

Preface

This volume is a product of collaboration among a group of social scientists from the Western Balkans within the South East European Research Network (SEERN) which was convened under the auspices of the Faculty Development in South East Europe Programme at the London School of Economics and Political Science. The main objective of the Programme, supported by the Open Society Institute, was to support higher education institutions in the aftermath of the break-up of former Yugoslavia in rebuilding their teaching and research capacity, by modernising curricula and upgrading teaching and research skills.

Regional cooperation represented an important and strong aspect of the programme, with an ambition to pursue different types of activities where the partner institutions had common interest, enabling the best use of the available knowledge and expertise to address many common challenges facing this region. For most academics participating in the programme, the pressure and demand to generate policy-relevant knowledge spurred foremost by the international donors' involvement in the domestic governance was a novel professional experience, having come from a system where collaboration between academia and the policy making community was negligible.

Bridging that gap by strengthening the capacity to produce expert knowledge that can be used by policy makers, and strengthening the dialogue between the two communities, has been the main motive for partnering with the World Bank Group's International Finance Corporation Advisory Services initiative to set up the network of policy makers in South East Europe. In November 2010, the two networks met in Tirana to talk about the issues of competitiveness in the Western Balkans, and the kernels of most of the contributions to this volume were laid in the course of those conversations. All chapter authors are established experts in their respective area who were asked to shift their analytical gaze to the policy making process and elaborate on the theme of competitiveness, by looking at specific reform episodes and the role of policy makers and political factors that drive policy choices and policy implementation in their respective country setting. So, in an important way, the case studies collected in this volume are the product of a joint effort to strengthen the capacity of the academic community in the Western Balkans to produce

policy-relevant knowledge and to engage in the policy making process. In terms of a broader contribution to the scholarship on policy making, these case studies provide a prism for examining the key elements of the policy making process in a region with a turbulent recent history of war and post-totalitarian transition, which has so far received scant attention in this area of social science. It is against this background that we hope this volume contributes to a modest body of empirical work on public policy making in the Western Balkans.

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