



PROMOTING REGIONAL COOPERATION

The Balkan Forum (The BF) has been facilitating and encouraging regional dialogue and cooperation in the Balkans on connectivity, student and academic exchange, green energy (including energy efficiency), refugees, media independence and professionalism, establishing inter-diaspora relationships and cooperation and strengthening their role in advancing democratic and socio-economic development of the region. We are doing so through webinars, roundtables, research, blogs, podcasts and other activities that involve civil society, journalists, young people and students, public authorities, experts, business leaders, and other actors from the countries of our geographic focus: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia. And, we disseminate inspiring messages and information on the benefits of cross-border and cross-sector cooperation as well as on the challenges to overcome as individual countries, and collectively as a region.

Roundtable with journalists from the Balkan region

On 9 November 2018, we held a roundtable in Podgorica with prominent journalists from the Balkan region including Aida Cerkez, OCCRP, Bosnia and Herzegovina; Daphne Tolis, freelance photographer and journalist, Greece; Lavdim Hamidi, Zëri, Kosovo; Milica Marinović, Al Jazeera, Montenegro; Miodrag Čvorović, Insajder, Serbia; Saša Kosanović, freelance journalist, Croatia. The roundtable centred on the importance of successful models and positive news on cross-border dialogue and cooperation; the effects of media coverage; how we can support the cooperation between the media in the region, and build on existing experiences and models. The key conclusions included: there needs to be a focus on a few topics that connect the region, specifically the economic ties between the countries; positive news require a more personal approach; working closely with producers is imperative; educating the new generation of journalists is essential, as is mentoring; and there is a need to implement a system of shared values, critical thinking and transfer of knowledge. <https://thebalkanforum.org/en/roundtable-with-journalists-from-the-balkan-region>



Discussion with young people

Discussions with young, bright participants from the Western Balkans (WB) region: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia at the REACT Summer Camp focused on: 1) The opportunities and challenges to mobility, and 2) Overcoming prejudices and negative perceptions.



Opportunities and challenges to mobility

Participants expressed their views and their personal experiences of the free movement of people in the region. Key conclusions included: there is still a lot of prejudice in the region; young people need to create contact and visit other countries in WB; we need to celebrate the diversity; the more we travel, the more we understand and cooperate with one another; youth should not be influenced by politics, rather, form their own views on issues; there needs to be a more significant investment in exchange programs; most importantly, we need to remove obstacles like the visa regime between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. <https://www.thebalkanforum.org/sq/balkanica-5>

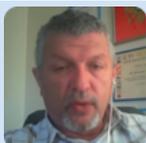
Overcoming prejudice and negative perceptions

The discussion on perceptions and prejudice (the image of the region) revealed that: there is a lot of prejudice in the region and main contributors are perceived to be bad politics, and politicians, media propaganda, nationalism, families, etc. It was said that the media plays a big part in influencing the perception that youth have in regards to the region, other ethnic groups and countries. It was also revealed that there needs to be a change in politics - the region needs a new generation of leaders, including politicians, who do not promote harmful agendas that damage relationships and escalate tension between communities and societies in the region. Youth should not accept being influenced by politics, media, older generations, or family, rather, they need to form their own views on issues. <https://www.thebalkanforum.org/sq/balkanica-6>



Interviews with CSOs, experts, business actors and students

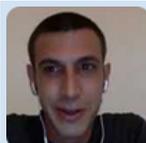
The following interviewees speak about their work and experiences, and express their views and analysis on regional exchange and cooperation among youth, civil society actors and academia; the issue of migrants and refugees; solar energy and energy efficiency; successful business stories; and external perspectives on the Balkan region.



Aleksandar Dedović, ALFA Center, Montenegro



Irina Janevska, ARNO, Macedonia



Panagiotis Tzannetakis, Human Rights 360 and Omnes, Greece



Petyo Valkov and Peter Danov, BHUB, Bulgaria



Ariane Lila, Green Economy Financing Facility in the Western Balkans



Maria Teresa Conte and Luigi Di Meglio, University of Naples, Italy



Tomislav Perušić, University of Belgrade, Serbia



Raffaele Rossi, Solar Power Europe



Fisnik Kuqi, RRËNJËT, Kosovo



Slobodan Ranković, University of Belgrade, Serbia

The Balkan Forum Podcast

In our effort to bring the most rounded perspective on developments in the region, we started a podcast series in September 2018. The podcast usually begins with an overview of the news in the Balkan region on the four thematic pillars of The BF: education, energy, tourism and labor market/human capital. It continues with a short introduction of entities making a positive impact in the region. And, ends with an interview on a topical issue of public interest. <http://podcast.thebalkanforum.org>

Resource bank

The [Resource Bank](#) in early 2019 will include up to date information on key policies, legislation, funding instruments and budgets, projects, research/analysis, actors, statistics and developments in education, energy, tourism and labor market/human capital in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia.

The Blogs

With contributors from four countries in the region, blogs provide a personal, on the ground perspective on important topics for the region. <https://www.thebalkanforum.org/en/blogs/0>



BUILDING PARTNERSHIP, VISION AND STRATEGY FOR THE REGION

Civil Society Platform (CSP)

In October 2018, CSP members held country meetings in Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro to establish the basis for developing a vision and strategy for the region. In November 2018, CSP members attended a conference in Arad, Romania, entitled "Western Balkans and Romania's Presidency of the Council of the European Union" organized by the [Center for Balkan Strategies \(CBS\)](#) and Aurel Vlaicu University. The aim of this conference was to discuss expectations, opportunities and challenges, particularly to the EU integration of the WB, enhancing mutual understanding and collaborative efforts to advance reforms, cooperation and good neighborly relations. In December 2018, CSP members met with the EU Delegation, and US, UK and German Embassy representatives in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia to discuss future plans and identify potential synergy. <https://www.civilsocietyplatform.org>



Cooperation with civil society actors in the Balkan region

The BF and the [Bulgarian Hub for United Balkans \(BHUB\)](#), are exploring opportunities for cooperation between the two organisations and to strengthen ties between the civil society actors from WB and Bulgaria. Same is taking place between The BF and CBS from Romania. The BF in partnership with [Foundation for Debate and Education IDEA South east Europe](#) from Macedonia, and [Južne Vesti](#) from Serbia will implement a new project financed by the EU which aims to enhance the policy debate, advocacy capacity and interaction between university students in Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia.

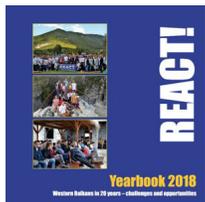


Foreign Affairs and Security Forum

In October 2018 The BF and Kosovo Youth Atlantic Council (KYATA) established FAS Forum which aims to encourage dialogue, synergy and cross-sectoral, inter-state, and international interaction in the Euro-Atlantic integration processes and security issues that have mutual implications in the region and internationally. The FAS Forum will bring voices from communities in the region into high level fora, integration processes, and security related issues. <https://fasforum.org/>



CONTRIBUTING TO THE REGIONAL EVENTS AND TOPICS



REACT Project!

The BF has been a partner in the REACT project which included the following activities: The National Essay Competition (NEC), Internship Program, and participation at the [React Summer Camp](#). Following NEC, authors of the best essay's have been selected for the internship programme with partner organizations in the region, and to participate in the Summer Camp. On 5 and 7 September 2018, The BF's director, spoke at the Summer Camp on "Youth mobility", and "Importance of negotiation process for stability in region". As part of this project, partners published the REACT Yearbook 2018. https://issuu.com/komocg/docs/yearbook_2018b

Participation in the Green Festival, and Conference on Energy Transition

In September 2018, The BF participated in the [Green Festival](#) organised by the [USAID EMPOWER Private Sector](#) in partnership with [SIDA](#), where over 40 green companies from Kosovo exhibited their work in the growing green sector that promises job creation, growth, and more sustainability for the country and region as a whole. In October 2018, [Balkan Green Foundation Conference on Energy Transition](#) focusing on "Challenges and Opportunities in Kosovo and the region" which saw discussions on the importance of integrating renewable sources into the energy system, and on the opportunities to invest in the energy sector. The point to take away from the conference is that future developments in the region's energy have to take into account affordability, diversification, security of supply, sustainability, and reliability as proposed cornerstones of energy policy.

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