

THE BALKAN FORUM

*We work to create a new vision
for the Balkan region*



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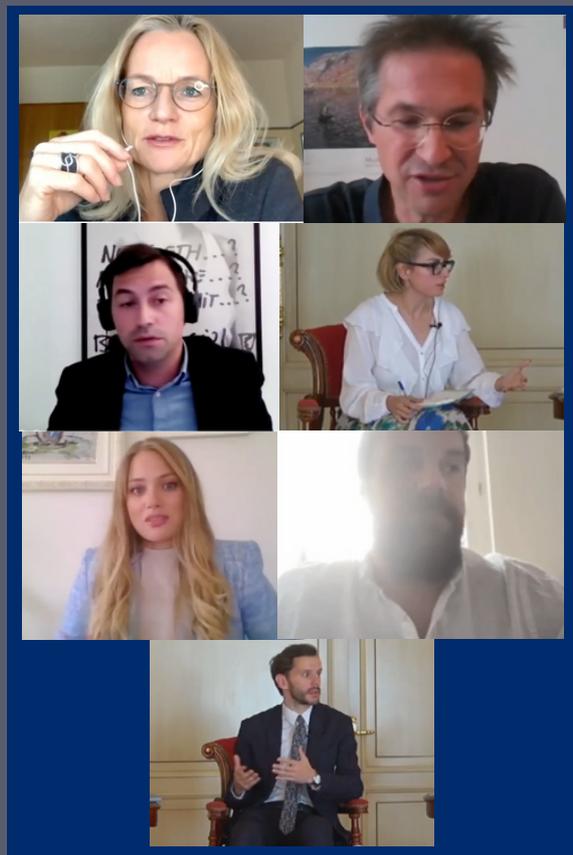
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January 2021. The **initiative #solution** comprised of 22 CSOs in Kosovo organized an online survey, video-interviews and debates with the aim of putting citizens' interests at the center of political and electoral debate and manifestos.





September 2021. Conference **Visa Regimes No More: Time To Put People First**, organised by the Balkan Forum (BF) aimed at addressing the serious obstacles to the freedom of movement for people in the WB and in the Schengen Area. It tackled the restrictions to freedom of movement of people and explored the necessary actions to urgently address such obstacles so that ordinary citizens could cooperate, develop and prosper.

September 2021. **Attacks on democracy and human rights – CSOs in support of WB societies facing disinformation, hate speech and hybrid attacks**. Organised together with CIVIL and the Civil Society Platform for Democracy and Human Rights (CSP), the conference explored ways to effectively tackle the disinformation and hybrid attacks which are disrupting public discourse, encouraging hate speech and threatening democracy.



September 2021. Conference organized together with Center for Investigative Reporting (CIN) in BiH **Brussels, do you understand us?**, brought together journalists, independent analysts, and civil society actors with the aim of identifying ways for overcoming challenges related to communication with Brussels and other EU capitals.



December 2021. A **joint statement** of 53 civil society actors in Kosovo and Serbia calls, among others, on the governments of both countries to continue the dialogue, implement the agreements reached, refrain from inflammatory rhetoric and populist narratives, commit to transparency and ensure civic participation, foster integration and respect the rights of minorities, and work on confidence-building measures to bring communities together.

2021 HIGHLIGHTS

Promoting Circular Economy (CE) in the Western Balkans (WB)

In May and June 2021, we published: 1) *Circular Economy in the Western Balkans region: Waste Management as a Challenge*, and, 2) *Circular Economy in the Western Balkan region: Waste Management legislation*.

The research seeks to address stakeholder interaction with the CE from not only a policy-oriented professional perspective, but one geared toward individuals and organizations unfamiliar with the concept.

Findings from the research have also been shared at a **Forum Talk** organised in collaboration with World Forum for Democracy / Forum mondial de la Démocratie in Jul '21.

Established in Dec. '21 by the Balkan Forum, **LogEx** is a partnership between universities and academics, civil society organizations and business actors from the WB region, and the region's diaspora. As a diverse community, it works to address the gap between higher education and the employment marketplace. And, it facilitates shared learning and collaboration to build human capital, strengthen a CE, reduce unemployment and out-migration.



International Advocacy



In the **Request to the EU Member States and Western Balkan leaders: Enable the freedom of movement for all the Western Balkan citizens**,

signed by 78 organizations and influential politicians, decision-makers, and experts from the region, we urged the leaders to act swiftly in abolishing the visa regimes and establishing the freedom of movement for all WB citizens traveling within the region and throughout the Schengen area.



In the petition **Time to put Western Balkans' citizens first: Abolish the visa regimes now!** signed by 690 individuals, CSOs and other actors across the WB region, EU and beyond, we demand from the authorities in the six countries of the WB and EU to implement the full freedom of movement within the region and between the region and the EU by abolishing the Bosnia-Kosovo visa regime and introducing the visa liberalization for Kosovo.

**BETWEEN BROKEN PROMISES AND REALPOLITIK:
WHAT FUTURE FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS?**

Reaction to Brdo Summit
by civil society actors
in the Western Balkans

25 October 2021

A reaction to **Brdo Summit** signed by 72 civil society actors in the WB and sent to EU institutions and Member States, EU Embassies and senior government representatives of the countries in the WB region, has triggered a response by **NEAR D1 – Head of Unit – Western Balkans Policy and Regional Strategy**.



2021 HIGHLIGHTS

Contribution to national, regional and international fora

Our contribution in various fora organised by other actors, and input into policy, strategic and programming related issues includes:

- **May and Aug '21.** Roundtable discussion on Kosovo–Serbia Dialogue Process organized by the Balkan Research Policy Group (BPRG).
- **Jun – Jul '21.** Youth Forum, and Civil Society & Think Tank Forum’s I and II of the Berlin Process, upon invitation by Aspen Institute Germany and the Southeast Europe Association, supported by the German Federal Foreign Office. This included contribution in articulating **Regional Youth Agenda** and joint civil society & think-tank **Policy Recommendations**. The BF and all members of the CSP were invited to participate in these events.
- **Aug '21.** Al Jazeera Kontekst Talk Show, online event hosted by Al Jazeera Balkans on 12 Aug '21, the International Day of Peace.
- **Sep '21.** RYCO Strategy 2022–2024, held in Prishtina.
- **Sep and Oct. '21.** Green Policy Academy and “Morning Meeting” organized by the Balkan Green Foundation (BGF).
- **Sep – Oct '21.** 8th WB Civil Society Forum held in Skopje, North Macedonia, focusing on enhancing the accession process; contribution of CSOs to the Green Agenda and sustainable development of the WB as part of the EU accession process; the state of social dialogue, as well as enabling civic space in the WB.
- **Oct '21.** 50th Annual Conference of The Association of European Border Regions.
- **Oct '21.** 2021 Interreg annual event, and contributed to **Youth Manifesto**.
- **Oct '21.** Belgrade Security Forum, panel “Civic Engagement – Change is Coming. And hope too.”
- **Oct '21.** The Humanity in Action International Webinar, where the BF contributed as a speaker in the topic “Better decision-making for better environmental justice: A practical exercise in advance of COP 26 Climate Summit.”

Projects

Key highlights of the project **Inclusion of people with disabilities in the green labor market through the production of reusable bags** implemented in partnership with Handikos Kosovo and financially supported by the Swiss Cooperation Office in Kosovo, include:

- People with Disabilities included in the project gained and put in practice new skills by producing environmentally-friendly, reusable bags, thereby contributing to environment protection in Kosovo. Their activities beyond the project end have been generating symbolic income.
- Significant support for the project by young volunteers, **citizens**, CSOs, **private companies** and senior **government officials**. This included: i) financial and expert support by eight local and international CSOs and private companies; ii) commitment to environmental protection by 19 private companies in Prishtina; iii) a **request by 31 CSOs to ban the single use plastic bags** sent to key Government institutions of Kosovo; iv) pledges made by the Kosovo's Prime Minister, two Ministers and a Member of Kosovo Assembly to strengthen legislation for both environment protection and economic inclusion of people with disabilities.



2021 HIGHLIGHTS



Project **Equipping, Empowering and Employing Youth, Women and Other Disadvantaged Groups in five municipalities of Kosovo** (Pejë, Istog, Klinë, Deçan and Junik), implemented in partnership with Syri i Vizionit and Municipality of Istog, financially supported by the European Union Office in Kosovo. Progress so far includes:



- 17 workshops/trainings held.
- 324 members of the target groups trained/participated in the workshops (65% women, 33% men, of whom 65% young people, 7% people with disabilities and 13% members of non-majority communities).
- 23 businesses & institutions in the five target municipalities expressed interest in receiving 89 interns in 52 different profiles.
- 42 social/media pieces produced, published and disseminated.
- 5 roundtable debates held, one per target municipality, attended by 58 relevant stakeholders.
- 49 young people were involved in the design and implementation of 5 street performances (29 young women and 20 young men, including 7 members of non-majority communities).
- 18 interviews with members of the target groups and business community were recorded and published. Interviewees included: 8 women, 5 persons from non-majority communities, 3 persons with disability and 2 business representatives.



Key outcomes of the project **Vicinity Chronicles** implemented in partnership with European Movement in Serbia, include eleven (11) news articles on topics such as: Religion and State; International Day of Peace; COVID-19 Vaccination; Bank Loans and Indebtedness of Citizens; Food and Health; Challenges of Independent Media; Innovative Entrepreneurship; Surveillance; Influencers and their impact on public opinion.

Supporting capacity building and regional collaboration of youth

in July '21, with the aim of raising awareness, building digital skills and enhancing cross-border/regional cooperation of youth, we **invited** young people from the WB region to apply with their video-recordings (vlogs) on Circular Economy. Vlogs contained messages on protecting the environment; reducing, reusing and recycling waste; donating clothes and other items; and, saving water and energy among others. At the end of the process, we **awarded** symbolic prizes for the best three vlogs.

In addition, through our **Youth Cooperation Fund**, we provided Small-Size Grants to NGOs from the countries of the WB region to join efforts and generate innovative and unique ideas for collaborative action on Circular Economy. Through these grants we supported 3 cross-border projects, involving 6 NGOs.





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