

Editorial

This first issue of the *SEER Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe* for 2019 addresses various aspects of the readiness of western Balkans countries for EU accession. Issues tackled by the following articles include the quality of social dialogue using the example of Croatia; an overview of economic development across the region; settling controversial past heritage ahead of EU accession (such as, for example, property issues and geopolitical disputes); and a historic evaluation of the EU's strategy for its earlier eastern enlargement.

The article by Cvetan Kovač, Ivana Krišto, Hrvoje Kovač and Ana Šijaković examines social dialogue and occupational health and safety in the Republic of Croatia. The article presents the results of a survey of various aspects of the perceptions of respondents on the quality of the dialogue in the implementation of OHS standards. Based on the results, the authors conclude that strengthening the social dialogue, both at tripartite and bipartite levels, would be a precondition in the delivery of better results for Croatia, and which would have lessons for the entire western Balkans region.

Sanja Paunović and Rajko Kosanović provide a comparative analysis of the economic development of the south-eastern Europe region. The article updates the authors' previous analysis of the economic position facing western Balkans countries. It analyses developments between 2008 and 2018 in five countries from the region – Serbia; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Montenegro; North Macedonia; and Albania – and contrasts this with the three newest EU member states – Bulgaria; Romania; and Croatia.

The article by Ardit Gashi addresses a central issue for post-conflict regions: the settling of property rights and establishing constitutional provisions for the protection of property. The author takes the example of Kosovo. Problems regarding the protection of property have, for many reasons, been a continuous feature of Kosovan institutions and society after 1999, both in the light of the constitutional provisions and in interaction with the standards and interpretations of the European Court of Human Rights. The article presents several aspects of the requirement for filing complaints over the protection of property, emphasising the position of the European Convention on Human Rights within the Kosovo legal system.

Florent Muçaj and Luz Balaj focus on the process of dialogue between the Republic of Kosovo and the Republic of Serbia from a constitutional perspective. The authors identify two main phases of the dialogue: the stage at which the process was considered to be technical; and then when it was continued initially at prime ministerial level and then, later, at presidential level. After eight years of negotiations, the process of normalising relations between the Republic of Kosovo and the Republic of Serbia is about to come to an end in the form of a final agreement which will be an international treaty mandatory for both states. Such reconciliation must be based on the states resolving the remaining issues and normalising their relations as two independent states and as international subjects. The article discusses the implementation mechanisms and obligations arising from the process thus far, whether the final

agreement will produce constitutional changes in the Republic of Kosovo and the Republic of Serbia; and how it might affect the sovereignty of both states.

Finally, in the focus topic of this issue, Mirela Veleva-Eftimova reflects on the EU's new eastern enlargement approach and draws conclusions for the western Balkans. In February 2018, the European Commission presented its Strategy for a credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the western Balkans. The article seeks to reconstruct the concept of the earlier enlargement to the east, culminating in 2004, taking account of the reality of the national interests and compromises that shaped its direction, enlargement conditionality being put into the context of the wider notion of European integration. The author concludes that an accelerated enlargement process had a knock-on impact on the quality of integration itself, lending a character to the process of the Europeanisation of countries in the region which remains unfinished.

In the open section of this issue, Fejzi Beqiri provides a comparative analysis of the criminal offence of the trafficking of human organs in former Yugoslavia, including the types and weights of criminal sanctions that are foreseen in the criminal codes in these states.

Finally, Dimitar Nikoloski examines the gender pay gap in North Macedonia, assessing the difference for both low-paid and high-paid employees.

Béla Galgóczi
Calvin Allen

June 2019