

THE WESTERN BALKANS BETWEEN INTERNAL TRANSITIONS AND THE EU INTEGRATION PROCESS

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Abstract

The Balkan region is still a “hot” zone where old legacies of the past interfere with the present and contribute to the transition processes of the countries there. The region seems committed to follow an EU-bound path, although it faces many challenges in terms of meeting the standards for EU and NATO membership. Somehow, persistent conflicts delay finding solutions. The difficult democratic transition, the lack of will and shallow political culture of regional elites delay the process of bringing these countries forward. This profound transition unfortunately occurs while the EU, on one hand, is trying to play the arbitrator part having promised to assume full leadership role and, on the other hand, tries to restrain the voices of those Euro-Sceptics who have been increasing their numbers recently. Meanwhile, a deterioration of the situation in the Balkans might have a negative impact across Europe and decrease the credibility of the EU as the main foreign policy and security actor in the whole region.

This paper will first analyse the transition processes in the Balkans and the back and forth efforts to leave behind the past and head toward a common European perspective. Secondly, it will analyse the required active role of the EU and the urgency for a closer monitoring of the situation in this region. Thirdly, it emphasises the need to encourage public diplomacy in the region in order to mitigate conflicts and promote cooperation between the people there.

Keywords

EU Integration; EU Intervention; EU Role; Public Diplomacy of Western Balkan Countries; Western Balkan Transition Process

1. INTRODUCTION

The latest developments in the international arena have had their impact also in the Balkan region. Since the break-up of Yugoslavia in the 90s, there have been many changes in regards to the international actors' presence, their engagement in crisis management and integration of the region. Presently, the region appears to be completely under the competence of the EU, as an indispensable actor able to draw these countries towards integration.

In a general overview, apparently the old-style political elites, inherited from the past are not helping enough to overcome the present challenges and domestic troubles that these countries are facing. Moreover, major institutional change, the transformation of the centrally planned economy into a market oriented system, the modernization of civil society and social life (Irrera 2011), the slow institutional bureaucracies and corruption, all contribute to the endless transition process of the Western Balkan (WB) countries. The issues of state-building capacity, implementing EU standards and the rule of law, remain crucial for these countries as they are the cause for the major differences with states that are already EU members. Balkan leaders have never shown unwillingness to participate in conferences, summits or other meetings in the name of the region's integration in the EU, and they have always expressed enthusiasm and commitment to turn the country's integration project into a priority of their political agenda. In practice however, contrary to their statements, "these leaders deftly play on the European constituency in their countries and pass measures that please it. But they do so in ways that are reminiscent of the old ways (even if wrapped up in new ones), and at the same time, they slowly cement their grip on power and limit the scope for a plural space" (Lasheras 2014). This kind of predominant behaviour is causing an endless transition at a slow pace. The expectations for the consolidation of democracy in these countries are fading away and ongoing efforts to meet the EU criteria are turning into constant fatigue. The critical situation in the Balkans coincides with the increased euro-scepticism within the EU. "Euro-scepticism is widespread, fanned by politicians' association of Europe with unpopular reforms, unwelcoming statements by EU politicians, and the reputational loss suffered by the EU in recent years" (Lasheras 2014).

Despite these two unfavourable trends, on the one hand, the EU is dealing with enlargement fatigue and, on the other hand, the Balkan region being wrapped up in a stagnation process, events in the international arena are rapidly moving forward and changing. The engagement of the international

actors is no longer similar to that of few years ago in the WB. For instance, the role of the United States (US) has already shifted to other international developments since the 90s with the intervention in Kosovo. Other issues are now at the core of US foreign policy, such as the fractious policies that Russia is pursuing in Eastern Europe, and moreover the emergence of Russia as a very dominant global player, as once in the Cold War period, as well as China's global role, establishing the cooperation relation with post-US withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Israel-Palestine conflict, the deteriorating situation in Iraq and, recently, the emergence of ISIS, as a terrorist and fundamentalist factor spreading rapidly its influence in the Middle East. These events have increasingly reduced the role of the US in the region (albeit not its attention), giving the EU priority and full patronage over the latter.

Russia, another emerging global power, with strong geopolitical ambitions, has always kept an eye on the region, as shown and confirmed in the case of Ukraine. However, whatever shifts or changes the global international relations undergo, the Western Balkan region is an integral part of the open European project, whose integration process is of imperative importance for the region. Therefore, whether global changes or internal EU issues make the EU regional approach to the Balkans easier or not, the WB region cannot be neglected by the EU under any circumstances.

This paper aims to present a general overview of the current situation in the Balkans, by analysing the EU's role and pressure exerted on the WB countries in order to meet the accession criteria, as well the internal issues caused by the ongoing transitions in the WB region and the challenges that the region faces in the reconciliation process. The analyse will assess, through exclusively qualitative research methods, what has been done by the EU in the WB in terms of soft power, and especially normative power. The paper emphasises the role of public diplomacy in mitigating conflict among the Balkan countries, but also in enhancing cooperation, mobility and exchange among their people, especially from the young generation. The launching of public diplomacy programmes and initiatives in the WB region would help promoting the common values of the WB, enhance cooperation and tackle situations of turmoil, for a stable region in the future.

2. THE WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES AND THEIR TIMELESS TRANSITION PROCESSES

After the accession of Croatia in 2013 it seemed like a new perspective appeared in the horizon for the Western Balkan countries aspiring to join the EU, but beyond hope the steps forward seem to be taken in slow motion by both the EU and the Western Balkan hopefuls. The transition processes of these countries are stagnating and have unfortunately been recently associated with unrest (the Kumanovo case) and immigration flows, which led them to take more steps backwards. Whilst the Balkan countries are dealing with their transition processes, the EU, preoccupied with its own issues, has intentionally or unintentionally set these countries at the periphery of its attention. This probably happens because the top-tier challenges are situated on the Balkan side, and the role of mediator or supervisor through normative power is not sufficient anymore in helping these countries overcome the challenges, despite the region's numerous achievements. The latest negative developments, more related to troubled economies and poverty in these countries, have led to immigration flows. Although the WB faced some immigration flows also in the past, the ongoing transition processes contributed to the emergence of this phenomenon once again. Groups of people have been recently leaving their homeland, seeking a job and a better future in the Western developed countries.

And last, but very important, the situation in Kumanovo, Macedonia is another major challenge to overcome. It seems like in the Balkans conflicts never cease, or if one might cease, another rises up or is likely to be repeated in another moment. The latest events in Kumanovo, despite the missing evidence about the target and nature of the attack, created instability and uncertainty about the future of the country and the neighbouring ones. This attack not brought a negative impact on the entire Balkan region, at the expenses of the lost lives, integration, reputation, security and democracy.

The violent episodes in the WB show that not only have the countries there not learned any lesson yet, but neither did the international community. The Balkan countries are still incapable or not enough consolidated to prevent on time or to manage such cases, mostly because of the lack of governing skills. Traditional state instruments have lost their ability to prevent conflict, if there is no multilateral involvement or approach to prevent future conflicts and overcome transition processes. Hence, the Balkan region as a whole

requires a comprehensive multidimensional strategy in the long run. "In this regard these countries must be considered a part of Europe; not a peculiar part of it, but a specific part of it, according to the simple idea that has always characterized the "soft power" European Union "every European member state, with its specific way of living, in a common way of being" (Beshku 2013, 57).

3. THE EU'S ROLE IN THE BALKAN REGION: IT IS TIME FOR SOME REASSESSMENTS

One of the main causes for the delays in the accession process of the Balkan countries to the EU is the lack of internal political stability or political consensus. This deficiency manifests itself in different ways and dynamics in each Balkan state. Domestic stagnation and economic crises in these countries unfold alongside the financial crisis in Europe and therefore the "enlargement fatigue" of the Union is also associated with the "membership/accession fatigue" of WB countries. The role of the EU as a transformative power is important in the Balkan region and beyond for its own reputation and position as a key player in the international arena, but the EU enlargement process has tightened the criteria for WB accession if we take in consideration the previous waves of enlargement. "First, the general trend towards these countries is the extension of terms, one can observe in the augmentation of new criteria for accession and the reinterpretation in an expanded manner of the earlier criteria. Second, the conditioning process of the WB aims to address and resolve sensitive political and regional issues of the past", even if the EU by "not giving a precise date for the membership of these countries reduces the credibility of conditionality"; apparently the EU will also continue to focus "more on conditions and monitoring process of these countries than in its absorptive capability" (Caka, Zajmi and Bishaj 2012, 58-59), given the Juncker Commission's current perspective and stance on the enlargement agenda.

Strong emphasis falls precisely on the challenges that the Balkan countries are not able to fight alone, as separate countries. Although the WB countries seem to show a cooperative spirit to co-ordinate actions and move at the same pace, in particular regarding Chapter 23 and 24 of the EU *acquis* dealing mostly with the political criteria, they are still lagging behind, namely

with issues regarding the rule of law, judiciary system, fight against corruption, fight against organised crime, etc.

The political culture inherited from the past years made these countries somehow immune to the ongoing crisis. The recent years noted a weakening in the EU's ability to forecast events and their impact in the Balkan region. So maybe it is time for the EU to innovate its economic and financial initiatives, diplomatic projects and security tools. Nowadays, the events are unfolding with great velocity. From this perspective, the intensity of interactions (what is referred to as the 'thickness' of globalisation) and the actors' responses to this mark the present era. Consequently, the ability to respond speedily to the ever-quickenning flow of events is deemed to be a key measure of actor capacity, and this is reflected in the organisation and operation of diplomacy (Casrlsnaes, Sjursen and White 2004, 97). The EU and the national governments in the WB region are aware of the issues which hold the region endlessly in standby, such as the unresolved bilateral disputes and the issues related to the Copenhagen criteria (as mentioned above). Precisely these issues will continue to keep the region on standby position as long as their accession depends on their own speed of reforms or each country's performance in meeting the standards. In a conference held in Berlin on 28 of August 2014 one could hear again the repeated statement from German Chancellor, Angela Merkel: "All states in the Western Balkans should have the opportunity to join the European Union if they fulfil the accession requirements" (Merkel 2014). This summit cannot go unnoticed because of the financial aid of 12 billion Euros for the period 2014-2020 that was granted in support of the Western Balkan countries. Under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance, 20% of this funding would go to regional projects, as the EU strongly believes that by strengthening regional projects and investing in joint regional projects, a good relationship between people (not only physical) and a favourable business climate could be established.

Still, doubts regarding the supportive role of the EU in the region exist, taking into consideration the approach of the region towards the East in the last years. As the author Milan Nic reports:

"the new Balkan approach is a combination of slow EU integration along with a search for new loans and investment from the East. Last year, Turkey was among the top three foreign investors in Croatia and Serbia, and among the top five in Bosnia. The Serbian government is courting new loans from Russia and Asia as it needs \$6 billion this year to service its debt (25% more than in 2012). In addition, state assets in energy and agriculture are being sold to Arab sheiks and Azeri oligarchs. A new bridge over the Danube in Belgrade and 140 km of highways in Serbia are being built by Chinese

companies. Such diversification of investment partnerships, now common across the region, reflects larger shifts in the global economy, but also shows a degree of desperation. In any case, it will make the EU a less dominant partner than before" (Nič 2013).

Considering all of the above, one can understand that there is no time to impose any other added criteria or any more conditions to the Balkan countries. The situation urges for joint action and more efforts on the ground in order to reach a common future, as in the Balkans there is already a predominance of non-European partners especially in the business domain. As Nye argues, transnational investment creates new interests and complicates coalition-making in world politics (Nye 1990, 161). This prompts countries to change their interests towards other actors or potential partners. If this shift towards other actors continues to increase, then it might become a loss for the European credibility and the role of the EU in the region, which can lead to further geopolitical shifts.

4. THE MECHANISMS OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AS A LEVERAGE SYSTEM TO MITIGATE CONFLICT AND ENHANCE COOPERATION

Soft power has been at the core of EU security and foreign policy as a tool to promote its normative values and European standards that attract countries towards the integration process. As Portela (2007, 9) notes, soft power was not a concept "tailor-made" for the EU, unlike 'civilian power' and 'normative power' (Nielsen 2013, 726)¹. Soft power is the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment (Nye Jr. 2008, 94). Literally, the EU accession process itself is a kind of normative power to draw countries towards full accession. For analytical reasons, a short explanation on the difference between the concepts of soft power and normative power is required since this last section of the article focuses on the kind of power that the EU has exerted in the WB and on what needs to be done internally in the region in the framework of soft power, more

¹ Still, the EU's historical narrative of peaceful integration between previously warring states is a significant source of soft power - and one for which it received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012 (Nielsen 2013, 729).

specifically the public diplomacy instruments¹ able to shape and strengthen regional cooperation,

Soft power is not contrasting normative power². But, when examining the WB countries in particular, the emphasis falls on “five core norms of peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law and human rights from the basis of normative power, set by the EU as criteria for membership” (Barkl 2013, 19); that is why the difference needs to be specified. Furthermore, “these norms are supplemented by the norms of social progress, anti-discrimination, sustainable development and good governance” (Barkl 2013, 19). On the contrary, soft power norms in general are not so much defined, unlike in the case of EU normative power. “Soft power is a descriptive, rather than a normative, concept” (Nye 2011, 81) and its norms might differ depending on each actor’s application of soft power, more specifically what norms or values an actor wants to assert and promote in relation or in cooperation with other actors and contexts. In the case of WB countries, the EU wanted for them to undertake reforms through applying its own to a certain extent, but has showed not to be efficient enough to pull the Balkan countries towards acquiring EU membership. If we examine the relationship between the EU and the Western Balkans since the 1990s, “the EU failed dismally in first preventing and subsequently ending the wars in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, eventually needing the USA and NATO to do the heavy lifting. Such failures did little at the time to bolster the EU’s soft power or credibility as a regional

¹ In international politics, the resources that produce soft power arise in large part from the values an organization or country express in its culture, in the examples it sets by its internal practices and policies and in the way it handles its relations with others. Public diplomacy is an instrument that the government uses to mobilize these resources to communicate with and attract the publics of other countries, rather than merely their governments (Nye Jr. 2008, 95).

² Both normative power and soft power theory shift the focus of power from traditional power such as military might and economic clout, to alternative forms of power such as changing norms and altering perceptions of power. Joseph Nye defined soft power as the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments and as a power arising from the attractiveness of a country’s culture political ideas and policies. Soft power is about getting other to want what you want, it co-opts people rather than coercing them (Nye 2004).

Ian Manners defines normative power as such: “It is the ability to shape or change what passes for normal in International relation and which will undoubtedly have utilitarian social moral and narrative dimensions to it, just as it will undoubtedly be disputed (Manners 2001). Normative power is located in a discussion of “the power over opinion”, *idée force* or ideological power (JCMS 2002; Barkl 2013).

pacifier. Its image has only gradually recovered through long and patient efforts at post-conflict stabilization, through peacekeeping and support for nation building processes, backed by the promise of eventual membership for all Balkan countries (Nielsen 2013, 731). Despite the fact that WB countries are now in the process of reaching EU membership (except Croatia), the criteria set by the EU are based on conditionality or a “standardized EU enlargement formula” which is argued to be “not functioning in the case of WB” (Troncotă 2014, 164). Although “the EU is a good model for Western Balkans countries and it can give good examples in terms of democracy, tolerance, integration and juridical aspects” (Beshku 2013, 57), the norms and criteria set by the EU to influence WB countries’ behaviours and reforms and to set a good role model to follow are still facing hardships in the implementation process. As the WB countries are still lagging behind on the domestic front, but also at a regional level as a block, they “could be surprised to see that for the next term the EU Commission will not “favour” the WB anymore and concentrate on other issues from its neighbourhood” (Troncotă 2014, 163).

The major challenge that these countries have been facing as a block is their own lack of cooperation. In this regard “it is very important for the European Union to set off a more pragmatic and decisive foreign policy towards the WB territory, which has been a venue of ethnic and never-ending conflicts” (Beshku, 2013, 56). There have been some programs for regional cooperation, mostly in order to familiarize the Balkan countries with the EU. A policy of good neighbourly relations is of major importance not only for the region but also for the EU, as the latter itself functions on the basis of member states’ cooperation and shared values. In a Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council called “The Western Balkans: Enhancing the European perspective”, the EU Commission highlighted the initiatives it had launched in order to intensify relations and promote cooperation with the Balkan countries, such as: people-to-people contacts; familiarizing people with the EU, visa dialogues, more scholarships for students from the Western Balkans, participation in Community programs and agencies; other activities in the areas of science and research, education, culture, youth and media; cross-border cooperation; good governance; cooperation in the area of justice, freedom and security; Parliamentary cooperation; trade integration - Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA); Economic and social development, etc. (EU Commission COM127 2008, 8-20).

Another attempt by the EU to bring these countries towards integration and make them cooperate with each other has been implemented in the field of infrastructure investment by building networks like railways, highways, but also energy networks. This initiative was launched at the Summit of the Balkan countries in Berlin in August 2014, as mentioned above. These programs are designed to build bridges between the countries in the region and to bring them closer to the EU in a coherent way, but the reconciliation process is another issue. Obviously, these countries have a common destination which is EU integration, but approaching them in such a way as to defuse conflicts, and increase cooperation among them requires a more concrete foreign policy from the EU and from the Balkan countries among themselves. Since the “new Commission might not only put aside, but also further slowdown enlargement” in the framework of Juncker’s policy “of taking a break” from enlargement” (Troncotă 2014, 170), the Balkan states could launch some reconciliation campaigns through public diplomacy (PD). The challenge is up for the political leaders of each country, their foreign ministries, diplomatic missions and diplomatic institutions, but to some extent the EU could help with incentives, “since the international projection of the EU relies heavily upon the promotion of the ‘domestic’ Union as exemplar – ‘you too could be like us’” (Duke 2013, 3).

PD campaigns generally focus on power over public opinion, in this context, cooperation between political elites to coordinate statements and political discourses that are in favour of integration by leaving behind nationalistic appeals in favour of mutual cooperation and taking a greater importance since they have a common goal which is EU membership. It is time for these countries to adopt new trends in public diplomacy, formulate foreign policies in favour of youth exchange and mobility of people, and enhance cooperation in different fields (in the first visit of Serbian Prime Minister Aleksander Vučić to Tirana, the leaders of Serbia and Albania set an example of the political stance to be followed from now on in favour of EU integration and of good relations and cooperation among countries that have experienced bitter pasts). Statements or messages conveyed by political leaders now take a much broader dimension, so the importance of communication and attracting “the publics of other countries” (Nye Jr. 2008, 95) through proper mechanisms is important in order to produce “the soft power” that the WB region needs in this case. The EU’s part should reside in constantly monitoring and assisting not only the political process and progress made on reforms by individual countries but also the political environment at the regional level. Regional

cooperation is one of the essential features in the EU soft power, “but one of the complicating factors when considering the EU’s public diplomacy is that, historically, it has been directed primarily inward”, when “beyond the EU, public diplomacy is more normally directed to foreign publics and conducted abroad” (Duke 2013, 2-3). Considering this fact, from the WB countries’ point of view, the expectations should be low in waiting for incentives from the EU regarding the launch of PD trends in the region. The EU support in this regard might be helpful, but the turning point or change in the beginning should happen from within. The Balkan region has great potential and resources to use in favour of cooperation. “In terms of resources, soft power resources are the assets that produce such attraction” (Nye Jr. 2008, 95). The cultural and historical values could play an attractive role if they would be fairly promoted by political elites, by the respective foreign and diplomatic missions and multimedia technologies. The WB could elaborate more on the importance of public diplomacy in order to help the region in a near future setting its goals in this kind of policies and mark a watershed moment of cooperation and integration among them.

The aims of public diplomacy cannot be achieved if they are believed to be inconsistent with a country’s foreign policy or military actions (Melissen 2005, 7). Therefore, building proper strategies of foreign policy in the service of promoting common values is essential not only for the purpose of connecting these countries and their people more with each other but also for the purpose of promoting their image outside the region. Despite public diplomacy policies that now the foreign ministries of the Balkan countries develop in the service of their own countries, coordinated public diplomacy policies could be developed also in favour of common regional goals which are cooperation, integration and good neighbourly relations, in favour of knowing each other better. The impetus of these countries to embrace public diplomacy must be truly linked to the integration motif among themselves and then further into the Euro-Atlantic structures. It is because of this reason that joint projects on public diplomacy might be very fruitful and show some results in the future. An incremental cooperative relationship between the EU and WB countries to find the right instruments that are required to promote the WB region and encourage them to undertake more reforms would be of major importance, in order to diminish the region’s risk of being left on the sidelines due to their crises and internal transitions.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Today, more than 20 years after of the fall of communism and the breakup of Yugoslavia in the WB region, Europe finally needs to assume a greater role in pulling these countries within the EU, as their people still look towards the West and hope for full membership of the EU. It is time for the EU to make some reviews in its Balkan policy for many reasons.

1. The Balkans has always been a vital part of Europe, and although recently the region has been set aside at its periphery, it is still an indispensable part of the European history and constitutes the origins of European civilization.

2. The EU should be more active and present in the Balkans with economic investments and European regional projects. Indeed, the EU has been and still is a very significant donor in the Balkans, but the many deficiencies inherited throughout the years and the quicksand of corruption in these countries have been difficult to overcome by EU investments so far. The WB, likewise Europe after World War II, have been in need of a "Marshall Plan"-type of initiative since the 90s. Some analysts believe that the financial aid of 12 billion euro foreseen for a six year-period is something similar to a "Marshall Plan", but if it is so, it is a bit late. For all the reasons mentioned above, the EU should make some adjustments in its role as a leadership factor in the WB.

3. Public diplomacy mechanisms should finally be implemented in the WB as part of a regional initiative that should happen from within, considering its crucial importance and the benefits it may provide in the reconciliation process and for the better external promotion of these countries.

Recommendations

The WB states should dedicate significant attention and efforts to joint initiatives to promote and support public diplomacy programs and projects. The EU could give assistance with sponsorship and financial aid for joint regional programs in this sector.

1. These countries should find the proper mechanisms to promote events in the field of culture, art, history and also sport. Some other activities might also be: folk festivals, various fairs in touristic seasons; scientific

conferences for historical events, where the Balkans acted united, etc. These projects should be designed to attract the targeted audience not only in the Balkans but also beyond, and may help furthermore to foster exchanges, soften relations and create a good climate within the region of WB.

2. The cooperative spirit to co-ordinate movements and actions, to move in the same pace, should not only focus on the political field, in particular regarding Chapter 23 and 24 of the EU *acquis*, but also on other levels. It is important to strengthen links not only for political dialogue but also to further advance in a continuous engagement regarding media outreach and internet programs. The multimedia tools and instruments are necessary to launch and promote common values, traditions and culture. Starting from the national levels, PD sectors or bodies should coordinate commitments and moves regarding strategic communication for the messages that could impact and enhance the reconciliation process.

3. "Cultural diplomacy is the linchpin of public diplomacy" (Advisory Committee on cultural diplomacy 2005, 1). "The definition used by Milton C. Cummings, describes cultural diplomacy: the exchange of ideas, information, values, systems, traditions, beliefs, and other aspects of culture, with the intention of fostering mutual understanding", for no matter how convinced we may ourselves be about the superiority of our values, practices and achievements, we must still approach others with an open mind and a readiness to engage with everyone on equal terms" (Tuomioja 2009, 4). Cultural diplomacy could play a very supportive role for the reconciliation process in the Western Balkan countries. There are several initiatives that could be developed in this regard, like for instance:

a) Common Values Initiative (Sharing the same values): The development of strategies and initiatives in the spirit of common values, beliefs, tradition and ideas exchanges would help the people of Balkan countries to get closer and get to know each other better. People of Balkan countries are used to refer to each other as "us" versus "them" (Itano 2007) but they are very similar to each other since they share a common history, tradition and culture. Television campaigns, advertisements, websites, newspapers, magazine, history books could be further explored as opportunities to illustrate and inform about the common history events, the style of living and common features that people of these countries express in their daily lives.

b) Promoting Balkan tours and developing regional tourism: Developing the regional tourism sector would contribute not only to the

economic growth of a country but also to regional development. Building the necessary infrastructure to interconnect the WB countries is necessary for the development of tourism. Some infrastructure projects were launched in the Vienna Western Balkans Summit on August 27. These projects will have a great impact on the development and interconnection of the region. "Among the so-called 'pre-identified' projects are the highway from Nis in Serbia to the Albanian coastal city of Durres through to the Kosovo capital of Pristina and the highway from Croatia to the Greek border via Montenegro and Albania. The construction of these two highways will increase trade exchanges in the Western Balkan region and promote tourism among these countries" (CC Law Office 2015). Developing regional tourism through the necessary infrastructure will help exchange tourism tours, promote values and cultures of the Balkan countries, and bring their people closer.

c) Educational projects and joint history projects: There was a joint history project by CDRSSE¹ initiated "in 1999, in an effort to change the way history is taught in schools across the Balkans. The founders are historians, diplomats and philanthropists. Today, the JHP is the gold standard in multi-perspective history teaching. The programme is therefore centred on education, on providing history-teaching materials for teachers that convey multiple perspectives of the same events, and on ensuring that these materials be used across the region. "Internationally, the History Workbooks have become effective advocacy tools for further raising awareness and putting on the EU policy agenda the importance of multi-perspective history teaching in promoting reconciliation," the USAID report stated. "It is critical that the JHP work continue in order to sustain achievements and impacts, especially in the current context of nationalism that still exists in the region" (CDRSEE 1999). Continuous joint history projects should be developed for the purpose of mitigating conflict and enhancing mutual understanding between Balkan people. Other educational projects could be launched and developed in order to approach the reconciliation process with an open mind, and to construct a common regional future and community based on so many similarities but also differences.

¹ CDRSEE is a Centre for democracy and reconciliation in Southeast Europe aiming to foster democratic pluralist and peaceful societies since 1998. The JHP is the original CDRSSE program that not only aims to revise ethnocentric school history lessons, but also encourages critical thinking and debate, celebrates diversity and recognizes shared suffering and achievements (CDRSEE 1999).

d) Other programmes and initiatives could be developed in the field of student and academic staff exchanges between Universities in the WB countries. There is a joint mobility programme called Eraweb by Erasmus¹ offered by eight Western Balkan universities and six EU universities, but the mobility flows of students and academic staffs are targeted from the European Union countries to the partner universities in the WB, or from the eligible countries in the WB to the partner universities in the European Union. Similar initiatives or projects could be launched between Universities in the WB countries, to promote student exchange in many research fields. Building networks of youth exchange between WB countries like establishing regional organizations or other bodies would be the kind of initiatives that would contribute to the reconciliation process through youth activism and to the establishment of a tradition of regional cooperation between the young people of WB countries.

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