“Balkan Girl Power” Exhibition

On 11 of February, in Tirana “Balkan Girl Power” exhibition, a project financed by Western Balkans Fund and implemented by Social Contract Institute (SCI) was launched. The project provided opportunities for more than 70 girls of 16-26 years old from Tirana, Skopje, Pristina, Belgrade and Podgorica to get to know each other and develop through photography, a shared vision of Western Balkans societies where women and girls play an equally active role with man and boys, in progress towards EU integration processes.

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WBF Logo Story

As it is well known, for each organization, the Visual Identity is quite relevant and of a significant importance. Fully aware of that and exactly for this purpose, having also in mind that the Western Balkans Fund (WBF) was created to serve and to belong to the peoples of our region, from the very beginning we took the decision that the young people of our region should be the designers of our Logo, as the main expression of WBF visual identity. And we did the right choice! So, let’s go back in time, and see what happened in 2016.

Read on page 2

Digging through the WBF assessment procedures

Once the WBF Call for Projects is closed, for the WBF Secretariat starts an important and intensive process of evaluation, aiming to identify the best applications.

All applications that have passed the Eligibility Check, are individually examined and evaluated “in house”, by two evaluation teams, composed by four experts. During the individual reading, each of our experts reads approximately 4-5 applications per day, as an average.

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WBF meets with the Japanese Delegation

On January 22, the Western Balkans Fund had a fruitful meeting with representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, further exploring possibilities for cooperation, based on the respective missions and objectives.

Following the Japanese program for supporting the reconciliation and economic developments in the Western Balkans, concrete ideas were discussed with the view to materialize components of this program.

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WBF Summary of First Call

The purpose of this summary is to provide partners, WBF grant applicants and wide public with a full overview of the lessons learned from our First Call, general information on the Second Call, results in numbers and our project evaluation timeline and procedures.

Please open the link below:

WBF Logo Story

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So, let’s go back in time, and see what happened in 2016.

The WBF Logo Competition was announced on 1st of October 2016 and it can be considered as our First public Call. The Call was opened for students of Graphic Design and Visual Arts from different high education institutions in the WB, to submit their original, innovative ideas regarding the official Logo of the Fund.

The response of the applicants was great! When the Call was closed (31 of October), we had received 51 applications from all over the region, most of them of high quality and well-conceived. The Call was also quite effective regarding raising the visibility of our newly created Fund. During the one-month period, when the Call was open, we reached 1700 followers in our Facebook account. The Logo competition can be considered as our first big promotional activity.

It was an interesting exercise and a beautiful surprise to see the Regional Cooperation in the eyes of the young talented people of our region.

Through a comprised and transparent process, shortlisted by the WBF Secretariat and then sent to the WBF Senior Officials and IVF experts, the jury panel selected the Logo (below) that today represents our visual identity that follows the Fund activities in every step of its journey.

First prize
Shpat Konomi, Pristina

Second prize
Stefan Mijic, Banja Luka

Third prize
Gent Shala, Pristina

Six circles representing the Six WB Contracting Parties, starting from the lighter shade and darkening their blue until reaching the electric blue of the European Union

Some other shortlisted logo proposals are below:
Digging through WBF assessment procedures

Once the WBF Call for Projects is closed, for the WBF Secretariat starts an important and intensive process of evaluation, aiming to identify the best applications.

The graphic overview of the main functional segments comprising the WBF Evaluation Process:

All applications that have passed the Eligibility Check, are individually examined and evaluated “in house”, by two evaluation teams, composed by four experts. During the individual reading, each of our experts reads approximately 4-5 applications per day, as an average.

After individual reading, each team comes with a consensual score/decision for each project evaluated. If there are big differences between the two evaluators, in order to have a fairer judgement, a third reading takes place. During all this process, special attention is paid to the conflict of interest, in order to avoid any external/prior influence to the evaluators. This phase aims to establish a short-list of the best ranking (about 55-60 applications), divided equally for each WBF contracting party.

Considering the high number and the quality of applications, this is quite a demanding process, and generally it takes more than two intensive months of hard work and dedication. For the WBF Second Call it covers the period between January 8th until March 5th 2019, where the last two weeks are dedicated for the second reading, and the organization and proceedings of the Evaluation Panel.

All WBF secretariat members and external experts compose the Evaluation Panel and during three days, it makes a group discussion and another evaluation for every project included in the shortlist. In this way, the Evaluation Panel develops the final list of projects recommended for the WBF funding, which includes:

✓ List of projects recommended for the WBF funding, and
✓ List of projects comprising the reserve list of projects.

The purpose of the Reserve Projects is to provide substitute for the Winning Projects in case they fail to conform to the requirements extended by the WBF Evaluation Panel such as valid Partnership Agreement, Financial Statement, etc.

The meeting of WBF Committee of Senior Officials endorses the list of projects recommended for funding, subject of the final decision by the WBF Conference of Foreign Ministers.

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On January 21st, on 2019 Western Balkans Fund (WBF) Prishtina Chairmanship in Office, WBF Executive Director, Mr. Gjergj Murra and Program Manager Ms. Dafina Beqiri were received in Prishtina by Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Behgjet Pacolli. During the visit of the WBF Executive Director in Prishtina, also a consultation with officials from MFA, in charge with WBF chairmanship in office took place. The meetings were focused on the progress achieved by WBF, the implementation of the project financed by the Fund aiming to nurture regional cooperation in Western Balkans through joint activities and common projects of civil society and other regional stakeholders. In this context, the officials from Prishtina informed about their program of activities during 2019 with special focus in organizing the next Conference of WBF Ministers of Foreign Affairs. Both parties agreed to continue their communication and to work closely in achieving the already agreed objectives for the Fund during 2019.

* 

On January 22, the Western Balkans Fund (WBF) had a fruitful meeting with representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, further exploring possibilities for cooperation, based on the respective missions and objectives. Following the Japanese program for supporting the reconciliation and economic developments in the Western Balkans, concrete ideas were discussed with the view to materialize components of this program. Both parties are convinced that concrete further steps will be taken in this direction.

* 

On January 25, the WBF received in the premises of the Secretariat a group of students from the Department of Communication Sciences. The meeting was a good opportunity to inform them about the Fund’s mission and work and also to listen to their ideas about communication and PR strategies, for reaching wider audiences and stakeholders in our Region.
On January 28, in the WBF Secretariat premises, its Executive Director, Mr. Gjergj Murra, received the Egyptian Ambassador in Tirana, H.E. Mr. Mohamed Khalil. Both parties discussed the possible ways of cooperation between the Fund and Egypt in areas of mutual interest, especially for sharing experiences about reconciliation and enhancing cooperation in post conflict issues. Mr. Khalil expressed his strong support to the mission and objectives of WBF and also his readiness to continue cooperating on topics discussed.

*  
The WBF participated at the Annual Media Forum, held in Sarajevo, January 31 - February 1, an initiative of USAID’s Balkan Media Assistance Program. The Forum was a good opportunity for the Fund to meet and discuss with other participants from the Western Balkans and raise awareness on the WBF activities in the Region. As the participants came from the media sector, they showed interest in the activities implemented by the WBF in the Region and were keen on the opportunities offered by the Fund to apply on the future projects to be launched by the WBF.

In the process of implementing WBF Projects of the First Call

*In this section, we bring to you some news, activities and photos related to the main project activities*

“Balkan Girl Power”

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The project provided opportunities for more than 70 girls of 16-26 years old from Tirana, Skopje, Pristina, Belgrade and Podgorica to get to know each other and develop through photography, a shared vision of Western Balkans societies where women and girls play an equally active role with man and boys, in progress towards EU integration processes. The exhibition runs till February 28, and it is opened at the Centre for Openness and Dialogue at the premises of the Prime Minister’s Office.
On May the SCI and the partner organizations announced a call for girls of 16-26 years old to participate in the project. Among many applications, 20 girls from each WBF Contracting Parties were selected and were mentored by professional photographers in order to achieve the required results. So, a network of around 100 girls from the five WBF Contracting Parties was set up and they were trained in distance by a group of professional photographers as mentors, led by the well-known British artist Mrs. Lala Meredith Vula, who is also the curator of the exhibition. The project aims to enables girls from WB region to equip themselves with creative skills and techniques in order to think critically on their role in society, by using art as a means to achieve it. Over 500 photos from 75 girls were published on the virtual platform created by the project, serving as a means of communication among the girls and the public, which was invited to vote, or to comment for the best/favorite photos.

“Balkan Girl Power” photo exhibition, as the final stage of the Project, included the best selected photos from 34 girls, (7 from Tirana, 7 from Pristina, 7 from Skopje, 7 from Belgrade and 6 from Podgorica), e displayed in the exhibition hall. Two girls from each WBF Contracting Parties, were selected and were present at the opening up of the exhibition.

While, on February 12, the curator Vula, organized a Master Class on photography techniques with all the participants. The girls had a chance to get to know each other and exchange their experiences during the two days staying in Tirana.

WBF has followed with special attention the development of this project, through all its stages.

Ms. Olta Ceta, on behalf of the project team, expressed her estimation for our role, by saying:

“WBF is not just a donor, as the other donors that we are used to work with. The fact that WBF is founded by the will and support of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of WB; the fact that the executive staff is comprised by high level experts in promoting common values and developing regional cooperation between citizens, civil society and institutions of the Western Balkans region by providing a concrete "people-to-people" approach, aiming the integration of the region at the European Union, makes WBF a unique actor in the region.”
Projections of activities for the upcoming month

- **8 January - 18 February**: Individual Project Proposal Reading
- **2 - 5 March**: Panel evaluation
- **14 - 29 March**: Council of Senior Officials / Final Decision of the List of Awarded Projects
- **1 April - 22 April**: Negotiation/Contracting process & Awarding Ceremony
- **11-28 February**: “Balkan Girl Power” Exhibition
- **22 February**: Regional Forum; Research, development and education in Western Balkans. “An assessment of the experience and new opportunities of the EU funded Programs”

**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. www.westernbalkansfund.org

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For more information related to this Newsletter, please contact us: info@westernbalkansfund.org