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## Democracy without Citizens: Inadequate Consolidation in Two Decades of the Western Balkans Democracy

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### Abstract

Potential candidate countries of the Western Balkans have to be (come) stable democracies in order to be allowed to join the European Union (EU). In reaching this goal they are, besides economic and institutional challenges, being contingent upon not only by the legacies of recent large scale inter-ethnic conflicts, but also by the socio-cultural characteristics of their citizens. The empirical data presented in this paper reveal that citizens of the Western Balkans countries generally do not trust in political institutions, demonstrate almost apathy for social and political actions and believe they themselves are not able to influence the political process. This all results in low and inadequate political participation in all surveyed countries, and along with their undeveloped political culture, it indicates inadequate democracy promotion in the EU's accession policy in the entire region. This paper therefore argues that the EU should consider changing the pre-accession democratisation approach, since mere export of its regulatory framework so far has not contributed to the democratic consolidation and development of democratic political culture in the future Member States from the Western Balkans.

**Keywords:** democracy promotion through the Stabilisation and Association Process, consolidation of political culture, external socialization, Western Balkans, European Union

### 1. Introduction

European Union, which serves as a chief motivator of democratic consolidation in the (potential) candidate countries of the Western Balkans, define democratisation as

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“a complex task which can only be achieved if numerous factors are put in place: free elections, institutional and legislative reform, an independent justice system, rights of minorities, the fight against discrimination, independent media and the fight against corruption”

(Barroso, 2008).

Although there is an understanding that “*acceptance of these elements depends in turn on the presence of broader conditions, such as peace and development*” (Barroso, 2008), this paper will demonstrate a lack of understanding in the democratisation process on the EU’s side since it keeps neglecting the importance of democratic consolidation of political culture in the Western Balkans (potential) candidate countries. In demonstrating this argument, this paper will apply a social constructivist paradigm, arguing that values of ordinary people influence an outcome of the democratization process.

At the outset, social constructivist Europeanization theories will be evoked as they treat socialization as externally induced norm of compliance that requires acceptance of preferred behaviours, eventually resulting in the internalization of new values and norms (Grabbe, 2005; Schimmelfennige & Sedelmeier, 2005; Schimmelfennige, 2006; Blokker, 2008). If citizens are willing and able to adopt values that push for, and may be conducive to democracy, their democratic mass orientations should subsequently translate into effective democratic institutions (Welzel & Inglehart, 2008, pp. 126-140). This is what Dimitar Bechev (2008, pp. 87-95) probably has in mind when he stresses the “*ability of Brussels to create demands for reform ‘from below’*”. In order to support this hypothesis, results of the inter-generational survey “*A Tale of Two Generations - From Yugoslavia to the European Union*”, conducted in late 2011, will be analysed (Kacarskaet, 2012).

This article presents just a small part of the research results, which disclose attitudes and behaviours related to a political participation and political culture. The results reveal that political pessimism and dissatisfaction with institutions are deeply rooted in Western Balkans countries. However, this paper does not mean to “orientalise” Balkans by asserting that prevailing subject political culture across the Balkans is not conducive to participatory democracy, only to show that the democratization approach need to be adjusted to regions/countries in a non-standard way because each region has its own set of unique historical, economic, political obstacles to democratization.

The study asserts namely that the level of political participation across the region is dangerously low, that two decades of democracy have not helped shape a democratic political culture, disclosing, as well, that values that motivate people to political change are driven by economic concerns. This article will consequently argue that the EU is (still) insufficiently using the Stabilisation and Association Process, the enlargement policy for the Western Balkans, and accession negotiations as an effective external political socialization mechanism in the region. Since 1999, the EU has offered the European perspective for five countries of the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro) through the Stabilisation and Association Process, arriving in the course of following ten years to seven (as the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro dissolved into independent Serbia and Montenegro in 2006, whereas in 2008 Kosovo declared independence from Serbia).

## **2. Europeanization as Externally Induced Change of the ‘Habits of the Heart’**

One of the numerous theoretical approaches and analyses of Europeanization is the social constructivist approach towards European integration’s impact on domestic politics acknowledging that external political agents are able to reproduce and transform the European political order (Schimmelfennig

& Sedelmeier, 2005). The social constructivists approach emphasizes a "*logic of appropriateness*" and processes of persuasion (March & Olsen, 1998; March & Olsen, 2009, pp. 1-28). This perspective advocates that

"[r]ules are followed because they are seen as natural, rightful, expected, and legitimate. Actors seek to fulfil the obligations encapsulated in a role, an identity, a membership in a political community or group, and the ethos, practices and expectations of its institutions. Embedded in a social collectivity, they do what they see as appropriate for themselves in a specific type of situation"

(O'Brennan 2001, pp. 161-187).

In other words, European policies, norms, and the collective understandings attached to them exert adaptational pressures on domestic-level processes, because they do not resonate well with domestic norms and collective understandings.

In a social-constructivist manner Claudio Radaelli (2003, pp. 30) explained Europeanization as

"processes of (a) construction (b) diffusion and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, identities, political structures and public policies".

(Radaelli 2003, p. 30)

In Heather Grabbe's words:

"[t]his definition stresses the importance of change in the logic of political behaviour, which is a useful way of distinguishing Europeanisation effects from the many other processes of change at work in the postcommunist political context"

(Grabbe 2005, p. 46)

She therefore distinguished between two kinds of transfers that the Europeanisation mechanisms are producing: "*hard transfer, that is, how the EU transferred rules, procedures and policy paradigms [and] soft transfer- of styles, 'ways of doing things', and shared beliefs and norms*" (Grabbe, 2005, pp. 46). Tanja Börzel and Thomas Risse (2003, pp. 60) argued that Europeanization results in the adaptational domestic processes. They suggested that there are two mediating factors, which influence the internalization of new norms and the development of new identities: the first are the "*change agents*" or "*norm entrepreneurs*" that are able to

"mobilize in the domestic context and persuade others to redefine their interests and identities". The second factor is political culture and other informal institutions "which are conducive to consensus-building and cost-sharing"

(Börzel & Risse, 2003, p. 60).

After the fall of communism in Europe, the EU, as well as several other international organizations (e.g. the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) initiated large-scale projects of international socialization of the post-communist European countries (Risse & Ropp & Sikkink, 1999; Checkel, 2001; Kelley, 2004; Gheciu, 2005), which resulted in Western-inspired "*rule-conforming political change*" (Schimmelfennig & Engert & Knobel, 2006, pp. 54). According to Frank Schimmelfennig (2005, pp. 828), external socialization has three major components.

The first is a *tangible perspective of the membership in the international organization*, since “only the high material and political rewards of membership in the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have triggered sustained domestic change in those CEE countries that initially violated the liberal-democratic community norms”. It is a “strategy of reinforcement by reward”, since if a country does not conform, the reward is withheld but there are no coercive enforcements.

The second is *inter-governmental nature of international reinforcement* where “the outcome depends on the political cost-benefit calculations of governments” (Schimmelfennig, 2005). Schimmelfennig (*Ibid.*) explains such socialization strategy emerged “because societies are too weak vis-à-vis the states, and electorates are too volatile, to serve as effective agents of socialization” (*Ibid.*).

The third component of successful external socialization requires *party constellations around liberal, pro-Western values* in the countries aspiring to the membership. Namely, “[i]n countries in which all major parties are pro-Western and reform-minded (liberal party constellation), international socialization has been smooth and has produced stable, consolidated democracies” (*Ibid.*). After fifteen years of international socialization of the new European (predominantly democratic) countries, Schimmelfennig concluded that “the results have been highly divergent. Whereas one group of countries, mainly the central European and Baltic countries, quickly and smoothly adopted fundamental liberal norms of state organization and conduct, other CEEC countries-most notably Belarus and Serbia- have long defied ‘Westernization’. Still others have displayed inconsistent patterns characterized by stop-and-go processes or fluctuation between progress and reversals” (*Ibid.*).

Although for the external socialization to be successful, the informal rules, procedures, shared beliefs and norms preferred by socializing agents need to be embraced by a wider population, the external socialization is often conceptualized merely as political elite-oriented socialization. Geoffrey Pridham (1999) for example explained this phenomenon as

“the transnational tensification of party with personal links” that “has had its political socialisation effects - grandly called ‘Europeanisation’ - where mentalities from elites in established democracies rubbed off on new party leaders and officials-many often young and with no previous political experience”.

(Geoffrey Pridham 1999, p. 1225)

Heather Grabbe, in the course of the former enlargement waves, warned that:

“[a]ccession conditions and negotiations privilege a relatively small group of central government officials over other political actors. The lack of involvement of parliamentarians and wider society in the accession process could, in turn, exacerbate the EU’s own democratic deficit after enlargement”

(Grabbe, 2001)

As a response of such exclusion, the citizens show to be discontent over political structure, decrease of support to the existing political options and the decline in trust in institutions, and eventually in the decrease of popular support for the EU membership (Džihic & Wieser, 2011).

Indeed, a political elite-initiated democratization process (as such, the process of EU accession can be understood) differs significantly from the successful functioning of democratic norms, rules and institutions and acceptance of their jurisdictions in the hearts of the citizens. Therefore is necessary to re-conceptualize the Europeanization as “a processes of socialization and learning resulting in the internalization of new norms and the development of new identities”. Tanja Börzel and Thomas Risse (2003, pp. 60) condition the positive outcomes in the socialising process by the presence of at least one of two mediating factors: in order to allow for it, there must be *change agents or norm entrepreneurs* at the

domestic level, and there must be a *political culture and other informal institutions* conducive to consensus-building and cost sharing. This, what they called 'sociological logic of domestic change', puts emphasis on "arguing, learning, and socialization as the mechanisms by which new norms and identities emanating from Europeanization processes are internalized by domestic actors and lead to new definitions of interests and of collective identities" (*Ibid.*). The task of change agents or norm initiators is first to mobilize and "to pressure policy-makers to initiate change by increasing the costs of certain strategic options" (Börzel & Risse, 2003) but also to use

"moral arguments and strategic constructions in order to persuade actors to redefine their interests and identities engaging them in processes of social learning. Persuasion and arguing are the mechanisms by which these norm entrepreneurs try to induce change"

(Börzel & Risse, 2003).

Political culture and other informal institutions, according to Börzel and Risse:

"facilitate domestic change in response to Europeanization. Informal institutions entail collective understandings of appropriate behaviour that strongly influence the ways in which domestic actors respond to Europeanization pressures. First, a consensus-oriented or cooperative decision-making culture helps to overcome multiple veto points by rendering their use inappropriate for actors. [...] Second, a consensus-oriented political culture allows for the sharing of adaptational costs thus facilitating the accommodation to pressure for adaptation. Rather than shifting adaptational costs upon a social or political minority, the 'winners' of domestic change compensate the 'losers'"

(Börzel & Risse, 2003).

### 3. The Western Balkans Democracy Twenty Years Hence - Dreams and Deeds

The last three decades of the twentieth century were marked by the emergence of a number of new democracies worldwide: the end of the dictatorships in Spain and Portugal, the overturn of the military regimes in Latin America, the transition to democracy in Africa, the abolition of apartheid in South Africa and the collapse of the former communist Europe. Huntington's democratisation typology places the Southeast European countries to the last segment of the Third Wave (Huntington, 1991). However, the spread of formal democracy, i.e. introduction of democratic rules, procedures and institutions does not necessarily entail the spread of substantive (Kaldor, 2008) or effective democracy (Inglehart & Welzel, 2008; Knusten, 2010; Alexander, Inglehart & Welzel, 2012). Democracy is, therefore, not attained simply by adopting the right laws or establishing the new institutions but if specific social and cultural conditions are met it is likely to flourish (Inglehart, 2000, pp. 228). Therefore, legacy of authoritarianism and the weakness of democratic culture are often used to explain the gap between formal and substantive democracy. Martin Bútorá (1999, pp. 90-91) argues that exactly a weakness of democratic political culture played a role in regime transformation in Central and Eastern Europe. According to him, the authoritarian culture inherited from a former, communist, regime, "is too deeply integrated into peoples' outlook and behaviour to alter easily." Indeed, setting up new institutions and passing legislation was easier than adapting to democratic political culture in the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe (Havel, 2009).

Jacques Rupnik (2007, pp. 19) claims that linear reading of democratization, applied in academic readings on East-Central Europe that examine two decades of its regime transformation, cannot necessarily be perceived merely as "a progression from liberalization to democratic transition to democratic consolidation" although "it has generally been presumed that the process is cumulative - once you reach the next stage, you do not regress". The democratic crisis in several of the new European democracies

(just to recall the relatively recent failed president's impeachment procedure in Romania, the restriction of media freedoms in Hungary, the resignation of the Czech Republic Prime Minister for corruption scandal of his close advisers etc.) underline the importance for consolidation of democratic political culture, those "habits of the heart" in the absence of which the legitimacy and stability of democratic institutions will always remain doubtful.

Substantive democracy requires a substantial level of interpersonal trust to be present in the society. With a prevailing social structure wasted in communist party membership and a ban of citizens' voluntary associations, it was hard to develop and maintain the interpersonal trust. However, Natalia Letki and Geoffrey Evans acknowledge existence of the interpersonal trust even under the Communist regime, which assisted citizens in "*the situations of economic hardships and the lack of accountability of political institutions*" (Letki & Geofftey, 2005, pp. 515-529).

According to the civic culture literature, a level of interpersonal trust is closely associated with existing democratic institutions. Almond and Verba (1963) were the first ones to demonstrate that in those countries where a greater proportion of interpersonal trust exists, democracy has historically worked well. That is, according to them, because interpersonal trust leads to a sense of cooperation, which, in turn, creates stable democracy. In other words, readiness to engage in political action is a clear indicator of the participatory political culture. Roland Inglehart (2001, pp. 201-214) also used a variable of interpersonal trust to explain democratic stability and democracy. Putnam's study of civic culture traditions in modern Italy established that Italian (as a rule Northern) regions have considerably more citizen associations and group activities and consequently tend to have more stable democracy (Putnam, 1994, pp. 87). Namely, civic engagement reflects both citizens' interest in public issues and their devotion to public causes (Inglehart, 2001). Putnam's theory of social capital proved that rich and dense associational networks facilitated the underlying conditions of interpersonal trust, tolerance and cooperation, providing the social foundations for a vibrant democracy. Civic attitudes articulated as a result of existent social capital are important prerequisites for cooperative behaviour and the successful solution of collective action problems. Social capital is an integral and probably irreplaceable part of any democratic political culture, as it clearly indicates an inclusive and tolerant approach to the population at large. Social capital is defined and measured through interpersonal trust, reciprocity, and networks. Interpersonal trust can be thus considered the heart of social capital. It allows citizen to join their forces in social and political groups, and it enables them to come together in citizens' initiatives more easily.

There is a presumption that trust and civic engagement are inherently connected. Almond and Verba (1963) consider the sense of efficacy or competence to be a "*key political attitude*" and recognize social trust and membership in voluntary associations as important pre-conditions of a civic polity.

Putnam explained a reciprocal linkage between trust and civic engagement, arguing that

"people who trust others are all-around good citizens, and those more engaged in community life are both more trusting and more trustworthy [...] the critically disengaged believe themselves to be surrounded by miscreants and feel less constrained to be honest themselves. The causal arrows among civic involvement, reciprocity, honesty, and social trust are as tangled as well-tossed spaghetti"

(Putnam, 2000, p. 137).

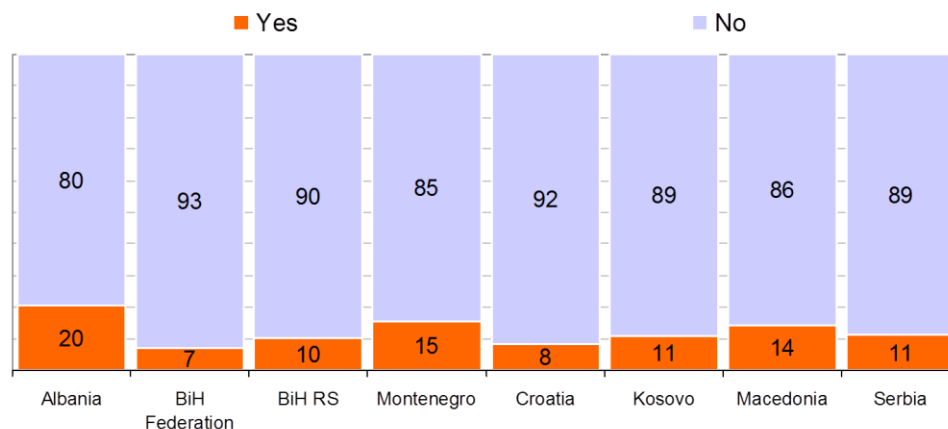
Consequently, existence of interpersonal trust has implications in the political sphere, allowing citizen to join their forces in interest groups and political parties, since the trust enables them to come together in citizens' initiatives more easily. Putnam, for example, argued that "*democratic government is strengthened, not weakened, when it faces a vigorous civil society*" (Putnam, 1994, pp. 182). That is

because civil society organizations are usually the fora for interpersonal trust expression in a society, thus playing an important role in both democratic transition and consolidation. Civil society is able to serve as a mobilizing agent of political change in the transitional period or as a watchdog in a time of consolidation since "[c]ivil society organizations seek from the state concessions, benefits, policy changes, relief, redress, and accountability" (Diamond, 1996, pp. 229). In the words of Thomas Carrothers (202, pp. 7), the strengthening of civil society allows conversion of democratic forms into democratic substance. Manal A. Jamal considered, moreover, that

"civil society can contribute to democracy in four central ways: (a) it counters state power, (b) it facilitates political participation by helping in the aggregation and representation of interests, (c) it serves as a political arena that could play an important role in the development of some of the necessary attributes for democratic development, and (d) more broadly, it plays an important role in furthering struggles for citizenship rights"

(Manal A. Jamal 2012, pp. 12)

However, the transformation of citizens' attitudes and their support for the civic goals takes time. The Western Balkans countries still suffer from a legacy of former socialist society, where participation in voluntary associations was not encouraged to the extent it is a case in consolidated democracies. Besides, previous autocratic control resulted in low levels of trust enduring in the post-socialist societies (Inglehart, 1999, pp. 88-120). Such legacy, including both poor civic engagement and lack of interpersonal trust, makes post-communist countries particularly prone to political instability, especially when faced with economic hardships (Inglehart, 1999, pp. 88-120). Former over-bureaucratized authoritarian political systems have not promoted interpersonal trust, requiring overarching loyalty towards the state.



**Figure 1.**

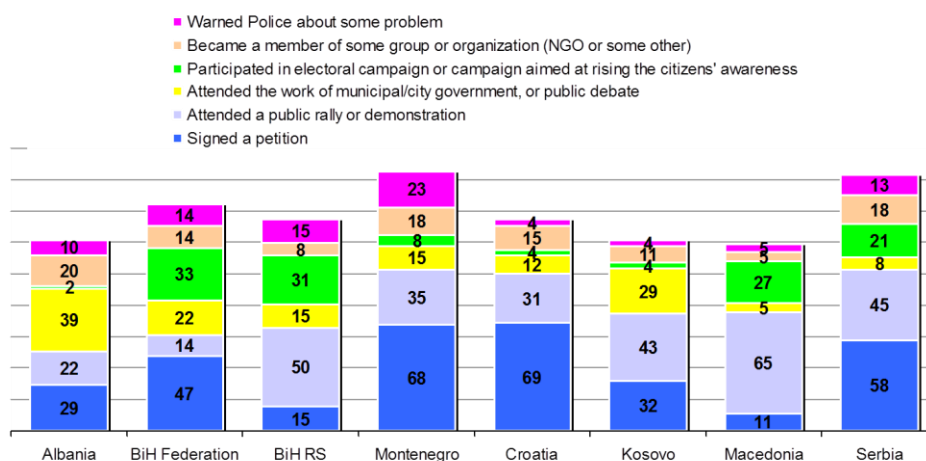
Participation in action related to problems in local community or society in general.

Source: The European Fund for the Balkans, Survey "The Tale of Two Generations", 2011.

Low level of interpersonal trust in the Western Balkans discourages citizens to take risks that are necessary for social change: the empirical results presented above suggest that a great majority of the people in all countries of the region did not participate in any action related to problems in local community or society in general. In other words, there is empirical evidence that introduction and development of



democracy over the last two decades in the Western Balkans countries have influenced peoples' constructive and participatory attitudes towards politics only to a certain degree. Readiness to engage in political action is a clear indicator of participative political culture. Civic engagement reflects both citizens' interest in public issues and their devotion to public causes. Participant political culture is specific for population that possesses a strong sense of influence, competence and confidence in understanding of the domestic political system. Survey results (**Figure 1**) indicate that population in all Western Balkans countries at large did not participate in any action related to problems in local community or society in general what points towards a conclusion that political culture in the region is rather subjective, i.e. where citizen are passive towards political institutions and role differentiation in political life.

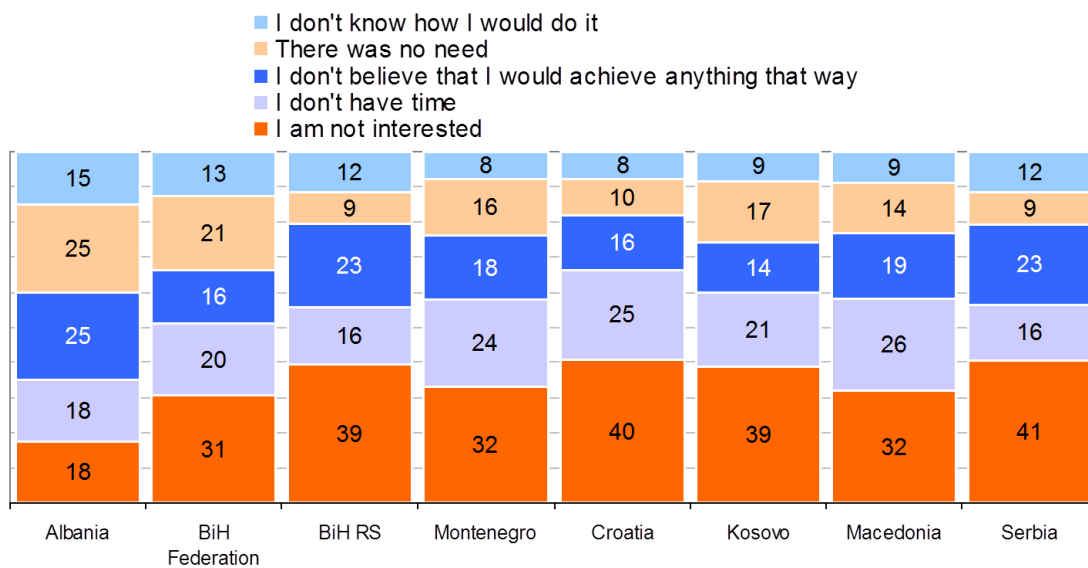


**Figure 2.**  
 Citizen's activity undertaken in a community or society in general.  
 Source: The European Fund for the Balkans, Survey "The Tale of Two Generations", 2011.

When taking part in an action or initiative during the past 12 months respondents mostly attempted to solve problems in their country or community by signing petitions or attending public rallies (**Figure 2**). Other actions included attending a public rally or demonstrations, or attending public debates. Just a small number of respondents (from 5-20%) found that their membership in civic associations could help solving societal problems. Such a small number of persons across the region who were attempting to influence the policy outcomes through the interest groups indicated the low level of interpersonal trust. The study of political participation in the former socialist countries established that the lack of interpersonal trust (De Francisco & Gitelman, 1984; Rose, 2009) resulted in conclusion that political culture in former socialist and authoritarian countries was subjective and passive.

Participation in post-communist societies namely takes place either outside the nominally participatory institutions, or within those institutions but in non-prescribed ways since those countries are vested with a legacy of social and political distrust resulting in in greater prominence of informal, rather than formal or associational type of, networks. Interpersonal distrust inherited from the former political regime is

the one directed towards the state institutions. Contrary to those findings, Slovene sociologist recently researched a level of protest participation in post-Yugoslav countries. They were particularly interested in comparing the levels of protest participation in established democracies and post-communist democracies and concluded that all non-EU post-Yugoslav countries seemed well Europeanized since their citizens took part in elite-challenging behaviour such as protest participation, signing petitions, joining in boycotts, and attending lawful demonstrations. They stressed, moreover, that Western Balkans democratic consolidation depended on political culture and behaviour of mass public. They argued that future prospects of democratic consolidation in post-Yugoslav states would mainly depend on future levels of socioeconomic growth and (non)existence of unfavourable contextual factors, especially within and between country political tensions (Krajnc, Flere & Kirbiš, 2012).



**Figure 3.**

Reason for not participating in civic actions.

Source: The European Fund for the Balkans, Survey "The Tale of Two Generations", 2011.

With the exception of Albania, lack of interest is the most frequently mentioned reason for not participating (**Figure 3**). It is striking that 40% of respondent in Croatia, with similar percentages in Serbia and BiH entity Republika Srpska, declared their lack of interest in communal life. This is a worrying indicator of the absence of civic values and indicates a prevailing individualism. In average, 20% of respondents in all surveyed countries think the time constraints keep them away from participation in issues of communal interest. Significant percentage, ranging from 14-25%, consists of people who opted for civic apathy because they did not believe they were able to influence the process and contribute to the societal change. Even one quarter of respondents in Albania and one fifth of them in BiH entity Federation of BiH considered that there was no need to act and seek reforms. These findings are especially surprising when the quality of life in those countries is taken into account. The same is thought by one tenth respondents in Serbia, Republika Srpska and Croatia, and approximately 14-16% of those surveyed in Macedonia,

Montenegro and Kosovo. From 8% to 15% of respondents in the region does not even know what they might do in order to address problems in local community or society in general.

#### 4. Dominant Materialist Values in Economically Troubled Societies

Apart from empirically establishing the linkage between trust and democracy, Inglehart suggests a strong inter-relationship between democratic institutions and economic affluence, arguing that “economic development is conducive to democracy [...]because it encourages supportive cultural orientations” (Inglehart, 1999, pp. 97). Needless to say, people in societies with lower economic development tend to perceive unemployment, health, and poor economic growth as their priorities. Indeed, this study indicated that a majority of those surveyed think that the gap between the poor and the rich is too big and that government should take steps to decrease it.

Since peoples’ priorities reflect the socioeconomic environment, the values central to people in the Western Balkans inspire them to get involved in those activities that are more likely to improve their everyday life. The hypothesis that was disclosed in previous generational surveys on post-materialist values was that younger generations’ value priorities differ from older generations’, because they have been brought up under much more secure formative conditions (Inglehart, 2000). However, this assumption cannot be reconfirmed in the present study, indicating the economic stagnation of virtually all countries in the region. The present survey indicates materialist values are still the most dominant ones when people decide to undertake public action. In contrast to this finding, people in wealthier Western countries are generally more concerned with post-materialist values, those emphasizing self-expression and the quality of life (e.g. environmental protection and lifestyle issues). Research of human development found out that only in post-industrial societies, which have experienced sustained economic growth, is the emphasis of human autonomy growing. On the contrary, low-income societies, such as former socialist countries, show a relatively little trend of autonomy of choices (Inglehart & Wezel, 2004, pp. 3-4).

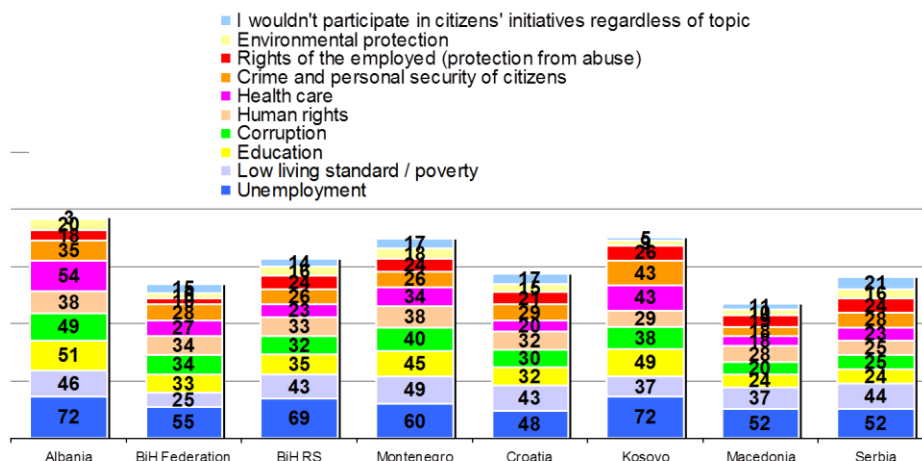
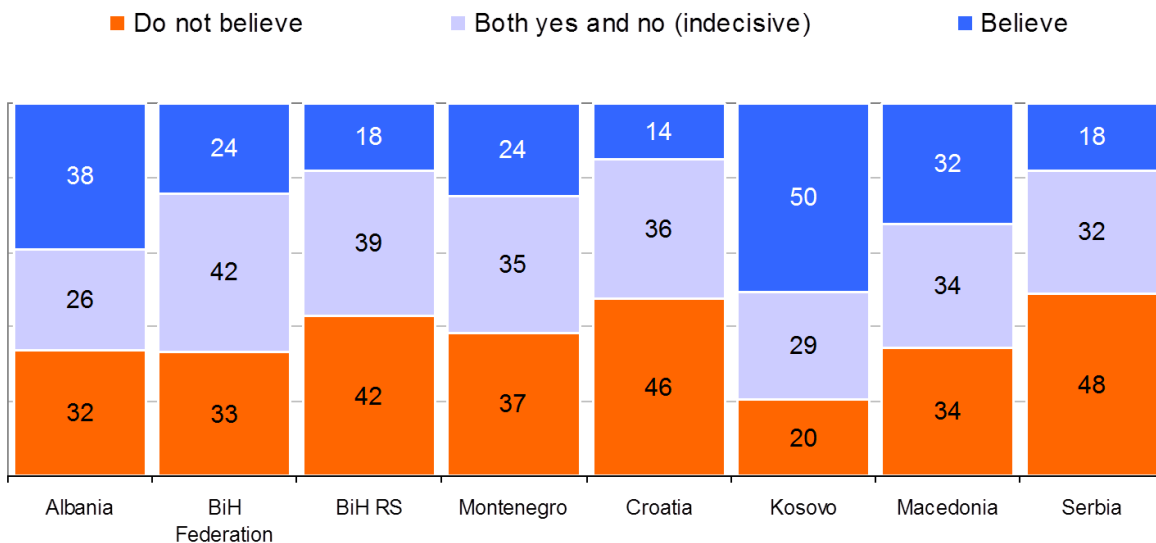


Figure 4.  
 Motivation for undertaking civic action.  
 Source: The European Fund for the Balkans, Survey “The Tale of Two Generations”, 2011.

Respondents who have undertaken any action or initiative for changes in their country during the past 12 months were predominantly motivated by unemployment. Low standard of living and the prevailing poverty are ranked as successful motivators of civic activism. Health-related problems and education follow in the list of motivators for a political action. Corruption is another relatively important motivator for finding solutions in society (**Figure 4**). Such results clearly indicate that people in the Western Balkans are concerned with materialist values, such as employment, costs of life, free education, and health care, i.e. those that allow for survival and physical safety and were secured free of charge in the former political regime.

In general, the overwhelming minority of citizens believe that they can influence changes in the society (**Figure 5**). Whereas half of the respondents in Kosovo believe this, merely 15-18% of people in Serbia, Croatia and the Republic of Srpska have positive attitude towards the civic change. In general, the younger generation believes somewhat more than the older ones that through their own actions, citizens can bring changes in society (i.e. 40% of younger respondents in Albania and 36% of them in Macedonia, (**Figure 5**). However, absolute optimism regarding ownership over own country's political destiny is not present in any of the surveyed countries.



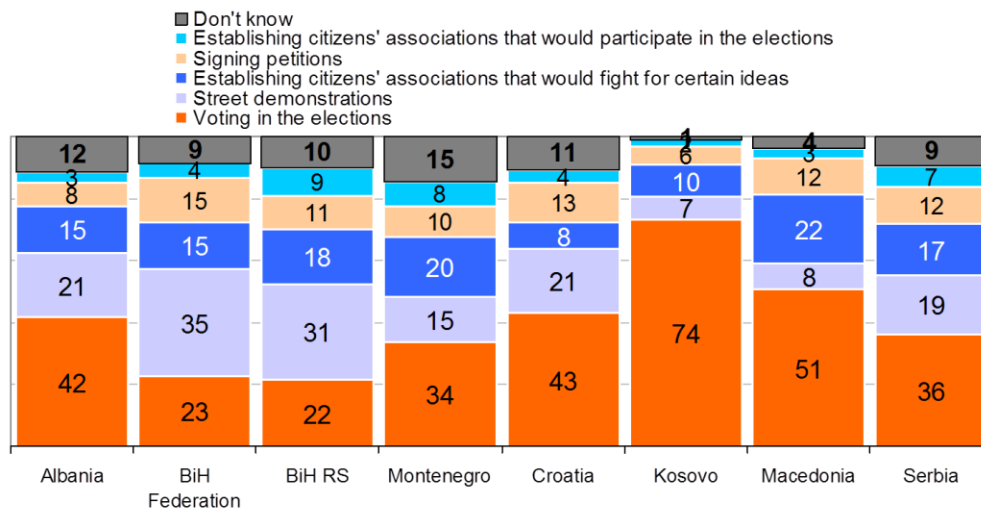
**Figure 5.**

Attitudes on citizens' ability to influence changes in the society.

Source: The European Fund for the Balkans, Survey "The Tale of Two Generations", 2011.

With exception of Kosovo and Macedonia, in which absolute majority of people think that voting in the elections is the most efficient way for the citizens to express their political beliefs, people are quite divided in their opinions on this issue. Though in Albania, Montenegro, Croatia and Serbia, voting in elections is still the most frequent answer, in Bosnia and Herzegovina relative majority of respondents (35% from Republika Srpska and 31% of them from Federation BiH) considers that through street demonstrations, citizens might most efficiently find solutions to their problems. This is a clear indicator of lack of trust in the institutions. A strikingly low percentage of respondents (ranging from 8% to 22% across

the region) consider citizens' associations as an efficient way to articulate needs and in this way try to influence political process.



**Figure 6.**  
 Attitudes on the most efficient way for the citizens to find solutions to their problems.  
 Source: The European Fund for the Balkans, Survey "The Tale of Two Generations", 2011.

This is not just an obvious indicator of absence of interpersonal trust among the citizens and correspondingly low social capital in the region, but also shows lack of trust of citizens in civil society organizations which are not perceived as a fora of citizens' cooperation but entrepreneurial agents. In order for political community to persist over time, cohesion amongst the members of society is needed. Social cohesion has been, moreover, degraded with recent inter-ethnic deterioration of contacts and cooperation across the region. Countries with low levels of interpersonal trust are less likely to build the kind of vibrant civil society that spurs strong government performance, and the result will be low citizen confidence in government and public institutions (Newton & Norris, 2000).

## 5. Institutions Not Trusted

William Mishler and Richard Rose underlined the importance of trust for democratic governments and their representative relationship with citizens. They argued that

"[i]n modern democracies, where citizens exercise control over government through representative institutions, it is trust which gives representatives the leeway to postpone short term constituency concerns while pursuing longer term national interests"

(Mishler and Rose 1997, p. 419).

Levels of social trust are influenced by citizen evaluations of their governments and the rise of trust in institutions is likely inevitable if democratic institutions do not function in accordance to their mandate:

delivering services while non-discriminating and fostering equally of all citizens, but also as a result of economic development. However, although

"[d]issatisfaction with the performance of regimes characterized by widespread corruption, abuse of power and intolerance of dissent, can be regarded as a healthy reaction"

(Norris 1999, p. 27),

the public disapproval of government's actions is exceptional and merely sporadic, usually not mobilising significant percent of population. May that be because poor government performance, rampant political corruption (Della Porta, 2000) and decreasing living standards is what the Western Balkans citizens have been facing since their countries' independence and consider those dysfunctions as systematic?

Dissatisfaction and growing loss of faith in the functioning of institutions of democratic government has been documented already back in 1970s (Grozier, Huntington & Watanuki, 1975; Dunn, 1988; Nye, 1997). For Newton and Norris (2000) this "*erosion of confidence in the major institutions of society, especially those of representative democracy, is a far more serious threat to democracy than a loss of trust in other citizens or politicians*". They explain that the "*loss of confidence in institutions may well be a better indicator of public disaffection with the modern world because they are the basic pillars of society*" (*Ibid.*) therefore they regard "*confidence in institutions as the central indicator of the underlying feeling of the general public about its polity*" (*Ibid.*). Ivan Krastev (2012) rightly points towards a democratic paradox of today: "*Democratic institutions are more transparent and, at the same time, less trusted than ever. Trust in politicians has hit rock bottom.*" Under a notion "*democratic paradox*", Robert Dahl (2000, pp. 23-40) described the absurdity present in many of the oldest and most stable democratic countries: while their citizens possess little confidence in some key democratic institutions, most citizens still continue to believe in the desirability of democracy.

Several authors argue moreover that vibrant institutions matter more to political stability in contemporary democracies than does the quality of interpersonal trust among citizens (Giddens, 1990; Seligman, 1997). Nations that enjoy a high level of social trust also tend to enjoy a relatively high level of confidence in political and bureaucratic institutions. Conversely, countries with low levels of social trust are less likely to build the kind of vibrant civil society that spurs strong government performance, and the result will be low citizen confidence in government and public institutions (Newton & Norris, 2000).

Citizens' support for the political system in which they live is important, since political system stability is conditioned with political culture congruence with its political structure. In other words, only those political institutions that are supported and trusted by citizens will function properly. The level of trust in institutions in a given society indicates a degree of trust in political institutions, such as parliament, government, administration, judiciary, political parties, the police, the army, and local government. Nations that enjoy a high level of social trust also tend to enjoy a relatively high level of confidence in political and bureaucratic institutions. The survey results reveal that confidence in political and bureaucratic institutions is quite low across the Western Balkans region (with the exception of Kosovo, where trust in institutions is disproportionately higher than in other countries of the region. This, for sure, can be explained by recently acquired statehood and related civic pride). Almost in all countries of the region religious institutions are trusted the most (support for them range from 31% to 60%, see **Figure 7**).

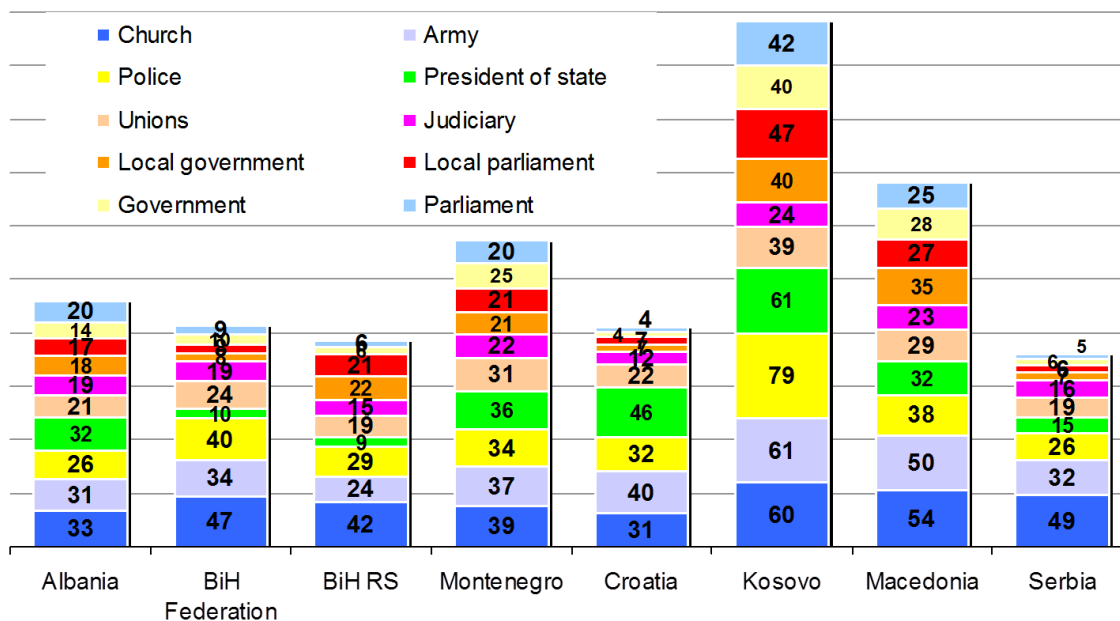


Figure 7.

Trust in institutions.

Source: The European Fund for the Balkans, Survey "The Tale of Two Generations", 2011.

The army and the police are the subsequent most trusted institutions. Similar findings were made in other recent surveys, which established likewise that people in the region trust "the uniforms" the most: church, army and police (Sekulić & Šporer, 2011). The trust in the parliament is strikingly low in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia, whereas one fifth and one quarter of respondents from Albania and Macedonia respectively trust in this chief political institution.

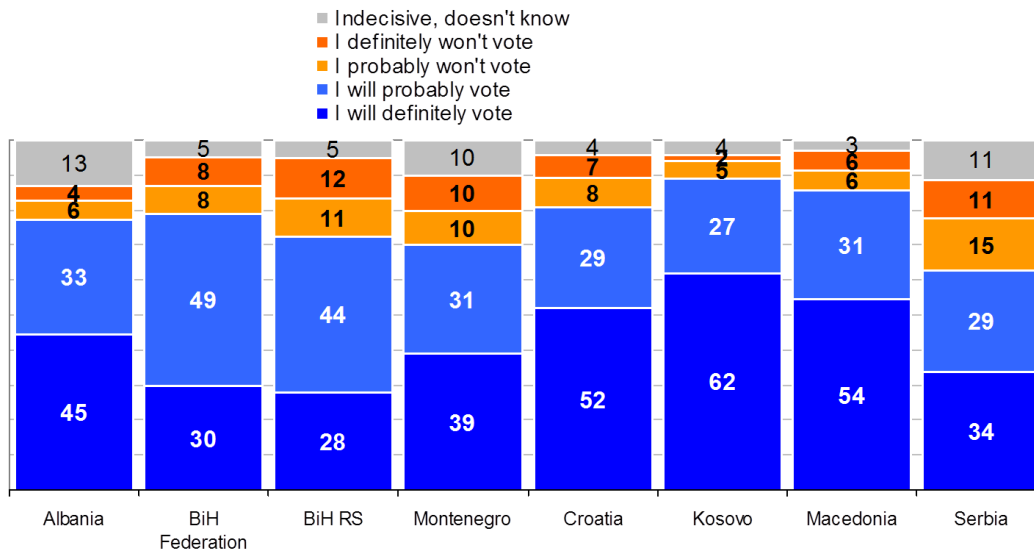
## 6. Inadequate Political Participation and Voters' Apathy

Similarly to growing lack of trust in institutions, a voter turnout continues to stagnate and decline across the globe, as it is being triggered by political apathy arising from disillusionment and disaffection with the formal political process. This, in turn, causes a crisis of legitimacy of representative democracy and endangers participatory society. Already back in early 1970s, Verba and Nie (1972, pp. 1) stated that "where few take part in decisions there is little democracy". Similarly, William Mishler and Richard Rose (1997, pp. 419) warned that democracy presupposes "an active and vigilant citizenry with a healthy skepticism of government and a willingness, should the need arise, to suspend trust and assert control over government". A blind trust by citizens in their government cultivates political apathy and undermines government's responsibility, which, in long term, undermines democracy (Gamson, 1968; Norris, 1999).

Research on voters' turnout in post-communist countries identified several conditions that influence voters' turnout (Blais, 2006; White & MacAllistar, 2007; Pacek, Pop-Eleches & Trucker 2009; Kostelka, 2010). First, institutional factors relate to type of the electoral system and party system characteristics. Research has, for example, shown that turnout is substantially higher under proportional representation, under larger district magnitude, and under more proportional systems in general (Balis & Aarts, 2006, pp.

180-196). Second, socio-economic factors might be detrimental for low voter turnout in some regions, i.e. economic conditions discourage people to vote if they reside in areas that experience economic hardship, high unemployment rates etc. This phenomenon is known in academic literature as *"the withdrawal hypothesis"* (Rosenstone, 1982; Caldeira, Patterson & Markko, 1985), explaining individuals' withdrawal from political participation by economic adversities that are causing them to place personal economic concerns over voting option. Besides this one, there is an divergent economic driven factor that influence the voting turnout explained by *"people under economic strain blame the government for their situation and vote, organize, lobby, protest, and so on to redress their grievances"* (*Ibid.*). Third, Tatiana Kostadinova (2003, pp. 158-59) includes also a *"dynamic component"*, which explains temporal changes generated by the transitional process.

Public distrust in institutions results in voters' apathy. Political apathy is however not strikingly high in the Western Balkans since a majority of people in all surveyed countries are planning to vote in the next elections (**Figure 8**). The reasons that make people abstain may be their conviction that elections do not bring change, or that there is no party they would support. Surprisingly, a minority of respondents claim they do not vote because they are not interested in politics, since their other responses reveal that they do not try to influence political processes in their countries in any other way (**Figure 9**).



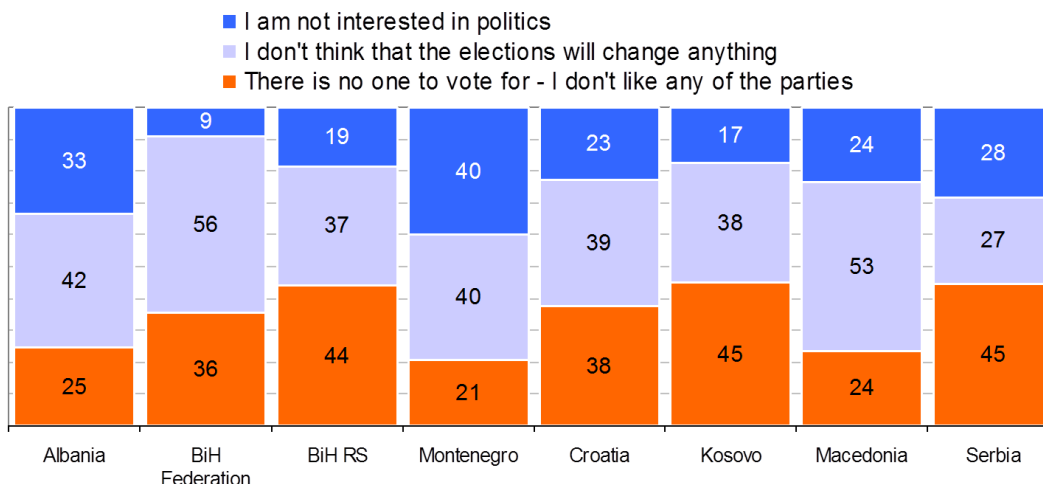
**Figure 8.**

Expression of intention to cast the ballot in the forthcoming elections.

Source: The European Fund for the Balkans, Survey "The Tale of Two Generations", 2011.

Citizens' lack of trust in political parties across the region caused the emergence of a great deal of political parties and independent lists that (mis)use populism for getting into political arena. Often small parties or independent lists tend to need coalition partners allowing for a formation of governments. The fragmentation of the political party scene is even more notable at the local level, where in order to form functioning local governments, such independent lists serve as clientelistic coalitional partner, eventually resulting in their perceived illegitimacy in voters' eyes.





**Figure 9.**  
 Reasons for not voting in the forthcoming elections.  
 Source: The European Fund for the Balkans, Survey “The Tale of Two Generations”, 2011.

In general, among the people who will not vote in the next elections, minority are the ones who are not interested in politics, while more frequently the reasons are that people do not believe that elections will bring change or that there is no party they prefer in the first place (**Figure 9**).

Voter turnout has been decreasing in every country of the region in the past two decades. The latest parliamentary elections in Serbia mobilised 57.77% voters (in comparison to 61.35% registered at the previous 2008 elections), whereas the second round of the presidential elections took 46.26% of the voters to polling stations (International IDEA a). The presidential elections held in December 2002 in Serbia failed three times due to a very low turnout (turnout in the second round was less than 50% of eligible voters, the threshold that was required by the electoral legislation of that time). The legislation needed to be changed in order to assure functioning of this democratic institution. The Croatian presidential elections held in 2010 witnessed as well the lowest turnout: 43.96%, while in the parliamentary elections in 2011, only 50.13% people bothered to vote (International IDEA b). Just in parliamentary elections held in 2007 the turnout was notably higher (59.58%), whereas presidential elections tend to attract less voters (around 50.57% in 2005) since the president has fairly limited competences.

A volatility of voter turnout in the post-communist countries may be explained by three hypotheses: a “*depressing disenchantment*”, the hypothesis predicting that voters are less likely to vote in elections when political and economic conditions are worse; the “*motivating disenchantment*” hypothesis predicting that voters are more likely to vote in elections when conditions are worse; and the “*stakes*”-based hypothesis predicting that voters are more likely to vote in more important elections (Pacek, Pop-Eleches & Trucker, 2009, pp. 473-491). The “*depressing disenchantment*” hypothesis was already confirmed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the country that is, except Kosovo, in the worst economic situation regionally. There, the voter turnout has been persistently low, or around 55% (International IDEA c). The “*stakes*”-based hypothesis was confirmed in numerous elections in the Western Balkans. For example, at the first democratic parliamentary elections in Croatia held in 1992 75.61% voters showed up, whereas at the presidential elections 74.90% (International IDEA d). Furthermore, the change of government in 2000,

when autocratic governmental style, which had dominated throughout the 1990s, was removed in 2000, more people went to the polls: in the year 2000, 76.55% voters turned out in the parliamentary and 60.88% in the presidential elections (Ibid.). Similarly, the early democratic elections in Albania brought 98.92% and 91.50% of voters to the voting station in 1991 and 1992, respectively. In the latest parliamentary elections, merely 50.77% of Albanian voters voted (International IDEA e). Similar trend can be observed in the 2002 Macedonian parliamentary elections, when 74.60% voters turned up at polling stations. This was actually the first electoral competition held following the inter-ethnic conflict that resulted in the Ohrid Framework Peace Agreement, which ended the 2001 crisis. Consequently, the 2002 elections were crucial for the country's stability, and this probably caused a rise in the voters' turnout since presidential elections held in May 2004 mobilised merely 55% of voters.

By applying the last hypothesis, one might expect that in the countries that secured independence recently (e.g. Montenegro in 2006 and Kosovo in 2008), the voters' turnout tends to be a bit higher than in the neighbouring countries because of a national(ist) revival. Whereas 72.05% and 66.19% of Montenegrin citizens turned up in the parliamentary elections in 2006 and 2009, respectively (International IDEA f), in Kosovo only 45.62% of voters cast their ballot at the 2010 parliamentary elections (International IDEA g; Ejupi, 2011). The data for Kosovo likely do not represent the real picture, since its population is still divided politically along ethnic lines: the Serb population from the North part of the country continues to vote in the Serbian elections and to boycott the Kosovar ones (Gallucci, 2012).

## 7. Conclusions

This article demonstrated that inexistence of "habits of the heart" in the Western Balkans may cause a slow pace of a democratic transformation. Specific social, economic, and historic conditions (communist legacy, recently waged wars, transition that added additional stress on population because it combined both economic and political reforms) have contributed to passivity of political culture. Regime transformation added uncertainty that were faced with challenges population, particularly the older and middle-aged, was not prepared to address. The empirical survey results presented above allow several conclusions to be drawn. The introduction and consolidation of democracy in the past two decades in the Western Balkans countries influenced peoples' attitudes towards politics only to a certain degree. The survey results moreover uncovered an alienated political culture with a low degree of confidence in political institutions and a lack of trust in the individual political competences of the respondents across the region. Civic community is being confirmed by the existence of interest for political process and by active participation of citizens in public affairs. The survey results imply that more is needed for the consolidation of democracy in the Western Balkans, in addition to adopting the right laws and introducing new institutions. The fact that citizens of the countries in the Western Balkans are to a great extent politically detached, do not believe they can influence political change, and are predominantly motivated by materialist values when undertaking civic engagement, points towards the conclusion that the political culture consolidation has not yet taken place in the Western Balkans.

Predominant lack of trust in political institutions among the citizens, followed by absence of interest for social and political actions, in addition to political apathy and lack of hope that they themselves are able to influence the political process, all result in the relatively low voting turnout often allowing nationalist political options to gain or remain in power. Although the EU Stabilisation and Association Process and subsequent accession negotiations contain a democratisation component, they have not so far succeeded significantly in promoting democratic consolidation of civic values. Informal networks, which tend to be friendship- and keen-based, prevail, while the social capital understood as "*a culture of trust and tolerance*"

*in which extensive networks of voluntary associations emerge*” (Inglehart, 1997, pp. 188) is still not common in the Western Balkans. As it has been demonstrated above, merely the trust produced within voluntary associations could positively increase participation in the Western Balkans democracies, contributing eventually to rise of democratic political culture and democratic consolidation.

It is not sufficient for specific social norms and values to be (mostly formally) transposed into domestic legislations and practices of democratic institutions of the future Member States. In order for democracy to become the “habit of the heart” of the Western Balkans people, it is important to develop interpersonal trust and social capital. This article therefore suggests that by developing social capital, policy outcomes in the region might be improved. A positive aspect of both the social capital and political culture is that it can be built up and fostered through education and socialization. Unfortunately, educational systems in the Western Balkans countries are often resulting in inter-ethnic segregation (as it is the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Kosovo, and to smaller extent in Serbia and Croatia, where substantive national minorities are also excluded through special minority education systems). Although the process of the political culture consolidation takes long time to achieve and “*can be sealed only by a generational change*” (Merkel, 2008, pp. 15), the EU democratization conditionality should recognize that without systematic investment into changing the prevailing values and beliefs of the citizens regarding their position toward democratic political regimes, democracy in the Western Balkans is not likely to take root. Therefore, the European Union should first and foremost encourage governments of the (potential) candidate countries to develop and implement educational programmes of civic education. In addition to this, the EU financial and technical support for development of civil society in the pre-accession period should be much more vigorous and encompassing. Moreover, active involvement of the civil society organizations in the accession negotiations process would assure both better transparency and the involvement of non-governmental actors in this important segment of the pre-accession process.

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