

Editorial

This 2012-1 issue of the *SEER Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe* continues to focus on the EU integration process of south-east Europe. This is, however, a two-way process and we need to look at both sides: is the European Union in its current situation ready for and capable of further enlargement? Is EU membership still attractive, and is the motivation for the necessary efforts to meet the accession criteria still there on behalf of candidate countries? This issue carries the title: *The EU and the Balkans: drifting apart?* in order to raise awareness of the dangers if such doubts as currently exist actually materialise. The stabilisation process of the western Balkans had been the most successful undertaking of the European Union in the last decade and progress, albeit not without question marks, is definitely visible in the region. With the shattered Euro project, Europe desperately needs a success story and, for the nations of south-east Europe, the guarantee of progress is still the prospect of EU membership.

We will examine a variety of aspects in this issue that relate to the readiness of both sides for integration. First, we provide an overview of the countries of the region to show how the ‘Europeanisation’ strategy of the EU is operating. We also show the current situation of a multiple-speed Europe that seems to be crystallising in the course of the enduring crisis. Then, we provide a snapshot of the state of the economy and the labour market in the countries of the region showing that, with all the trouble in Europe, the gap in welfare is still enormous. We also examine particular aspects of economic and social development in a number of countries, from the role of foreign direct investment to social security reforms.

In our outlook section, we also carry articles from the wider region that are not related to the focus topic but are still relevant for the profile of our journal.

George Aspridis and Marina Petrelli examine the ‘Europeanisation’ process of the western Balkans to show whether this model can explain the pre-accession process for applicant countries, drawing also a draft profile of the countries of the western Balkans.

Béla Galgóczi looks at a crisis-ridden Europe progressing at multiple speeds where convergence between the countries of the core and those of the periphery seems to be in danger. Convergence had been the major promise of European integration and, in the pre-crisis period, this had been a massive success for both southern and central-eastern Europe. What we see now is a downwards spiral and growing divergence.

Greece does not belong to the narrow profile of the journal, but current developments still have wide consequences not only for the western Balkans but also for the whole of Europe. Masoura Eleftheria gives us a historical analysis of the development of social security policies in Greece (1974-2011), using multi-dimensional data analysis methods.

Béla Galgóczi and Bruno S. Sergi provide a snapshot of the economic and social situation in the countries of south-east Europe, setting basic indicators against the European benchmarks.

Liviu Voinea’s article poses the question: ‘Why is there no money for pensions?’ and gives us a critical analysis of the state of pensions reform in Romania, putting this also into a European perspective and in the context of the ongoing crisis.

Ivan Markov, Jeni Nacheva, Yosif Yosifov, Maria Zareva and Petya Georgieva calculate reimbursement rates in Bulgaria and give an overview of that country's recent social security reforms.

With all its controversial effects, one of the drivers of economic modernisation in both central-eastern and south-eastern Europe has been foreign direct investment (FDI). Danijela Jaćimović takes a comparative approach to examining if FDI has contributed to a raising of the level of competitiveness in the western Balkans.

In this issue's outlook, Nilay Etiler and Kuvvet Lordoglu provide a qualitative study of domestic services in Turkey, with a particular focus on the health issues of immigrant women.

Finally, Lela Rekhviashvili gives us an account of the survival strategies of the poor and marginalised in Georgia by exploring the situation of internally-displaced people.

Béla Galgóczi

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Calvin Allen