

Editorial

This first number of the *SEER Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe* for 2015 focuses on *Economic development and quality of life in the western Balkans*. We have a block of articles focusing on this broad theme from different angles, taking a look at various countries of the region in a comparative way, examining also the important factors in economic development, including education, leadership and the business environment. With two further articles, we return to one of our long-term themes – labour migration and related policies – against the backdrop of the heightened currency of the migration issue in many different debates within the EU and concerning its neighbourhood. Finally, we take a look eastwards of the European Union, examining geopolitical and energy security issues which clearly also have a major role to play in the development of the Union, and even in determining its future.

In her article, Ela Golemi makes a comparative analysis of the economies of the western Balkans in the process of European integration, evaluating the impact of the global economic crisis on the western Balkans. Her statistical overview shows that the level of integration and the openness of member countries to external economies have contributed to the deterioration in the microeconomic indicators.

Gökhan Telatar takes a look at the European Union's role in the maintenance of international peace and security in the 21st century. He goes on to investigate whether the EU has succeeded in developing policies corresponding to its international role and approach in the 21st century, debating whether the adoption of a more enhanced international role might lead to the EU replacing the US as a hegemonic actor, at least on the local stage.

The article by Murat Kayıkçı compares Balkan countries in the context of sustainable development and quality of life performances, focusing on Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Turkey. The author pays particular attention to national strategies in chemicals and waste management on the one hand, while exploring issues such as subjective well-being and the local environment on the other.

Svetlana Dušanić Gačić and Vanja Šušnjar Čanković regard education and training as a major economic factor in the development of Bosnia and Herzegovina against the context of competitiveness, the standards of other European Union countries and the needs of a modern labour market. The authors also examine citizens' attitudes towards the role that education and training might play in the development of the country, drawing on original research conducted with the use of a survey.

Iya Petkova-Gourbalova explores the leadership specifics of managers in the business services sector in Bulgaria, applying both quantitative and qualitative analysis to empirical data collected from 35 businesses so as to consider differences in formal leadership style. In the process, she considers the impact of the socio-cultural context and gender on the merits of transformational or transactional styles.

Ermira Hoxha Kalaj focuses on survey data and qualitative evidence from a sample of Albanian manufacturing firms to examine the scale and consequences of corruption and tax evasion at enterprise level. Proceeding from an application of regression ana-

lysis to the data, the article emerges with a number of interesting public policy proposals as to how corruption can be effectively tackled.

Vanya Ivanova takes a look at the phenomenon of the return migration of highly-qualified workers in Bulgaria and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and examines related policies and returnees' responses. She incorporates a number of quotes from a qualitative sample of interviewees whose observations provide the grounding for the institutional backing required to make the return experience a more rewarding one for individuals and indeed Bulgarian society and its economy.

Violeta Ivanova, Stella Georgieva and Evangelos Evangelou provide an account of a highly worthwhile initiative launched by Bulgarian and Cypriot trade unions to improve the labour market and institutional protection of Bulgarians working in Cyprus – the most numerous group of foreign workers in the country. The initiative establishes a best practice case study of how trade unions can collaborate across borders on migration-related matters, as well as to fulfil their roles in offering an organised, collective response to labour market issues.

Finally, Anis Bajrektarevic and Petra Posega take a look at the Caspian energy plateau and draw geopolitical and energy security lessons from an international policy perspective. The Caspian Basin is troubled with its own specific set of complexities, encompassing its undefined legal status, territorial disputes, ethnic instabilities and its vicinity to other hot spots such as a middle east in turmoil and the more recently-sparked conflict in Ukraine. Its geographical setting, and rich resources, makes the Caspian of central interest to European energy security and political interests.

We hope that you continue to find something of interest in this number, and which might spark some interesting train of thought which you might want to develop into an article of your own. We are always interested in contributions so, if you have a particular idea, please do contact either one of us for a discussion.

Béla Galgócz

June 2015

Calvin Allen