Annual meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the V4 and WB6, took place in Poznan, Poland, on the 28th of June 2021.

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On June 14-15, the WBF Council of Senior Officials met in Tirana under the North Macedonian Chairmanship!

During the meeting, the WBF Secretariat and the CSO members discussed the accomplishments within the period of January – June 2021.

This meeting served as a great opportunity to exchange more in detail information on the implementation of 24 WBF funded projects within the framework of the WBF 3rd Call for Proposals. Based on the progress made with the implementation of the 3rd Call, the Secretariat introduced a bigger picture related to projects to the CSOs also information related to WBF’s financial planning, representation, networking, public relations and fundraising.

CSO meeting facilitates the WBF Contracting Parties to share collaborative spirit and willingness to support common projects from the region.

**ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE V4 AND WB6**

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WBF Executive Director Dr. Gjergji Murra, shared the achievements and future plans, ensuring thus support and sustainability of the Western Balkans Fund. “V4 Group-WB6 political format is a vibrant indicator of the excellent partnership among our two neighborly regions, celebration of the long-standing commitment of the V4 Group and its Member States towards cooperation, stability, development and the European perspective of the WB” - said in his address Mr. Gjergji Murra. “WBF and the region today are in a better spirit, with shared visions, more fostering attitude, and better equipped with exchange at the people-to-people level. We are thankful for the continuation of support in this path” concluded Mr. Murra on behalf of the WBF. At the end of the fruitful event, the Executive Directors of IVF and WBF, Mrs. Szilágyiné Bátorfi and Mr. Gjergji Murra, signed a MoU which paves the way to further strengthen the cooperation between the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkan Fund, raising the operationally of the WBF in various fields in the WB Region.
“The challenges of Albania within the process of EU integration” Seminar

Continuously, the Western Balkans Fund is demonstrating its values of moving forward, recognizing and embracing obstacles, learning the lessons and keep moving as the Fund navigates into the multi-ethnic and multicultural environment of the region. What people need in scenarios like ours is the soft connectivity, a crucial factor that aligns with WBF’s goal of people-to-people links and bringing people of the Western Balkans closer together for resolving mutual hurdles.

This was the core of the address made on June 25th by the Executive Director of Western Balkans Fund, Dr. Gjergj Murra, as part of the seminar “The challenges of Albania within the process of EU integration”. Organized by The Diplomatic Academy of Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania, the training was the right platform to explore in detail the role of the Western Balkans Fund in strengthening regional cooperation. A unique opportunity for the future young diplomats in reference to the topic and to learn more about the work of the WBF’s through the years, as the only intergovernmental body in the region.

MEL Workshop

WBF team is in progress of the preparation of detailed Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning framework as an important tool of translating the results into action! WBF is being supported and guided by PeaceNexus in a MEL workshop in Vlora.

Growth is sought after and in need for everyone in the Western Balkans. To enable the much-expected growth of projects and engagements, we need to get ready. Crafting 360° approach on monitoring, designing new roles and responsibilities, paving the way for a more in-depth support to our "people-to-people links" approach in the Region.

Meeting with OIK

On June 5th representatives of OIK (Chamber of Nurses) from Prishtina visited WBF, who kindly shared with the WBF team their acknowledgments and conclusions of the 1st International Congress of Nurses, Midwives and Other Health Professionals of the Balkans Congress CNMHPB supported by WBF. The congress highlighted how the events gave opportunities to all health care professionals to present their scientific works, collaborate and exchange experiences with their colleagues from the Region, discuss challenges they are facing in their daily work, during the COVID-19.

“A sincere expression of gratitude to the donor of this Congress, the "WBF", without whose support and cooperation this congress wouldn’t be possible” -said the Executive Director Mr. Naser Rrustemi.
On 28-29 May took place "The Regional School of European Integration" in Budva, Montenegro. This three-day event gathered graduate, postgraduate students and researchers from partner universities with the aim to improve their knowledge on the EU integration process and to stimulate mobility and exchange of lecturers and young researchers from Montenegro, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Regional School was officially opened with the formal address by Ms. Zorka Kordić, Chief Negotiator for Montenegro with EU and the Dean of Humanistic Studies Prof. Dr Ilija Vujačić.

On behalf of the Western Balkans Fund, who supported this initiative, the Executive Director, Dr. Gjergji Murra, invited participants and organizers to continue their efforts of regional cooperation in the field of education and research and emphasized the willingness of the Fund to continue joint efforts in the Region.

In a festive spirit to celebrate the start of summer season in Abania, organizers of the Butrinti Film Festival were present with the trailer of the documentary "The future begins today". A dynamic atmosphere with the presence of many diplomats in Saranda, ending "Europe Month" tour and starting summer season in the coastal city.

The documentary "The future begins today", supported by the Western Balkans Fund will be displayed for the wider public during summer period, bringing history, experiences and cultural exchange between many artists from all our region!

Discover Western Balkans amazing scenery, roads, culture, people, summer. Take that bike and group of friends and cycle in our amazing region.

Unsure of the roads, destinations and spots? No need to be! Download the app on Balkan Cycling below and have an experience you never thought you could. Proudly supporting Balkan Tour. 
https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.cultours.app&fbclid=IwAR2-Eu0XCKqeFv86yjkecd1MxKgN0pguHiFygPMAZkY0ZkmSEe5Ld7j18Ho
Strengthening the role of women in promoting peace, reconciliation and cooperation in the Western Balkans is an excellent initiative primarily because women have dealt and continue dealing with the great burdens and sacrifices throughout the history of our region. Women know very well why we need peace and reconciliation and how cooperation can improve the lives of all and especially creating an encouraging perspective for generations to come. Peace is a state in which there are no conflicts.

Reconciliation is a process of overcoming conflict based on justice and truth. Cooperation is a joint effort and interaction of different actors where we all benefit from. In order to achieve these goals, it is necessary to work hard and persistently be open enough to get to know and understand different points of view, perspectives and interests.

The project “Strengthening role of women in promoting peace and cooperation in Western Balkan region through capacity building and educations” is led by civil society organization Center Support of Local and Regional Development from Montenegro, and Beopolis from Serbia, and SENSUS from Bosnia and Herzegovina, this initiative is supported by the Western Balkans Fund which contributes to women’s participation in reconciliation process in WB region through capacity building and education. Together with their implementing partners, CEP and their partners gathered women around the region to present different models that increases the trust on women values and meritocracy itself. It all took place in a four-day regional conference in Herceg Novi on Thursday, may 27th, gathering women who are mothers, teachers, university professors, journalist, politicians, psychologists, or activist, sharing their views and experiences in five different workshops on peacebuilding and reconciliation.

Only prosperous and peaceful relations between us as neighbours can keep our region together. In order to have a prosperous future, it is necessary to appreciate the efforts of women in projecting peace and stability in regional level. We cannot continue be isolated on our small islands, but together, we need to find new forms of communication and cooperation to take advantage of the potential that the region offers us. As a woman, I believe that there is no more unique voice that should call for peace and cooperation than our women’s voice. Therefore, strengthening the role of women in our societies is strategically important to stabilize the relations and improve overall cooperation in the Western Balkans - said Dafina Begiri, Senior Programme Manager for Western Balkans Fund, at the opening ceremony.

The conference included the exhibition "History that does not exist" in the City Music Pavilion, honoring the women of Montenegro and highlighting their efforts and impact on the country’s legacy. Powerful speeches were delivered by Ms. Gordana Krcunovic, Director of the Public Institution of Culture Herceg Fest and Ms. Majda Gluscevic, Advisor in the General Directorate for Multilateral Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro.
Our beloved elderly deserve to have an active and healthy lifestyle. Hence, ZDK Retirement Home took the initiative to bring a livelier approach to the third age group in our region. Their meaningful efforts were made in cooperation with the Association "Creatives" from Ženica, Banja Luka Archdiocese - CARITAS Banja, Gerontology Center Vrsac (Serbia), Home for the Elderly and Grabovac "Risan (Montenegro). All sought to contribute to regional cooperation and healthy aging.

As part of the project “Healthy Aging”, on 28th of May event, the Retirement Home ZDK pointed out the improvement of the elderly's lifestyle and assistance by relevant professionals through cultural, educational and creative activities, as well as exchange of best practices in the region.

The efforts have made a visible contribution to improving the quality of life of the elderly in the areas where the interventions occurred! A multitude of educational and creative workshops were provided for our dear fellow citizens of the third age. The project team and we at Western Balkans Fund are pleased to notice how the project established close links between staff and beneficiaries of partner institutions with the organizations for the elderly from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia.

The approach will hopefully bring bigger interventions and will lead to larger project partnerships in the future. A Daily Center for Healthy Aging was established in PI "Retirement Home with Hospital" ZDK. It was rewarding to observe the improved quality of life and creativity of the elderly in the target communities through workshops on photography, painting and other recreational activities for a healthier and dignified aging!

The region comes together in education, research and science. International online scientific conference “Local to global research policy: Universities role in orienting society towards science” was held on 10 June 2021. The conference, organized by Donja Gorica University, is within the regional scientific project “Strengthening regional academic and research exchange". The project is being implemented in collaboration with American University of Europe-FON, Univerzitet u Zenici, Universiteti Luarasi and with financial support from Western Balkans Fund.

What are the successful circular business models from the region that can inspire next generations of circular businesses? Here’s the very informative clip shared by our implementing partners at Yes Network! The video was created as part of the project "Partnership for Circular Economy - Sustainable Development of SMEs and Regional Development", co-funded by Western Balkans Fund.

https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=184063663719951
Hanan Kovacevic, a young talented professional coming from Sarajevo, recently concluded her Internship Program at WBF. When asked about her 3-weeks experience working closely with WBF Team and on her perception of regional cooperation through grant-giving and support towards civil society organizations, Hanan answered through an article, which we are happy to share with you.

“Stay here! The sun that shines in a foreign place
Will never warm you like the sun in your own –
The bread has a bitter taste there
Where one has no one, not even a brother.”

Bosnian poet, Aleksa Santic described the hardships and dilemmas of Bosnians more than a century ago in his poem “Stay Here”. As a young person, who wants to shape my own destiny, I want to give a try to contribute to positive trends so needed for our bare survival. I was born and I have lived outside of Bosnia and Herzegovina for a good part of my life and strongly identifiable within the verses written by Aleksa Santic a century ago. I understand the longingness towards homeland and my responsibility to try my best to build better future there. There is no hope for a better future without the prosperity of your neighbors.

Western Balkans Fund’s mission and vision of creating a prosperous region and rebuilding multicultural bridges between the societies in the Western Balkans identifies with my world view. To have an opportunity to start working towards a greater mission sparks eagerness and will for betterment. Being from Bosnia and Herzegovina and my life, and the life of my generation is shaped by regional interactions. If those interactions are cooperation, exchange, mutual coexistence, and development, my generation will have a chance to build their own lives with the peace and prosperity. It is of fundamental importance for me, that goal of the Western Balkans Fund is achieved, and I was honored to have a chance to contribute to them.

This internship is a great starting point for my future professional career. The experience that I acquired at Western Balkan’s Fund elevated my knowledge and skills and equipped me for success in my professional life. I had the opportunity to study under experienced programme team represented by the regional experts who provided me with new knowledge and skills. Throughout my internship, I have acquired transfer of knowledge given to civil society organizations through grant-giving and support from the Western Balkans Fund. Interactions and cultural exchange from the region will play an essential part in building my readiness to work in western Balkan region.

This region was throughout history interconnected in many ways, we share many values, and our cultures are deeply rooted in our common heritage. Western Balkans Fund as an organization is bridging back mutual cooperation and hope for the multicultural region and I am proud to have been part of the team.
WBF PROMOTIONAL VIDEO

We know you share the same excitement with us, as we work, share and promote the region we all call "Home". Western Balkans positive vibes, from all of us!

Proud of the achievements and we can't wait to work with many of you again! Enjoy the video through the following link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Dw-kdzsRp8

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