

## INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) has for the last five years been preoccupied with financial turmoil, high public debts in a number of member states, weak public finances, weak or negative economic growth and high unemployment rates. Weak but insufficient progress has been made in dealing with economic and functional EU difficulties. With the weakening of global economic growth, causing additional negative pressures on growth efforts within the EU, the economic, social and other differences among member states are being further increased. Improvements in sustainable general economic growth, social progress and stability, together with the downsizing of risks related to the success of fiscal consolidation, remain the key challenges of future EU existence and success.

The EU has been essential in developing and sustaining general peace, cooperation, and even economic progress among European nations for a number of decades. Even today, when the EU is faced with economic, social, and functional problems, a number of nations are expressing their interest and willingness to meet conditions for obtaining EU membership as soon as possible. Such interests are especially strong and reasonable in cases of the Western Balkan countries which perceive the accession to the EU as an anchor for peace and sustainable and higher economic progress. It is important to keep these interests and efforts strong among all population structures and put them in good use. This may contribute to the solving of economic, national, social, and other problems present in the Western Balkan region and reduce the risks of political or other tensions or fights which might endanger even the future stability and progress of the EU. Prudent EU reforms can foster growth while maintaining social cohesion and an extensive welfare state. Such EU perspective could represent the best challenge and guaranty for the Western Balkan accession achievements in the future.

Today we all have more dilemmas and questions about how to successfully implement and carry out EU reforms and how to keep the EU ideas attractive to potential and currently accessing countries. Besides such dilemmas, there are different options in how to act to get the best economic development and social stability results. The new challenges and new global changes deserve due analytical understanding of the nature of present problems and a lot of fresh concepts and ideas on how to successfully manage and overcome all problems.

The texts which follow are focused on analyzing the nature and structure of the problems which are typical for today's EU, candidate and to be candidate countries. The analyses contain suggestions for future improvements and sustainability of growth. They range from general macroeconomic approaches to micro case studies of companies' behavior and perspectives. The studies contained in the present volume

cannot really give the final answers to all the difficult and multidisciplinary issues of EU development and accession. The interesting quality of the collected texts lies in the fact that the authors come from states and regions where EU and accession problems are now in focus, extremely complex and often misunderstood outside these states and nations. That's why authors' assessments and suggestions shed some new light towards the end of the EU development and accession tunnel.

Vinko Kandžija  
Andrej Kumar

Rijeka – Ljubljana – Vitez, July 2013