

PUBLIC POLICY CHALLENGES – EUROPEAN AND REGIONAL DIMENSIONS

Economic Policy Institute (EPI) from Sofia, Bulgaria, had organized XVIII 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 29 - June 2, 2017 in Albena at the Bulgarian Black Sea coast, with the support of the Hans Seidel Foundation, the Austrian Embassy in Sofia, the Central European Initiative and the Representation of the European Commission in Bulgaria. It gathered a diverse group of young public policy professionals from public administration structures and research centers from South East Europe and the Black Sea region: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine.

The Seminar “Public Policy Challenges – European and Regional Dimensions” was organized into four panels and two interactive workshops.

The first panel was entitled “Public Policy Challenges of SEE and Black Sea countries”. It highlighted corruption, bad business environment, inadequate access to data as some of the most important obstacles and challenges of public policy in SEE and the Black Sea countries. SEE and the Black Sea region consist of numerous countries. Some of those countries are the EU members, some of them are not. However, all these countries have similarities when it comes to the level of corruption, access to data and e-government, as well as the inadequate business environment. Panelists indicated consequences that might happen if those bad trends continue in the future, and offered some examples of positive practices worldwide as a model for solving challenges of public policy in SEE and the Black Sea region.

The second panel was dedicated to the economic growth and competitiveness of SEE and the Black Sea countries. It explained the catch-up index of new post-communist member states of the EU. It showed the level of convergence or divergence along four categories: Economy, Quality of Life, Democracy and Governance between “new” and “old” member states. A keynote speaker from this panel, Andras Inotai, a professor emeritus from Hungary, pointed out that the cooperation with China and Chinese investments might be crucial and multiply beneficial for the future of SEE and the Black Sea countries.

“Political, Economic and Security Challenges on the EU Agenda” was the title of the third panel. It highlighted globalization and the EU integration, lessons learned from the EU enlargement process and some of the crucial political and security challenges within the EU countries. The EU had shown some serious

disagreements when it comes to numerous foreign policy aspects. Serious economic crises have happened in Greece, Spain and Portugal. Disagreements culminated with the European migrant crisis. Also, Brexit was one of the most serious challenges when it comes to the political future of the European Union.

“Key Challenges on the Agenda of SEE and Black Sea Countries” was the title of the fourth panel. This panel pointed out the importance of cooperation and learning from its neighbours’ experiences when it comes to the European integrations of SEE and the Black Sea countries. Positive aspects of such cooperation exist in the “Visegrad group” between Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. A similar model might be created in the future within some of the SEE and the Black Sea countries. Some of these countries have a history of conflicts and territorial disputes. Some of them are the EU members, some of them are not. However, the most common characteristics of all these countries is a necessity of good neighbourly relations and cooperation. The non-member states have to learn from the lessons of its neighbours when it comes to the EU membership and integration process. SEE and the Black Sea countries have to find mechanisms to overcome its political differences. They have to develop the politics of cooperation between themselves, as well as the cooperation with the “old” EU members and China.

XVIII 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, as well as the most important challenges for SEE and the Black Sea countries. Participants and lecturers highly evaluated the organization of the Seminar.

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