

# THE BALKAN FORUM



*A new vision for the  
Balkan region*

## **Taking Transformative Action!**

June was quite the hectic month for the Balkan Forum team. Committed to fostering connections among the Western Balkans countries and between them and the world, the keywords of our diverse and impactful activities this month were peace, education, active citizenship, and strengthening of capacities.

The Balkan Forum facilitated and participated in several events, including engaging workshops with university students, youth from around Kosovo through round tables about political developments in the WD and training sessions on media literacy; gave powerful messages about women's role in peace-building efforts across the world at the second annual conference "No Peace Without Women", and continued to build on the partnership with other organizations.

We witnessed inspiring dialogue, knowledge exchange, and mutual support among participants from different backgrounds, strengthening a sense of shared purpose and cultivating inclusive societies.

Yours,  
Gazmend Bërlajolli  
Project Manager  
The Balkan Forum



[www.thebalkanforum.org](http://www.thebalkanforum.org)



In a collaborative effort with our partner, the International Institute for Peace (IIP) and with the support of the University of Prishtina and Community Building Mitrovica, we facilitated a study trip to Kosovo to mark the 20th anniversary of the Thessaloniki – Western Balkans Summit. The focus of this study trip was on engaging young people and have an open-minded dialogue with them how to address community-specific issues.

The goal of the trip was to meet with regional politicians, RYCO, national youth councils, and other stakeholders who provide valuable insights and first-hand stories.

In Prishtina and Mitrovica, Kosovo, the group met with university students and other youth to talk about the impact and outcomes 20 years since the Thessaloniki Western Balkans-EU Summit. We heard from the youth themselves how they perceive this transformative process.

Their insights and shared knowledge will help compile a comprehensive set of recommendations for the EU and local governments how to strengthen the bond between the Western Balkans and the EU. The information is crucial for discussing the future of EU integration for the Western Balkans, particularly through the lens of the youth.

At the conference “No Peace Without Women” organized on 13 June 2023 at the Parliament of Kosovo, the Balkan Forum contributed with meaningful messages to the conversations that explored the invaluable contributions of women in peace processes, conflict prevention, and human security in the Western Balkans. The conference was organized by the Women's Federation for World Peace, and the International Association of First Ladies for Peace (IAFLP), a project of the Universal Federation of Peace (UPF), in collaboration with the Government of the Republic of Kosovo, as part of the Women's Global Leadership Series by the United Nations offices in Geneva and Vienna.

Throughout the conference, inspiring discussions shed light on the pivotal role women play in building and sustaining peace. Their unique perspectives, resilience, and commitment to inclusive peace-building were celebrated and acknowledged. “As we strive for a harmonious Western Balkan region, it is essential to recognize and empower women in all aspects of peace processes,” said Astrit Istrefi, Executive Director of the Balkan Forum, one of the speakers in the session “Peace Leadership: Access and Opportunities for Young Women in STEM, Media Literacy and Information Technology.”

Cultivating ties with partner organizations is a top priority for the Balkan Forum, as a sure way of creating a network of like-minded organizations dedicated to promoting peace, inclusivity, and progress in the Western Balkans and beyond.

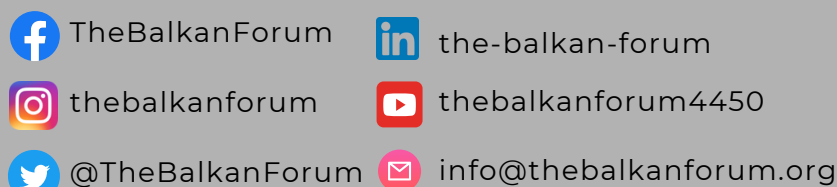
In June, as part of our continued partnership with HANDIKOS, we facilitated a three-day workshop on developing the organization's strategy for the next five years.

The workshop conversations were made more meaningful thanks to the valuable contributions from the Handikos team, assembly and board members, children with disabilities and their parents.

Participants actively engaged in identifying the most pressing issues and providing proposals to shape the future actions of HANDIKOS and influence the advancement and fulfillment of the rights of persons with disabilities in Kosovo.

The workshop was made possible through the project "Improving the Kosovo Legal Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Encouraging Respect for Their Rights and Dignity," supported by the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).

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