**QUALITY REPORT**

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON “MIGRATION, DIASPORA AND DEVELOPMENT IN ALBANIA AND IN THE WESTERN BALKANS”**

**Mediterranean University, Tirana, 27-28 October 2017**

1. **Introduction**

The International Conference on “**Migration, Diaspora and Development in Albania and in the Western Balkans**” was held in Tirana on 27-28 October 2017, at the Mediterranean University of Albania.

The Conference was organized by the Center for Economic and Social Studies (CESS), a leading think tank in Albania specialized on migration issues. CESS is a founding member of the Western Balkan Migration Network (WB-MIGNET), a new research network of leading think tanks in the field of migration from seven Western Balkans countries[[1]](#footnote-1). The conference brought together scholars and policy makers from the Western Balkans and EU countries and offered a forum for exchanging knowledge and discussing on the issues that surround migration research and policy.

The Conference was organized over two days and was financially supported by the Decentralization and Local Development Program (DLDP) and the Central European Initiative (CEI).

1. **Objectives and scope of the Conference**

The main objective of the International Conference “**Migration, Diaspora and Development in Albania and in the Western Balkans**” was to raise the awareness of key actors in Albania on the role of the Diaspora in the socio-economic development of the home country. The conference aimed to create bridges of cooperation between diaspora representatives, civil society organisations and policy makers dealing with migration and developmental issues.

Another objective of the conference was to promote the involvement of the Albanian Diaspora in socio-economic local development. In order to reach this objective, the Conference

a) discussed the experiences of the DLPD in involving the diaspora in local processes and activities;

b) identified international good practices on diaspora involvement at local level in the home country; and

c) organized a panel discussion with diaspora representatives, policy makers, and key actors in the localities and researchers.

1. **Participation**

The Conference was attended by a number of representatives from Albanian central and local government institutions, international organizations (IOM, OSCE, UNDP, World Bank, ILO, GIZ, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation), embassies, civil society organisations, academia and students[[2]](#footnote-2). More than 150 people in total participated during the two days of the conference.

The list of participants included distinguished guest speakers, such as Mr. Pandeli Majko, Minister of State for Diaspora, Prof. Anastas Angjeli, member of the Albanian Academy of Sciences and member of the Parliament of Albania, Mrs. Donika Hoxha, Head of the Directorate of Public Diplomacy, Partnerships and Diaspora at the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania, Prof. Russell King from the University of Sussex (United Kingdom), Mr. Ferrucio Pastore from FIERI Italy, Mrs. Tanja Dedovic from the International Organization for Migration, Austria, and Aija Lulle from the University of Sussex (UK) and University of Eastern Finland.

In addition, the conference was attended by representatives of research institutions/universities from Western Balkan countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosova, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia), researchers and representatives from migrant organisations (mainly from Italy)[[3]](#footnote-3). Researchers from Albanian universities (Shkodër, Durrës, Korçë and Tirana) and representatives from local government units in Shkodër, Malësi e Madhe and Tropojë also attended the conference.

**4. Diaspora and the Local Development: Capitalizing experience of Diaspora involvement in local processes**

The second day of the conference (28 October 2017) was organized as a dedicated panel titled: “**Diaspora and the Local Development: Capitalizing experience of Diaspora involvement in local processes”.** This panel was supported by the Decentralization and Local Development Program (DLDP) and focused mainly on the cases of Diaspora mobilization in the local processes.

Representatives of the local and central government, the academia, the Diaspora, migrant associations and other key actors of Diaspora mobilization, discussed at length about the migration – development nexus.

The session ‘**Diaspora and the Local Development: Capitalizing experience of Diaspora involvement in local processes’** was divided in three parts, in a logical framework from the theoretical approach and global experiences, to concrete cases of Diaspora involvement in the local processes and then to comments and recommendations from different actors that can play an active role in the process.

Mrs. Donika Hoxha, Head of the Directorate of Public Diplomacy, Partnerships and Diaspora at the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs opened up the session speaking about the measures undertaken by the Albanian government to involve the Albanian Diaspora. She underlined that the Diaspora has been considered as an actor of development for the policy makers and this is reflected in some governmental platforms.

The keynote speeches at the Conference were delivered by **Prof. Russell King** (Sussex University, UK) and Mrs. **Tanja Dedovic** (IOM, Austria).

**Prof. Russell King** (Sussex University, UK) focused on the way the Diaspora may be involved within the migration-development nexus, the barriers that this process should overcome and some positive examples of Diaspora involvement in the world[[4]](#footnote-4).

Mrs. **Tanja Dedovic** (IOM, Austria) shared the experience of the Joint Migration for Development Initiative (JMDI) to mainstream migration in the local development planning[[5]](#footnote-5). Challenges and opportunities of local development in the different cycles of migration were at the centre of this presentation.

From the global and regional experiences, the conference moved on to the experience of the DLDP in capitalizing the role of the Diaspora in policy-making processes and funding opportunities.

**Erka Caro** (University of Tirana) presented her study entitled “Diaspora Engagement in Local Development of Origin Countries with the Cases of Malesi e Madhe and Tropoja Municipalities”. In this study, she explored the Albanian diaspora participation in local developments in the homeland, when incentivized by stakeholders in the home country. The study identified good practices on which future actions and policies at the local, regional and national levels can build. This was achieved by analyzing, defining and conceptualizing the Albanian diaspora in USA and their role in development processes, constructing a typology of diaspora organizations and mobilization and identifying the challenges in involving diaspora in decision making processes, development and policy-making and practice[[6]](#footnote-6).

**Bresena Dema** (University of Shkodër) presented a paper on the capitalization of fundraising opportunities and co-development strategy in the former commune of Dajç, currently one of the most important Administrative Units of Shkodër Municipality. This transfer of the experience to Hot (Malësi e Madhe Municipality) and the sustainability of the models were some of the presented issues[[7]](#footnote-7).

The third part of the conference was planned as a platform of debate among representatives from the Diaspora of Italy (migrant associations, investors in the fundraising process), the Diaspora of the USA, through a live Skype communication; the DLDP programme; the local priest of the Catholic Church; local and central government officials, and academia in order to fill the gap between research and policy and, at the same time, to get different points of view regarding Diaspora involvement. The discussants shared their own experiences with migration and different investments in the home country, their Albanian organizations in the host country; their perceptions on Diaspora as an actor in development, how and why they consider the Diaspora as an opportunity and the obstacles it has to face.

Collaboration between the different stakeholders: academia – policy - government – non-governmental institutions – migrants, was at the core of the discussion. Building trust, more transparency, less bureaucracies, clear messages for serious collaboration, benefits for the two sides of the coin (home country and Diaspora), different ways of involvement to tackle economic, political, social and cultural issues such as fundraising, policymaking, businesses and enterprises, investments, social help, cultural events etc. were some of the main common points of interest.

The conference concluded in with the guests and discussants affirming their willingness to discuss again on the issues pertaining to the Diaspora. The results of the conference were discussed in workshops that were later organized in some of the main municipalities and administrative units. The conclusions and recommendations are reflected in a policy brief, and two research papers will be published in prestigious journals.

**Workshops**

After the conference, CESS organized five local workshops in the Municipalities of Shkodër, Malësi e Madhe, Tropojë, Dajç Administrative Unit in Shkodër and Hot Village in Malësi e Madhe. The workshops discussed the conclusions of the conference, ideas of the policy paper, and provided some views on how to further improve it.

Representatives of the local government returned migrants, representatives of the local communities and civil society organizations participated in all the workshops. In the city of Shkodër, representatives of the University of Shkodër and of the Regional Development Agency also attended.

In the post-socialist transition period, more than 1/3 of the population in Shkodër, Malësi e Madhe and Tropojë have migrated mainly to Italy, the US, Germany and the UK. The people of Dajç have migrated mainly to Italy (especially from the villages of Samrisht, Belaj and Rrushkull) and the US (especially from the villages of Shirq, Darragjat and Mushan). The people of Malësia e Madhe and the village of Hot have migrated mainly to the US and Italy. In recent years, the migratory flows towards Germany mainly, and the US and Canada have also increased.

The migrants have created clusters of communities in the host country. For example, the migrants from Dajç in Italy have settled in the area of Pistoia, Florence. In the US, the migrants from Dajç have settled in New York (Bronx) and Florida (Jacksonville). The migrant communities in Italy and the US communicate constantly (phone, Skype, e-mail, personal visits, etc.) and exchange also information about developments in the home country. In the context of this communication, they have undertaken some joint initiatives to help the local community in Albania.

These initiatives are facilitated also by new structures of social capital they have created in the host countries. In Italy, Albanian migrants from Dajç have established an association, Alba Migrante, whereas in the US powerful social networks are active. In addition, these initiatives have been boosted also by influential people in the local communities, such as representatives of the Catholic Church.

Many of the discussants in the workshops underlined the fact that such an organization of the Albanian diaspora should be encouraged and empowered, with the home country acknowledging the contribution of the diaspora, through meetings and information exchange, participation in local and general elections in Albania, etc. The workshops organized in Malësia e Madhe and Hot showed that the diaspora of Montenegrin Albanians was better organized than the diaspora from these two areas in Albania. Participants in the workshop organized in Bajram Curri pointed out to the need for having a working group at the municipality for contacting Albanian diaspora organizations.

The Albanian diaspora has contributed with concrete investments in the home country. For example, the migrants from Dajç have invested around EUR 80,000 to asphalt the road in Pentar, renovate the Church in Shirq, which is a monument of culture, the Church in Pentar and in Samrisht. In Hot, migrants have invested in the improvement of the cemetery in the village, construction of a road, building a cultural centre, restoration of religious premises, drilling a well for potable water, etc.

In addition to joint investments, many migrants and returnees have made individual investments. In general, migrants invest in fields they have specialized in the host country. Thus, migrants from Dajç have invested their financial and human capital in cultivating decorative plants, woodworks, and establishing agricultural farms.

In all the workshops, participants highlighted that such investments, which contribute to the local development and create jobs, should be supported, promoted, and oriented with policies by the Albanian state. They asked for issue of property titles (in Dajç and Hot they do not have property titles/certificates) to be resolved, less taxes for smaller businesses for the first 2-3 years, improvement of the infrastructure (electrical energy supply, water supply and drainage, protection against floods, roads, etc), tackling the high informality level, corruption in the public administration, etc.

Some of the participants in the workshops said that migrants should be helped and showed where to invest through relevant agencies or municipal units, providing adequate information and less cumbersome procedures.

All the recommendations of the workshops are reflected in the policy paper.

1. The membersof WB-Mignet are: CenterforEconomicand Social Studies (CESS), Tirana, Albania; Center for Development Evaluation and Social Science Research (CDESS), Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina; Institute of Economics, Zagreb, Croatia; Riinvest, Prishtina, Kosovo; South East European University (SEEU), Tetovo, Macedonia; Institute for Strategic Studies and Prognoses (ISSP), Montenegro; and University of Belgrade, Serbia. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See the listof the participants in the conference – attached to this report. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Representatives from Croatia and Greece were unable to attend the conference. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. **King R**., Diaspora and Local Development, Paper presented at the International Conference on “Migration, Diaspora and Development in Albania and in the Western Balkans”, Tirana, 27-28 October 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. **Dedovic T**., Mainstreaming migration in local development planning – a tool developed by the Joint Migration for Development Initiative (JMDI), Paper presented at the International Conference on “Migration, Diaspora and Development in Albania and in the Western Balkans”, Tirana, 27-28 October 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. **Caro E**., Diaspora Engagement in Local Development of Origin Countries: Cases of Malesi e Madhe and Tropoja Municipalities Paper presented at the International Conference on “Migration, Diaspora and Development in Albania and in the Western Balkans”, Tirana, 27-28 October 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. **Dema B**., Mobilising the diaspora in function of development of the country of origin: the caseofDajcand Hot, Paper presented at the International Conference on “Migration, Diaspora and Development in Albania and in the Western Balkans”, Tirana, 27-28 October 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)