

NEWSLETTER

Tirana

WBF Activities and Ceremony for Awarding the Winning Projects

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Sofia

WBF involved in EU-WB Summit Declaration

The Western Balkans Fund expresses its high appreciations for being included in Sofia Declaration of the Western Balkans Summit, for the implementation of the Priority Agenda. The Fund, an organization established and supported by WB6 group, is encouraged and motivated to continue supporting Civil Society

Read on page 4

Skopje

Balkan Youth Forum organized

The Balkan Youth Forum “*Creative innovations towards active youth participation in the Balkans*” was successfully organized from 14th to 17th of May in Skopje. Over 70 representatives of CSOs, local authorities and youth workers participated in the three-day forum from different WB countries.

Read on page 5

Bratislava

WBF staff visits the International Visegrad Fund

Within the partnership framework among WBF and IVF, the Secretariat staff was invited to Bratislava to learn and exchange monitoring experiences and grant assessment. WBF team had a chance to meet IVF grantees and partners.

Read on page 6



We will be able to build the future together!*

By Ditmir Bushati

“Now we are realizing that we have many things in common and through this process through the work of Western Balkan Fund, also through the work of RYCO we will be able to know better each other.”

Read on page 4

The Western Balkans Fund Official Activities and Ceremony for Awarding the Winning Projects of the First Call

The Western Balkans Fund organized for two days activities on May 7th and 8th 2018 in Tirana, Albania with the grant awarded organizations of the WBF First Call.

WBF gave the opportunity for the first time to a such a big number of organizations from WB6 to come together for sharing their vision regarding regional cooperation activities, aiming enhancing people to people contacts in our region. 18 projects involving 84 partner organizations from universities, schools, associations of culture, arts, sports and institutions from the Western Balkans region are rewarded, symbolically starting implementation process. 18 of WBF grantees had a chance to directly communicate with WBF team and learn more about the project implementation process that will ensure a smooth collaboration and transparent implementation process. In order to fine-tuning the upcoming process, in order to ensure a smooth cooperation while implementing our projects. In the evening of May 7th, at the WBF premises the Contracts, stipulating the necessary legal requirements, were signed by each representative of awarded organizations and WBF Executive Director.

On the 8th of May, the organizations were awarded in a ceremony where dignitaries from Podgorica, Prishtina, Sarajevo, Skopje and Tirana, diplomats from the region, V4Group and European Union, civil society organizations, academia and media participated. The motto of the event was *“WBF – an important instrument for enhancing regional cooperation and people to people contacts”*.

Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania, Mr. Ditmir Bushati and Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina Mr. Almir Sahovic joined and greeted the event. Minister Bushati said that this is the first time that the civil society organizations are funded by the Western Balkans Contracting Parties directly. Addressing to the 18 winners of WBF projects, which aim to enhance people to people contact in the Western Balkans, Minister Bushati emphasized that: *“Through these projects we will be able to better know each other, to*





Assistant Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina Mr. Almir Sahovic, expressed the unconditional support of his country for this very important regional initiative. “This Fund is very important because it shows that our region is changing and our region is going towards European values and European perspectives. We have all been speaking a lot about the need of the increasing of the physical connectivity among our countries throughout our region. Also there is another important connectivity: connectivity among our people. And this is the main aim of our Fund” Mr. Sahovic said.

Executive Director of WBF Dr. Gjergj Murra in his speech underlined that the Western Balkans Fund is now a reality that has started to deliver. “In our assessment, the results of the Call are a clear sign that: The regional stakeholders are mature, willing and ready to cooperate; There is a strong need for support from civil society organizations; The decision, to create WBF was a timely one and very well accepted by our societies” Dr. Murra said.

V4 Group Hungarian Presidency and RYCO Secretary General gave thoughtful messages to participants emphasizing that WBF is becoming one of the most important instruments to increase regional cooperation. All the speakers highlighted the importance of a project implementation and expressed their strong belief that the process will bring an added value, to the regional cooperation and people to people contacts in the Western Balkans. At the end, all the organizations present, were awarded with special certificates on behalf of the WBF.

These meetings, symbolically initiate the implementation phase of the projects and WBF Secretariat together with the grantees, will follow carefully all the steps necessary by monitoring the results and the impact of each of the projects. We are quite confident that, based in the experience and expertise of the awarded organizations, this important phase will bring the desired results in the service of our societies and our beautiful region.

The official announcement could be found here:

<http://westernbalkansfund.org/2018/04/12/western-balkans-fund-announces-the-list-of-grant-awarded-projects-of-the-first-call/>

We will be able to build the future together!*

By Ditmir Bushati

I am so pleased to be here today with you, the winners of the projects that would be financed by Western Balkans Fund and as I have seen you here today I remembered myself few years ago when I was part of the civil society sector but we never managed to get any funding from governments few years back.

So our main sponsors our main supporters during the period of time were either European Union either EU member states which were implementing agendas in relation to rule of law and other projects or other foundations. So the fact that the governments of the Western Balkans countries have pledged modest amount of money for the civil society or in contribution to civil society, I think is a sign of maturity first and foremost of our region.

My second point and second message today is in relation to the transformation of our region. My friends from Serbia do not miss do not miss any opportunity from highlighting the developments, the journey the region has already made but also differences which are still present. And I am happy to see that here through the selection procedures of the winners, the Fund has managed to overcome some political disputes we politicians cannot do it, cannot make yet. So, I'm happy to see that my friend, Ivica Dacic is saying even street art or Doku Fest is playing a critical role in terms of region or collaboration, so I believe through this message you send also a clear signal to the political leads in Western Balkan in order to transform our self, our societies from former enemies into neighbours.

And my third message, and the last one, is in relation to the future, is in relation to the mobility. During the last 20 – 25 years we have been looking always towards West. We Albanians have always seen Italy as our European window of opportunity. But now we are realizing that we have many things in common and we have to know better each other and through this process through the work of Western Balkan Fund, also through the work of Regional Youth Cooperation Office we will be able to know better each other. We will be able also to reduce negative stereotype which are quiet prevalent still in our societies and we will be able to build the future together.

The future belongs to you and I wish you all good luck. Thank you!

**The speech of the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania, H.E. Mr. Ditmir Bushati, at the WBF Ceremony for Awarding the Winning Projects of the First Call, Tirana May 8th 2018*

WBF welcomes the involvement in the EU Western Balkans Summit Declaration in Sofia

The Western Balkans Fund expresses its high appreciations for being included in Sofia Declaration of the Western Balkans Summit, for the implementation of the Priority Agenda. The Fund, an organization established and supported by WB6 group, is encouraged and motivated to continue supporting Civil Society activities and human mobility in our region, with a special focus on people-to-people contacts.

The Sofia Declaration in English language and in all the languages of WB6 could be reached here: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/05/17/sofia-declaration-of-the-eu-western-balkans-summit/>



In the process of implementing WBF Projects

The implementation phase of WBF projects has already started. In this section we will bring to you some news, activities and photos related to the main project activities, as they are organized in our region. WBF would like to inform all the parties that the first tranche of the Call is disbursed according to the contractual agreements.



Balkan Youth Forum successfully organized in Skopje

The Balkan Youth Forum titled “Creative innovations towards active youth participation in the Balkans” was successfully realized from 14th to 17th of May in Skopje. Over 70 representatives of CSOs, local authorities and youth workers participated in the three-day forum, all of them coming from different Western Balkan countries.

The forum included an open conference, creative workshops and study visits. The youngsters also visited the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia during the forum, where the two youngest Members of Parliament presented themselves in front of the participants and a tour of the building was organized.

The forum was organized within the Balkan Regional Platform for Youth Participation and Dialogue, project coordinated by ALDA, implemented together with 7 LDAs from the Balkans and financed by the EU. This year, the project is supported by the Western Balkans Fund and the forum is the first activity that’s being realized supported by this forum created to promote and support projects that foster regional cooperation.

“Young people are the hope of the region because without Southeast Europe we cannot have a real Europe”, French Ambassador to Macedonia Mr. Thimonier said in his speech.

“This Forum is bringing youth from the region of WB and is strongly promoting people to people contacts and our regional cooperation, which are the main aims behind the WBF as one of the supporters of this initiative. We believe that trough this type of projects we contribute toward better understanding of our shared common values that are leading toward a faster EU integration of our region” - mentioned Antoaneta Ivanova, as representative of WBF.

Mr. Sasa Bogdanovic, Mayor of Municipality of Centar, Macedonia, Mr. Lutfi Haziri member of the Governing Board of ALDA and also Mayor of Gjilan and Ms. Eliska Gerthnerova from the EU Delegation in Skopje greeted the event at the opening session.

This project aims at structuring regional thematic cooperation and coordination between Civil Society and public authorities to improve environment for youth activism and participation, in particular of young people with fewer opportunities.

Please visit here for more details:

http://www.ald-europe.eu/newSite/news_dett.php?id=2202

DOKU.TECH presented in Tirana

Following the short presentation in Belgrade and Skopje, on May 19th, in Tirana, in the course of a dedicated session of Open Source Conference Albania 2018, IPKO Foundation concluded the introduction and presentation of DOKU.TECH initiative in three of WB6 capitals. Enthusiastic for the achievements of DOKUTECH, as WBF is one of the donors to support such an important event this year, our team was glad to share a short message with the audience. Please visit here for more info:

- <http://www.facebook.com/events/1877241738977015/>

“Birds Without Borders” project launched

Other projects funded by WBF have also started their implementation phase.

- In English: <http://ptice.ba/en/birds-without-borders-strengthening-bird-protection-on-regional-level/>
- In Bosnian: <http://ptice.ba/bs/ptice-bez-granica-jacanje-saradnje-na-regionalnom-nivou/>

Some WBF projects updates could be found in the web pages of our awarded organizations in the links below

- <http://kom018.org.rs/en/ceremonija-dodela-grantova-organizacijama-podrzanim-u-prvom-pozivu-fonda-za-zapadni-balkan/>
- <http://www.vojvodjanskazelenainicijativa.org.rs/>
- <http://ecpd.org.rs/index.php/12-news/211-the-western-balkans-fund-ceremony-for-awarding-the-winning-projects-of-the-first-call>
- <http://sindikaturavers.ba/2018/05/15/sindikaturave-republike-srpske-u-odabranom-evropskom-drustvu/>
- <http://cliohipbih.ba/clio-in-the-balkans-enhancing-history-teachers-network-and-improving-the-practice-of-teaching-history-as-tool-for-reconciliation-in-the-region/>
- <http://activezenica.com/zenica-postaje-prvi-grad-sa-zvucnom-mapom-u-bosni-hercegovini/>

WBF Secretariat Staff visits IVF in Bratislava

Within the partnership framework among WBF and IVF, the Secretariat staff was invited to learn and exchange monitoring experiences and grant assessment. WBF team had a chance to meet IVF grantees and other partners.

Young diplomats from MEFA visit WBF

WBF is becoming one of the important addresses to learn more about the support is providing to regional cooperation. Very pleased and enthusiastic to share our vision with young members of the diplomatic service of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania.

Visit of WBF Staff at the Embassy of China in Tirana

WBF Secretariat was hosted for a meeting with the high representatives of the Embassy of China in Albania, Mr. Bai Yunbi and Mr. Zhu Zhixue. We informed them related to WBF activities and projects. Possibilities of collaboration were discussed.



International Visegrad Fund an important partner supporting Western Balkans Fund.

Partnership among two funds WBF and IVF sealed in September 2017, with the aim to support sustainable regional cooperation in the two respective regions, assisted WBF to establish a sustainable long-term functioning of the WBF's Secretariat. This partnership comes as a result of the very positive engagement of the V4 Group.

Institutionally to be addressed the IVF and WBF signed the Memorandum of Understanding establishing technical and financial support towards the WBF. With the IVF's support WBF is currently moving forward with the implementation of the third stage of the technical assistance aiming to further support WBF in public outreach to make WBF known in each contracting party in WB6 which would slowly contribute to the transformation into a success story regarding regional cooperation landscape.

International Visegrad Fund's success established through the years provides the WBF with a concrete example to follow.

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Technical and advisory support from Peace Nexus Foundation

Peace Nexus Foundation known for addressing peace building challenges with a regional perspective since September 2017 kept providing a valuable technical and advisory support to Western Balkans Fund.

During this period of cooperation the partnership among two organizations kept getting stronger. Peace Nexus currently is assisting the WBF Secretariat in the strategic and operational organizational development both through expertise and constant process support.

Within the partnership framework Peace Nexus and WBF organized numerous activities that directly contribute to the WBF development process.





Call for Expression of Interest: Consultant/s to support WBF in the development of mid-term strategy and organizational capacities

The Western Balkans Fund is in process of identifying partners that are going to assist the Secretariat on the development of midterm strategy and organizational capacity process, for more information please click the link below:

<http://westernbalkansfund.org/2018/05/29/call-for-expression-of-interest-consultant-s-to-support-wbf-in-the-development-of-mid-term-strategy-and-organizational-capacities/>

Projections of activities for the upcoming months

- Ongoing - Monitoring the implementation of WBF projects, all over the region;
- Ongoing - Collaborative visits to WBF partners in the WB6 Region;
- End of June- Identifying the consultants to support WBF in the development of mid-term strategy and organizational capacities.

NOTE: In our web page at the Calendar section you may find the latest information regarding the timing of the concrete activities of WBF projects, as they are updated accordingly.



WBF Newsletter is prepared with the financial support of our partner International Visegrad Fund

www.visegradfund.org

For more information please contact us: info@westernbalkansfund.org