

10 years of Balkan Case Challenge

From the very beginning the Balkan Case Challenge (BCC) has always aimed to provide a kind of wake-up call to students from South-Eastern Europe. Its name was intended to welcome all those who considered themselves part of this geographical region which has suffered unfortunate events in recent years. The case study method, simulations of real-life engagements, teamwork, positive challenges, friendship, the exchange of ideas and cultures, and all the other specifics that accompanied the BCC together have constituted its soul.

The Balkan Case Challenge comprises four separate competitions under one roof, quite literally. However, each single competition (Business Case Competition, ICT Case Competition, Model European Council and Law Moot Court) has a dynamic and life of its own, an energy that makes it a specific and an integral part of the diversity that has been promoted by the BCC. This diversity reflects the conditions of human resources on the labor market: the very resources the BCC seeks to improve and develop through its unique blend of disciplines, techniques and tools. These and many other reasons have contributed to the 10 years of the existence of the BCC, probably the largest, most prestigious and popular event for students from the Balkans or South-Eastern Europe (SEE) respectively, which is the more neutral term preferred by the inhabitants of this region.

When we began the BCC in the year 2000, on the initiative of Mr Thomas Klein who did his civilian service at WUS Austria in Sarajevo, the capital letter B in "BCC" stood for "Bosnia and Herzegovina" since the participation in the event was limited to students from this country. In the consecutive years, the technical term "BCC" developed its own brand identity and the case competition itself included participants from more and more countries every year (in 2001 all countries of former Yugoslavia and Albania joined the BCC, in 2004/05 Moldova, in 2006 Austria; in 2008 and 2010 we even had guests from the Oman taking part).

Even though the term "Balkan" in "Balkan Case Challenge" has led to lengthy discussions with participants, jury members and other stakeholders, we kept the name in order to promote the many positive connotations the term brings to mind, and retained the all-inclusive element that the students from these different backgrounds found in the competition. When we thought about the term "Balkan" in the context of the BCC, we wanted to give it a fresh, progressive and forward-looking meaning. We focused on the goals of the BCC: the richness in different cultural backgrounds, the team-oriented cooperation among the different ethnicities and the academic accomplishments. All these factors aimed at a higher employability and better future in all countries participating in the Balkan Case Challenge.

For 10 years the Balkan Case Challenge has offered High Potentials (more than 2,500 participants in total!) from South-Eastern-Europe, and since 2006 Austria as well, the opportunity to present themselves in an international context and to establish ties with potential employers. Vienna, as a point of contact between the East and the West, played an essential role in the success of the BCC. In 2006, on the occasion of the EU Presidency of Austria, the venue of the BCC was relocated from Sarajevo to Vienna. In that way, Austria's contribution to the economic development in SEE was given visibility. Apart from that the BCC encouraged exchange, network-building and the strengthening of ties between companies and students from SEE and Austria. Through the enhanced involvement of companies in the realization of the BCC, a closer connection between university education and employment was established, since companies used the event to recruit employees for their business locations in South-Eastern Europe (in this way at least 10% of the participants found a job through the BCC).

Finally, the Balkan Case Challenge aims at establishing awareness of South-Eastern Europe and the Balkans and its potential as an integral part of Europe. Therefore, besides the aspect of employability, the BCC also has a consistent "political" component. In 2006 the participants of the Model United Nations (which was replaced by the Model European Council in 2008) developed a Visa Liberalization Resolution in order to raise awareness of the EU-entry regulations for the countries in the Western Balkans. This resolution was widely distributed and the reactions proved relevant. Members of the EU Commission, the Austrian Ministry of European and International Affairs, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Austrian Chamber of Commerce, representatives of the European Parliament and the European Parliament itself were among the respondents.

Today, most of the countries that participate in the Balkan Case Challenge do not need visas anymore. This cannot be directly linked to the BCC but still we believe that we contributed to this process through projects, like the BCC, which support higher education in South-Eastern Europe with regard to the development of this region and within the context of the medium-term extension of the EU. Investments in higher education have a lasting positive effect on the employment of the population. Beside the development of human resources, a good tertiary education at university locations results in an increased interest in investments by local as well as international companies, and thus contributes to securing and developing business locations.

In this regard, the Balkan Case Challenge is a success story where achievements can be measured and quantified. But the BCC is much more than facts and figures; the BCC is about people, about cooperation and friendship. Or, as a former colleague once said: *"The sparkle in the eyes of the competitors upon departure from a successful BCC cannot be replaced by any evaluation form or kind word. A successful BCC is a general feeling that is transmitted in bursts of positive energy among all those involved."*

Therefore I want to thank all those involved, all participants, partners, donors, sponsors, jury members, case creators, coordinators ... all who made 10 years of Balkan Case Challenge possible! It has been fun!