

ethnic groups. The challenge is to restore confidence in the Macedonian authorities and to create social cohesion.

According to Mr. Kickert, the concept of a "Greater Albania" is a myth, created mainly for propagandistic reasons; it has no significant backing among ethnic Albanian areas of the region. Still, a decision on Kosovo's final status cannot be postponed eternally.

The issue of organized crime and corruption, Mr. Kickert argued, is a significant problem in the Balkans: the region is a centre for illicit trafficking of cigarettes, arms, drugs and human beings, and corruption is intimately linked to organized crime. Still, the way forward is the integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, therefore values of transparency, public accountability and fight against the climate of legal impunity for organized crime should be promoted in the region.

Albania's post-Communist political and economic transition has been fraught with setbacks, according to **Dr. Robert Austin, Project Coordinator of the Centre for Russian and East European Studies at the University of Toronto**. He emphasized that Albania still lacks a leadership that understands democracy; and the country's political life, which is increasingly insignificant to a largely apathetic population, is still dominated by just a few politicians, formed during the Communist regime.

A weak economy and a weak infrastructure, which have led to widespread poverty, are Albania's biggest problems. In addition to this, although not being involved in inter-ethnic rivalry, Albania has needed the international community to come to its aid to mediate disputes between Albanians; in Dr. Austin's opinion, this indicates a low level of political maturity. However, a new generation of politicians could change this situation and could promote the country's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.

According to **Dr. Atanas Gotchev, Professor at the Department of International Relations Association in Sofia**, Bulgaria is perceived as a country with a high level of state capture and corruption, which, along with a weak system of governance, are factors limiting investment and constraining the business climate. Some of Bulgaria's problems are the concentration of power (despite progress towards decentralization), weak legal and regulatory frameworks, weak capacity to monitor corruption and enforce laws, as well as weak overall accountability and transparency.

However, the careful assessment of the experience of the past policies, said Dr. Gotchev, can create opportunities for the future. New and better-designed policies could contribute to faster economic growth. Based on the economic improvements of the last few years, Bulgaria can move from economic stabilization to accelerated development. The political life tends to be characterized by normality and the process of accession to the EU should contribute to strengthening the rule of law and to increasing accountability and transparency.

Post-Communist Romania has had a difficult time building capitalism without capital and consolidating democracy in the absence of a civic spirit, said **Dr. Lavinia Stan, Director of the Centre for Post-Communist Studies at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia**. Even the most optimistic forecasts recognize that economic success is still out of Romania's reach. Compared to some of its neighbours, Romania scores higher in terms of inflation and corruption, and lower with respect to living standards, foreign investment and Human Development Index levels. Regional