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Introduction

Given the many challenges facing the Western Balkan countries, we aim to understand whether and what kind of role clientelism plays in the crisis of democracy in the region. Our aim is to explain why clientelism is so dominant in Western Balkan societies and how it undermines the main pillars of democracy such as the rule of law and protection of civil liberties. In the chapter, we argue that the persistence of clientelistic practices originates in the historically present practices of informality that have been adapted to the current political environment. Since 2000, with the establishment of more defined political power structures, both electoral promises and public policies were more focused on protecting individual and small group interests, while the broader society's aspirations were pushed to the background. It also is difficult to portray the Western Balkans' political context outside the framework of EU accession and any assessment of the nature of the informal networks in these countries must be viewed also through the prism of their aspiration to join the EU. For all the improvements that have been made since 2004 to the tools, methods and approaches to enlargement, illiberal practices and authoritarian tendencies abound, much to the dismay of the EU and the citizens of the Balkan aspirants. We argue that political clientelism is one of the most difficult problems in the Western Balkans and its existence has been continuously undermining democratic principles that started emerging in the new states.

It is common to hear people from the Western Balkans share stories about having to use personal networks to obtain a job. Most commonly, the path to employment in these countries does not depend on one's knowledge, education, experience or skills, but rather on whether people know someone who is in a position to 'plant' them somewhere. Jobs and other commodities are usually obtained through social networks or political party affiliations. In some countries, there is a specific expression for personal networks that have a potential to produce gain, like *štela* in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

Western Balkan societies are strongly based on personal networks that result in inequalities and uneven distribution of opportunities through nepotism, clientelism and patrimonialism. These practices create negative and destructive dynamics within social relations that disempower many citizens and can prevent individuals or groups from interacting with each other on a personal, everyday level, leading to isolation and the breaking down of the social fabric. In ethnically diverse societies, with large ethnically defined groups, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia, the existence of personal and family networks also creates a perception that the majority ethnic group has the upper hand and control over social, economic and political resources. This phenomenon is not restricted to majority groups, as ethnic minorities are equally prone to clientelistic practices, such as when the leadership of the ruling minority party distributes certain opportunities to personal networks of members and supporters.

This chapter will provide an overview of clientelistic practices and their negative impact on the Western Balkan democracies with a clear emphasis on the asymmetrical and hierarchical nature of the social relationship between a patron and a client, and its reciprocal character. Given the many challenges facing the Western Balkan countries, the aim is to understand the manner and extent to which clientelism contributes to the crisis of democracy in the region.

What is clientelism?

Clientelism is a cross-cutting phenomenon that harms state-citizen relations, including voter participation and formal institutions, both in terms of their effectiveness and accountability; it also undermines trust and confidence in political and private institutions, as well as the freedom of the media. Clientelism has many faces and even though its manifestations are often easily identifiable by ordinary people, theoretically it lacks clarity and tends to be mixed up with concepts and practices such as corruption, nepotism and patrimonialism. They also represent a type of informal exchange that is a) often used interchangeably with clientelism and b) widespread in the Western Balkans. These concepts are often interchangeably used, and are also equally detrimental to formal institutions, albeit different in nature and outcome to clientelism. Corruption and nepotism are often used as proxies in the study of clientelism but they come with serious methodological limitations, because this

approach fails to grasp the nature of the clientelistic phenomenon and its socio-cultural background.[1] A specific focus of the chapter will be on political clientelism as an explicit political strategy and a type of political exchange that is typical in the Western Balkan societies.[2]

Clientelism is a system of direct exchange between individuals or small groups that is processual in character[3] and can thrive in both autocracies and democracies, as well as in different cultural contexts as one finds in the Western Balkans.[4] Even political clientelism and patronage were generally understood as cultural in nature where the way interpersonal relationships are established and maintained was assigned to societal norms and cultural practices that were mirrored onto the political sphere.[5] This approach required further attention to explain clientelism.

Clientelism is usually defined as an informal hierarchy, a network that operates within or coexists with formal institutions and that is focused on the patron's exercise of influence (Weingrod, 1968).[6] As such, it is most commonly used to describe failure and shortcomings of an institutional setting or to denote a system in which "socially shared rules, usually unwritten […] are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels."[7] It also characterises "social relations where personal loyalty to a patron prevails over democratic decision-making, professional duties and ethical behaviour.[8] Despite the fact that it relies on unequal power relations, where one party is on the distributing and the other on the receiving end, it has a 'reciprocal' character and represents a personal and enduring affective relationship

[1] Wolfgang Muno, "Conceptualizing and Measuring Clientelism," paper presented at the workshop "Neopatrimonialism in Various World Regions", GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies, Hamburg, August 23 2010.
[2] Allen Hicken, "Clientelism," *The Annual Review of Political Science* (2011), 289-310, at 292.
[3] In fact, until political scientists became interested in it, anthropological and historical studies were often exclusively preoccupied with the nature of the relationships and the phenomena itself.
[4] Hicken, *Clientelism*.
[5] Piattoni, Simona. "Clientelism in historical and comparative perspective." Clientelism, interests, and democratic representation: The European experience in historical and comparative perspective (2001): 1-30.
[6] Alex Weingrod, "Patrons, Patronage, and Political Parties," 10(4) *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (1968), 377-400.
[7] Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky, "Informal Institutions and Comparative Politics: a Research Agenda", Working Paper #307, Helen Kellogg Institute, Notre Dame University (2003), at 725.
[8] Alexander Kotchegura, *Civil Service Reform in Post-Communist Countries. The Case of the Russian Federation and the Czech Republic* (Leiden: Leiden University Press.2008).

from which both sides essentially derive some sort of benefit. Clientelism is at odds with the 'ideal type' of a bureaucratic system that is based on norms of rationality, anonymity and universalism.[9] The fact that both the patron and client derive an advantage from the relationship and the informal nature of the networks, represents the main obstacle in tackling clientelism.

The idiosyncrasies of the Western Balkan context

Traditions of clientelism and informality, but also graft practices, were well established in Yugoslavia, and they were further transformed and strengthened by the disorder resulting from the violent breakup of the country. Often, the root causes of clientelism are searched in the past. While this may be justified to some extent, we need to recognise that the nature of clientelism also changes with a societal transformation (see Schmidt at all., 1977)[10] and even though some of its practices may echo the Communist or even pre-Communist format and style, the new political elites in the new states have developed their own networks that allow them to maintain power. The context of state-building and wars that characterised the Balkans' socio-economic and democratic transformation effectively allowed the post-communist governments in these countries to enjoy a broad scope in their exercise of power. In fact, talking about Serbia, Sorensen (2003)[11] argues that the social transformation brought about by the Balkan wars led to the development of an illiberal economy (see also Edmunds, 2009). The same argument is valid not just for Serbia but for other Western Balkan countries, as many of them, despite the long and seemingly diverse post-communist transition, maintained similar formal institutions in place[12].

Even though deeply rooted informal structures and institutions in Serbia dated from the pre-socialist era and a slow process of modernisation, they were reinforced by the

[9] Rene Lemarchand and Keith Legg, "Political Clientelism and Development: a Preliminary analysis," 4(2) *Comparative Politics* (1972), 149-178.

[10] Schmidt, Steffen W., Gausti, Laura, Landé, Carl H and Scott, James C, eds. 1977. *Friends, Followers, and Factions: A Reader in Political Clientelism*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

[11] Sorensen, Jens Stilhoff. "War as social transformation: Wealth, class, power and an illiberal economy in Serbia." *Civil Wars* 6.4 (2003): 55-82.

[12] However, as number of authors showed, informal networks shouldn't be seen as exclusively historically determined and linked to the past.

socialist system's nurturing of personal ties.[13] Adam Riley[14] uses the term 'refeudalisation' to describe the state of political affairs in the Western Balkans, where the power is held by informal networks. Each of the new states saw the emergence of political elites who resorted to nationalist mobilisation and established themselves financially and institutionally through heavy reliance on the war economies. The politics of nationalist consensus in the Western Balkans yielded thus a critical vacuum in which political parties concentrated power in the executive, fused economic and political clout in the process of privatisation, while simultaneously redistributing existing material assets and benefits preferentially.[15]

As a result, what was supposed to be the democratic transformation of the former Yugoslav republics and neighbouring countries became a struggle to maintain informal institutions as a type of public goods that could be exchanged for voters' support. The current state of affairs is not that dissimilar to the patterns of distribution that existed during the socialist era. Persistent clientelism and patronage, together with corrupt and criminal practices as "informal realities" of the countries going through transition, are main causes for the sluggishness and perpetual failure of the transformation process in the region.[16] Hence, it is important to shift attention away from the formal institutions that are the main focus of the EU's conditionality in the Balkans and zoom instead into the informal sphere of relations and action. In short, despite its best efforts, the EU still does not seem to have the recipe on how to address the systemic character of clientelism in the region, dismantle informal channels of political influence, incentivise key reform stakeholders, and build effective democracies in the Western Balkans. The problem is compounded by the fact that clientelism persists in the member states as well, and the EU also lacks an effective mechanism to deal with the issue in these

[13] Marija Babovic and Slobodan Cvejic, "Briefing on Party Patronage and Clientelism in Serbia," SeConS Development Initiative Group (2006).

[14] Adam Riley, "'Refeudalisation' in the Balkans and the Danger to the EU," *Prospect Magazine* 2013, at http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/other/refeudalisation-in-the-balkans-and-the-danger-to-the-eu-alan-riley-croatia-serbia-corruption (Accessed 26/02/2017).

[15] Nenad Zakošek, "Pravna država i demokracija u post-socijalizmu," 4 *Politička misao* (1997), 78-85; Danijela Dolenec, "Democratisation in the Balkans: the Limits of Elite-Driven Reform," 12(1) *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* (2006), 125-144.

[16] Timothy Edmunds, "Illiberal Resilience in Serbia," 20(1) *Journal of Democracy* (2009), 128-142.

countries. In the case of the Western Balkans, what accounts for the resilience of clientelism?

How clientelism plays out in the Western Balkans

In very simple terms, political clientelism refers to giving material goods or benefits in return for political support (Cvejic, 2016)[17] it is distributive in nature with a *quid pro quo* aspect (Stokes, 2007).[18] Put differently, everyone participating in the transaction benefits, but this often remains an unfulfilled promise on the patron's part. The clients, often destitute, persist in maintaining the relationship in the hope that a benefit may come about in the next cycle, if it failed to materialise the first time around. The types of exchange vary, most commonly including public goods[19] for political support, a practice commonly described as patronage.[20] The aim here is to expand the discussion and shift the focus away from *who* the main actors are to analysing *what* is being exchanged. This, it is argued, will lead to a better grasp of the relationship between clientelism and democracy, as well as the clients' and patrons' interests and motivations (Scott, 1969; 1972).[21]

The main actors of clientelism in the Western Balkans are people who hold or aspire to positions of political power. They might have acquired this status thanks to the political party in which they have membership, towing to the party's control of the given position. Alternatively, they might be professionals who need the party membership in order to achieve promotion, such as to managerial and decision-making posts. From power positions, the patrons, either politicians, civil servants or professionals, are then able to distribute goods, services and favours to clients, or else to exert unduly influence on institutions to shape policies, the legal environment and

[17] Cvejić, Slobodan. "On inevitability of political clientelism in contemporary Serbia." *Sociologija* 58.2 (2016): 239-252.

[18] Stokes, Susan Carol. *The Oxford handbook of comparative politics*. Vol. 4. Oxford University Press, USA, 2007.

[19] Public goods typically include defence, environmental goods, official statistics, information (different forms), invention, authorship, infrastructure (e.g. roads) and some government public spending - -

[20] Muno, *Conceptualizing and Measuring Clientelism*, at 9.

[21] James C Scott, "Corruption, Machine Politics, and Political Change," 63(04) *American political science review* (1969), 1142-1158; also James C. Scott, "Patron-client Politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia," 66 (01) *American Political Science Review* (1972), 91-113.

the wider economy in line with their own interests. Clientelism can then also entail the politicisation of state jobs and the practice of favouritism to distribute government contracts, concessions or market advantages in exchange for political support. In very simple terms, the clients are all others who are not in a position of power and who rely on favours from the patrons or perceive their socio-economic reality as one in which goods and services are completely out of their reach through normal democratic means.

The next question then is what is being exchanged. The list of clientelistic practices is long and 'what is being exchanged' goes far beyond jobs, licenses, services and misuse of public administration. In some cases, as outlined above, these are specific goods, while in others it is access to healthcare, education or employment, particularly jobs in state institutions, which guarantee long-term economic stability. Since 2000, the politicisation of public administration, for example, runs deep: in the majority of the Western Balkan countries, the number of state employees has increased by more than 50 per cent since the beginning of transition and each change of government (or else government coalition composition) tends to bring a wholesale and expensive replacement of everyone holding management positions in the public sector.[22] Employment along party lines, coupled with the extension of social assistance and other entitlements to groups that do not necessarily fulfil the legal criteria, foster dependency on the 'patron' state and discourages contention on the side of the 'client' population. If anything, it persuades those seeking or occupying a state position, those relying on state pensions or other state benefits, or those waiting on the local government official in charge of granting licences or distributing vouchers, to cast their vote in the next elections in such a manner as to maintain the political *status quo* that delivers such privileges.

Politicisation can amount to a major cause of incompetence and inefficiency of public bodies.[23] It does not only entail public sector recruitment on the basis of cronyism,

[22] Dragan Tevdovski, (2014), "The Damned Triangle of Inequality, Neo-Liberalism and Patronage in Western Balkans: is There Any Way Out?;" in Ernst Stetter / Conny Reuter / Judit Tánczos / Maurice / Claassens / Elsa Laino and Sara Hammerton (eds.) *The Social Dimension of EU Enlargement*, FEPS and SOLIDAR, 49-79, at 66.

[23] See Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (2016), at: https://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/corruption_perceptions_index_2016 (Accessed on 26/03/2017).

nepotism and other informal and non-meritocratic criteria but it also reinforces the unwarranted idea that people holding public sector jobs belong to a higher-status group with respect to the rest of the society. Catch phrases like from "plan to clan" or from "nomenklatura to kleptocratura" emerge then as depictions of the new power morphology in the post-communist Balkans (Miller *et al.*, 2001). Moreover, this leads to situations in which the state administration functions well only when palms are greased by those needing to obtain what others would consider normal treatment in democratic contexts, where all citizens are expected to be equal before the law.

Example 1: Macedonia – Secured vote has no price

Macedonia came into the limelight in 2016 when citizens very publicly took to the streets to protest against the government of Nikola Gruevski. The protests were prompted by the decision of President Ivanov to pardon politicians charged with war crimes or under investigation for involvement in a wiretapping scandal. However, the reasons for the current political instability in Macedonia are much deeper and longstanding. The local elections of 2013 and 2014, for example, clearly showed deeply entrenched practices of clientelism that largely enabled the incumbent government led by the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) to win power. It seems that no means were out of bounds, and solutions for any type of citizen's problems were offered for the promise of political support – providing building material for the house, scrapping child's bad school grades, legalising a new, illicitly built or anything else.[24] This is combined with exerting pressure through repelling state subsidies for those who are politically neutral or members of opposition parties. Coercion or blackmailing of voters into giving their electoral support was widespread as well, e.g. village members who were directly told they would not get access to subsidies or, in contrast, agricultural producers VPMRO-DPMNE members, who received 300 acres of land for supporting the governing coalition.[25] Such practices clearly play to personal benefits or losses of the citizens but thy also create grievances related to how communal resources are managed – in this case what is seen as wasteful disposition of valuable municipal

[24] Zorana Gadzovska Spasovska, [analysis of the mechanism for ensuring voter support and votes in the local elections in Macedonia in 2013] "Za siguren glas ne se prašuva za cena," *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, March 16 2013, at http://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/24929603.html (Accessed 26/03/2017).

[25] Ibid.

land. Over time, a combination of personal and collective injustices on the part of the patrons built up into the mass protest against the government.

Another well-known example that illustrates both corrupt practices and clientelism aimed at securing voter support is the case of "Sun City" - a holiday complex, whose construction was supposed to start in 2007 in the municipality of Sopište. The start of the project was marred by illegal tendering procedures in which the government allocated building land to an Israeli company, without receiving evidence that it actually had the capacity to complete the work.[26] Several years later, in 2011, the Israeli building corporation abandoned the project, forcing the government to look for another investor.[27] All of a sudden, in 2014, the Macedonian government invested 260 million euro[28] into building 22km of a tar road that leads to 'Sun City", even though the project and the famous 'city' have not moved much further from being a sketch on the paper. Building this infrastructure has been used to attract political support of Sopište residents for VMRO-DPMNE in the local elections of 2013. What makes the Macedonian case of flagrant clientelism really stand out is that since 2015 it led to the serious destabilisation of a country that only a decade ago was forging towards the EU, which now poses a serious security threat to the region as well. It also shows how important it is for the EU and other international actors to focus on both understanding the root causes of clientelism and developing approaches as to how to divert it into more formal practices.

Shortfalls in dealing with clientelism

Indeed, this type of asymmetric relations, which tend to cost the 'client' (here citizens) more than the 'patron', should be understood against the complexity of the Western Balkan societies, in which informal institutions of power and unequal power relations

[26] Transparentnost Makedonija, 'Sun City' case report, 2016, at http://www.transparentnost-mk.org.mk/slucai_dokumenti.aspx?id=3, (accessed 28/02/2017).

[27] "Israeli Investor Abandons Residential Project in Macedonian Capital," *See News*, July 28 2011, at https://seenews.com/news/israeli-investor-abandons-residential-project-in-macedonian-capital-189644(accessed 26/03/2017).

[28] "Construction of 'Soncev Grad' Infrastructure," *Independent.mk,* February 24 2014, at: http://www.independent.mk/articles/1958/Construction+of+%22Soncev+Grad%22+Infrastructure, (accessed 26/03/2017).

between different groups still linger on vigorously from the communist era and continue to produce different outcomes than what one would expect by observing formal, democratic rules and principles.[29] The paradox is that in spite of the fact that the public at large might be burdened and revolted by the system, people continue to use these informal networks and practices, which they perceive as inescapable and indispensable. As this chapter argues, the main reason is that clientelism is the only way to secure access to resources or services and clients resort to using clientelistic practices because formal entitlements, even when they exist, are completely unreliable.

In the Western Balkans, laws can also be competing, overlapping or absent, especially when it comes to regulating conflicts of interest, and a single, legally binding code of conduct for the whole public sector, detailing norms, instructions and penalties for every situation is also lacking.[30] To make matters worse, existing legislation is not diligently implemented and law enforcement agencies (like courts and police) are often under heavy political pressure and utterly inefficient. The challenges faced by the Balkan countries in maintaining the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary are a primary focus of the EU's conditionality for the Balkans. They are well documented in the European Commission's annual country reports and set the bar high for their governments' democratic standards. The partisanship of media (see Chapter x of this publication) or blatant infringements of the freedom of expression and media, the weak parliamentary scrutiny, feeble or unconstructive political opposition or else outright lack of alternation in power [like in Montenegro or Macedonia], as well as the other many problems linked, for instance, to the financial sustainability and operational capacity of civil society organisations throughout the region only exacerbate the difficulty of ensuring law-abiding elite behaviour that ultimately makes democracy meaningful in substantive terms.

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[29] On "status societies" Kenneth Jowitt, *Social Change in Romania: 1860-1940* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[30] **See, for instance, the European Commission's reports on the candidate and prospective candidate countries of the Western Balkans at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news_corner/key-documents_en?field_file_theme_tid[0]=82&field_file_theme_tid[1]=97&field_file_theme_tid[2]=98&field_file_theme_tid[3]=99&field_file_theme_tid[4]=85 (last accessed on 28/02/2017)** need more specific data here, e.g. a direct link to the source.

But the strength (or lack thereof) of popular pressure from below in the Balkans invariably reflects also these countries' overall level of socio-economic development and, in particular, growing levels of unemployment and thus inequality.[31] Rising deprivation and social inequalities work against individual emancipation, fostering instead a popular culture that builds on 'bread-and-butter' materialistic and security preoccupations, and feeds on ignorance, obedience, and distrust at the expense of self-expression values.[32] Research indicates that self-expression values are not only beneficial for the prospects of elite-challenging actions but they also have significant civic consequences in strengthening democratic institutions.[33] Rather than empowering subjects capable of demanding respect for formally enacted democratic liberties, such conditions only create a fertile ground for nationalist appeals that sustain the predatory elites' sway in how they exercise power. The viability of recent political activism witnessed, for example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina (the 2014 plenums), Montenegro, Kosovo and Macedonia (all in 2016) is thus questioned by the persistence of harsh living conditions and, in some cases, the trauma of past conflict experienced.

Example 2: Bosnian *štela* – A necessity and reality of everyday life

[31] In some cases, clientelism can provide stability in situations of exalted inequality (e.g. Maquet, 1961 on Rwanda in, Jacques Jérôme Pierre Maquet, *The Premise of Inequality in Ruanda: a Study of Political Relations in a Central African Kingdom* (International African Institute, 1961), while more recent studies that focus on economic inequality find that it leads to a rise in clientelism (e.g. James A. Robinson and Thierry Verdier, "The Political Economy of Clientelism," 115(2) *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics* (2013), 260-291.

[32] Rosa Balfour and Corina Stratulat, "The Democratic Transformation of the Balkans;" *EPC Issue Paper 66*, Brussels, European Policy Centre (2011).

[33] Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy," 53(1) *American Political Science Review* (1959), 69-105; Otto Kirchheimer, "Confining Conditions and Revolutionary Breakthroughs," 59(4) *American Political Science Review* (1965), 964-974; Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *Modernisation, Cultural Change and Democracy: the Human Development Sequence* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Bosnia and Herzegovina, as other countries in the Western Balkan region, has not escaped the practice of clientelism, which citizens refer to as *štela,* and it plays a crucial role in maintaining societal ties and in the modern political life of Bosnia and Herzegovina. *štela* are personal networks that almost operate as a coping strategy for the majority of citizens, particularly at the local level, in helping them gain access to resources. Because of the extremely complicated institutional, governance and administrative framework that was put in place as a result of the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA), Bosnia and Herzegovina is more vulnerable than other countries in the region to clientelistic practices and informal networks branched out at multiple administrative and governance levels. As argued earlier, understanding the origin of the informal institutions, their cultural and historical background is extremely important (Helmke and Levitsky, 2006), particularly for grasping how societal transformations change client-patron relations.[34] On the other hand, the analysis needs to be framed in the light of a poor economy and permanent instability, which puts Bosnia and Herzegovina in first place in the region with 50 per cent of its citizens[35] saying they want to leave the country.

The initial post-war distribution of power between the three main nationalist political parties that claim to represent the three major ethnic groups, Muslim, Serbs and Croats, created a fertile ground in which it is easy for the leaders and their cronies to abuse public office. Even though the political field diversified and new political parties emerged, it only increased the number of claimants and expended the tools and mechanisms of clientelistic practices. At the same time, embeddedness in local clientelistic networks and informal economies continue to provide and strengthen an environment in which informality in operation and access prevails, particularly in the economic sphere (Divljak and Pugh, 2008).[36] In this environment/context, it is easier for the power structures to distribute funds to support and favour curriculums of the patrons, from national to the municipality level. This approach often leads to

[34] Helmke and Levitsky, *Informal Institutions*.

[35] Balkan Barometer 2016, Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), at http://www.rcc.int/pubs/39/balkan-barometer-2016-infographics-pocket-edition (Accessed 26/03/2017).

[36] Divjak, Boris, and Michael Pugh. "The political economy of corruption in Bosnia and Herzegovina." *International Peacekeeping* 15.3 (2008): 373-386.

discrimination of minority ethnic groups and, at the same time, encourages local voters to support nationalist parties. The key problem is that ordinary people are struggling to even start believing that access to jobs, services and institutions is possible without using personal networks.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the majority of people believe that having personal connections is always, or at least sometimes, useful for getting visas, jobs, health services and other benefits. This is particularly highly emphasised when it comes to obtaining jobs (85.7 per cent) and getting into school or university (80per cent).[37] The latter is very worrisome if we observe the latest census figures on education, which show overall, of just over 3.5 million citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, around 3 million are older than 15 years, approximately 12 per cent are illiterate or functionally literate, while 18 per cent have only primary school, bringing the figure to a staggering 30 per cent combined. Levels of education are correlated to voting patterns, access to services (health, social care) and employment, as well as to citizens' participation in political and public life, which makes it really problematic that access to education is significantly regulated by clientelistic practices.

The most common mechanisms of political clientelism are the financing of political parties, distribution of leading executive and managerial positions in state-owned companies, bypassing legal procedures in public tenders, employing political party supporters (although this represents a major challenge with a lack of positions in the current economic climate), and lobbying for favourable legal and administrative frameworks that would protect or be less punitive towards the existing informal networks. The complexity of the legal system and divided jurisdictions are favourable to such approaches. According to the UNDP (2009)[38] report, in almost all parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, between 90 and 100 per cent of citizens believe that *štela* is useful, and this opinion is equally common among the employed and unemployed. If the social networks are observed outside family and friend circles, money starts to play an important role either as a direct payment or in the form of gifts, which is also linked

[37] UNDP Bosnia and Herzegovina, National Human Development Report, 'The Ties That Bind: Social Capital in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *UNDP,* 2009.
[38] Ibid.

to historically embedded norms. And many people are prepared to pay bribes or provide gifts, even if they disagree with the practice.

> "I lost my job and when I asked people at the employment service, 'Now what? Can I apply for a pension based on my age and years of work?' 'You can try', [they said]. But the man openly told me: 'You will need a few thousand marks, and it will not be paid back'… He openly told me I could try, but that I would not get anything. Personal connections are generally useful…. but unless you can pay money, you have to have a strong family connection. It is not a secret. We have some companies in town… people already call them family companies. As soon as they graduate they get jobs, while other people can apply a million times and will never get the job. They can be good, regular students, but connections are still more important. (Female, unemployed, Sarajevo)" (UNDP, 2009:80).[39]

This is just one illustration of a much broader trend, which is that people in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region gravitate towards public sector jobs. In Southeastern Europe, 7 per cent of people state they would rather work in public sector jobs, predominantly listing job security as the main reason (54 per cent)[40]. This can easily explain why those in the patron positions on the offering end have enough demand and motivation from the clients to maintain clientelistic practice. In post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, informality of clientelistic practices should not just be seen as an antidote of the "formal" but as a vehicle of communication that people use to navigate development in internationally supervised local communities.[41]

Conclusion

Clientelism is not a Balkan peculiarity; EU member states are also confronted with the phenomenon. The difference is that clientelism is more the norm rather than the exception in the Balkan societies, and its roots lie in the distribution of power itself.

[39] UNDP; The Ties That Bind, at 80.
[40] Balkan Barometer 2016, Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) http://www.rcc.int/pubs/39/balkan-barometer-2016-infographics-pocket-edition
[41] Karla Koutkova, "Informality as an Interpretive Filter: Translating Ubleha in Local Community Development in Bosnia," 24(3) Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe (2016), 223-237.

The communist legacy of the countries in the region might have set the steppingstones of clientelism, but clientelistic relations mutated and adapted to the new democratic context following the breakup of Yugoslavia. Neither the creation of democratic institutions nor the ever-stricter membership conditionality imposed by the EU on the Balkan aspirant countries has prevented the perpetuation of clientelism. Quite the contrary, democratic institutions and practices, like elections, have come to be used for clientelistic purposes, inadvertently helping – rather than deterring – the existence of clientelism in the political system. The reforms undertaken by the Balkan countries in their transition period and in the framework of their EU integration process, almost seem to have a blind spot to clientelistic networks or else struggle in terms of the formula applied to tackle the phenomenon. The 'patrons' arguably stand to lose more than win from abandoning clientelistic practices, while the European perspective does not seem to offer a strong enough incentive for politicians, bureaucrats or magistrates in the region to change their behaviour.

The consequences are neither unimportant nor uncomplicated for the consolidation of democracy in the Balkans. Clientelism undermines the rule of law and citizens' equal rights before it. Patrons and clients might voluntarily agree to enter a clientelistic relationship with the aim of deriving some interest, respectively, but the exchange is not (always) predictable, guaranteed to deliver any benefit at all for the client, and the citizens who do not have access or refuse to partake in such networks are deprived of services and treatment which would be considered normal in other, functioning democracies. If the polity works on the basis of rules that are arbitrary, non-universal and unreliable as a means of correcting mistakes and policies or changing governments, democracy becomes a mere façade. And the problem is not just that clientelism weakens formal democratic institutions but also that it flips on its head the very principle of democracy, that of the power resting with the people, not the elites. When the state becomes captured by a patron and the electorates are reduced to powerless clients, the democratic foundation is shaking. Clientelism distorts election results significantly, undermines rule of law and is inherently based on informality, illegality and inequality, thus undermining democracy.

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