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Interview - Unemployment has overwhelmed all countries in the region

"None of the countries is in a favourable position in terms of employment of young people. We are witnesses of the fact that there is a constant outflow of workforce abroad, because young people do not see their perspective at home", says Svetlana Gligorovska.

(Gligorovska is an Expert on Infrastructure in the Regional Cooperation Council, responsible for drawing up and coordination of the implementation of the transport section of the draft South East Europe (SEE) 2020 strategy: "Jobs and Prosperity in the European Perspective")

Maja Tomic

What is your assessment of the general state of the labour market in the countries of the region?

The problem with high unemployment has long been present in all countries in the region and this issue represents a priority for their governments. Therefore, in the 2020 Draft Strategy for SEE: "Jobs and Prosperity in European Perspective" we have outlined a succession of measures and activities aimed at increasing employment and opening one million new jobs by 2020, that also means economic prosperity for the countries in the region. The strategy envisages increasing of foreign direct investment by 240 percent, the volume of trade by 140 percent, employment by 5 percent and higher educated workforce by 300,000 persons.

The document covers several areas of activities that are quantified and measurable, with specific numbers and data, so that the ordinary citizen will be aware of what it actually means, and what are the benefits of its implementation. The need for the adoption of this Strategy was established in 2011 at a ministerial meeting, and the Regional Cooperation Council has been given the mandate to coordinate all the activities for its development and implementation. In November 2012, 11 major regional goals were adopted, which are the basis of all envisaged measures, plus 77 national goals. The strategy SEE 2020 was inspired by the EU 2020 Strategy and it is the regional response to this European initiative. Approximately 1000 people from all areas have been involved in its creation and are taking an active part in it. Its content is similar to that of "Europe 2020", but it was adapted with special emphasis on the needs of the region. The activities and measures envisaged in the Strategy are very ambitious, thus great coordination between the states at the national and at the regional level, as well as support from international partners, primarily the European Union is required. Through a coordinated regional approach, by the assistance of EC, through the IPA2 pre-accession funds and international financial institutions, we expect this Strategy to give a strong contribution to the achievement of the determined goals.

In Skopje on 10 September the Regional Cooperation Council held the first of a series of workshops that will be held in all capitals of the countries in the region. The workshops will continue in Prishtina, Podgorica, Belgrade, Zagreb and Tirana.

The final version of the Strategy should be adopted at a ministerial conference in Sarajevo in November this year.

Which country is in a worse, and which is in a better position in terms of the fast creation of new jobs? What is the position of [The Former Yugoslav Republic of] Macedonia?

I do not possess specific data for each country but the fact is that none of the countries in the region is in a favourable position in terms of employment, particularly of young people. In general, the problem is present everywhere and I could not rank countries as being in a more or less favourable position. In all countries, there is an outflow of brains and young workers abroad, which are trying to find their future outside their home countries, because they cannot see their perspective at home. So, although there is high unemployment rate, [The Former Yugoslav Republic of] Macedonia is not in a much worse position than the other countries, if we take the ratio of the number of residents into consideration. All countries are in a similar position.

The Government adopted a succession of measures aimed at increasing of employment which are in progress and include various subsidies for companies and individuals. What is your opinion on this kind of support by budgetary funds?

After a long-lasting state of unemployment, it is impossible to achieve specific results quickly. It is also difficult to give a direction or to say that one thing can completely improve the whole picture. Therefore, in the Strategy we envisaged a sequence of interconnected measures to boost employment in all five pillars, from the development of transport infrastructure, increasing of trade, free movement of persons, goods, services and capital... as far as establishing numerous companies, both domestic and international. That all logically leads to creation of jobs, the number of which by 2020 should amount to one million for the overall SEE region. I believe that every assistance and support from governments is appreciated and welcomed. Each government should set its own priorities, activities, measures and action policies that should constantly be developed according to the unemployment situation which has not been improved for years.

To what extent can foreign investments be of assistance?

Without foreign investments, the countries in transition would deal much harder with the problem of unemployment, and would find it more difficult to implement the envisaged measures. Foreign investments, in view of opening new or mixed companies are more than welcome, as this trend also leads to the creation of new jobs. It is good to have more such companies in different areas, which will contribute to the better operation of local companies as well.

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