

3rd Itinerant Summer University in the Balkans: “Refugees, Migration and Rule of Law in Balkan Countries”

Session I : SKOPJE

12th of September 2016 09:30 –

10:00 Opening Ceremony

Opening speech (excerpt)

(...)

Last year, in July, the Ambassadors of France and Germany expressed the significance that our Itinerant Summer University represents for them, in a spectacular *common declaration* on its beneficial effects in terms of cultural and geopolitical policy, highlighting that our initiative is “consistent with the goals formulated at the Conference of Western Balkan States in Berlin in 2014 that appealed for the expansion of the exchange of the young generations within the region”. Which is why we were particularly thrilled this Spring when the European Commission and the Government of the French Republic, supported by the *European Youth Forum* and the *South East Europe Resource Centre*, were launching a call for applications to the **Western Balkans Youth Conference** organized in Paris, 4 July, in the margins of the 3rd Western Balkans Summit. The *Youth Conference* brought together 150 young people from the EU and Western Balkans countries, to discuss common challenges and work towards finding joint solutions. Questions and working methods the young participants of our Itinerant Summer Universities were perfectly prepared for – in particular due to their active participation in our workshops. Therefore, a number of highly motivated, socially engaged Ph.D. students and Masters students from Skopje, Pristina, Tirana and Podgorica submitted their application – unfortunately without success: these young people were bitterly disappointed, especially since they did not receive any justification for the declined applications.

To my knowledge, there are only few initiatives comparable to ours: lecturers, Ph.D. students and students from France and Germany question - together with their partners from the Balkan countries – the common European roots, as well as the perspectives and strategies of their European integration.

As the *European Motor*, it is up to France and Germany to reflect the role of European law for countries that aspire to adhere to the European Union. Therefore, it is imperative to deal with the identity of the Western Balkan countries, as well as with the conditions of adherence. As you remember, we tried last year to determine to what extent Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania and Montenegro fulfill the *Copenhagen Criteria* in different fields of law for the admission to the EU in a near future.

Beyond the scope of the programme of our last Summer University, the *refugee question* and its challenge for Europe was the prevailing topic: the *Balkanroute* of over half a million (2015) migrants started at the Greek-Macedonian border as we all know. Macedonia strived to cope with its role as transit-country for refugees whose goal was to reach Austria or Germany. Considering the desperate attempts of the country

to channel the flows of refugees into organized paths, respecting humanitarian standards, the media sought our advice. In a television interview we presented ourselves as optimistic that this problem of European impact would be solved sooner or later *together* and that Macedonia would thereby have the opportunity to prove itself as a trustworthy partner and therefore to recommend itself for an adherence to the EU in the near future: „ That’s a European problem, you are not alone. We see that Germany, France and other countries are preparing a project to integrate **these** refugees. So that’s a very important function that your country has to play, in cooperation with us. We think that’s even a possibility for better integration of Macedonia in the European policy, it’s a chance” (TV TELMA). This interview was held on September 12th. Our optimism – as you surely noted – was still marked by the *welcoming culture (Willkommenskultur)* of chancellor Angela Merkel (“Wir schaffen das”). But just one day later, on September 13th, the reversal of the tendency was beginning: the German government commanded the temporary reintroduction of controls especially at the Austrian border.

You are aware of the further developments.

No one in this room will disagree with me when I claim that Europe has not – despite decreasing migration figures – been able to manage or permanently solve the refugee crisis until this day, whether on a political or legal basis. The EU-Turkey *Refugee Convention* from March has never been more controversial, not only because there is more doubt than confidence related to its efficiency: since the attempted coup last July, Turkey is tending towards an authoritarian regime that disregards fundamental principles of the rule-of-law, which causes an increasing alienation of the partners and could lead to the failure of the convention. But the main reason for the declining flow of refugees, as our Macedonian friends know all too well, is the closing of the *West-Balkan-route*.

The dramatic events of this Spring in South-East and Central-Europe have urged some of us to contribute in March to an *appeal* of social networks directed to the French president and the German chancellor who came together in Paris for the preparation of the Turkey-Deal. We joined the appeals to humanity and to common sense emanating from the *civil society*, addressed to the European governments, to agree on a fair distribution of refugees: “Together, you can bring Europe to implement a plan that guarantees our security, that comes to the rescue of the most vulnerable, and that protects our values. We also ask you to stop European countries from building more walls and barriers. These initiatives that violate international law are the origin of an unacceptable violence towards those who are fleeing war. Finally, we are convinced that it is crucial to provide humanitarian help for Turkey and Greece so that all refugees may find a refuge and that programmes can be implemented in order to improve their access to education, health care and employment”. Some of us suggested even to our Macedonian partners a *solidarity walk* from the Greek-Macedonian border to Skopje. But this idea has clearly become obsolete since the closing of the *Balkan Route*.

The 3rd Itinerant Summer University in the Balkans opening today with the title *Refugees, Migration and Rule of Law in Balkan Countries* does not content itself with

the status of a purely *academic* event. Contrary to its two predecessors, it is open to *civil society*. Thanks to the efforts of our colleagues from Skopje, the active involvement of the *Macedonian Youth Lawyer Association* - a non governmental organisation (NGO) at the service of refugee aid and in close cooperation with the *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees* (UNHCR) and the *International Organisation for Migration* (IOM) - in our program is possible.

What also makes this third Summer University particularly attractive is that it enhances the collaboration between partner universities - as impressively shown by the presence of delegations from Pristina (Kosovo) and for the first time from Tirana (Albania) at this first session here in Skopje - and it also broadens our cooperation network to other Balkan countries : to Serbia and Bulgaria. The second session will already be taking place at a new partner university: at the *Sofia University St Kliment Ohridski*.

Particular emphasis must be laid on the fact that the **students** are becoming increasingly important *actors* of these Summer Universities. Because the number of *workshops* that enable them to work in groups is increasing every year and their composition promotes international law comparison. Skopje represents a remarkable novelty: this year, over 40 Master students from Macedonia, Kosovo, France and Germany will come together - every day - to exchange on the legal aspects of the refugee issue. The itinerant Summer University is therefore on the verge of reaching one of its main objectives : to become a *forum for the interactive dialogue* (...).

Pr. Otmar Seul, Université Paris - Nanterre