

# Editorial

The first issue of the *SEER Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe* for 2018 addresses European integration perspectives in south-east Europe. SEER is entering its 21<sup>st</sup> volume in 2018 and, during its past twenty years, European integration has been one of the key topics that we have regularly addressed over the years, including also a retrospective special issue in 2015. On 8<sup>th</sup> May 2018, ahead of the EU-West Balkans Summit, we held a *SEER* 20 years Anniversary Symposium in Sofia devoted also to the issue of the EU accession process of the region.

*SEER Journal* has its focus on social and labour issues, so it is no wonder that we also address the EU accession process from this perspective, as was the case at the Anniversary Symposium. Presentations by *SEER* authors and social partners from the region emphasised that, since the economic crisis, income and especially social convergence between poorer and richer countries in the EU has been slowing down and, in certain cases, has gone into reverse. This is undermining the EU's own ambitions and calls into question its attractiveness to future members. Poverty, high unemployment, the informal economy, low wages, corruption, malfeasance, the emigration of skilled workers, discrimination against minorities and the 'brain drain' are affecting all western Balkan countries. Wage convergence has not been established within the countries of the western Balkans. In some countries, the wage gap with the EU has even increased, affecting the economic and social security of people in western Balkan countries. Most countries of the western Balkans have not experienced any increase in real wages since the crisis. Statutory minimum wages exist in all western Balkan states, but these, in many cases, do not cover the minimum subsistence level for families.

We start the current issue with a conference note by *Lidija Pejović* with the full edited text of her contribution to the *SEER Journal* Anniversary Symposium. The author reports on the progress of the EU-Montenegro accession negotiations and formulates the main trade union expectations from Montenegro's EU integration.

The article by *Christophe Solioz*, the first in a series, takes a historic perspective, analysing the south-east European EU integration project in the twenty years up to 2009. It seeks in particular to question the 'turning point' rhetoric – often applied to the fate of countries of the region and the European Union. It is clear that Europe is currently facing a 'polycrisis': a crisis in economics (banking, debt, currency, growth, inequality, cohesion and work); an institutional and political crisis; and also a crisis of imagination and trust. Indeed, the end of the post-Wall era is characterised by an immediate post-accession crisis apparently introducing a period of de-consolidation. As to how the EU and south-east European integration responds to this, the view of the author is that there is a need for paradigm change, prompted by a new understanding of the post-1989 period.

The article by *Anna Plachkova* presents an analysis of democratisation in the countries of south-eastern Europe in the context of EU membership. After a brief literature review of the EU model of democratisation, the author highlights the increased attention that researchers have paid to the quality of democracy and, in particular, to the rule of law as key mechanisms guaranteeing the successful functioning

of representative democracy. The article then conducts an empirical study of European Commission progress report documents for Bulgaria, FYR Macedonia and Serbia with the purpose of finding empirical evidence on whether the EU has learned lessons from the accession of Bulgaria and Romania that it can apply in its relations with candidate countries from the western Balkans regarding democratisation.

*Ekrem Yaşar Akçay* provides an assessment of the European Union membership processes of Romania and Bulgaria in comparison with Turkey. While Bulgaria and Romania were able to resolve the EU accession negotiations within a reasonable time frame, for Turkey the half-century stalemate has currently reached a point in which there is a freeze in negotiations. Critical of the Turkish government's 'disproportionate repressive measures' after the failed *coup d'état* in 2016, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the suspension of accession negotiations with Turkey.

*Mirlinda Batalli* and *Muhamed Vokrri* analyse the development of labour relations law in Kosovo and in the EU, and the integration process of Kosovo with the EU, with a particular focus on the harmonisation of labour legislation.

The article by *Flamur Hyseni* examines the issue of the partial transfer of Kosovo's sovereignty to international organisations, addressing constitutional considerations. The issue of Kosovo's territorial integrity is also considered throughout the period of international administration from the UN until the declaration of independence and presently.

*Orion Garo* examines wage developments and human capital potential in the Albanian labour market, comparing Albanian workforce productivity and labour market earnings with those in neighbouring countries.

The article by *Ariana Qosaj-Mustafa* examines the use of international women's human rights law in addressing gender-based violence in Kosovo, presenting how feminist legal scholars have approached the subject of law and the role of law in advancing the equality of women with men. By analysing the example of Kosovo, the article discusses the adoption and use of formal legal regulations for international instruments on women's human rights and the institutional response to cases of gender-based violence in Kosovo.

The article by *Vjosa Osmani-Sadriu* sets out a comparative overview of the legal and constitutional protection of property rights in the systems operating in Europe and the United States with a view to understanding how the right to property is protected through constitutions and international treaties.

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