

# THE BALKAN FORUM

## Monthly update July 2024



### The Civil Society Think Tank 2024 Preparatory Workshop

One of the flagships meetings within the Berlin Process, organized in early July, the Civil Society Think Tank 2024 Preparatory Workshop, hosted by the Southeast Europe Association and the Aspen Institute Germany, generously supported by the German Federal Foreign Office, marked a crucial step towards regional cooperation and integration.

The event started with a welcome reception on July 9th at the German Embassy. More than 120 Civil Society and Media Activists from the Western Balkans met the following two days, July 10-11, in a colorful workshop and forum. This Assembly has become an important part of the Berlin Process, which provides opportunities for CSOs to forward their ideas and stimulate regional ownership.

Seven working groups focused on the themes: EU Integration, Dealing with the Past and Reconciliation, Gender and Diversity, Common Regional Market and Mobility, Energy, Climate Change and Decarbonization, Environment and Sustainable Economic Development, and finally, Disinformation and Cyber Threats. Their discussions through these two days gave rise to constructive debate and solutions with recommendations for the solution of very important regional issues.

Over the weeks to come, these discussions will be distilled into concrete recommendations forming the very foundation of the Civil Society and Think Tank Main Forum that this main event is set to coincide with the Berlin Process Summit on October 14, 2024, in Berlin, Germany, from where those insights will go on to help shape the future of the Western Balkans.

Yours,  
Gazmend Bërlajolli  
Executive Director  
The Balkan Forum



# ToKeQark

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## Ferizaj

In Ferizaj, a group of young people recently engaged in an innovative activity to highlight the importance of the circular economy through art. More than 15 participants, armed with knowledge from a three-day training on innovative solutions, climate change, and environmental challenges, painted to convey their message. This initiative was part of a broader campaign to promote environmental protection and new ideas focused on prosperity and sustainable peace. The activity, which aimed to educate and inspire their peers, was also featured on Tema TV, showcasing the community's dedication to fostering a sustainable environment.

## Graçanica

The youth of Graçanica have taken a significant step towards promoting environmental protection and the circular economy within their community. They recently held their first televised debate as part of the ToKeQark project, featuring Silvija Avdi, an activist and participant in The Balkan Forum's three-day training. During the debate, Avdi discussed the project's activities and explained the principles of the circular economy. This initiative culminated in creating a mural at their center to spread the message of environmental protection and participating in a campaign to raise citizens' awareness. The youth group's efforts are showcased in a video summarizing their activities and their commitment to a sustainable future.

## Mitrovica

The youth of Mitrovica have embarked on a series of activities within the ToKeQark project, aiming to promote the circular economy and environmental protection. Their first debate, held on July 12 and aired on RTV Mitrovica, featured key community members discussing the project's initiatives and future plans. Four young participants, guided by their mentor, created an installation using recyclable materials to educate their peers about recycling and green practices. The youth group continued their efforts with a second televised debate on July 13, discussing their experiences and promoting their installation.

**This activity was carried out within the ToKeQark project, which is implemented by the organization The Balkan Forum, with the support of the regional project SMART Balkans, supported by Centar za promociju civilnog društva, Center for Research and Policy Making, IDM Albania and financial support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA).**



# ToKeQark

Ferizaj

Graçanica

Mitrovica





# The BF podcast



## Bold Balkan Women

On the series "Bold Balkan Women" of The Balkan Forum podcast, Elvira Ibrahim-Hoti, the founder and CEO of Accell, shared insights about her journey in the field of economics. "Obstacles shouldn't make you stop," advised Ibrahim-Hoti, reflecting on the struggles and challenges she faced along the way. She offered this advice to all the girls thinking about following in her footsteps.



## Balkans and Beyond

"The decision we make is like an oath we take in front of ourselves every day: we must never retreat because the truth is singular. There can't be two truths. The existence of multiple truths signals a society in distress," said Xhabir Deralla, investigative journalist from North Macedonia and founder of Civil MK. And with that Deralla concluded the interview for the series "Balkans and Beyond" on The Balkan Forum podcast.



# Visegrad project articles

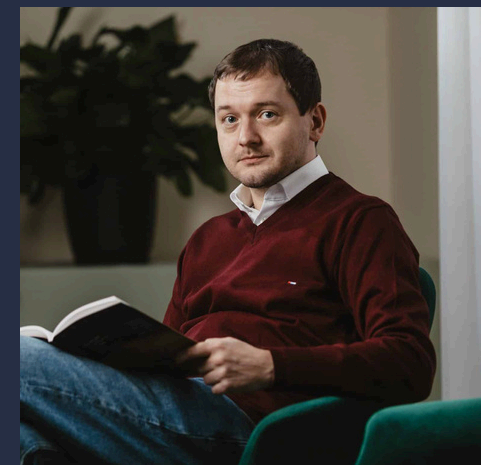


## Poland's Vigilance and Its Echoes in Western Balkans

In an age where information circulates instantaneously, disinformation has emerged as a formidable threat to society and political stability. Our latest article, authored by Szczepan Czarnecki, Senior Analyst at the Instytut Europy Środkowej in Lublin, Poland, sheds light on the challenge of disinformation in Poland and the Visegrad countries, and its potential impact on the Western Balkans, especially Kosovo.

Czarnecki delves into how Poland and the Czech Republic are combating disinformation, providing valuable insights and lessons that can be applied to build stronger public resilience against this phenomenon in our region.

This article was written within the framework of the project "Countering False Information in Kosovo: Experience-Sharing between V4 and Prishtina," supported by the International Visegrad Fund.



## Foreign Actors in the CEE and Western Balkans

The regions of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the Western Balkans face significant challenges due to foreign interference in domestic political processes. This article, written by Pavel Havlicek, Research Fellow at the Asociace pro mezinárodní otázky/Association for International Affairs, explores the impacts of Russian aggression, Chinese espionage, and other external threats. Discover how these regions are responding and striving to protect their societies.

"And while there is a lot that still needs to be done to improve the societal resilience, Czechia as well as some of the other CEE countries, including most prominently Poland or the Baltic states, relatively succeeded in pushing back and calling out the malign actors and mobilize allies to show their solidarity and unwillingness to bend to their pressure," writes Havlicek, concluding his article.

