



The Civil Society Forum Series is focused on establishing a sustainable and relevant second-track platform in the so-called “Berlin Process”, creating an impetus for debate between WB6 citizen and decision makers. The series was launched with the goal of providing a relevant platform where governments and politicians in the region can continuously maintain closer cooperation with civil society.

The Civil Society Forum Series intends to contribute to the greater role, visibility and impact of non-government actors in the Berlin Process and in the broader EU integration process of the Western Balkan aspirants. Civil society organisations have rallied around this initiative with the idea to develop a common position, following in the footsteps of the Berlin, Vienna and Paris Summits. The objective is to construct a more permanent Forum for civil society to cooperate and develop a dialogue with political leaders and governments.

With eyes on the Western Balkans Trieste Summit that will be held on July 12, 2017, the Civil Society Forum Series will once more provide its contribution to the current and future challenges in the Western Balkans. It is our conviction that the European cohesion must be co-shaped with the citizens, with the civil society, the policy community, media and other relevant stakeholders in the EU and the WB region.

Following the Paris Summit, and with the Trieste Summit approaching, the Civil Society Forum Series initiative envisioned two intermediate regional events - the Civil Society Forums in Skopje and Tirana.

The CSF Skopje, focused on “Democracy, Europe, Social Justice: Future Strategies”, was held November 24-26, 2016, in Skopje, Macedonia. It brought together more than 100 grassroots movements, civil society organisations, think tanks and academia members (activists, analysts, advocates) from across the region to discuss and formulate answers to the challenges facing the region. What kind of reclaiming of hijacked terms (Democracy, Europe, Social Justice) do we need and how can we achieve it? Do alternatives exist only in theory or can they become vital sources of change in the societies of the region?

The final conclusions of CSF Skopje posited that WB CSOs should steer the reform process in a direction that allows them to continue to work independently to build deliberative democracies in which educated citizens reaffirm themselves through the democratic process. Democracy needs to be redefined based on the rule of law as its basic principle and imperative. It should be more about stable norms than contingent and arbitrary political decisions. Institutions of liberal democracy need to be strengthened in a collective enterprise of state and non-state actors. Human rights must be a tenet. Progressive legislation should be thoroughly implemented, not just adopted as part of ticking-the-box administrative exercises.

WB citizens want the WB6 countries to be part of the European family, sharing the same values and the same future. In this optic, the next edition of the CSF, will be held on 26-28 April in Tirana, continuing to feed the Berlin Process Agenda. The Civil Society Forum Tirana will build upon the achievements of the Civil Society Forum of the Western Balkans Summit Vienna 2015, and the Civil Society Forums in Belgrade, Paris and Skopje in 2016.

Tirana Forum will build up on the non-governmental actors contributing in setting the European agenda, in making and debating policy proposals and in evaluating policy results, and on formulating key messages and recommendations concerning the topics of the Trieste Summit. Tirana Forum will focus on: (1) rule of law/anti-corruption, (2) SME (small and medium enterprise) support and innovative platforms for cooperation, (3) business forums, and (4) reflections about the future of the Berlin Process.

The key topics will be discussed in the format of plenary session, panel discussions and thematic workshops. More than 80 participants will attend, including representatives of think tanks, policy institutes, academia, grassroots organisations and citizens' initiatives from the countries of the Western Balkans. High-ranking government and EU officials, MEPs, diplomats, members of regional and international organisations and foundations, and local and regional media will also contribute in the Tirana CSF workings.

The Civil Society Forum Tirana is a joint initiative of the European Fund for the Balkans, ERSTE Foundation and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. The local partner of the Civil Society Forum Tirana is the Cooperation and Development Institute Tirana.

The conclusions of this Forum will serve as a basis for formulating a set of messages that will be communicated at the Western Balkans Trieste Summit.