



‘Regional Academy for Social Democrats in South Eastern Europe 2018’

FEPS Activity Report

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FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN
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This Regional Academy for Social Democratic Parties, promoted and organised by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies and the National Democratic Institute RPI, is intended to prepare, motivate, and encourage political activists who want to learn more about policy development process, upgrade their skills for conducting policy research and possibly pursue political engagement in policy units of their party.

Pogdorica, 9-11 March

On March 9-11, 2018, in Podgorica, Montenegro, FEPS and NDI organised the first module of the Regional Academy. The group that participated to this first module was composed of 29 participants (20 female and 9 male) from 8 countries (Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Romania, Kosovo, Albania, Macedonia). In the course of the three-day workshop, participants were first offered the opportunity to gain basic knowledge about policy development from Vladimir Pavlovic, Policy Advisor at the Belgrade Open School. Mr Pavlovic was selected as mentor for this group, so he worked with them in order to help them produce high-quality policy brief.



Usage of social media in communicating policy brief was instead the topic of the presentation of Ms. Elena Gil, FEPS New Media Advisor. She gave basic information to the group on why should policy proposals be presented and discussed in social media, who could be potential influencers and what are the tips for communication of their recommendations. Elena did a great job in explaining what are the best ways to communicate their ideas on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.

Participants also got tips on how to emphasize gender and youth component in their message.

The last session was focused on Involving civil society into policy development, presented by Bojana Mikovic, Coordinator in Trag Foundation from Serbia. Ms Mikovic explained to the group what are civil society organisations and what types of such organisations exists. The most important part of her presentation showed how and what political parties can gain from CSOs and what CSO resources can be beneficial for political parties.

Participants agreed on suggested timeline by their mentor, so it was decided that the first draft of their policy briefs were to be finished by the end of May 2018. The second module to be held in Brussels, was scheduled for the beginning of July 2018. FEPS was given the task of checking the availability of MEPs and other organisations and persons that this group will meet there.

Brussels, 8-11 July 2018

The second module of the Regional Academy for SD parties was held in Brussels, on July 9 and 10, 2018. This time the number of participants was 13. They were chosen among the previous group on the base of the quality of their policy briefs. The 13 participants and their respective topics were:

Name	Topic
Adrian Tudor	The next step towards combating discrimination in Romania: Creating the National Anti-Discrimination Fund
Amir Vrca	Low turnout on elections in BiH: Duty, protest or negligence
Jelena Anasonović	Access to information of public importance: Citizens' rights, responsibility of public officials and penalty policy
Sandra Prenkić	How to better position women in legislative and executive branches of governance
Luizita Voda	Improving agriculture, while simplifying procedures
Endrit Zabërgja	Unsupported legislative framework for youth entrepreneurship initiatives
Andrija Jurčević	Lack of housing conditions meaning leaving: inadequate housing policy
Helena Mikulandra	Agrifuture of Ravni Kotari
Hamza Pecar	Bosnia's shackles of economic reforms
Kristina Pepovska	The Law on use of languages: A challenge or an opportunity for the concept of one society for all?
Damir Novalic	Minimum wage in Montenegro is too low and the state does not care about it
Vedrana Vujović	Quality of education: Until it collapses
Vesna Bukvić	Minority culture for deaf and semi-deaf in BiH

During the mentorship period, they were intensively working with their mentor Mr. Vladimir Pavlovic. Most of them respected deadlines and communicates with Vladimir on a regular basis.

As mentioned, 13 of them qualified for second module.

They had to prepare a short presentation out of their briefs to be delivered in Brussels at FEPS. Almost one whole day was dedicated to their presentations in FEPS office. Five FEPS Policy Advisors offered their comments, remarks and suggestions on content and presentations itself.

After the presentations, participants visited the European Parliament and the Hemicycle.

The second day was dedicated to different meetings with different EU officials. First meeting was held at the Committee of the Regions, with Mr. Santiago Mondragón, Policy Advisor at the PES Group. Participants found out what the role of this institution is in the framework of the European Union and the links and cooperation existing with regions and municipalities in the accession countries. In this case, regular yearly meetings (in some cases meetings take place every three years) are held on topics that are of interest for the region or the municipalities. For example, last meeting in Kosovo was about e-procurement, which is one of the requests of EU.



The second meeting was with Tanja Fajon and Knut Flechenstein, Members of the European Parliament, S&D Group. The participants asked question concerning the process of enlargement and the position of the European Parliament or the S&D Group on the Western Balkan states' domestic issues and were very interested to hear their opinion.

During the meeting it was mentioned that Bosnia-Herzegovina will need to amend its Constitution before entering the European Union. That is something mandatory and something that will be required as eliminatory criteria. In their view, BH politicians are not yet mature enough to take care of the country and people Also the question of corruption was considered of the utmost importance. Also with regard to Bosnia-Herzegovina, it was discussed the issue of the so-called “ethnically clean political parties”, something that is unacceptable for the European Union. It was also underlined how it is up to the Western Balkan states to find solutions to their problems and reach compromises. Macedonia represents a good example: it showed that it really intends to move towards the EU path, even if this means to change the name of the country.

The question of the enlargement fatigue, that is the fact the EU is at the moment afraid of receiving new members was largely discussed. This is due to the fact that the EU member states are currently dealing with different internal issues and have little willingness and energy to deal with enlargement.

In the case of Kosovo, the question of the visa liberalisation, which was about to happen, was discussed. The MEPs mentioned that they were just waiting for assessment from the committee to be published.

Everybody in the EU was impressed with Macedonia (to become Republic of North Macedonia) and how brave the decision to change name was. They hope Macedonia will succeed to open up their negotiations next year.

Social Democratic parties in the region are in crises in this moment, as are the sister parties in the European Union. Fajon said that even her party in Slovenia is facing difficulties. She thinks that the only way out from crises is networking of the parties. Also, parties must work more on their image, involve youth more, and they must modernise themselves, adjust strategies for new workers, better understand globalisation trends. SD parties must go through reforms, follow their goals no matter what and build networks.

Last meeting was with Eduard Auer, a Head of Division for Western Balkans in European External Action Service. This institution is EU's diplomatic service. Its role is to make sure the voice of the EU and its people are heard in the world. They are the body that make sure foreign policies and security policies are coordinated.

Participants were interested in many issues, but they mostly got diplomatic answers and information that are generally common knowledge. Mostly the discussion revolved around the Kosovo/Serbia issue and what are the hidden agendas for both sides, but also about Russian and Chinese influence in certain countries in the region.