

Monthly Update

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Western Balkans at a Crossroads: A Common Vision

On December 16, 2024, The Balkan Forum, in collaboration with the International Institute for Peace (IIP), the Austrian Institute for International Affairs (oiip), and the Karl Renner Institute, organized an event: “Western Balkans at a Crossroads: A Common Vision” in Vienna.

The initiative addressed critical socio-political challenges facing the region while exploring pathways to stability, democracy, and European integration.

The event presented two workshops at the Karl Renner Institute: “Bridging Perspectives: Navigating Identity Conflicts for Lasting Stability” and “Citizen Participation and Democracy as a Means to Secure Prosperity.”

These sessions brought together youth activists, researchers, and stakeholders to tackle identity conflicts, rising nationalism, and the need for enhanced democratic engagement.

The discussions emphasized critical challenges in the Western Balkans: the growing disconnection of youth, fueled by overemphasis on national identity, social media-driven nationalism, and ineffective reconciliation strategies, which limit their exposure to diverse perspectives and hinder democratic engagement. Rising Euroscepticism, driven by systemic issues such as inadequate education, lack of meritocracy, and weak social protections, has deepened pessimism and underscored the need to redefine European values to resonate with regional realities.

The EU’s role in fostering integration was highlighted, with calls for urgent reforms, investments in democratic institutions, grassroots movements, and inclusive decision-making to address geopolitical pressures and promote a shared European identity while focusing on collaboration over division.

The event concluded with several actionable recommendations:

- **Reevaluate Democracy and European Values:** Transparency in EU accession processes and a clear, inclusive definition of democracy are crucial for rebuilding trust.
- **Drive Genuine Reform:** Systemic change, rather than superficial political adjustments, is necessary to tackle institutional shortcomings.
- **Support Equitable Growth:** Foreign investment strategies should be restructured to ensure tangible benefits for local populations, fostering sustainable development.

This event drew attention to the power of collaborative efforts in addressing regional challenges and reaffirmed the importance of youth engagement and shared responsibility in shaping the future of the Western Balkans.

Projects



KICKOFF MEETING FOR THE ECO-CHAMPIONS PROJECT

On December 9–10, the Eco-Champions project officially began with a kickoff meeting held in Prishtina marking the start of an active and engaged partnership. Eco Champions is supported by the European Union and is expected to implement core activities across Belgium, Spain, Italy, Greece, and Kosovo. The project involves six partner organizations: Connect Your City and Bond Beter Leefmilieu (Belgium), Cohesion Network 2gether (Greece), The Balkan Forum (Kosovo), La Bien Paga (Spain), and Crhack Lab (Italy).

 Co-funded by
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 ECO
CHAMPIONS

Coordinator: Partners:

 CONNECT
BRUSSELS

 CO
2GETHER

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BOND
BETER
LEEFMILIEU

 labien
paga

 CRHACK
LAB

Associated Partners:

 egino

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PRE-KICKOFF MEETING FOR THE GREENBRIDGE PROJECT

The Greenbridge project, launched in 2024, aims to foster regional collaboration on environmental sustainability by connecting youth from the Western Balkans through workshops and exchanges focused on green innovation. The first virtual meeting for the project was held in December 2024, and the official kickoff is scheduled to take place in Sofia, Bulgaria, in January 2025.



Projects



Final LogEx meeting for 2024



LOGEX



On December 18, The BF hosted a meeting with the LogEx community. Discussions included reviewing past activities, brainstorming ideas for the Circular Economy Week 2025, and exploring fundraising opportunities. A highlight was the introduction of Zero Waste Montenegro as a new member of the LogEx and Towards 2030 initiatives.

Towards 2030



Tolerance – A Path to Change or an Excuse for the Status Quo?



Sixteen Days Are Not Enough

As part of the "Towards 2030" initiative, we published two blogs during the last two months of 2024. On November 18, in honor of the International Day for Tolerance, we published a blog titled "Tolerance – A Path to Change or an Excuse for the Status Quo?" written by Dalia Koler, an activist at the Youth Initiative for Human Rights – Serbia. Additionally, to mark the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, we published a blog titled "Sixteen Days Are Not Enough," authored by Maja Milosevic, a journalist and a student of Gender Studies at the Faculty of Political Science.

