

MACEDONIA'S LOST GENERATION BETWEEN TRANSITIONAL CRISES AND NEW PERSPECTIVES

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After the breakup of Yugoslavia, the countries in the region faced major political, social, cultural and economic changes and turmoil. They share a communist legacy and face a long and troublesome route to Western-style democracy¹. Many of them have faced violent conflicts and subsequent challenges involving state and nation building. In some countries, authoritarian parties have prevented regime change and impeded democratization. In other countries, the absence of state legitimacy, together with the presence of weak institutions and a fragile civil society constituted obstacles to democratization, not to mention the recent challenges from populist movements, criminalisation, corruption and the shadow economy. In the transition period and the formation of independent nation-states, in building their own identity and democratic values, these countries have been striving towards integration into the European Union. The processes of democratization and integration into the European Union are interlinked. To integrate into the European Union and to become an active and successful member, South East European countries, as well as Macedonia, need to reach a certain level of democratic development.

Republic of Macedonia is independent country since 1991, when started the process of long year's transition period, which country tries to overcome. Politicians and government officials every elections during the last quarter of century, promise to citizens brighter future, but the fight for a better life is very hard. The reforms in price liberalisation, democratisation, opening the country up to foreign competition, as well as privatisation are painful in the economic, social and political systems, and often criminalized. The politicians started to implement them in a desire to catch up with the developed world and to provide higher living standards for Macedonian citizens. Transition is tough period for all citizens of the country, but it leaves behind more serious consequences to the young people and their future.

The young Macedonian population and the young population worldwide belong to the generation known as the world's Millennium generation, or generation Y (born between 1981 to 1999)². It is believed that the young generation of this group have a very specific and unique set of values, characteristics and preferences, because these young people have witnessed many social and economic transformations in their recent past and is a generation that grew up in a pinnacle period of technological innovation.

¹ Hurrelmann Klaus, Weichert Michael, Lost in Democratic Transition?, Political Challenges and Perspectives for Young People in South East Europe, Results of Representative Surveys in Eight Countries, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Regional Dialogue SEE, Berlin, Maribor, Skopje, 2015, p. 7

² Topuzovska Latkovic Marija, Borota Popovska Mirjana, Serafimovska Eleonora, Cekic Aneta, Youth Study Macedonia, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Skopje, 2013, p. 7

Youth unemployment is a serious source of concern for the Republic of Macedonia and the whole Balkans region. Beyond its impact on economic growth, it is real potential of creating a 'lost generation' who may never fully recover from the long-term impacts of this ongoing situation. And that exactly is what is happening today.

According to the sixth South East Europe Regular Economic Report (SEER) high unemployment, particularly among the region's youth, continues to affect the growth potential of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia (the six countries comprising the South East European region).

The experience and the influence of the recent economic crisis to creation of new job places, by young people has been very different across Europe and, indeed, within individual countries. In the Republic of Macedonia this situation is complemented with other factors: actual political crisis which is ongoing past two years, refugee crisis which affects the country as a transit country across Balkan route, connections of the state institutions with the ruling party, the unfavourable level of corruption and organized crime etc.

The high youth unemployment that has resulted from different factors (among them is the recent recession and previous ones) is considered to be such a challenge as economists in several developed countries have shown that those who experience prolonged unemployment when they are young are likely to suffer lifelong consequences – called 'scarring effects'.³

As this generation, that lives while several wars on Balkans, represents the first generation to be fully educated after the collapse of the communist regimes in the region, a failure to integrate the youth into the labor force means that countries could miss out on their most productive generation to date.⁴

Macedonia is an example of a country where brain drain is significant and it is serious problem for its future. It has huge impact on the highly skilled labour migration out of the country. Uncertainty, together with the lack of security and low economic standards are the basic 'push' factors⁵ for the majority of highly skilled migrants from Macedonia. The overall character of highly skilled labour emigration from Macedonia follows the brain drain form. Some researchers⁶ describes it as "emigration of tertiary educated persons that is of longer-term or permanent character, and it is reaching significant levels and not compensated by the 'feedback' effects of remittances, technology transfer, investments or trade".

In a Macedonia's youth study⁷ that was conducted in 2013 by surveying 1.065 youth between the ages of 15 to 29, over half of the youth in Macedonia

³ Bivand Paul, Generation lost: Youth unemployment and the youth labour market, Touchstone Extras, 2012, p. 8

⁴ Tanic Sanja, Youth Unemployment in South East Europe: Averting a Lost Generation, 26.05.2014, retrieved from <http://www.worldbank.org/mk/news/feature/2014/05/26/youth-unemployment-southeast-europe-averting-lost-generation>

⁵ Horvat Vedran, Brain Drain. Threat to Successful Transition in South East Europe?, Southeast European Politics, Vol. V, No. 1, June 2004, pp. 76-93

⁶ Janeska Verica, Migration of Highly Educated and Skilled Persons from the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje: Institute of Economics, University 'Ss. Cyril and Methodius', Skopje, 2003

⁷ Taleski Dane, Reimbold Haley, Hurrelmann Klaus, Building Democracies in South East Europe: Youth as an Unwilling Agent? In Hurrelmann Klaus, Weichert Michael, Lost in Democratic

reported intent to leave the home country. The dominant motivations include improving their standard of living, better employment possibilities or better educational prospects. These are the most common answers, when the young asked their main reasons for leaving. While in general, most of the youth in South East European countries are considering moving to Western Europe, and Germany seems to be the country of primary preference, 25% of the youth in Macedonia would choose the United States and Canada. The survey showed that it would seem that youth's democratization potential is higher when the challenges for democracy are greater. However, if democracy is more stable, then the youth democratization potential is lower. For example, Macedonia still faces some challenges with democratization, but according to these results, the democratization potential of its youth is higher than in other countries in the region, which are more stable democracies. Support for EU, and expectations from the EU, are higher among youth in aspirant countries, such as Macedonia.

Other survey⁸ related to the attitudes of the youth regarding their social status, showed that nearly a third of young people in Macedonia want to move to another city in the country for better living standards, employment, better higher education, wider opportunities and diverse cultural events. The internal migration is directed towards Skopje, the capital, as the place with the greatest employment opportunities, entertainment and cultural events. Young high school graduates, express greatest aspirations for migration from the country. Young Macedonians have a greater desire to emigrate, in comparison to young Albanians. The rural youth prefers to migrate to other places within the country, whereas young people from urban areas - outside the country. Each young man from the Macedonia who considers living abroad, has no other reason than financial. The most preferred destination for living is Western Europe whereas the second is the United States and/or Canada. A third of the young people, who are considering leaving the country, would never return to live in the birthplace. On the other hand, interesting finding of this survey is that the young population is optimistic about the future, and most of them believe that living conditions would improve.

In a study⁹ aimed to provide a detailed description of the individual predictors of youth (un)employment in the Republic of Macedonia, the findings are alarming. Firstly, the study confirmed that when all things held constant (most notably the level of acquired education), the Macedonian youth is seriously disadvantaged in the labour market. Secondly, the fact that the education of the respondent's parents rather than their own education better predict employment is worrying. Furthermore, that the predictive power of the social status and the social network are stronger than that of the education is also an upsetting finding. This is especially true for the younger generation where the social status and the social networks are one of the few demographics that successfully predict employment whereas the predictive power of education is

Transition?, Political Challenges and Perspectives for Young People in South East Europe, Results of Representative Surveys in Eight Countries, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Regional Dialogue SEE, Berlin, Maribor, Skopje, 2015, p. 42

⁸ Topuzovska Latkovic Marija, Borota Popovska Mirjana, Serafimovska Eleonora, Celic Aneta, Youth Study Macedonia, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Skopje, 2013, p. 66-67

⁹ Korunovska Srbijanko Jana, Korunovska Avramovska Neda, Maleska Tanja, Generation "Getting Nowhere": The transitions of unemployed youth in transitional Macedonia, Reactor, 2011

nonexistent. Given that the vast majority of the two of the most underprivileged groups on the labour market, namely women and youth, are declaratively known to be willing to work even when given the chance not to, these results call for serious revisions in labour market and education policies.

Finally, the realization that the investment in higher education does not pay off in the labour market (especially for the young generation of Macedonians) calls for a closer analysis of the utilization of human capital in the country, the quality of higher education and the structure of the labour market in Macedonia.

At recent time the awareness for existence of this problem is increasing especially in the actual period of political instability. That's why Macedonian government takes some actions to prevent youth migration and brain drain.

The single most important strategic document regarding migration issues overall, including labor migration and alleviation of the brain drain effect, has been the National Resolution on Migration Policy 2009-2014 introduced by the government of the Republic. Some of the basic principles of the Resolution, among other things, are "the primacy of long-term macro-economic utility based on free migratory movements" and the responsibility of the state for the return of members of the Macedonian diaspora.

Five categories of stakeholders¹⁰ can be distinguished in the field of brain gain in Macedonia: a) government and public institutions; b) institutions of higher education and research institutions; c) international organizations working in the country; d) civil society actors and e) representatives of the business sector.

In a report published by the Regional Research Promotion Programme in the Western Balkans¹¹, is noted that a comprehensive and coherent policy approach mainstreaming migration into national development plans instead of ad hoc brain gain initiatives are likely to be more beneficial. Nations should map their diasporas and create a database for distinct categories of migrants to help mainstream migration into development plans. This is especially needed for the Macedonian government, which, the report claims, "has not committed significant resources for harnessing the diasporas for development" and has "shown little interest in the study of the phenomenon of migration despite its clear socio-economic significance". Other ways to encourage brain gain include contractual agreements and incentives to return by the scholarship or employment sponsors; preferential hiring of skilled diaspora by international donors as technical assistance staff for those countries; and creating a more enabling work environment for repatriated talent. And given that low education quality at home is the main 'push factor' encouraging emigration, there is a need for introducing reforms in higher education to boost the domestic quality of tertiary education, the report says. This may prevent long-term outsourcing of education and could be helped by encouraging more expats to return.

¹⁰ Developing brain gain policies in Macedonia: Pitfalls and challenges, Center for Research and Policy Making, 2012, retrieved from http://www.crpm.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Developing-Brain-Gain-Policies-in-Macedonia_Pitfalls-and-ChallengesOPTIM.pdf, p. 14

¹¹ Regional Research Promotion Programme in the Western Balkans, 'Brain Circulation and the Role of Diasporas in the Balkans - Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia', Report, 2013, retrieved from <http://www.rppp-westernbalkans.net/en/News/Brain-Circulation-and-the-Role-of-Diaspora.html>

The experience of unemployment¹² can be particularly damaging for young people, as evidence shows that those who experience prolonged worklessness when they are young are likely to suffer lifelong effects on both earnings and employment prospects. For this reason tackling youth unemployment needs to be a policy imperative.

Youth is potentially a factor for change¹³ – a potential that needs encouragement and support – first of all, from within their societies, but, secondly, also from international and other European partners and actors.

Supporting youth organizations, financially and technically, would be beneficial for expanding informal educational possibilities, but also for empowering youth engagement.

Also, an education system¹⁴ that helps children and youth from all backgrounds realise their full potential is vital for continued prosperity and for reducing labour market exclusion among youth.

For young people to play a more positive role in democratization and European integration, it is necessary to improve the education system. It is important to strengthen the democratic capacities of youth in Macedonia and other developing countries.

Unemployment, poverty and job insecurity are the biggest concerns for youth across the South East Europe. Youth consider that these issues should be top priorities for their national governments.

One of the key issues¹⁵ that need for immediate and profound reforms in order to overcome the challenges facing youth today is that young people are still waiting for decisive response to the factors that led to creating lost generation. Youth is a resource and not a problem.

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¹² Bivand Paul, Generation lost: Youth unemployment and the youth labour market, 2012, Touchstone Extras, p. 5

¹³ Hurrelmann Klaus, Weichert Michael, Lost in Democratic Transition?, Political Challenges and Perspectives for Young People in South East Europe, Results of Representative Surveys in Eight Countries, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Regional Dialogue SEE, Berlin, Maribor, Skopje, 2015, p. 9

¹⁴ Scarpetta Stefano, Sonnet Anne and Manfredi Thomas, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Papers, no. 106, Rising youth unemployment during the crisis: How to prevent negative long-term consequences on a generation?, Directorate for employment, labour and social affairs, Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee, 2010, p. 26

¹⁵ FutureLab Europe, Young Europeans' perspectives on the crisis, Europe's lost generation?, 2013

- Hurrelmann Klaus, Weichert Michael, Lost in Democratic Transition?, Political Challenges and Perspectives for Young People in South East Europe, Results of Representative Surveys in Eight Countries, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Regional Dialogue SEE, Berlin, Maribor, Skopje, 2015
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