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Jean Monnet Network – Active citizenship: promoting and advancing innovative democratic practices in the Western Balkans, project aims at building a consortium of higher education institutions, civil society organizations and research institutions with the purpose of exploring the potentials of innovative democratic practices to democratize the Western Balkans societies while bridging a divide between the scholarship on grassroots democratic initiatives (in WBs) and on institutionalized democratic innovations practiced in many EU countries. Jean Monnet Networks have as a goal to assist in the creation and development of consortia in the area of democratization in order to gather information, exchange practices, build knowledge and promote EU integration.

The growing lack of interest of the European societies' citizens in participating in political life through traditional instruments of representative democracy has caused a renewed concern of the EU and its member states for the promotion and encouragement of active citizenship. This has resulted in a process of democratic engineering inspired by the principles of the participatory and deliberative conceptions of democracy. Democratic experimentation along these lines, which can be observed in some EU countries, gave rise to the promotion and institutionalization of democratic innovations (public debates, neighborhood councils, citizens' juries, participatory budgets, etc.). At the same time, in the post-socialist and post-conflict societies of the Western Balkans, the lack of democratic tradition, of efficient mechanisms of the citizens' participation and the infinitely prolonged accession to the EU pose additional challenges to any attempt to meaningfully engage citizens. Moreover, while the crisis of representative democracy in the EU resulted in a call for more democracy and tangible efforts to institutionalize different democratic innovations aiming to foster the effective inclusion of citizens, similar actions are almost completely absent in the WB states. However, in the region, we have recently witnessed different kinds of citizens' participation in initiatives against growing authoritarian tendencies. The examples of these bottom-up citizens' mobilizations vary from the so-called "colourful revolution" in Macedonia's capital Skopje to plenums in Bosnia and Herzegovina and a wide variety of civic initiatives at local levels in all countries of the region.

The Jean Monnet Western Balkans project focuses on investigating the interaction between democratic innovations promoted in the EU countries and bottom up citizen's mobilizations in the WB countries. Our aim is to bridge the research gap between these two modes of political action. We also aim at promoting citizen's participation in the Western Balkans through innovative democratic practices as way to foster political culture that will build strong citizen's resilience to growing antidemocratic tendencies in the region.

Partners:

University of Belgrade, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory;
University of Sarajevo, Faculty of Political Science;
University of Graz, Center for Southeast European Studies;
University of Turin, Department of Cultures, Politics and Society;
Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, Faculty of Law Iustinianus Primus;
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See more: **'Active citizenship: promoting and advancing innovative democratic practices in the Western Balkans'**.