



**International Conference**

**YOUNG PEOPLE, MIGRATION AND THE  
DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS**

**28-30 October 2020<sup>1</sup>**

**Conference Format:** Digital

**Conference Language:** English

The Western Balkans are facing a severe demographic challenge. During the last two decades, the region has lost crucial parts of its population and workforce mainly to EU Member States in Western Europe. While the unemployed and people with limited skills were the first to leave, current emigrants have a wide range of job profiles and social backgrounds. Furthermore, studies show that many in the younger generation are planning to leave the region and try their luck abroad.

This conference aims to shed light on both the phenomenon of emigration from the Western Balkans and the challenges and opportunities this entails. The goal is to offer more insight into why people decide to leave and the effects this exodus has on countries of origin, as well as to develop recommendations for policy responses. The conference will bring together scientists, experts and political decision-makers from the Western Balkans, EU Member States, and EU institutions to analyse the situation in the region and to discuss long-term strategies as well as short-term measures. The overall goal is to identify joint strategies for countries of origin and destination that are mutually beneficial. The issues will also be discussed with an eye to the additional burden that the COVID-19 pandemic is placing on the region.

The conference is part of the official programme of the German Presidency of the Council of the European Union and is supported by the German Federal Foreign Office.



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<sup>1</sup> All times are in Central European Time (CET).

**WEDNESDAY, 28 OCTOBER 2020**

**16:00 OPENING**

Opening speech by the **Federal Foreign Minister Heiko Maas**

**16:30 EMIGRATION, THE DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGE AND POLICY RESPONSES IN THE REGION AND BEYOND**

Following the Federal Foreign Minister's speech, the **Ministers of Foreign Affairs from the Western Balkans**, as well as **Dubravka Šuica**, Vice-President of the European Commission for Democracy and Demography, and **Olivér Várhelyi**, European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, will discuss potential policy solutions to the current challenges jointly with **Minister of State Michael Roth**, Federal Foreign Office.<sup>2</sup>

Moderation: **Minister of State Michael Roth**, Federal Foreign Office, Berlin

**18:00 Coffee Break in the Virtual Networking Space**

**18:30 PANEL DISCUSSION ON "YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO?"**

**Six young representatives from the Western Balkans** discuss their personal perspectives on migration and brain drain with **Minister of State Michael Roth**, Federal Foreign Office, **Dubravka Šuica**, Vice-President of the European Commission for Democracy and Demography, and **Nikola Dimitrov**, Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration, North Macedonia:

Moderation: **Adelheid Wölfl**, Southeast Europe Correspondent, Der Standard, Sarajevo

**Marjola Memaj (28)**, Co-founder and former Regional Representative at Western Balkans Alumni Association; working as a Communication and Policy support with EuroFIR AISBL in Brussels.

**Samir Beharić (29)**, Board Member of the Western Balkans Alumni Association and a recent graduate of University of Vienna and Leipzig University.

**Egzona Bokshi (26)**, Engaged in the project "Empowering Youth for a Peaceful, Prosperous and Sustainable Future in Kosovo" funded by the UN Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund.

**Nina Drakulić (27)**, Currently working as a telecommunication engineer; graduated from the Faculty of Electrical Engineering in Podgorica and founded the NGO Montenegrobotics.

**Tomica Stojanovikj (27)**, Graduated from the University of Economics, Skopje; worked for Peace Corps North Macedonia and at the youth organization Mladiinfo International.

**Nenad Jevtović (28)**, Director of the Institute for Development and Innovation, member of the Coordination Body for Monitoring Flows of Economic Migration at the Serbian Ministry of Labor.

**20:00 Reception in the Virtual Networking Space / End of the Conference Day**

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<sup>2</sup> Panel will be held in English. Translation will be provided.

**THURSDAY, 29 OCTOBER 2020**

**09:00 WELCOME AND OPENING OF THE SECOND PART OF THE CONFERENCE**

Rüdiger **Lentz**, Executive Director, Aspen Institute Germany, Berlin

Manuel **Sarrazin**, Member of the German Bundestag, President of the Southeast Europe Association, Berlin

**09:30 PANEL I: LEAVING THE REGION: FACTS, TRENDS AND CHALLENGES**

Moderation: **Ambassador Susanne Schütz**, Director for South-Eastern Europe, Turkey, EFTA States, OSCE and the Council of Europe in the Federal Foreign Office, Berlin

Miran **Lavrić**, Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Maribor

Peter **van der Auweraert**, Chief of Mission, Regional Coordinator for the Western Balkans, International Organization for Migration (IOM), Sarajevo

Danica **Šantić**, Associate Professor, Faculty of Geography, University of Belgrade

Francine **Pickup**, Resident Representative, UNDP Serbia, Belgrade

Tomica **Stojanović**, Graduate from the University of Economics, Skopje

The panel will discuss motives and trends of emigration from the Western Balkans. Based on available data and survey results, it will offer detailed insights into push and pull factors, the size and characteristics of the phenomenon, as well as possible variations among sections of societies and among the countries of the region. It will shed light on data problems when it comes to migration from the region and discuss ideas on how to improve data bases to better inform policy-making. Panelists will also debate potential changes in trends resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

**11:00 Coffee Break in the Virtual Networking Space**

**11:30 PANEL II: THE EFFECTS OF EMIGRATION ON THE COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN**

Moderation: Tim **Judah**, Balkan Correspondent, The Economist, London

Mihail **Arandarenko**, Professor, Faculty of Economics, University of Belgrade

Anita **Richter**, Senior Policy Analyst & Project Leader South East Europe Regional Programme, OECD, Paris

Edo **Omić**, Directorate for European Cooperation & Strategy, Council of Europe Development Bank, Paris

Andrea **Mićanović**, Youth Representative of Montenegro in the Governing Board of RYCO, Podgorica

The panel will focus on both challenges and opportunities resulting from emigration for the countries of origin. Topics to be discussed include the different kinds of costs resulting from emigration, effects on state revenues and on the labour market, on politics and political participation, and on the education system, but also potential windows of opportunity. Discussants will explore whether and how existing societal challenges are affected by migration and which effects are the most pressing and should therefore be prioritized by policy makers.

**13:00 Lunch Break in the Virtual Networking Space**

## **14:00 SPOTLIGHTS ON MIGRATION EXPERIENCES**

Moderation: Frank **Morawietz**, Managing Director Crossborder Factory / Special Envoy for Southeast Europe, Franco-German Youth Office (FGYO), Berlin  
Antje **Müller**, Programme Director, Zoran Djindjic Internship Programme of German Business, Berlin

Milena **Popin** (32), Belgrade: "Life abroad was like brain storming, and the fine tuning of ideas came after I came back to my homecountry."

Ismar **Haćam** (29), Berlin / Sarajevo: "The reasons why I left my home country became clear to me when I arrived here, when I realised that I can enjoy more possibilities and a life where I can express myself more freely."

Maja **Baumschabel** (28), Zagreb: "Living abroad inspired me to see the opportunities I did not want to miss back home."

Uroš **Milutinović** (19), Ljubljana / Belgrade: "I decided to move from my home country because I didn't feel that there was enough freedom and I think that young people don't have a good future there."

In this section, individual people from the region will have a chance to talk about their migration experience. These subjective presentations will broaden the understanding of the multifaceted phenomenon beyond data analysis and highlight important, inspiring, unexpected, or often neglected aspects of the process of migration, people's experiences, and their relationships to their home countries.

## **15:00 PANEL III: DOMESTIC REFORMS I: TOWARDS A BETTER MATCH OF SKILLS AND LABOUR MARKETS**

Moderation: Anja **Quiring**, Regional Director South Eastern Europe, German Eastern Business Association, Berlin

Nora **Hasani**, Managing Director, German-Kosovar Business Association (KDWW), Prishtina

Ivana **Aleksić**, Senior Education Consultant Wider Europe, British Council, Belgrade

Boris **Jokić**, Higher Research Associate, Institute for Social Research, Zagreb

Barbara **Gerber**, Head of Global Professional Education Dräxlmaier Group, Vilsbiburg

Françeska **Muço**, Secretary General of the "Young Professionals Network", Youth Representative of Albania at RYCO, Tirana

The two panels on domestic reforms will discuss the need as well as the potential for change in the WB6 in specific sectors most relevant for the decision to emigrate. In this first panel, dicussants will focus on how to better match skills and labour market demands, how to strengthen and expand the offer of vocational training, how to improve young people’s labour market integration, and how to increase the number of jobs available. Besides domestic policy options, the business community’s ability to support education reform and the question of how to create more jobs especially for the qualified youth will be of interest.

**16:30**                    **Coffee Break in the Virtual Networking Space**

**17:00**                    **PANEL IV: DOMESTIC REFORMS II: STRENGTHENING GOOD GOVERNANCE AND THE INCLUSIVENESS OF POLICY MAKING**

Moderation:    Valbona **Zeneli**, Chair of Strategic Initiatives Department, George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, Garmisch-Partenkirchen

Marko **Kmezić**, Senior Researcher, Center for Southeast European Studies, University of Graz

Genoveva **Ruiz Calavera**, Director for Western Balkans, DG NEAR, European Commission, Brussels

Dafina **Peci**, Secretary General of the National Youth Congress, Crossborder Factory Tirana Office, Tirana

Lorenta **Kadriu**, Representative of the Youth and Women Leadership Program, Partners Kosova Center For Conflict Management, Prishtina

This second panel on domestic reforms will focus on questions beyond people’s direct material needs that are nevertheless important for the decision to emigrate, such as state capture, corruption, and low responsiveness of politics to citizens’ demands. More concretely, dicussants will focus on how to give young people a stronger voice in politics, how to address corruption in the education sector, reduce the politicization of labour markets as well as hurdles for investments and job creation resulting from politics (e.g. red tape).

**18:30**                    **“ONE WAY TICKET? WHAT LEADS YOUNG PEOPLE FROM THE WESTERN BALKANS INTO EMIGRATION AND WHAT BRINGS THEM BACK – EIGHT VOICES”**

Short film produced by the One Way Ticket Project / crossborder factory, realized by Branka **Pavlović** and Snežana **Bogavac**.

**18:45**                    **Reception in the Virtual Networking Space / End of the Conference Day**

**FRIDAY, 30 OCTOBER 2020**

**09:30 PANEL V: JOINT MEASURES TO FOSTER CIRCULAR MIGRATION AND RE-MIGRATION**

Moderation: Daniel **Göler**, Professor, Geographic Migration and Transition Studies, University of Bamberg

Birgit **Glorius**, Professor, Human Geography, Main Focus on European Migration, Technical University Chemnitz

Monica **Roman**, Professor, Department of Statistics and Econometrics, Bucharest University of Economics

Jelena **Predojević-Despić**, Research Associate, Institute of Social Sciences, University of Belgrade

Alida **Vračić**, Director, Think Tank Populari, Sarajevo

Samir **Beharić**, Board Member of the Western Balkans Alumni Association, Jajce

The panelists will explore measures to stabilize Western Balkan's workforces of all skills and professions. They will focus on the likelihood of and best measures to foster re-migration of those who would rather like to return to their countries of origin, as well as the potential of circular migration between the EU and the region. The debate will include examples from existing policies in the WB6 as well as Southeast European EU Member States' experiences in this field, and focus on policy approaches, design, impact and potential EU support in this area.

**11:00 Coffee Break in the Virtual Networking Space**

**11:30 PANEL VI: THE ROLE OF THE DIASPORA AND REGIONAL RELATIONS**

Moderation: Michael **Martens**, Southeast Europe Correspondent, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Vienna

Nermin **Oruč**, Director, Centre for Development Evaluation and Social Science Research (CREDI), Sarajevo

Lumnije **Jusufi**, Researcher, Department of Slavic and Hungarian Studies, Humboldt-University Berlin

Silvana **Mojsovska**, Professor in International Economics, University "Ss.Cyril and Methodius", Skopje

Adem **Gashi**, Team Leader, WB Youth Lab Project, Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), Sarajevo

Nikola **Kandić**, Lawyer and Project Assistant, Youth Council of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo

While governments in the Western Balkans can improve the situation using innovative policies, other institutions and the society can also make a change. This panel will therefore ask for the potential of the diasporas' engagement with their respective countries of origin, how governments of the region can support this engagement, the chances to tackle the challenges jointly in formats of regional cooperation among the WB6, and the role the EU could play in this. Panelists will discuss existing trends of diaspora engagement and regional cooperation, pointing to successful existing initiatives as well as to room for improvement.

## 13:00 SPOTLIGHTS ON CONFERENCE TAKE-AWAYS

Đuro **Blanuša**, Secretary General of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), Tirana (tbc)

Nora **Hasani**, Managing Director, German-Kosovar Business Association (KDWW), Prishtina

Dafina **Peci**, Secretary General of the National Youth Congress, Crossborder Factory Tirana Office, Tirana

Frank **Morawietz**, Managing Director Crossborder Factory / Special Envoy for Southeast Europe, Franco-German Youth Office (FGYO), Berlin

Tim **Judah**, Balkan Correspondent, The Economist, London

## 13:30 CONCLUDING REMARKS

**Ambassador Susanne Schütz**, Director for South-Eastern Europe, Turkey, EFTA States, OSCE and Council of Europe in the Federal Foreign Office

### End of the Conference

*The conference is supported by*

