

## EVENTS

### **SEMINAR “PUBLIC POLICY CHALLENGES – EUROPEAN AND REGIONAL DIMENSIONS”**

*May 30-June 3, 2016. Albena, Bulgaria*

Economic Policy Institute (EPI) from Sofia, Bulgaria, had organized the XVII Summer Seminar for Young Public Policy Professionals from Southeastern Europe and the Black Sea Region named “Public Policy Challenges – European and Regional Dimensions”. The seminar took place within the period May 30-June 3, 2016, in Albena, the Bulgarian Black Sea coast, with the support of the Hans Seidel Foundation, Austrian Embassy in Sofia and the Representation of the European Commission in Bulgaria. It gathered a diverse group of 34 young public policy professionals from public administration structures and research centers from ten countries from South East Europe and the Black Sea region: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Turkey.

The seminar was opened by Yassen Georgiev, Executive Director of the EPI, Wiebke Beiche, Project Assistant of Hanns Seidel Foundation in Bulgaria and Todor Churov, Director of Political Affairs General Directorate in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria.

“Public Policy Challenges – European and Regional Dimensions” seminar was organized in seven panels and three interactive workshops.

The first panel was entitled “Political, Economic and Security Challenges on the EU Agenda”. During this panel, Ambassador of the Netherlands to the Republic of Bulgaria H. E. Tom van Oorschot pointed on the most important challenges of the European Union during the Dutch Presidency, and H. E. Marián Jakubócy Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Republic to the Republic of Bulgaria gave a lecture on the preparations and priorities of the upcoming Slovak Presidency. One of the most challenging topics of the first panel was Scenarios after the UK referendum of Brexit by Professor Plamen Ralchev. It showed advantages and disadvantages for the UK after Brexit, as well as the potential consequences for the EU in the case of Brexit.

“Public Policy Challenges in the SEE and Black Sea Countries: Fighting Corruption and Smart Regulation” was the title of the second panel. Having in mind that corruption is one of the crucial problems and one of the major

obstacles to the sustainable development in the regions of SEE and Black Sea countries, lecturers presented data on the level of corruption in these regions, malfunctioning of the judicial systems, as well as the wide range of anti-corruption measures proposed across the region during the past decade. Better legal regulation is a key factor in fighting corruption and future economic growth of these regions.

The third and fourth panels were dedicated to the major challenges of the South East Europe region. It dealt with the strategic issues on the Agenda of Europe and South East Europe and promotion of growth and entrepreneurship. The lecturers discussed on energy challenges in South East Europe, Europe in the Catch-Up Index: Implications of the Convergence and Divergence Processes, and Technological Commercialization. A special attention was dedicated to the TTIP and its role in fostering growth. The lecturer Michael Koplovsky, Minister Counselor for Economic Affairs, the U.S. Mission to the European Union, presented the advantages, disadvantages and some of the controversies of TTIP, having in mind that reports on the ongoing negotiations and the contents of the negotiated TTIP proposals are classified from the public, and can be accessed only by the authorized persons.

“Key Challenges on the Agenda of the SEE and Black Sea Countries: EU Integration and Regional Cooperation” was the title of the fifth panel. H. E. Dušan Štrauch, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Czech Republic to the Republic of Bulgaria, explained the Visegrad Group as a role model for Cooperation. Experiences from this model of cooperation between the Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, created for the purposes of furthering their European integration and advancing military, economic and energy cooperation can be used as a role model for strengthening the cooperation in South East Europe and the Black Sea region. In addition, all the lessons learned from the EU enlargement process have to be role models for possible new members, especially for the Western Balkans countries.

The sixth and seventh panels were dedicated to The EU Neighborhood Policy – Current Trends and Future Challenges and Visions for the Future of EU and the SEE and the Black Sea Region. The lecturers discussed the theoretical perspectives and practical implications for the future of the Eastern Partnership. If the EU is not unified in maintaining a strongly supported common foreign policy towards the region and it is unable to offer EU membership perspectives, the risk of disappointment of the pro-western population and the political elite will likely be on the rise, which could lead to the definitive elimination of the remnants of the EU’s soft power. The Greek debt crisis, migration and refugee crisis, Brexit and heightened terrorism threat are the most challenging issues for the EU. The range of political and economic pressures, slow growth and high unemployment in many EU countries, the rise of populist political parties, “euro

skeptic” complicates the EU’s ability to deal with a multitude of internal and external challenges. The lecturers discussed possible scenarios for the future of the EU such as establishing two speeds, More Intergovernmental Configuration and More Integrated Configuration.

XVII Summer Seminar for Young Public Policy Professionals from Southeastern Europe and the Black Sea Region was a very useful experience for all the participants. Through lectures, interactive workshops, transfer of experiences, best practices and ideas young public policy professionals enlarged their knowledge about the European Union, the process of EU integration and the regional cooperation. The participants and lecturers highly evaluated the organization of the seminar. Summer Seminars, as a project of the Economic Policy Institute with a long, 17 years old tradition, helps in better mutual understanding, creates opportunities for cooperation for young public professionals and striving to create better perspectives for the regions of South East Europe and Black Sea.

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