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Support to the Promotion of Civil Society regional actions in the Western Balkans (Phase II)

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER ISSUED BY THE WESTERN BALKANS FUND

ISSUE X, JANUARY 2025



A new platform for networking and dialogue



The Western Balkans Fund (WBF), in partnership with the European Union, launched in October the “Regional Networking and Dialogue Sessions”, an innovative, EU-funded platform dedicated to enhancing cooperation, dialogue, and creative problem-solving across the Western Balkans.

Platform for Regional Voices and Solutions

The “Networking and Dialogue Sessions” were created as an open forum, providing a space for meaningful exchange among government representatives, civil society organizations, and other relevant stakeholders from all Contracting Parties. The aim is to collectively identify challenges and opportunities, share diverse perspectives, and develop practical recommendations for the future.

Throughout these sessions, the Western Balkans Fund fully utilized its unique role as a bridge-builder between governments and the civil sector, ensuring that a wide range of voices were heard and that the search for innovative, scalable solutions was truly inclusive.

First Event in Skopje | Spotlight on Education and Research

The first edition of the Regional Networking and Dialogue Sessions took place in Skopje on November 7–8, 2024. The thematic focus for this initial event was education and research, two sectors vital to the future development of the Western Balkans.

Over two days, key stakeholders, including policymakers, academic leaders, youth representatives, and civil society actors, convened to discuss shared challenges and opportunities for regional cooperation in these fields.

The session in Skopje offered a vibrant platform for open discourse, with participants exchanging experiences, best practices, and policy recommendations.

The collective findings and actionable proposals gathered in Skopje were set to be presented at a major Regional Conference in Spring 2025, ensuring that the ideas generated could inform broader policy initiatives and inspire cross-border collaboration in the years to come.

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Second Event Belgrade | Strengthening Cultural Cooperation

The momentum generated in Skopje continued in Belgrade, where the second edition of the sessions was held on December 17–18, 2024.

This time, the discussions centered on strengthening regional cooperation in the field of culture.

Once again, the event brought together a diverse group of participants, including cultural institutions, artists, policy makers, and representatives of civil society, all united by the common goal of advancing cultural ties in the Western Balkans.

During the Belgrade session, participants identified key challenges facing the cultural sector, such as funding, mobility, and collaboration barriers, and worked together to propose solutions tailored to the region's unique context.

The Belgrade meeting built on the foundations laid in Skopje, creating a continuous process of dialogue that connected different sectors and countries under a shared vision for the Western Balkans.

The outcomes and recommendations from both sessions were to be presented collectively at the upcoming Regional Conference, ensuring that the momentum for positive change would be sustained and amplified.

Coming Up Next

In Spring, we will land in Podgorica, where a special session will be dedicated to cooperation in the field of sustainable development.

Once more, key selected participants will be chosen to continue with the in-depth dialogue and exploration of the emerging ideas on how to improve cooperation further.

In June, this initiative will wrap-up with the a large gathering in Prishtina, where the final findings and report will be published.





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New Horizons for Cultural Cooperation | “SPARK” Project Ignites in Banja Luka

In Banja Luka, a new wave of regional cultural collaboration is underway. Hosted by the DIS Theater, the “SPARK” project brings together partners from Shkodër, Skopje, and Zrenjanin, expanding the network of cooperation in the arts. Launched in mid-November, “SPARK” features a series of ongoing activities that strengthen ties between theaters and creative organizations. Key project partners include CEKOM, Theater Pi, and The Door.



Advancing Labor Rights | Decent Work Academy in Herceg Novi

From December 5, 2024, Herceg Novi hosted the Decent Work Academy, bringing together regional stakeholders to promote labor rights and social protection. For three days, participants focused on vital topics such as living wages, inclusive labor policies, democratic governance, and sustainable development. The event concluded with a manifesto and recommendations aimed at policymakers, civil society, and unions across the region.



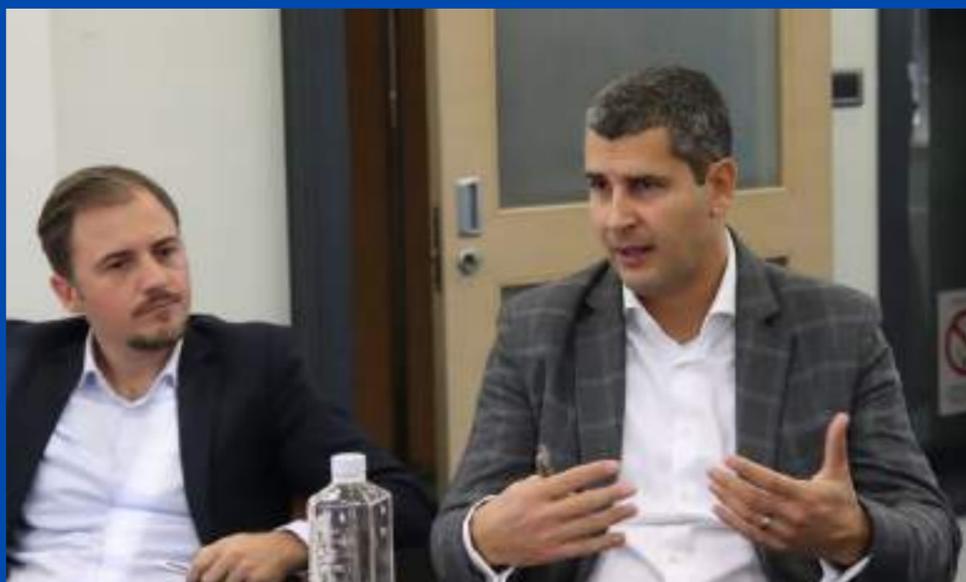
Green Innovations | Building Regional Cooperation in Waste Recycling

In Skopje, partners from across the region have joined forces to improve waste management through an ERC Grant initiative. From December 3–4, participants toured recycling facilities, learning directly from successful cases in eco-packaging, oil-waste treatment, vehicle processing, and textile recycling. Led by the NGO Planktonium, the project is establishing a regional platform for sharing knowledge on waste management and advancing the green economy.



Boosting Resilience | Strengthening Media Literacy in the Western Balkans

Strengthening media literacy is essential to countering misinformation and promoting democratic values. A WBF-funded project has built a network of regional partners to boost resilience and media awareness. Currently underway, the project is led by Alfa Centar Niksic, in cooperation with organizations such as Humanity in Action Bosnia and Herzegovina, Horizon Civitas, and sbunker.



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