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Western Balkans, Reforms and Eurointegrations¹

Abstract

The subject of this research is the processes of transition and reform in the Balkans and integration into the European Union (EU). These processes have their historical, political, economic, social causes and consequences. The efforts and efforts to integrate the countries of the Western Balkans (WB) into the European space are emphasized. The question is: can the Western Balkan countries help each other in further regional and European integration? The assumption is that the knowledge and experience gained so far about the aforementioned integrations is poorly used, but that there are realistic social and economic assumptions to accelerate the reforms of these societies. The countries of the Western Balkans should learn from the positive experiences of EU member states, but also adapt normative and other solutions to their own social circumstances.

Furthermore, the authors refer to the emergence and meaning of the term Western Balkans, which came to the limelight from the beginning of the 20th century, and revived in the last decade of the same century, when it is most commonly used to denote an atmosphere of intolerance, hatred, conflict, war and division. Such an atmosphere dominated the breakup of Yugoslavia and resulted in the warlike dissolution of society and the common state. These processes are an obstacle to the reforms, democratization, economic progress and European integration of the Western Balkan countries. However, the intense work and desire for EU integration in recent years, in these countries, have contributed to making conflicts in the past a barrier to further development.

Keywords: European Union, Balkans, integration, peace, transition, rule of law

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Introduction

■ The beginning of the transition of the Balkan countries, in literature, began with the fall of the Berlin Wall. From an economic and sociological point of view, major changes in the economic and social structure of the Balkan countries began before 1990, but have accelerated and deepened over the last three decades. During this time, both the international environment and the European Union itself were changing. Overall, the transition direction of these societies marks the transition from a self-governing / state socialist system to capitalism. The manner, pace, characteristics of the main entities that governed the society are different, but their strategic goals were as follows: to create a market economy, a multi-party parliamentary system and the rule of law. For most of them, the strategic goal was to join the EU, but the pace of achieving this is different from country to country.

How did Serbia move forward? The key point was that as “the country of the heavenly people finally descended to earth” and began to solve real problems. To look at the domestic and international situation and position, which she began to work on herself, on her own changes, while recognizing weaknesses, ignorance and her own shortcomings. Then it was revealed how great the job was, and that it would not be done quickly or easily. In addition, the issue of inter-regional relations in the region has been raised, but also closer ties with all EU countries as well as non-EU countries such as the USA, China, Russia, Turkey, Israel, BRIXA countries and many Arabian countries. It was her own firm determination to develop the country economically and for its citizens to live “like all the normal world”? She realized that no country can develop economically with human resources that do not want to work and develop, with young people being allowed to live in illusions, and youth is prone to it. When events are thus viewed, what does globalization and the fall of the Berlin Wall have to do with it? Enough of this is the country itself, in ourselves. But it cannot be overlooked that there have been various international pressures, for which there are many facts and evidence, about which much has been written. Wise Japanese once said, “50% are guilty of our own fault, and 50% of our own fault” (Shinici, 2013).

The countries created by the breakup of the second SFR Yugoslavia are Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro (without Croatia because it is already in the EU, Slovenia although the former SFRY country is also in the EU, but it does not belong to this name because it is a country of central Europe) and Albania, today politically referred to as the Western Balkans.² Albania belonged to a different type of real-socialism than the SFRY and was one of the least developed countries. Depicting privatization of social / state property, de-industrialization, old and new economic and social inequalities and poverty of employees and other citizens, as well as lack of rule of law, along with old and new conflicts, are considered as the most important structural obstacles to the development and acceleration of European integration. In addition, the existence of corruption is an indirect indicator of the absence of the rule of law. However, respect for rights and human freedoms are some of the most fundamental values that the EU requires from future members. These are some of the factors that are essential for regional cooperation and integration, without which the economic and social progress of these societies is difficult. However, the term “Balkanization” is multi-layered and has different dimensions (economic, historical, political, cultural). Mary Todorova wrote more about this and pointed to numerous stereotypes about the Balkans. She also emphasized that since the 1990s it has gained pejorative and ideological significance (Todorova, 2015: 22). The name was created after the Balkan wars at the beginning of the XX century, and with the wars of the 1990s in this area it gained new content and importance. Its essence concerns the fragmentation of societies, separatism, division, aggravation of conflicts, the rise of nationalism, local and civil conflicts and wars, after which non-volatile societies and states emerge. This has led some authors to point to disintegration processes in the EU (Brexit, for example), as a danger of the “Balkanization” syndrome of that community (Dedovic, 2017; Srncevic, 2012).

² These countries and the people who live in them have much in common, though there is no talk of creating something that was the former SFR Yugoslavia. The name Western Balkans itself is more of a political name.

The European Union and the Western Balkan countries

However, just after World War I, someone noticed that the “Eastern Question” was in fact a “Western Question”, so now the “Balkan Question” is more than ever a “European Question”. Since Thessaloniki in June 2003, the accession of the Western Balkan countries to the European Union has become a formal political commitment, although the EU itself has wanted enlargement to the east. However, it turns out that the big difference between Central Europe and the Western Balkans is that the WB lost ten years in the wars of the 1990s. However, with the end of the conflict and regime change in Serbia, the EU has become a key international player in the Balkans. However, it must be noted that there is disagreement on the views of EU Member States with regard to resolving the Kosovo issue and recognizing Kosovo. In the Western Balkans, the Europeanization of society has been under way in the last two decades, though in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina the US continues to enjoy greater credibility than the EU. Also, Putin’s Russia, relying on Orthodox Serbs, tried to gain a major role in the Balkans in those same years. Putin’s visits to Serbia reinforce co-operation but also strengthen bilateral relations in the energy sector. Also, the factor of influence is Turkey, which wants to strengthen its influence in the Balkans again, working together with Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia to overcome old animosities. Turkey’s policy cannot weaken the EU’s influence in the Balkans, as the EU helps countries in the region consolidate and tackle trade and communication issues. International relations are renewed, trade and links between companies also. When looking at Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro, progress has been noted in economic reform and regional co-operation, although there are still “concerns” about the rule of law. However, the difference between the countries of Central Europe and the Western Balkans, apart from the time lag, is the issue of state building, defining borders, democratic consolidation, which will make it a sovereign state. Thus, the EU emerges as an effective factor in integration, a factor of restoring stabilization, as a factor of regaining the capacity for co-operation (which entails the question of building institutions and state capacities to exercise the rule of law of all citizens of a country). The

proximity and involvement of EU Member States is useful as they can help mediate the Europeanization of the Western Balkan countries, thereby mediating the enlargement process automatically. However, the issue of the “Cypriot lesson” implies that the EU does not want to transmit state conflicts to its territory, but wants bilateral conflicts resolved before integrating into the European space. Subsequently, other issues, such as the rule of law issues such as corruption and nepotism, are the focus. The main sources of these phenomena are the “legacy of socialism” - social capital in this case means corrupt networks to circumvent the law; “War economy” - bypassing the embargo on cooperation with organized crime; ‘Market transitions - which are non-transparent and highly corrupt; and “the use of political employment” - to impose party goals as national (Rupnik, 2011: 19 - 27).

Nevertheless, the Western Balkan countries are connected by a long shared history and the organization of life in the same area. What these countries need now is integration of their neighbors into a broader, European context. The countries of the Western Balkans have a burdensome relationship with the problems that arose during the war of the 1990s, and especially with regard to the succession issues of displaced persons, although pressured by internal economic and political problems. However, regardless of the EU, Serbia had to embark on processes of reforming society and embracing European values. The EU’s role would only be to support these processes and to consolidate them. The will, the decision, the reform must be the decision of Serbia, for its own sake. The countries of the Western Balkans, as well as the entire Balkan region, have one common dominant political goal, which is to become part of the EU. This idea has brought progress in relations with one another, leaving conflicts behind, and showing a strong desire to normalize relations and life between WB countries. They should not miss this last chance (Kovacevic, 2010: 49–51).

However, the world is in deep change, the EU is changing, the US is changing, and Russia is changing, China is changing, other countries are changing, for example, Turkey, but also Serbia. What is the path to creative renewal and flourishing of Serbia? Does the US-Russia bidding for Serbia contribute to leaving the EU? Or perhaps the most significant is that Serbia has taken a route with Paris

and Berlin and is moving at the speed of “modern trains”.³ (Pantelic, 2010:73-75). “One world is disappearing, edited from one center. A polycentric structure of the world is being born, instead of the clash of civilizations - the cooperation of civilizations, new relationships are emerging between globalism and the national structure of the world ”(Markovic, 2010: 13).

The European Union and its foreign policy in the process of its own transformation and/or evolution, must face two of the most important challenges, namely security and energy. Namely, the risk of production and use of weapons of mass destruction has become greater due to the efforts of individual countries to produce nuclear weapons. Thus, the EU conducted negotiations between Iran and North Korea at two levels, levels of dialogue and levels of pressure. In addition, the issue of energy security indicates that the EU does not want its citizens to pay for the Russian-Ukrainian dispute or for them to suffer gas shortages. Climate change, increasing natural disasters, and environmental degradation and conflicts over natural resources and warming the earth, on average, are 1.5% significant. For these reasons, the European Union is today a powerful global player in all fields of international politics, from economy, energy, diplomacy and defense. Because of its magnetic and soft power, it is today a civilian superpower without which the United States can hardly meet key global challenges (Ejdus, 2010: 39 - 41). Many countries, such as the US, Japan, China, and the EU, have offered a reduction of around 25% of uncontrolled planet pollution. Countries also agreed that the participants in the Copenhagen summit, seeking to reduce their emissions by 50% by 2050, from the 1999 level. The issue of protecting forests in Brazil that absorb 20% of carbon dioxide was also a particular issue. The EU’s active work on protecting the environment from emissions of fossil fuels, protecting fossil fuel consumption, suggests that it is “the only one with the rules, commitment and realistic mechanisms to achieve those goals” (Ilić, 2010: 41–44).

The EU itself has had its crises. Specifically, the economic crisis in the EU member states was caused by maladaptation to globalization, and was further exacerbated by the 2008 global finan-

³ The two strongest EU countries are Germany and France (author’s remark).

cial crisis. Another type of crisis was the institutional crisis of EU identity in the adjustment process. So the political crisis. However, what is important for Serbia, and for all Western Balkan countries, which is seemingly unfavorable, has been the tightening of the criteria for EU accession. The WB countries have problems of economic underdevelopment, lack of rule of law, high corruption, organized crime, and a particularly critical issue for Serbia is the issue of Kosovo and Metohija. All these countries are undergoing a transition “from real Soviet-type socialism to Eurocapitalism” (Teokarovic, 2010: 53-55, 59).

The parties in power in Serbia, the SNS, the SPS and those of the opposition (DS) have united on the pro-European issue. Thus began the consolidation of democracy in Serbia. But one key issue that hampered Serbia’s economy was de-industrialization, massive job losses, declining foreign direct investment, long-standing interest from the rich and influential, a phenomenon known as the “captive state”, the removal of regulations that hamper private business development and prevent corruption and one general inability to respond to the situation and the demands of the times. It is only in the last year that some elements of improving the standard of living of the population can be seen, the unemployment rate is below 10%, bad coordination within the government has been eliminated, and the process of Serbia’s EU integration is accelerated. Thus, Serbia has taken a leading role in the region on many issues, such as the construction of the IT sector, the growth of FDI, and the rate of economic development. Military neutrality was proclaimed, the development of bilateral cooperation with China, Russia, Turkey, the development of regional relations with Hungary, Bulgaria, Albania. Today, Serbia has sixteen recognitions of Kosovo’s independence withdrawn and is actively working to make the world aware of Kosovo’s unjust secession, which was also illegal and which sets a precedent in international law (Teokarovic, 2011: 61-62). Serbia faces many illogicalities, but it can be said that it has overcome many problems and is taking major steps forward. WB countries have small economies, and as Prof. dr. Domazet⁴, they

⁴ Oral presentation at the Conference “Peace and Democratic Multilateralism”, 2019 ECPD, Belgrade.

need a new model of economy, new development, new social reality, new democratic politics, new institutions and new ideas.

Today, the governments of the Western Balkan countries are led mainly by “moderate nationalists” whose task should be a reform process that will overcome the issues at stake in order to complete the process of joining the EU region. Thus, European reform is not viewed as something external, but as the homework of every 19th-century European democratic society. Furthermore, “the EU is committed to transposing its model of peace through institutionalized interdependence in the Balkans,” though in real terms, the delayed process of nation-building in these areas. These items are an obstacle to the development of these countries themselves. The development of national policies in the Western Balkan countries, which are territorially small, is important for themselves and for the EU (Rupnik, 2011: 28).

The people of the Balkans do not want to jeopardize their progress, they do not want to return to the old days of hatred and evil. The only way out of the crisis is that violence must be replaced by diplomacy, that is, negotiations that must be pragmatic and guarantee peace, in order to change the Balkans’ outlook. An era of mutual co-operation, but also co-operation with EU-led Western policies, is desirable. Serbia is today a major factor in stability in the Balkans, precisely because of the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo.⁵ The EU is leading the final stages of transition in the Balkans, and Belgrade is particularly praised for having contributed to the rise of democracy, although the focus remains on practical economic and legal issues (Abramowitz, 2014: 174 - 177).

Nevertheless, the European Union is entering a new phase of political development, and should increasingly be viewed as a whole (Radovic, 2010: 61). To this end, the EU has developed a new European security strategy. “From a common vision to a joint action: implementing the EU’s global strategy” is in fact the catchphrase the EU launched when defining its “EU Foreign and Security Policy” (EUGS). It actually served as a springboard for the EU to raise the issue of further European in-

⁵ For example, Albania and Kosovo have the highest share of households in which one family member is employed in one of the EU Member States (Manchin, 2011: 165).

tegration and the survival of its member states after the UK referendum. Many doubted that the EU would survive after Brexit. However, the EU was consolidating very quickly and rapidly moving towards security and defense changes, with the creation of a new EU Military Training Command Center. In addition, the EU seeks to remain a global power and become a security zone for its citizens, and is committed to peace and development worldwide. Cooperation with the United Nations is very important because of climate change and sustainable development. Because in a world of great powers and constant global challenges, the EU can only survive as a community, because the largest markets in the world, its member states individually and collectively, invest the most in development cooperation and only in that way can they effect change. The emphasis is also on preventing new wars, humanitarian disasters, refugee crises and seeking a new approach to crises. The constant conflicts in the world, the threat of terrorism affect the everyday life of ordinary citizens. What the EU insists on is cooperation with countries of origin and transit to better manage migratory flows, and a proposal to draw up a global treaty on refugees and migrants. The “whole of the EU” is that it is “global”, “security”, using other foreign policies such as enlargement, development and trade, migration, energy, climate, environment, culture. The implementation of the EUGS objectives entails a strong and united Union, with respect for regional and geographical priorities. The EU has placed a particular focus on developing peace and respect for neighborhood relations in the WB so that these societies can recover, adapt and respond to development and crisis challenges. The resilience of these countries strengthens EU financial support for their reforms, the fight against corruption, the improvement of public administration, the judiciary and support for civil society (www.eeas.europa.eu/topics/eu-global-strategy/49750/eu-global-strategy----year-1_en, date).

For these reasons, it is not surprising that when seeking support for a fresh start to the EU, Ursula von der Lajen took the Western Balkans as her first point of presentation (www.telegraph, en/news//politics/3126334-door-eu-open-to-west-balkan-fon-der-lajen-seeking-support-for-a-new-start-europe).

Transition Characteristics: The Path from the Socialist to the Capitalist System and the Rule of Law

With the disintegration and disintegration of the SFRY and the Eastern bloc of the re-socialist countries, in the specific geopolitical international circumstances, each of the newly created states embarked on their own path of changing society. The processes of changing economic and social structure are marked by the term transition (Novakovic, 2017: 48-52). Controversies over its content do not end to this day, but the fact is that these changes have changed the entire social structure.

Tranzition of society

It was based on changes in ownership of the means of production and then on the existing political, educational, health, social and cultural subsystems. This meant creating a new class and new layers of the structure of society, whose interests were woven into the concept of transition and privatization. The basis of the legitimacy of government was also changing, and the old ideology gave way to (neo) liberal ideology. Instead of the ruling working class, the capitalist class is in the forefront with the transition. Also, work as an important social value is viewed in the context of profit, and resources are used purposefully. The one-party system was abandoned, in the name of the multi-party system, and state governance of the economy and society was pushed to the sidelines. The state was given a new role, determined largely by the ideology of neoliberalism. The consequence of these phenomena is the dissolution and disappearance of the welfare state system, ie. material and social security of citizens based on socialist distribution. According to Branko Horvat, the average social standard of citizens of socialist Yugoslavia was above the level of some Western European countries⁶ (Horvat, 2002). The dynamics, manner and success of the transition of society were determined by the way in which the new states emerged and the earlier achieved level of social and

⁶ Hence understanding why regrets of past times in certain sections of the population.

economic development. The international factor became more and more important during and after the conflicts in the Balkans.

A positive example of transition is Slovenia, which has economic independence even though it is a small country. Slovenia has successfully transformed its economy. In the first years of market transition, there was a gap because there was a surplus of employees and the need for them was reduced (Maksimović, 2004: 143). Namely, Slovenia has a small domestic market, and it cannot achieve economic development without active foreign trade. The economy is open-ended, it has managed to retain the core sectors of business companies, the R&D sector, the banking sector. Until the global financial crisis of 2008, the country managed to keep finances well balanced, with a smaller deficit, external debt was low, and so were public debt. Its good economic results are supported by the international competitiveness that the Slovenians are particularly committed to. An additional strength is the application of design in industry (Yama, 2019: 135). Before 1990, Slovenia was the most developed republic of Yugoslavia in terms of GDP, and Macedonia belonged to the underdeveloped (Mihailović, 1993: 35). The former had a “small war” with the JNA, gained independence and reached the GDP level most rapidly since before the transition began (Torkar et al. 2018: 174-198). In 2004, she joined the EU. Macedonia avoided the Balkan wars of the 1990s, but not the processes of national conflicts and disintegration and instability. In Albania, there was no civil war, but the change of political elites in power was a relatively successful transition, so much so that they considered it to be the “leader of the Balkans”. It is well known that Albania has a number of customs barriers that it manages to protect its market. (Teleskovic, 2018). This is what it looked like at one point because Albania has had more successful economic development throughout the transition, which is only partly explained by the low starting base.

Furthermore, the transition concepts of the Balkan societies differed, but were dominated by two. The first is a “gradual or gradual” and the second a “fast or shock” transition. Slovenia (and Hungary) applied the former, and the above mentioned WB countries the second. Slovenia gradually implemented the reforms, retained more elements of the old system and cautiously opened and

liberalized itself from the outside (Mencinger, 2002). Other countries practiced “shock” or rapid transition. At the core of this concept is the so-called. Washington Consensus, the embodiment of the essence of neoliberal capitalist development (Bukvic, 2011). Thus, the dominant influence of the international financial institutions that imposed it on the indebted Balkan countries was realized. With all the danger of a simplified interpretation of the Washington Consensus, the following processes can be cited: rapid and universal privatization, liberalization of foreign trade and reduction of customs duties, and withdrawal of the state (deregulation) from the economy and the most important spheres of society. For politically deprived and economically impoverished countries of the WB, this has proven to be a pernicious model.

However, the views of researchers and others on the success of the transition of WB countries are different. As a rule, international creditors consider it necessary, not fast enough, relatively successful, and most WB citizens are disappointed with the incidence of mass poverty and unemployment (Sadiku, 2013; Šućur, 2006: 237). There are other indicators of transition, such as the growth of public debt, the demographic breakdown of their societies, and the economic and other dependence of citizens and society on foreign factors. Unfortunately, the lower classes and strata appeared, unjustifiably, and in recent times encouraged by new opportunities, ie. community life that threatens the security of employment, treatment, education and, in general, the safety of the individual and his or her family. The capitalist class and parts of the middle classes consider it successful, not slow enough, and would prefer, on behalf of European values and at any cost, sometimes brutally to protect their interests by law. In practice, this is often far from the rule of law, which, among other things, implies the equality of all before the law. The EU institutions’ assessments of the reforms in the WB are particularly negative in the area of the rule of law.

Unlike the mentioned countries, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina had a civil war during the first five years of transition. BiH is still under international protectorate and is far from EU membership. Serbia and Montenegro officially split in 2006. In the first decade of transition, Serbia had UN sanctions and war events in its

territory, especially in 1999. Strategic decisions on how to move society played the largest role in the ruling classes and their elites, which were intimately linked to international centers of economic, military and political power. It also defined the concept of transition of society as a whole.

Corruption as an indicator of the absence of the rule of law

Ever since Welstaff Peace and Sovereignty of States, the rule of law and developed rule of law have been achievements that characterize developed societies and one of the most important conditions to be fulfilled by countries seeking to join the EU (Maksimovic, Petrovic, 2017: 216). Looking at the transition and privatization flows in WB companies, it can be concluded that they have not yet reached this level of development. This is evidenced by numerous examples of violations of existing laws, the absence of institutions that protect the interests of all citizens, or the frequent pressures and influences of the executive on the legislative and judicial branches. Building a rule of law in developed capitalist societies has been a long-term and decades-long process. In this, they are prevented not only by the historical, political and cultural heritage, but also by the relation of the basic classes in society. There was no social consensus among them about the form, pace and goals of society's transition, or even the rule of law. The society was changing rapidly, and the issues of reform and relations between the executive, judicial and legislative branches were delayed and slowly resolved. At the core of this are different class interests, to which external pressure from EU institutions could accelerate these processes. While the processes of the so-called the initial accumulation of capital and the creation of a new capitalist class were of no interest in passing firm and clear legislation that would treat all citizens equally. Advocates for such legislation, for example, come after the end of privatization and transition. The goal of the capitalist class is to protect acquired capital and wealth. By then, civic and business morale had already been seriously impaired, and corruption had become widespread and almost systemic.

According to Slobodan Vukovic, corruption is “a forced market transaction in which, by violating the principle of impartiality, the unlawful use of social position and power for the sake of self, family and group power comes to the full” (Vuković, 2003: 10). It has become a widespread and common occurrence in Serbia. In our society, but also in the environment, it is present in almost all areas of society. Due to the underdeveloped rule of law, it was further encouraged. Studies on privatization have shown that state institutions are susceptible to corruption, as well as to breaking the law (Maksimovic, 2013). They did this before, during and after the privatization of enterprises and institutions. Control by international institutions was absent or delayed and was detrimental to the interests of workers (in assessing the value of the company, controlling the implementation of the sales contract, disbursement of funds for the social program, continuation of production) (Novakovic, 2013). Opinion polls show that citizens are among the most corrupt in labeling health, public administration, education, the judiciary and healthcare. Healthcare bribe legalized in Serbia (Jeremic, 2019). Confidence in these systems is low and information from the media confirms that corruption is widespread in other societies in the region.

The poor legal order of society is also evidenced by the numerous procedures initiated by citizens before international institutions and courts. Even court judgments in favor of citizens cannot be enforced because they are the responsibility of the domestic authorities. On the other hand, a number of system laws have been adopted, which are formally in line with European standards, but are rarely rarely implemented or interpreted differently. The practice of passing such laws quickly, by urgent procedure and without a public hearing, has also become anomalous. Weak and conflicting unions and citizens’ representatives are powerless to withstand it. This was extensively reported by the media in the reform of labor and social legislation (labor law, pension system law). Failure to follow the legal procedure is just one example of the absence of the rule of law. Much more severe are the cases and the influence of the executive on the judicial authorities, when disputes are delayed for years or end to the detriment of the citizens who initiated them. The deeper causes of such phenomena are the

“reforms” of the judiciary and the judiciary, carried out to the tune of the ruling or dominant coalition parties in power. The rule of law would benefit all citizens. Public and public administration would be more efficient, cheaper and more responsible. Each individual would be protected in the same way by the law and before the courts. Confidence in these institutions would increase, and the need for myth and corruption would be reduced to a tolerable measure. WB companies are still far from it, ie. the rule of law and the developed rule of law.

Privatization of social / state property

The privatization of social / state ownership of the means of production is simplified in the division between winners (new elites, owners of capital) and losers (working class, recipients of social assistance). Fundamentally, property relations are paramount to the character of the economic and social system, and any fundamental change in that essentially means a change in the nature of society. It depends on the character of the class in power and the place of subordinate classes and classes in the social division of labor and in the creation and distribution of social power. During the transition, property relations were changing, and with them the class structure of society. Before the transition began, the views of Serbian citizens were divided between the western, market economy and the self-governing Yugoslav economy. For the former, almost half of the respondents were 49.6% and for the latter 47%. This attitude was expressed by two-thirds of political and economic leaders (Mrksic, 1990: 14). Of course, at the beginning of the transition, the essence of privatization was not openly discussed, and so often the emergence of capitalist social relations was masked by the euphemism of “open society”, “entrepreneurial society” (Bolčić, 1994). Privatization was practically completed in WB companies, and a new class structure was consolidated. “In short, some of the pipes of privatization are declaratively prominent, and in reality they have been achieved quite differently. The end result was the creation of a new capitalist class. The working class is systematically and permanently dispossessed, crushed, thrown into the poverty

zone and into the margins of society ” (Novakovic, 2017: 135). The ruling class and dominant political parties rarely publicly acknowledge that there are relations between working class exploitation, the dominance of the interests of owners and representatives of capital, and the emergence of a new owner of capital-state. She is still the largest employer in these societies, but also the legislator. The interests of capital, including the state, are woven into both the concept of privatization and the basic systemic laws (on labor, employment, companies, for example). This is a characteristic of all WB countries. They are often brought under pressure from centers of financial power, on the pretext that it is in the name of Eurointegration (IMF, World Bank, WTO). There was no serious and greater resistance from the citizens. They did not follow the experiences of the citizens of Slovenia, Hungary and Poland, for example regarding liberalization, rapid privatization and borrowing from the IMF. Light borrowing and poor investment in development have brought most ZB companies into a group that is indebted and increasingly dependent on global power centers.

Privatization in the former republics of Yugoslavia was conducted from the change of laws, federal and individual republics, to the change of ownership of the means of production, and then it was regulated by new and often amended laws (Novakovic, 2017: 103-107; Lojpur, 2018; Horvat, 2002; Čengić, 2000; Čučković, 2000). The result of the overall changes is that a market economy dominated by the private sector has been created. The tertiary or growth of the services sector has also been carried out, with the secondary sector experiencing the greatest changes. Namely, before the transition he dominated, both in the creation of the GDB and in the overall employment. After the privatization, there was a massive de-industrialization, the disappearance of large development companies and large industrial cities. The working class is therefore disintegrated. The massive job loss has further increased officially registered unemployment. “In a nutshell, deindustrialization led to the decay of most of the working class, as workers were left without jobs. Poverty, mass unemployment, greater exploitation and social inequalities have arrived ”(Novakovic, 2016: 750). This is only partially mitigated by activities in the illegal or gray economy, which is relatively high in the Balkans after 2008 and is

persistently represented (Vujović et al, 2013). One of the important roles of the informal economy is the amelioration of social tensions, greater social conflicts and the ability of the poorest citizens to mitigate their low material standard of living. Every country that joined the EU had to reduce this area to a tolerable level and restrict it by law.

Rapid privatization has created an economy in which most of the companies are privately owned, in which there is little and no legal restriction on monopolies, and foreign investors are favored over domestic ones. This is especially characteristic of Serbia. In addition to the sale of socially-owned enterprises, sales of publicly-owned enterprises, which are important for the quality of life of other citizens, have also come into play. In the final stage of privatization, national resources (water sources, mines, etc.) were also sold, which seemingly additionally leads to the creation of a subsidiary. Privatization funds went mostly to the state budget and then to spending, not investment for job creation. State institutions that led and controlled privatization at the WB, such as agencies, were strongly influenced by the executive and foreign institutions (Begovic, 2005: 224; Obradovic, 2005: 534). The legal restrictions on their operation were relatively weak, which went to the detriment of employees of privatized companies. This is especially characteristic in the final stages of privatization.

The goals and results of privatization at the WB are not significantly different. In these countries, there is a lack of a single human resource management model. The fact is that transition countries and their economies have moved from a central administrative system to reforming countries with basic market principles. Realistically, it was also a way of transforming large and outdated industrial sectors (Maksimovic, 2004: 140). A market economy has been created, in which there are monopolies, unfair competition, state interventionism for the benefit of the capitalists, and it is far more developed than the EU. No new jobs have been created to alleviate high unemployment and stimulate economic development. The proceeds from privatization are very small, sometimes below the level of annual remittances of citizens from abroad. There was also a lack of investment in innovation, research and education in general. WB countries invest little in inno-

vation, which indirectly contributes to the low competitiveness of the economy relative to others. (Krstic et al. 2016: 1035). The new private sector is fragmented, not sufficiently independent of the state, without the ability to accelerate faster development of the economy and society. Government subsidies are most often targeted at privileged domestic entrepreneurs and foreign multinationals. A consequence of the neoliberal concept of transition is the absence of an independent economic and monetary policy. Democracy is not yet consolidated, and for it the presumption is the existence of a state (Linz et al. 1998: 35). This is increasingly being pointed out by EU representatives.

The new capitalist class and the introduction of parliamentarism

The new capitalist class in countries in transition is by its origin, education and the power of heterogeneous composition. It arose largely from the nomenclature (economic, military, intellectual) of the former ruling and sole parties. Other sources of emergence are the remnants of the former civic class, followed by private and private sector entrepreneurs, people who made a fortune through the privatization process, but unfortunately war profiteers and speculators (Bolcic, 2006: 42; Bolcic, 2008: 82; Obradović, 2017: 90; Novaković 2006: 129-152; Lazić 2014: 69-98; Sekulic et al, 2000: 1; Cengic, 2000). Their primary interest is the creation and appropriation of profits, as quickly as possible enrichment and its legal protection. Opposite this capitalist class was the mass of labor, dispossessed of means of production, peasantry, and middle classes. Their material and overall social position is significantly different, and conflicts between and within them are open and covert, of lesser or greater intensity, depending on specific social and political circumstances. It is also a means of controlling the citizens who are the biggest losers in the transition, and who often vote in political elections for the parties who encourage it.

Changes in the political system boil down to the introduction of parliamentarism, in which the proportional system of elections is dominant (Djukanovic, 2006: 529). Political parties are

weakly socially entrenched and the state “weak” (Stojiljković, 2013: 135). The findings of relevant research in this area lead to the conclusion that it is a weak democracy and an unstable system, in which political corruption is also present (Goati, 2016: 4-10; Stojiljković, 2013: 135). This is far from the set ideal and goal of the parliamentary system in developed EU societies. Indirect evidence is the occasional public outcry of citizens in the WB (some examples are BiH 2014, Albania 2018, Macedonia 2017 and 2018). Citizens have little confidence in the ruling elites. They are disappointed with their actions, political and civil liberties achieved, and especially the quality of life achieved. This can be a factor in the coming to power of parties that are against regional and wider integration of society, or an important brake on those who are able to get in and out more quickly and effectively in EU. Therefore, the incentives that the EU encourages economic and other societal reforms are important as a prerequisite for joining this community.

Poverty, economic and social inequalities

Economic and social inequalities and poverty have become limiting factors in regional and European integration. The achieved level of development of WB countries during the transition is evidenced by inequalities in wages, distribution of total income, poverty of citizens, as well as data on GDP growth, share of industry in its creation, amount of investments, indebtedness abroad, open and hidden unemployment and demographic structure of the population. GDP growth was slowed down at the beginning of the transition, ie. in the tenth decade of the twentieth century because of the so-called transition recessions (Marjanovic et al, 2019: 52-56). The more successful countries outperformed it faster, while Serbia only began to recover after 2000. Of all WB countries, this recovery was the slowest in it (Begović, et al, 2005: 41 - 46). The 2008 world economic crisis has further hampered the development of these societies. Unemployment in the region was high due to the completion of privatization, and in 2008 it increased further. Changes in the labor market should be such as to accompany the creation of occupations in line with market needs. Thus, investing

in on-the-job training is the greatest competitiveness and opportunity for innovation. Modern societies are based on the “knowledge economy” (Maksimović, 2014: 167). Furthermore, the debts of the citizens and the state increased, so that the former republics of Yugoslavia had long exceeded the public debt of the country before its dissolution. Inequality in the distribution of income and in the size and patterns of household consumption has increased rapidly and strongly. The Gini coefficient has increased in all WB countries (Arandarenko et al, 2017). The income inequality measured by this coefficient has grown the fastest in Serbia. Layering has taken on a large scale, a relatively small elite of 5-10% of the richest citizens stands out, and the majority of the population is poor (Lazić, Cvejić, 2014). In that sense, the situation in Macedonia and BiH is somewhat worse.

Relatively low population activity and employment characterize WB countries. It is far from the EU average. Mass unemployment is structural and is only partly mitigated by the mass departure of citizens from outside the country. In particular, there is a high unemployment rate for young people and those seeking long-term employment. The problem of low activity of older working age persons is becoming more and more pronounced, which is behind the EU member states (Eurostat, Unemployment statistics). Finally, each WB country has its own specificities, regional, political, cultural, religious and confessional particularities. They are often the cause of social tensions and conflicts, which is a disruptive factor in the development of both regional and wider integrations of society.

Poverty in WB societies has become structural, as a normal and logical consequence of the emergence and functioning of capitalism (Wallerstein, 2016). One of the most important causes of poverty growth was the clumsily implemented privatization of social / state property. The second, no doubt, is an attempt to quickly realize the neoliberal concept of society transition. The third concerns inherited problems, and only in the fourth place are the impacts of the global economic crisis. The situation of poor citizens, for example, has not improved much during the transition of Serbia in the last ten years. Official statistics also testify to this (Mladenović, 2017: 12-13). Many of them lost their jobs during privatiza-

tion, or could not find regular employment for years. Otherwise, in times of economic growth and prosperity, the interests of the employer, employees and governments differ, and this is especially pronounced in times of crisis (Maksimović, 2014: 166). A significant category of “new poor” were also employed workers who did not receive rent or were occasional and insufficient for a decent life. They are often voters for political parties that use populist rhetoric (xenophobia, nationalism), and which is often directed against the European integration of society. This further slows down the stabilization of the democratic order while fostering internal and external tensions and social conflicts.

Instead of a conclusion

The paper outlines the most important processes occurring in the EU and the WB. They highlighted current problems in the functioning of the EU and new initiatives in this regard. The EU has a special place in the changed world of political, economic and military circumstances. New opportunities for EU functioning and its potential to encourage other countries to join it were also highlighted. First and foremost, these are the Western Balkan countries.

The term Western Balkans came into being on specific social and historical occasions after the Balkan wars. It was later used less often to bring the wars back to political and other public attention with the wars during the breakup of the SFRY in the 1990s. Its essence is to strengthen the nationalist and separatist movements, which led to the dissolution of the larger social and state community. The breakup was not peaceful but through war conflicts, mass destruction and material and human loss. Subsequently, small, not sufficiently independent states emerged, highly conflict-ridden, burdened with the same problems, without greater potential to tolerate others, especially those with which wars were waged. The burden of the “past” bothers them to accelerate economic and social development in general, making it difficult for them to integrate into the regional and wider environment.

The Western Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia) have so far completed

the transition of society. They also ended the privatization of social / state property over the means of production. Each of them had specific problems, which through the transition were solved or complicated (debts, unemployment, inequalities). They all accepted the neoliberal concept of transition (Serbia after 2000), and the results are similar. This is exemplified in building a market economy, parliamentary democracy and the rule of law. A capitalist class was created, linked to the global capitalist class and the world centers of economic, political and military power. The once nominally ruling working class was set apart. At the forefront is the interests of the capitalist class, which defends itself by all means, from law, corruption and bribery to open social conflicts and war events. Privatization was the material basis of this. The concept of transition and privatization were adopted under the pressure and control of foreign institutions. Its implementation has led to rapid and widespread privatization of enterprises, massive job losses, reduced rents and socio-economic rights of employees, increased official unemployment, poverty, the informal economy, and a deterioration of the morale of individuals and social groups. Fragmentation and inequalities in the position of employees and other citizens intensified during the transition of society. They have also become obstacles to the further progress of society, which through the transition has been de-industrialized, economically declining and financially indebted. Inequalities in citizens' political power are even greater than in the EU and in the pre-transition period.

The regional cooperation of the Western Balkan countries is a necessary prerequisite for their progress and integration into the EU. The changes taking place in the EU will largely determine the pace, manner, conditions and time of integration of these societies into the EU community of countries.

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