

Editorial

The first number of the *SEER Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe* for 2014 focuses on *integration and sovereignty in Eastern Europe: new trends and old histories*. We have a block of articles focusing on this theme, timely at a point of the increasing uncertainty and insecurity which dominates Europe's world, and in what some have termed an opening of a new geopolitics, as well as a number of other articles focusing on contemporary topics in eastern Europe.

2014 has seen commemorations of the one hundredth anniversary of the start of the First World War, whose cradle was Sarajevo, which lies at the heart of our journal; as well as a flowering of civic protest movements in various Bosnian cities. The flowering might have been all-too-brief, but the movements provide some hopes for the future as regards the sclerosis into which politics and political elites in the country have fallen, although it seems unlikely that there will be developments in the near future, including as regards the autumn elections. In eastern Europe, which also lies at the core of our interests, the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the violent unrest which has marked eastern Ukraine raises substantial question marks over security of the sort that have not been raised since the Helsinki Accords in 1975. Furthermore, disturbances in Iraq, and the question of sending arms to the Peshmerga forces, raises the issue of security on Europe's south-east borders, as well as the dangers facing Turkey.

The lead article in this issue, by Dragan Đurić, examines institutional capacities in the context of the development of the South-East Europe 2020 Strategy, modelled on Europe 2020. He argues that the uncritical copying of the instruments and mechanisms of the European Social Model in western Balkans countries is likely to have very limited effects while, furthermore, the EU integration process implies a need to strengthen the capacities of all societal bodies in the region. Local solutions to local problems are what are most important and the rejuvenation process is, no doubt, one that needs to be all-encompassing.

Wolfgang Petritsch and Christophe Solioz deliver some brief thoughts on the 'Bosnian spring', pointing out that Bosnia, and Bosnians, do not lack creativity or invention as regards their problems; what is needed is, in contrast, a stronger and more facilitative Europe capable of encouraging the possibilities provided by an emergence from powerlessness.

In a deliberately provocative and confrontational personal essay, Anis Bajrektarević undertakes a wide-ranging survey of the current state of geopolitics, drawing as the backdrop to his theme the anniversary of the commencement of the First World War and, twenty years ago, Sarajevo in the middle of a cruel siege while Europe, somewhat pre-occupied with internal matters, regarded itself as incapable of effective intervention. The author's ultimate intention is to point to what Europe used and still tends to be, despite all our passions and hopes, visions and targets, institutions and instruments.

In a follow-on piece, Professor Bajrektarević explores the geopolitical issues which link interests in the Caspian and the Arctic, both of which are expected to have a considerable influence on the passions and imperatives of future geopolitical strategies given the strategic locations, and resources, of each.

Next, Ali Yaman reviews the position of the Alevis in Turkey, a group of Turkish Muslims with a different set of beliefs to the Sunnis which make up the majority of Turks, and with particular regard to the stance of the JDP, the ruling party, *vis-à-vis* the secularism on which the Turkish state was founded. Dr. Yaman takes a historical perspective, seeking to account for the differences, and the misunderstandings, which too often prevail and which prevent the development of more cohesive societies.

Badr Aziz and Bruno Sergi address some attention to labour markets in Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, concluding that governments across the region need to allocate resources properly in order to enhance labour force quality. Increasing the wages of workers, improving living standards, creating jobs and improving skill levels, while maintaining labour rights, will make a contribution to growth and development, and at minimal social cost.

Taxation agreements in the era of integration is the focus of Sejdefa Dzafche's contribution. Arguing for the centrality of an open approach, Dr. Dzafche reviews the impact of taxation requirements in the Republic of Macedonia on the country's EU integration processes, with particular attention to a flat-tax regime and those agreements which would seem to be contradictory as the Republic approaches EU membership.

Finally in our thematic section, Eva Maurina reviews twenty years of independent history of Latvia and the country's standing in the contemporary constellation of Europe. Drawing on original research, Ms. Maurina concludes that Latvia has been compelled to sacrifice economic sovereignty in order to preserve its political independence: a choice which is, perhaps the only one a small and resource-hungry nation can make in an era of cut-throat globalisation.

The open section of this issue consists of a pair of linked articles reviewing the contribution of research and development and IT innovation to diversifying the Russian economy.

Firstly, Badr Aziz and Bruno Sergi examine the prospects for Russia's IT hothouse at Skolkovo, seen as a mirror of California's Silicon Valley, highlighting the economic impact this project will have on the Russian economy and how it is intended to shift Russian dependence on natural resources to those of its people.

Secondly, Fabian Teichmann takes an extensive review of the factors which lead to success in international R&D collaboration from the perspective of the lessons they hold for Russian diversification and the chances for success of projects like Skolkovo.

We hope that you find something of interest in this number – and, as always, we would gladly consider contributions, of whatever length, based on something that you have read in these pages. Through debate and argument, and a consideration of different, sometimes controversial, points of view, we find our ways forward. If an article stirs you to making a response, we invite you to discuss your thoughts and contribution with either of us, or with the members of the Editorial Board. You will find the contact details for both of us at the front of the volume.

Béla Galgócz

July 2014

Calvin Allen