

Norwegen setzt Forschungsk Kooperation mit dem westlichen Balkanraum fort

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Der englischsprachige Artikel des norwegischen Forschungsrats resümiert die Forschungsk Kooperation von Nowegen mit den Ländern des westlichen Balkans im Rahmen des jüngst beendeten WESTBALKAN Programms (2006-2009). Norwegen wird die Zusammenarbeit im Kontext des Programms NORGLOBAL fortsetzen (2010-2013).

The Research Council's Cooperation Programme with the Western Balkans (WESTBALKAN) was recently concluded with a large-scale conference in Sarajevo. Research cooperation with the countries of the Western Balkans is to continue through a new initiative under the research programme Norway - A Global Partner (NORGLOBAL).

A total of 17 cooperative projects were completed during the programme period, which ran from 2006 to 2009.

Political conflict a dominant theme

The thematic areas encompassed by the programme were strongly influenced by the turbulent period the countries of the Western Balkans experienced after the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia. Several projects addressed research issues related to violent conflict, corruption and efforts to build new democratic institutions.

Other key thematic areas included challenges relating to natural resources and pollution, with a focus on management of water resources and marine resources in seas and lakes.

Conflicts exacerbated by rhetoric

Professor Pål Kolstø from the University of Oslo headed a research project entitled "Spinning Out of Control: Rhetoric and Violent Conflict" together with researchers Gordana Djerić from the University of Belgrade and Tarik Jusić of Mediacentar in Sarajevo. The project examined the part played by media rhetoric in certain conflicts in the Balkans and how it contributed to their spiralling out of control.

"We found that the risk of violence was reduced if the media described conflict situations as a problem between political leaders and not between population groups," explains Professor Kolstø.

"The conflict in Bosnia had the highest death toll, and in this case it is clear that the media failed to differentiate between the political, criminal and ethnic aspects of the conflict. After three years of violent conflict the different ethnic groups referred to each other quite routinely in derogatory "ethnicised" terms."

"It is obviously not possible to understand the conflicts on the basis of media reports alone. Variables such as demography and the presence of strong individuals in positions of power also play a role, of course. But we can say that it looks as though media rhetoric played a part in the escalation of the conflicts," states Professor Kolstø.

Complex system of corruption

Together with researchers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia, Åse Berit Grødeland, formerly of the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR) and now at the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI), studied the question of how local culture and a number of other factors promote informal practices that encourage corruption. As part of a project entitled "Informal Practices and Corruption in Post-Conflict Areas: the Case of the West Balkans", hundreds of in-depth interviews and surveys were carried out among the elite in the three countries to identify the mechanisms that foster corruption.

One possible explanation can be traced back to the supremacy of the Ottoman Empire over the countries of the Balkans, which lasted for several hundred years. During this period the original inhabitants enjoyed few privileges and found their rights severely restricted. One way of compensating for this was by making use of informal contacts to obtain benefits.

"In the former Yugoslavia certain ethnic minorities compensated for their minority status by employing similar tactics in their dealings with public employees," explains Dr Grødeland.

Since the countries of the Western Balkans gained independence many of them have struggled with poverty, limited public economic resources and widespread corruption. The project shows that many people feel that making use of informal contacts and networks is the only way they have of safeguarding their own rights vis-à-vis the public authorities.

New initiative

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has allocated NOK 24 million for the new programme period 2010-13, for joint projects between research groups in Norway and groups based in the countries of the Western Balkans. Priority will be given to cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, but projects carried out with research groups in Albania, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia will also be eligible for funding.

A funding announcement has been issued through the Research Council. Grants will be awarded in the middle of June 2010.

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