WBF Evaluation Panel aiming to select the best projects of the WBF 2nd Call

The Evaluation Panel of WBF Second Call for regional projects, composed by WBF Secretariat team and two external experts took place on 4th – 5th March at the premises of the Secretariat. The Panel was fully engaged in finalizing the evaluation of 54 best regional projects, nine for each WBF Contracting Party, out of around 250 Applications received during the WBF Second Call.

Each project, was presented by evaluation team members who in details explained each project’s strengths. Power Point presentations were prepared and made available to all Panel members for giving wider insights on the project and for justifying the evaluation/scores of the first individual reading phase.

After the presentations/discussions for the projects, each Panel member was invited to establish a ranking list of the best 6 projects (4 recommended and two in the reserve list). Deborah Reymond and Mr. Randall Puljek Shank, form Peace Nexus Foundation, were part of the panel delivering’s. Their general impression is that: “WBF Evaluation Panel was a very professional, transparent and an effective process”. In their view: “The Panel managed to select and to draft a comprehensive list of projects, that will further enhance people to people contacts, contributing to the overall regional cooperation activities and processes in the Western Balkans”.

Read on page 2

WBF receives a Norwegian delegation

On March 5th, in the WBF Secretariat premises in Tirana, we received a delegation from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs headed by Deputy Director Mrs. Annette Bull and H.E Ambasador Per Strand Stjasastad.

Read on page 5

Creating synergies in WB for strengthening education and science

On February 22nd, regional study within the project “Creating synergy in Western Balkans for strengthening education, research and science”, supported by Western Balkans Fund was presented in Tirana.

Read on page 5-6

WBF visits the CEI Secretariat Headquarters

On 14-15 of February, a delegation from WBF Secretariat, payed a working visit to the Central European Initiative Secretariat Headquarters, in Trieste.

Read on page 4
The Panel members provided the rationale for their score/ranking and, after the relevant discussions and the calculation of all the scores, the Recommended List of the proposals to be financed, was created. The balance distribution of the projects among WBF Contracting Parties and among WBF Areas of Intervention was highly taken into consideration, during delivering/ranking procedures of the Panel. After the presentations/discussions for the projects, each Panel member was invited to establish a ranking list of the best 6 projects (4 recommended and two in the reserve list), following the below criteria:

### No. Relevance of the Project Proposal

- **I.** How relevant is the project proposal to the objectives and priorities of the WBF Call for Proposals?
- **II.** How relevant to the particular needs and constraints of the target contracting party(ies) is the proposal (including synergy with other regional initiatives and avoidance of duplication)?
- **III.** How clearly defined and strategically chosen are those involved (final beneficiaries, target groups)? Have their needs been clearly defined and does the proposal address them appropriately?
- **IV.** Does the project proposal contain specific added-value elements, such as regional cooperation, people to people mobility, connectivity and regional cohesion or innovation and best practices?

### No. Design of the Project Proposal

- **I.** How coherent is the overall design of the project proposal? In particular, does it reflect the analysis of the problems involved, take into account external factors and relevant stakeholders?
- **II.** Is the action feasible and consistent in relation to the objectives and expected results?
- **III.** Is the budget feasible and coherent towards the results and activities? Does the project budget have flexibility for further modifications?
- **IV.** Is the implementation period of the project longer than foreseen in the application guidelines?

The Panel members provided the rationale for their score/ranking and, after the relevant discussions and the calculation of all the scores, the Recommended List of the proposals to be financed, was created. The balance distribution of the projects among WBF Contracting Parties and among WBF Areas of Intervention was highly taken into consideration, during delivering/ranking procedures of the Panel. The List, was delivered to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of all WBF Contracting Parties, for their endorsement, to be followed by the final approval by the WBF Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

In general, for all of us in the WBF Secretariat, the overall conclusion of this important process is that, based on the high quality of applications, the awarded projects of the Second Call, will bring further elements to nurture regional cooperation in Western Balkans, enhancing people to people contacts in our region, through joint activities and common projects of civil society and other regional stakeholders.

“WBF Evaluation Panel was a very professional, transparent and an effective process”. In their view: “The Panel managed to select and to draft a comprehensive list of projects, that will further enhance people to people contacts, contributing to the overall regional cooperation activities and processes in the Western Balkans”.

*Deborah Reymond and Mr. Randall Puljek Shank, Peace Nexus Foundation*
The “Balkan Girl Power” exhibition, a project financed by Western Balkans Fund and implemented by Social Contract Institute (SCI), 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. During this activity, the WBF had the opportunity to interview some of the girls from WB participating in the exhibition and got their impressions and experiences.

Q1 WBF: What are your impressions from this activity on the framework of regional cooperation?

S. Hysenaj, Pristina: My impressions for this project are very good and I think that projects like this have an impact on the improvement of regional relations. J. Milovic, Podgorica: This was great experience, because give us perspective about the problems of our generation in region. F. Miloti, Tirana: The activity at the prime ministry premises had to do with modern art. I liked the fact that there were Albanians and foreigners too. The exhibition brought together people from different part of the region and that was something very worthy. A. Memeti, Skopje: It was a good time to get to know and exchange experiences with girls from the region.

Q2 WBF: Do you believe that this experience has influenced on building better relations between the girls of the region?

S.H: In fact, yes, actually now with some of them we are also virtual friends and the experience in this project remains one of the best experiences of my life. J.M: Of course, now I have new friends in Albania or Serbia, with same way of thinking, and together we can change things. F.M: I actually do believe that this experience brought different relations between people. We exchanged cultures, we learned more about foreign cultures too. A.M: A single activity in Albania does not believe it could affect building relations between the region, but the idea of the project in general can have a positive impact. If this project is extended to other WB societies if the exhibition travels through all Balkans, believe that this would have had a positive impact on improving or building relationships among the girls in the region.

Q3 WBF: What do you consider as the main challenges in this whole activity?

S.H: The main challenge for the realization of this project was to find the location where to take photos. J.M: Well I think that the biggest challenge was to accept the possibility for my work to be criticized by my colleagues and by the public. But in the end, that critics brings us progress. F. M: The main challenge especially for me was the fact that I had to show my art to the world. For a closed person it is not easy but in this experience it was very delightful. I learned to express myself and my art. A.M: I did not have a challenge in this activity for myself. I can only call it a challenge until the qualification for the selection of photos for the exhibition, and this is at the local level among the girls of Macedonia, while there was no challenge later on. It cannot be said that it was a challenging activity considering that the winner of the exhibition were declared ten girls in total!

Q4 WBF: Once the activity is over what would be your message to other girls in WB?

S.H: My message for the other girls not just in WB but around all of the world is: being who you are, believing in yourself and fighting for your dreams no matter what, we are equal and we should be treated like that, our time is coming. J.M: We make great job, but this is just beginning so we must to continue. We cannot expect any progress if we only sit and wait for it to happen. F.M: I would like to say that the activity was worthy for new experiences. Every girl like me that has fears to share their art and opinions should just express themselves. Everyone should try it. A.M: My message is to continue photographing in their manner and style. All the pictures were good and conveyed different messages. All the girls were wonderful and of course I am glad to meet them. If this activity is to be held this year too, I would suggest to all girls engaged in photography. Even it lasted a bit, it was a great experience I wish that this project will take a more serious course and certainly my desire is to travel through the Balkans.
On 14th and 15th of February, a delegation from WBF Secretariat, paid a working visit to the Central European Initiative (CEI) Secretariat Headquarters, in Trieste. WBF delegation, composed by WBF ED Mr. Gjergj Murra, WBF Senior Official from BiH MFA, Mr. Milos Prica and WBF Programme Manager Ms. Dafina Beqiri, held discussions with CEI Secretary General, Mr. Roberto Antonione, alternate SG, Mr. Antal Nikoletti, Deputy SG, Mrs. Nina Kodelja and a team of experts covering different areas of competency within organization.

The meeting was a useful opportunity for WBF representatives to learn more about CEI programs and to discuss potential areas of cooperation, as per CEI action plan (2018-2020) and WBF program. CEI is one of the first regional organizations that contributes to European Integration and sustainable development through cooperation and acts as a platform for political dialogue, through its strong operational result-oriented approach to regional cooperation.

During the meeting, it was highly emphasized that WBF and CEI share a lot of similarities, especially in the development and implementation of projects and also, both organizations aim to foster dialogue and people to people contacts. WBF presented its achievements during the first and second Call for Project Proposals, CEI representatives were impressed to learn about the willingness for cooperation among WBF stakeholders, as it was stated during the meeting this is another sign that by enhancing cooperation among these two institutions will further foster dialogue between communities in Western Balkans and also in Central Europe. Follow up actions of this visit are: definition of concrete actions to be proposed by WBF Secretariat to CEI in terms of cooperation, promotion of dialogue and support to common projects, close cooperation for sharing best practices and respective know-how, etc. In this respect, a working visit of a CEI delegation to the WBF premises, in Tirana, in the forthcoming period, was agreed upon.

*The First Regional Thematic Network Forum and Annual Conference of the ALDA - Western Balkans Network for Local Democracy was held in Tirana. The Forum created synergy and enabled joint action of CSOs for EU integration through thematic regional networking. A studious gathering of more than 50 representatives of the civil sector and youth from the Western Balkans and Turkey who engaged in discussion on the key reforms in the field of rule of law, fundamental rights, social policy and employment and public administration reform needed in the region to further the EU integration processes.
On February 25th, at the Europe House in Tirana, the Western Balkans Fund was part of the group of Civil Society Organizations and other institutions, who were invited to discuss about the preparations of the Western Balkans Summit in Poznan, July 2019, in the framework of the Poland Presidency of the Berlin Process. Interesting exchange of ideas on the topics of youth and civil society cooperation was held with the delegation from the MFA of Poland, including Presidency Coordinator, Amb. Wiesław Tarka and Mrs. Jaczewska, in the presence of the Polish Ambassador to Tirana, H.E Mr. Karol Bashura.

On March 5th, in the WBF Secretariat welcomed at its premises delegation from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs headed by Deputy Director Mrs. Annette Bull and H.E Ambassador Mr. Per Strand Stjasastad. Both parties discussed the possible ways of deepening the cooperation between the Fund and Norwegian government in areas of mutual interest, as Norway remains high in the agenda of cooperation for WB region.

On February 28th, in Tirana, the Migration Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI), organized the Workshop on the topic: “Strengthening regional dialogue and cooperation on migration”. Western Balkans Fund’s Executive Director attended the opening session of the event and met with MARRI RC Director, Mr. Sashko Kocev and the team of experts, for continuing exploring areas of common interest, with a view of potential joint activities in the future.

On March 11th, the WBF Secretariat hosted the Slovak Ambassador in Tirana, H.E. Peter Spišiak. As Slovakia is actually Char-in-Office of V4 Group, the meeting was a good opportunity for sharing information’s, about the achievements and challenges of our Fund, with a view to improve the mutual cooperation and for making it more result oriented.
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

**WBF committed to foster and support education, research and scientific cooperation in WB**

On February 22, in Tirana was presented the regional study within the project “Creating synergy in Western Balkans for strengthening education, research and science”, supported by Western Balkans Fund. It was implemented by a team of experts from European Movement Albania in partnership with Balkans Policy Research Group and European Movement Novi Sad.

The overall objective of this project is to understand and facilitate the construction of a more enabling environment in research, education and innovation with a particular focus dedicated in strengthening EU Funds absorption capacities in Western Balkans region.

“This partnership signifies a firsthand symbol of the cooperation, and the achievements of your joint work encourages future cooperation at the service of our region and our societies. We are all aware that there is a distinctive lack of communication and cooperation amongst the research and education institution in the region, therefore promoting this exchange remains one of our immediate challenges”, said Mr. Gjergj Murra, Executive Director of WBF, greeting the event.

The study provides a comprehensive map of all state structures, adopted national strategies, legislation and budget dedicated to the areas of research and education, offering a clear view of current situation in all WB in general, focusing on Tirana and Pristina, including Belgrade as a case of positive experience.

According to the three parties study, the WB have made steps forward through the strengthening and improvement of national systems of education, scientific research, technology and innovation. Nevertheless, there remains a considerable difference in the level of performance among countries and there is a strong need for support and cooperation in the future.

**The future is digital and female!**

The Innovation Centre in Pristina, held the final event of the "Digital Girls of the Year" project 28th of February. During the event, 15 girls from Tirana, Skopje and Pristina, pitched their ideas in front of a panel of experts. The "Digital Girls of the Year" project enabled the creation of "The Regional Network of Digital Girls, a platform that will provide the right support via training, coaching, mentoring and other activities to all the girls that have an innovative idea using the technology tools, and want to impact their communities.

CID Balkans Development, Innovation Centre in Pristina and Estima, NGO from Skopje implemented the project.
Projections of activities for the upcoming month

- 26-27 March - Council of Senior Officials / Final Decision of the List of Awarded Projects
- 1 - 22 April - Negotiation/Contracting process & Awarding Ceremony

Facebook remains the favorite mean of communication for the Western Balkans Fund activities. Less than in a month period, from January 23 to February 19, the figures show a considerable increase of followers of the WBF Facebook page. Our deep appreciation and thankfulness to the readers, friends and followers! Keep following us, we will continue to keep you posted with our latest developments and activities!