Chapter 1

UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: A COMPARATIVE VIEW OF THE BALKAN COUNTRIES

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Abstract

Sustainable development is a complex set of activities on which the United Nations (UN) has based the future sustainable, inclusive, and ecological development of countries. By setting goals in the 2030 Agenda, sustainable development became a priority over economic growth. Improvement of the environment, progress of the economy, and preservation of the planet have become the general goals of every state policy and are achieved through the harmonisation of public policies. The goal of this paper is to review the progress of the Balkan countries through a comparative analysis of sustainable development goals by measuring sustainable development indicators. The primary set of sustainable development goal indicators from the available UN database is analysed. The results show that each of the mentioned concepts is directed at a common goal: reaching the highest possible values of the sustainable development goals. The objectives are designed and linked to lead to the same result regardless of the approach. The conclusion is that for every country, regardless of the political system, the basic concept of future economic development represents sustainable development and a contribution to global sustainable development. The contribution of this paper is reflected in the ability of the state or individual to see the advantages and disadvantages through a broad approach to the goals of sustainable development, while the results of the work can be a good basis for a more detailed analysis by sub-indicators or different groups of indicators.

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1. Introduction

The UN concept of sustainable development is implemented within all its professional bodies and organs, indirectly or directly, through the adoption of numerous resolutions, conventions, declarations, and other documents. Basically, the idea is to promote global actions for a sustainable world, performing state-of-the-art analyses and applying global norms and collective solutions that promote sustainable development. The emphasis is on the three dimensions of sustainability, which are viewed through the interrelated three components of sustainability – social, economic, and environmental. This idea is manifested through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are presented as indicators of the response to the global challenges we face, including water, energy, climate, food, oceans, urbanisation, transport, science, technology, and at the same time as a measure of support and capacity-building for goals and related thematic issues. The UN within the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), through the Department for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG), which acts as the Secretariat responsible for the SDGs, reports on the SDGs (Global Sustainable Development Report – GSDR), evaluates the implementation of the 2030 Agenda within the UN system, and advocacy and information activities related to the goals of sustainable development. The key role of the DSDG is reflected in timely and accurate reporting to intergovernmental bodies on the reports and impact of normative and analytical efforts at national, regional, and global levels.

The task of each UN member country is to respond to the set SDGs promptly through numerous indicators. They are obliged to adapt the methodology of calculation and evaluation of indicators and sub-indicators, with the aim of enabling the ranking of the set levels, building additional capacities and support, as well as reporting on the achieved goals. This is a very complex task and at the same time a highly expensive one. It implies the engagement of the entire social community, that is, the public sector, the private sector, households, and individuals. The process is demanding, primarily due to the need to have the necessary capacities, which include

infrastructure, finance, and human capital. At the same time, the process is costly, especially for less developed and lower-income economies, but over time it brings numerous advantages. Investing capital in the field of sustainable development is a safe investment, that is, each additional unit of capital brings a higher profit/result. This process is also time-limited. In other words, it implies continuity in activities to achieve the set goals. It should become part of national strategies, and should be achieved by the deadlines stipulated in the action plans.

The aim of this paper is to conduct a comparative analysis in the Balkans through the analysis of indicators of all SDGs. The comparative analysis will be conducted in two steps. First, the emphasis will be on available UN data according to Agenda 2030. In the second step, according to the already established rule that each country evaluates its set of indicators according to its specificities and characteristics, the EU-specific indicators will be revised. The analysis will use all available UN and Eurostat data related to the SDGs to gain a clearer picture of the activities, support, and capacities of individual countries. The conclusions of this research will provide a sound basis for a more detailed analysis of the SDGs, indicators, and the regulations in which the SDGs are implemented, by country. The recommendations resulting from this study will unequivocally indicate the shortcomings of the implementation of the process of sustainable development in the Balkans and neighbouring countries.

2. Sustainable Development in Action

Through a series of conferences in the last five decades, the UN has continuously promoted sustainable development issues, documented them, and presented them to member countries. This has been the case ever since the first world conference on the environment in Stockholm in 1972 (UNGA, Conf. 48/14), which was followed by a series of new and numerous initiatives in that direction. The first conference started a dialogue between industrialised and developing countries and recognised the link between economic growth, air, water, and ocean pollution, and the well-being of people around the world. Recommendations (109 of them) contained in the action plan were presented through three categories: 1) global environmental impact assessment programme; 2) environmental management activities; 3) international

support measures for assessment and management activities carried out at the national and international level. The significantly greater role and contribution of the first conference to sustainable development should be seen from the perspective of the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). It is the leading global environmental body, which includes several environmental conventions, secretariats, and interagency coordinating bodies. UNEP's goal is to foster cooperation in environmental care, encouraging nations to work continuously to improve the quality of life in a way that does not jeopardise the quality of life of future generations. Even then, three global crises that the world is facing and will face were recognised, namely: climate change, loss of nature and biodiversity, and pollution and waste. Seven interrelated subprogrammes were then proposed to deal with the crises: climate action, action against chemicals and pollution, action in nature, science policy, environmental management, finance, and economic transformation and digital transformation.

During the second United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, under the working title "Earth Summit", held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro (UNGA Conf. 151/26), a connection was made between various factors (economic, social, environmental) and their interweaving within/between different sectors of the economy. Even then, it was recognised that new perceptions of the way we produce and consume, the way we live and work, and the way we make decisions were needed. And this conference made an important contribution that was reflected in the creation of Agenda 21. An action programme with new investment strategies for the future was presented to achieve sustainable development in the 21st century. The recommendations (27 of them), which were on the table, related to new methods of education, new ways of preserving natural resources, and new ways of participating in a sustainable economy. In addition, two important conventions were adopted at the conference, signed by more than a hundred participants, heads of state: the UN Convention on Climate Change (UN, 1992a) and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (UN, 1992b).

In June 1997, a special session of the General Assembly (known as "Rio+5") was organised in New York. This conference was planned in advance as a five-year review and had the task of reviewing the progress of countries, international organisations and civil society in meeting the goals of Agenda 21 after the Rio Summit. During the session, two resolutions were adopted, namely the Resolution on the implementation of Agenda 21

(UNGA, RES/51/181) and the Resolution on the programme for the future implementation of Agenda 21 (UNGA, RES/S-19/2).

The Millennium Summit was held in New York in 2000 when the new realities and needs of the world in the field of sustainable development for the twenty-first century were set. The two-year global campaign aimed to increase the commitment of the international community and strengthen partnerships with governments and the civil sector. During the summit, the Millennium Declaration (UNGA, RES/55/2) was adopted by 189 signatory countries, which contained eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and develop a global partnership for development.

The next summit on sustainable development was held in Johannesburg in 2002 (UNGA, CONF/199/20*) when a political declaration and an implementation plan (set of activities and measures) for environmentally friendly development were adopted. Several days of consideration of the issue of sustainable development resulted in new decisions related to water (encouraging public-private partnership), energy (diversification in supply, with an emphasis on renewable energy sources), health (protection from infectious diseases and access to medicines), agriculture (market access and reduction of export subsidies), biological diversity (use of genetic resources), and other important areas such as the Kyoto agreement on the reduction of greenhouse gases, solidarity in the eradication of poverty, and the promotion of regional and national initiatives aimed at accelerating the transition to sustainable patterns of production and consumption. The outcome of all the mentioned initiatives resulted in a new UN resolution (UNGA, RES/57/253).

At the World Summit in New York (UNGA, A/RES/60/1), held in 2005, world leaders agreed on several major global issues, citing as a priority the achievement of the development goals of the Millennium Declaration. Additional funds for the fight against poverty were agreed ($50 billion per year), and the need to find innovative sources of development financing and measures to ensure long-term debt sustainability was emphasised, firmly relying on trade liberalisation and committing to implement the development aspects of the Doha work programme.

A high-level meeting on achieving the Millennium Development Goals was held in New York in 2008 (UN, INF/63/3), earlier than planned. The meeting was launched, unusually, by the positive results achieved in relation to the MDGs. The aim was for all interested parties to further strengthen their actions and take urgent measures to achieve the goals of the Millennium Development Goals in a timely manner. The leaders of the Member States had the opportunity to review progress, identify shortcomings, and take concrete actions in finding the necessary resources and mechanisms to solve them, all with the aim of accelerating the implementation and monitoring of the MDGs.

During the next summit in New York in 2010, a key question was raised as to how far the promises related to the Millennium Development Goals had been fulfilled (UNGA, RES/65/1). Numerous initiatives to combat poverty, hunger, and disease were announced, and the progress achieved in the area of women's and children's health was highlighted.

The UN Conference on Sustainable Development (also known as Rio+20) (UNGA, CONF.216/5) was held in Rio de Janeiro in 2012, where a key decision was made to launch a process for the development of a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which would be based on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and would relate to the new development agenda after 2015. Numerous other decisions on energy, food security, oceans, and cities were also adopted. Innovative guidelines on green economy policies were adopted, and, finally, a sustainable development financing strategy was set. The conference ended with the adoption of a resolution called The Future We Want (UNGA, RES. 66/288). A significant step forward was made in the same year within the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), when the Central Platform for Monitoring Sustainable Development (UNGA, RES. 67/290), was called the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). Its main role within the UN, under the direct supervision of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), is the monitoring and review of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at the global level (UNGA, RES. 70/299; UNGA, RES. 75/290B). The idea is to encourage states to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at national and sub-national levels, which will serve as the basis for regular reviews by the HLPF (voluntary, state-controlled, including stakeholder participation).

A special event on the topic of achieving the Millennium Development Goals was organised in New York in 2013 (UNGA, CONF. 68/202). Once

again, the commitment of all member states to achieving the goals was confirmed, and then the goal of balancing the three elements of sustainable development was set in the following format: ensuring economic transformation and the possibility of lifting people out of poverty, promoting social development, justice, and environmental protection.

During a three-day summit in New York in 2015 at the UN headquarters, more than 150 world leaders came together and announced a new plan called Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by 2030 (UNGA, 70/1). The plan contained declarations, sustainable development goals (17 of them), and indicators (169 of them). The goal of introducing the plan was reflected in several key activities: finding new ways to improve people's lives, eradicating poverty, promoting prosperity and well-being for all, protecting the environment, and fighting climate change. Not long after, the 2015 climate change conference, known as COP21, was held in Paris, where 187 participants signed the Paris Agreement (UN, 2015).

At the last international meeting on sustainable development, held in Stockholm in 2022, environmental action aimed at the faster implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs for all member states was encouraged through four plenary sessions.

All of the above, through the concept of sustainable development, their introduction into domestic regulations through national sectoral development strategies, and implementation through action plans, represent a clear future development path for each UN member country. Let us say that the conventional economic issue of economic growth becomes secondary. The race of the previously established economic concept based on production, exchange, capital, and profit will be replaced by a green economy as the basis of the future comprehensive context of economic growth and development. These concepts will involve simultaneously solving several environmental and social issues. Likewise, social issues will not be viewed separately from environmental and economic issues. Finally, ecology will not be considered independently of measures to solve social and economic issues.

The concept, therefore, reveals advantages through development goals. The advantage of using the SDGs is the fact that their analysis presents a global focus. This is precisely where the main advantage lies – the analysis of average values at the national level ignores existing inequalities. Another advantage is that the SDGs apply to every country and not, like the MDGs, only to low- and middle-income countries. Finally, mutual interweaving and

connection imply a holistic approach in analysing SDGs. Necessarily, their realisation cannot be selective. Achieving these goals, however lofty, gives every country the opportunity to achieve benefits, even for the less wealthy. The Sustainable Development Goals cover a range of topics. They are interrelated and should be addressed simultaneously, not individually.

The limitations, threats or weaknesses of SDG implementation are negligible at the global level compared to the benefits the goals bring over time. Limitations are reflected in time and financial dimensions. From the perspective of the time dimension, the achievement of the set goals requires a longer period than planned. Objective circumstances – crises, wars, weather disasters, pandemics – are external and can hinder and/or slow down the process of sustainable development based on the UN concept. From the aspect of finance, the limitations in the size of funds for financing sustainable development projects are significant, especially if these issues are viewed from the perspective of less-developed and developing countries. Despite the potentially available funds for the needs of sustainable development, the largest part of achieving the SDGs falls on the state itself. Funding from budget resources for less-developed countries is additionally burdened because, in addition to the direct costs for achieving the goal itself, or a group of goals, several indirect costs also occur due to the lack of an adequate system and partly due to maladjustment, regulations, and positive practices. Investments in physical infrastructure (including renewable energy) and human capital, especially for low-income countries (LICs) and lower-middle-income countries (LMICs), imply adequate access to capital markets on acceptable terms. Without it, the process of divergence will more clearly indicate the deepening of the gap between rich and developing countries. This means, in other words, that the SDGs are and remain a global project and a global task, and, accordingly, a global plan for financing the SDGs is needed.

The period of the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to progress in the field of sustainable development (Serbia is a good example in the field of regulation), because awareness was raised about the importance of a healthy life for individuals and/or the environment. On the other hand, the following period with its energy crisis and unfavourable climatic adversities (rainfall and floods vs. droughts and fires) during 2022 contributed to environmental regression (back to fossil fuels and non-renewable energy sources), but also economic well-being (decline in economic activity and the standard of living of citizens). Therefore, within the current cycle of the HLPF, priority

is placed on: (a) 2022: building back better protection against the coronavirus disease while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda; (b) by 2023: Acceleration of recovery from the coronavirus disease and full implementation of the 2030 Agenda at all levels. Likewise, the sets of sustainable development goals will be discussed in detail, namely: (a) for 2022: SDG4, SDG5, SDG14, SDG15, and SDG17; (b) for 2023: SDG6, SDG7, SDG9, SDG11, and SDG17.

3. Literature Review

The SDG indicators are set in such a way that it is possible to combine them through different systemic analyses. Some of the analysed systems were created ad hoc to monitor progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. They are based on existing UN SDG indicators, together with a new and specific set issued to monitor specific sustainable development goals (Kougias et al., 2021; Mashhoodi et al., 2020; EC, 2019; Fragkos and Paroussos, 2018; Bodis et al., 2017).

Other actors use already existing sets of indicators and data sources established to monitor different strategies or public policies at the local and regional levels (Siragusa et al., 2020; Lynch et al., 2019; Charron et al., 2015). It is an approach to selecting appropriate indicators and providing evidence of results (successes vs. shortcomings) that will be highlighted in the annual report (McGranahan et al., 2016).

The European Commission has also prepared recommendations to member countries for achieving the SDGs at the EU level (EC, 2018). By the end of 2019, there was also a high-level multi-stakeholder platform on the SDGs at the EU level (EC, 2017). The platform was important for the achievement of the SDGs for all participants in the EU single market in the field of sustainable development, ensuring the exchange of good practices between sectors and at the local, regional, national, and EU levels.

4. Sustainable Development on the Balkan Peninsula

The countries of the Balkan Peninsula follow UN activities aimed at sustainable development and are part of that process at the global level. Progress

in sustainable development is dominant in countries that have significantly improved regulations on sustainable development with EU membership, and individuals are aware of the importance of sustainable development on an individual and collective level. The Balkan Peninsula consists, in the broadest sense, of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia, as well as Greece and Turkey.

Figure 1. Balkan Peninsula

5. Data Sources and Methodology

The broader scope of the analysis of the sustainable development of the countries of the Balkan Peninsula should provide us with an overview of the state and level of movement of SDG indicators by country over several years. Data availability is crucial for the effective monitoring of SDG indicators. The data should also be consistent to allow accurate measurement over time. This is why the research uses the reference frame for data from the UN and EUROSTAT databases. The analysis will cover the period after 2000. Only data on countries available in the same years will be used, which will enable adequate comparisons both by country and by year. This approach will provide a clear context for analysing the differences and similarities between the SDGs by country.

The UN database has 231 unique indicators out of a total of 248 indicators. The indicators are classified into 17 thematic chapters with 169 objectives. The EU monitors progress in achieving the SDGs through 102 different indicators, evenly distributed across the 17 SDGs, of which 41 are multipurpose indicators. At the same time, only 56% of EU indicators are aligned with the UN SDG indicators, while as many as 88% are updated annually. In this paper, progress towards the SDGs is monitored based on the official UN indicators, which are currently also the official indicators for Serbia.[1]

A methodologically simple, comparative analysis in this paper represents the relationship between two or more data sets on SDG indicator values. This analysis will enable a comparison to be made of a large amount of sustainable development data to assess the effectiveness of countries in advancing the sustainable development goals. A comparative analysis of all SDGs will give a clear picture of the achieved individual results of the countries, enable a better understanding of the problem, and contribute to the formation of a development strategy as a response. At the same time, the scope of the sustainable development goals will be analysed from the point of view of the domestic economy, and their progress and shortcomings will contribute to the making of recommendations.

1 Ristanović (2022) analysed the SDGs only on the basis of specific indicators defined by the EU. By accepting the new methodology for EU accession, Serbia simultaneously accepted the regrouping of sustainable development goals into clusters.

6. Results

This section seeks to provide a comparative overview of the achieved sustainable development results of the countries of the Balkan Peninsula. It is of particular importance to understand the results achieved in terms of sustainable development, and to understand the challenges that countries face in managing sustainable development. Since 2000, the systems of government and the governance of states have changed. Ambivalent influences come from international institutions, uncertain geostrategic challenges are increasingly present, conventional theory is increasingly ignored, and the world is burdened with problems – from the global financial crisis, the decline of the real sector, through the Covid-19 pandemic, to the energy crisis. In 2022, the world faced numerous problems – social, economic, political, geostrategic, and, recently, ecological. The aforementioned circumstances had a significant impact on the neglect of sustainable development, primarily through inaction and failure to undertake the necessary activities, but due to the immediate threat to the environment. Certain countries have returned to fossil fuels to overcome the insufficient supply of expensive gas, in others, the volume of electricity production via thermal power plants has increased, and the transport of gas and oil by oceans has grown, transport at a global level has risen, etc. Besides, manufacturing and construction are responsible for 50% of the world's exploitation of natural resources (their consumption accounts for a sixth of the world's freshwater, a quarter of the world's timber, and a quarter of the world's waste). All this will increase the pollution of air, soil, and water in the future. An environment is being created in which the established sustainable development measures defined by the Millennium Development Goals, and then by the 2030 Agenda, are being ignored. They are falling apart! At the same time, it is unequivocally observed that the system of sustainable development is possible in conditions of stable socio-economic global trends without economic turbulence in the markets (goods and services, labour and capital). Although expensive, the process based on sustainable development is only achievable with the synergy of all interested parties equally.

Table 1 shows the values of the general index of sustainable development goals for 2021 and 2022. Among the EU Member States, Romania has made significant progress thanks to a significant increase in spillovers (Spillover Score). This indicator shows the importance of the environment in which the

SDGs are implemented. From an economic point of view, this indicator is characterised by growing returns on capital since investment opportunities are unlimited. Different combinations of SDGs enable the creation of synergistic effects and benefits for society, the economy, and ecology. Greece and Bulgaria have more moderate growth. Of the remaining countries included in the analysis, only Moldova has progressed. Otherwise, the ranking of countries largely depends on the activities undertaken for the SDGs at the national, regional, and local levels and, to a lesser extent, on the activities undertaken by other countries for the same purpose.

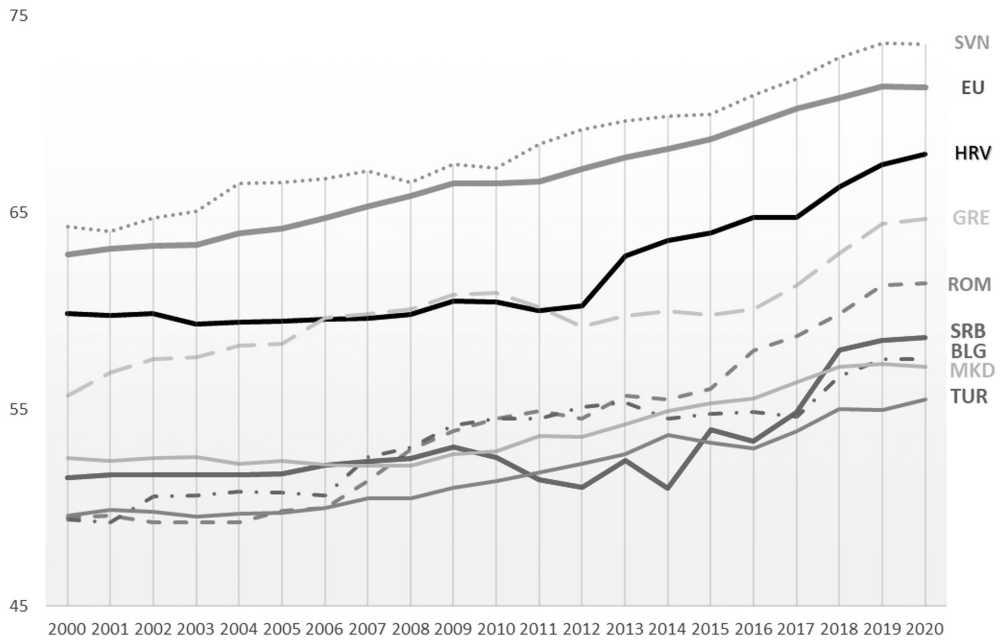
Table 1. SDG indices and ranks for the Balkan countries

2022/2021		SDG Index Rank	SDG Index Score	Spillover Score	Population
SLOVENIA	↓	15(163)/9(165)	80.0/81.6	60.9/60.8	37.8 mil.
CROATIA	↓	23(163)/14(165)	78.8/80.4	76.4/84.8	4.1 mil.
ROMANIA	↑	30(163)/39(165)	77.7/75.0	90.5/84.0	19.2 mil.
GREECE	↑	32(163)/36(165)	76.8/75.4	72.8/72.3	10.4 mil.
SERBIA	↓	35(163)/34(165)	75.9/75.6	85.6/82.6	8.7 mil.
BULGARIA	↑	42(163)/45(165)	74.3/73.8	88.2/86.9	7.0 mil.
MOLDOVA	↑	46(163)/48(165)	73.9/73.7	95.5/99.7	4.0 mil.
N. MACEDONIA	↓	57(163)/54(165)	72.3/72.5	91.6/93.9	2.1 mil.
B&H	↓	59(163)/47(165)	71.7/73.3	91.6/95.8	3.3 mil.
ALBANIA	↓	61(163)/48(165)	71.6/73.7	93.6/99.7	2.9 mil.
TURKEY	↓	71(163)/70(165	70.4/70.4	94.5/93.7	85 mil.
MONTENEGRO	↓	86(163)/85(165)	68.8/68.2	74.6/69.3	0.6 mil.

Source: UN database

The following chart shows the ranking trend of countries from the Balkan Peninsula, in relation to the EU average. Countries with pre-accession funds for sustainable development are the most advanced. This is especially pronounced with full membership in the EU, which only confirms the impact of the spillover effect that exists among member countries. Compared to the EU, Slovenia continuously exceeds the high average values of the EU SDG indicators. Croatia has shown significant progress in recent years and is constantly approaching the EU average. Greece weakened further during the crisis and has shown significant progress toward improving the sustainable growth index over the last few years.

Graph 1. Trend in the SDG Index Rank, 2000-2020



Source: UN database

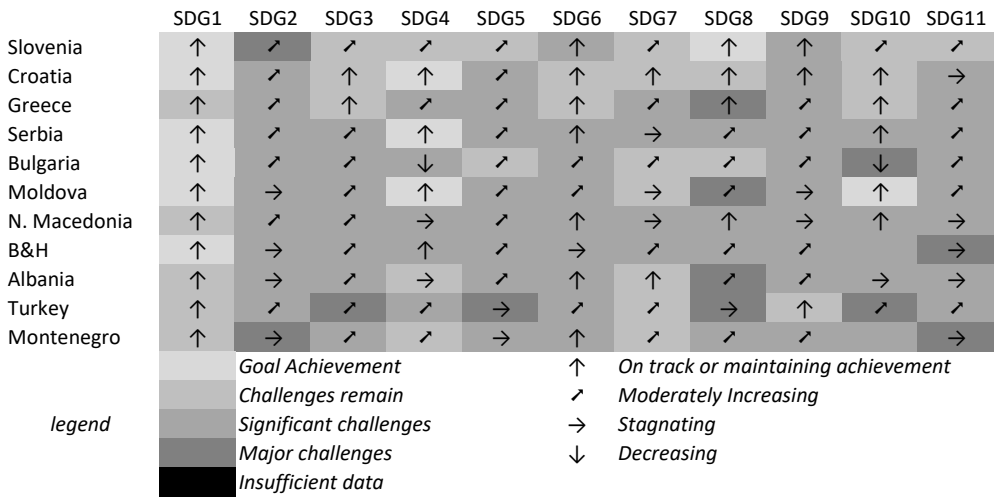
All reports on sustainable development until 2020 had a positive and optimistic view of global progress in the field of environment and sustainable development. A 2013 report (GSDR, 2013) shows significant progress in many areas since 2000, with many countries embracing the concept of sustainable development and finding ways to measure their progress (nationally, locally, or regionally). Data were collected, and assessments and evaluations of sustainable development were carried out using well-established indicators, which were developed for their own social, economic, and geographical conditions. The following period was used to eliminate deficiencies, improve indicators, and align methodologies to prevent further variations in indicator values. In the 2019 report (SDG, 2019), UN members agreed that all sustainable development problems are interconnected and require integrated solutions. Just as the problems are interconnected, the solutions to poverty, inequality, climate change, and other global challenges are also interconnected. The need to accelerate the progress of the SDG indicators has accentuated the need to examine the interlinkages between the goals –

creating a mix of goals. For example, climate change requires a transition to clean energy, conservation of forest resources, and changes in production and consumption patterns. Likewise, sustainable agriculture can help reduce hunger and poverty. Access to safe drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene can save millions of lives. Attending school and improving knowledge will provide better economic conditions and give better chances in the global market. The conclusion was to take a holistic approach to the 2030 Agenda and identify areas of the greatest impact for targeted interventions.

In the period from 2015 to 2019, the world made progress on the SDGs at a rate of 0.5 points per year (not a trend that allows the SDGs to be met by the 2030 deadline). The year 2020 was a challenging one due to the pandemic, and slow or non-existent recovery in poor and vulnerable countries (low-income and lower-middle-income countries). The multiple and overlapping health crises of COVID-19 led to a reversal of progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. For the first time in 20 years, the rate of extreme poverty increased, the continuity of health care was interrupted, there were job losses and wage cuts for workers, inequalities within and between countries increased, biodiversity declined, and terrestrial ecosystems further degraded, in addition to all existing problems in our societies – insufficient social protection, a weak public health system and inadequate health insurance, structural inequalities, environmental degradation, and climate change. The COVID-19 pandemic shook the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A solution in finding transformative ways in turbulent times was sought (SDR, 2020). For two consecutive years, 2021 and 2022, the world no longer made progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDR, 2022).

In 2022, sustainable development on the Balkan Peninsula was satisfactory but not even close to achieving the goals (Table 2). There were significant challenges to achieving higher SDG indicator values. Achievement of the goals progressed slowly, but positive developments were visible in all goals and differed from country to country. The number of targets whose values decreased or stagnated declined. Improvement was achieved in the area of poverty reduction (SDG 1), but also in health care (SDG 3). Individually, Slovenia dominates even when the goals are analysed separately.

Table 2. Comparative analysis of the SGDs by countries, 2022



Source: UN database

In the last few years, the Government of the Republic of Serbia has shown a high level of interest in sustainable development, and it has begun to improve all activities related to them. Significant efforts are being made to establish an institutional framework for monitoring the achievement of sustainable development goals in the country (PPS, 2021; PPS, 2020; PPS, 2017).

7. Concluding Remarks

In conditions of increasing geopolitical uncertainty, energy unsustainability, and economic instability, every country faces the question of how to successfully reverse the negative impacts of the pandemic on the SDGs and put countries back on the path of achieving the vision of Agenda 2030. More efforts are needed to maintain and improve the current state of sustainable development. All this requires strong financial support.

In this paper, a comparative analysis was conducted to look at the main elements of the sustainable development of the Balkan countries, with the aim of drawing conclusions, recommendations and scientific lessons. The recommendations seek to support the policy orientation of sustainable development management; improve existing protection systems; and promote an effective monitoring, evaluation, and reporting system through SDG indicators.

The results of the analysis of the SDG indicators for the countries of the Balkan Peninsula show that the region lags significantly behind the EU average. The exception is Slovenia, observed from 2000 to 2020, with recorded index values above the EU average. Croatia is making significant progress, especially in the years when it became a full member of the EU. Romania's progress in these indicators can also be observed, which, compared to other EU members, is slower than Croatia and faster than Bulgaria. In Greece, the financial crisis continued to threaten the realisation of sustainable development. Other small Balkan countries are far from the EU average, and significant efforts are needed to catch up with neighbouring countries.

It is necessary to prepare an adequate regulatory framework and methodology in the Balkan countries for improving the SDGs. It is also important to include all SDGs in their own national, sectoral, and local strategies, as well as their timely implementation through action plans. It is even more important to adapt the methodology for determining the status of SDG indicators to the UN methodology. This will positively affect the measurability and evaluation of the achieved SDGs, and the Balkan countries will be ranked better. For further progress, more significant financial resources are needed for the implementation of the SDGs. This environment should be a prerequisite for creating a strategic framework for sustainable development, enabling business opportunities to be discovered, providing answers to new market needs, and forming the basis for future regulatory measures to harmonise business and public interests. SDG analysis is important for every country because it can unambiguously indicate the need to improve certain parts of the sustainable development system, and the dynamics, intensity, and pace of the necessary measures. It should also encourage the launch of new models or innovations of sustainable development, indicate the real risks to sustainable development, point out the places where it is necessary to strengthen the action, and encourage the cooperation of all actors. Finally, it is necessary to maintain such a system of sustainable development which, through measurable values, will be the basis for a better understanding of various external influences on sustainable development.

In the coming period, the priority should be the renewal and acceleration of SDG progress in all countries, the reform of the international development financing system, and the building of national statistical capacities with data for global indicators.

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Chapter 2

THE NEW CONCESSION MODEL FOR MUNICIPAL WASTE MANAGEMENT IN HUNGARY

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Abstract

At the beginning of July 2023, two important changes occurred in Hungary in the field of municipal waste management that are unprecedented at the international level. From this date, a Hungarian oil and gas company won a tender for a 35-year municipal waste management concession. The petrochemical company and its contracted institutional service providers have the right to exercise the public duty of waste management – the collection of approximately five million tons of municipal solid waste (MSW) each year from residents, institutions, and business organisations – in the territory of Hungary.

This paper analyses the situation regarding waste management policies in Hungary with regard to the centralisation of municipal waste management and the introduction of the new Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme. The transformation of the Hungarian waste management system started on the path set out by EU directives, and changes are currently underway.

Key words: municipal waste management, concession contract, Extended Producer Responsibility

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