

Inspiring stories: Springboard to reconciliation

Project: *Youth* can change the future



Why „YOUth can change the future“ project is necessary?

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There are various studies that emphasize the role and importance of youth in promoting inter-ethnic dialogue and cooperation. The most recent study on youth participation conducted by the Council of Europe, in cooperation with the EU, see young people as important promoters of democracy nowadays: “young people are not ‘victims’ or ‘problematic’ as often claimed, but diverse and critical stakeholders in democracy”.¹

The end of wars in Balkans did not result in the end of conflicts and divisions among its population, especially among youth. Several researches in Serbia show that young generations are more conservative and less tolerant than the older, 65+ generation.²

We are witnessing that the barriers and hate speech based on ethnic identities are becoming reinforced in recent years. The radicalization of public opinion is reflected by higher level of intolerance, lack of mutual understanding, prejudices, racism, hate speech, etc. Additionally, messages of racism and demonstration of hatred in social networks are becoming more frequent.

The research done by CEDEM shows that over 40% of Montenegrin population expresses both ethnic and social distance towards Albanians.³ This was confirmed through the research conducted by Forum MNE, whose results were published in 2017.⁴ The research shows that ethnic distance among youth in Northern Region of Montenegro is at a high level. Moreover, according to available researches, Albanian youth has a strong ethnic distance towards Serbs (6,19/7) and Montenegrins(4,58/7).⁵

Concretely, youth in Western Balkans is facing the following challenges:

- Growing extremism among them, due to frustration caused by the economic and social problems in their respective societies;
- Poverty and enormous rates of unemployment among them (in some societies more than 50%) make them an easy target for manipulation;
- They are often confused about information provided by the media or stakeholders, so they inform themselves through Internet portals or among friends, thus not necessarily getting the true information;
- Increase of hate speech among them, as hate speech is seen as something that makes them popular;

1 <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/7495153/What+is+youth+participation.pdf/223f7d06-c766-41ea-b03c-38565efa971a>

2 <http://iea.rs/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Stav-gradjana-Srbije-o-EU-NATO-Rusiji-i-Kosovu-jul-2016.pdf>

3 <http://www.cedem.me/publikacije/studije-i-javne-politike/summary/69-studije-i-javne-politike/720-etnika-distanca-2013>

4 http://www.forum-mne.com/images/slike-za-clanke/Otpornost_mladih_na_radikalna_i_ekstremna_ponašanja_u_CG_MNE.pdf

5 <http://oaji.net/articles/2014/457-1415392684.pdf>

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- Lack of spaces where they can openly establish dialogue, discuss and exchange views;
- Increase of aggressiveness towards different groups in the society such as ethnic minorities, especially Roma or LGBT people, financed and fostered by extremist organisations in the societies;
- Growth of popularity of radical political groups among them;
- Exposure to discrimination at schools, on workplace etc.

Therefore, the intercultural dialogue has nowadays become one of the most pressing challenges of the area of Western Balkans, and the role of youth in bridging diverse communities is more emphasized than ever before. Providing information and knowledge about intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding and open mindedness seem to be a need that is crucial for achieving tolerance.

Youth that comes from rural areas faces with the lack of opportunities for learning, cooperation and participation in decision making processes. Poor education, lack of critical thinking and social or cultural development of youth, encourage the emergence of prejudices and negative stereotypes towards others.

Young people are influenced by their parents' or societies' attitudes towards different ethnic groups, usually without the possibility to receive knowledge and skills for intercultural dialogue through international youth exchanges. Therefore, their attitude towards their peers in the region is based on negative stereotypes and prejudice.

Encouraging the intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding among youth in the region, through intercultural exchange programmes, using European practice and innovative methods, will result in both youth's active and effective participation in the civil dialogue, and decreased level of hate speech, negative stereotypes and prejudice among youth.

Accordingly, young people definitely need to gain greater knowledge, bigger motivation and more possibilities to get to know each other. Developing peer-to-peer education mechanisms will foster the learning process, help young people change their wrong perception of others, and provide them with the possibility to make friendships and socialize.

The project "Youth can Change the Future" responded to the abovementioned problems and challenges, by gathering young and enthusiastic people from Montenegro, Serbia, Albania and Kosovo*, and enabling them to find a common, fertile ground for working on creating a better future for all of us.

The project was implemented in **Montenegro, Serbia, Albania and Kosovo.**

*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

Reasons for having the project in these societies are the following:

- Ethnic distance towards Albanians is at a very high level. Over 40% of total population in Montenegro shows distance towards Albanians (according to CEDEM's research conducted in 2013);
- Albania is listed as the third enemy country to Serbia (according to the Institute for European Affairs from 2016);
- Albanian youth shows a huge ethnic distance towards Serbs and Montenegrins;
- In Kosovo, Serbia is rated as the biggest external security threat, regardless of the fact that it has been almost a decade since political representatives of these two societies were pushed by the EU to start technical and political dialogue. It seems that the public opinion among Serbs and Kosovo Albanians is that the dialogue between these two societies have not been successful.

These perceptions indicate that hatred based on ethnic identity among Albanians and Serbs in both Kosovo and Serbia is very intense, and mostly youths are involved in acts that have ethnic character of origin.⁶ At the same time, the fact that this project included young members of marginalised ethnic groups and youth from rural areas, who often do not have opportunities for non-formal education or travelling, makes this project even more relevant.

According to the abovementioned, this project aimed to respond to these challenges. The general aim is to enhance and promote the intercultural dialogue through raising awareness on cultural and linguistic diversity, and making young people more open-minded, thus preventing negative attitudes towards people from other societies. The project activities were directed towards creating a positive atmosphere where exchange and dialogue can happen, as well as contributing to mutual understanding and cooperation between young people, by building strong and long-lasting friendships and relationships among individuals from different ethnic groups in the Western Balkan region.

In the line with the project aim and objectives, the main activity of the project was the study visit which lasted almost three weeks - 5 days in each, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania and Kosovo. The study visit included peer-to-peer learning of Montenegrin-Serbian and Albanian language, workshops on the topics related to intercultural dialogue, visits to public institutions and museums at Vranje, Prishtina, Shokdra and Bar, as well as public activities in each city they visited.

Therefore, the study visit included the following:

1. Language courses

In order to improve the participants' knowledge of Montenegrin-Serbian and Albanian language, and to raise awareness on cultural and linguistic diversity among

⁶ http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/barometri-dialogue-eng_967295.pdf

them, 34 language classes lasting 45 minutes were organized. After the completion of the study visit the knowledge of the participants was on A1 level.

2. Visits to state institutions, museums, cultural sites

This activity aimed at getting familiar with different cultures through visiting cultural sites and institutions. Participants visited many places such as Museum of Bora Stanković, White Bridge, Innovation Kosova Centar, Unicef Innovation Lab, Museum of Kosovo, Marubi Photography Museum, Shkoder Historical Museum, Old Town of the city of Bar and King Nikola's Palace.

Participants got a chance to speak with mayors of Vranje, Prishtina, Shkodra and the city of Bar.

3. Workshops on intercultural dialogue, with particular focus on the social and political context, and customs of the specific society.

4. Renovation of public spaces

In each city participants planted trees on green surfaces. This activity was implemented in cooperation with local governments, with an aim to enable participants to jointly contribute to their societies and local communities. Moreover, it was another way to promote the project and increase its visibility.

YOUNG PEOPLE WERE ASKED WHERE PREJUDICES AND STEREOTYPES COME FROM AND TO DESCRIBE THE REASONS FOR HAVING PREJUDICES AND STEREOTYPES TOWARDS ALBANIANS/SERBIANS/MONTENEGRIN/KOSOVARS?

Prejudices and stereotypes are formed as a result of massive immigrations from these places to other places. Also, there are even reasons related to the history of these countries, their socio-economic conditions, and a lot of thoughts and behaviours are inherited even from previous generations. (Sara Dervishaj, Albania)

Separation of former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia brought the separation of people with same ethnics, nationalities, believes... Today, Balkan is a region with diverse ethnic groups, religions, nations, and cultures. This is an initiator of prejudices and stereotypes. In my opinion, there is a strong prejudice between Albanians and Serbians because of the war that happened. **Many Albanian people were killed, moved away from their territories forcefully, and even now, after the independence, the memories are alive, they cannot build trust and cooperation.** (Bukuri Hoxha, Albania)

The reasons for having prejudices and stereotypes can be based on a number of factors including sex, race, age, sexual orientation, nation's socio-economic status, religion, homophobia, nationalism, religious, ageism and xenophobia. (Megi Dukeli, Albania)

Usually the reason why my community has prejudice towards Serbians is the history between the three countries: Albania, Serbia and Kosovo, the war in Kosovo. Because of the horrific ethnic cleansing campaign and mass killings, even 15 years later there is still a mistrust between the three countries. Due to these historical injustices, Albanians judge Serbians as

I have not met a lot of people of different religion and, thanks to the media, history, social media, I have heard more information in a bad context than in good, regarding the Albanians and Kosovars.

Aleksandra Jovović, Montenegro

people who seek to fulfill their own purpose and do not generally trust them or what they promise, and this feeling of mistrust is reciprocal. The Kosovar and the Serbian government are participating in many discussion tables aiming to enforce their relationship and set peaceful communication relationship, but these discussions are proceeding slowly because of this feeling of mistrust. (Erka Tan, Albania)

When you live in a small place you are able to see only a small part of this huge world and everything that is happening in it. It is the biggest influence which created prejudices towards these ethnic groups.

Mostly young people are stereotypically seen as criminals, drug dealers and rapists. Media provides a lot of space and attention to crimes committed by ethnic Albanians, Kosovars, Serbians or Montenegrin.

Sara Dervishaj, Albania

Politics mixed up everything and citizens are still afraid to make joint effort and create relations between nations.

Igli Pallosha, Albania

Secondly, I think that people are not the same, even in one country, even in one town. We are all raised in different ways. We may speak the same language or have the same interests, but we are all different. **I have so many prejudice and stereotypes that arise from ignorance and isolation, because I was not able to learn about and with people different in many aspects.** (Aleksandra Jovović, Montenegro)

Referring to the Balkan countries' history of wars, there are popular myths related to the unclear and unexplained hatred between nations... But still I am insecure if countries are fans of wars against each other, or countries have left the past behind and

are seeking to have a bright future. On the other hand, the relation between Albania and Montenegro is not easily understandable. It is confusing whether these two countries have common interests or not. And I doubt there is any relation between Montenegro and Kosovo at all, except borders?! Albania and Kosovo are two culturally similar countries, but still I do not know too much about youth interest and point of view. (Igli Pallosha, Albania)

These stereotypes and prejudices have existed, and the only reason is the dispute for division of borders. The reason for stereotypes would be the discrimination based on ethnics, culture, religion or language. **An important role in Balkans plays the history, because every country wants a wide history with strong roots.** (Zylali Esmeralda, Albania)

Racism, prejudice and xenophobia have been present in almost every single civilization and society throughout history. Even though the world has progressed significantly in the last couple of decades, both socially and technologically, racism, hatred, discrimination and prejudice are still present today, deeply embedded in old-fashioned, narrow-minded, insular traditions and values. The legacy of past racism directed at Albanians, Serbians, Montenegrins and Kosovars in the Balkans is like a bacillus that we have failed to destroy and keeps spreading like a disease. For instance, by the late nineteenth century, Albanians were being characterized by Serbian government officials as a "wild tribe" with "cruel instincts". Others from Serbia's intelligentsia such as the geographer Jovan Cvijić referred to Albanians as being "the most barbarous tribes of Europe," and this keeps happening today. There is a very rotten mind-set that causes this level of prejudice and racism. Serbs are seen

The main reasons for having prejudices and stereotypes towards Albanians, Serbians, Montenegrins and Kosovars are that young people are subject to the imposition of an opinion by the elderly. We were not part of these horrible events, but some people want to introduce us to that world through their events and stories. They share hatred and intolerance instead of love and solidarity.

Sara Borančić, Montenegro

as the invaders, dictators and the nation that always terrified the Albanians. This rotten mind-set comes from our "dark" past. It is perhaps Serbia's medieval period of control of Kosovo which lies behind nationalists' claims to the province – some consider it the cradle of the culture and state of the Serbian people. But Albanian claims to the territory pre-date the arrival of the Serbs. Nationalists argue Albanians are descendants of an ancient tribe who allegedly inhabited the western Balkans before the 7th century. Both Albanians and Serbs have been authors of grisly massacres with Kosovo's massacre as the latest one. **The wounds are still fresh and will take time to heal, but that belongs to the past if we want to progress we have to seek collaboration.** (Stivi Canka, Albania)

Kosovars and Albanians are a relatively unknown people to me, and I have reasons to believe that they may not be as bad as we like to think, yet media, politicians and others tend to speak otherwise. (Filip Radojevic, MNE)

The main reason for the prejudice between these nationalities is the constant struggle in the Balkans. Albanians and Kosovars have always had their claims as autochthonous people, while Serbs have always had claims for Albanian territories, calling them as part of their territory. **The traditions of these people are not so different from each other, but hatred and nationalism among young people, fed by adults, have created every barrier to exchange information between them.** (Romina Duraku, Albania)

I could give only an explanation regarding this occurrence: exaggerated nationalist spirit. Each of nations is strongly connected with the historical past when our countries fought

for territories and dominance. **We inherited and developed the hatred caused by our predecessors' mistakes. I also believe that politicians in our region haven't followed the right strategies to end these awkward situations.** As a result, the consequence is aggravated relationships between the Slavs and Albanians. (Amelia Kurti, Albania)

This is how often unquestionably many positive features that only this or that nation, people, or group of people have. **This must be avoided because hatred is not a solution.** (Fjolla Shaban, Kosovo)

Nationalism is a bias that is based on common cultural characteristics, common identity and over-estimation in relation to those of other nations, and this is a man among the prejudices between these countries.

Fjolla Shaban, Kosovo

The media uses more hate speech than people and from the media we create the idea how the people of these countries think of us.

Saranda Ramaj, Kosovo

I think one of the main reasons why we are prejudging is the lack of complete information or belief in wrong information... Such a thing, even though not in all cases, necessarily leads to discrimination. (Xhevahir Lamce, Albania)

Well, having prejudice happened to me. Me and my family were travelling to Montenegro and we stopped near some young guys to ask them for a nearby location and at first they were all with a very good attitude, but after they saw our car plate they started reacting weird. They were: speaking bad words, making fun of us and talking on their mother tongue. But what do these young guys know about the wars we had in the past or

about the historical bad relations of their own country? Well, I guess all they know are some stories from their parents and the idea of hating the other country that took some lands from their own territory. **Their knowledge and mentality that surrounds them must be changed.** (Edera Dibra , Albania)

I think that Albanians and Serbs use the same words to describe each other - they accuse each other of being violent, robbers, and discriminatory. So, I think that both Serbian and Albanian history textbooks are full of stereotypes, generalizations and black and white views of the past. Second reason for my prejudice is the media. (Saranda Ramaj, Kosovo)

I think the most common stereotypes are connected to wars that happened in the past. One famous philosopher and politician once said: **"We still haven't destroyed the bridge that connects us with the catastrophic past, it is still possible to fall. Balkan is full of destructive potentials"**. Also, the prejudice is often based on wrong information or fear of the unknown, and political structures that are in power in some of our countries. Being aware of cultural values and norms can help us understand international issues and conflicts. (Anja Filipović, MNE)

I am willing to learn more about neighboring countries' cultures and traditions, and also finding the similarities and differences to my own. Reasons for having stereotypes and prejudices are the following: **1) people do not know enough about other countries' cultures and traditions 2) the improper media coverage of certain events in the history of international relation 3) the geopolitical conflicts of interest, and 4) the isolated past of the respective countries.** (Arbri Kopliku ALB)

In today's Albanian society, we rarely find ourselves in touch with people different from us. Our style of dressing and the way of speaking are, of course, creating a certain stereotype for us, according to which we judge positively or negatively. If one with the opposite opinion tries to persuade us, we would ignore anything that does not fit our preconceptions.

Xhevahir Lamce, Albania

Inspiring stories :

"How to increase trust and good relations among young people in the region"

First of all, we should enhance the trust and good relations, knowledge and skills of young people. Although most young people create positive impact with minimal resources, it's important to provide them with the tools they need to become more effective change-makers. In concrete terms, this means giving them access to the teachers, facilitators, educational programs and networks that can hone their conflict resolution and leadership skills. Training opportunities can range from content-based topics, such as conflicts or gender to more practical-focused areas, such as advocacy or project management. Some of the most successful interventions also find ways to leverage youth interests - arts, sports, media, informal learning and personal relationships. Young people alone by no means have the answers to the challenges the world and communities around the world are facing, neither do older generations. By bringing together the vision of young people today, and the experience of older generations, new answers to challenges are created. Also it is important to build trust between youth and governments, and to promote intergenerational exchange. Through partnerships with community groups and elder councils, youth can demonstrate the benefits. Such communication and collaboration channels also enable young people and adults to explore the common problems they face and to tackle them together, thus participating in the emergence of sustainable solutions. (Sara Dervishaj, Albania)

Everything has a start and an end, but sometimes in the end of the story comes another beginning; it's the circle of life! Of course the things are not easy, nothing is easy in fact, but we should start the job from one point to reach our goals and to succeed, because no one does this for us! It's difficult to increase trust and good relations between young people in the region, because a lot of things have happened in the past. We can't solve the past anymore, but we can do better and heal both the present and the future, not only for us, but also for the generations to come! Everything starts from something, sometimes this something is always us, me, you, me, he, she. It does not matter. What matters is that we should believe, we need to forget the hatred, the misunderstandings from the past. We need to live like persons, not like states or governments. We need to believe and be open for other perspectives, other views. We need to see the things from a different perspective of view, from the view of our "enemy", and only then we can understand that he/she is our friend! The first thing I think must be done is the responsibility of the civil society. It is able and must create different programmes, trainings, winter/summer schools, because in this way you get a new experience, you test yourself. Moreover, by getting to know new people, you

see and understand that the things are different! By participating in projects you create new relationships, and you make new friends if you earn them! Then our governments should create politics for youth, especially politics about youth exchanges in the region. They must offer free internships, thus providing us with the opportunity to experience a new culture, a new language. In this way, we can increase the trust and good relations between youth in the region! I think we should create exchange programmes in every area in order to learn to live with each other, to share our life, our stories, our experiences, and to learn to trust! In this regard, RYCO is a super factor, because by funding projects with the motto: Youth can change the future has made it possible to build hundreds of friendships and to increase trust and good relations in the region. My story is not your story! I learned to break stereotypes and prejudice by putting myself in the place of the person that I was prejudging. Everyone has a possibility to create an amazing story by increasing trust and good relations in the region! How? Simply by being yourself and not excluding anybody, before knowing them. My story may be different from your story! **(Adrian Zalla, Albania)**

It has always been a little hard to gather young people from the region together to work or spend time together. There are a lot of problems that cause the lack of trust and good relations between young people. In my opinion, the biggest problem is the high technology and the lack of knowledge about organizations that help young people participate in projects like this one. If there was created a camp for some days to see what the problem is, really dig in and find the best solution through communication and activities, I believe that the trust and the good relation between young people in our region would increase a lot. **(Lirika Shifta, Kosovo)**

In times of dramatic change, the story we tell ourselves of the future is even more important than that of the past. While the past may tell who we are, it is a compelling vision of the future that must guide us and propel us forward. What does the future hold for the Balkan region? After years of brutal and often violent conflicts, the people of the Balkans are now rebuilding and renewing their commitment to the goals of peace, progress, and prosperity. While many obstacles: political, social, and economic remain, one cannot underestimate the power of a shared vision combined with the will to achieve it. A vital key to peace and cooperation is cultivating both a recognition of commonalities, and greater understanding and respect for differences among the region's diverse ethnic groups, religions, nations, and cultures. The progress is made through joint action in promoting tolerance, solidarity and cooperation. Youth are the future. Youth participating in decision-making processes is an asset. In Balkans, people under the age of 24 comprise more than a quarter of the population, and they are the ones who will soon own the future and are now poised to play an active role in shaping it. We must seek to understand and respect one another - to embrace our similarities and our differences. None are immune to the problems that plague the region as a whole. Thus trust and cooperation is not more a choice but a solution. **(Bukuri Hoxha, Albania)**

"We are alone here!" my friend said to me as we were discussing about the future of our country. Surprised I asked why and she replied: "We are surrounded by people who do not want us to succeed, who have historically used us and never helped. Greeks on the south, Serbians on the north!". As she finished her sentence a young boy, could have been 17 years old, walked into our class with our teacher as she said: "Attention everyone, this is your new classmate, this is Miroslav. He moved here from Serbia with his family." And as she finished her sentence, I turned my head and saw my classmates frowning. It was something I could not explain, maybe even they could not explain. It did not look like their feeling, it looked like an imposed feeling of mistrust, of hatred towards Miroslav, without even knowing him, just because of where he came from. The weeks passed and I always saw Miroslav standing alone, never surrounded by peers, and as I passed by his study table, I saw it had threatening notes like "Die!", "Go away!", "Serbians are not accepted here!", "Go back to Serbia!", and I saw him crying. That was the moment I decided to sit next to him. This action of mine was judged by my classmates as a "treason", and to be honest I could not understand all the hatred towards Miroslav, because I had never even heard him speak once, only when he said "I am present", as the teacher read the names from her classbook, and so had everyone else. As I sat next to him, he asked me frightened: "What are you doing?!" "Sitting next to you", I replied calmly, and I saw a tear slipping through his eye. It was a happy tear, a tear of appreciation, as if I had given him the greatest gift, while I had only sat next to him - I had given him the chance to get to know him, to know more than his name and where he came from, and he was grateful to me for that. As the week passed, me and Miroslav became close friends and I learned so much about him, about his culture and I discovered he had a beautiful mind and that he also wanted to eliminate the prejudice of Serbians towards Albanian and Kosovars. One time as we walked by the school corridor, somebody yelled to him: "We don't want you here", and this time it was me crying for Miroslav. I could not understand how others could not see the Miroslav I could see, so I asked him in tears: "What can I do for you? How can I change the way they see you?". And he replied: "You already are changing the way they see me! You gave me the opportunity to show you more, to get to know me more with no prejudice. And trust me that one day they will too." And then I understood that sometimes the little actions can bring changes. Changes do not happen overnight, they require time, time for people to build bridges. At that time it was only me and Miroslav building a small bridge between us and our countries, but as the time was passing by, I was not alone anymore, many others wanted to know more about Miroslav and so I understood that it requires only a mind free of prejudice to build these bridges! One person can help motivating others and then from one we can become many, until we turn into a generation with no prejudice. We should not inherit the prejudice deriving from the past into our present and lead towards the future in which we judge each-other on ethnical basis or any other basis. And these little bridges can help us build a bigger bridge between our two countries. **(Erka Tan, Albania)**

In my opinion, what brings young people together is different cultural and artistic manifestations. Volunteering in this region would help connecting different cultures and bring new visions and new perspectives to these countries. So, what's the first action that we could take? We can organize concerts, different cultural and artistic exhibitions, so young people can truly find themselves and build relations and connections with this region. **(Besjana Rrahmani, Kosovo)**

By getting to know each other, developing as many multicultural activities as possible, making as many excursions as possible, creating groups of students/young people working to strengthen cultural/academic relations among the countries in the Balkan region, we can reach peace and stability in the region. We are the most historical nations in Europe, and perhaps the time has come to challenge hatred and to make Balkans famous again, but this time not for wars or conflicts, but for cooperation and coexistence. **(Enxhi Ismaili, Albania)**

Balkan is a special place and people who live here are special too. We are always so proud, temperamental, dignified... We are different, but we are also so similar, and we do not understand that first we have to become strong community, so that we later could become members of the larger ones. They say that young people are the future; they say that the world remains on us and because of that we have to behave like the future of our countries which we are. We need to destroy old borders and to make new ones, „our borders” and truths. Old borders have created this prejudice that we want to change. Trust and good relations cannot be made overnight, years of mutual support and love are needed to rebuild today's relations. **(Aleksandra Jovović, Montenegro)**

Young people can engage in peacebuilding, using new technologies to mobilize societies to bring a change. Collaborations with cultural institutions, such as museums and cultural centres, provide alternative opportunities for youth to learn about their own and other cultures. Such collaborations can also help recognize and understand different interpretations of historical events. **(Igli Pallosa, Albania)**

Trust is a short word with a deep meaning. It's so easy to pronounce it. Sometimes it looks that this word exists only in dictionaries, because it is rarely present in reality. It's so difficult to build trust, but it's so easy to destroy it. But we can change that and we can make it an old myth. Of course, the journey would be long, but it will be worth it! As youth that we are we need hope, but more than hope we need support. It's enough for us to see only a light and it doesn't matter if it is far away, we will follow it until the end, until we make the impossible possible. That's who we are, young people with big dreams. Sometimes our dreams are bigger than us, but that can't stop us to follow them. Good relations and trust can be built only by investing help, support, time or money. Every type of investing is important for us, because it feeds us with hope. Investing in scholarships, different important activities that can develop our knowledge or anything else that would support us and our dreams. I have read that, over half the world's population is under the age of 30. To someone, this number may seem daunting, but the way I see it is different. More than 3.5 billion are young people so we have 3.5 billion opportunities for change. We need to be involved more meaningfully in both national and local actions intended to meet our needs and respond to our problems. Young people are the smart investment for a country, you invest in us today, and we will be the best country's investment tomorrow. **(Zylali Esmeralda, Albania)**

I think that first of all we are human beings, human beings who through mutual communication can achieve positive results. Besides this, we are also neighbors with each other and our relationships must be good. I think we have to leave behind the history and move towards a common goal, which is the membership in the European Union. The young people are the future and we need to improve today if we want a better tomorrow. I come from a rural area, an area where the woman has been deprived of being active. I also participate in an association that helps strengthen rural areas and women in particular. Being from rural areas to many coming from urban areas, means you are different. I think there is no impact on the geography position where we are, rather than cultural development. We, young people, must get together, in harmony with each other and give our world and our politicians a good and positive example. **(Enkeleda Paluku, Albania)**

I think the best way to overcome a number of differences as well as the improvement of young people's attitudes in the region is that young people as much as possible meet, to talk about daily life, problems, history and culture. The more we learned about each other, the better we can understand each others. Due to the historical reasons and number of disagreements in the past this required a lot of time for improvement, but I think that the younger generations are the ones who can make a difference, because at the end of the day we are all my people, with much more similarities than we can imagine. **(Maja Nikolić, Montenegro)**

Build trust between young people and governments. Youth mobilization in peace-building efforts is more likely to be successful if young people are given the capabilities and opportunities to work with local and national governments. With few constructive avenues to influence local and national politics, young people tend to view governments as beset by corruption. Conversely, governments often fail to take into account the views of youths in policymaking, and may have different priorities for peace. As such, joint workshops, community projects or platforms can all help bridge the divide between youths and government officials. It's also important to encourage young people to learn about national or regional peace priorities while helping them work toward their own peace priorities. Promote intergenerational exchange rather than working with youths in isolation, peace-building projects seeking the engagement of youths should also include parents and elders. Youths are deeply influenced by the attitudes of their entourage. Yet adults might perceive youth-led initiatives as a threat to their own power and position. This points to the need for youth peace-building projects to be accompanied by dialogue and cooperation between young people, their relatives and community elders. Seek more inclusive means for young people to express themselves and participate in awareness-raising among the wider population. Through partnerships with community groups and elder councils, youths can demonstrate the benefits of their peace actions. Such communication and collaboration channels also enable young people and adults to explore the common problems they face and to tackle them together, thus participating in the emergence of sustainable solutions. "Young people alone by no means have the answers to the challenges the world and communities around the world are facing. Neither do older generations. By bringing together the vision of young people today, and the experience of older generations, new answers to challenges are created. To conclude I think that the key is supporting dialogue and youths who are positively contributing to their communities. Simple rewarding systems such as certificates, prizes and scholarships can serve as great incentives for youth. They can also inspire their peers to take action and participate in peace programs. **(Bela Gega, Albania)**

I always believed that good relationships among young people could make a better country. These are skills that can be learned and applied in life. The first thing for me is to be a good listener. Everyone has the basic desire to be heard and understood. We naturally bond with people who really listen, hear us and that we'd want to spend time with them. The second thing is to pay attention to the whole person while somebody speaks. Also, is very important to be consistent and manage emotions, to be open-minded and to share when the time is right. To build strong relationships we need to be able to pace ourselves and share when it's appropriate, and at a level that is consistent with the depth of the relationship. The last thing is that we need to be interacted with a lot of activities that invites all the youngsters to do something different, to share their voice. That's how we build trust. **(Senada Llukaj, Albania)**

The historical and political events in the Balkans region have had a big impact in the inhabitants mentality. This mentality may often lead to racism, prejudice and conflicts between the states of the region themselves and as a consequence between people too. The youth is the future of a country and it is essential that they are taught important values such as tolerance and acceptance, in order to preserve peace and quiet in the region. To achieve this, it is necessary to increase trust and good relations amongst youngsters, by creating youth organizations that will bring them together, by creating exchange programs, cultural values and different point of views and by creating exchange programs in schools. First, youth organizations exist in every country. Its aim is to bring together young people, discuss ideas, projects and overall to teach them the benefits of team work. If those kind of organizations would set up projects and collaborations between the states of the region, then it would help young people know more peers, work with them and learn a lot about different cultures and traditions. One of my friends participated in a similar organization EYP (European Youth Parliament) Albania, and she had the best experience, because she got the chance to interact with people of her age, who came from different cultures and backgrounds. She also made a friendship with girl from Serbia, with whom she keeps in contact to this day. Apart from learning a lot about one another, they also exchanged some very good ideas on how to get rid of racism between our countries. Second, the internet has become a "second home" for the youth. In order to improve relations between youngsters, we must first ask them what they think is the best way to interact with one another. So in order to achieve this, a good idea would be setting up a web page where they could upload power point presentations, different projects, writings and even organize trips with their peers. Considering the proximity between our state and the rest of the states of the region, it would be an easy task, moreover an enjoyable one. It is all about dedication and the will to do something positive that will most likely affect the future of our countries. Last, schools have also a great responsibility when it comes to teaching students good values. Schools must cooperate in order to establish exchange programs, starting from high school between states of the region. By setting up these exchanges, even if it is only for a three months period at least, students will get the chance to live in these countries and get a first hand experience of what it's like to live in a certain state, also understand the mentality of the inhabitants. In conclusion, I'd like to say that improving good relations and trust between young people that come from different states of the region is a crucial step for the future of our countries. It is certainly the time to take matters into our own hands and help setting up exchange programs, online websites, and youth organizations, whose priority will be educating youngsters and promoting peace, tolerance and acceptance between the countries of the Balkans region. **(Ervina Xhixha, Albania)**

Programs like RYCOs' are a huge positivity for youth, because maybe there are no Kosovars that would go to Serbia if there wasn't this kind of programmes and vice versa. It would be good to have a TV programme where we could talk about more interesting things than politics, a place where the youth from these countries would go and do common things and have fun. Of course, it would be good if schools could provide us joint workshops. In this way, all of us that take part at these activities would spread the knowledge to others that don't. Social media is a part of our life now, and we could stay in contact with others and be friend any maybe one day organise similar things. I know that this problem can not be easily solved, it will take a more time, but I really believe that all young people want the same thing - security and indivisibility of all young people. **(Almedina Niković, Montenegro)**

Projects initiated by non-governmental organizations are good opportunity to help young people to fight against prejudices and stereotypes. Meeting and connecting, traveling and sharing beautiful moments between youth from different states are the best way to show them that does not matter where do you come from, that you are amazing by showing yourself in some other ways not through that place where you were born and I am not going to put label on someone just by the nation, that he/she belongs. Encouraging young people who are fighting against intolerance and nationalism should be the base of these kinds of programmes in order to prevent future conflicts. **(Sara Borančić, Montenegro)**

Relationships are powerful. Our one-to-one connections with each other are the foundation for change. Building relationships with people from different cultures, often many different cultures, is key in building diverse communities that are powerful enough to achieve significant goals. Whether you want to make sure your children get a good education, bring quality health care into your communities, or promote economic development, there is a good chance you will need to work with people from several different racial, language, ethnic or economic groups. In order to work with people from different cultural groups effectively, it's needed to build sturdy and caring relationships based on trust, understanding and shared goals. Trusting relationships are the glue that hold people together as they work on a common problem. As people work on challenging problems, they will have to hang in there together when things get hard. They will have to support each other to stay with an effort, even when it feels discouraging. People will have to resist the efforts of those who use divide-and-conquer techniques-pitting one cultural group against another. Regardless of your racial, ethnic, religious, or socio-economic group, you will probably need to establish relationships with people whose group you may know very little about. Each one of us is like a hub of a wheel. Each one of us can build relationships and friendships around ourselves that provide us with the necessary strength to achieve community goals. If each person builds a network of diverse and strong relationships, we can come together and solve problems that we have in common. **(Arnita Veliu, Kosovo)**

YOUTH. Young people can be a creative force and a dynamic source of innovations, and they have participated, contributed, and even catalyzed important changes in political systems, power-sharing dynamics and economic opportunities throughout history. For the future of a region as destabilized as ours, growing healthy relations among youth is of crucial importance. There are a variety of ways to grow and to bolster these healthy relationships. Giving youth access to the teachers, facilitators, educational programs and networks that can hone their conflict resolution and leadership skills is essential in fostering their representation in local and national policymaking processes. With few constructive avenues to influence local and national politics, young people tend to view governments as beset by corruption. Conversely, governments often fail to take into account the views of youths in policymaking, and may have different priorities for peace. The Balkan nations need to firmly support and trust each other and be sincere and good friends. It is important that they render each other firm support on major issues concerning core interests such as sovereignty, territorial integrity, security and stability. Every Balkan country should encourage their youth to develop this particular mindset. Youth should know that alliances, formed by countries that are willing to enhance practical cooperation and be good partners of win-win cooperation, are healthy alliances. Furthermore, a brilliant way of increasing good relations among youth people in the region is creating a healthy education curriculum. Young people are in the very prime of life, the best time to obtain knowledge, build character and develop skills. Therefore, they need to be fed with "healthy" information from the very beginning of their education. School books should be written by qualified historians and not by advocates driven by patriotism. By applying this method, the foundations of their educations will be steady and well-balanced. In addition, extracurricular activities like Model United Nations (MUN) are also an exceptional opportunity for building a network of foreign peers that are as motivated and driven. It raises awareness of global issues, and it helps people to develop public speaking skills. MUN builds self confidence and helps people to socialize and make new friends. Learning to support your personal ideas is good, but looking at issues from different people's point of view widens perspectives and makes us think in a different way. We are here on this planet together; each one of us was born in different countries, but our world is the same. There will always be issues, either politically or environmentally. People should do their best to make the world a better and livable place. Lastly, sports are also a great way of building trust. Creating regional sports tournaments can be a brilliant opportunity to increase trust and good relations among young people. The great social benefit of playing sports is the new friendships that develop. Some could even last forever. New friendships mean new connections and a bigger social circle and network, which can translate to career success later in life. The amount of time that youth spend together while traveling to tournaments, sitting on the sidelines between games or even winding down by the hotel pool help them to identify similar qualities and interests in each other that help to form and strengthen those friendships. I believe that young people are the future envoys of friendship between our countries. They will contribute their youth and energy to the growth of Balkan states' comprehensive strategic partnership.

(Stivi Canka, Albania)

Focusing in the future, concretely in a good future for our kids, is the solution for a better world. Unfortunately, no one of us can change the past and of course, but I am pretty sure that no one today would approve making war. But, history has made us grown up with stereotypes and prejudices. I believe we, the young generation are just a victim of the past. But, of course we can make something to change it. Being positive and willing to know each-other is the first step of ruining these stereotypes. Avoiding each-other is not a solution; is an consequence of prejustice. So, I would really love to start from myself of making these trip, knowing many people and why not, making real friends. We are all human, let's just make love. Life is too short to hate people! **(Safete Neza, Albania)**

Often we hear phrases that need to improve education, enable young people to acquire practical knowledge, prevent them from going abroad, etc. but young people only get the promise, not the tools to fight for better tomorrow - and the promise is not alive. What is exceptionally wrong in our society is actually the first step that discourages young people in inclusion to help improve relationships, are related - kin, political, whatever. They are an example of an unhealthy system that does not lead to the prosperity we all strive for, and which presents in our heads such an abstract concept that we do not even know if it is possible to achieve it in our little state. Unfortunately, we are clearly unaware of how much this harms our society because such a system provides unparalleled and decent individuals to a glorious future while others are looking for their luck most often abroad because they can not be realized in their homeland. This is the biggest problem that is affecting the inhabitants of this country, and which is not publicly spoken. An additional problem poses and is silent about what we are expecting progress. This is the absurdity of our society. I think that our generation is the real future because we have different thoughts and deeds, and we agree with each others. In our country, education is reduced to a theory that offers us certain knowledge, with the possibility of doing the same in practice during schooling. **(Miloš Jovović, Montenegro)**

Enclosing ourselves within our own domains creates a bubble in which hatred grows, and prejudices based exclusively on ignorance. Although many of us don't fall for such stories they have a lasting impact on the society, and create a ksenophobic policy, which in turn results to violence. Since the official policy on which all the regional authorities keep their people in check are fear and disinformation, we ought to fight these through non-government controlled chanells. Whether we are talking about non-govermant activities, meetings or economic treaties, the emphasis is always on allowing personal contact, which breaks the border-bubble, and allows information and attitudes to flow through. We can learn from history as many centuries ago, we did not have a national construct (during medieval times) and it proves that trade and commerce were possible, as well as good relations and coexistence. Dialogue is the key to building a healthy relationship with our neighbours,

and having an insight in their daily lives, which may not differ from ours at all. These new borders based on prejudice must be broken, if we hope to thrive further, for we alone are too small and insignificant to face the global changes alone.

(Filip Radojevic, Montenegro)

It was 2014 when a guy from Montenegro told us a joke about his parents fear of visiting Albania. Among all the things he mention about ALbania, he said that - My perents are happy and surprised at the same time that no one had kiddneped me after three days here. Even that he told this as a joke, its very disturbing about prejudices, fears and insecurity that balkan people have about each other. It all comes because people after the war are more likely to suffer from hatred rather than material damage caused by war. and it is precisely this hatred that eavesdrops the minds and souls of the generations and does not let them live and interact together. This situation is something that we should change and improve working all together. The ways that youngsters should use to improve it is to find and to get involved in events that create the opportunity to know more about different cultures, to share their knowledge, experiences and ideas with different people and to have that will to let bad things and the past behind. Creating a new and better future is something difficult that ask for a lot of hardworking engagement and will, gifts that young people are full of. I strongly recommend that participating in common projects is a good way of cooperation between people coming from different cultures because warking with each other gives you the opportunity to meet amazing people who have been in different situations. Also sharing previous experiences is another way to show the youngsters that they are not alone is this kind a situations and that people are there for them to help in this difficult journey.

(Romina Duraku, Albania)

Pistanthrophobia - fear of trusting people due to past experiences with relationships gone bad. I think it is time for this word to be deleted from the relationships' description between western Balkan countries. We don't trust, we don't evolve. As a result we can't create a common European Future. I have heard great minds of the world to quote: If a nation doesn't know its own history, they won't be able to create a Future. Well, we are conscious about the pain and suffer the war between Albanian and Slavs has brought to society in the past centuries. It is our responsibility to overthrow the dark story and let the sun shine among our shared, border-less, peaceful country, Western Balkan. Most of revolution in democratic world were initiated by young people. For them it is easier to adapt new rules, new situations, new relations. The 21th century youth, we can make a revolution. We are the architects of United Western Balkan. The first step: young people have to learn the real meaning of Tolerance and its functional use in current region situation. Secondly: diversity and the respect it deserves. Combining those two main ingredients, and of course adding the essential spices like: dialogue, debate, agreement, friendship; we would be able to savor the taste of Freedom. We are lucky to live in countries with wide variety of cultures and traditions, that also evidence an ancient history. But this doesn't mean that we have to be based on history for every step we take. Rage against the Slavs, because of genocide they

perform against Albanians. That's what We have inherited from history. But if we keep emphasizing the past, there's no time to think for the present and future. No Visions. The time to act has come. There are two ways to solve the problem: war or peace. War would totally destroy our countries and our nation probably would remain Legends from the past. So, PEACE. From my perspective, a very important step in the process of building trust and good relations, is to present the values of each nation. Values should be estimated and also people should understand the historical and social circumstances that lead to their formation. After that, the young people should learn some basic language and some traditions of each country. It is necessary to inform youth about the consequences the conflicts in our region has brought to our countries. Another idea to create trust and good relations, is organizing more camps, congresses, forums of Western Balkan Countries where to discuss different topics. As a result, more young people will get i touch with each other, will get to know other cultures and nations better. Only then they will be able to act differently and accept to be part of a happy diverse society, with a dark, painful past. I believe that our societies are capable enough to understand that borders were created and were functional only on times when diplomacy and dialogue hadn't the development scale they have today. Let's erase the borders. Let's trust. Let's live. **(Amelia Kurti, Albania)**

Ideas to meet and listen more closely to one another, let us create a different impression for each other, because the prejudices that ever will remain is impossible to disappear always, but when it shares one's thoughts with each other express your ideas, others can create a better performance even though you may not be fully impressed with your opinion. These best trades will be created when sharing experiences with others, and these experiences are easily created because sometimes it is very difficult to obey some people who may have had a different thought for you earlier, so this is a program that should be welcomed. **(Fjolla Shabani, Albania)**

Despite every fact, we all are humans. What I believe that can change this relations is to exchange hate with love. As somebody says "when the power of love overcomes the love of power that's when the world will find peac ". Another fact is that we should stop living in the past and follow the light that is leading us to the future, by that I mean to reduce the hate and increase the humanity between people and reach out what this life is really about which is to be there for one another. So, I say if we are not for ourselves let us be for others. **(Shkendije Azemi, Kosovo)**

Good relations between people are built by knowing the tradition, language, identity and respecting them and the country they came from. Stereotypes and prejudices are two phenomenon which we encounter in the political aspect of our countries but in our society it doesn't happen as e phenomenon. I play tennis and we often do tours in nearby countries such as: Kosovo, Montenegro, Albania and Serbia. There I did matches with friends all around the Balkan zone: Vesa from Kosovo, Maya from Montenegro and Petra from Serbia , and then after the matches we get to know each other and the stereotypes we had at first felt down immediately we had a very good connection between because we recognized that we live at different countries but we are all one. We exchanged the phone numbers and we still are in touch with each other. Organizations like sport groups, cultural activities, travelling to the nearby countries are a good step for increasing trust and good relations among young people. **(Edera Dibra, Albania)**

It's been said that the lie spoken hundred times becomes the truth, and what happens if all people take it for granted. That problem would be easy to solve , we would need just a few people to study it , and reveal its flaws, but our situation is a bit different. Our problem lies in our past, in mistakes our predecessors made, and they spoke about these mistakes as glorious deeds, also spoke about their victims as monstros evil enemies, and so time has past , these stories made more conflict, more hate , wars. It's been said that if you want peaceful and joyful life you need to make peaceful and friendly neighborhood. And how can you have neighborhood like that, if you think about your neighbors as evil and dirty people even if you don't know them. We lack the essential need for communication, friendly debate and just that little time together, and over the night your worst enemy can become your best friend. My conclusion in this „philosophical“ essay would be to befriend young people from all countries, to open the doors of our homes, to always leave the open seat to our table, and to have a hell of a good time together. Friendship is the best way. **(Petar Banović, Montenegro)**

Did you know that terrestrial hermit crabs socialize with each other? According to a recent study, hermit crabs congregate together, not for protection or mating, but to trade their shell in hopes of finding a roomier one. The crabs all line up in a row, from smallest to largest, with each crab grabbing ahold of the one in front of it. They then go at it – trying to uproot each other from their homes with the goal of moving into better real estate, which in hermit crab terms, is a larger shell. The crabs left with the smallest shells, are left the most vulnerable to predators, and consequently, the worst off in this trade war. I know what you are thinking: why am I talking about the crabs. Well, young people are not as concerned about money and getting rich as they are about changing the world. Like the land crabs, these are people who are behaving in a different way, while learning to adapt and evolve in their current environment. But it is hard going through this all by yourself. I think what every young person needs is someone to listen to us. We don't need somebody who is going to tell us that we are thinking or doing anything wrong.

Everyone has a desire to be heard and understood, but not everyone knows how to be a good listener. We are preoccupied thinking of what they want to say next to really listen to what other person is saying. So just listening closely can bond us with other people. Spending time with other young people can make you feel wanted. You'll find solutions to all your problems. Organizing lectures in high school, middle schools, etc, will make more people involved and they can meet someone new with same interests. Organizing charity actions (posting informations online will interest more people) like spending time or raising money for children with special needs, will not only bond the volunteers (or other people) and children but will help bonding the volunteers themselves. Other actions can be adoption of abandon animals, cleaning of parks, charity concerts or more study trips like this. By collecting money or just spending time together, at this events, young people will open up about their problems and find a new friend, whether it was a man/woman or an animal. Being in a new place, with different people, who hold different values and go about life differently (or perhaps not) changes our perspective and strips all that familiarity to which we are used to away. **(Anja Filipović, MNE)**

How to increase trust and good relations among young people in the region Planet Earth has about 7,645,606,679 human inhabitants. Only 16.16% of this population is aged 15 to 25. However, things are very different from what they seem. In an aging world, these young people are the ones that set things in motion, the ones that stir the huge boiling soup of actualities. Being the ones that take action but are left out of the spotlight, the above-mentioned demographic group deserves a lot more attention than today's society is able to provide. Conflicts of any kind are the ones that remind us an interesting fact about humanity: it is never completely pleased. Although some might argue the obvious decrease in the most dangerous ones, conflicts of interest make up most of a normal day's news. However, there is no way to instantly convince everyone to group, forgive and forget. Such a command was left out of our DNA checklist and yet, there are plenty of ways up there to make a step forward and show clear signs of a good will, desires to, simply stated, make our world a better place. One of them is more or less the very answer of our subject's question. Imagine a newborn just brought to life. Think about its face for a moment: does that seem eager of hatred, hostility or anything such as ethnic differentiation? I don't think so. And many of the ones before us didn't too. It's exactly that pure desire for love and harmony reflected in that newborn's eyes that makes us believe we stand a chance. Now imagine having these feelings together with ambition, will and desire to start right off making things better: who better than that 16.16% of young people can even dream of making the change? Our goal now is to get these capable human beings together, but things aren't that simple. It takes some time, since you can't just gather 1.2 billion people together and tell them to be friends. The key is to try a different approach, one where you use common culture details as a base to start building other useful bridges, to start building our future. A very meaningful and thoroughly good way to identify these specific common grounds in different but neighbor ethnicities is to, in all means, study each other. Some casual words for a high purpose, able to be brought to reality only through hard work and long hours of dedication.

As the phrase "We fear what we do not know" suggests, the tension present today in the Balkans region is due to the previous conflicts and wars, originating in the different identities and cultures, misinformation and prejudices delivering the intentional profiling of every intention as hostile. Through the above paragraphs, a solution can be deduced. We have been, are and will be neighbors for a long amount of time. Thus, our best option is to stress our similarities and learn to live with our differences: after all, wouldn't it be better if all the young people here, whose hatred is only taught, not lived, brought the desire of cooperation to the surface? Answers such as "It is to be seen in the future" have for long been the end of such conversations. There is only one problem: THE FUTURE IS NOW. **(Arbri Koplaku, Albania)**

What we should do is to learn how people can trust us. It is not a one-way street. Both must express sincerity and honesty. Sincerity in dealing with people is a must. If we are sincere it means we can be trusted. And when we are sincere, it means we are also honest. We deal with people in all honesty and sincerity. By that we increase the trust between people. When we deal with people we must not say one thing and do another. By that only people would know if we can be trusted. We have shown our dealing fairly if we give importance to what is fair for both sides. We do not think and consider only ourselves. People depend on how one expresses himself. Even if people hide their true self, it will be discovered later. There is no secret in the world that cannot be exposed. It will happen sooner or later. So it is better to be truthful and honest, if not we will find ourselves in a discouraging state. This is true for both, for people who wished to be trusted and to be trusting. People are people wherever we go, but trusting between people is a positive social norm for a better interaction. **(Nertil Hoxhaj, Albania)**

Trust and good relations are increased where cultures are understood as different but still mutual respect exists between each other. Western Balkan Region has suffered great losses during and after the war and is still managing to recover under the unilaterally independence of WB countries and the communism era of past generations. Moreover, youth of the region has been raised under difficult conditions, which has been grown into a bridge in cross-border relationships. However, young people have become individuals with strong education, whom are working toward a better future for themselves and their families. I believe that only through education, innovation hard work, mutual respect, lack of prejudices, experience in field work learning would young people manage to increase trust and good relations. **(Gentiana Isufi, Kosovo)**

Relationships are powerful. Our one-to-one connections with each other are the foundation for change. And building relationships with people from different cultures, often many different cultures, is key in building diverse communities that are powerful enough to achieve significant goals. Each one of us is like a hub of a wheel. Each one of us can build relationships and friendships around ourselves that provide us with the necessary strength to achieve community goals. If each person builds a network of diverse and strong relationships, we can come together and solve problems that we have in common.

(Fjolla Ramizi, Kosovo)

GENERAL KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE WESTERN BALKAN ON THE INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

During the project preparation and implementation, the project team faced various challenges in order to keep the study visit as planned.

However, it is very important to note some key findings, together with challenges faced, regarding intercultural dialogue. The key findings and recommendations are listed below.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Young people have often been manipulated by political representatives of ethnic communities in promoting nationalism and participating in conflicts with other ethnic groups;
- The culture and habits of neighbors are not sufficiently known, with the problem of insufficient and (or distorted) knowledge of the history and culture of the one's own people, as well as the tradition of affiliation and cooperation with other ethnic communities;
- Inadequate media involvement in the process of reconciliation of youth in the region and promotion of intercultural dialogue;
- Inadequate engagement of teaching staff in stimulating intercultural dialogue and education;
- Unawareness of the importance of intercultural learning and dialogue through plans and programmes of educational systems of RYCO Contracting parties;
- Legal barriers may discourage young people from becoming engaged in intercultural dialogue;
- Still insufficient involvement of the public authorities and local governments in encouraging and promoting culture, thus creating an important space for dialogue and at other level, although the RYCO Contracting parties have been involved in the creation of RYCO and provision of its resources;
- The impact of various religious communities in the Western Balkans is extremely high, which is why young people are further manipulated and create attitudes based on what religious leaders say and those speeches are often negative and non-encouraging for the intercultural dialogue;
- Insufficient use of space for public authorities and all social actors to develop intercultural dialogue in everyday life and respect for fundamental human freedoms;
- Intercultural knowledge should be part of the education of citizenship and human rights.;

- A large number of organizations face unprofessional and insufficiently responsible partners willing to cooperate which can be reflected in achieving results in the field of intercultural dialogue.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Targeting those societies whose organisations could perfectly cooperate, so that initiatives and projects within RYCO and the process of reconciliation can have successful results and can get its full meaning and purpose. Those projects should be focused on overcoming the existence of a high level of ethnic distance among specific Western Balkan societies not among all of them. So, mapping the problem and after that mapping those societies which have the biggest problem with the issue. So, it is necessary to create a clear vision and a specific approach while applying for projects with an additional condition based on relevant data that will define which societies can and should cooperate with each other in order to solve a particular social problem that is existing in their societies;
- The necessity of facilitated procedures for RYCO participants when crossing border;
- Media and in particular national and local public broadcasters, should devise ways for joint action and joint production at a regional and national level, program material that demonstrates its value by mobilizing public opinion to respond to intolerance and to improve relations between communities;
- The teaching staff should be able to re-think existing school practice and the concept of learning and knowledge on which this practice rests, and to propose and introduce newspapers for the promotion of school and education;
- Organizing trainings for teaching staff according to the plan and program (which has to be accepted by the National Education Council) which would stimulate intercultural learning from the earliest age;
- Include representatives of religious communities in debate forms of various projects to create a clear picture of the importance of intercultural dialogue and education;
- Lack of events such as the Partnership building activity (PBA) to ensure the participation of responsible partners from project preparation, implementation and reporting;
- More and better tools are needed for policy-makers to “think as youth”.

