

**Forum:** General Assembly  
**Issue:** Ensuring voting security in transitional countries in the Balkan region  
**Student Officer:** Yulim Koo  
**Position:** Chair of General Assembly 1

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## Introduction

For centuries, the Balkans faced instability and tension due to the conflicting interests of nearby great powers (from the Ottomans and the Austro-Hungarians to the Russians and the Americans). This created an unstable region for the citizens to live in. Currently, all the Balkan States are republics but they were not like this from the beginning — they did go through a drastic transformation after being through several wars including the World Wars and the Balkan Wars.



Figure 1 The Balkan Region

The Balkans were always an area of dispute. They were once grouped together as Yugoslavia, a country in the Southeastern and Central Europe that existed for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was a place of the fight between the Axis and Allied powers. After the world wars, there was a catastrophic collapse of communism and lost power after facing massive opposition. The Balkans have then started putting in efforts in forming a democratic government system. In other words, the countries in this region have effectively gone from brutal autocracies into functioning democracies. A specific example is Albania; in Albania, Enver Hoxha's death in 1985 caused the Communist domination to slowly fade away and in 1992, it was able to form a parliamentary democracy. Apart from this, Bosnia and Herzegovina survived from a horrific war and was able to declare independence, establishing a democratic state in 1994. Furthermore, in Serbia, the Communist federation gave way to a more democratic nation because citizens rose up and rebelled for their rights.

However, the Balkan region is still perceived as weak states that are in need of international support. After experiencing a period of transition as well as ethnic conflict, there was a decline in the standard of living and reduced the economic growth rate. Due to the deterioration of inter-ethnic relations within regions and the lack of multicultural policies, the ethnic divisions in the Balkan region is a large obstacle for stability, security, and democracy. For example, in Albania, over-politicization of electoral

institutions has lowered the effectiveness and reliability of these institutions. They need to be less engaged when it comes to politics and shouldn't be too involved in things like policymaking. Politics should not be covering daily life excessively, meaning people should not be too engaged with politics and policymaking. The same goes for other Balkan nations as well — In Bosnia and Herzegovina, ethno-nationalism along with patronage politics are dominating the election processes, weakening public faith. This is because each ethnic group had a tendency to vote along ethnic-nationalist lines even though they were not really satisfied and impressed with the party leaders; they feared that politicians that do not belong to their ethnic group would gain political power. Moreover, in Serbia, efforts to consolidate a democratic government system are being hampered by corrupted politics and the lack of public's interest, resulting in the deterioration of general politics due to unfair electoral competition and management. There are policies that aimed to address these conflicts. However, there still needs to be an appropriate yet different approach towards each country in the Balkan region.

Throughout the Balkan region, the parliament was established in countries such as Albania and Kosovo from votes in nationwide elections according to the laws written in the Constitution. However, because of its non-respected legal framework and weak administrative capacities, the quality of legislation is getting jeopardized. Due to the lengthy colonial period, they still need a period of stabilization for the Balkan nations to form a consolidated government, however, change is needed in order to improve the current situation.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Voting Security

Voting security means any security that allows the people voting to choose which candidate they want to vote for and are given the rights to do so. In regards to this issue at hand, transparency of voting procedures is not fully adapted, thus leading to the loss of basic voting security during elections. The nations must start providing public oversight and allow the public to see and verify the election processes. They should start working towards making a stable and resilient democratic government.

### Balkan states

This term is used to describe several countries that are in the Southeastern side of Europe. Some of the examples include Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia and so on. In regards to this issue at hand, the Balkan region is facing problems with voting security; democratic gains in this region are fragile and there needs to be a development plan for further improvements.

### Transitional economy

A transitional economy is the transformation of a planned economy to a market economy. This

means that it used to be an economic system in which all the decisions were made by the government or the state, but now it is a system in which decisions are made according to the citizens and private businesses. Voting security in a transitional economy is unstable and this is an important problem to address because it is essential for the functioning of democracy.

## **Politicization**

Politicization is when actions are taken in order to cause an event or activity to become political or more involved in political matters. Being intensely politicized, also known as over-politicization, will be ineffective for the nations in general because it will lead to bureaucracy and intensity bias if it is beyond a certain degree. This will lead to inflated expectations of what democracy can bring.

## **General Overview**

### **Albania**

#### *Background and context*

Due to the overwhelming political pressure caused by citizen protests and regional pressure caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union, Albania became a democratic government in 1991. They liberalized their economy and were able to start reforming international ties. From 1992 to 1997, the Democratic Party led the nation. However, civil unrest caused the Ponzi scheme to collapse. This is a fraudulent investment operation that uses money from subsequent contributors to pay back to the initial contributors, first being formed by Hajdin Sejdia. The Albanian citizens relied heavily on this and invested most of their money, but because of the catastrophic collapse, it resulted in a seven-month period of anarchy and civil war, killing 2,000 civilians. After this conflict, the Socialist Party took power and from then on, socialist and democratic parties went back and forth. The last coalition was a social democratic party that was splintered off from the Socialist Party.

However, even though democracy took power for more than 25 years, the Communist regime is still entrenched in major parties and in terms of political culture in Albania. One effect of this unresolved electoral issue is that a huge population mistrusts the country's democratic institutions, causing electoral issues. In fact, according to a 2014 Standard Eurobarometer Survey in Albania, 46% of the respondents did not trust the national government and only 41% did, meaning that more than half of the people who responded were mistrusting it. Albania's political climate will not improve unless there are changes made to the legal or regulatory environment that shapes the elections and political life.

Overall, Albania went through a drastic change during the past 25 years, including the economic transition from a command economy to a market economy and the transition from a communist state to democracy. Even though they are free of ethnic and religious tensions, the democratic structure in this country still is fragile and vulnerable. One of the major reason behind all these weakness is excessive

politicization. The democratic potential is hindered by pervasive politicization that discourages the electoral votings. They still have room for improvements and should aim to achieve for better and efficient laws.

### *Limitations: Electoral and political issues*

Electoral malpractice is one of the major issues Balkan nations are facing as of now. Albania currently is failing to follow the democratic ideals; it is indicated that there is a widespread perception of electoral malpractice. It includes things such as vote buying, exchanging votes for money, and voter intimidation. Fortunately, the European Union (EU) announced its initiative on electoral reforms in 2015 and with the interlocutor research, they have decided to focus more on judicial aspect. This initiative enabled the nations to reflect on electoral malpractice they are currently facing and come up with recommendations for electoral reforms. This for sure did affect Albanian elections in 2013 and 2015 positively and will inevitably affect the future elections in the future.

Furthermore, there are still occasions where political parties are buying individuals' identification in order to manipulate the election results. This is a very concerning aspect of governing in Albania as well as the other Balkan states because selling or buying illegally in the black market is still unknown to the public and this will inevitably harm the democracy itself. The manipulation of votes needs to be better fought against by strengthening identifications when voting, and in the bigger picture educate the public on taking responsibility for their own votes.

## **Serbia**

### *Background and context*

After decades of authoritarian rule in Serbia, in 2000, the nation was able to bring down Slobodan Milosevic's authoritarian government and transition into democracy. Thus, it was able to start regular elections—a peaceful transfer of power for future presidential or main legislative elections. Serbia transitioned considerably from 2008 to 2012. During this period, the democratic system and the socialist party governed in a coalition. However, soon after that, the nation started becoming weaker due to the unfair electoral competition among opposing parties. The fragile nature of this democratic government system is putting Serbia at the risk for backsliding.

### *Limitations: Electoral and political issues*

In Serbia, there are limited inspections on executive power, mainly because the parliament does not have enough power, in other words, enough support from the public. They are struggling to achieve democratic stability while weak legislatures have caused the collapse of trust towards the parliament. In fact, there are not enough civil organizations that have the needed assistance and have structural support as well. This means that whilst the structure of the organizations is not systematic enough, the civilians

are still not as passionate and successful about bringing equality in power in voting. Currently, there is no opposition party that can effectively overrule the socialists. While the democratic party is growing, severe internal strife led the party to break down into smaller ones, preventing them from forming a strong opposition party. The internal strife, including the Kosovar's shouts for independence in 2008 are merely contributing to the disharmony of Serbia. Furthermore, the Serbian legislature is known for having a lack of vital debates that deal with policy issues. Serbia's democracy is also limited by the lack of independent media outlets. According to some of the media professionals in Serbia, they believe that the outlets are used to advance their political agendas, but are mostly owned by those that have a close relationship with the government. Thus, it makes it hard to make media outlets remain independent from governmental influence.

Another limitation is that the quality of electoral administration is deteriorating; the Republic Electoral Commission (RIK) does not have enough experienced staff and caused organizational issues during days of the election, mainly caused by the lack of passionate individuals to contribute better. Consequently, even though Serbia experienced many elections since 2000, the country still is a novice in the conduct of elections. In fact, in 2016, the RIK complained that poll workers had only a limited understanding of their work and could not fulfill their responsibilities efficiently and effectively. Insufficient training and knowledge about electoral management will affect the voting security in the Balkan region.

## **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

### *Background and context*

Bosnia and Herzegovina emerged after the Yugoslav wars that caused it to separate into seven states. In particular, this state went through several conflicts including the Bosnian war, which was an ethnic conflict that occurred between Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats. This resulted in ethnic cleansing and caused 100,000 people to die. This kind of conflicts are continuing to harm the politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Communist rule continued to influence the nation's politics and electoral systems, often leading to divisive ethno-nationalist appeals. This created an environment where parties take power and dominate.

Until now, their political system is known to be the world's most complex system. They have a highly decentralized federal structure—they are divided into two entities that have major political power: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) that is in the west part of the state and the Republika Srpska (RS) in the north and east. FBiH is populated by Muslim Bosniaks and Catholic Croats whereas RS is populated by Orthodox Serbs. Even though the state government is responsible for things like defense and customs, these two sub-national entities are very important and function as a state.

### *Limitations: Electoral and political issues*

Due to the complex and rigid system of division between ethnics, votes are primarily determined by ethnicity rather than ideologies or approaches to policy. Hence, election campaigns cause interethnic tensions to amplify and some citizens are fearing that one ethnic group will take power and influence the economic structure of the nation.

Adding on, the judiciary is ineffective in prosecuting those powerful officials; they often run away without being punished mainly because of the lack of effort in the Prosecutor's office in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This shows that they need to work more effectively in combatting corruption as well as electoral malpractice. Also, civil society organizations are underdeveloped and are undermined; in general, they don't have much power in setting public policy agendas and lack general interest in politics or electoral process.

Furthermore, the election system in the nation is so vulnerable and evidence of election malpractice is widely known. This includes irregularities in voter lists at polling places, which can be considered as one of the causes of dispute between electoral commission and the polling station committee. Election process vulnerabilities are evident in most Bosnian elections and are mainly carried out by political parties. Even though Bosnia and Herzegovina relatively have strong election laws, the laws have not yet been implemented properly and need more improvement in this matter.

## **UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events**

The initial implementation of the Reform Agenda that was adopted in July 2015 by Herzegovina and Bosnia. Reform Agenda was introduced in order to modernize the economy of the country and to strengthen the rule of law or administrative capabilities. This worked towards increasing efficiency, especially in public institutions. The security in these Balkan nations has started to remain calm and stable for the past few years, showing the future capability of dealing with security threats and for a better, safer environment. Also, most recently, the Security Council renewed "Multinational Stabilization Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2443 (2018)" and this emphasizes the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina in specific still has a lot of space for improvement. This resolution aimed to work constructively towards implementing fair results in general elections and prioritizing reforms that will benefit citizens.

In June 2017, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), an organization that provides assistance to states and civil society in promoting democracy, started a new three-year project about electoral management in the Western Balkans. They mainly focus on supporting the election-related institutions and give recommendation related to management, voter registration, and the conduct of media during election campaigns. So far, it was able to bring successful outcomes because it was able to start to make and strengthen democratic reforms in the Western Balkans. The weakness is that it wasn't emphasized enough



Furthermore, the Balkan nations and the European Union (EU) are also cooperating towards a common shared vision of a transparent future that would cement responsibility of ensuring transparency and security of voting in the region for the better good for the whole of European Union. Government and each of the parties are now at the point of heading towards adhering to the law of ethnic division, crime, corruption, violent extremism, and terrorism. Whether they will succeed or not will depend on the passion and enthusiasm of the public to reform and secure voting procedures. This is because having a passion means that more people will care about the government system and take more interest in it, which will eventually lead to a better Balkan State.

## Timeline of Events

The timeline covers some of the major news and political developments from the 1990s to nowadays.

Date	Description of event
1990~	After the end of the Yugoslav war in the 1990s, politics in the Western Balkans was dominated by ethno-nationalist parties, which prevented multi-cultural societies to coexist peacefully and led to conflicts
October, 2000	After the presidential elections, Serbia was able to bring down Slobodan Milosevic's authoritarian government. This was a significant election since it helped the nation transition into a democratic nation and a more stable nation
December, 2009	Serbia sends a formal application in order to join the European Union and after the council's recommendation in February 28 <sup>th</sup> , 2012, the nation was able to receive full candidate status
September, 2016	Croatian conservative party wins the elections and they were able to prevent social democrats from gaining power
June 25th, 2017	Albania's parliamentary election was held in June 25th, 2017 and this election helped figure out the fault lines of democracy in the nation such as over-politicization, malpractice and corruption or even the cynicism of the voting public

## Possible Solutions

Raising awareness for the general public is one of the most crucial components of transparent electoral security. Nations should ensure that citizens' demand for anti-corruption and accountable government should be strengthened. By empowering the citizens, it will be able to build mutual trust

between citizens and government. For instance, there should be monitoring initiatives that can contribute to the detection of corruption as well as reduced leakages of funds. In general, the nations should promote democracy and make sure that the citizens are well informed before they go through the election process. This is because citizens need to know who they are voting for without being disturbed by external influences. They need to remain seized in this matter in order to deal with threats for a safer and a much securer environment.

In addition, the member nations need to ensure that there is stricter enforcement of campaign regulations concerning media and finance; there needs to be a fair and transparent election process. They must ensure that there can be law enforcement made on gender dynamics, particularly for women that may face issues during elections. Also, there needs to be verification of voting results conducted by election officers. International assistance providers such as Supervisory Board and Anti-corruption Agency should contribute to making fairer elections in the Balkan region.

Another method is to support the Central Election Commission in order to create election officers that are more trained and skilled. Central Election Commission is an electoral management body that consists of several members and the chairperson, who is appointed through an open application process. Member nations should continue to support this committee, offering capacity building and training sessions for election commissioners. The committee needs to do technical training for counting teams and voting center commissions. One problem is that some nations tend to replace the officers working at these commissions by bribery charges. This will inevitably lead to untrained officers being assigned to election duties which may seriously affect the voting security and the eventual result. In order to prevent corruption, member nations should encourage the improvement of financial management and the role of auditing agencies—there should be government openness.

For better security, member nations in the Balkan region should all work together in union to improve transparency in internal party processes for the benefit for all of these nations. The international community should help political parties to establish a better, solid method of secure democratic voting procedures. Internal functioning of political parties including candidate selection rules, internal elections for leadership positions and women's representation in the party must be objective and transparent. The international community of the Balkan should aim at reviving efforts to maintain a more intimate relationship with each other, strengthening opportunities of helping each other out. These countries must indeed learn from others and try to promote a democratic culture of political parties in order to head to a fair election process.

Preventing and combatting corruption is crucial when it comes to ensuring voting security in the Balkan region—the United Nations should make sure that they are convinced. It will undermine the Governments' ability to serve the citizens and will definitely act as a brake on development—affecting the overall social and economic development in the nation. This also stresses the importance of the rights and



power of citizens as well as how passionate they are in political matters; this will convince them to aim towards this and try to resolve this issue.

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