included the rebuilding and modernization of its education system.

The rest of the Western Balkans passed the transition period in the worst possible scenario. Seemingly a stable and internationally open country just a few years before (during the Olympic Games in Sarajevo in 1984), Yugoslavia disappeared in fire and smoke. While Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin was made an unrestricted passage, the territories of the former Yugoslavia were divided by impassable new borders. The Berlin Wall did not fall overnight and the disintegration of Yugoslavia was similarly a long process.

Disintegration was deemed likely after Tito's death (1980), but it became more tangible after Slobodan Milošević won power in Serbia (1986). This was a point of no return: Yugoslavia was a train without brakes but it still took quite a lot of time for the final crash to occur. In January 1990 the League of Communists of Yugoslavia broke up; the famous slogan of 'brotherhood and unity' was destroyed by rapidly escalating nationalism. In June 1991 Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence, followed by Macedonia in September. After a '10-day war' in June, Slovenia was out of the Western Balkans, but a real war in Croatia had only just begun. In spring 1992 war also erupted in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The next few years were an enormously malicious period, even when compared with the cruelties of previous wars. International forces involved in the conflicts with great hesitation finally intervened to stop the hostilities. The war in Croatia ended in summer 1995 and in Bosnia and Herzegovina in November, after the NATO air strikes on Bosnian Serb military targets; they were followed by the Dayton Peace Agreement in December 1995.

The wars seemed to have been halted but they were followed by a long and complicated process of political and diplomatic negotiations. The previous federal republics went in very different ways. In the second half of the 1990s, Slovenia was already on its path to the EU. Croatia again established sovereignty over its full territory in 1998. Bosnia and Herzegovina was confronted with an enormous amount of reconstruction work on the economy and civic life on the basis of the Dayton Agreement, which divided the country into cantons, designed mainly along the lines drawn by ethnic cleansing, with a very weak central government. Macedonia seemed to be the only country that achieved its independence without a military conflict, but it was affected by serious political and economic crises. Due to a polemic with Greece, its name is still not internationally recognized. A direct military conflict did not significantly affect Serbia (with Vojvodina and Kosovo now directly subordinated to Belgrade) and Montenegro. They formed the (new) Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1992, yet Montenegro proclaimed its independence in 2006, thus putting the final nail in the coffin of Yugoslavia.

However, 1998 was not the end of war in the region. Serbia was in a deep economic and political crisis and social protests were ever louder. Students often went out onto the streets to protest against the autocratic regime and miserable standard of living. Tensions in Kosovo grew into a military conflict and in the summer of 1998 Milošević sent his troops into Kosovo. The recognized scenario was being re-enacted: the international community expressed its concern; the UN first threatened and in the spring of 1999 started air strikes. Serbia withdrew its troops in May 1999 and United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) forces entered the province (which declared its independence in 2008, although its full international recognition and status within the international community is still unresolved). Protest and social unrest in Serbia was on the increase. In an extremely volatile situation, elections were held in September 2000 and finally brought changes to Serbia, strongly supported by students and professors supportive of democracy. After hesitating for a few weeks, Milošević acknowledged defeat. A democratic government was formed by Zoran Đinđić. In April 2001 Milošević was arrested by Serbian police and later extradited to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia at The Hague, where he died in 2006. Prime Minister Đinđić was not in power for long; he was assassinated in a terrorist attack in March 2003.

Even at this point, weapons did not become silent. Shots were heard throughout almost all of 2001 in Macedonia, which had remained outside the firing zone in previous years. A conflict erupted in part of north-western Macedonia with a strong Albanian minority, on the border with the UN-administered Kosovo. With

the Ohrid Agreement in 2001, the rights of the Albanian population (officially over 25%) were improved, including as part of the administration of the country and by making Albanian the second official language, thereby also broadening access to (higher) education.

Tensions and incidents remained a constant of the Western Balkans during this decade but there were no more military conflicts. Countries there started, sooner or later, on economic and social reconstruction. It was clear that damage to education systems was enormous and that education was one of the highest national priorities; however, the circumstances were difficult. Deeply cleaved by wars, often with UN peacekeeping forces in their territories, the countries' reconstruction was impossible without international and, in particular, EU aid and support.

In late 1998 a conference was organized in Graz (Austria) on *European Educational Co-operation for Peace, Stability and Democracy*, which had a huge impact on educational reconstruction in the Western Balkans. This was the beginning of the so-called *Graz Process*. It was disturbed by escalation of the Kosovo crisis, but not stopped. On the contrary, on 10 June 1999 the *Stability Pact for South-East Europe* was adopted in Cologne and reaffirmed the following month in Sarajevo. A detailed action plan was designed and education was included as a priority area in one of the three Working Tables. Thus, the *Graz Process* evolved into the *Enhanced Graz Process* (EGP), encompassing a number of governmental, non-governmental and international organizations. In the following years, it was the main supporter of the region's educational reconstruction, linking up with education trends in other European countries and promoting regional cooperation and networking as instruments for wider participation in international initiatives. Six working groups were established within the EGP Education and Youth Task Force and one of them—coordinated by the European University Association (EUA)—focused on higher education (see Zgaga, 2005: 9–21).

There was an enormous amount of work to do in each individual country of the Western Balkans, now divided into seven new independent countries and the territory of Kosovo with an open status. First of all, there was a need to reconstruct the national systems of higher education. The two former systems of the region—Yugoslav and Albanian—were both obsolete and ruined; in addition, there were political reasons to create a distance from them. The social contexts had changed enormously and were changing in some countries all over again, and the question of how to adapt the education system to the needs of the new society emerging was quite challenging. The two former systems were replaced by many new ones; new legislation and reforms ran in quite different ways in each of them, making them less and less compatible.

RECONSTRUCTION: A FRAGMENTED REGION VS. EUROPEAN INTEGRATION PROCESSES

Alongside launching the *Enhanced Graz Process*, 29 European ministers signed the Bologna Declaration (19 June 1999, see www.bologna2009benelux.org), thus initiating a process aimed at constructing the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) until 2010. Its introductory part stresses that a 'Europe of knowledge' is an irreplaceable factor of social and human growth as it fosters European citizenship, empowers citizens with the necessary competencies for working together, and with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space. In the third paragraph, the Declaration openly refers to SEE: 'The importance of education and educational cooperation in the development and strengthening of stable, peaceful and democratic societies is universally acknowledged as paramount, the more so in view of the situation in South East Europe.'

Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia, as EU associated countries, were among the 29 signatory states to the Declaration. Croatia signed the Declaration in 2001 and the remaining five countries signed in 2003. Large parts of the Western Balkans needed serious reconstruction of the whole tertiary education system before entering the Bologna Process and this task was addressed within the framework of the EGP helping with the

'Bologna' agenda. Several common priorities were identified, including the need for new legislation and reform of university governance (the 're-integrated' university); the development of quality assurance mechanisms; the introduction of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS); curriculum renewal; democratic and ethical standards, recognition of multi-ethnicity, etc. (*Higher Education in Europe*, 2003). In terms of the Bologna Process, these priorities were all part of the public responsibility for higher education, and this was an issue of the utmost concern at the beginning of the post-conflict period in the Western Balkans.

In the former Yugoslavia part of the region, higher education was seriously affected. The horrors of war, forced migration, etc. also hurt students and teachers; the 'brain drain' was enormous. In a number of cases, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, institutions were split along ethnic divisions. Two universities were created sometimes out of a previous single institution, for example the Sarajevo and Mostar University; in Kosovo the University of Prishtina with Albanian as the teaching language and the Serbian University of Priština at a temporary location in Mitrovica. The University of Tirana was also split in 1991, but for quite different reasons. This division had to be taken as a reality, but the key dilemma was how to provide access to the increasing number of young people, and how to maintain the quality of education provision. These were particularly tough questions when we recall that in some places academic activities had stopped for a long period, staff had been displaced and equipment destroyed. Activities were carried on in extreme circumstances: moral resistance was more important than real teaching and learning. For example, in Kosovo Albanians had rejected Milošević's forced education reforms at the beginning of the 1990s and had persisted with a 'parallel education system' in private houses and cellars until the 1999/2000 academic year.

There were high expectations of universities in the newly established nation states. Under circumstances that prevented mobility, new learning opportunities were required in regional centres with no real academic traditions. New faculties were established either from nothing or on the basis of previous branch departments. The tradition of strong 'independent faculties' and a weak university made the mushrooming of new institutions easy. The role of the university in society was reconfirmed in a similar way to in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries: the time for 'the national university' had returned. Rector Rugova explained it in the following way: 'The role and significance of University of Prishtina since its foundation were typical for the roles and significances that universities have played in the western civilized countries, illuminist and liberator from tutelage of the others' (Rugova, 2010).

A process of higher education for the masses started in Yugoslavia just before the period of conflict began. During the 1990s the demand for study places rose enormously everywhere, driven by high unemployment and a general search for opportunities. In 1989 there was a total of 17 universities in the region that we now call the Western Balkans; since then this figure has exponentially expanded. The increase in the number of state universities has been much smaller than in private ones. New state universities have mainly been established on political bases and with very limited budgets, while the new circumstances have made private initiatives in the higher education area almost totally unrestricted.

This trend has been particularly strong in Albania, where around 30 private institutions of various kinds have appeared alongside the old one, as well as 10 new public universities. Kosovo has witnessed similar growth of private institutions—but not public ones. Institutions and their branches have been flourishing across Macedonia, where there are five state universities and twice as many private institutions. The picture is similar in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has eight state universities and twice as many private institutions. In other countries, the growth of private institutions has been more controlled—not only by national accreditation procedures but by traditional academic leaders. Many of the new institutions could not be classified as proper universities and are instead 'independent faculties' and 'higher schools'. Higher education systems in the region have remained mostly unitary, with the exception of Croatia which differentiates *sveučilišta* (universities, of which it has eight), *veleučilišta* (colleges, of which it has nine) and *visoke škole* (higher schools,

of which it has 21). In Serbia there are six, mainly 'old', state universities (excluding the disputed one in Mitrovica, Kosovo) and three times as many private institutions. The Montenegro system is the smallest and consists of one public and one private university.

The growth of private higher education has been predominantly caused by demand and the lack of state support:

> 'Public higher education institutions depend dominantly on public funding. The regional and local investments to higher education are marginal. Higher education institutions do have a possibility to generate their own income, however the data on the own income is difficult to access. Some estimates suggest that one third of the overall income is generated by the institutions independently.' (Ivošević and Miklavič, 2009: 103)

Fees have been the best way for underfunded public institutions to improve their position. This was a shock for the region, as fees had never been required before; however, called for during the worst period, they were accepted. Usually the government pays fees for a given quota of students, while students outside the quota must pay for themselves. In the fragmented system of 'independent faculties', many teachers also teach at other public or private institutions. This has made the system somewhat opaque, often bringing complaints and the occasional corruption scandal.

The fast-growing higher education sector has raised serious concerns among policy-makers and institutions about reputation. Establishing accreditation procedures has been the most common response, but an evaluation culture also started to develop later, following best practices from EU countries (see EUA, 2004). The more a national system of accreditation was delayed, the more serious the problem: what should be done with the non-recognized institutions that have appeared in the meantime? In addition, in transitional countries accreditation has been often used in clashes between 'old' and 'new' elites for hegemony in the national administration, economy and culture. As mentioned, the wild growth of institutions has also been a result of the tradition of independent faculties—an outcome of an obsolete governance system.

In fact, at Yugoslav universities after the Second World War the council of the university, with the rector as chairman, dealt 'with all general questions concerning the running of all the Faculties', while the faculty councils discussed and took 'decisions on all general questions affecting the ordinary running of the Faculty' (Uvalić, 1952: 4). The radical constitutional and legislative reforms of the mid-1970s (we cannot analyse them here in any depth, so let us only note that they were also some kind of a *divide et impera* approach against the student and academic revolt of 1968; see Zgaga, 2007: 63–82) petrified the concept of independent faculties, which—as legal entities or 'university members'—united to form a university. For various reasons, this concept survived the 1990s and in a modified way it has defined recent developments. In most cases even today, '[u]niversities are a loose confederation of faculties at the best; yet, in fact they do not exist because no important decisions are taken at this level. Even in cases when they are taken individual faculties can behave in a direct contradiction to decisions taken at the level of the university because they are autonomous in relation to the university' (Vukasović, 2005: 402).

This formation can be seen in all former Yugoslavian countries, except Albania. By virtue of this, changes in governance have been slow and have often encountered strong opposition. Slovenia introduced legal provisions for an integrated university in 1993, but it took a lot of time for the system's implementation, including a dispute before the Constitutional Court, which finally decided that faculties were not autonomous, but the university was. It was similar in Croatia, but there a formal decision on autonomous faculties was made, blocking integrative attempts. However, integrative approaches to university governance have not been entirely ruled out and some new practices have appeared, for example some new institutions have a rector claiming an integrative philosophy, supported by academics and external stakeholders. In general, the 'older' universities are more traditional, whereas changes can be expected among the 'younger' ones. The universities

in Rijeka (Croatia), Novi Sad (Serbia) and Tuzla (Bosnia and Herzegovina) have often been included in the latter group. Macedonia has also made provision for the functional integration of state universities (2008), although the transformation is expected to be 'a painful process, especially of university-faculty relations' (Pecakovska and Lazarevska, 2009: 46).

The University of Prishtina, in Kosovo, changed significantly during the UN administrative period. On the other side of the border, the SEE University in Tetovo (Macedonia) is a particularly interesting example. Its roots go back to the turbulent start of this decade. Max van der Stoel, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) High Commissioner on National Minorities at the time, initiated a project to develop a university that would improve the opportunities for higher education in minority languages. The international community provided funds for a new campus and the Macedonian Government donated the land. The SEE University was opened in November 2001, following the end of the inter-ethnic conflicts that had escalated earlier that year. It is the first private, non-profit university in the region with a modern governance structure, and with Albanian, Macedonian and English teaching languages.

Before the 1990s higher education was perhaps the most 'internationalized' part of social sub-systems in the region. We may refer, for example, to the Inter-University Centre in Dubrovnik (devastated during the war)—the organizer of the 'University Today' international conferences during the 1980s. The higher education sector, therefore, gladly accepted international aid and initiatives for reconstruction. Co-operation within the EGP and the Bologna Process, as well as projects within the TEMPUS programme, were extremely important for overcoming the outcomes of the conflict period and starting reconstruction. In general, 'Europeanization' has been regarded as 'de-Balkanization'.

During the first stage, the big issues were addressed: legislation, finance, quality assurance and governance. Their resolution was assisted through the EGP activities, with important help from the EUA, and later through full membership in the Bologna Process. The implementation of systemic novelties started in around 2005 and brought teaching and learning to the fore. There have been huge discrepancies between the (formally) modernized system and obsolete teaching and learning practices. A lack of human and financial resources, extremely high student to teacher ratios, the heritage of a long period without normally functioning institutions and international isolation have had strong negative impacts.

Several recent surveys in the region have analyzed the impact of system reforms on teaching and learning. In one of them, which focused on teacher education at universities in the region, a problem common to all disciplines and departments was identified: 'The extent of reform of higher education curricula varies from field to field, […] some institutions have gone further in the reform […] while in other cases the structure has remained completely the same' (Pantić and Camilleri, 2009: 30).

Conclusion: Higher Education in the Region Beyond 2010

In spring 2010 the Bologna Process crossed the finish line, as defined in 1999. Yet in the Leuven Communiqué (2009) ministers self-critically noted that 'not all the objectives have been completely achieved', and that proper implementation requires 'an increased momentum and commitment beyond 2010'. However, all countries of the EHEA have not been in an equal position in terms of modernizing their higher education systems. The countries of the Western Balkans joined the Process later than other countries, and it should not be a surprise to learn that various criticisms of the Bologna reforms have been often heard there in the last year or two.

These criticisms may be divided into 'conservative' and 'progressive'. The first group recommends boycotting changes, while the latter recommends '[d]istinguish[ing] between the *idea* of the reform with the potentials that it unlocks, from the *reality* of its imperfect implementation with disappointments that it brings' (Gregorić, 2010). 'Progressives' in Croatia propose to draw 'a distinction between the harmonization of higher education

in Europe (the Bologna Process) and Bolonja [the phonetic transcription used in colloquial south-Slavonic languages]', which is 'a distortion of the original idea' and 'an example of a failed reform'. Further, Bolonja 'understands the Bologna Process in a way which makes its implementation in Croatia impossible'. Relying on Thomas Kuhn's concept of paradigm change and Paul Feyerabend's interaction of traditions, it is shown 'that "Bologna" is an undesired mixture of our old tradition and the model introduced by the Bologna Declaration' (Kurelić, 2009: 9–10). Siniša Rodin deepens this criticism: 'Implementation of the Bologna reform in Croatia is a failure. In essence, the majority of higher education establishments have extended their original four-year degree programs into five-year ones. At the same time, such extended programs were mechanically split in two parts in order to satisfy the formal requirement of 3+2 or 4+1' (Rodin, 2009: 30). Further on, 'master programs did not develop in direction of diversity and multi-disciplinarity but, as a rule, remained mono-disciplinary and substantively related to the first Bologna cycle' (Rodin, 2009: 26).

Of course, this criticism is far from being limited to Croatia; yet it is a privilege for Croatia to listen to sharp criticism. An experienced 'European connoisseur' of the Balkans' higher education already sensed the danger of purely formal reforms in the whole region several years ago: 'One weakness is the escape into window dressing, such as advertising compliance with the Bologna Process by just cutting and pasting old curricula into the new modes, or by topping old studies with post-graduate programs without sound basics in the graduate programs' (Daxner, 2006: 6). We should note here, however, that these problems are not unknown in certain other European countries. What makes the countries of the Western Balkans more vulnerable at this point is their incomparably different positions. It is extremely difficult to implement ambitious European reforms at an impoverished grass-roots level; it is even more difficult to 'Europeanize' until cooperation on the regional level is revitalized and substantially improved.

Nevertheless, some encouraging steps have been taken in this direction. Let us use as an example the TEMPUS project, Multilingual Internet Step-by-step Maths for All (launched in 2004), which aimed to foster multilingual cooperation in the smaller universities of SEE and to improve basic practical maths skills for students in various study fields. In cooperation with colleagues from Greece and the United Kingdom, the project was carried out at two universities in Macedonia (Bitola and Tetovo). The former is mainly ethnic Macedonian and the latter is mainly ethnic Albanian. The specific value of this project was that it exceeded its direct subject-area aim (i.e. maths learning) and, importantly, contributed to mutual understanding among staff and students from both ethnic groups (see Zgaga, 2008: 42).

The good news is that ambitious projects at a departmental level are growing. The modernization of teaching and learning is really coming to the fore. Often it is connected to implementation of tools and strategies recommended by the Bologna Process, such as the credit system, student workload, learner-centred approaches, etc. For example, at the Sociology Department of the University of Belgrade the four-year 'traditional' study programme was estimated at 319 ECTS points; after a curricular reform this was refreshed and the programme was downgraded to 243 ECTS points, i.e. to the recommended size (see Vukasović, 2005: 402).

However, the grass-roots process of modernization is hindered by ambiguous legislation and a resistant old-fashioned academic culture. Like all European states, countries in the region need 'an increased momentum and commitment beyond 2010'. For this reason, sharp critical analyses might be very important. During the last 10 years a new generation of experts in higher education has also been emerging. They often started as national student representatives in the European Student Union (ESIB/ESU), completing graduate studies abroad before returning home. It is particularly encouraging that they are communicating across national, ethnic or language borders without difficulty.

In general, academics have helped the process by jumping over narrow ethnic fences. In August 2002 rectors from all SEE countries met at the renewed Inter-University Centre in Dubrovnik for the first time since the decade of conflict, to discuss international processes in higher education from a regional point of view. This

event was influenced by the Bologna Process, yet it also marked a turning point: the return of regional cooperation to higher education. There are many signs that the will to cooperate across the region (and not solely 'with Europe') is on the increase. Here, a question has been raised: 'is the South Eastern Europe Higher Education Area possible?' (Lacrama, 2007). A regional group from health studies has already responded that 'it is unlikely that a small country can or even should afford an expensive institution with the full spectrum of activities. The result in this situation very often is an institution being too small, understaffed and sub-standard'. Therefore, 'structured regional cooperation may offer the solution' (Burazeri et al., 2005: 98).

Regional cooperation is truly developing. There are also virtual networks that support cooperation, such as the Education Reform Initiative of South-Eastern Europe (ERISEE, see www.erisee.org) and the Coordination of Research Policies with the Western Balkan Countries (INCO-NET, see www.wbc-inco.net). Last, but not least, something else may enhance the momentum. The already quoted connoisseur of the Balkans put it in the following way:

> 'But there is one thing which I have learned, not least in the Balkans: if there is a place where societies can restart to think themselves, it is in the universities. Many of those who are now on the progressive side, which means on the European side of transition, have been active in student movements, in academic resistance against authoritarian rule, and could learn their future roles within the protective walls of academic freedom. This is one of the strengths of Balkan academia, which some less lucky countries do not share.' (Daxner, 2006: 8)

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