

Let's know Regional Youth Cooperation Office

Policy Brief Youth / 2 / 2017





Let's know Regional Youth Cooperation Office

Berlin Process Series Policy Brief Youth / 2 / 2017

Authors Krisela Hackaj Dafina Peci

© 2017 by Cooperation and Development Institute

Cooperation and Development Institute
Address: Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, Kompleksi "Green
Park", Kulla 1, Shk. 1/28
Tirana - Albania
info@cdinstitute.eu
www.cdinstitute.eu

This Working Paper has been supported by Albanian Agency for Support of Civil Society.



The opinions, findings, conclusions and recommendations expressed in this Policy Brief are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of Albanian Agency for Support of Civil Society.

1 | Introduction

In the framework of the Berlin Process (BP) Summit that took place in Vienna in August 2015, the governments of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia officially agreed¹ upon the initiative of the Prime Ministers of Serbia and Albania, to establish a Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) of the Western Balkans. They were supported from the German-French Youth Office in setting it up. With the aim to "promote the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation between the youth in the region" through exchange, RYCO was officially established December 8, 2016 in Tirana.

The Berlin Process was initially conceived as a temporary replacement for the "slowing / stopping" of the enlargement process, as epitomised in the Juncker's speech2. It gradually evolved into a process constituted of different cooperation platforms (political, technical and financial); at different levels of hierarchy (prime ministers, ministers, technical, etc.) and collaboration (communications meetings / / joint selection and implementation, etc.); and (EU. International actors Financing Institutions and Western Balkans Six governments, CSOs and businesses).

Today, Berlin Process allows for increased attention to, and constitutes the most important concrete to link structurally and inextricably the Western Balkans and European Union by furthering their mutual economic, political and security interests. Its implications go beyond short-term mercantile profit.³

This Policy Brief is the second contribution of Cooperation and Development Institute (CDI) under the Berlin Process Series / Youth Component. "Berlin Process Series" is an initiative started by CDI in November 2015, in Tirana, and is supported by Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Konrad Adenauer Foundation and Hanns Seidel Foundation. The initiative encompasses:

- Research on the Berlin Process and its priority areas.
- Yearly Monitoring Reports on advancement of Albania in BP agenda on issues such as youth, migration and connectivity.
- Annual Conference "Albania in the Berlin process", followed by the conference proceedings.

The Policy Brief "Let's know Regional Youth Cooperation Office" is supported by the Albanian Agency for Support of Civil Society and aims to be a helpful tool for youth organizations, youngsters and other interested parties, who wish to be better informed on the most tangible outcome of the Berlin Process on youth cooperation, i.e. RYCO. Up to now, RYCO is most innovative contribution to youth cooperation in the Western Balkan region.

The Policy Brief aims to provide an insight to the context and process of RYCO establishment. An historical overview on the

confirmation vote, available at: https://www.neweurope.eu/article/juncker-commission-no-further-eu-enlargement/

¹See Conclusions of Western Balkan Summit of Vienna,

https://www.bmeia.gv.at/fileadmin/user_uploa d/Zentrale/Aussenpolitik/Chairman s_Conclusi ons_Western_Balkans_Summit.pdf

² "There will be no new enlargement in the next five years" Juncker said in a speech leading up to a

³ Hackaj A., Madhi G. and Hackaj K., "Monitoring the Berlin Process: From Paris to Trieste", Cooperation and Development Institute, 2017.

youth positive agenda and on the first Albanian-Serbian youth exchanges will also be shortly analysed. The Brief is enriched with the personal views of 10 young participants of regional exchange activities that took place in the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding on Youth between the Republic of Serbia and Republic of Albania. These interviews provide an interesting point of view on vouth cooperation from the youngster's perspective. The final section provides update on where RYCO stands now and what it will support. Two interviews, with the Albanian National Youth Service and with the Special Commissioner of the Franco -German Youth Office for South - Eastern Europe, enrich this Policy Brief and provide valuable considerations about what RYCO should achieve.

2 | Brdo Process: the Slovenian contribution to the WB6 youth agenda

The Brdo Process is a complementary political platform to the accession process of the EU. It marks the starting process of an intense dynamic of political meetings between the Western Balkan 6 (WB6) countries. The Slovenian Government efforts paid special attention to the youth agenda.

Slovenian Prime Minister Borut Pahor and Croatian Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor launched Brdo Process on 20 March 2010 and the first meeting was held in format of the heads of governments and foreign ministers. The main objective was facilitation of political dialogue and increase of confidence among the countries in the Western Balkans.

It became the Brdo-Brijuni Process (BBP)⁴ in July 2013 when Croatia joined the EU. As a joint political initiative of the former Slovenian President Borut Pahor and his Croatian counterpart Ivo Josipovic, it was supported by the French President Office. BBP aims to contribute to the stabilisation of South East Europe through regional cooperation and consensual resolution of outstanding bilateral disputes.

BBP is based on high-level political dialogue and sees the participation of the presidents of eight South East Europe countries (Slovenia, Croatia and the Western Balkans Six), along with the attendance of an honorary guest from a leading EU member state.

It is in 23 April 2015, during the meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs at Brdo, that the Positive Agenda for the Youth in the Western Balkans was adopted in the framework of the so-called Youth Connectivity. "The Agenda will include concrete initiatives and proposals, which will be implemented with the help of the European Commission. This is a precise study of mechanisms that the EU already has in place for young people in the Western Balkans; their effectiveness and accessibility need to be examined, they need to be adapted to the situation on the ground and the programmes available for young people from the EU

cooperation initiatives involving the Western Balkan Six.

⁴ Together with the Berlin Process, both processes constitute two important regional

candidates need to be extended to include the countries in the region"⁵.

So, this agenda has the aim of identifying and reflecting on specific tools, actions and programs already in place, and how they could be made more visible and effective for WB6 youth benefit. **ERASMUS+** programs and scholarships, employment fairs, secondments of young Western professionals Balkans within administrations of EU member states and opening various EU programs projects, were discussed.

The importance of the youth in policy dialogue with and among Western Balkans countries was also underlined during this April 2015 meeting and finalized with the Joint Statement on the "Positive Agenda for Youth". There it was unequivocally stated that "educated young professionals with positive approach towards their personal future and future of their societies could importantly help achieving lasting political, economic and social stability in the region. EU education and experience would also provide the region with experts equipped to assist in EU negotiation process"6.

Several events, conferences and workshops have been afterwards organized under the coordination of the Slovenian MEPs, Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and / or Slovenian Ministry of Education and Sport. The most recent and important one is the Western Balkans Youth Conference "Connecting Youth" held in Paris on 4th July

2016, which preceded the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Western Balkans and some EU Member states on the same day.

Another important event was the "Europe-Western Balkans Youth Meeting: Connecting Youth Work and Youth Policy"8 held in Ljubljana, on 25 - 29 September 2016. This meeting aimed in particular to explore possible concrete actions that could contribute progress on the to recommendations of the Western Balkans Youth Conference "Connecting Youth", which was organised by the European Commission and the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Paris on 4th July 2016. A detailed Action Plan was developed. It focuses on the following issues of particular relevance regarding the contribution that can be made in the youth cooperation field:

- > European citizenship
- > Youth participation
- Social inclusion
- > Youth employment
- Combatting radicalisation and extremism
- Dealing with the past

Since then, several measures and actions were addressed by the stakeholders to be linked to RYCO future aims and objectives.

It should also be noted support that WB6 youth cooperation initiatives and RYCO have received also the support of the Members of the European Parliament (EP). "[it is] the role

⁵ Cit. Foreign minister of Slovenia, Karl Erjavec during the meeting of the Foreign ministers of the EU and the Western Balkans, part of the Brdo Process, on 24.04.2015.

⁶ Joint Statement of the Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs at Brdo, 23 April 2015 available at:

http://www.mzz.gov.si/fileadmin/pageuploads/fot o/1504/joint statement Brdo ministers.pdf

⁷ More information is available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhoodenlargement/news corner/news/2016/06/201 60630 2 en

⁸ More information is available at: https://www.saltoyouth.net/rc/see/connectingpolicy/europewby outhmeeting/

of the European Parliament, which should be established as a comprehensive platform for discussing the issues of young people in the countries of the Western Balkans" declared by MEP Tanja Fajon during the EP-hosted conference "A better future for young people in the Western Balkans".

The implementation of the Slovenian initiative "Positive Agenda for Youth in the Balkans" Western reinforces positive alternatives for voungsters through enhancing their mobility, encouraging contacts between them, and underlining the importance of education, employability and the involvement of the young in political processes.

3 | Albania - Serbia Memorandum of Understanding on Youth Cooperation

There has been already a regional youth exchange process going on in the Western Balkans even before RYCO was founded. Local institutions and / or programmes have also previously existed and specifically

supported international youth exchanges within the Western Balkans, between the Western Balkans and the European Union and within the European Union, such as for example the Franco-German Youth Office, the German-Polish Youth Office or the Erasmus+ Programme¹⁰ of the EU. But until now, there has not been a regionally owned institutional mechanism focussed into the Western Balkans to support this region's youth exchanges.

The Western Balkans countries face both a common heritage and common challenges. Youth is paramount to achieve development through joint action in promoting tolerance, solidarity and cooperation values. Youth cooperation is not only necessary, but crucial for the reconciliation and European integration of the entire region.

As a result, in the aftermath of the Berlin Conference of August 2014, an intensive agenda promoting regional youth cooperation took form. It resulted in the formulation of a bilateral memorandum of understanding to establish a regional youth exchange structure.

In the spirit of a supported regional cooperation within the Berlin Process, the Albanian Prime Minister visited Serbia on November 10, 2014. Youth and Economic cooperation were in the focus of the talks of this historic visit. The same day, the Foreign

youth workers" and in Key Action 3 "Structured Dialogue: meetings between young people and decision makers in the field of youth". In 2015, more than 18,400 young people and youth workers from Western Balkans countries and Erasmus+Programme Countries were involved in these projects". Available at:

http://pjp-

<u>eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/9508453/Conc</u> <u>ept+Paper+Regional+Activity+Montenegro+201</u> <u>6.pdf/18788424-3d96-454e-bdaf-</u> <u>2f8a013870c7</u>

⁹ "A better future for young people in the Western Balkans", Conference of the European Parliament hosted by Slovenian MEPs Tanja Fajon and Franc Bogovič, as quoted in: https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2016/07/14/young-people-are-not-our-future-but-our-present/

¹⁰ "While organisations from the Western Balkans can participate in Western Balkans Youth Window as applicants and/or partner organisations, they can also participate, as partners, in Erasmus+ Key Action 1 "Mobility projects for young people and"

Ministers of Albania and Serbia signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Youth Cooperation. As envisaged by Article 2 of this Memorandum, "...both countries agreed to intensify regional youth connections by establishing Youth Union of the Western Balkans countries involved in the Berlin process, aimed at creating a permanent dialogue between the youth and the institutions of the two countries in order to promote peace, understanding, stability and prosperity in the region."

During his historical visit in Serbia, Albanian Prime Minister stated "...the visionary program of student and youth exchanges, founded by Charles de Gaulle and Chancellor Adenauer initially to facilitate overcoming of the bitter history between France and Germany, serves as an encouraging model, showing the power the youth can have for a rapid progress in the cooperation between countries, if it is given a role to play"¹¹.

Consequently, the OSCE Mission to Albania and the OSCE Mission to Serbia started immediately supporting youth exchanges in the Memorandum Understanding between Albania and Serbia on Youth Co-operation. As a first result, 34 young people from Albania and Serbia took part to a Summer School in Tirana and in a Winter School in Serbia dealing with the subjects of inter-cultural dialogue in the digital era. They discussed and shared experiences and ideas on challenges facing the vouth in their countries. The Summer school took place in Tirana in the period 24-31 July 2015 and the Winter School on 10-15 December 2015.

In order to assess the first exchanges taking place in the framework of the MoU on Youth

Cooperation, the authors of this Policy Brief have carried out 10 individual interviews with 10 Albanian participants of the first two exchanges that have been supported by OSCE. We present below some of the most interesting findings, separated by rubrique.

a) reasons for participating in the exchange

When asked about the reasons for participating to this exchange, one of the interviewed stated:

"...I wanted to know more about the perceptions that we have on each-other and understand the roots of the hate between our countries".

Another participant stated:

"...This was the first exchange between Serbian and Albanian youngsters. I wanted to see the other face of the coin. I am a youngster who spends a lot of time on the social media, but also on the classical one, where hate is so much promoted. It was the right moment for me to stop being a spectator".

Another young participant stated:

"...I wanted to know more about a neghbouring country, I wanted to share experiences with other youngsters and extend my network."

b) former exchanges

When asked about their former experience with youth exchanges, 7 out 10 stated that they had previous experience with youth exchanges (mainly through School Senate,

 $\frac{press\text{-}conference\text{-}with\text{-}prime\text{-}minister\text{-}}{vucic\&page=1}$

http://www.kryeministria.al/en/newsroom/news/speech-of-prime-minister-rama-at-the-joint-

¹¹

European Youth Parliament, Erasmus +, etc.) while 3 interviewees responded that they didn't have previous experience with youth exchanges and/or activism in local organisations or associations.

c) added value of youth exchange

When asked about the basis created by these exchanges for concrete cooperation, they responded:

- "...many Serb friends with whom I share constantly through social media".
- "...I hope RYCO will provide the right tools to concrete cooperation between us".
- "...no concrete cooperation opportunities, but friendship and contacts for sure".

When asked about what future exchanges should focus on, some of the interviewees responded:

- "...I'd like the future exchanges to involve young researchers".
- "...I'd like the exchange to be more concrete"
- "...I'd like to have more delicate issues to be treated during the exchange, those issues which need to be dealt with diplomacy, and which have not been part of the previous exchange".
- "...I'd like less formalities in the format of the exchanges. The formalities just slow down processes".

d) knowledge of RYCO

Asked about their knowledge on the existence of RYCO, 5 out of 10 participants didn't know the initiative at all, while the other half knew RYCO and its mission.

When inquired about their wishes on RYCO's future support, they responded:

- "...I'd like RYCO to support not only the youngsters with experience from the urban areas, but also to those disadvantaged youngsters from the rural areas".
- "...I'd like RYCO to concretely support projects that promote friendship and peace".
- "...I'd like RYCO to finance functioning systems and structures, so that youth exchanges can gain importance and more support".
- "...RYCO should support spaces where we can concertize and compete our project ideas".

e) Albanian - Serbian friendship

Both exchanges seem to have provided a perfect ground for the Albanian youngsters to tie friendship with Serbian youngsters. All have positively assessed the possibilities that these exchanges offer for knowing the other and sharing uniting and dividing opinions on values, history and opportunities. They all agree the exchanges should be more concrete and linked to other ongoing or future initiatives, so that there may be a continuum of contacts and cooperation initiatives.

4 | RYCO: first steps

Based upon the Memorandum of Understanding on Youth Cooperation between Albania and Serbia signed in November 2014, the WB6 countries agreed

to use the Berlin process to build upon the initiative of building bridges between WB6 youngsters. As a result, the Joint Declaration on the Establishment of RYCO¹², was signed in the Vienna Summit. RYCO will focus on youth projects in five priority areas:

- 1. fostering regional cooperation;
- 2. enhancing mobility;
- 3. supporting reconciliation;
- 4. building peace and stability; and,
- 5. ensuring a prosperous future for young people in their respective countries

The French Government identified youth cooperation in the Western Balkans as one of the top priorities of the Paris Summit held in July 2016. This commitment resulted in the official launching of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office in the Western Balkans during the Paris Summit.

There was a combination of bottom-up and top-down approaches in the RYCO establishment parcour. A determinant factor was the involvement of the CSOs, because it brought the voice of civil society organizations directly into the process.

The involvement of CSO was articulated by its direct participation within the Working Group¹³, on an equal level as the government representatives. This direct involvement was complemented with broad consultations, throughout the working process, with other interested CSOs that deal with youth and could contribute to the work based on the steps and needs of the process.

Born to be operational in a region with a difficult past and common challenges, RYCO has been supported by the international community since its conception phase¹⁴. RYCO was conceived in an intense positive momentum in the political relations between the involved countries, and under the umbrella of the Berlin Process. RYCO establishment process was initiated by the highest political level in the region - the Prime Ministers of the Western-Balkans-6 Participants. It was supported by the other political levels concerned by the process (especially Ministries of Youth or equivalent, Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Ministries of Finance).

Since the first Western-Balkans Summit in Berlin, in August 2014, there has been a clear will to go ahead with RYCO. It was first expressed by the governments of Serbia and Albania, and then joined by the governments of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Macedonia and Montenegro. All partners committed themselves to the establishment of RYCO.

A Working Group was constituted with the task to elaborate "concrete proposals for the mission, structure, activities and financing of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office". This Working Group gathered governmental representatives and representatives from youth organizations from the WB-6-Participants. As also foreseen by the Joint Declaration, the working process was facilitated by the Franco-German Youth Office.

The Working Group prepared:

https://rycoblog.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/ annex 1 jointdeclaration establishment-youthcooperation-office-western-balkans-1.pdf representatives from the government and from the civil society.

¹² Available at:

 $^{^{13}}$ All six WB-Participants were represented in the Working Group. All countries had

¹⁴ Interview with Frank Morawietz, Special coordinator for the activities of French-German Youth Office (DFJW/OFAJ) in South-East Europe.

- Draft of the Agreement for the creation of RYCO
- Draft of the Statute of RYCO as an annex to this Agreement
- Definition of the mission and of the activities of RYCO
- Organigram proposal for RYCO
- Budget proposal for the first year
- ➤ The Agreement on and the Statute of RYCO, which, without substantial changes, were then officially signed by the Prime Ministers of the WB-6-Participants on 4 July 2016, at the WB Summit in Paris.

RYCO was officially launched on December 8, 2016 in Tirana, date that corresponds with the National Youth day. To the inauguration participated French ceremony State Secretary for European Harlem Desir, Prime Minister of the Republic of Albania Edi Rama, Secretary General of OFAJ, RYCO working group and the 6 representatives of the civil society from each of the WB6 countries. Prime Minister Rama highlighted moment and wished historical institution would do what the Germans and the French did for Europe after World War II. Minister Klosi evidenced the important role both civil society and governments representatives have played since the beginning of the journey.

During the same day, the RYCO Constitutional Board meeting took place. Important working documents prepared initially by the Working Group were discussed and approved during the meeting, namely:

- open call for Secretary General of RYCO,
- selection procedure of the Secretary General,
- > applicant's criteria definition.

Regarding the ratification status of the RYCO Agreement, three countries are still working on that direction, namely: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia. Meanwhile the budget has been allocated by each of the countries in order to fulfil the obligation towards financing of the newly established organization. Each of the civil society organization representatives in the Board, have updated the Board on the initiatives and projects carried out in each of the countries to promote RYCO.

On the occasion of the constitutional Board meeting, a donor conference was also organized in Tirana, with the aim of establishing partnerships and ensuring financing to joint initiatives.

5| How will RYCO function?

RYCO will be fully operational when all structures foreseen by its agreement are in place. Those structures are:

- 1. <u>Secretariat</u> + 5 local branches
- 2. <u>Governing Board</u> (6 governmental representatives in charge of youth policy + 6 youth representatives)
- 3. <u>Advisory Board</u> (representatives of Donor community, civil society, international organizations and other relevant institutions)

All these structures will perform complementary important roles. Their well-

functioning is the only guarantee of RYCO fulfilling its mission.¹⁵

annual budget higher than 300,000 EUR;

RYCO will finance the following actions:

- 1. <u>Individual exchanges</u> (internships, fellowships, trainings, apprenticeships, etc.) 1 week to 1 year;
- 2. <u>Group exchanges</u> (study visits, seminars, workshops, etc.) 3 months to 30 months.

Those exchanges will be in the following areas:

- 1. Participation and activism
- 2. Education, Research and Science
- 3. Culture
- 4. Sports

In Berlin, in March 2017, the Working Group and Governing Board of RYCO will meet to select the Secretary General of RYCO. They also set the work on the selection call for the other staff of the Secretariat, and defined the main elements of the call for proposals addressed to youngsters.

At the current state of development of the call for actions, RYCO is expected to finance:

- ➤ 100% of the budget for individual exchanges;
- ➤ 95% of the budget for group exchanges for organizations with annual budget less than 50,000 EUR;
- ➤ 85% of the budget for group exchanges for organizations with annual budget higher than 50,000 EUR and less than 300,000 EUR;
- > 75% of the budget for group exchanges for organizations with

6| Final considerations

- After RYCO starts functioning, it is crucial for the institution to be *transparent* and accountable, in order to optimise its performance and achieve the pre-defined objectives;
- Dealing with the past and reconciliation is one of the guiding pillars of the RYCO strategic framework programme. It is very important that the governments of the WB6 ensure long-term political and financial commitments so that RYCO may achieve the agreed objectives.
- RYCO is an independent regional organisation. Principles of *independence* will need to guide the daily activities of the organization.
- Promotion of RYCO outside the WB6 capital cities, in the local cities all over the regions is also very important in order to ensure balanced geographical youth inclusion. Youth participation from rural areas will need to be encouraged and youngsters from these areas will be provided equal access to RYCO initiatives.
- > Synergies with other youth initiatives and programmes are also important to ensure an "activism environment", where

¹⁵ Interview with Frank Morawietz, Special coordinator for the activities of French-German Youth Office (DFJW/OFAJ) in South-East Europe.

youth organizations can find the due space for their project ideas.¹⁶

- RYCO should not be overloaded with too many expectations.¹⁷ One of the biggest challenges will be to see how much RYCO will be able to contribute not only to individual lives, but also at the societal and regional levels. One of the main differences between the Franco German Youth Office and RYCO is that the former was created on the basis of the Franco-German friendship treaty. While RYCO has been created without a more general political agreement between the involved countries. If RYCO improves the lives of young people, it can perhaps bring its part in the development of larger positive changes in the region.
- Monitoring of RYCO-related process could only be beneficial to its performance. Civil society organizations can and should play an important role in this regard.

References and Links

Conclusions of Western Balkan Summit of Vienna 2015, available at: https://www.bmeia.gv.at/fileadmin/user-u-pload/Zentrale/Aussenpolitik/Chairman-s-Conclusions-Western-Balkans-Summit.pdf

Hackaj A., Madhi G. and Hackaj K., "Monitoring the Berlin Process: From Paris to Trieste", Cooperation and Development Institute, January 2017, available at: http://cdinstitute.eu/web/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Monitoring-the-Berlin-Process-From-Paris-to-Trieste.pdf.

Statement of the Foreign minister of Slovenia, Karl Erjavec during the meeting of the Foreign ministers of the EU and the Western Balkans, part of the Brdo Process, on 24.04.2015, available at: http://www.vlada.si/en/media room/newsletter/slovenia weekly/news/article/fms at brdo european future and cooperation remain crucial for a stable and successful europe 52728/

https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhoodenlargement/news corner/news/2016/06/ 20160630 2 en

https://www.saltoyouth.net/rc/see/connectingpolicy/europe wbyouthmeeting/

https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/201 6/07/14/young-people-are-not-our-futurebut-our-present/

http://pjp-

<u>eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/9508453/</u> <u>Concept+Paper+Regional+Activity+Monten</u> <u>egro+2016.pdf/18788424-3d96-454e-bdaf-2f8a013870c7</u>

http://www.kryeministria.al/en/newsroom/news/speech-of-prime-minister-rama-at-the-joint-press-conference-with-prime-minister-vucic&page=1

https://rycoblog.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/annex 1 jointdeclaration establishmen t-youth-cooperation-office-western-balkans-1.pdf

http://www.dwpbalkan.org/cms_dwp/userfiles/file/Balkan Perspectives Nationalism Eng.pdf www.roadtoryco.com

Interview with Kreshnik Loka, Albanian National Youth Service

¹⁷ http://www.dwpbalkan.org/cms_dwp/userfiles/file/BalkanPers pectives_Nationalism_Eng.pdf