



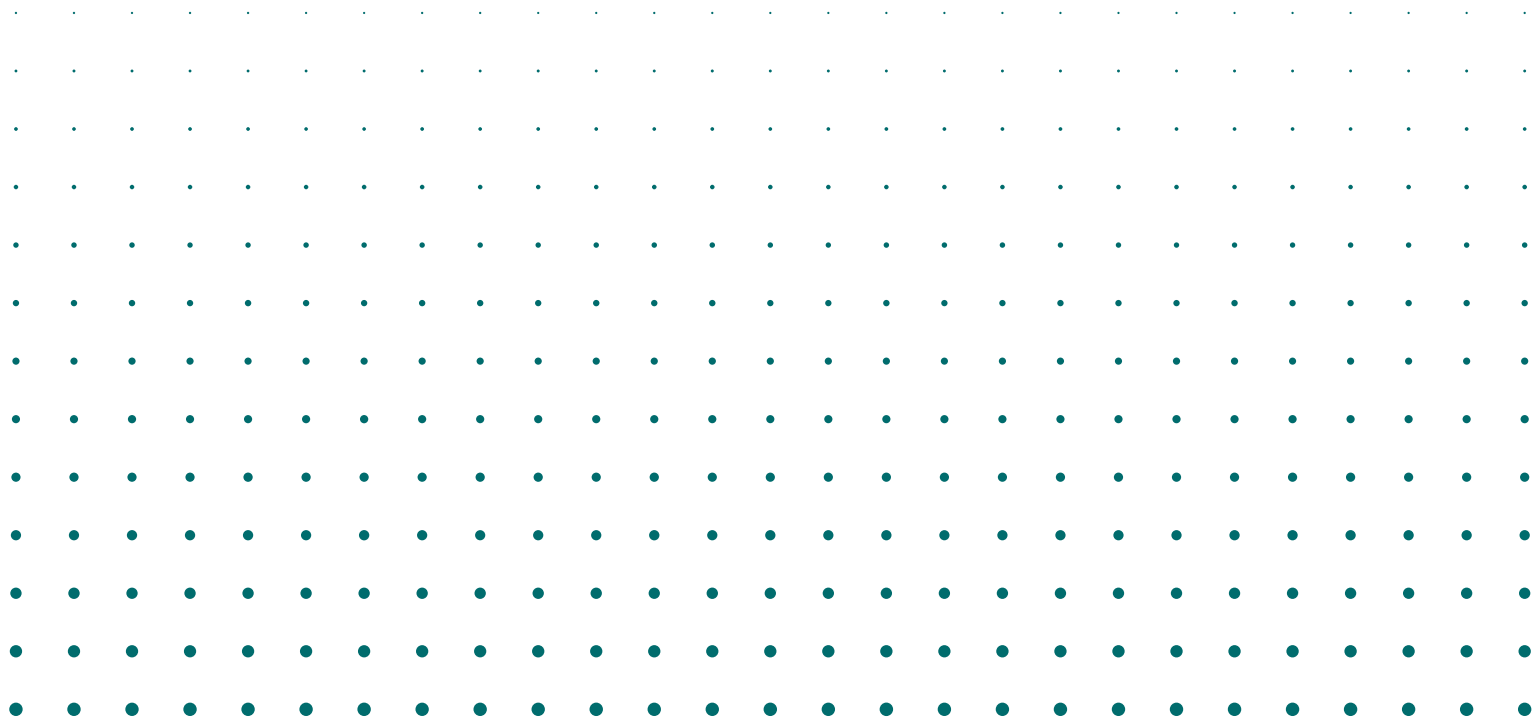
Briefing

Political Trends & Dynamics

Women Leaders in Energy Transition



Volume 1 | 2021



POLITICAL TRENDS & DYNAMICS IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE

A FES DIALOGUE SOUTHEAST EUROPE PROJECT

Peace and stability initiatives represent a decades-long cornerstone of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's work in southeastern Europe. Recent events have only reaffirmed the centrality of Southeast European stability within the broader continental security paradigm. Both democratization and socio-economic justice are intrinsic aspects of a larger progressive peace policy in the region, but so too are consistent threat assessments and efforts to prevent conflict before it erupts. Dialogue SOE aims to broaden the discourse on peace and stability in southeastern Europe and to counter the securitization of prevalent narratives by providing regular analysis that involves a comprehensive understanding of human security, including structural sources of conflict. The briefings cover fourteen countries in southeastern Europe: the seven post-Yugoslav countries and Albania, Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Romania, and Moldova.

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EDITORIAL

Jasmin Mujanović, Alida Vračić and Ioannis Armakolas

As in so many aspects of their broader socio-economic development, the Western Balkan polities remain ensconced in the midst of an ongoing energy transition. Still dominant communist-era models of production and distribution — outdated, dirty, and inefficient — have left the region in a curious conundrum: it is both disproportionately affected by the already visible ravages of climate change, and yet local governments and policymakers remain largely resistant to adopting new technologies and organizational regimes.

The notable exception in this pattern are women, who have in recent years emerged as leaders in the region's (attempted) energy transition. There are a number of reasons for this. Women are especially susceptible to the inefficiencies and inequities produced by existing energy and climate regimes. That is even more so the case for women from already marginal and vulnerable communities, like the region's Romani people. Women have also been on the front lines of dealing with climate change-induced catastrophes, responding to situations of energy scarcity, but have also taken the lead in technological and policy innovation.

This edition of the *Political Trends and Dynamics* newsletter focuses on this phenomenon of women as emerging leaders in the regional renewable energy sector, and examines the barriers but also the opportunities for further tapping into the transformative and creative energies of women to respond to global and regional manifestations of the climate change crisis.

Taken in sum, the articles and interviews in this edition provide a provocative horizon for policymakers and innovators alike: women themselves as the most promising reserve of energy for the post-climate change future in the Western Balkans. As ever, the critical question remains *how*? How can women be better included in policy and decision-making? How can existing female leaders in the energy sector be buttressed in their efforts? And what resources can be made available to ensure that future generations of women and girls — across industries and sectors — will more easily be able to contribute to our generational energy and climate challenges?

The path forward is not without hurdles. Yet recognizing how climate change intersects with patriarchal and sexist political and social norms, in the energy sector and more broadly, is the first step in developing more equitable solutions for women and men alike in the 21st century.

The FES SOE is committed to sustainable socio-ecological transformation, and just and inclusive energy transition.

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AWAKENING THE GENDER VOICE IN THE EUROPEAN ENERGY TRANSITION: FROM ENERGY PATRIARCHY TO A JUST TRANSITION IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE

Dr. Radostina Primova

Gender equality in EU and the Paris agreement

Human rights and gender equality are fundamental principles of the European Union, as defined in the founding treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The EU has committed to tackling inequalities and promoting gender equality in all its activities¹ and has introduced legislation integrating these principles in many areas where it has exclusive or mixed competencies. Gender equality is a key component of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2030. SDG 5 is dedicated to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, including improving the conditions for their participation in decision-making, and ensuring their access to land and economic resources. In total, 24 targets and 46 indicators for the SDGs contain explicit gender considerations.

The gender dimension of climate policy has also been increasingly recognized in the UN climate negotiations processes since 2001. The preamble of the Paris Agreement contains an explicit reference to promoting gender equality and addressing climate justice, which also includes the protection of the most vulnerable groups of society such as women and migrants who are also suffering from the consequences of climate change. Hence, the Paris Agreement also embraces a gender-responsive approach to climate adaptation and capacity-building. On the other hand, gender-related references had been deleted in the legal provisions on technology and finance during the negotiation of previous draft versions of the Treaty.

The EU claims leadership on climate change policies as well as on the international protection of human rights. At the same time, the Union strives to ensure policy coherence in its domestic and external policy agenda by implementing a cross-cutting holistic approach, integrating the economic, environmental, social, legal and governance dimensions of sustainable development at all stages of domestic and international policy making.



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The European Green Deal also includes a gender angle, in particular through a gender mainstreaming commitment in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). Gender aspects will also be reinforced as horizontal objectives within the different funding programmes. As green and digital transformation are the key pillars of the European Green Deal, gender mainstreaming criteria will also play a major role in the Just Transition Process in Southeast Europe. The European Parliament reinforced its call for a robust, comprehensive and binding EU gender equality strategy in its resolution of 15 January 2020 on human rights and democracy in the world.¹

However, guidance is needed on how gender equality can be systematically considered in the design of energy policy strategies so that the energy transition process could deliver climate and social justice in line with the SDGs. For this purpose, gender-relevant criteria have to be designed and integrated in the planning, preparation and implementation of energy policies at national, regional and EU-level. This would also enable a more efficient monitoring of gender equality in different energy and climate policies, as well as other sectoral policies such as trade, development, regional, employment, education and industrial

¹ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0007_EN.html

policies that would also have an impact on gender-relevant aspects in the energy transition.

Engendering the energy transition in the Southeast European region – major challenges

In addition, gender mainstreaming has been also extended to the EU accession process in Western Balkans. The second Gender Action Plan (GAP II) for 2016-2020 adopted by the European Commission and the European External Action Service aims to empower women in different areas of EU external relations, including the Western Balkans. Despite the EU's commitment to gender mainstreaming, the region has suffered from the lack of a systematic approach to implementing gender equality at a national level due to persisting gender stereotypes and the limited prioritisation of gender considerations by national authorities in these countries.

One of the major challenges in tracking progress in this area is related to the limited gender-disaggregated data in different sectoral policies, in particular in decision-making and employment opportunities for women in the energy field. This makes the monitoring and evaluation of the success of relevant initiatives very difficult. Women take part in the European energy transition in three different capacities: as energy professionals, decision-makers and as energy market participants (consumers/prosumers and energy traders).

Gender plays an important role in energy transition, in particular in relation to the demand and consumption of energy, the security of supply, the health impact of energy generation and the access to energy services.² Researchers show a correlation between the changing perceptions of women's roles in society and the total energy use.³ Energy policies are often shaped in a gender-neutral way that assumes that men and women display the same needs, preferences, resources and objectives with regard to energy access, production and use.⁴ However, motivations

for and obstacles to sustainable energy technologies turn out to be gender sensitive.

When it comes to the role of women in decision-making and the energy market, a study commissioned by the FEMM committee of the European Parliament⁵ demonstrates a significant gender gap in the number of women in the position to influence the energy transition, both in the public energy sector and civil society initiatives, as well as the corporate sector. According to a global study including 72 countries, women represent only 6% of ministerial positions in charge of national energy policies and programs,⁶ which reflects to a certain extent the gender gap in the EU, where only 7 out of 27 countries have a female energy minister (Belgium, France, Austria, Spain, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Malta). In the countries from the Western Balkans, the picture is a bit more balanced – the energy ministers in 3 out of six countries are female, namely in Albania, Kosovo and Serbia. However, the general underrepresentation of women in public and private sector positions is an obstacle to democratizing the entrenched power structures in the energy sector. The highly centralized energy generation systems in the region, the high level of state ownership in the energy sector and the predominance of power elites strongly linked to existing business schemes have also blocked the emergence of energy citizenship forms and the participation of new actors (including women and other underrepresented groups) in the domestic energy market.

When it comes to their role as energy professionals, the EP study shows that women continue to face various employment barriers in the energy field,⁷ some of which are attitudinal (for example decisions about responding to vacancies), others are associated with conditions of employment (for example flexibility of hours to combine care responsibilities at home with professional commitments), and a third group of obstacles are procedural (for example, recruitment policies shaping selection of candidates for interview). The current pandemic has aggravated this trend, since women are taking up more family care and domestic chores, which poses the risk for worsening their

2 UN-Industrial Development Organization, UN-Entity of Gender Equality and the empowerment of women (2013) "Sustainable Energy for All: the gender dimensions".

3 Butler, Catherine et al. Energy consumption and everyday life: Choice, values and agency through a practice theoretical lens. *Journal of Consumer Culture*. 0(0) 1–21.

4 H2020 Enable Project (CSC, ISINNOVA, JDI, other): Final comprehensive literature review setting the scene for the entire study.

5 [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608867/IPOL_STU\(2019\)608867_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608867/IPOL_STU(2019)608867_EN.pdf)

6 Pearl-Martinez, R., Women at the forefront of the clean energy future, IUCN-USAID, Washington, DC, 2014.

7 [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608867/IPOL_STU\(2019\)608867_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608867/IPOL_STU(2019)608867_EN.pdf)

employment and education opportunities in the context of COVID-19 crisis.

Gender inequalities in the energy sector are not disconnected from the general structural and social inequalities in national energy systems. Energy poverty is not gender-blind, it is intrinsically linked to broader gender and social disparities in SEE exposing the vulnerabilities of the current energy systems. A growing concern is the social dimension of EU climate and energy policies, or the affordability of sustainable energy services. According to Eurostat,⁸ one in seven households within the European Union is living in a condition known as energy or fuel poverty. The EP study shows that women, particularly if they are the bread winner in the family, alone parent or above retirement age, are more likely than men to suffer from energy poverty at some stage in their life.⁹ At the same time, their unequal situation could limit their access to renewable energy services and act as a powerful barrier for them to playing an active role in the energy transition as prosumers or participants in an energy community. This can be explained with the so called “Matthew-effect” of energy transition:¹⁰ those who can afford to invest in energy efficiency and prosumer-oriented ownership models benefit from such policies, while the poor households tend to stay in energy poverty, reinforcing the gender and climate injustice for such vulnerable groups.

The green energy transition as a major opportunity for addressing a gender balance and climate justice

There are however, signs of hope. Research findings show that the renewable energy domain features a better representation of female em-

ployees than other branches in the energy sector, including the oil and gas sectors.¹¹ Compared to the other energy branches, professional networks in renewable energy tend to be more open and inclusive, which leads to a multiplier effect: female professionals in these networks may also attract more women to the sector.¹²

KEY TAKEAWAY

The monitoring of gender equality in energy and climate policies, as well as other sectors is of great importance and can help to guide gender-relevant aspects related to a green energy transition. Moreover, this could be extended to EU accession requirements for Western Balkan countries, as a green and just energy transition is a great opportunity to simultaneously tackle the issue of gender inequality and climate justice in the EU and Western Balkans in tandem.

The European green recovery and the energy transition bring unique opportunities for women. The democratization and decentralization of energy supply could promote co-ownership of renewable energy sources, empowering vulnerable groups and women in particular. The EU-funded project SCORE¹³ highlights the potential of energy communities for fostering inclusion of women and low-income households in the energy transition process.

The pilot cases in the project also showcase the empowerment potential of this democratic model of energy ownership: it is the involvement of these under-represented groups as prosumers through financial empowerment rather than social protection that could best tackle the core of energy poverty issues.

The European energy transition in SEE could also benefit from stronger participation of women during the green recovery. According to some academic research women tend to be more motivated by environmental causes¹⁴ than men and are greener in terms of making decisions about household appliances. They are also more concerned about the the impact of their ecological footprint.

What could be done?

- Policy-makers in SEE should consider a gender-responsive approach in planning, designing and implementing green recovery and en-

⁸ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608867/IPOL_STU\(2019\)608867_EN.pdf#page=1&zoom=auto,-158,93](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608867/IPOL_STU(2019)608867_EN.pdf#page=1&zoom=auto,-158,93).

⁹ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608867/IPOL_STU\(2019\)608867_EN.pdf#page=1&zoom=auto,-158,93](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608867/IPOL_STU(2019)608867_EN.pdf#page=1&zoom=auto,-158,93).

¹⁰ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608867/IPOL_STU\(2019\)608867_EN.pdf#page=1&zoom=auto,-158,93](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608867/IPOL_STU(2019)608867_EN.pdf#page=1&zoom=auto,-158,93).

¹¹ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608867/IPOL_STU\(2019\)608867_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608867/IPOL_STU(2019)608867_EN.pdf)

¹² Lucas, H., Pinnington, S., and Cabeza, L.F., ‘Education and training gaps in the renewable energy sector’, Solar Energy, Vol. 173, 2018, pp. 449–455.

¹³ <https://www.score-h2020.eu/about-us/>

¹⁴ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608867/IPOL_STU\(2019\)608867_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608867/IPOL_STU(2019)608867_EN.pdf)

ergy transition measures in order to maximise the social benefits of their programmes and projects.

- Promoting more decentralized energy supply models and better regulatory conditions for energy communities and prosumership will also automatically improve participation opportunities for women to get involved as active energy participants in the energy market (instead of passive consumers.)
- Gender-related indicators should be included in key energy, trade, education and transport-related components/chapters of EU Neighborhood policies and the application of EU funding instruments in the SEE region.
- Since the coal sector in SEE has been historically dominated by male employers, the just transition process in these regions should proactively promote the involvement of women and other vulnerable groups in the consultations, as well as develop targeted employment and training programmes for women to encourage a proper gender balance in the sector.
- Energy poverty should be prioritised in the policy frameworks of the energy and environment ministries in SEE countries,¹⁵ in close co-operation with the social policy ministries at a national level.
- Actions to address energy poverty and vulnerability should include financial and regulatory incentives for women to participate.
- Improving corporate responsibility and establishing a gender task force within energy departments could also create a work environment for female professionals in the energy sector.

¹⁵ https://csd.bg/fileadmin/user_upload/publications_library/files/2021_01/Policy_Brief_93_web.pdf

INTERVIEW WITH DRITAN NELAJ

conducted by the editorial assistants Tea Hadžiristić and Azra Muftić

FES SOE: Can you tell us about potential challenges or opportunities posed to the Roma population in Southeast Europe by climate change and the energy transition?

DN: The most marginalized segments of the Roma population often live in the outskirts of urban centers, which are more exposed to the impact of climate change such as flooding. Living close to rivers or terrain with underdeveloped infrastructure further increases the exposure to floods. For instance, the 2018 floods in Tirana disproportionately affected Roma families living close to the city riverbank. Furthermore, poor housing conditions and insufficient access to government safety nets increased their vulnerability. The possibility of a pandemic occurring has increased with climate change and the unsustainable development model and ultimately, affects Roma communities disproportionately due to their heavy reliance on the informal economy, which is not supported in instances of governmental economic recovery interventions. Climate change will increasingly influence public funding priorities by creating more pressure on insufficient funding of traditional public services (education, social protection, etc.). This could hinder more vulnerable communities from having access to certain programmes and losing their social mobility.

Energy transition is an essential opportunity for Roma in the Western Balkans. With the use of Photo Voltaic (PV) technology, Roma families could produce the quantity of electricity they need for their household consumption. This is critical on several levels. Firstly, it is directly linked to energy poverty as many poor Roma families are unable to pay their electricity bills, which leads to electricity cuts and affects the quality of life of the entire family. Electricity connection cuts have forced many poor Roma families to establish an illegal connection to the power grid. Such acts led to penal proceedings against Roma (usually men), which further deteriorate their fragile domestic economy. The possibility to produce their own energy would create a positive economic impact on the Roma family, improve living standards, and prevent confrontation with penal processes, which usually do not end well for the poor



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given lack of access to good quality legal aid and inherited discrimination within the justice systems of WB countries.

FES SOE: How do you see the role of Roma people in energy transition in the region? Do you think that there are any implications to the Western Balkan Green Agenda failing to mention Roma communities?

DN: There are two paths ahead of us. The first one is about achieving sufficient and sustainable green energy production, which will be the basis for a green economy. In this case, the Roma population could benefit indirectly from the positive results of a more stable climate. The second way is to use the pandemic and climate crisis as an opportunity to rethink the economy in terms of sustainable development and economic justice. In these terms, Roma and other local communities could benefit fully if the energy transition resulted in the democratization of renewable energy production. This framework would create opportunities for Roma and other marginalized social groups to fully participate in the energy transition by gaining greater access to the economy, which would improve aspects of an energy transition and make its outcome more resilient and sustainable. Indeed, given the market concentration of energy production in Western Balkan countries, the concept of renewable energy production democratization might be overlooked by governments. Therefore, it is crucial to build awareness and help communities to understand this opportunity. This could lead to better grassroots organizing and more robust advocacy efforts.

FES SOE: *When looking to achieve energy transition targets, national governments may down-scale or shut down mining, automotive, and other polluting industries. Workers in those industries are likely to get training to help with either re-skilling and changing careers or being offered early retirement. However, these services and benefits may not be made available to many Roma workers who work informally. What is your view on possible solutions to this problem?*

DN: Change often resolves certain problems and creates new ones. If energy transition is framed as the sole path to a green economy, overlooking the importance of a just economy able to distribute opportunities and welfare rather than concentrate them, the side effects would be negative. Furthermore, an energy transition should develop through everyone's effort. Therefore, building a wide consensus among society in general is crucial to avoid deadlock and economic and political conflict, which could slow down the speed to transformation. The new economy (circular, green, and just) should offer the opportunity to workers to transition into new professions and gain new skills. For instance, some projections estimate that the new jobs created during the process of energy transition would surpass the number of jobs that would be lost. Countries like Serbia, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina are more likely to be affected by energy transition investments due to their heavy reliance on fossil energy production, so they would need to develop policies that will facilitate a transition into green jobs.

Given that in all the Western Balkan countries a significant portion of the Roma population is engaged in the informal economy due to systemic exclusion, government efforts towards greater formalization of the economy, which sometimes means Roma losing their market share over bigger capital, could be harmful to Roma economic inclusion without offering a feasible path forward. It is economically rational to make an effort to include Roma in the economy of each Western Balkan country given the demographic decline of the general population and the overall young age of the Roma population. Roma participation in energy transition, especially community solar investments (community or shared ownership over power plants based on photovoltaic energy), would produce jobs, improve Roma households incomes and energy security, and put the marginalized at the forefront of climate action. Similarly,

guaranteeing Roma a market share in the circular economy would improve their economic basis and enable Roma families to co-subsidize investment into education and new professions.

FES SOE: *Some informal Roma settlements may be ideally suited for the EU Renovation Wave initiative, which seeks to improve energy efficiency and thermal comfort in buildings. What are the best ways to ensure that Roma communities are included in the planning of such activities or prioritized during implementation?*

DN: Informal settlements represent different typologies: settlements populated by shacks that could not be legalized; settlements with solid buildings which could not be legalized due to legislation restrictions; and settlements populated by solid buildings which are eligible for legalization, but which in many cases do not have property titles due to the failure of public authorities to guarantee their rights.

The first step is to make sure that Western Balkan countries are included in the EU program. If this is the case, then there is a need for specific research which will provide evidence from the field. I believe that investments to achieve energy efficiency should target particularly poor and low-income families since their houses technically are far from the required standards, the electronic devices they use due to lack of income are not energy efficient, and the monthly energy bill represents a significant portion of their household spending, leading in many cases to energy poverty or the inclination to establish an illegal connection to the grid. EU investment in improving Roma houses energy efficiency could also motivate public authorities to speed up the housing legalization process, therefore further advancing Roma housing rights.

FES SOE: *Switching to renewable energy sources is one of the hallmarks of energy transition. There are hopes of increasing public participation in the energy generation process, for example through prosumers and citizens' energy communities. Do you think that there is interest in the Roma community broadly in the use of decentralized energy production, for example the use of household solar panels for local energy production? Do you have any specific examples from the region?*

DN: The Open Society Foundation in Albania is conducting a feasibility study in four Roma set-

lements addressing this particular question. The feedback we received from the Roma community was encouraging. Roma participation in multiple models of PV renewable energy production is a significant opportunity for economic empowerment and elevated social and political roles in the societies they live in. Their participation as just consumers of the energy that they produce from the roofs of their houses is crucial to tackling energy poverty. Their participation as prosumers (self-consumption and trading part of the produced energy) is important as an additional source of income and direct contribution to addressing the global climate crisis.

Community solar investments, which mean multiple Roma community members participate in the governance and ownership of a photovoltaic power plant with higher production capacity compared to rooftops, is an opportunity for economic empowerment and restoring community life. The income generated by the trading of the energy would improve the economic status of families and also constitute the basis for a community fund, which could be a vehicle towards more resilient and democratic communities. This would improve their ability towards collective decisions and practical efforts in addressing common problems and priorities.

***FES SOE:** Do you think that participation in energy production or any other elements of energy transition could be sources of economic empowerment for Roma women?*

DN: Yes, it would improve family welfare and provide a real opportunity to balance Roma women's contribution to the care economy by allowing more space for Roma women's full participation in the social, economic, and political sphere.

INTERVIEW WITH VESNA BOROZAN, Ph.D

FES SOE: *Integrating national power systems is a crucial part of energy transition as well as a requirement for entry into the EU common market. What are your thoughts on the regional social political connectedness required in order to connect energy systems in this way?*

VB: Interconnectedness between power systems in Europe is crucial for achieving the objectives of the EU Green Deal: decarbonization, economic growth based on domestic resources, and just transition for citizens. The set priorities require cost-effective planning and the utilization of energy efficiency and renewable resources for providing clean electricity to businesses and citizens at affordable prices.

However, considering the numerous network integration challenges of renewable energy sources, the maximal and efficient consumption of clean electrical energy can be achieved only if regional resources are shared and operated such that electricity reaches customers at the very instant they need it, not when it is produced. Such an unobstructed cross-border flow of electricity, besides technical preconditions, requires a uniform regulatory and economic space as well as harmonized contractual relations among Market Operators and Transmission System Operators of different countries.

From a purely technical perspective, power systems in SEE are quite well interconnected and, in fact, underutilized leading to welfare loss, as found in a recent study by the Energy Community (EnC) Secretariat. But the situation becomes especially challenging when considering energy legislation because the geographical scope of South East Europe (SEE) includes EU and non-EU countries at various levels of vertical and horizontal acquis implementation. One major issue is that most individual electricity markets in the region are mainly captured by governments and local incumbents, intending to keep low regulated electricity prices, at least for households (electorate).

Therefore, the establishment of a functional regional wholesale market based on the EU com-



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mon rules is the first prerequisite. Then, further developments toward the Green Deal objectives could come through technological investments, social and political connectedness.

A comprehensive example on the way forward, from both a technological and legislative perspective, is the European Commission (EC) funded H2020 project CROSSBOW – CROSS BOrder management of variable renewable energies and storage units enabling a transnational Wholesale market (www.crossbowproject.eu), that I am happy to participate in as a coordinator of the UKIM/FEIT team. The project will develop software products that facilitate the shared use of resources at a transnational level, which are to be demonstrated on the power systems of participating SEE countries. The ultimate idea is to convince National Regulatory Authorities and governments of the overwhelming benefits of shared resources and enhanced competition, so as to start removing the present regulatory, standardization and socio-economic barriers to implementation.

With a lot of support from EC and EnC, the social political connectedness for the purpose of a successful energy transition is underway in SEE.

FES SOE: *Technological innovation plays a large role in energy transition, and start-ups in the energy sector are developing in the EU and USA. In a region where the energy corporate landscape is still marked by more traditional companies, how can we ensure that they have robust R&D departments or cooperate with universities like yours to follow global trends?*

VB: Fast developments in terms of technological innovations can hardly be expected in basic energy industries or in big natural monopolies like electricity networks. In such complex energy systems, the primary role of network operators is to ensure robustness and security of supply of essential universal services. With their responsibility in provision of essential services and risk of socio-economic losses in case of supply interruption, such companies are very careful with the application of novelties, both in equipment and operation. On the other hand, without the major participation of these companies and network integration of new technologies, a smooth and economical energy transition cannot be achieved.

For these reasons, they opt for R&D in big consortia including universities and companies which are facing similar problems, and for scientifically proven and enforceable solutions. The cooperation in CROSSBOW is one example. I expect that energy companies in the region will be interested in eventually implementing some of the concepts that are entering leading energy sectors, like the EU and USA. However, any advancements will be preceded by such R&D projects, in which innovations are thoroughly researched and proven.

Cyber security is one of the recent fast-growing challenges for providers of essential services and an opportunity for R&D cooperation between universities, ICT sector and energy companies. UKIM/FEIT has established a Center for Technology Transfer and Innovations – INNOFEIT, which is successfully conducting many small innovative projects with industry partners, including students' projects, and is an excellent supporter of innovative start-ups and spin-offs in the country and the region.

FES SOE: *With the threat of more people being displaced by the effects of climate change and climate-driven conflicts, do you think that the threat of climate refugees will be more likely to accelerate our journey towards decarbonization or to strengthen nationalism and derail energy transition?*

VB: Sadly, nationalism seems to be the most common response to any crisis and, from a political point of view, it is difficult to distinguish between climate refugees and war refugees. However, history has shown that this response has never offered a long-lasting solution to any problem, instead, the results were quite the opposite. I

personally always vote and stand against any form of nationalistic or racist expression. It is important for every individual to remember they have this civil right – a voice with which to oppose any such derailments.

For the time being, climate-driven refugee problems are not evident in the developing countries of Europe as the population primarily struggles with poverty, including energy poverty, a danger of losing workplaces, corruption and crime, and a missing governance of law and justice in general. What I try to convey is that it is difficult to encourage people to sympathise with and take measures against problems which are not that immediate nor evident in the pure economic and democratic conditions they currently live in.

However, I truly believe that the EU will continue to handle ongoing and emerging problems on European soil, along with climate change, refugees, COVID-19 and other global crises, by implementing its basic principles of democratic governance, solidarity and trust. Results cannot be expected overnight but can strengthen our resilience in response to any future challenges.

FES SOE: *In your view, what is the best way to engage trade unions in discussions about the coal phase-out?*

VB: Honestly, I would not have the courage to start a discussion with trade unions in the energy sector on decommissioning of coal-based power plants without a feasible solution for replacing thousands of endangered workplaces.

The common storyline that "investments in renewables are increasing domestic employment" is only valid for developed, highly industrialized countries, with competitive economies and fast technological developments. Besides, investments supported by feed-in-tariffs and to some extent by feed-in-premium schemes, increase electricity prices for final customers. In the Western Balkans and even in some EU member states, customers are very sensitive to the price of electricity. Therefore, further developments in renewables should be preferably done on a market basis, which as a precondition, requires fully open and competitive markets along with the introduction of an appropriate carbon taxation. Only after creating the right conditions, the market itself can generate a sort of pull away from coal-based jobs and encourage retraining.

For a true success story, RES and flexibility assets like storage units and demand side management should be given market opportunities to prove their cost-effectiveness. To allow for viable business opportunities for these technologies, harmonization of legislation should take place across SEE and sophisticated trading and operation platforms, like the CROSSBOW products, should be implemented.

Potential solutions to the problem of job losses are viewed in intensive gasification and conversion of coal-fired to gas-fired power plants, but this is hardly a simple, cheap or sustainable solution. In any case, a serious program for life-long education and prequalification of the workforce would be needed.

FES SOE: *In November 2020, the Western Balkans region got its own Green Agenda. In your view, can this declaration lead to policy change and decarbonization?*

VB: The EU member states, led by Germany and supported by the EnC Secretariat, have done a lot so far under the framework of the Berlin Process or WB6 initiative. The Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda for WB is their most recently established program in favor of the overall Energy Union policy. Besides the leadership, a key driver in WB6 programs have been the substantial infrastructure funds and the adequate technical assistance. However, what we have seen many times since the establishment of the EnC, the advanced sectoral policies are duly implemented mainly by the countries with a clear and immediate EU agenda. Therefore, it is expected that the level of policy change and decarbonization will differ among WB countries, primarily following the streamline social political trends. Moreover, there are some WB countries, such as North Macedonia, that are fossil fuel pure or have already exhausted the available lignite resources. These countries should also enthusiastically take advantage of the Green Agenda.

FES SOE: *People in the region feel the negative effects of environmental damage each winter, when air pollution rates in major cities are among the highest in the world. In your view, how can the Green Agenda bring people in the region together to demand urgent steps to reduce pollution under the Green Agenda commitments? Do you see any political potential in this bringing together to fight for a common cause?*

VB: The problem is not purely political and consequently cannot be resolved by social political will alone. For many years now, in winters, we are witnessing civil protests and warning statements of some green political parties. Then, in summers, we are also seeing even more massive protests against announced price increases for any of the regulated energy services. Let us imagine the reaction in the event that the government decided to drastically limit emissions from vehicles. All of these expressions are happily used by any opposition political party for criticizing the government. In such situations, it is strange why neither the government nor the environmental NGOs have the courage/interest to explain to the public that greening the environment and mitigating climate change has a monetary cost which is not negligible and that the governmental budget, which is filled once again by the taxpayers, is not sufficient to reducing pollution in the short term.

Therefore, I would ask a question in return – Could we create enough political potential to motivate citizens to financially support the implementation of the Green Agenda voluntarily?

FES SOE: *How can we ensure an inclusive energy transition? Where do you see the most opportunities for women to make a greater impact and how can they be encouraged to get involved?*

VB: Recently, my intuitive perception was confirmed, and I was delighted to read in the media that based on the data of UNESCO Institute for Statistics from June 2019, North Macedonia has the highest percentage of female scientific researchers in Europe, closely followed by the rest of the WB countries. What we need now is to influence media and PR to shine a spotlight on women professionals, ask their opinion and advice on important matters, and give them adequate appreciation for their roles. The voice of women needs to be heard loudly more often.

In terms of ensuring a prevailing energy transition in an inclusive environment, I believe education is the most important. Higher education can certainly contribute to better transparency and information on consumer rights and possibilities created by new technologies, but raising awareness of the importance of inclusivity and the energy transition, or even simple waste selection and recycling, should start in primary education at the latest.

***FES SOE:** Are there any particular trends you have observed in your career that you find either encouraging or discouraging when it comes to energy transition and tackling climate change in the region?*

VB: Our discussion indicates that the process of energy transition is advancing in the region. However, there is a serious precondition to the implementation of the Green Agenda before any remarkable steps forward could be observed. Besides the required energy infrastructure, there is the question of truly functional and cross-border open energy markets in the region. Without a liberated market economy, it is difficult to exploit the incremental merits of energy efficiency measures, as well as renewable generation and other new technologies. Considering the rate at which these technologies mature and the financial burden of support schemes, there is an urgent need for a platform to enable their integration and large-scale uptake – namely efficient regional wholesale and ancillary services markets.

The markets as a foundation, complemented by energy efficiency measures, can facilitate the progress towards a sustainable future. Widespread awareness for the fight against climate change would consequently come hand in hand with possible economic growth and higher living standards for a majority of citizens in the WB.

WOMEN, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ENERGY TRANSITION

Mirela Holy, Ph.D

Climate change and sustainable development

Climate change is the greatest threat to humanity. Scientists from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded that human impact on climate change is undeniable. A rise in global air and ocean temperatures, the melting of snow and ice, rise of ocean and sea levels, temperature extremes and wind fields are all manifestations of climate change. Excessive greenhouse gas emissions come from many human practices, including energy, industry, agriculture, transport, construction, overproduction and over-consumption of single-use or disposable products. However, climate change is a consequence of our relationship to the world, animate and inanimate nature, which humans treat exclusively as a resource. This ideological matrix applies not only to plants, animals, and nature, but also to the many members of humanity. The result is not only environmental degradation and climate imbalance, but also an unjust society. In this sense, climate change is a direct consequence of the dominant capitalist ideology.

The awareness that socio-economic models must change for humans to survive the climate crisis, which scientists call the sixth great extinction, has become stronger since the 1972 publication of *The Limits to Growth* report by the Club of Rome, primarily penned by Donella Meadows. A major impact of the report was how it built a strong link between the many interconnected factors in environmental degradation, i.e. accelerated industrialization, uncontrolled population growth, widespread malnutrition, and the use of non-renewable sources with environmental pollution. The report cautioned that the 'limits to growth' would be reached in less than a hundred years if trends continued, and they lobbied for long-term global planning and economic and environmental sustainability to prevent collapse. The report spawned the sustainable development movement, which aimed to tackle both the problems of environmental degradation and social inequality.



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The European Union has the ambition to be a leader in sustainable transformation, evident from the *European Green Deal* (2019), which implements both the Paris climate targets (reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by more than 40% by 2030) and 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which balance the three dimensions of sustainable development (environmental, social and economic dimensions). The *EU Green Deal* (2019: 9) envisages "a new growth strategy that aims to transform the Union into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy, where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use". At the heart of the *EU Green Deal* is a just transition which means that marginalized groups, including women, must not be left behind.

Gender equality and sustainable development

According to principles of sustainable development, gender equality issues are inseparable from environmental issues. The contribution of women to the environment is particularly emphasized in the Rio Declaration (1992), which explicitly states in Article 20 that "Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential in achieving sustainable development." Women and gender equality are not only one of the key topics

of sustainable social transformation, but women from different sectors have played important roles in designing, informing and advocating sustainable development policy - for example Gro Harlem Bruntland, Donella Meadows, Rachel Carson, Angela Merkel, and Greta Thunberg. The ecofeminism movement argues that there is a similarity between the central theses of environmentalism and feminism, which both oppose domination over nature and domination over women, and which they see as having the same root cause: patriarchy.

A patriarchal society functions based on structures of hierarchical binaries in which one part of the binary is always privileged and the other subordinated. For example, Culture – Nature; Male – Female; Intellectual – Emotional; Active – Passive; Human – Animal. Patriarchy survives thanks to the dogma that such a binary division is “natural”, which is cynical when one considers the patriarchal subordination of nature as a resource. In such a dual, hierarchical division of the world, men are associated with the public realm of the public, while women are relegated to the often undervalued private realm, which includes energy-intensive chores such as cooking and heating.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Climate change caused by anthropogenic greenhouse gases is intrinsically linked with patriarchy and is the greatest threat to humanity. The United Nations and the European Union have found a solution to the problems of climate change, environmental degradation and social injustice in a policy of sustainable development. Although women are the main users of energy in households, their role in energy related decision-making processes, both at the household and policy-making levels, is marginal. Restructuring the energy sector is the key to implementing a sustainable development concept in regards to climate justice and gender equality.

responsible for a household's energy supply, they suffer the most from energy poverty. EnergyPedia claims that unbalanced gender energy access influences the health, safety, education, economic development and empowerment of women. In many rural African and Asian-Pacific countries, women are the primary energy producers and consumers in their households. They use wood, charcoal, or animal waste for cooking and heating, but these energy resources are in scarcity and women spend a lot of their time collecting and providing these

materials. They do not have time for education or building their professional careers. Because of that, women are more exposed to energy poverty than men. UNDP (2013: 4) explains that the energy poverty of women also “leads to drudgery, greater health risks and a lack of time to focus on income-generating, educational or other self nurturing (e.g. leisure) activities.” There are health risks associated with the usage of cooking stoves in indoor spaces, which causes pollution and serious health problems. Collecting heating and cooking materials is an extremely

strenuous, often full-time job due to which women also have serious health consequences, amongst others “prenatal mortality and increases post-delivery complications.” (UNDP, 2013:2)

Gender and energy empowerment

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) explains that “women spend more time at home, managing most of home energy consumption, from heating to powering of household devices.” The OECD also claims that “women tend to be more sustainable consumers” and appreciate “energy-efficient transport and in general are more likely to use public transport than men.” Women are, according to the OECD, key actors in change of consumption patterns towards more sustainable solutions. Consequently, public policies regarding consumption should consider a gender perspective.

On the other hand, energy is one of the key drivers of the world economy and as such, is a male-dominated sector. As women are of those most often

These are not the only problems. The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) warns of low women's participation in the energy business sector. Although women make 48 % of the global labour force, only 22 % of the oil and gas sector employs women, while they occupy 32 % of positions in renewables. Although numbers in the renewable energy sector are more gender balanced, the representation of women in the clean energy sector is smaller than that of men. At the management level, the under-representation of women is even greater. According to Ernst & Young index (2016), women occupied only 16 % of the boards of the world's largest power and utility companies. Unfortunately, women are rarely included in discussions about energy policy and the results are “gender-blind planning, financing, execution and implementation.” (UNDP, 2013: 2) Women globally occupy only 6 % of min-

isterial positions responsible for energy. Greater participation of women in the energy sector is crucial as, according to Johnstone and Silva (2020), gender diversity in the energy sector is linked with innovative and inclusive solutions for global clean energy transitions. O'Dell, Peters, and Wharton (2014) link energy access to women's economic empowerment by concluding that the empowerment of women must include efficiency in their household duties, further gains in education, access to the workforce, and the ability to start a business. Women's energy empowerment is therefore linked to:

- Economy (gender-balanced employment in energy business in all levels of hierarchy)
- Education (workload and access to educational programs in the field of energy)
- Social (combating gender stereotypes and roles)
- Health (access to and use of healthier and more sustainable energy sources)

This implies a holistic approach that is in line with the concept of sustainable development. UNDP (2013: 5) recommends following solutions for gender energy empowerment:

- Implementation of low-emission energy projects instead of collecting of wood, charcoal or animal waste
- Suppression of gender-based constraints related to access to energy, finance, training, employment and entrepreneurship
- Financing of the energy sector should complement gender equality, poverty eradication and sustainable development
- Mainstreaming gender in energy policies and programming

Similar to the UNDP, the EU project SocialRES also seeks to find the best solutions for future innovative and inclusive energy strategies. The role of gender in social innovation in the energy sector is one of the project's main focal points. One of the objectives is to involve women, as primary users of energy in the household, directly to participation in renewable energy projects. Some of the obstacles to this are:

- social and cultural norms conditioned by traditional hierarchies of power (purchasing decisions within patriarchal structured families)
- lack of gender sensitive policies and scarce training opportunities (women have less time for other activities due to the burden of household chores)
- social impact assessments and policy developments are not tailored to women
- women do not have access to information and technical and business skills

Conclusion

Restructuring the energy sector is key to the implementation of a sustainable development concept, not only from an environmental but also from a social and gender perspective. In this sense, greening of energy must cover not only the replacement of non-renewable with renewable sources and the application of clean technologies, but also far greater participation of women in decision-making regarding energy policies and energy consumption. It is necessary to increase the number of employed women in the energy sector, but also in responsible political positions that make decisions on energy via gender quotas. Given the fact that energy poverty affects women far more, it is necessary in the financing of energy projects, especially grants, to take into account the gender perspective when selecting projects. What gives hope is the fact that the multi-year efforts of international and European institutions aimed at energy gender empowerment are beginning to bear fruit. Now is the time to speed up the realization of gender parity in the energy sector, the traditional patriarchal stronghold of men, and thus achieve sustainability.

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The background is a teal-tinted photograph of a building's exterior. In the upper left, a white dove is captured in flight against the sky. On the right side, a portion of a balcony with a metal railing is visible. In the lower right, a large, stylized peace symbol is painted on the wall, featuring a dove in the center and radiating lines. The overall mood is one of peace and conflict resolution.

POLITICAL TRENDS & DYNAMICS

OVERVIEW

THIS SECTION AIMS TO PROVIDE A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS AND UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN SECURITY, WHICH INCLUDES STRUCTURAL SOURCES OF CONFLICT SUCH AS SOCIAL TENSIONS BROUGHT ABOUT BY UNFINISHED DEMOCRATIZATION, SOCIAL OR ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES OR ECOLOGICAL CHALLENGES, FOR INSTANCE. THE BRIEFINGS COVER FOURTEEN COUNTRIES IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE: THE SEVEN POST-YUGOSLAV COUNTRIES, ALBANIA, GREECE, TURKEY, CYPRUS, BULGARIA, ROMANIA, AND MOLDOVA.

BETWEEN THE VIRUS AND THE NEEDLE

Vaccinations against COVID-19 have begun across the region, albeit in a very uneven fashion and not in all countries. At present, Serbia stands out as the regional champion in terms of the number of citizens vaccinated, with more than a million people vaccinated out of a population of around 7 million. This has propelled the country as a leader in vaccinations in Europe and beyond. Turkey is also doing a good job, with 6.85 million vaccines administered to a population of 82 million. Romania has also vaccinated a respectable number of its citizens – just over 800,000 have been vaccinated out of a population of around 19 million. Hungary has given the jab to just over 450,000 of its 9.7 million citizens.

By contrast, Bulgaria, with a population similar to Serbia's, has managed to vaccinate only around 120,000 citizens. Croatia is doing only slightly better with around 108,000 vaccinated out of a population of 4 million.

By contrast, other countries in the region have struggled to acquire vaccines and begin distributing them. Montenegro's count of vaccinated individuals runs in the low hundreds; the country received 2,000 Sputnik V vaccines from its neighbour Serbia, and is hoping to receive a shipment from China. In Albania, just over 4,000 people out of a population of 2.8 million have received a vaccine. The situation is most dire in Kosovo, Moldova and Bosnia's Federation entity, where vaccination campaigns have not yet come off the ground as I am writing.

People arrive to receive second dose of China's Sinopharm Covid-19 vaccination during the mass vaccination campaign in Belgrade, Serbia



The uneven picture is in part due to geopolitical considerations and how different countries hedged their vaccine bets. Serbia has been particularly successful precisely because of its often ridiculed strategy of geopolitically sitting on several chairs. Unlike most of the other countries of the region which banked on the COVAX mechanism and EU solidarity mechanisms for deliveries of vaccines manufactured by Western companies, Serbia sought to hedge its bets by negotiating deliveries of China's Sinopharm and Russia's Sputnik V vaccines. That it was successful in doing so seems to be primarily the result of its good diplomatic relations with these two countries.

Despite the start of a vaccine roll-out, many countries in Southeast Europe seem to be on the brink of another wave of COVID-19 infections. Not least Serbia, despite the high number of vaccinated individuals, where the number of infections has exploded over the last couple of weeks. Hungary seems to be in a similar situation, while Montenegro has begun implementing fairly tight lockdown measures in an attempt to halt the spread of the virus. The situation appears to be more stable in Croatia, but in Bosnia officials are also sounding the alarm over a potential explosion in the number of infections.

One reason for the new wave of infections may be the arrival of new strains of the virus in the region. Yet ironically, it seems that the arrival of the vaccine to the region may have bred a sense of complacency among ordinary citizens that the public health emergency is over – well before it is.

ELECTIONS

Compared to most of 2020, the first quarter of 2021 has been quiet when it comes to elections.

The only major electoral contest was the one held in Kosovo, where voters went to the polls on February 14th to elect a new Parliament. The elections were triggered by a decision of the Constitutional Court, which on December 21st ruled that the previous government of Avdullah Hoti had been elected with the vote of an MP who had been elected to Parliament, despite having had a criminal conviction, which was against the law. Consequently, the election of the Hoti

The Self-determination Movement (LVV) candidate Albin Kurti casts his vote at a polling station during the snap parliamentary elections in Pristina, Kosovo.



Government was declared invalid, forcing the holding of new elections. As predicted by most opinion polls, the Parliamentary election delivered a resounding victory for the Vetëvendosje (VV) movement of Albin Kurti. VV won a total of 47.9% of the votes and 56 seats, giving it close to an absolute majority in Kosovo's Parliament. While the result was largely expected, it is nevertheless a major shock for Kosovo's political system. The now seemingly unstoppable election of a VV government will push the parties and political elites that have traditionally ruled Kosovo – either the LDK or parties which emerged from the KLA or both – into opposition for the first time since the war of 1999. Meanwhile, VV has very little experience in governing – indeed, the party has grown into the present force primarily as an 'insurgent' political movement committed to overthrowing the existing corrupt political system, but also ridding Kosovo of foreign tutelage.

Kosovo's left-wing opposition leader Albin Kurti and acting-President Vjosa Osmani hold a press conference in Pristina. Kosovo's left-wing opposition leader Albin Kurti declared victory early Monday in the country's sixth general elections.



Despite its thumping majority, it will not all be plain sailing for VV. There are at least two obstacles on the path ahead, neither of which will be easy for the party to navigate. One immediate challenge will be to fulfill the constitutional requirement of having at least one minister from the Serb ethnic minority in the new government. Yet all 10 seats reserved for ethnic Serbs in the Kosovo Parliament have been won by Srpska Lista, which VV leader Albin Kurti accuses of being the extended long arm of Belgrade and whose electoral legitimacy Kurti challenges. During his short-lived tenure as Prime Minister at the beginning of 2020, Kurti accepted the need to include members of Srpska Lista in his government, yet it remains to be seen whether he will do so again, or whether he will try to find ethnic Serb representatives more acceptable to him and VV. Yet even when this hurdle is overcome, another major challenge which awaits VV and Kurti will be managing the election of Kosovo's next president. While the President of Kosovo is elected in Parliament, the voting rules are such that the cooperation – if not necessarily the support – of two-thirds of MPs is needed to elect a new president. All of this requires either a very broad coalition or some basic ability to work together among a wide array of parties. Yet politics in the Balkans is known for its zero-sum logic and Kurti and VV are not known for their skills of compromise and striking deals. Thus, it remains to be seen how a formula will be found to elect a new president. Failure to do so quickly could lead to yet another round of elections in Kosovo.

Bulgaria is next in line for holding Parliamentary elections in the region. As things stand, Bulgarians will cast their votes for the new Parliament on April 4th. The election comes after a prolonged crisis of the current GERB-led government, which has been dogged by a number of corruption scandals. Predicting the outcome of the election seems like a tricky task however. The country's political system seems to be getting more and more fragmented. Currently, opinion polls give anywhere between 12 % and 18 % of their support to 'There is such a People' (ITN), a big tent populist party founded in early 2020 by a Bulgarian singer and TV host. GERB is still in the lead over its traditional rival, the centre-left Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), but not by a large margin. Who is in a position to form the next

government will in all likelihood depend on the performance of new parties such as ITN, whose support remains volatile. However, the prospect of GERB being unseated seems real.

Albania is due to hold Parliamentary elections on April 25th, barring any major escalation of the coronavirus epidemic. Elections are generally tense and potentially turbulent events in Albania, often marred by allegations of irregularities, fraud and vote buying. The country's main political parties spent much of 2020 haggling over what reforms, if any, needed to be implemented to improve electoral conditions. While some improvements have been made, the country is far from having a strong framework in place for holding elections whose result will be accepted by all sides, particularly in the event of a close result. Given that the opposition boycotted the 2019 local elections precisely over the issue of electoral conditions, the atmosphere is perhaps more tense going into these elections than it has been in a long time. One issue that has clearly not been resolved (and indeed will not be) is enabling Albania's diaspora of more than one million to vote without having to return home. Reliable polling is scant, but what data does exist appears to suggest that the ruling Socialists are in the lead, although the combined support for the opposition Democrats and LSI suggests that the two main blocks are in fact tied neck to neck.

On March 14th, the **Montenegrin town of Nikšić** will hold local elections. The election itself would not be particularly significant beyond the confines of Montenegro and Nikšić, were it not for the momentous political changes which took place in the country late last year. As things stand, the election will be a key bell-weather of support for both the formerly ruling DPS and the various parties that now form the governing coalition in Montenegro. Nikšić is all the more interesting given that the DPS has succeeded in maintaining power in the town despite a lack of popular support expressed in elections for years. Consequently, the outcome of the elections will offer important lessons to all the country's currently governing political parties and will likely shape their own calculations over whether to stick with the current government in the short and medium term or take a gamble on new elections.

GOVERNMENT STABILITY

By and large, governments in the region have remained stable over the last few months, the main exception being **Kosovo**, where the government of outgoing Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti was felled by a decision of the Constitutional Court on December 21st. The Court found that Hoti's Government was in essence illegitimate, given that it had been elected with the vote of MP Etem Arifi, who, in turn received a corruption sentence prior to being elected and should thus have not been allowed to assume his seat in Kosovo's Parliament. Given that it was Arifi's hand that gave the Hoti Government its majority, the Constitutional Court ordered the holding of fresh elections. The case had been brought before the Court by the opposition Vetëvendosje.

A day after the effective collapse of the Kosovo Government, **Moldovan** Prime Minister Ion Chicu also announced his own resignation, in what he described as a decision intended to trigger early Parliamentary elections. The move came one day before the new President Maia Sandu from a rival, pro-European party acceded to the President's office. In theory, both Chicu's PSRM and Sandu's PAS were in favour of early Parliamentary elections at that moment. Yet in practice, this does not appear to quite be the case. While PAS and Sandu appear to be trying to force an early election in the belief that popular support for them is rising, PSRM seems to be engaged in Parliamentary manoeuvres aimed at avoiding, or delaying an election. Time will tell how this tussle will end, but an election seems to be on the cards.

The former Moldovan President and leader of the Action and Solidarity Party, Igor Dodon (L), meets new president Maia Sandu (R) after Sandu is sworn in as Moldova's president in the capital Chisinau, Moldova. Sandu becomes the first Moldovan female president with foreign citizenship.



Meanwhile, **Romania** got a new government led by Prime Minister Florin Vasile Cîțu on December 23rd. The government is a coalition made up of the ruling National Liberal Party (PNL), the centrist USR-PLUS alliance and the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR). For his part, Cîțu was the Finance Minister in the previous government. The three parties have a combined total of 244 MPs and Senate members, 11 more than the necessary 233 seats needed for a majority. Given that the new government was voted in with the support of 260 MPs and senators, it seems that it will be able to rely on a comfortable majority.

The **Slovenian** Government led by controversial Prime Minister Ivan Janša faced a vote of no confidence in February. The motion was tabled by the main opposition parties over the country's perceived democratic backsliding during Janša's tenure. However, Janša and his government survived to fight another day on March 15th, when the motion failed to secure enough votes. In the end, only 40 of 90 MPs in the Slovenian Parliament voted in support of the motion of no confidence. Yet Janša's majority remains tight and this may not be the last motion of no confidence that he and his government face before their mandate comes to an end in mid-2022.

LAW AND ORDER

A rare piece of good news when it comes to rule of law and fighting corruption in the region came at the end of February, when the US State Department announced that **Albanian judge Adrian Dvorani** has made it onto a list of 12 'anti-corruption champions' around the world. Specifically, the Albanian High Court judge is praised for having 'developed mechanisms to reduce political and criminal influence in the justice system.' Dvorani is one of only two judges of the High Court who survived Albania's judicial vetting process, intended to weed out corrupt or problematic officials from the justice system.

In terms of fighting high-level corruption there were positive news from **Romania** that the country's prosecutors had charged former Prime Minister Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu with corruption. Popescu-Tăriceanu stands accused of demanding and receiving material goods worth \$800,000

from an Austrian company in 2007 and 2008. Until recently, Popescu-Tăriceanu had been speaker of the country's Senate, and was therefore protected by Parliamentary immunity.

Less impressive was the news from **North Macedonia**. There, the country's government was left red-faced at the end of February when the country's former secret police head Sašo Mijalkov disappeared two days before a verdict in the latest trial in which he stands accused of masterminding a mass yet illegal wiretapping operation. Police immediately began an operation to locate him. Yet insult was added to the government's injury when Mijalkov casually reappeared two days later in front of the office of the Organized Crime Prosecution, seemingly of his own volition, telling journalists in passing that he had merely self-isolated himself for health reasons. Mijalkov was subsequently sentenced to a 12 year jail term for masterminding the wiretapping.

Meanwhile, on February 23rd the Skopje Criminal Court in **North Macedonia** handed down hefty jail sentences as part of the retrial of 6 ethnic Albanians, who were found guilty of terrorism for committing the murder of five ethnic Macedonians in 2012 on Orthodox Easter. The case has been dogged by controversy – while it deeply shocked most Macedonians, many ethnic Albanians suspected that the convicted men had been framed by the previously ruling VMRO-DPMNE. The case thus became a source of inter-ethnic and political tensions in the country. In line with this, ethnic Albanians in Skopje organized a protest against the verdict just a few days later, clashing violently with riot police during the course of the protest.

Another controversial judicial case also resurfaced during February in **Montenegro**. There, the country's Appeal Court quashed a first-instance conviction issued in the so-called 'coup plot' from 2016 against a number of individuals, including several leaders of the then opposition and now ruling parties. The verdict had been handed down in May 2019, but the Appeals Court cited numerous procedural errors and violations in quashing the original verdict and ordering a retrial. The decision was congratulated by many in Montenegro, who have claimed that the entire 'coup' from 2016 was fabricated by the then ruling DPS.

In **Serbia**, at the beginning of February police began rounding up members of a major crime gang. The gang, known as the Janjičari (Janissaries) and led by Veljko Belivuk (or Velja Nevolja/ Velja the Trouble), stand accused of murder, extortion, kidnapping and drug dealing. The Janjičari are also known as a notorious football fan (or perhaps more appropriately hooligan) group. They have also been linked with the Montenegrin 'Kavački clan', another regionally notorious organized crime group. Even more troubling is that investigative journalists have reported its ties to state officials for years, particularly inside the police and security services. The operation has been billed as a major success in fighting organized crime and making Serbia a safer place. State officials have even suggested that the gang had plotted the murder of Serbia's President Aleksandar Vučić, comparing the operation to that launched in 2003 to round up members of the Zemun clan, another organized crime group which included associates within the state security apparatus. The case of Veljko Belivuk and his group will no doubt generate plenty of new revelations, as even government officials and senior members of the ruling party have acknowledged that the group had links within the state apparatus. Other observers have claimed that the arrest of this particular group is also a sign of the beginning of a purge within the ruling SNS itself.

The trial for the murder of **Kosovo** Serb politician Oliver Ivanović got underway at the Pristina Basic Court at the beginning of February. Six suspects accused of involvement in his murder pleaded not guilty to the charges of organizing his assassination. On March 1st, the same court withdrew the arrest warrant issued against Milan Radoičić, who was previously alleged to be the leader of the organized criminal gang which is responsible for Ivanović's murder. The Special Prosecution, which had requested the arrest warrant to be withdrawn, failed to issue any comment.

MEDIA

Media organizations in Southeast Europe continued to feel squeezed by leaders with authoritarian tendencies.

In **Slovenia**, the government of Prime Minister Janez Janša stands accused of trying to under-

mine the independence of the state-funded STA news agency. The accusations came at the end of February as it was announced that the Government's Communication Office had decided to suspend payments for the services provided by the STA for the second time in recent months. Earlier during the same month, the Slovenian Journalists' Association accused the Communication Office of practicing a new and more subtle form of censorship by routinely preventing officials from speaking to the media.

Meanwhile, **Turkey's** Constitutional Court ruled at the end of February that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's move in 2018 to put the Anadolu News Agency under direct control was unconstitutional. Following the introduction of an executive presidential system in the country in 2018, the Agency was put under the control of the Turkish Presidency's Communications Directorate. The Constitutional Court noted that the Agency was constitutionally an autonomous institution albeit one with a state supplied budget, hence the direct control undermined its institutional independence. What practical implications this ruling will have remains to be seen.

MIGRANT WOES

The close of 2020 brought plenty of distressing news and visual images when it comes to the problems faced by migrants and refugees passing through the Balkans. On December 23rd, regional and international media reported that a number of migrants holed up in **Bosnia's** north-western corner had decided to set fire to part of a camp which had, until recently, housed them. At the moment when it was set on fire, the camp was in the process of being dismantled and closed down, yet the images, and news, were still fairly shocking. The fire forced many migrants to spend the night in the freezing open air, while those being moved out of the camp had no clear idea where they were headed. Initially, there were plans to move them to the nearby city of Bihać, yet there was bitter opposition from the local population. After protests in Bihać, Bosnian authorities ordered the country's army to erect new tents to house migrants at the Lipa camp. Needless to say, migrants were not happy with this news, organizing their own protest and demanding passage to Western Europe rather than new tents.

Refugees leave Lipa refugee camp in Bihać, Bosnia and Herzegovina located on the border with Croatia, which burnt down last week and is being evacuated.



All of this is a reflection of the growing social tensions which the International Organization for Migration (IOM) sees building in Bosnia over the presence of migrants. The IOM sees host communities falling prey to xenophobic narratives, but also becoming more angry due to a sense of lack of control over migration management decisions which impact local communities very unevenly. All of this in turn is putting a strain on Bosnia's already fragile post-war social fabric, at the same time as COVID-19 is adding to public anxiety in the country.

Meanwhile, across the border from Bosnia, inside the EU, the issue of **Croatia's** treatment of migrants and refugees is becoming an ever more hotly contested issue. At the beginning of 2021, Nermin Kljajić, the Minister of Interior in the Una-Sana Canton, claimed that Croatia had forcibly returned more than 7,000 migrants and refugees from its territory to Bosnia.

A refugee from Lipa camp takes a bath in the river in freezing temperatures near Bihać, Bosnia and Herzegovina.



Zagreb is coming under the spotlight not just for the pushback of migrants from its territory back into Bosnia, but also over allegations of violence and abuse against migrants. As a result of such allegations, the EU has demanded the creation of an independent border-monitoring mechanism by Croatia. Yet Zagreb appears to be dragging its feet on this issue, running the risk of harming its bid to join the passport-free Schengen zone.

'ME TOO'

In mid-January, Serbia's public – followed by much of the region – was shocked by rape claims emanating from the acting world. The episode began when several well-known Serbian actresses lodged accusations of rape with the police against renowned acting teacher Miroslav 'Mika' Aleksić. The rapes are alleged to have occurred between 2008 and 2020. Aleksić was promptly detained by police, while an outpouring of similar stories and experiences began in the media and on social media platforms. Yet the revelations of sexual abuse and rape quickly took on a regional dimension, as actresses from across the region began sharing their own experiences of rape and sexual abuse in the acting world, similar to the 'Me Too' movement which began in 2017, sparked by similar revelations in the US.

SHORT COMMENTARIES – THE IMPORTANCE OF RIGHT COMMUNICATION OF ENERGY TRANSITION

NAIDA TASO, MA

The decarbonisation of the energy sector is key to mitigating climate change. Renewable energy and energy efficiency measures alone have the potential of achieving 90% of the required carbon reductions. Governments around the globe are working on policies and measures to promote sustainable development. The implementation of the Clean Energy Package and recent political developments towards the implementation of the European Green Deal in the EU are expected to result in an increase of 2030 targets for renewable energy, energy efficiency and greenhouse gas emissions reduction. Last year, leaders from the Western Balkans signed the Sofia Declaration committing to working towards the 2050 target of a carbon-neutral continent together with the EU. It is as clear as ever that we live in an era of energy transition that can only be successful if we all work together.

The Clean Energy Package (CEP), which is expected to be transposed in the Western Balkans by the end of 2021, already puts citizens at the center of the energy transition by enabling self-consumers and energy communities to generate, store and sell excess renewable electricity. CEP obliges governments to certify the origin of renewables sold to final consumers, which gives them the option to choose the source of their energy. While incentive measures for households need to be stepped up, the main challenge remains to make citizens aware of the benefits of existing opportunities. By now, everyone knows that cities across the Western Balkans frequently rank among the most polluted places in the world, but how do we convince consumers that the source their energy is directly affecting their health or that energy efficiency measures can make their house warmer and reduce their energy bills?



Naida holds a Master's degree (MA) in Electric Power Engineering and has almost ten years of international experience in the areas of renewable energy, energy modeling, electricity markets and sustainable development.

In my personal opinion, awareness raising needs to start at an early age. My niece (4 years old) recently watched a cartoon where lava from a volcano is pictorially depicted as a source of geothermal energy. She was so impressed that she couldn't take her eyes off the television. So when her grandmother told her that her aunt works in renewable energy, she was so thrilled that she repeated it to her classmates in kindergarten for days.

Sustainable development means changing the way we live in the long term. To achieve that, awareness raising needs to start immediately, in kindergartens and schools. The story of the planet and how it is affected by our way of life should be told through cartoons and books. From smart grids to cost-effective solar panels, innovative solutions already exist. Moreover, curriculums at universities must match the accelerated development of technology to increase its usage. Climate-educated children and young people will become responsible adults ready to lead the world into a better, cleaner and safer future.

**This does not represent the official position of the Energy Community Secretariat*

REA NEPRAVISHTA

Albania's electrical energy production relies almost 100% on hydropower. Energy production and climate change create a vicious circle in Albania: Albania's over-dependency on water resources to cover energy needs has exposed the country to the challenge of increasing dry periods resulting in shortfalls of water brought about by climate change. On its end, climate change is caused by environmental degradation, including the deterioration of freshwater habitats and ecosystems vis-à-vis the construction of small hydro. Therefore, energy transition towards renewable sources such as solar and wind is of paramount importance.

We do not consider hydro energy a green energy as long as it destroys our rivers and makes life impossible for the communities it's built in. Based on traditional roles in certain communities, women are often those who care about the families, the households, and small agriculture and livestock around the house. When water resources are disrupted or lacking in rural areas, women are most affected as their survival and living conditions become more harsh and severe. Albania's strategy to overuse hydropower resources for energy production has long been opposed by local communities and the energy transition towards other more suitable forms of renewable energy such as solar and wind should have been prioritised time ago. A transition towards solar and wind has become imperative because the country's water resources are largely damaged due to being intensely deployed for hydropower purposes. Although there are solar farm projects in their starting phase recently launched by the government, they are still too few and the processes are too slow to be considered a groundbreaking transition from hydro to solar sources of energy. Wind is another unexplored sphere to date



Rea is a feminist and environmental activist based in Tirana. She is engaged with protecting water resources against hydropower construction. Rea leads the organisation UJA, which is part of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Adria network in the Balkans.

that has potential in Albania. We need to position ourselves radically and declare our rivers untouchable anymore for energy production! Not a drop of water should enter turbines anymore! Enough is enough.

Another important element towards a more environmentally sustainable society is the rehabilitation of an existing network of transmission of electrical energy, which could save a lot of losses during energy transmission in the system. Energy saving in the existing outdated system could return to use a lot of energy that currently gets lost. This way, it would be easier to refrain from developing new energy projects which have negative impacts on the environment.

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Southeast Europe

After more than two decades of engagement in southeastern Europe, the FES appreciates that the challenges and problems still facing this region can best be resolved through a shared regional framework. Our commitment to advancing our core interests in democratic consolidation, social and economic justice and peace through regional cooperation, has since 2015 been strengthened by establishing an infrastructure to coordinate the FES' regional work out of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Regional Dialogue Southeast Europe (Dialogue SOE).

Dialogue SOE provides analysis of shared challenges in the region and develops suitable regional programs and activities in close cooperation with the twelve FES country offices across Southeast Europe. Furthermore, we integrate our regional work into joint initiatives with our colleagues in Berlin and Brussels. We aim to inform and be informed by the efforts of both local and international organizations in order to further our work in southeastern Europe as effectively as possible.

Our regional initiatives are advanced through three broad working lines:

- Social Democratic Politics and Values
- Social and Economic Justice
- Progressive Peace Policy

Our website provides information about individual projects within each of these working lines, past events, and future initiatives: <http://www.fes-southeasteurope.org>

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