



FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN  
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES  
FONDATION EUROPÉENNE  
D'ÉTUDES PROGRESSISTES

**FMS**  
Foundation Max van der Stoep

# DEEPENING DEMOCRACY IN THE EU NEIGHBOURHOOD



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## PREFACE

Social democratic political parties in the EU and the EU neighbourhood are increasingly challenged in their role as actors and engines of economic and societal change. Globalisation, the rise of populism and nationalism, the increasing influence of multinationals and financial markets on the decision-making process and political fragmentation have all contributed to an image that mainstream political parties are rigid and unable to effectively respond to, or represent the voices and interests of the citizens. In fact, it is questionable whether politics in general is still in control of increasingly intertwined global economic processes. In many countries citizens are demanding less corruption, more transparency and a role in the decision-making process. Social movements – often with a core of disillusioned young people – have been addressing these questions in many countries. The good news is that research has shown that young people, in spite of their apparent disenchantment with political parties, are in fact open to a narrative based on social democratic values. But how to reach and involve these young people? And how to convince and show them that social democratic parties are, and can continue to be, a driving force for change?

During 2018 and 2019 the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) and the Foundation Max van der Stoep (FMS) organised a series of training seminars to discuss socio-economic and political challenges for young people in the EU neighbouring countries – Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Lebanon, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Morocco, Serbia, Tunisia and Ukraine. In cooperation with local partners FEPS and FMS brought together activists from civil society and young members of progressive political parties with the aim of enhancing their ability to engage in politics and become actors of change in their countries. Despite the many differences between these countries, participants in the training seminars identified mostly the same kind of challenges in their respective countries: shortcomings in the education system, a lack of opportunities for young people and unemployment, corruption and a lack of inclusive institutions. Perception among young people that the ruling elite's unwillingness and inability to change things for the better has increased apathy, activism as well as contributing to a brain drain. A study on Potential Net Migration Index (PNMI) by Gallup shows that 32% of citizens from Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina want to leave the country. The PNMI for Ukraine is 25%, Tunisia 27% and Morocco 19%. A recent Friedrich Ebert Stiftung youth study in South-east Europe concluded that 'while some choose to emigrate, others report low engagement with politics and society and a sense that they are not represented in the political sphere. A third group could be described as those who take political action to contest nationalism, political violence, impunity, and corruption....'. The study shows, amongst other things, that economic reasons are the driving force behind the wish to move to another country and it underlines the importance of civic education to increase citizens' awareness and participation in the decision-making process. Previously FEPS and FMS focused on the challenge of bridging the gap between social movements and progressive political parties, with the strong assumption that

political parties still play an important role in transforming social discontent into political action, policy and structural change, and that political parties and movements can filter grievances among disadvantaged groups in the society. Consequently, establishing trust and a platform for a value-driven and issue-based cooperation between activist and individuals within political parties is an important first step.

The peaceful Colourful Revolution in North Macedonia is a good example of successful cooperation between social movements and political actors. Politicians of the main opposition Social Democratic Union (SDSM) with good relations with civil society joined the protest movement against the corrupt and authoritarian government of Nikola Gruevski. After securing a basis for free and fair elections and forming a post-election majority, SDSM opened up to the civil society and provided space for different stakeholders to get involved in the decision-making process. In Armenia the protest movement behind the successful and peaceful Velvet Revolution of 2018 turned into a political alliance that managed to win an absolute majority in the national parliament. The leading figure of the movement, Nikol Pashinyan, became Prime Minister and the Armenian civil society is now trying to redefine its role vis-à-vis the government. In Morocco, left-wing political parties allied with the Hirak Rif movement do not to strive for a revolution, but for reforms. A new constitution, basic human rights and an improvement of the quality of life have been the core demands since protests erupted in the northern Moroccan region in 2016. When news outlets misinformed the public about the rallies, the political parties involved in the protests condemned media practices that twist the facts. In Serbia – a country that peacefully overthrew dictator Milosevic in 2000 – social movements and opposition parties from left to right joined forces in 2018 to fight for democracy and the rule of law.

Although critics argue they lack a strategy and do not offer a clear alternative, social movements and political parties are increasingly cooperating in EU neighbouring countries to fight the rising tide of illiberal democracy.

## RECLAIMING DEMOCRACY!

The liberal democracy – based on universal rights, independent institutions, restricting powers and the rule of law – is being gradually replaced in some countries by so-called illiberal forms of democracy, which are characterised by strong leadership, the culture of 'the majority decides', and institutions that serve those in power.

In his book 'The Road to Unfreedom', Timothy Snyder argues that Russia has had some success in exporting unfreedom: interfering in elections, spreading misinformation and even by allegedly plotting a coup d'état in Montenegro in 2016. President Putin finds inspiration in Russian philosopher Ivan Ilyin who argues that democracy is a ritual in which we vote to confirm our leader, facts have no value, and freedom is knowing your place in society. To a certain extent this philosophy has been propagated by influential political leaders in the EU neighbourhood and the EU as well. As Figure 7.6<sup>1</sup> from a recent FES study on youth in the SEE region shows an increasing number of young people in the region support a strong political leader. Civic education and activism have an important role to play in the fight against this philosophy.

For this reason, the follow-up project of the Deepening Democracy project – Reclaiming Democracy! – will focus on value-driven policy development and democratic empowerment of young progressives, women and minorities. We will develop – in cooperation with our local partners and participants at the seminars – policies, inspired by ideology, that will enable stronger civic participation to fight the challenges that many EU neighbouring countries face: a democracy in decline.

From this framework we will develop a range of issues that each country can choose from, depending on their country-specific situation. During a workshop at the 1st FEPS-FMS Neighbourhood Dialogue Conference that was held in Belgrade on 29 June 2019 – the final activity that closed the previous project and launched the Reclaiming Democracy! project – participants mentioned in particular the following topics: (youth) unemployment, corruption, modern social democracy and values, activism and empowerment, social democracy and the peace-building process, social democratic political economy and modernising political parties. Some of these issues are reflected in the abovementioned study as shown in the Figure 7.1.<sup>2</sup>

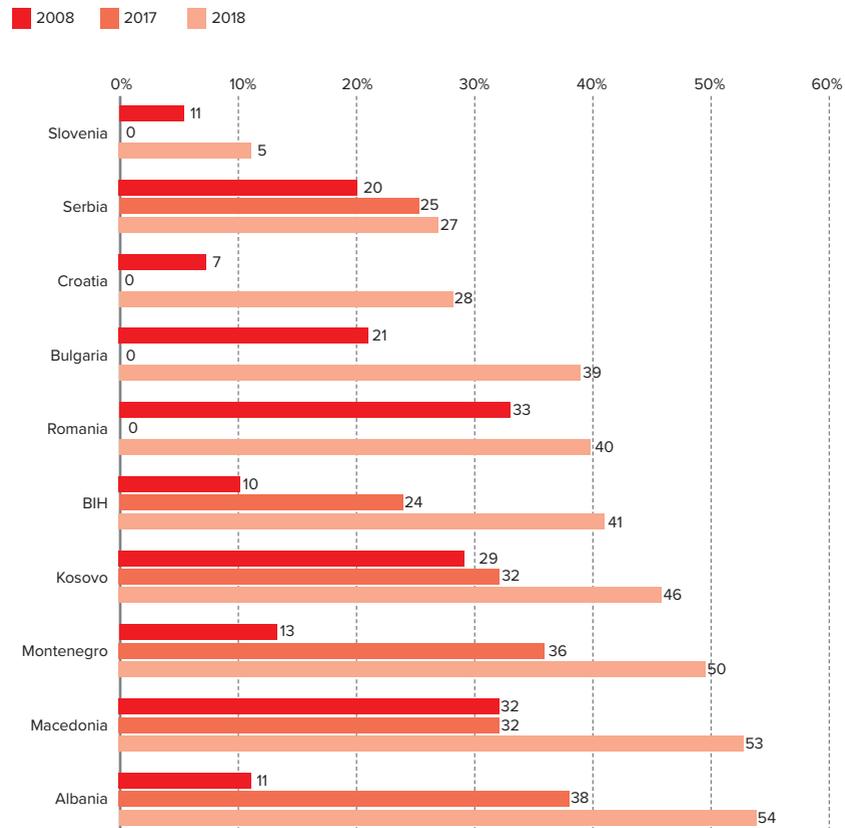
While skills, networking and exchange of experience and best practices will continue to be a crucial part of the Reclaiming Democracy project, the current format – an interaction between theory and workshops – will be strengthened by the introduction of short masterclasses that will be given by regional and international experts. Finally, we will continue the successful formula of engaging our pool of international trainers to facilitate the seminars.

1 Lavrić, Miran; Tomanović, Smiljka; Jusić, Mirna, Youth Study South-east Europe 2018/2019, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/15274-20190408.pdf>

2 Lavrić, Miran; Tomanović, Smiljka; Jusić, Mirna, Youth Study South-east Europe 2018/2019, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/15274-20190408.pdf>

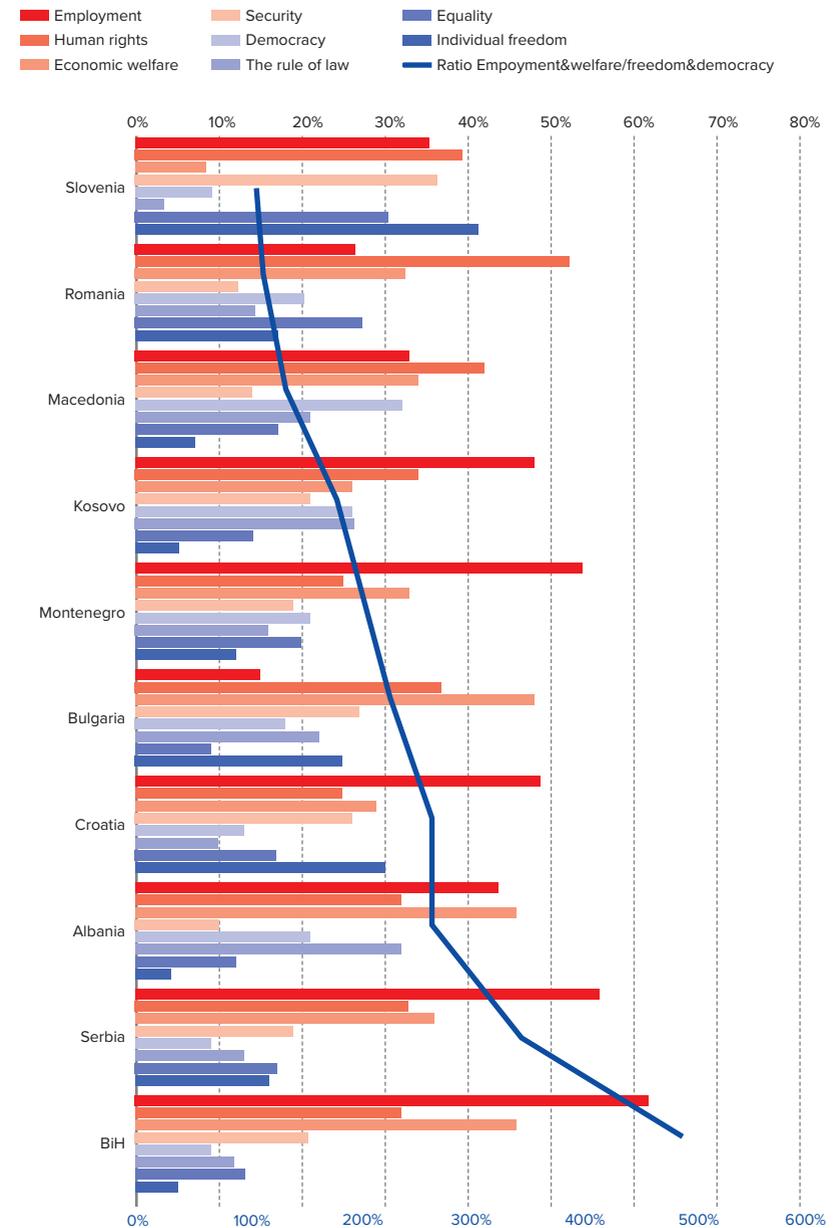
Before we engage in the new project it is worthwhile highlighting the main findings and conclusions of the previous – Deepening Democracy – project. That is exactly what this short publication aims to do. It will analyse the political dynamics and summarises the main findings of the training seminars in each of the ten participating countries. The content is based on the narrative reports of the seminars and the input from our local partners who were asked to answer the following questions: 1) Could you describe the most recent political developments and political dynamics in your country? 2) What are the three main topics, issues or challenges that young people face in your country? 3) What are the main conclusions and recommendations of the seminar? 4) What can be done to enhance inclusive politics, youth participation and human rights in your country? Which role can the European progressives play in this?

Figure 1: Percentages of youth declaring strong support for a strong political leader, 2008-2018, by country



Note: Percentages of those choosing answer 5 ('Completely agree') on a scale of 1 to 5. Data for 2008 were derived from the World Values Survey, while data from 2017 were gathered as part of the INFORM project.

Figure 2: The relative importance of eight major socio-political values, by country



Note: Respondents were asked to rate their three most important socio-political values. The scores on the graph were computed as a weighted arithmetic mean, whereby the share of youth ranking a given value first was assigned a weight of 3, the share ranking a given value second was assigned a weight of 2, and the share ranking a given value 3rd was assigned a weight of 1.

2018 was significant in terms of major political developments in Armenia. It started with massive anti-government protests in April-May that led to the resignation of the then Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan and his Republican Party-controlled coalition government. Nikol Pashinyan, an opposition politician of the parliamentary block Yelq, who was also the leader of the protest movement 'My step', was elected Prime Minister of Armenia after several rounds of voting in Parliament. Later that year, in October Pashinyan resigned to push for snap parliamentary elections in December, in which Armenian voters endorsed his 'My Step' Alliance with more than 70% of the vote for further social, political and economic reforms in the country. This was a moment that many Armenians had been striving for years: an opportunity for everyone – social movements, different civic groups and unions, activists, people engaged in political parties and NGOs across the country – to put their issues on the political agenda. A big, common, nationwide agenda that could create momentum for the ongoing collective effort that could foster a sense of shared direction, connectedness, and collective power at a national scale.

The 2018 protest and ensuing political changes, also known as Armenia's Velvet Revolution, are remarkable as they demonstrate that non-violent methods of resistance are applicable and effective for broader mobilisation and transition from a system that allows very little to no space for dissent.

Following the Velvet Revolution and the election of PM Pashinyan there is a period of hope, energy and high expectation, coupled with a great degree of uncertainty. Extensive systemic changes are being demanded by society – especially by the young people – and have been promised by the new government. This includes severing ties between the political and the business spheres (or oligarchy), ensuring a level playing field for all in terms of the judiciary and the economy, but also reducing rampant inequality of access to practically all socio-economical spheres – including the job market, education, healthcare and infrastructure (difference between urban and rural communities). The challenges facing – especially – the young generation that was the driving force behind the Velvet Revolution are thus not separate concrete issues, but rather a complex task of ensuring that the government delivers on the abovementioned major political reforms that are now expected in all spheres of government.

Many young people in Armenia believe that freedom, democracy and equality should be at the heart of political processes and decision-making. They imagine, demand and press for new forms of political organisation and culture to radically transform Armenia into a state where people are not hindered or controlled by structural barriers, where divisions do not lead to inequality and restrictions, where social and cultural gaps do not limit and divide citizens, where women are not restrained or confronted by gender bias, where people with differences and/or disabilities do not face obstacles in their freedom and quality of life. They insist that political activity could and should result in policies that ensure that children and young people receive a good education, elderly people are

guaranteed a dignified old age, sick people are provided with good healthcare, and decent jobs pave the way to welfare and development in the country and society. The main conclusion of the seminar that was held in Aghveran from 18 to 21 November 2018 was that populist content is dominant in contemporary political processes and we need to be more assertive and creative in order to promote and shape progressive values and agendas in Armenia.

At the same time, it was obvious that there is potential for positive developments now, and the participants of the seminar were committed enough and interested in obtaining more experience and knowledge for promoting progressive values in their everyday lives and activity. They were motivated to use the competence they thus gained more effectively and strategically, as well as looking for new connections, alliances and networking tools for progressive change both inside their organisation or movement and in the country at large.

Enhancement of inclusive politics, youth participation and human rights in Armenia will be possible through continued effort, determination and belief that progress is not only possible, but in fact inevitable. Therefore, we urge progressive partners in Europe and elsewhere to help develop and promote the progressive agenda in Armenia through assisting the local progressive organisation on a number of issues:

- developing the necessary capacity and resources for the progressive organisation and its campaigns;
- introducing various case studies and approaches on converging efforts and building on collective action for progressive change;
- creating a solidarity network of progressive partners in Armenia and beyond.

For the upcoming period the progressives in Armenia will mostly focus on organisational questions like realising working space and facilities for their organisation in Armenia and developing its communication tools (promotional strategy and materials, newsletters, online platforms, etc.), as well as organising events and discussion platforms for an exchange of ideas and experience, proposing policies and strategies of influence, and building connections on the basis of progressive thought. Examples include a Youth Social Forum 2019 and Progressive Cafés on various social issues. Further focus will be on opinion surveys and related research to examine and update the list of progressive issues and topics to be discussed and promoted in 2019.

*Local partner: Forum for 21st Century Leaders*

The situation in Belarus is marked by the presence of a strict authoritarian regime. For 25 years, the country has been headed by Alexander Lukashenko, who came to power in the democratic elections of 1994. Through a referendum he later removed the constitutional term limit of two terms. Since then, elections in Belarus have become a symbolic ritual with election campaigns being reduced to nothing more than an imitation of a political process, meant to support the large-scale repressive apparatus. The democratic opposition has lost its power and influence in the face of constant repression. Democratic parties cannot grow either quantitatively or qualitatively. Party membership often means dismissal from work or expulsion from school or university, making the barrier to join an opposition movements or parties too high for many Belarussians. The parliamentary elections that were held on 18 November 2019 brought no significant changes: all 110 MPs elected to parliament hailed from parties and organisations loyal to President Lukashenko. International observers from the OSCE concluded that ‘fundamental freedoms had been disregarded’. The lists of candidates for parliament are prepared by the presidential administration, and the voting day itself has no real significance. The presidential elections in 2020 are fully expected to be rigged and the political situation will not change.

The challenges that young people face in Belarus include lack of political freedoms and the resulting impossibility of active participation in politics. Furthermore, on the socioeconomic front, education is poor and expensive, there is a lack of adequate jobs and wages for young professionals are low, which leaves them struggling to afford even rent. All this leads to a lack of perspective, resulting in most of the highly educated and able young people in Belarus looking for opportunities to emigrate.

According to FMS-FEPS project instructions, young people representing different left-wing oriented organisations were invited to participate in the training. Most of them participated in such a training for the first time. Their level of preparation, experience of participation in the social and political life of the country and their interests were right in line with the programme offered by the trainers. Since the training took place, there have been many positive and grateful responses from them on social networks. The Belarus Women’s League, which organised the seminar locally and invited the participants, found new allies. For the first time we invited young people with disabilities – representing organisations that fight for their rights – who need our support in their struggle for equal rights and access to public spaces. Thus, this training allowed us to establish a dialogue with new groups of young people. At the same time, new members of the Belarus Women’s League for the first time had an opportunity to learn from international trainers. All expressed a desire to maintain this contact with international organisations to exchange experiences and views. In fact, organisations in Belarus often feel isolated from the rest of Europe, so building an international network is vital for them.

The workshop contributed to shedding light on the problems of vulnerable groups, specifically people with disabilities. Because of a lack of space for any political alternative, in Belarus it is difficult – if not impossible at the moment – to achieve major political change on the national level. However, there are still many issues and challenges on a local level, or on a smaller scale, where improvement could have a significant impact on the persons affected. It is thus possible to fight to improve ordinary people’s lives, or at least fight to achieve some acknowledgement of their struggle. Helping vulnerable groups, voicing their concerns and challenges, and making them heard by the wider public are major and urgent tasks that the local organisation is currently facing. Existing barriers must be identified, exposed and eliminated. The local organisation is currently seeking equal rights for young people with disabilities, who are experiencing all kinds of negative effects from their lack of access to public spaces, especially in the sphere of education. In order to pursue in this endeavour, they will need the continuous support of European partners. Contacts and moral support are essential and trainings such as the ones organised by FEPS and FMS help local organisations to open up new areas of action, new contacts and new subjects to work on, while at the same time providing some useful skills and knowledge.

*Local partner: Belarus Women’s League*

Since the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) was signed in 1995, nationalist parties have dominated the political scene in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Although progressive parties gained some votes, the October 2018 general elections were no exception. The main ethno-nationalist parties consolidated their support, but the government formation process is still ongoing. Two years after the elections governments at different levels are yet to be formed. At a central level a crucial obstacle is NATO integration: Croatian and Bosnian parties support accession, while Serbian parties are against it. In August the three main nationalist parties signed an agreement on the government formation but it is unclear what the agreement says about NATO integration. Bosnia's nationalist Serbian leader Milorad Dodik is threatening to withdraw from the establishment of joint armed forces, the state court and police force, unless a state-level government is formed soon. There is an overall trend towards ethnic consolidation, making the opposition parties in the ethnic groups invisible. The only current opposition at state level are the civic and multi-ethnic parties based in the mainly Bosnian-Croatian Federation BiH with strongholds in Sarajevo and Tuzla.

An interesting example of civic parties joining forces can be found in the capital Sarajevo, where the main Bosnian ethno-nationalist party won the elections, gaining over 25% of the seats in the cantonal parliament. As it did not manage to form a government because none of the remaining parties showed any interest to join a coalition, a government consisting of six progressive parties was formed, which so far seems to be functioning very well, creating the impression that change is indeed possible in a country held hostage by nationalist politicians since the break-up of Yugoslavia. The ruling parties in Sarajevo are trying to create another way of doing politics: transparent and in the common interest of all citizen.

Sarajevo is the exception that proves the rule: in the rest of the country the outcomes of elections show no real shift, especially as there is a tendency to vote along ethnic lines and for nationalistic parties. Serbs and Croats are working together towards the further federalisation of the country. The third ethnic group, the Bosnians, is strongly opposed to this initiative. With regards to EU integration, Bosnia-Herzegovina is lagging behind the other countries in the Western Balkans, because it is unable to implement the requested reforms. Under the current constitution, established in the DPA, the decision-making process follows ethnic lines. Meanwhile young people and the educated middle class are 'voting with their feet' by leaving the country.

During the training seminar the participants argued that, without doubt, unemployment is the main challenge for young people in the country. High unemployment rates – youth unemployment reached 54% in 2016 – are having a severe effects on the life of young people, influencing their ability to start a family, but also their self-confidence and the possibility to live their own lives without the help of their parents. Consequently, an increased number of young people is leaving Bosnia and looking for opportunities elsewhere. A recent research by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung shows that only 36% of youths in the country has no intention to migrate. Also, several studies show that young people are mainly interested in

working in the public sector, looking for a secure and well-paid job with limited stress situations. The lack of incentives and other obstacles to starting one's own business is recognised and there are tools to encourage youth entrepreneurship with financial and non-financial incentives. Lack of motivation and apathy among young people is visible in the political arena as well. Young people are not interested in being involved in the political decision-making process due to their perception that the political parties and the political leaders are corrupt. Activism in political parties and civil society has great potential but it is often not considered as a potential driver of change in a country that has been stuck in a status quo since the end of the war in 1995. Finally, the participants noted that they are aware pressure on political parties and elites has to come from a grassroots movement.

The FEPS-FMS project has contributed to enhancing the engagement of the participants in local communities: starting from following local politics, through active engagement, and then developing different policies and initiatives to solve important issues. Their main challenge concerns the protection of human rights, equality and the fight against corruption. One conclusion was that there is still no social movement in the country capable of engendering broad support among different actors in the society and transforming their demands into political action. Most social movements are focused on a single issue and unable to keep the momentum going after successful mobilisation. Bosnia and Herzegovina is still in the process of a transition from a post-conflict society and economic development is moving slowly. 'We still haven't closed the door on the past and we have to turn our sights fully towards to the future', one of the participants noted. A social movement that all people will accept is needed in order to complete the reconciliation of the three main ethnic groups, improve the economy and work on social prosperity. Social democratic and progressive political parties can play an important role in shaping this movement that should be based on freedom, workers' rights, equality for all, tolerance, peace and reconciliation, and should contribute to bringing Bosnia and Herzegovina closer to the standards of the rest of Europe. Moreover, such a movement could help the country to move closer to accession to the EU.

In order to strengthen inclusive politics, elected parliamentarians at different levels must be supported and made accountable to their constituencies, especially to young people. Once young people feel that their interests are truly represented instead of parties merely regurgitating party lines, they might be interested in an active political participation. This is a huge opportunity for non-nationalist progressive citizens' parties in the country. Unfortunately, while in government, progressive parties have showed the opposite, losing credibility, trust and their links to the constituencies. Some of them learned from their mistakes and decided to remain in opposition after the 2014 elections instead of obtaining privileges and positions as a reward for participating in the ruling coalition. At the same time European progressives should serve as a role model to the elected politicians in the SEE region in terms of how cooperation with civil society can be established, thereby showing young people that societal engagement does not necessarily mean engagement in the political parties, but can also take the form of influencing overall life through their work in the civil society. The main threat to democracy, especially to progressives, is apathy among citizens. Therefore, any civic engagement has to be sought and actively facilitated.

*Local partner: Forum of Left Initiative*

After not having had elections for nine years and subsequent government deadlock, Lebanon went to the polls in spring 2018 to elect a new parliament. This was made possible because of the election of Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun – a Maronite Christian – as president, and thanks to the promulgation of a new electoral law, providing for fairer representation. The Lebanese political landscape can be described as polarised, turbulent and marked by continuing instability. It has a system where power is shared by different religious sects, including Sunnis, Shias, Druze, Maronite Catholics, Eastern Orthodox and protestants. Due to protracted negotiations, the new government only took office at the beginning of 2019. The biggest problem in forming a coalition was the division of ministerial posts based on the new power balance, which had shifted in favour of Hezbollah and its allies. Prime Minister and Future Movement Leader Saad Hariri suffered a heavy loss, but continues to lead the government.

One of the major issues causing deep divisions amongst the different group mentioned above is the status of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than a million Syrian refugees are registered in the country, while the true number may be as high as 1.5 million. There is a deepening conflict about their legal status and the pace of return. Refugees are being accused of taking jobs while not paying taxes and thus crushing the economy. The refugees themselves do not want to or cannot return because of loss of property and, more importantly, fear of the Assad regime.

In a wider international context, Lebanon is used as a proxy by important regional players and functions as one of the battlegrounds in the Iranian-Saudi conflict. Hezbollah is supported by its main Shia ally Iran, while the Saudis are close to the Sunni group of Prime Minister Hariri. As a consequence, rising tensions between Tehran and Riyadh impact the political dynamics in the small Mediterranean country. Also, Lebanon has a strained relationship with its southern neighbour Israel. Having experienced several armed conflicts, of which the Israeli invasion of South Lebanon in 2006 was the latest, neither economic nor diplomatic relations have been established between the two countries. Currently, the Lebanese accuse the Israelis of undermining their sovereignty in an offshore oil and gas dispute.

The main challenge for the Lebanese youths is unemployment. Currently, around 40% of young people do not have a job. The 30,000 graduates leaving university every year are left with two options: being unemployed or seeking better opportunities elsewhere. The latter is increasingly becoming a problem with a rising number of youths going abroad to find work. Closely related to the issue above is the dichotomy between wages and living expenses. Even if you have a job, metropolitan Beirut – where more than one third of the population lives – is expensive. This makes it difficult for young people to be financially independent. Many youngsters, even those who are in employment, live with their parents.

Another topical issue is the fight against corruption, which was recently waged by the Lebanese government. Even though this should be applauded, it also raises several questions on the political neutrality of these campaigns. As a consequence, there is an absence of trust between citizens and the state.

In the framework of this project, the FEPS and FMS organised seminars with the Progressive Youth Organisation (PYO) linked to the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP). There were two main conclusions from the seminar. First of all, the participants came to realise that Lebanese democracy is fragile in the sense that it does not meet 'the true standards of qualifying to what we claim it to be'. According to them, Lebanon's political system only succeeds in producing a semblance of democracy. And secondly, it urgently requires attention and action: 'Any delay in the correct implementation of democracy is no longer an option'. Advocating (social) democracy is challenging due to the motives and corrupt agendas of some of the political blocs.

To tackle the issues above and boost inclusive politics and an increase in youth participation, according to the PYO a long-term framework should be put in place. This framework should be articulated on three different levels. The first one should structure cooperation between younger and experienced politicians in a more inclusive environment. A second level of the framework should provide a platform where youth participation can begin from as early as possible. The third level of the framework should revolve around the issue of human rights, and should first call for loud demonstrations, and then promote awareness and organise educational campaigns.

One of the main challenges for the PYO is represented by the lack of human and financial resources, which leads to ideas being more often shelved rather than executed.

It has been suggested that European progressives can empower Lebanese youth in general and activists of the PYO in particular by building up their communication, campaigning and negotiating skills. Capacity-building trainings have become an important tool for PYO activists during election periods, such as during the previous parliamentary elections. It is the best tool for them to understand the needs and positions of the public and why they vote.

*Local partner: Progressive Youth Organization*

Having managed to peacefully survive the 1990s wars that led to the disintegration of Yugoslavia, Montenegro's politics and society were determined by its relations with and independence from Serbia. In 2006, a majority of 55.5% voted in favour of independence, narrowly passing the official 55% threshold. Montenegro has been a NATO member since 2017, and in the process of EU accession, it is the closest of the Western Balkan countries to entering the Union in the future. The country has relatively good relations with other countries in South-east Europe, is a trailblazer in the region when it comes to LGBTI rights, it has appointed an independent special prosecutor to tackle organised crime and high-level corruption, considerably improved the relations between civil society and the government and aligned its foreign policy with the EU. The reforms related to EU accession negotiations have also exposed the challenges the country is facing with regard to democracy and the rule of law. Business tycoons are dominating the economy that mostly runs on remittances and tourism; major incidents around election day are the rule rather than the exception and the country has never experienced a change of power in elections.

President Milo Djukanovic of the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) – in power since 1991 –for the first time experienced serious pressure when a former party financier, businessmen Duško Knežević, revealed a video recording of himself giving an envelope with money to the former DPS mayor of the capital Podgorica. Knežević confirmed he had been illegally financing DPS for years. This triggered the most massive demonstrations in recent Montenegrin history. Opposition parties joined civil sector representatives, media, unions and citizens that gathered each Saturday demanding Djukanovic's resignation and an end to corruption. The next elections are planned for 2020, but opposition parties have signed a memorandum binding them to not participating in any elections organised by the DPS administration and under current laws and preconditions. The last parliamentary elections were overshadowed by an alleged coup d'état carried out with support of Russian intelligence. It seems clear that Russian money was flowing in to support pro-Serbian and pro-Russian parties, but there is no clear evidence yet of Russia's involvement in the alleged coup. In addition, it is not uncommon for elections in Montenegro to have similar incidents on election day, which according to critical analysts and the opposition are meant to distract and frighten people who would then vote for the stability Djukanovic always claims to be providing.

The three main issues that young people in Montenegro face are: lack of employment opportunities, delayed career entry and a lack of affordable housing. Montenegro has high young unemployment. Precarious work opportunities lead to delayed career entry and existing regulation in Montenegro is not efficient enough to prevent these issues. Lack of employment opportunities and delayed career entry are the main reasons why many young people cannot afford decent housing.

We have been implementing the Deepening Democracy project for three years in Montenegro with partial success. Overall, participants were satisfied with the seminars and expressed a desire for more training such as this one. They especially enjoyed group work and video materials creation and expressed their will to participate in similar events in the future. All participants could relate to the seminar topic and demonstrated high levels of interest in taking active part in the seminar work. On the other hand, it has been a great challenge to bring together civil society and progressive parties together in the seminar due to a lack of trust. The organisations participating in previous years have continued their cooperation and send representatives to the seminar. However, bringing in representatives from other social movements and civil society organisations has so far proved to be challenging. One of the reasons for this is the polarisation and competitiveness among Montenegrin NGOs that results in organisations from one 'bloc' not participating in events that are being attended by the other. It will be our main challenge for the future to try to overcome this.

Bringing down unemployment rates among young people is the main priority for Montenegrin progressives. Also, political parties have to show more initiatives in attracting young people to politics and making it more appealing. For this reason our partner in Montenegro has started implementing the Youth Employment Initiative, drafting a bill that aims to create more job opportunities for university students and young people with disabilities. For their part, European progressives need to launch campaigns and create help for each other to find solutions for these issues. The Youth Employment Initiative is an encouraging starting point for achieving better living conditions for young people.

*Local partner: Social Democratic Party*

The main political trends seen in Morocco during the recent months are marked by a severe tightening of the regime. There are two important cases that illustrate this. An important example of the strong restriction of public freedoms was the administrative and judicial measure to ban Racines, an association that promotes culture and the freedom of expression. Legal proceedings were initiated after the governor of Casablanca-Anfa filed a complaint over Racines' hosting of a satirical online show that discusses Moroccan news topics. The ban was said to have been based on the association having organised activities outside its stated objectives. Racines was one of the last associations of its type in Morocco. The second example is the confirmation by a Casablanca court of long prison sentences for the Hirak Rif movement protesters. Its leadership, including opposition symbol Nasser Zefzaki, were sentenced to twenty years in prison. Protests erupted in 2016 after the death of a local fishmonger who was crushed to death by a garbage truck in the northern city of Al-Hoceima as he tried to retrieve his fish, which had been confiscated by the police. His death prompted a wave of anger and discontent about the poor living standards in the Rif region, with thousands taking to the streets accusing authorities of abuse of power and corruption. Moroccan authorities crushed the protests and more than 400 people were detained.

At the political level, the two historical leftist parties in Morocco, the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP) and the Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS), always support the government led by the moderate Islamist party, the Justice and Development Party (PJD). As a consequence, they have lost a distinct social democratic/socialist profile and are out of touch with their traditional constituents. This has led to a continuous decrease in the number of seats these parties hold in parliament.

The PJD, Morocco's biggest party, struggles with internal strife between its former Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane and the current Prime Minister Saadeddine Othmani. Benkirane was removed from the government by King Mohammed VI after his failure to form a coalition government in the wake of the 2016 elections. Ever since, he has criticised the government of his successor and Othmani's style of leading the party.

The party that really dominates Moroccan politics is the centre-right National Rally of Independents (RNI), which is headed by a close ally of King Mohammed VI, successful businessmen and billionaire Aziz Akhannouch. Even though Morocco has seen many political reforms since the 2011 Arab Spring, 'real' power still lies with the king. The Unified Socialist Party (PSU) is the only political group that advocates a parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy, in which the king has purely a ceremonial position and all executive power is in the hands of the democratically elected government.

Young people in Morocco are suffering from a deficit of individual and collective freedoms. This deficit especially constitutes a problem for women since it implies an imbalance in

the relationship between men and women. There has been a negative trend when it comes to personal freedoms. Women are being shamed for the way they dress and the way they behave. Young people are also affected by insufficient opportunities in the labour market. Many university graduates cannot find employment related to their field of studies. When they do find a job, the wage is not sufficient to sustain a decent living, nor does the work meet their expectations. As a result, many youngsters leave Morocco to live and work elsewhere. They not only migrate to Europe, but also to North America and some Arab Gulf states. Lastly, poverty and illiteracy amongst a great number of families is a real issue. This pushes young people belonging to these families to fall into delinquency or to join Salafi and radical movements.

The three challenges outlined above can only be faced with a strong mobilisation of leftist parties and contributions from Moroccan civil society. These forces must constitute a common front in the political and social struggle. Concretely, they have to develop and demand the implementation of a national programme to combat poverty in marginalised neighbourhoods of both Morocco's major cities as well as rural areas. In addition, it is necessary to reform the education and the vocational training system and see a rebirth of public schools that are accessible to all with identical chances of success. This will be at the basis of a blossoming society and of the formation of a better labour force for which the economy and the country as a whole have the greatest need. It will also constitute one of the most important bases for an inclusive society, where gender equality and human rights can be developed and protected. Human rights conditions are better in countries where the access to a high level of education is possible for the whole population, without any limit related to financial means or ethnic and regional origin.

In reaching these objectives, European progressives have to provide political support and have to demand their respective governments to make a link between their economic and financial relationship with Morocco and the real attitude to human rights of the Moroccan government and to the satisfaction of the real needs of the population, particularly the fight against poverty, illiteracy and unemployment.

*Local partner: Unified Socialist Party*

The transformation Serbia has gone through since the break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s has been very dynamic, to say the least: from a dictatorship heavily involved in the wars in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, bombed by NATO, then a peaceful revolution and democratisation and now towards a semi-authoritarian regime that started EU accession negotiations in January of 2014. After years of a pro-European democratic government, Aleksandar Vucic – former member of the Serbian Radical Party and minister of information during Milosevic's regime – and his Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) took power in 2012. He continued the pro-European course of the former government but suppressed free media and civil society, centralised power and weakened the rule of law. The EU has tolerated this backlash as it hoped Vucic was the 'right guy' to make a deal with on the status of Kosovo. Against this backdrop, mass protests have erupted over corruption scandals. A recent trigger for protests was an assault on Serbian Left opposition party leader Borko Stefanovic. Since then, protest are organised in Belgrade and other cities in Serbia every Saturday under the umbrella of '1 in 5 million' protests movements. The name was chosen after Vucic stated he would not meet any of protesters demands even if 5 million people would show up on the streets. Although the protest movement seems to have lost momentum and lacks a clear strategy, it is united in its call for Vucic' resignation and free and fair elections. The divided opposition in some cases even managed to join forces politically by establishing the Alliance for Serbia of several parties who consider themselves social democratic. Feeling the pressure of the mass protests, the ruling SNS organised – in a typical authoritarian style – several pro-government meetings for which Vucic supporters were bussed in free of charge from all over Serbia. Vucic' strength partly lies in a lack of ideas and enthusiasm of the opposition parties. Citizens' determination to see change happen could be even greater if there were a strong opposition alternative at the next elections in 2020. The opposition meanwhile hopes for a North Macedonia scenario: with pressure from the EU and US for free and fair elections. A crucial part would be free public media and a clean-up of electoral lists.

Like in other countries in South-east Europe, most participants in the training seminar noted that unemployment is the main issue young people face. After finishing school, disappointed by the lack of job opportunities, many young people emigrate to EU member states. Consequently, the system is losing not only resources invested in education of people but highly educated people and increasingly the middle class as well. Education itself is a challenge as well. During their education young people are often financially completely dependent on their parents. The rigid education system provides them with very little room to work, and after finishing their studies it is very hard to find a job in line with their qualifications. In addition, corruption in the education system is a huge problem. For example, many politicians have been exposed by investigative journalism platforms for plagiarism and obtaining fake diplomas. Students have very little trust in the education system and prefer studying abroad. Finally, there is a lack of trust in politics in general. Young people show very little interest to participate in the decision-making process or to

get active in political and social organisations. They consider that, in order to advance in society, it is much more important to have political connections rather than institutional channels. Youngsters often say politicians 'are all the same'. These are the reasons for little political activism and low voter turnout.

The Deepening Democracy project has offered a great opportunity to progressive activists and youth members of political parties to discuss their challenges and develop joint initiatives. Due to a lack of mutual trust they usually do not have these opportunities even though they often share values and ideas. Benefits of the seminar are twofold: participants improve their skills and enhance their network, while trainers gain experience in working in different countries. In this regard the addition of international trainers – who received training during the previous FEPS-FMS project – had been an excellent addition to the project. The seminar is very well designed; with great workshop results at the end that can be translated into political action. However, it takes a big effort from the trainers to bring the participants to that point. The enthusiasm during the seminar is often lost afterwards due to a lack of incentives among participants to try to implement their ideas in a very difficult political and social context.

Due to a successful divide and rule policy of the ruling party, the opposition in Serbia is very weak and divided. In addition, it lacks resources and has been unable to formulate a strategy and implement tactics to form an alternative to the current government. The elections in Serbia show that a culture of democratic election processes is still lacking. For example: parties who share values and agenda fight each other over positions and privileges. Serbia needs a strong and united opposition that grooms new, younger political candidates. Young people have more trust in independent institutions (Ombudsman) and non-governmental organisations than in those who hold political power. They recognise that most state institutions do not act for the common good and that public resources are often misused.

It is unlikely that the current wave of protests will lead to resignation of Vucic and free and fair elections. While – with support from international partners – the opposition movement has to fight for democracy and the rule of law in Serbia, at the same time it has to develop a clear strategy on how to move forward in order to offer a credible alternative. Close cooperation between progressive movements and political parties is required for this.

*Local partner: Center of Modern Skills*

Tunisian politics can be best described as volatile. Outgoing Prime Minister Youssef Chahed last year left the party that appointed him – the biggest secular party Nidaa Tounes – and took with him a large number of members of parliament, forming a new parliamentary group. This caused a severe crisis between the Prime Minister and another Nidaa Tounes leader, the then President Beji Caid Essebsi. In early 2019, Chahed founded his own new political party – Tahya Tounes – using the means and tools of the state. More recently, Nidaa Tounes faced another big split. Two rival factions organised their own party congresses, electing their own new leadership. While in 2014 secular forces were united in the Nidaa Tounes project, which brought them a big win, since then the party has fragmented. The party that is benefiting most from this is the moderate Islamist group of Ennahda. In the meantime, outside parliament new political forces are gathering strength. One of them is Nabil Karoui, a former member of Nidaa Tounes, and described as the Berlusconi of Tunisia. He owns Nessma, one of the largest TV channels, which voices its anti-government position. He has also created an NGO charity to provide goods to the poor. This is broadcasted daily on Nessma TV which has increased Karoui's popularity. In May 2019, he announced that he would run for the presidency and shortly after he was polling the highest of all potential candidates. In September's presidential runoff, Karoui managed to reach the second round, after which he lost against another political outsider, law professor Kais Saied.

Another worrying development is the rise of Abir Moussi, a former mid-level leader of the party of Ben Ali, the president ousted in the 2011 revolution. She has created her own political platform attracting conservatives and hardliners from the former regime. Moussi has pledged to change the constitution and to put Islamists party members in jail. She is often compared to the leader of the French Rassemblement National, Marine le Pen. Her success is explained by analysts as a reaction to the disappointing economic conditions. The country's economic state is not benefiting from the situation. Its currency, the dinar, has devalued significantly since 2014 (1€=2,1 TND in 2014, to 1€=3,5 in 2019). This has caused widespread anger, especially against the government, but also against politicians in general. Lastly, when it comes to the judiciary, there has been deadlock since October 2015 about the installation of the full constitutional court.

Young people in Tunisia face the three main issues and challenges. First of all, Tunisia has a very high unemployment rate. Since the 2011 revolution, there has been no adequate change in the way the government tackles this issue. As a result, many young Tunisians have migrated, regularly or irregularly. The first problem has led to issue number two: brain drain, the migration of young people with higher education. Despite the fact that migration has historically been part of Tunisia's narrative, the level has risen and the composition of migration outflows has changed. This is mainly due to the unstable social and political situation and prospects of the country. Tunisia is left with an imbalance in the ratio of qualified versus unqualified workers. Thirdly, there is a loss of hope, not only

amongst young people, but within the whole population. There is widespread disappointment about the social and economic situation and how the problems are being addressed by political actors. There is a feeling that politicians are only motivated by their own interests. Corruption, a biased media and unaccountable flows of money make young people lose hope for positive change and thus abandon political and civil participation. Tunisia needs to tackle this issue in order to build a 'second republic' and a more efficient, fair and inclusive development model.

Future seminars should focus on ways to give people hope, to let them believe in a better future, especially young people. Young people are sceptical about change. They should be put in a condition to shape the change themselves, to become drivers of change. In addition, activists from progressive parties should be provided with the skills and tools to attract and involve youths who are not yet active in the civil and political sphere.

European progressive movements should continue supporting the democratic transition which is still ongoing in Tunisia. They should strive to include young people in this transition by involving them in politics and civil society. In order to reach the youth, social media campaigning with the right targeting tool should be reinvented with content that better fits the specific needs of the target population. Moreover, there is a lot of work to do on the subject of political awareness among youngsters. They should be empowered in order to become rational actors instead of falling for populist speeches. Lastly, specific action is needed to develop entrepreneurship, both social and in business. This could revive Tunisia's underperforming economy. Tunisia's strong civil society actors kept the country on the right track after the revolution, but this still a work in progress.

*Local partner: Solidar Tunisia, Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties – Ettakatol*

In 2019, substantial political changes took place in Ukraine, and their dynamics are intensifying. Three main trends of the 2018-2019 political life can be discerned: 1) the emergence of new approaches in political technologies during the presidential elections of April 2019, along with a dominant role for online media and digitalisation; 2) more active mobilisation of young people during elections; 3) strengthening of the impact of anti-corruption investigations and political movements.

In the spring of 2019, presidential elections were held in Ukraine, which were won by an 'outsider' candidate, i.e. a candidate that had not been part of or had any dealings with the existing political elites: comedian Volodymyr Zelensky. In the second round he received 73.22% of the votes, while the incumbent president Petro Poroshenko gained only 24.45% of the voters' support. What was the cause of this? The main factor was the activation of young people and others that had for many years felt excluded from the decision-making process, with the help from online communication. Digitalisation and professional use of new media have become basic tools for distributing central messages and communicating with voters by the campaign managers of most of the candidates. Politicians were actively using viral video clips and online advertising tools on social networks such as YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. There were also many online live streams from party congresses, events and campaigns throughout Ukraine. Such active communication in the online space increased the involvement of young people in the elections, which was almost record-breaking.

A state that seeks progressive development requires the fullest possible involvement of young people in transformational processes and political decision-making. Despite the fact that in Ukraine young people have big hopes for politics, they still try to keep out of it. There are three main reasons for this: 1) the young generations do not trust state authorities. Only 4% of young people in Ukraine believe that their opinion is even considered in the decision-making process. This is due to the bureaucracy, a lack of understanding of the needs of young people and their low engagement in the development of effective tools and adoption of appropriate decisions. 2) For a long time, Ukraine's political system has been under the influence of oligarchs, who directly finance the main political parties and individual politicians. 3) Ukraine is in the 'trap of populism', which is firmly entrenched in political life and has become a steady attribute of the government and its opponents. It has a tendency to acquire new features and become more active during critical periods of Ukrainian history.

Ukrainian youth is confident that politics can be different. Attracting voters' attention is possible not only with advertising run on primetime TV and thousands of billboards throughout the country, but also with programmes and campaigns that are ideologically backed, with a creative and non-standard approach, through working with young people in social networks and involving the population in various initiatives. Populism in politics,

as a basis of communication, only has a negative impact in the long run. At the core of any campaign there should be an ideological basis and set of principles, which politicians should consider first and foremost when adopting and declaring all political decisions. This is the foundation for political stability and for building a relationship of trust with society. Young people should be involved in the development and implementation of socially important campaigns. These campaigns include fighting populism, developing tools to increase the media literacy of young people, conducting information campaigns on ideologies and raising the level of political education.

The lack of institutional capacity to ensure inclusivity in politics is one of the biggest problems in Ukraine. First of all, the electoral code works in such a way that public representatives and new social movements cannot get elected without belonging to political parties or influential financial-industrial groups. Today, young people in Ukraine support independent political movements more than parties; therefore, it is important to pursue electoral reforms that, at least at the local level, will allow balloting from civil society organisations that truly advocate human rights. This will gradually create the conditions for a transition to inclusive policy, starting from the local level. As electoral reform is a complex process that requires bringing together many political forces, it is important for European progressives to stand with the progressive young people of Ukraine, and help push and/or coax the Ukrainian political elites in this direction. Especially considering the newly emerging major political player in the person of the new president and his political party, which has not yet clearly defined itself on many social questions, there seems to be a window of opportunity for such change.

Another point concerns the process of decentralisation in Ukraine, which is strongly supported by the European Union but lacks inclusiveness in Ukraine itself. Any willingness to unite local communities is supported by financial motivations and the prospects of financial gain rather than solidarity. A significant added value of the European progressive political forces will be the promotion of a more inclusive decentralisation process and demonstration of the best democratic practices of decentralisation in the EU. This will provide important knowledge to the Ukrainian youth progressive political youth movements and will motivate them to participate more actively in the 2020 local elections in Ukraine. Trainings like the ones provided by the FEPS-FMS Deepening Democracy project are another valuable tool in sharing knowledge and skills and motivating young Ukrainians to become more active in their country's politics, on the national as well as local level.

*Local partner: SD Platform*





In the framework of our *Deepening Democracy in EU Neighbourhood* project, we organized training seminars in 9 countries over the course of 2018 and 2019: Tunisia, Morocco and Lebanon in the MENA region, Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina in SEE region and Armenia, Belarus and Ukraine in Eastern Europe and Southern Caucasus. The trainings were tailor-made for each country, but in general focussed on the key topics of inclusive politics, youth participation and human rights. The present publication summarises the outcomes of those trainings, with contributions on those subject by our local partners in each country.

The **Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS)** is the think tank of the social democratic political family at EU level. Our mission is to develop innovative research, policy advice, training and debates to inspire and inform progressive politics and policies across Europe. We operate as hub for thinking to facilitate the emergence of progressive answers to the challenges that Europe faces today. FEPS works in close partnership with its members and partners, forging connections and boosting coherence among stakeholders from the world of politics, academia and civil society at local, regional, national, European and global levels..

The **Foundation Max van der Stoep (FMS)** is a political foundation affiliated with the Dutch Labour Party. The vision of FMS stems from a social democratic background with international solidarity as its mission. The FMS believes that the voice of people in developing countries should resound in Dutch and European politics. In order to put development cooperation on the top of the political agenda, the FMS advocates fair Dutch and European politics and organises political debates and public events on international solidarity.

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