

Zitierhinweis

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Yugoslav space, even more so as both parts of the equation are currently undergoing rapid change, for better or worse. The downside is that volumes like this restate and rework at length numerous well-known facts and events – from Dayton to Ahtisaari and from Rambouillet to Ohrid.

Wim van Meurs (Nijmegen/Kleve)

**Caterina RUGGERI LADERCHI / Sara SAVASTANO (eds.), *Poverty and Exclusion in the Western Balkans. New Directions in Measurement and Policy*, New York et al.: Springer, 2013 (Economic Studies in Inequality, Social Exclusion and Well-being, 8), 298 p., ISBN 978-1-4614-4945-4, € 107,09**

The last two decades have been an intense period in the Western Balkans. The states of the region have emerged from a series of conflicts towards the pathway to EU accession (already completed by Slovenia and Croatia), while they have also been impacted by the world economic crisis. The heterogeneity of the countries – in ethnic composition, in the degree of economic development etc., and the relative scarcity of policy-relevant data – makes an analysis of their economies an extremely complex exercise. “Chronic conditions” such as the low economic activity of the population, the proliferation of informal employment, endemic poverty and budget pressures have been aggravated by the crisis, while some positive tendencies have been disrupted. Problematic issues are deeply rooted in the taxation system, social benefits design, features of the labor market and educational sphere. Reforms in economic, political and social spheres are necessary, and this book contributes to the creation

of a methodological base from which to make local policy measures coherent with the EU-2020 agenda. It is also topical in the context of the EU-enlargement.

The present collection of papers by a team of acknowledged experts provides an in-depth overview of the state-of-the-art in the analysis of poverty and social exclusion, and of the enhancement of welfare systems in Western Balkan countries. Apart from the regional analyses, this volume outlines the methodological challenges of creating comparable databases (across countries and time). Given the general uncertainty of conditions, not only in the Western Balkan countries, but also globally, the validity of a number of policy-relevant definitions (e.g. of relative poverty lines) is questioned and redefined in accordance with the current context. In addition, the volume offers a policy-relevant analysis with a mix of qualitative and quantitative methodologies from different disciplines - economics, sociology, and anthropology.

Concerning regional specifics, the book definitely provides an excellent introduction to the up-to-date complex reality of the Western Balkan countries and the heterogeneity of problems that they share. In the case of *Albania* the book covers noteworthy aspects such as the creation of regional poverty maps of in-between-census years (Ch. 5), gender wage gap development and reasons for gender discrimination (Ch. 10), internal migration and its impact on the maintenance of social ties and intra-network transfers (Ch. 11), precision in targeting of vulnerable groups by social assistance programs (Ch. 16, or, in particular, the Roma population in Ch. 4). The first ever set of estimates of social exclusion indicators for *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, *BIH*, (Ch. 6) is certainly a breakthrough. Multiethnicity (which is closely tied to the

question of national stability) is neatly addressed through the notion of within- and between- communities cohesion in the *FYR of Macedonia* (Ch. 7), the ethnic fractionalization, and attitudes towards a multiethnic state and ethnically mixed living in *Kosovo* (Ch. 12). Formal employment activation is still one of the biggest challenges in *Serbia*. Current active labour market policies, their impact on employability and subjective well-being of the “hard-to-employ” groups (Ch. 8) and study of disincentives to formal employment (Ch. 9) lead the reader to an understanding of the inevitability of reforms for further economic and social development. Governmental plans (as of 2009) for social assistance program optimisation and their possible impact on income distribution and poverty in Serbia are also discussed (Ch. 15).

In fact, the compelling topic of “*safety nets architecture*” (design, implementation, financing, and performance of social assistance programs) in the Western Balkan countries and the Central and Eastern European perspective occupies more than a quarter of the volume. A rigorous historical analysis of the emergence of the socialist welfare state in the former Yugoslavia, and the path dependence of the processes in question (Ch. 13 and 14) serve as a roadmap for further reforms. A micro-simulation of the consequence of changes in the social assistance law in Serbia (Ch. 15) illustrates how the administrative burden and high transaction costs linked to one’s right to social assistance might hinder reform implementation. The question of precise targeting of the most vulnerable groups for the allocation of social assistance (Ch. 16 for Albania), and thus of the definition of eligibility, is shown to depend heavily on an informational basis on both municipal and local official levels.

The strength of the book lies in conceptual redefinition. Alongside the poor recipients of social assistance, newly emerged vulnerable categories of population (e.g. potentially excluded, in-work poverty) are also considered (Ch. 2). In line with the modern tendencies in economic research, the subjectivity of experiences comes to the light: e.g. the perception of one’s own poverty (Ch. 4), the impact of labour market policies on subjective well-being, self-perceptions and employability (Ch. 8).

Its critical discussion of concepts of poverty and social inclusion/exclusion and the revision of existing indicators – their historical development, growing emphasis on “beyond the material aspect”, subjectivity of the categories, and country-differences in definitions – means that this volume might serve as a handbook for those interested in the EU context. In line with the Europe-2020 strategy, the multidimensionality of social exclusion is placed to the fore: risk of poverty, both material and non-material deprivation, low work intensity in Ch. 6 for BIH, and employment, assets, living conditions, subjective well-being and social capital in Ch. 7 for the FYR of Macedonia.

The creation of a framework of data (harmonized and comparable across the Western Balkan countries and other EU member states) collection is one of the priorities for the near future; and this volume recommends the EU-SILC framework as a base (Ch. 3). The analysis of the weak and strong sides of the LSMS and Household Budget surveys (including a discussion on “picking the right tool in a crowded box” for income measurement) is particularly useful, as well as a table summarizing household surveys already conducted. Separate chapters also exploit some local and much less known data arrays.

The low frequency of data collection in the Western Balkan countries is a challenge in the context of regional short-run policies development in inter-census years. The repeated cross-sections of surveys might still be sufficient to make micro-estimates of poverty and inequality at the commune level, as shown by the author's methodology of updating maps with counterfactual population distribution (Ch. 5).

While most of the economic research is based on quantitative methods, this volume demonstrates how qualitative methodologies, often based on a solid understanding of the available quantitative evidence, may enrich policy relevant analyses. Among the methodologies discussed in depth, there are focus group discussions (Ch. 4) and face-to-face in-depth interviews (Ch. 8, 12). These tools may be used to address vulnerable groups that are largely inaccessible through surveys (e.g. "hard-to-employ" individuals in Serbia in Ch. 8, or internal migrants in Albania in Ch. 11).

In my opinion, this is a book not only for an experienced Western Balkans economist. It neatly places the Balkans into the EU context, and might be useful for students and researchers interested in the EU-related poverty and social exclusion issues.

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**Arolda ELBASANI (ed.), European Integration and Transformation in the Western Balkans. Europeanization or Business as Usual?** Abingdon: Routledge, 2013 (UACES Contemporary European Studies). 215 pp., ISBN 978-0-415-59452-3, £ 85,-

This volume is made up of contributions by scholars from such various fields

of research as European integration, international relations, and comparative politics. Its aim is to assess the impact of the Europeanization processes on the domestic politics of the countries of the Western Balkan region, namely Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo, and Serbia. Most importantly, it focuses on how various internal contexts affect the integration process. In recent years we have witnessed a plethora of publications dealing with the Europeanization of the region. In an almost classical paradigm the EU is presented as the "normative institutional power" to which the Balkan countries should adhere by following a roadmap of "homework", obligations, and short and long-term objectives.

The book is important for two principal reasons. The timing of the publication could not have been better. All countries located in this part of the Balkans, with the exceptions of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, have already set their own agendas for becoming European candidate-states, or full members, or are on the way to applying for these statuses. These agendas have led to various results. Croatia became a full EU member in the summer of 2013; Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia have attained different levels of EU candidate status, and Albania failed to get a positive response in December 2013, after having been refused twice before. Thus, the process of the Balkan countries joining the EU is beset with ongoing problems, and it will take both internal and external efforts to deal successfully with these issues. The process presents challenges at various levels and should be viewed in the wider context of the EU policy dilemma over expansion toward the Balkans, a part of Europe which is geographically as close to the EU