



AcadEU - a promising start

By Zlatko Šabič, Chairs of Panels, and Staff at the conference on 23 November 2013

Introduction



The 1st AcadEU conference (www.acadeu.eu) has gathered around 100 participants, half of them coming from various parts of the post-Yugoslav space. Impressively, all of those invited have responded positively. Only three have sent us a last-minute cancellation, and all of them with more than just convincing reasons, and all of them expressed big interest in being part of the network and its activities in the future.

Judging by the reactions of the participants, the organisation of the conference has been without any major problems. For the most part, the organisation was in the hands of post- and undergraduate students, under the stewardship of Assistant Professor Boštjan Udovič and Natalija Ferlež. The (social)media aspect of the conference has been covered, too. The Twitter Account, which was moderated by Tjaša Božič (@Acad_EU), was very much alive during the conference. Over 100 photos, made by Tamara Kajtazović (tamarasblend.com) have been made. The presentation of the programme and the news related to the conference were firmly in the hands of Tina Orešnik and the web journal she edits (defactual.com).

As for individual roundtables, the participants have focused on exploring opportunities for further co-operation as well as political and economic aspects of relations between the EU and the post-Yugoslav space. Good practices and challenges in the European integration process have resulted in agreements and conclusions that promise substantive follow-ups to this conference.

The opening



The first part of the conference has been followed by Angela Velkova, herself a participant at the AcadEU conference (full report to be published at pecob.eu). The excerpts of her report are as follows. Chaired by the project manager and coordinator, Prof. Zlatko Šabič, the AcadEU was inaugurated with the speeches of the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Prof. Bojko Bučar, the Minister of Education, Science, and Sport of Slovenia, Dr. Jernej Pikalo, the Deputy Head of the European Commission

Representation in Slovenia, Ms. Ulla Hudina, and the Keynote address by the Member of the European Parliament, Mr. Ivo Vajgl.



Dean Bučar welcomed the participants and stressed the importance of academia in shaping and promoting future cooperation and integration of the region. Minister Pikalo called upon the need of an increase of civil participation in European affairs, for “the European Union is our common future.” Deputy Head of EC, Ms. Hudina, expressed concerns about the rising euroskepticism and invited academia to curb this phenomenon, as “we should not remain disillusioned by pessimism.” This goes in line with raising awareness of the European Citizenship and the rights Europeans possess. Importantly, Ms. Hudina noted that “the EU is a cultural and social project in addition to its economic goals.” Member of the European Parliament, Mr. Ivo Vajgl pointed out that he “was amazed by the openness and democratic discussion in the EU.” The more the end of the mandate is approaching, however, the more he realizes the deficit of a democratic discourse (one of the very problems that the AcadEU addresses). Regarding to the Western Balkans countries and their prospects for EU integration, MP Vajgl asserted and then detailed his argument that a lot of work still needs to be done, thus acknowledging the relevance of the work within the AcadEU.

Institutional co-operation



At the institutional level, senior administrators (mostly Deans and Vice-Deans, as well as Heads of International Co-operation) met on two occasions. The talks were moderated by Dean Bojko Bučar and Vice Dean Miro Haček respectively. While tangible results at this initial set of meetings could not of course be expected, some concrete work has been done. Besides exchanging information and experience in the field of international cooperation of between representatives from higher education institutions from the post-Yugoslav space, a commitment to explore opportunities such as in the light of newly built research and higher education financial schemes (Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+) has been made firm. To this end, several bi- and trilateral talks between higher education institutions have also been held.

Interdisciplinarity and diversity management

In the morning, two topical sessions took place. One, chaired by Ana Bojinović-Fenko pointed to the often-neglected inter-disciplinary character of the post-Yugoslav studies, an approach that should guide co-operation within the AcadEU.



Introducing the discussion on the importance of an often-lacking inter-disciplinary approach in analyses of developments in the post-Yugoslav space, the Chair suggested a focus on a set of common challenges of states and societies in the region and then offered a disciplinary mapping of research efforts to understand those challenges. The following were highlighted as common regional phenomena: states' and regional stability and security, political and economic transition, governance of new states and the role of external actors in the region. The participants in the conference offered their political-economical and institutional perspectives, with a particular emphasis on the EU foreign policy approach and the role of complementary institutions, in particular the OSCE. As the debate unfolded, the participants agreed on the necessity to put more efforts on external-internal co-construction of new rules in domestic political governance and in regional inter-state relations. The post-Yugoslav region is a clear example where outside enforcement-lead approach without inclusion of local communities' values has limited success.



The panel on (ethno-national) diversity management proved very clearly that this issue-area is attracting a lot of academic attention across the region. The panellists were seeking answers to the following questions: what happened with the Yugoslav legacy of ethnic diversity management in an individual independent political entity? What changes in ethnic diversity management (in terms of legislation and policy/-ies) have occurred since independence, and why? Which ethno-national groups have been perceived as 'problematic' and what has been the official response to those 'problems'? To what extent, and how, have inter-state relations affected diversity management nationally? What other issues can help us understand the development of a country-specific approach to diversity management? What was the role, and impact, of developments from outside of the post-Yugoslav space (including pressure by individual international organisations,

monitoring, conditionality, but also tangible or intangible interests by other states)? Is the process of nation-building (and state-formation) complete, or what are the manifestations of the ongoing process of nation-building?

These questions led to country-analyses referring to Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Kosovo. This way, the panel was able to offer a comparative perspective on the development of diversity management across former Yugoslav entities that are now independent states. All panellists could see some traces of the legacy from the former common state, but at the same time, they all observed the impact of the recent nation-building and state-formation processes. Of course, the panel could not offer definite answers and all panellists agree to continue their collaboration, both in terms of working on a joint publication, and in terms of organising joint panels on the issue-area in international academic conferences such as the upcoming conference of the Central and East European International Studies Association (CEEISA).

Foreign policy perspective



This part of the conference included two working panels. In the introduction, a research (frame)work on foreign policies of individual post-Yugoslav states has been presented. The group has opted for a case-study approach that would enable consolidation of data for a comparative analysis of region's states foreign policies and preparation of an academic publication on this subject. The speakers identified interest-based and identity-based changes in foreign policy objectives and actions, where identity-motivated changes might pertain to the nature of state-building (and nation-building). The panellists focussed on identity-based motivations of foreign policy change which stemmed from nation- and state-building processes and were unfavourable to post-Yugoslav regional cooperation (e. g. Slovenian 1992–98 'away from the Balkans to Central Europe' strategy; Croatian 1996–99 'isolation from Balkans and Europe' strategy; Montenegrin 1998-99 'creeping independence' actions; Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008 and the recent pursuit of foreign policy on the level of Bosnian entities and even cantons rather than on the level of the state). Serbian foreign policy stance on 'Serbs in one state' was questioned in terms of whether it was applied due to interest- or deep-seeded identity-based (nation-/state-building) foreign policy motivation. Macedonian foreign policy was identified equally as entirely based on identity (nation-building) motivations, however the open issues in this case are related to outside Yugoslav space (Albania, Bulgaria, Greece). Both panels were preceded by a working meeting in which plans for follow-ups to this conference and the timeline of future activities of the group had been discussed.

The Role of Stereotypes in Economic Cooperation among Western Balkan States and the EU



The panel on stereotypes and their importance for business in the markets of the former Yugoslavia was introduced by Marjan Svetličič who also chaired that panel. He presented the results of a pilot study conducted among students of social sciences faculties in Slovenia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia. The analysis was discussed in the panel. The panellists agreed about the persistence of stereotypes in the region, in spite of globalisation processes. This is a message of particular importance to the EU. The EU policy-makers but also member states would therefore need to take into account what is increasingly seen as an important factor in conducting business in the post-Yugoslav space. The panellists then moved on to discuss improvements of the survey to test their argument (about the importance of stereotypes) even further. Various ideas and suggestions have been entertained. They ranged from a critical observation of terminology such as "ethnic", "ethnicity" or "statehood" and how to 'measure' those categories. It has been agreed that the panellists will closely co-operate in improving field research needed in order to arrive at data that would allow a comprehensive analysis.

The Europeanization of Civil Society in the Former Yugoslav Republics



The idea of bringing together established authors and younger scholars has been particularly emphasised in this panel. The civil society in the post-Yugoslav space is a promising project to which a set of young scholars from the region was invited. The panel agreed that they would work together on a book dealing with the aforementioned topic. In the light of future calls for research proposals within the EU, the panellists agreed that the panel proposer, Danica Fink-Hafner, should co-ordinate efforts to apply for EU-funded research projects. Among the key preliminary findings in the region calling for further research have been that: 1) there is not only a considerable variation in civil society developments caused by traditions and particularities of transitions to democracy in particular countries, but also 2) that the EU has been changing its policy and conditioning in the region in terms of involvement not only in the development of NGOs, but

more recently also encouraging social partnership. Further research is needed 1) focused on factors of civil society developments in the former Yugoslav region as well as on 2) EU changing conditioning while the EU enlargement is moving to the South-East. Both directions of research are highly promising both in terms of the development of new academically relevant knowledge as well as in terms of feeding the findings on EU policy impacts on civil society developments in the region back to the EU policy-makers. Last but not least, both kinds of research seem to be highly plausible also for EU enlargement policy and neighbourhood policy in other EU bordering areas.

Efficient innovation policy

WORKING PANEL on Efficient innovation policy

16:00 – 17:30, Senate Room

Chair: Metka Stare, University of Ljubljana

PARTICIPANT	AFFILIATION
Ivanka Švarc	Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar
Domagoj Račić	Mreža znanja, Zagreb
Muamer Halilbašić	University of Sarajevo
Duro Kutlača	Institute Mihajlo Pupin, Belgrade

At the outset, the participants and chair presented the characteristics of the innovation system and innovation policy in their economies. Important differences were identified, among them those that are related to the stage of institutional and economic development, level of integration into the European Union and various country specific socio-political factors. What seems to be however common to all countries of former Yugoslavia is the gap in the implementation of innovation support measures and policies. It ranges from practically non existent innovation policy in some countries (e.g Bosnia and Herzegovina) to rather well developed innovation support mechanisms in Slovenia where funds for R&D and innovation activity have been rising in spite of crisis, but inputs have not yet been reflected in proportionally increased outputs. It was observed that in most countries of the region the business sector is the most active actor in innovation activities while the government lags far behind. The participants agreed that simply copying the innovation support measures from more advanced economies failed to boost the innovation activity . This approach does not take into account the absorption capacity of stakeholders in less advanced economies and their governance capability.

The participants welcomed any initiative and projects that would enable and support their future cooperation regarding the innovation policy development, also by learning from each other. In this respect, they will keep AcadEU in the loop for future initiatives that could strengthen this particular network.

PhD Panels



The third pillar of the AcadEU, to encourage networking among young scholars and in particular PhD candidates, to share their expertise and research results related to the EU-Post Yugoslav space problematique has turned out to be a huge success. The panel chairs, all university professors, have commended the serious approach of panellists. The panel chairs were enthusiastic about the level of preparedness of panellists. Most of the panellists, for their part, have expressed great satisfaction with the feedback they received, and they received some insights such as on publishing in peer-reviewed journals, as well as possible co-operation in joint projects. The AcadEU will continue its focus on PhD students, and we look forward to seeing some concrete results of co-operation stemming out of the potential offered by PhD candidates and young PhD from the post-Yugoslav space.

AcadEU in the media



The AcadEU and its first conference have been noted both by the government and by the national media. Web pages on which the news about the AcadEU have appeared:

<http://sta.si/vest.php?id=1950149>

<http://www.sta.si/en/vest.php?s=a&id=1950210>

<http://www.mladina.si/151011/cas-je-da-cela-jugoslavija-vstopi-v-eu/?cookieu=ok>

<http://www.gorenjskiglas.si/section/c/1226>

<http://www.evropa.gov.si/si/vsebina/novica/news/strokovnjaki-iz-nekdanje-jugoslavije-v-ljubljani-o-evropskih-integracijah/5fd583fb1a85f2734d211a4022aec661/>

<http://ivovajgl.eu/novice/3766/za-siritveni-veliki-pok-na-zahodnem-balkanu>

<http://sta.si/vest.php?s=s&id=1946807>



In addition to this, the AcadEU staff has used social media to follow the AcadEU, notably twitter. As for the future, participants have given an initiative to consider putting the AcadEU on Facebook or at least open up an open blog on which participants would post their contribution. To this end, the existing platform which supported the AcadEU, DeFactual (see above) could also be used for that purpose.

Conclusion



The conference has offered a much-needed foundation for further co-operation. The AcadEU will now take stock of the accomplishments, ideas, future plans identified by participants. It will then, through follow-up events, assist in providing a solid foundation to strengthen those efforts. We will stay in touch and update you on future events and other activities of the AcadEU. Last but not least, a big Thank You to the staff – all of them belonging to the young generation, working hard on expanding their knowledge and improve their competences to enter competitively to the labour market – who have done an excellent job in making the 23 November a success.

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