

## Editorial

This second issue of the *SEER Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe* for 2020 focuses on the heritage of the Dayton peace agreement 25 years after its signature as well as on wider EU-western Balkans relations.

Following the dissolution of the former state of Yugoslavia, by early 1992 the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) had voted in a referendum on a sovereign and independent BiH, recognised by the international community but not by the Bosnian Serb Democratic Party (SDS) and by Milošević's Serbia. War and genocide followed. The Dayton accords put an end to the 3 1/2 years of the Bosnian War, one of the wars hitting former Yugoslavia, setting Bosnia and Herzegovina and, with it, the entire western Balkans region on an eventual path towards European integration.

*Jasmin Mujanović* takes a critical look at Bosnia and Herzegovina's eroding Dayton constitutional order as it inches towards the third decade of its existence. The author takes stock of the apparently stalled democratisation of BiH within the context of its attempt to integrate into the EU and NATO. He recognises Dayton not as a break but as a continuation of the same politics that destroyed the Yugoslav federation and which it was meant to replace, most prominently the peculiar and elastic form of nationalist-authoritarianism that has survived and even deepened its hold on the country. By cementing the territorial and political fragmentation of BiH, the author sees the Dayton constitution empowering the country's pre-war political oligarchy, the very actors the international community otherwise bemoans as the country's biggest problem. As a 'fractured authoritarian' state, BiH is in need of a kind of holistic social transformation that only a genuine collective effort on the part of civil society and (what few) reform-oriented institutional actors exist in the country can provide. Based on the social movements of the 2014 Bosnian Spring the author sees some hope for a new social and political contract being struck by ordinary BiH citizens themselves.

*Fatima Fazlić* looks back over twenty five years of the Dayton Agreement asking whether it has created the possibility for the development of BiH as a functional state or only the assumptions needed for peace. The article also deals with the problems of BiH citizens in a post-Dayton BiH, with a particular reflection on those experienced by workers and their trade unions, focusing in particular on inequality and the impoverishment of the population, refugee returns and the recent experience of migration, and the failures of privatisation. Meeting the requirements to join the EU is a political and social imperative for the country's future but remains blocked by a series of factors which the author identifies as the ethno-nationalist state created by Dayton and its impact on everyday politics; the failures of the international community the fragmentation of which, also referred to by Jasmin Mujanović, is not helping the international community in its role; and, finally, among the citizenry itself.

*Christophe Solioz* reviews the third decade of transition of the western Balkans with a focus on European integration, identifying the processes of deconsolidation and de-democratisation, backed up by surveys and other indicators. While acknowledging that the next window for the western Balkans is now 2025, the author presents three contrasting scenarios for the western Balkans EU integration: an 'hour

of Europe' scenario where, through sustainable reforms and positive results in key areas, the region becomes a credible partner of the EU and in which Montenegro and Serbia have become members while the remaining Balkan countries have made irreversible progress towards European integration; a 'Balkans in limbo' scenario, where Balkan countries are still on the path to EU integration but are making slow progress in implementing reforms due to a lack of political will; and, finally, a 'ghosts of the past' scenario in which the EU integration process has slowly slipped off the political agenda while geopolitics and violent conflicts are resurgent.

The article by *Calvin Allen* examines the European Commission's 2020 Enlargement Package and the 2020 country reports for its partners in the western Balkans and Turkey. The focus is social policy and employment which are examined from the angle of how the Commission assesses progress and what it regards as priority among the outstanding issues. The author concludes that the Commission's new commitment marks a return of conditionality while the carrots (as well as some sticks) have been made plain. Nevertheless, there are problems to overcome: among them years of bad governance, corruption and petty squabbling, on top of the remarkable lack of progress towards the social aspects of the *acquis* that states have, in general, made thus far. A more active and interventionist hand from the EU would therefore be needed.

In the open section of this issue, *Lyuboslav Kostov* examines inequalities and political populism in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic with a focus on Bulgaria. Based on a literature review and empirical information, the author concludes that a broad public and expert debate is long overdue on dealing with growing inequality and one of its consequences, the emergence of populism.

The article by *Ivaylo Dinev* analyses the dynamics of class mobilisations based on evidence from Bulgaria and Slovenia. The author draws on a unique protest event dataset to explore the relations between social class, repertoires and claim-making. The exploration highlights that more than one-third of protest events in Bulgaria and Slovenia subsequent to the financial crisis were driven by specific social class actors.

Finally the article by *Ildiko Otova* examines state and policy failure concerning refugees in Bulgaria based on an analysis of dynamics and trends. As the reception system for asylum seekers was facing collapse and was setting the tone for the public and political debate, the concerns of the population were quickly instrumentalised by political parties, but this has acted to prevent the making of real policies. This lacuna, in turn, poses the real threat to national security insofar as Bulgaria remains unprepared to face subsequent migration.

If you have read something here that sparks a thought or two which you would be interested in shaping into an article for a future issue of the *SEER Journal*, do contact us: we would love to hear from you and would be more than happy to discuss your ideas with you. Our next issue is scheduled for publication in summer 2021.

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