



Araştırma Makalesi • Research Article

Extending the Rights of Diaspora Through External Voting in the Balkan Countries: An Analysis of the Seven Independent States of the Former Yugoslavia

Balkan Ülkelerinde Yurtdışından Oy Kullanma Yoluyla Diasporanın Haklarının Genişletilmesi: Eski Yugoslavya'nın Yedi Bağımsız Devletinin Analizi

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Abstract: Many countries are improving diaspora engagement policies to contribute to development processes and maintain ties with their diasporas politically and culturally. The seven independent Balkan states of former Yugoslavia, which are Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia, have improved diaspora engagement policies. When compared to their population and GDP, the number of citizens living abroad and remittances received by these countries are proportionally large, so diaspora engagement policies are significant for these countries. This paper aims to examine external voting policies which entitle the diaspora right to vote in the homeland in the seven Balkan states through the lens of diaspora engagement policies. This paper concluded that all the examined countries recognize the potential of their diasporas and have similarities, but they are at different stages of diaspora voting. Although the countries allow external voting, the diaspora's voting turnout is very limited. Results show that extending the right of diaspora is legally not enough, and new methods need to be improved to cope with challenges. These countries may create a new perspective to increase diaspora's interest in the homeland elections and consider an extraterritorial and non-residential form of citizenship if they wish to find leverage through diaspora engagement policies for their development.

Keywords: Diaspora engagement policies, Diaspora voting, External voting, Balkan countries

Öz: Pek çok ülke kalkınma süreçlerine katkıda bulunmak ve diasporaları ile politik ve kültürel bağları korumak için diaspora politikaları geliştirmektedir. Eski Yugoslavya'nın yedi bağımsız devleti olan Bosna ve Hersek, Hırvatistan, Kosova, Karadağ, Kuzey Makedonya, Sırbistan ve Slovenya diaspora politikaları geliştirmiştir. Nüfus ve GSYİH karşılaştırıldığında, yurtdışında yaşayan vatandaşları ve bu ülkelere gönderilen işçi dövizleri oransal olarak geniştir, bu yüzden diaspora politikaları bu ülkeler için önemlidir. Bu makale, yedi Balkan devletinde diasporaya anavatandaki seçimlerde oy kullanma hakkı veren yurtdışında oy kullanma politikalarını diaspora politikaları bakış açısıyla incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu makale, incelenen tüm ülkelerde diasporanın potansiyelinin anlaşıldığı ve benzerlikler olduğu, ancak diasporanın oy kullanmasında farklı aşamalarda olduklarını göstermektedir. Ülkeler yurtdışında oy kullanmaya izin vermelerine rağmen diaspora oyları çok sınırlıdır. Sonuçlar diasporanın haklarının yasal olarak genişletilmesinin yeterli olmadığını ve güçlüklerle başa çıkmak için yeni yöntemler geliştirilmesi gerektiğini göstermektedir. Bu ülkeler kalkınmaları için diaspora politikaları yoluyla bir kaldıraç bulmak istiyorlarsa, diasporanın anavatandaki seçimlere ilgisini artırmak için yeni bakış açıları geliştirebilir ve toprağa bağlı olmayan veya ikametgah dışı vatandaşlık biçimlerini düşünebilirler.

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Received/Geliş: 26 July/ Temmuz 2021

Accepted/Kabul: 01 November/ Kasım 2021

Düzeltilme/Revised form: 26 October/ Ekim 2021

Published/Yayın: 25 December/ Aralık 2021

Anahtar Kelimeler: Diaspora politikaları, Diasporanın oy kullanması, Yurtdışından oy kullanma, Balkan ülkeleri

Introduction

Migration management is important for countries in terms of human mobility management and border security. As of 2019, the number of international immigrants is estimated to have reached 272 million, and 82 million of these live in European countries (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, 2019: iv). While migration management covers the quantitative and qualitative determination of the people who will enter the country in terms of immigration countries, the countries of emigration have started to implement diaspora policies to establish strong ties with their nationals living abroad (Gamlen, 2006).

The most obvious element of being a diaspora is to be dispersed in more than one country. Tölölyan (1991: 4) mentions that although the word diaspora was previously used for the Jewish, Greek and Armenian diasporas, it is now described by the terms such as "immigrant, living abroad, refugee, guest worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community". Developments in communication and technology have made it easier for states to communicate with their dispersed populations, develop policies regarding their diasporas, and establish links through diaspora networks. In this paper, the term diaspora is used for citizens living abroad.

There is significant literature on transnationalism aiming to understand the immigrants' social, economic and political ties with the country of origin (Bloch & Hirsch, 2018: 1). Transnational ties can be categorized as economic, social, cultural and political (Al-Ali et al., 2001; Itzigsohn & Saucedo, 2002; Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011; Portes, 2001; Snel et al., 2006). Generally, the literature focuses on the economic, social and cultural activities of immigrants, but there are also studies on transnational political activities and the role of states (Levitt & de la Dehesa, 2003; Martiniello & Lafleur, 2008). Moreover, a considerable amount of literature was published on the diaspora policies of states and their relations with their diasporas (Agunias & Newland, 2012; Ancien et al., 2009; Bauböck et al., 2010; Délano & Gamlen, 2014; Gamlen, 2006, 2014; Levitt & de la Dehesa, 2003).

Although voting in elections is a democratic right, the increase in immigration, particularly with globalization, has brought the right to vote of citizens living abroad to the forefront of all countries' agendas. States implement different practices making electorate participation easier for their diasporas, such as making it easier for their citizens living abroad to vote at consulates and embassies in their countries or allowing them to vote within the country or at customs gates or by post. On the other hand, a limited number of countries apply "extraterritorial electoral constituency-diaspora constituency-overseas electoral district" in addition to the electoral constituencies within the country, which aim to represent their citizens living abroad. Furthermore, the restriction of international mobility during the Covid-19 epidemic period has increased the importance of practices that allow citizens living abroad to vote in places such as consulates and embassies or remote voting systems.

The independent seven states of the former Yugoslavia (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, North Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Slovenia) have improved diaspora engagement policies and formed governmental organizations after the disintegration of former Yugoslavia. The main problems of these seven countries and other Balkan countries are the constant migration abroad and the decreasing population. In this case, it has become more important to maintain and strengthen ties with their diasporas. In this context, the inclusion of the diaspora in political processes has become a powerful tool to maintain strong ties with these countries' citizens living abroad. Political participation from the diaspora perspective is a means of preserving and strengthening national belonging and ethnic identity. In this context, external voting is an essential strategy both for the diaspora and origin countries. There is limited literature on the political inclusion of diaspora elections in the homeland (Garding, 2013; Kasapović, 2012; Ragazzi & Balalovska, 2011), and no study was found comparing the seven countries. Thus, this paper will contribute to the literature with its analysis of these countries practices of extending the political rights of diaspora and revealing the difficulties.

The independent seven Balkan countries have various external voting procedures to provide their citizens living abroad with the right to vote in the homeland elections. For example, after gaining

independence, Croatia and North Macedonia accepted extraterritorial electoral constituency to ensure the political participation of the diaspora in the elections. Croatia granted the right to vote in 1992, North Macedonia in 2008, Serbia in 2004, Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1996, Slovenia in 1992, Kosovo in 2008 and Montenegro only allow in-country voting. Nonetheless, because of the ethnic problems, the approach to diaspora is not moderate and positive in all Balkan countries and some countries have hesitations about their diasporas like Serbia. Regulations on facilitating external voting in these countries show that emigrant enfranchisement is an important norm related to democratization.

This paper examines external voting (absentee voting, out of country voting, diaspora voting) procedures in the seven independent Balkan states through the lens of diaspora engagement policies. In this context, this paper discusses these Balkan countries' provisions about registration to vote in the elections, voting procedures such as voting in embassies and consulates, voting by post, voting in person in the country and representation mechanism. If countries are implementing restrictive citizenship policies and have ethnic and infrastructural problems, only granting the right to vote abroad will not be enough to increase the diaspora's participation. For this reason, allowing only external voting is not sufficient to maintain the diaspora's interest in the country; hence, more comprehensive policies are necessary. Moreover, this paper highlights the strong economic incentives for Balkan states to strengthen ties with their diasporas. Considering the complex ethnicity of Balkan countries and history, this paper does not intend to suggest a simplistic categorization about the meaning of diaspora, emigration or external voting in these countries. It rather suggests that evaluation of external voting procedures challenges both countries and members of diasporas beyond perceived economic opportunities; indeed, external voting procedures in the seven states through historical perspectives play a key role. This paper is structured as follows; first, it broadly mentions migration from the Balkans, the seven Balkan countries' populations and remittances to evaluate the role of diaspora for these countries. Second, this paper briefly discusses external voting and diaspora representation mechanism (overseas electoral districts) in the world. The last part addresses the regulations with respect to the inclusion of external citizens in homeland elections, diaspora representation mechanisms and factors that hinder political participation in these states.

Migration from the Balkans and the Role of Diasporas

The region has historically faced a complicated series of advancing and retreating movements. Looking into the past population movement is vital to comprehending the meaning of movement from Balkan countries, diaspora and ethnic complexity. A specific historical perspective is necessary to understand the development of migration and the formation of diaspora.

Territories which today belong to the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bosnia, Croatia, and some parts of Romania, Italy, Ukraine, Moldova, Serbia, and Montenegro were among the territories of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The rise of nationalism in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Balkan Wars and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire brought significant socio-economic consequences for the region. There were ethnic shifts in all territories for all religious and ethnic groups, and wars of independence exacerbated ethnic problems. It was impossible to draw ethnically harmonious state borders, and thus minority issues arose. This historical change and the political turmoil in the region emerged as a factor that triggered migration.

Located in the West of the Balkan Peninsula, the former Yugoslavia established three different states in the 20th century, continued its existence until 2003, and was divided into seven countries with the separation of Kosovo in 2008. The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (previously the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia), which was established after World War II and disintegrated in the 1990s, was made up of the republics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia, as well as the autonomous regions of Kosovo and Vojvodina. Following the fall of the communist bloc, Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence, Macedonia became independent despite ongoing name disputes with Greece, Serbia and Montenegro formed a federal structure, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has the most ethnically complex structure, was drawn into the war (Morrison, 1996: 146). During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany granted a form of temporary protection (Duldung status) that did not give them the legal right to become refugees under

the German Constitution to more than 320,000 refugees fleeing Bosnia and Herzegovina (Dimova, 2006: 2). With the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, approximately 4 million refugees migrated from the federated republics (Remiddi et al., 2019).

There are different phases regarding migration flow and diasporas from the seven countries in question. However, these phases can be categorised as nationalism-induced uprisings and Balkan Wars, World War I, World War II, labour migration in the 1960s, and the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Until World War II, emigration targeted the countries such as the USA, Latin America and Australia, whereas postwar period during which we witnessed migration flows have been predominantly to Western European countries (Garding, 2013; Republic of Croatia Central State Office for Croats Abroad, 2021; Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, IOM, UNDP, 2016; Selm, 2007).

Migration from the Balkans, which has been the "migration champion of Europe" since the disintegration of former Yugoslavia, can be examined in three main periods: Migration in the first period, which lasted from 1989 to the middle of 1990 with the fall of the Berlin Wall and caused by the tragic events in the Balkans; in the second period, migration in the post-conflict and Europeanization phase, which began after the 1995 Dayton Agreement and lasted until the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the EU in 2007; in the third period, migration for economic purposes aiming the integration of the region into Europe (Zemon, 2019).

During and after the establishment of the countries, diasporas have become economically important for the Balkan countries. After the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the remittances sent by the newly formed diasporas to the countries of origin were effective in the development of the region, and it was also common for people to send money by themselves or with their relatives, usually seen in post-conflict economies (Remiddi et al., 2019: 14–15). For example, diaspora remittances account for 16.3% of Kosovo's GDP, 11.1% of Montenegro, 9.9% of Albania and 8.5% of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Croatia and Serbia are the countries with the highest amount of remittance inflows among the countries in the region. The countries with the lowest diaspora remittances as a share of GDP are North Macedonia and Slovenia, according to World Bank 2020 data (World Bank, 2020).

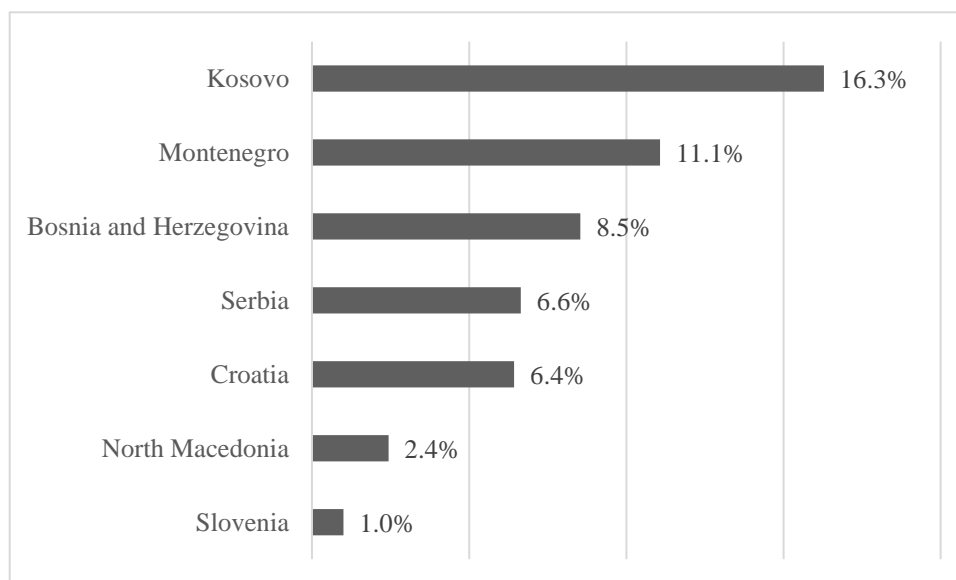


Figure 1. Remittances as a Share of GDP in 2020 (estimated)

Source: Created by the author, using the World Bank Migration and Remittances Data. (Accessed on 28.04.2021). <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migrationremittancesdiasporaissues/brief/migration-remittances-data>

In the post-communist period, Southeast European countries have faced a significant migration of their population to Western Europe starting from the 1990s-2000s, because of low fertility rates, problems of improvement in social and human rights, and the Covid-19 epidemic which led to an increase in immigration (Kondan, 2020). Half of the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 32% of

North Macedonia, 24% of Croatia and Montenegro have emigrated abroad (Table 1). Balkan countries have taken various measures to stop the ongoing migration. In addition to the measures taken to increase the birth rate, restriction of immigration and developing relations with the diaspora have become important, and countries have started to improve relations with the diaspora by establishing organisations such as diaspora agencies or diaspora ministries (Kondan, 2020).

Table 1. Total Emigrant Population *Hata! Başvuru kaynağı bulunamadı.*(2019)

Country	Emigrants	Population	Emigrants as a percentage of population
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1,653,056	3,301,000	50%
Croatia	990,012	4,130,000	24%
Montenegro	153,009	628,000	24%
North Macedonia	658,264	2,083,000	32%
Serbia (including Kosovo)	950,485	8,772,000	11%
Slovenia	147,593	2,079,000	7%

Source: Created by the author, using the United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Population Division (2019) data. International Migrant Stock 2019 (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2019). (Accessed on 23.04.2021). <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates19.asp>.

One of the European countries that receive the highest number of immigrants from the Balkans is Germany, due to its policies towards recruiting immigrant labour and its proximity to the region. Germany started to receive "guest workers" from Turkey, Morocco, Portugal and Tunisia with the labour agreements in the 1960s. In addition, within the framework of the agreement signed with the former Yugoslavia in 1968, more than half a million people immigrated to Germany as temporary workers (Parusel & Schneider, 2012: 68). With the disintegration of former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Germany became a country where forced immigrants settled in the 1990s. As of 2019, there are 21.2 million immigrants in Germany, and the number of immigrants from the former Yugoslavia is 1.9 million (Federal Statistical Office, 2020). Germany adopted some regulations in 2015 to control the flow of asylum seekers through the Balkan countries due to the conflict in Syria. In this context, the Western Balkans Regulation, which was adopted in 2015, designated Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia as safe third countries, allowing citizens of these countries to migrate to Germany without restriction between 2015 and 2020, provided they have a job offer from a German employer and a need in the labour market (Bither & Ziebarth, 2018: 9). Thus, while Germany facilitates the migration originating from the Western Balkans, it aims to prevent irregular migration. Those who migrate from the Balkans for economic reasons are the immigrants who work in construction, tourism, maintenance services etc., and who are the groups called "brain drain" or "Euro-stars" that make up the highly qualified workforce in the Balkan countries (Zemon, 2019).

External Voting and Diaspora Representation

According to Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, everyone has the right to participate in the elections in their country. Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states that every citizen has the right to participate in elections and be elected (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966). Lappin (2016: 863–865) states that political rights are also included in other international conventions such as the 1990 "International Convention for the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families", and emphasizes that the right to vote is clearly granted to citizens in the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and that there is no restriction on the right to choose in any of the conventions regarding residence (Lappin, 2016: 873).

The increase in international migration with the opportunities provided by globalization in technology and transportation has led to a rise in the number of citizens living in almost every country.

Therefore, the participation of the diaspora in the elections in their country of origin has become more and more on the political agenda of these Balkan countries. The political activities of the diasporas are not new; diasporas carry out activities such as electoral and non-election-oriented, lobbying, financial or other support to political parties, protests, and in the end, states have started to deal with diasporas and develop policies such as dual citizenship and establish ministries related to the diaspora (Vertovec, 2005: 5–6). Thus, the number of diaspora institutions increased rapidly, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) organized the Diaspora Ministerial Conference with the participation of 143 governments in 2013 (Gamlen, 2014: 182).

Adamson (2015) points out that the diaspora policies are effective in many areas, such as the economy, security and foreign policy, and diaspora policies can create both opportunities and challenges for countries due to the transnational constituencies blurring the border between domestic and foreign policy. Furthermore, remittances and investments of the diasporas to the country of origin reach significant amounts in some countries which develop policies to maintain this financial flow. Therefore, diasporas have become important both politically and economically for countries as well as socio-cultural ties.

Countries have expanded the regulations regarding their citizens living abroad to include different areas such as voting, election, social security, schools, humanitarian protection (Laguerre, 2017: 135). Levitt and De la Dehesa (2003) examine the diaspora policies in five main groups: consular or ministry reforms, investment policies, increasing political participation, improving services and state protection, and symbolic policies such as cultural activities and protection of ties. Gamlen uses three categories of diaspora engagement policies as capacity building policies, extending the rights of diaspora and extracting obligations from them and political incorporation policies to extend the rights (Gamlen, 2006). Voting abroad provides the diaspora with the right to vote in the elections in their homeland. The overseas diaspora constituency applied in some countries gives the diaspora the opportunity to choose people to represent them directly. One hundred fifteen countries implement the external voting system according to a study published in 2007 (Ellis et al., 2007: 3). Although external voting methods differ from country to country, there are generally four methods: in person, postal, proxy and online (Aman & Bakken, 2021: 12). For example, Belgium accepts five voting modalities for its citizens living abroad: vote in person in the country or in the consulates of the countries where they live, by proxy in the country or by proxy in the consulates and by postal (Mandin, 2020: 60).

On the other hand, there are theoretical debates about whether citizens who do not have a residence in the country have the right to vote in the elections or not. López-Guerra (2005) claims that, although it is argued that those living abroad should have the right to choose due to their economic contributions, voluntary emigration, cultural or familial ties with their country, obligations such as military service and taxes, they are not required to participate in the election since those who live abroad are not subject to the laws of the country of origin and these privileges should be abolished as they live permanently in another country. Bauböck (2007: 2418–2419) criticizes López-Guerra's view for being "strictly territorial" and considers that states can impose responsibilities and grant rights to their citizens living abroad to their citizenship rights. Bauböck indicates that the strictly territorial assessment is not acceptable considering the number of people residing abroad, even if they are not subject to the country's laws. However, if citizenship is accepted as territorial, the question of ensuring equality between residents and non-residents citizens will arise.

"External voting means procedures which enable some or all electors of a country who are temporarily or permanently abroad to exercise their voting rights from outside the national territory" (Ellis et al., 2007: 8). However, not everyone abroad may be entitled to vote. In general, some professional groups such as illegal immigrants, refugees, internally displaced persons and government officials can not vote or all citizens who are permanently or temporarily abroad can be offered the opportunity to vote, as in the case of Russia, Austria and Sweden (Ellis et al., 2007: 4–5). Moreover, apart from the citizenship rule, countries may impose some restrictions on the right to vote abroad, such as the time limit on living abroad. Some countries such as Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Estonia, Norway, Poland, Sweden and the USA allow voting abroad no matter how long the amount of time abroad, whereas Germany limits the right to vote for those who have lived abroad more than 25 years and the United Kingdom more than 15 years (Ellis et al., 2007: 93). Also, other restrictions on external

voting, such as granting the right to vote to those who continue their intention to return, reaching a certain number of registered voters in the country where they want to vote, limiting the opportunity to vote in some elections or referendums may be imposed by the countries (Ellis et al., 2007: 5–6).

Countries apply different systems regarding external voting, and one of the institutionalized forms of these systems is creating "extraterritorial electoral constituencies" (Mégret & Girard, 2015: 186). "Overseas constituency" (Laguerre, 2013: 21) or "extraterritorial electoral constituencies" (Mégret & Girard, 2015: 186) allows citizens living abroad to elect their representatives in the electoral districts determined for them, as an extended form of the right to vote. This practice enables the diaspora to participate in the decision-making processes related to their problems and appears as a strategy or engagement policy for states to maintain relations with the diaspora. The implementation of separate constituencies for those living abroad provides the diaspora to vote for their representative which is implemented in countries such as Croatia, France, Italy, Portugal, Algeria, Angola, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Colombia, Ecuador and Panama, and the Cook Islands abolished this regulation in 2003 (Ellis et al., 2007: 28).

France is the pioneer of diaspora representation in parliament. The first senators were elected in 1948 within the framework of the constitution adopted in 1946, and a similar practice, which was a colonial parliamentary representation system, was institutionalized in 1789 (Laguerre, 2013: 50–51). In Algeria, where the National Assembly consists of 462 seats, Algerians living abroad have the right to vote at the embassies and consulates abroad, and eight seats are reserved for Algerians living abroad with the amendments in 2012 (AFFORD, 2020: 1–2).

Italy, where the right to vote depends on citizenship status, provided the right to vote to all citizens with the Italian Constitution of 1948, four external electorates were created including Europe, South America, North and Central America and Australia, Asia, Africa, Oceania and Antarctica and the diaspora was granted the right to vote in their country of residence (Arcioni, 2006). In the statement published in the Official Gazette dated 29.12.2017, the number of Italians living in the constituencies abroad is 4,973,942 (2017: 22). 12 of the 630 deputies according to Article 56 of the Italian Constitution and 6 of the 315 senators according to Article 57 are reserved for overseas constituencies (Senato della Repubblica, 2018: 26–27).

With the transition to democracy, Portugal granted the right to vote for the national parliament to those living abroad in 1975, while in 1987, it expanded this right to the European parliamentary elections with its EU membership. Since 2001, the diaspora has allowed voting in the Presidential elections, and only two deputies were elected from two constituencies formed for those living in Europe and those living outside Europe (Ellis et al., 2007: 83–87). According to 2019 data, there are 2,631,559 Portuguese origins abroad (United Nations Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019).

Extraterritorial or overseas electoral constituency systems have taken more and more attention from homeland countries, considering the impact and economic contribution of diasporas to the development of countries. For example, Senegal recognized the right to elect 15 representatives (15 out of a total of 165 deputies) to the diaspora with eight new electoral districts created in the parliament with the regulation approved in 2016 ('Sénégal', 2017) and the contribution of the diaspora to the national economy was 9.4% of GDP in 2020 (Migration and Remittances Data, 2020).

Who is next? Some other countries have been under pressure from their diasporas on this issue. For instance, the Indonesian diaspora community had lobbied the government to set up a special electoral district for 2.25 million citizens living abroad for better representation because of their votes pouring into the Jakarta electorate II (Berger, 2014). Lithuania began to consider a new legislative amendment to set up a single-member constituency for the Lithuanian diaspora in the parliamentary election in 2020 (Two separate election constituencies needed for Lithuanian diaspora, says FM Linkevičius, 2019). In addition to these, Irish people (non-residence) living abroad cannot vote in Dáil or a presidential election or a referendum. Thus, the Republic of Ireland was planning to hold a referendum in 2019 to extend the voting rights of diaspora and diaspora constituency may be on the agenda (Carswell, 2017). According to the Electoral Act 1992, a person who has reached the age of 18,

a citizen of Ireland and ordinarily resident has the right to vote, and citizens who do not have resident in the State do not have the right to vote (Global Irish, 2021).

The Voting Right of the Diaspora in Seven Balkan Countries

The former Yugoslavia was a kind of melting pot ethnically, religiously and culturally, and political regime change led to bloody conflicts in the 1990s in the region because of the rise of nationalism. The collapse of communism in the disintegrating former Yugoslavia resulted in the Balkan countries' establishing bonds with the wealthy diasporas living, especially in the West, and developing policies regarding the political participation of the diaspora in various forms for this purpose. Although knowing the size of the diasporas is an important issue in establishing a bond with the diaspora and designing engagement policies, the figures are generally based on estimates since those who do not have citizenship ties to the country are also included in the diaspora. Seven sovereign Balkan countries shared the same territory in the 1800s during the Austro-Hungarian and then the Serbian Kingdom, and this circumstance has resulted in the multi-ethnic structure and intermingling of diasporas with people living in different countries today, despite having the same ethnic origin. Therefore, it is controversial whether the immigrants from 7 independent states constitute their diaspora.

According to Safran's definition, which is one of the well-known definitions, key components of the diaspora are dispersal from the homeland to two or more countries, collective memory or myth about the homeland, a feeling of alienation based on the acceptance that they will not be completely accepted in the countries they live in, and the country of origin being the ideal and real country to return to, support for the future and security of the homeland, community awareness and solidarity through activities maintaining contact with the homeland (Safran, 1991: 83–84). On the other hand, Cohen (2008: 6) points out four of the six elements in Safran's definition which focus on the relationship of the diaspora with the homeland, although this is important, some elements are repeated and can be combined. As can be deduced from the definition, transnational practices that express the immigrant's protection of her ties with the country of origin become more important for being a diaspora. Nevertheless, Cohen expands the classical definition of diaspora by adding "worker", "trade", and "imperial" diasporas and hence includes voluntary migration for economic reasons (Cohen, 2008: 6–7).

The multi-ethnic and intertwined structure of the Balkan countries, whose borders were drawn with the dissolution of former Yugoslavia, already brings along discussions about who constitutes the diaspora of these countries. For example, referring to Benedict Anderson's term "imagined communities", Avramović argues that Bosnian Serbs may have more in common with Serbs in Serbia and see themselves as more Serbs than Bosnians (Avramović, 2018: 12). Although it is difficult to find all of Cohen and Safran's diaspora elements in a single group, the diaspora of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has a heterogeneous structure like other immigrant groups, is dispersed in more than two countries and has a myth about the homeland, even if the homeland is not the current borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Halilovich et al., 2018: 8–9). Another example of the differentiation of the country's borders is Croats living within the borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

All the countries examined in this paper have different rules and procedures about the right to vote for the diaspora. Despite the well-known importance of the diaspora for these countries, some of them have stronger policies, and the others have weak or no policy on this issue. For example, Croatia and Northern Macedonia have an overseas constituency or diaspora representation systems enabling external voting.

The population of Croatia, which became the 28th Member of the EU in 2013, is estimated to be 4 million according to the 2001 census and more than 3 million immigrants living abroad (Republic of Croatia Central State Office for Croats Abroad, 2021). The right to vote for those living abroad who do not have a permanent residence in the Republic of Croatia was accepted immediately after the 1992 Parliamentary elections; and in addition to the existing ten constituencies, "diaspora constituency" was created as a separate region for those living abroad in 1995 (Kasapović, 2012). In 1995, the number of representatives to be elected from the diaspora was fixed at 12, but later this regulation was amended, the non-fixed quota was applied in 2000, 2003 and 2007, and the number of representatives to be elected from the diaspora was fixed at three in 2011 (Kasapović, 2012: 786). Possibly, the decrease in the number of representatives to be elected from the diaspora from 12 to 3 (2% of the parliament) over time

also reduced the diaspora's interest in participation in the elections. The number of 12 representatives determined for the diaspora in 1995 constitutes 9.5% of the Croatian parliament; and since the number of votes required to be elected from the diaspora is much less than in other constituencies, transition to an unfixed quota was made (Bartulac-Blanc, 2007: 3–4).

Although the diaspora living in the USA and EU countries are important in the Croatian diaspora, the diaspora representatives are chosen from those living in Bosnia and Herzegovina in greater number than the diaspora living in other countries, and this situation makes an important difference from countries that implement similar systems such as Italy and France (Laguerre, 2013: 79). Although there are diaspora voters living in 43 countries, 70% of the voters live in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bartulac-Blanc, 2007: 3) and the proximity of the countries facilitates daily commute. However, the complex ethnic structure of the region complicates the definition of diaspora. Ethnic Serbs who immigrated from Croatia in 1995 can not vote as part of the diaspora, and minorities have limited representation (Ragazzi & Balalovska, 2011: 11). Vertovec (2005: 6) points out that the diaspora was rewarded after Croats living abroad donated \$4 million to Franjo Tudjman's campaign in 1990. It seems that "Party distribution of diaspora representatives in the Croatian Parliament expresses the strength of HDZ in the diaspora since it is the exclusive beneficiary of the diaspora vote" (Laguerre, 2013: 89). The Croatia case has shown that the ruling party's interest has an important role in allowing external voting.

The Macedonian diaspora includes ethnic Macedonians currently in parts of Bulgaria and Greece and Macedonian citizens of various ethnicities. The size of the Macedonian diaspora is estimated from 350,000 to 2 million, while Macedonian authorities estimate the size of the diaspora as 350,000-700,000 (Selm, 2007). Due to the multi-ethnic structure of Macedonia, the definition of the diaspora should include those who migrated, not only ethnic Macedonians those who migrated from today's Republic of Macedonia, but also those who live in neighbouring countries (Balalovska, 2012: 6).

North Macedonia entitled external voting for those living abroad with the legal amendment in 2008, and also, by creating an electoral constituency for the diaspora, provided the opportunity to elect three deputies, albeit symbolically (Ragazzi & Balalovska, 2011: 18–19). Elections in North Macedonia are held every four years, and the number of electoral districts increased from six with the 2014 amendment to the 2009 Election Law to nine with three added regions for Europe and Africa, North and South America, and Australia and Asia (Dimeski, 2014: 35). Elections were held for 120 deputies in six constituencies in the 2020 Parliamentary Elections. Since the threshold of 6,450 registered voters was not exceeded it was not possible for diaspora voters to vote, and any representatives were not elected (IFES, 2020: 1). The failure to reach the required number of registered diaspora voters for the electoral district in the 2020 elections can be interpreted as the diaspora not showing enough interest in the North Macedonia elections.

According to Ragazzi and Balalovska (2011: 19), political participation of the diaspora in elections is necessary and legal, but the limited number of representatives that can be elected and the low number of Macedonian embassies and consulates abroad reduced diaspora's interest. Accordingly, opportunities provided for direct representation of the diaspora through the special electoral districts are not enough to increase participation of diaspora and stronger infrastructure to facilitate participation abroad, and the number of diplomatic missions is also significant.

During Milosevic Serbia, the diaspora was not allowed to vote. After the overthrow of Milosevic in 2000, Serbia changed the restrictive policy, prevented the political participation of the diaspora, as a result of the lobby of the diaspora, the right to vote abroad was on the agenda in 2004 (Garding, 2013: 134). All nationals of Serbia, at least 18 years old and with legal residence in the country, have the right to vote in the elections. Serbians living abroad can vote at diplomatic representatives in which they reside abroad (Voter Registration for Voting Abroad Resumed, 2020).

Although Serbs living abroad have had the right to vote in the Parliamentary and Presidential elections since 2004, the diaspora's interest and political influence in the elections is limited, a separate system for diaspora representation, like in Croatia and North Macedonia, has been discussed (Ragazzi & Balalovska, 2011: 14). The reasons for the weaker ties with the diaspora in Serbia, unlike Croatia, are

the nationalism towards expanding Serbia's territory during the Milosevic era, the emphasis on the protection of ethnic balance in Serbia with refugees, and seeing the diaspora as an enemy (Ragazzi & Balalovska, 2011: 16). Although there were changes regarding the voting processes of the Serbian diaspora, no facilitating measures were taken since no party could predict who would benefit from these votes, and approximately 37,000 people from the diaspora, which is estimated to be 3-4 million, registered for the 2008 elections and only 12,813 votes were cast (Garding, 2013; Ragazzi & Balalovska, 2011). In addition, while 300,000 people were expected to participate in the 2014 elections, only 3,500 voted in 2014 (BIRN, 2014). In this context, taken together, the support of political parties as an active actor in elections is required to facilitate the Serbian diaspora to vote, and Serbia's historical perspective, which sees the diaspora as an enemy, negatively affects the participation of diaspora.

The political structure that came into force with the Dayton Agreement has deepened Bosnia and Herzegovina's ethnic problems. Bosnians, Croats and Serbs are the founding communities of the country, which consists of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska within the framework of the 1995 Dayton Agreement (Ellis et al., 2007: 163). According to the official authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, approximately 2 million people live in 50 countries, with 80 percent of people of Bosnia and Herzegovina origin living in European countries, and the size of the diaspora reaches approximately 53 per cent of the country's population (Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, IOM, UNDP, 2016: 4-5). Citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina who are over the age of 18 can vote by registering at the place of their permanent residence. In contrast, those temporarily residing abroad can vote by posting or individually by registering them as permanent residents at the place where their residence was located before leaving the country, and dual citizens can vote by registering if their permanent residence is in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Jukić & Hadžiefendić, 2019: 29). Bosnia and Herzegovina allows voting by posting, but having residency in the country is required for nationals living abroad or dual citizens.

The number of registered external voters increased to 630,257 in the 1996 elections as a result of OSCE and IOM efforts to increase participation; however, the number of registered voters decreased to 222,000 in the 2000 elections, and one of the reasons for this is ethnic issues such as Bosnians and Croats candidates on the voter lists of those living in the Serbian region before and Serbs on the voter lists of those living in the Serbian region before (Ellis et al., 2007: 165-166). Due to difficulties in collecting sufficient credentials, the number of registered voters abroad reduced to 58,000 in 2001, the OSCE tasks were handed to the government, nationality certification or identity cards started to require registration (Ellis et al., 2007: 167). The country is trying to increase the participation of those living abroad in the elections. More than 100,000 people registered to vote after the Ministry of Foreign Affairs made efforts to register citizens abroad to participate in the local elections to be held in 2020 (Y.Z., 2020). Bosnia and Herzegovina's complicated system of government and political loyalty is based on ethnic identity, and ethnic politics play an important role in diaspora voting, among other reasons. Moreover, the authorities' proof of citizenship, including for more than 320,000 refugees fleeing from Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992 (Dimova, 2006: 2), is a major problem to be registered.

Slovenia was the first to declare sovereignty and has been a member of the EU since 2004. The country has comprehensive rules allowing alternative voting methods such as voting at diplomatic missions, by post and at the specific polling centre. Remittances as a share of GDP in Slovenia are only 1% (Figure 1), despite the fact that 7% of the Slovenian population lives abroad (Table 1). Following the independence of Slovenia, the Governmental Office for Slovenian Abroad to improve relations with minority Slovenes living abroad and living in neighbouring countries was established (Vah Jevšnik & Cukut Krilić, 2020: 444) and external voting was allowed in 1992 (Ellis et al., 2007: 243). Those with permanent residence and registration in Slovenia but are temporarily abroad on election day can vote at diplomatic missions or by post; however non-permanent residents immigrating from Slovenia can vote at polling stations, diplomatic missions, by post, and at the special voting centre of the electoral commission if they are in Slovenia during the election period (Voting from Abroad, n.d.). While Slovenes living abroad have the right to vote in parliamentary, Presidential, European Parliamentary elections and referendums, they do not vote in municipal elections if they do not reside in Slovenia (Vah Jevšnik & Cukut Krilić, 2020: 447).

According to the Kosovo Agency of Statistics' April 2011 data, the total population of Kosovo, including emigrants and people of Kosovan origin, is 2,483,999, with a total of 703,978 people living abroad, an estimated 550,000 people immigrating from Kosovo, and 153,978 people born outside Kosovo (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2014: 76).

Kosovo's definition of diaspora is as follows:

Every person who has a legal and regular residence outside Kosovo, but who was born in Kosovo and has close family and economic relations in Kosovo is considered a member of Kosovar Diaspora. A member of Kosovar Diaspora is considered every person who within one generation is the descendant of a person born in Kosovo and who has family relations in Kosovo. (State Portal of the Republic of Kosovo, 2021)

Kosovo has a comprehensive definition and accepts the descendant of a member of the diaspora as part of the diaspora, having residency in the country is not necessary. Furthermore, Kosovo allows dual or multi citizenship and supports return migration (State Portal of the Republic of Kosovo, 2021).

The number of Kosovans registered for the elections in 2021 increased. 40,000 Kosovans living abroad registered for the parliamentary elections of 2019, and 151,000 registered for the parliamentary elections of 2021 due to facilitating access to information and political parties' interest in remittances (Uijtregt, 2021). Kosovo, on the other hand, does not allow voting at embassies and consulates, enables the diaspora to only vote by mail to the CEC, and verifies applications for external voting via phone calls, which is a complicated process due to time differences and the limited time for mailing votes (Uijtregt, 2021). It seems that Kosovo's implementation prevents the right to vote for the diaspora because of the verification process and allowing voting only by mail.

Montenegro is the smallest country within seven countries, with a 628,000 total population and 153,009 living abroad (Table 1). Owing to the proportionally high percentage of external voters (24%) within the total population, each of the external votes is very significant and could be a game-changer in the results of the elections. The Montenegrin Constitution grants voting rights to every citizen at least 18 years of age, who has resided in the country for two years and, according to the election law, citizens who were residents for two years immediately before polling day have the voting right (OSCE ODIHR, 2020: 8). According to Article 2 of the Law on Election of Councillors and Representatives, "Persons with Montenegrin citizenship who are included in the electoral roll by the law regulating the electoral roll (hereinafter referred to as voter) shall elect councillors and representatives and be entitled to be elected councillors and MPs." (Law on Election of Councillors and Representatives, 2011).

The country accepts passive voter registration, uses computerized cross-checking with a database maintained by the Ministry of Interior and citizens living abroad keep their residency in the country except for their deregistration demand (OSCE ODIHR, 2020: 8–9). The report on the 2020 Parliamentary Election mentions that there are "vote-buying practices, including in Roma settlements, and sponsoring of travel expenses of diaspora voters" (OSCE ODIHR, 2020: 12). Furthermore, opposition parties have accused the ruling party of using the Albanian diaspora by organizing flights from Western Europe and the USA to win the parliamentary election on August 30, 2020 (Kajosevic, 2020). Montenegro is an outstanding example with automatic registration of voters, two year rule before the elections and allowing only in-person voting in the country even if citizens from the diaspora.

When the political diaspora incorporation policies of the seven countries are compared, challenges such as a lack of diplomatic representatives (only for countries that allow voting at embassies and consulates), low voter turnout, ethnic issues, complex registration procedures, and the rule of having residency in the country can be identified.

Croatia and North Macedonia may have stronger policies aiming at more substantial participation and representation due to the extraterritorial electoral district enabling the diaspora's direct participation. Furthermore, Croatia is also an interesting example for allowing the right to vote for diaspora without permanent residence in Croatia. Generally, having permanent residence in the territory of a state is

considered as the basic requirement to have voting rights, except in extraterritorial citizenship discussions. The participation rate of the diaspora in the elections is very low except for Croat diaspora living in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the ruling party's interest in the diaspora is very notable. Although North Macedonia has a similar diaspora constituency, the diaspora does not elect any representatives due to the low registration rate to vote in the elections.

Furthermore, Kosovo and Montenegro do not permit voting at diplomatic facilities, but Kosovo does permit voting by mail. Despite the country's improved automated voter database, Montenegro only allows in-person voting within the country, and it is the only country that does not allow external voting outside the country. The complexity of Bosnia and Herzegovina's ethnic structure and government system makes full integration of the diaspora difficult. Slovenia was one of the first countries to grant the diaspora the right to vote in 1992 and has the most extensive regulation.

In addition, low turnout and a lack of interest in registration among the diaspora indicate the need for new engagement policies. It should be noted that members of diasporas may prefer to support their homeland financially rather than participate politically. Six of the countries (except Montenegro) have granted the right to vote, but they face numerous challenges in practice. Incorporating diaspora is politically difficult, and most of these countries have simply extended the right of diaspora while failing to take the necessary steps to use the right. For example, Serbia has some reservations about the diaspora; it allows the diaspora to vote legally but does not consider any facilitating measures to be implemented to realise the right to vote.

Conclusion

The right to vote, which distinguishes citizens from others (aliens), is significant in democracies. The growing body of literature on external voting and diaspora engagement policies demonstrates that these are evolving phenomena that deserve to be addressed. External voting regulations appear to be necessary but insufficient to provide or increase diaspora's political participation, and countries require improved practices and new perspectives on this issue to meet the challenges. The purpose of this paper is to examine external voting procedures in the former Yugoslavia's seven independent Balkan states through the lens of diaspora engagement policies.

The issue of mass enfranchisement is diaspora electoral participation in the homeland, and granting emigrants external voting rights is an indicator of both recognition of citizenship and democratic practices. Despite differences in the emergence of diaspora and engagement policies across countries, this research shows that policies and programs share remarkable similarities and understandings of diasporas. Croatia and North Macedonia, for example, have extraterritorial electoral constituencies that allow for direct representation of diaspora. Three members of the Croatian diaspora have been elected to the Croatian parliament. Although North Macedonia reserved three seats for the diaspora, the diaspora was unable to elect representatives in the 2020 elections due to a lack of 6,450 registered voters. Slovenia has permitted alternative voting methods to facilitate diaspora voting rights. Although Kosovo recognises the right to vote, the country's verification system is flawed, and voting by mail is the only option. Serbia legalises external voting, but is concerned about the diaspora's preventing and discouraging the establishment of strong ties with the diaspora. While Montenegro only allows in-person voting, the country has already had issues with diaspora participation in parliamentary elections. Furthermore, the government structure and ethnic complexity of Bosnia and Herzegovina affect the realisation of the right to vote for the diaspora.

Most countries legally extend diaspora rights by granting diasporas external voting rights, but implementation is always problematic. In comparison to the size of the diaspora, voter registration and turnout are very low. The implementation of laws in certain countries revealed that, despite its great potential for enhancing democracy, diaspora political engagement must be carefully monitored. By tracing the variation of external voting mechanisms in the seven independent Balkan countries, this paper discovered that the electoral interests of political parties, particularly incumbent parties, have a significant impact on the degree of diaspora's inclusion in electoral processes. Why should governments be concerned about external voting? Aside from economic support, emigrant votes have the potential to influence election results, particularly in countries where the diaspora population is proportionally large, and remittances are an important tool as a share of GDP.

The economic contributions of the diaspora in the form of remittances and investments are critical to the national development of these countries. However, the countries must improve new diaspora engagement policies. The reason for this is that according to this paper, emigrants from the seven independent Balkan countries are not always willing to exercise their right to vote, and the cost of voting in some countries is prohibitively expensive for members of the diaspora. Countries can reconsider implementation challenges and enhance new remote voting procedures. In addition to extending the diaspora's political rights, countries can improve new perspectives, such as broadening social rights and building professional and scientific networks to transfer new technologies by means of highly qualified emigrants in order to build and sustain relations with the diasporas.

This paper serves as the point of departure for further research on the inclusion of Balkan diasporas in elections and is restricted to regulations and literature discovered. Further researches based on the views of diaspora members interested in participating in their homelands elections and the challenges could be important to systematize and evaluate differences in diaspora's interest across countries.

The implementation of extraterritorial and non-residential forms of citizenship by the seven independent Balkan countries demonstrates that extraterritorial and non-residential forms of citizenship are required from an immigration standpoint. Countries may need to change their policies to allow for various forms of participation by citizens living abroad, including non-residents. Finally, the role of the diaspora and its economic contribution to the homeland will continue, and states will need to find leverage through diaspora engagement policies. Some of the questions that need to be investigated are whether increased diaspora participation leads to increased remittances and how diaspora voting in the homeland affects political incorporation in host countries.

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