

# YOUTH IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE DEMAND A DECENT FUTURE!

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**THE FRIEDRICH-EBERT-STIFTUNG (FES) IS PUBLISHING GROUND-BREAKING REPORTS ON THE EXPERIENCES AND ASPIRATIONS OF YOUTH IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE COVERING A WIDE RANGE OF CRITICAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES.**

## AN OPPORTUNITY FOR WELL-INFORMED YOUTH POLICY

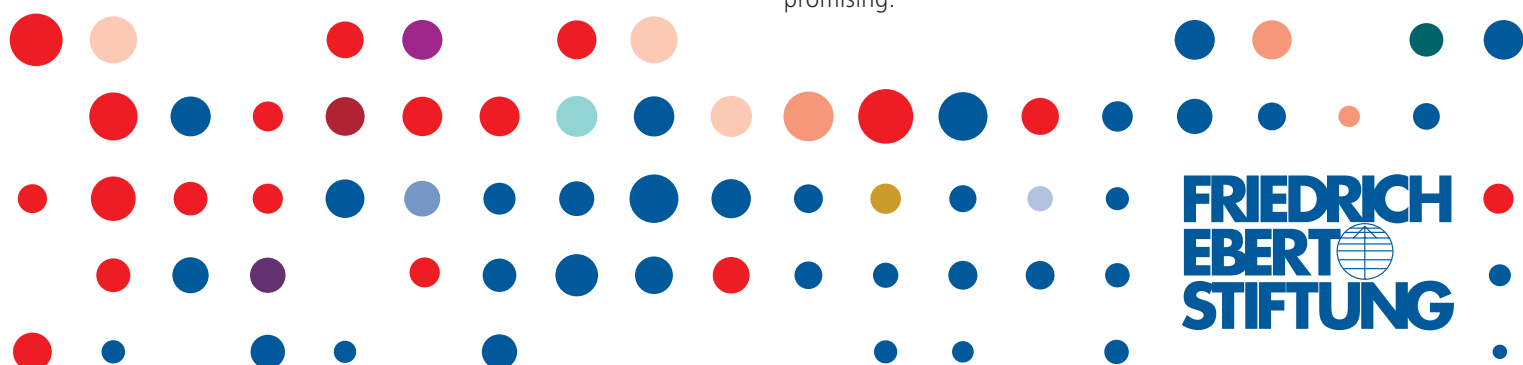
In early 2018, the FES carried out a representative region-wide survey on a sample of more than 10,000 young people aged 14–29 from ten countries in Southeast Europe. The ten national and one regional reports contain a wealth of policy-relevant, comparable data on issues such as migration, employment, and education. They also analyse political values, attitudes, and beliefs of youth in the region and their outlook on the future, providing a point of departure for facts-based policy-making. Addressing the evident lack of channels giving youth a say in politics, the reports are meant to give youth a voice on topics that could make or break their future. The full results as well as the complete dataset are available at [www.fes.de/youth-studies](http://www.fes.de/youth-studies).

## IT'S THE INSECURITY, STUPID

With youth unemployment ranging from 12% to 43%, NEET rates of up to a quarter of the youth population, and 78% on average reporting anxiety over not having a job, youth in Southeast Europe live in a “political economy of insecurity”. In Montenegro and Serbia, the share of non-standard work in total youth employment is as high as 67%. Between one-quarter and one-half of youth state they cannot afford to live independently from their parents. Echoing the global trend of millennial socialism, youth demand equal opportunity and fairer economic arrangements while remaining supportive of open markets and entrepreneurial initiatives. Southeast European youth want an active welfare state, i.e., a stable system of democratic governance reigning in the economic and social uncertainty currently permeating all aspects of their lives. This support is substantially higher among youth with lower socio-economic status.

## EUROPE, THE SOLUTION?

Southeast European youth are overwhelmingly pro-European. Along with the general approval for an active welfare state, this is the most pronounced political and social tendency found by the surveys. Across the region, youth place greater trust in the EU than in their national governments. Membership in the EU enjoys increasing support by a majority, ranging from 56% in Serbia to 95% in Albania. At the same time, youth with a weaker European identity have the most positive image of the EU, which points to some degree of idealisation in the non-member states. Pro-EU orientations are especially strong among youth from socio-economically less developed countries. In general, the EU is appreciated less for its values than for the economic prosperity it is promising.



## PERCEPTION AND TOLERANCE OF CORRUPTION

Youth in Southeast Europe have a good understanding of how corruption delays progress. Besides poverty and social injustice, corruption is reported as a top concern; it is seen as rampant and on the rise, specifically in education and labour markets across the region. In the WB-6 countries, for instance, non-merit factors such as party membership are reported as very important in finding a job. However, tolerance of informal economic practices such as bribery or cheating on taxes is also high and has substantially increased since 2008. Alongside socio-economic development, more commitment to implementing the principles of the rule of law is needed to fight back normalised corruption.

## REJECTION OF TRADITIONAL POLITICS

Youth across the region are quite eager to participate in parliamentary elections. They feel poorly represented and want a stronger say. At the same time, the vast majority are not interested in taking on a political function. From 50% in Macedonia to a staggering 84% in Bulgaria, youth are saying 'no' to traditional politics. Despite this marked disinterest in party politics, there is considerable potential for unconventional political participation, for instance through signing online petitions or taking part in demonstrations. The lack of welfare is perceived most prominently by youth on the political extremes, which implies a certain susceptibility to populism. Survey data even suggest increasing receptivity for autocratic leadership as a potentially more efficient means for achieving social and economic security.

## THE WISH TO BELONG

In the absence of trustworthy politics, European integration or social security, youth – at least in the WB-6 – increasingly turn to tradition and family, exhibiting a narrow radius of trust and conservative cultural values. Chillingly, the shadows of the past are passed on within families; ethno-nationalism continues to feature prominently among young people's worldviews. Leading the list are Albania and Bulgaria, where 58% or 65% respectively believe that it would be best to live in a mono-ethnic society. Notably, respondents in more socio-economically developed countries express far less nationalism and much more inclusive attitudes towards marginalised social groups. Especially for the WB-6, our findings suggest that restoring trust, if not in politics, in a European perspective and social security are necessary for resilient communities and social progress.

## MOBILITY DOES NOT HAVE TO BE ZERO-SUM

The desire to emigrate is ranging from 26% in Montenegro to 43% in Albania. These numbers have been slightly decreasing over the past five years. The strongest drivers of emigration are precarity and pessimistic views on the future of their countries. Notably, youth from EU member states Croatia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, and Romania report a significantly lower desire to leave, especially so when it comes to long-term migration plans. This suggests that EU membership and higher socio-economic development discourage long-term emigration and encourage return or circular migration of youth instead. Despite the availability of mobility programs, few young people in the WB-6 have spent substantial time abroad. Those that have are far less supportive of nationalist ideas and much more interested in politics.

### IMPRINT

**PUBLISHER:** Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

Dialogue Southeast Europe

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**DESIGN:** Andrea Schmidt • Typografie/im/Kontext

**DATE:** 2019

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