REGIONAL CONFERENCE: “COVID-19 ECONOMIC IMPACT AND CRISIS CONSEQUENCES”

Jointly organized by the Chambers of Commerce in Prishtina (the lead partner), Skopje, Tirana and Vlora, the event gathered a high number of business representatives, decision-makers, international organizations, media, etc.

The conference was greeted by Deputy Prime-Minister from Skopje Mr. Fatmir Bytyqi, Minister of Industry, Entrepreneurship and Trade from Prishtina Mrs. Rozeta Hajdari, and heads of Chambers of Commerce of the parties involved …

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WBF PROJECTS

On page 3-8 you can learn more about the most recent activities and implementation phase of our funded projects.

WBF 3RD INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Youth empowerment and cooperation is one of the many goals of WBF, so our intention is to give a platform to the youth of Western Balkans to develop on the professional level and network …

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Meeting with the RYCO Secretary General, Mr. Albert Hani

Very pleased to welcome in our office on 21st of May Mr. Albert Hani, the newly appointed RYCO Secretary General.

There is a high interest on our shared goals and contributions for the Western Balkans region, for our youth and people. Hence, we were all happy to discuss the Regional Cooperation and advancement of the combined efforts between WBF and RYCO.

We are looking forward to joint actions with Mr. Albert Hani and offer our sincere congratulations to the Secretary General.

Hanan Kovacevic is our 6th Intern, and the first Intern to join us in this 3rd Internship Program. Hanan comes from Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and she has just received her master's degree in Project Management at Tsinghua University in Beijing, China. She received her bachelor's degree in Business Administration at Bahcesehir University in Istanbul, Turkey.

Her research work was focused on understanding individual cultural values and cultural intelligence and their impact on negotiation styles. Besides her academic achievements, Hanan prides herself in the voluntary work she did for Women for Impact in Beijing and her membership in both of her universities' student councils as well as the role of the Bosnian representative. She hopes that her experience at WBF will foster interactions and culture exchange from the region which will build readiness for her to work in the Western Balkans. During this internship program, Hanan will work closely with our team, who will be happy to mentor and guide the learning about project cycle management and the dynamic processes of working in an environment which is rich in culture, projects, and approaches.

WBF 3RD INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

WBF is currently implementing its 3rd Internship Program, aiming to provide an opportunity to up to two interns from different WBF Contracting Parties.

Youth empowerment and cooperation is one of the many goals of WBF, so our intention is to give a platform to the youth of Western Balkans to develop on the professional level and network on a regional level by creating the conditions to share mutual experiences, values, traditions and culture which will promote our perspective on good neighborly relations on people-to-people level.

Through the support of the International Visegrad Fund, the Program is intended as a jump-start to students/young professionals to enhance their knowledge about regional cooperation and specific objectives of WBF through a three-week Program, at the WBF Secretariat Premises.
Tourism, Western Balkans, Local ideas and Regional solutions, all encountered on 19th of May at the online forum "Western Balkans Tourism in the spotlight", organized to connect the Western Balkans trough tourism, offering the chance to touristic workers and stakeholders from WB6 to meet and talk in the frame of this project.

The event was part of a series of discussions and short presentations in an open forum, sharing experiences from the Balkans. It offered a great meeting point to network, make connections and even create a joint touristic offer.

Touristic guides, workers and enthusiasts shared their experience about the topic of Tourism in Western Balkans.

A special treat: Cultours, the mobile application that offers 3 tours to visit 9 monuments in the Western Balkans was promoted.

In the event, Executive Director of WBF, Gjergj Murra, addressed the promotion of shared cultural heritage and support of local sustainable development.

“It is very important to promote shared cultural heritage in Western Balkan related to common history through creation of youth friendly tools, to support local sustainable development of micro-localities though income generating activities and tourism and to reinforce the cooperation and networking among different stakeholders on local and regional level”- said Mr. Murra.

On behalf of the WBF, Mr. Murra praised the mobile application created to promote shared cultural heritage related to monuments from World War 2 in Western Balkans, the touristic products developed in cooperation with local stakeholders, promoting thus sustainable economic growth, as well as regional and local events to promote cultural heritage and local economic development related to tourism

“All these activities reinforce the Balkan Network for local democracy to implement thematic project that include civil society organizations, local authorities and other economic and cultural stakeholders”- concluded Murra.
WBF is happy to see the successful closing of the 3rd International Scientific Conference on "How regional University Cooperation can improve business cooperation – ideas, challenges and expectations" on 18th of May 2021 at "ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION CENTRE University of Zenica.

It was a great opportunity for everyone to reach the large assemblage of participants from academia, researchers, junior researchers, and other professionals.

The conference provided unique and rational opportunities to all the academics and researchers from the fields of Philosophy & Law, Economics, Information Technology & Innovation, Engineering, and others. The conference is part of the project "Strengthening Regional Academic and Research Exchange" between Luarasi University Albania, FON University in North Macedonia and University of Zenica in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Donja Gorica University Montenegro!

At its first regional conference, on May 12th, our implementing partners from the Youth Entrepreneurial Service Foundation (Yes Foundation) in Skopje talked exactly about the circular economy! They introduced the circular economy concept and have started to build skills among businesses and CSOs for transition to circular economy.

Amongst other benefits, circular economy contributes to job creation and sustainable development. With the adequate support and promotion, the circular economy concept has proven to be an effective new approach in enhancing regional development through networking and strengthening SMEs and CSOs capacities around it.
We are happy to see the outcomes and results of the “Partnership for circular economy” project in North Macedonia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The project is contributing to regional and cross-border cooperation, good neighborly relations and strengthen regional cohesion in the WBF region, via the circular economy. The aim is to create job opportunities through boosting circular economy concept among businesses and to raise awareness about it into businesses and other key stakeholders/actors.

It is already increasing regional cooperation among all actors (SMEs, CSOs and public sector) through these joint activities for circular economy.

The project is passionate about increasing the capacities of 60 SMEs and CSOs for implementing the circular economy concept into their businesses, to raise awareness amongst 70 others and to create new job opportunities on long-term.

“Partnership for circular economy – sustainable SMEs growth and regional development” is a great example of impact in the overall regional economy, by promoting the circular economy concept, and by gathering and sharing knowledge, best practices and fostering dialogue amongst relevant actors in our region!

If you want to learn more, check out this dynamic video prepared by our creative implementers on the benefits of the circular economy! [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=can-1BB9gz8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=can-1BB9gz8)

How would you like a virtual tour on the common Roman cultural heritage we share in the Balkans? Time to revisit the video made by our partners at Digi.Ba as they take us back in time and walk us through the whole region in a very attractive approach via story-telling and VR application.
Take a few minutes to visit virtually the monuments in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Albania showing how our region shares this common cultural heritage demonstrated in Roman villa and terme in Ilidza near Sarajevo, Roman military camp and city Viminacium near Pozarevac, Serbia, Municipium settlement near Pljevlja, Montenegro and Durres amphitheater in Albania, all presented through VR storytelling.

Digi. Ba team is now enriching the user-friendly application that will be available online and installed in local museums, close to the selected archaeological sites. It will allow all of us, the Internet users and museum visitors to take a virtual walk-through Balkans in the Roman period and learn about monuments preserved only in fragments in selected sites and listening to relevant explanations.

This project, proudly supported by the Western Balkans Fund, continues the path identified with the initiative “Roman heritage in the Balkans” and follows up applying the same technology. The VR application developed last year presents the Roman heritage sites through VR digital stories, where the actress Selma Alispaic plays different roles from the life in those places during the Roman period, increasing awareness and knowledge about the Roman presence in Contracting Parties of the WBF showing that the whole area had common cultural heritage.

The project is also improving cooperation and exchange between experts such as archaeologists, historians, IT people, moviemakers from BiH, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania and in the long term to provide a contribution in building a path of better social, political and cultural relationships among people of Contracting Parties of the WBF. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QRCc1hJTxfE

We all called them “heroes” during the pandemic, but have you ever thought of the psychological burden of health workers during the Covid-19 crises? What about the quality of life and stress of nurses during the epidemiological emergency in regional hospitals? What do we know on the effects it had on pregnant women or mothers who gave birth during the pandemic? What was the impact of (truncated) social support received during covid-19 pandemic on maternal postpartum depression? These are all questions that do not cross people’s mind on the everyday life, but they certainly occupy the mind and affect those who provide the crucial health services mentioned above: nurses and midwives of our region.

From a caring and professional perspective, all these issues were discussed in the First Balkan Congress organized by the Chamber of Nurses, Midwives, and other Professionals in Kosovo- OIK.
Western Balkans Fund is proud to support this important initiative that will unveil “The role, importance and challenges of nurses, midwives and other health professionals during the Covid-19 pandemic”.

It was an intensive event that required months of preparations and a very sophisticated approach to bring together 25 presentations, in 4 sessions, with 8 highly professional moderators and 12 representatives from institutions and associations of nurses and midwives, from the WB6, as well as Croatia, Slovenia and Turkey.

Can students take a more active role in fair transition to renewable energy production? Can they develop advocating tools on Regional Green Youth Charter (RGYC)? We have just shown that they can, with the adequate training and support by donors and partners.

This is exactly what our project “Regional Green Youth Charter” is doing, under the inspiring guidance of the European Movement in Serbia and the project partners from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo* and Montenegro. EMS is conducting impactful trainings and activities with students to raise awareness of youth on importance of transition to renewable energy production. These empowered trainees will take a more active role in their local communities towards fair transition to renewable energy production.

All these and other dynamic points of development were discussed on May 24th in the online conference that brought together the Western Balkans Fund and the implementing partners, promoting the Regional Green Youth Charter which is, together with the online platform, the main outcome of a project.

Executive Director of WBF Dr. Gjergj Murra and Jelica Minic, President of the European Movement in Serbia (EMinS) highlighted the importance and the results of this approach. Five of the students who took part in the project of raising the ecological awareness in the region presented their impressive work. More than 25 participants were brought together in this event, making us even more hopeful that the project can make a significant impact on improving the way how the WB6 states and actors are dealing with ecological problems.
Impact of Covid-19 in the regional business cooperation, how it is being addressed and what have we learned, were all questions answered on May 25th in the event: Regional Conference dedicated to the impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on the business and economic situation in the Western Balkans!

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The conference was greeted by Deputy Prime minister from Skopje Mr. Fatmir Bytyqi, Minister of Industry, Entrepreneurship and Trade from Prishtina Mrs. Rozeta Hajdari, and heads of Chambers of Commerce of the parties involved.

During the event, an important regional study dedicated to the impact of Covid-19 in the regional business cooperation was presented feeding interesting discussions from the participants, aiming to define the best modalities and ways to increase the cooperation in the future.

Taking the floor during the event, WBF Executive Director, Mr. Gjergj Murra, highlighted that: “Economic and business cooperation is one of the most important components of regional cooperation, with a strong impact to the good neighborly relations and overall regional cohesion. That’s why WBF was more than enthusiastic to support for the second time in a row the initiatives under this project”.

He also expressed the readiness of WBF to continue working with the partners and other business organizations/associations in the future, as part of the contribution of the Fund to enhance regional cooperation and good neighborly relations.
INTRODUCING OUR NEWEST TEAM MEMBER!

WBF Team continues to grow and this May we welcomed our new Project Coordinator from Belgrade, Ms. Sanja Petkovska.

Sanja holds a doctoral degree in Cultural Studies since 2017. Previously she obtained a bachelor’s degree in Continuing Education and a master’s degree in Sociology. She has a long experience with international and non-profit organizations in Serbia. Currently, she serves as a Research Expert to Centre for Advanced Study Sofia (CAS) ’s project. Her research is thematically focused on social, political, economic, and cultural aspects of knowledge production and distribution, but also on the problems of gender and inequality.

Sanja is the author of the book "The Idea of University and Bologna Process" (2010) and numerous articles. She is working on a book with Routledge on the topic of progressive politics and policies for former socialist countries which could prevent their rising peripheralization. Besides the academic work and work in non-profit sector, she took part in several artistic initiatives, activities, and publications, including a blog Biking the Post-Socialist Decay dedicated to exploring the possibilities for using biking in ethnographic research.

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

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