

ANNUAL REPORT 2018

February 2019

Introduction

This Report presents an overview of Regional Youth Cooperation Office activities for 2018.

The 2018 started with new premises granted to the Head Office from the Host government, while in the second half of the year, the Host Country Agreement between the Republic of Albania and RYCO was signed, and further ratified and entered into force. RYCO Strategic Plan 2019-2021 was adopted which process contributed into stabilising, consolidating and institutionalising RYCO organisational and operational structures and systems, in order to ensure medium and long-term operations quality. Not only that it defines different available instruments for grant-making, diplomacy and policy advocacy, communications and promotion, capacity development, research and learning, the outlined strategic priorities will boost intra Balkan youth mobility.

Premises of the Local Branch Office in Macedonia were opened, while Local Branch Office premises in Serbia were assigned. This was an important step in enabling the RYCO flow of work on a contracting party level.

A total of 33 project proposals were granted in the frame of RYCO first Call for Project proposals entitled "Better region starts with youth". Their implementation phase started in the second half of the year by a total of 117 secondary schools and civil society organizations, and expected 1000 young people take part in the regional exchanges.

RYCO dedicated special focus in obtaining recognition from relevant stakeholders in the region and across Europe. Energy, creativity and innovation were invested in RYCO visibility to prove the positive organization's identity. Relevant partner organizations and institutions continued to support Secretariat's work, through activities focused on capacity building, promotion, political recognition and investment in understanding RYCO role. In February, the European Commission adopted the Western Balkans Strategy, within which RYCO was acknowledged as a part of the six flagship initiatives – specific actions that the European Union will take over the next years to support the transformation efforts of the Western Balkans in areas of mutual interest. RYCO will take part within the initiative to support reconciliation and good neighbourly relations, which will also include expanding RYCO's scope.

In terms of building financial stability, significant efforts were made in fundraising activities. As a result, RYCO concluded grant agreements with the European Commission and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, while the project proposal of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF offices based in Albania and RYCO, supported by United Nations Peacebuilding Fund was approved.

Internal processes

RYCO canalized the support provided from partners, to reach relevant expertise and upgrade existing internal ruling documents to a level which reflects and equally meets the regional context in applicable legislation, as well as the reality of RYCO activities. In this related, RYCO benefited from external expertise in producing RYCO Financial regulations and Rules of procurement, and revising existent Staff regulations and Travel rules. This support resulted not only with the documentation production and delivery, but served also as capacity building to RYCO Head Office staff, who were directly and fully engaged in the drafting process. As a result, RYCO Financial regulations and Rules of procurement were adopted on the 8th RYCO Governing Board meeting.

In November, RYCO was subject to institutional auditing for the fiscal 2017. This activity allowed the evaluation of the controls from a design and operational effectiveness prospective. As an outcome, in the period of writing this report, RYCO received a positive opinion about the financial statements, in the direction of presenting true and fair view of financial performance of the organization, free of material misstatement. At the same time, RYCO obtained recommendations in the areas considered for improvement. In addition, accounting system was put in operation in May 2018. Finance Department has been managing it on monthly basis.

In the first half of the year, a tailored training on guidelines outlined in the latest available European Commission Procedures and Practical Guide (PRAG) was organized for Head Office staff, aiming to adequately implement PRAG and to generally gain understanding on eligible and indicative actions, financial allocation, timelines, concept notes, evaluation procedures, as well as selection and awarding criteria. More in-depth steps on contracting, types of procurement and detailed correlated procedures were predicted for the finance and administrative staff members.

Financial sustainability

RYCO contracting parties concluded the Statutory obligations to contribute to RYCO Budget in October 2018, reaching the amount of 1,000,000 EUR.

Contracting parties contributions during 2018

No	Date	Description	Amount in EUR
1	29.01.2018	BiH contribution for 2017	154,000
2	29.01.2018	BiH contribution for 2018	154,000
3	15.03.2018	Montenegro contribution for 2018	44,000
4	15.03.2018	Serbia contribution for 2018	389,000
5	29.03.2018	Macedonia contribution for 2018	138,000
6	16.04.2018	Kosovo* contribution for 2018	101,900
7	20.07.2018	Albania contribution for 2018	130,000
8	11.10.2018	Albania contribution for 2018	43,000
Total			1,153,900

Note: Contribution from Bosnia and Herzegovina for 2017 is transferred in 2018. Albania has transferred the contribution in 2 instalments.

Toward the end of 2018, RYCO has concluded 2 grant agreements: with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, benefiting and amount of 748,392 EUR, and with the European Commission, benefiting the amount of 500,000 EUR. The approved project proposal of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF offices based in Albania and RYCO, supported by United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, predicts that RYCO will be managing a total amount of 820,686 Euro.

* 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.

In terms of budget expenditure, the total operational expenses were in the amount of 384,193 EUR. The following table contains the actual % spent on the operational budget and activity budget, compared with the planned budget.

Budgeted Operational costs	€ 433,760.00	Budgeted Activity costs	€ 230,000.00
Subtotal Operational Costs	€ 383,491.97	Subtotal Activity costs	€ 64,001.91
% Used Operational Costs	88%	% Used Activity Costs	28%
Contingency costs 5%	€ 13,012.80	Subgranting funds	€ 2,301,727.20
Subtotal Contingency Costs	€ 261.41	Subtotal Subgranting Funds	€ 681,775.28
% Used Contingency Costs	2%	% Used Subgranting Funds	30%

The following table presents the actual amount spent from the operational budget, for each budget line, and the % to the total amount spent.

OPERATIONAL COSTS JAN-DEC'18

N o	Operational Costs	Actual costs	% to Total expenditures
1	Wages	€ 241,200	62.85%
2	Travel & Health insurance	€ 2,303	0.60%
3	Communication costs	€ 8,669	2.26%
4	Office supplies	€ 1,568	0.41%
5	Hospitality in the Head Office (meetings, refreshment etc.)	€ 1,311	0.34%
6	Representation costs	€ 2,352	0.61%
7	Travel and accommodation costs (regional and international travels - all staff)	€ 9,854	2.57%
8	Per diems / daily allowances	€ 36,953	9.63%
9	Taxi costs (HO Tirana)	€ 672	0.18%
10	Hospitality/representation/local transport (LBO) - Lump sum	€ 3,100	0.81%
11	Governing Board meeting costs	€ 12,003	3.13%
12	Other services (official translations, notarial, IT maintenance, etc)	€ 907	0.24%
13	Vehicle insurance and maintenance	€ 2,123	0.55%
14	Bank fees	€ 4,602	1.20%
15	Car	€ 23,988	6.25%
16	Office equipment	€ 18,113	4.72%
17	Capacity building and Staff training	€ 3,591	0.94%
18	Audit	€ 2,100	0.55%
19	External consultancy	€ 5,649	1.47%
20	Office cleaning services	€ 2,431	0.63%
21	Contingency costs	€ 261	0.07%
	Total Operational Costs	€ 383,753	100.00%

Total expenses for 2018 from Activity budget were in the amount of 64,002 EUR, as presented in the table below:

No	ACTIVITY COSTS JAN-DEC'18	Actual Expenditures	% to Total expenditures
1	Training of trainers	€ 5,710	8.92%
2	Participation and presentation on the London Summit	€ 1,005	1.57%
3	Web design and maintenance	€ 2,273	3.55%
4	Visibility costs, actions/campaigns, promo materials	€ 5,845	9.13%
5	Info days in WB6	€ 7,095	11.09%
6	Advisory Board meetings	€ 4,147	6.48%
7	Strategic planning process support	€ 28,421	44.41%
8	Joint programs/activities with partner organizations (OFAJ, OPENS 2019, DW, OSCE, EXIT, WBF...)	€ 6,044	9.44%
9	Board development - Advocacy role of the youth representatives in the GB	€ 3,462	5.41%
Total of Activity costs		€ 64,002	100.00%

Sub-granting:

Funds available for sub-granting (+bank fees)	2,301,727.20 EUR
Approved amount of sub grantees 2017	883,153.30 EUR
Payment of first installment (+bank fees)	708,621.52 EUR (first instalment)
One grantee is withdrawn on Aug18	- 26,846.24 EUR transferred back

Cooperation and partnerships

During 2018, various meetings were realized with state institutions, foundations, think-thanks, international organizations, diplomatic missions and local and regional youth organizations, in order to create a basis for future cooperation. As a result of these efforts, RYCO has put a strong emphasis in creating and consolidating long-lasting partnerships. During 2018 over 30 strategic partnerships were created and strengthened.

RYCO can firmly recognize that the **OSCE** is one of the crucial partners in the region. Trainings were delivered in Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Serbia, in the areas of youth mobility, cooperation and activism in the Western Balkans. These trainings were targeted to less experienced representatives of the civil society organizations and secondary schools with the main aim to strengthen the capacities of potential RYCO beneficiaries in project cycle management and intercultural learning and dialogue. Around 200 participants attended these trainings in the period from May till December. In the frame of this regional cooperation, **the OSCE Mission to Montenegro** supported RYCO LBO coordination meeting, focused on organization working priorities. The meeting aimed to synchronize RYCO activities in each of the Contracting Parties, based on the region's needs, as well to align them with RYCO Strategic Plan 2019-2021.

The OSCE Mission to Montenegro directly supported the realization of the 2nd RYCO Advisory Board meeting and the capacity building activity for granted beneficiaries in frame of RYCO First Open call for Project proposals, in order to ensure successful implementation of the projects. This capacity building program had focus on relevant thematic areas such as intercultural learning, dealing with the past, youth participation in decision making processes and child and youth protection measures in youth exchange projects. In addition, **OSCE field Missions in the region** and RYCO jointly promoted a Scholarship Programme for young people from the Western Balkans for the European Innovation Academy. In that manner RYCO recognized that the economic future of the region was in the hands of young generations, and it is shared duty to invest in youth skills. Moreover, in partnership with the **OSCE Presence in Albania** and the Municipality of Tirana, RYCO organized the second edition of the "Youth Trail: Promoting OSCE values in the Western Balkans". Participants from the Western Balkans engaged in a program that combined sessions on discussing human rights, youth engagement, gender equality, fight against corruption and countering violent extremism. This activity supported regional connectivity among young people as a means of promoting peace and security in the region.

The **PeaceNexus Foundation** proved to be a stabile partner, supporting RYCO development in continuation, by providing external expertise in internal processes, by supporting leadership course for RYCO management, tailored in for coaching skills. In addition, the Secretariat was guided through an "organisational check-up", as well as to a review of the first Open Call and recommendations for the next edition. This support for the whole 2018 is estimated to 40 000 CHF, expressed through various activities.

The **Youth Initiative for Human Rights** supported a seminar on dealing with the past, within which the organizations explored ways of potential cooperation in the upcoming period, as well as the proposed Memorandum of Understanding which should serve as a legal basis for the joint activities.

In partnership with RYCO, the **Franco-German Youth Office**, in close cooperation with the Institut français d'Allemagne / French Embassy in Berlin, the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. (VDK) and the Office National des Anciens Combattants et Victimes de Guerre (ONACVG), organized the international youth meeting "Youth for Peace - 100 Years after World War I, 100 Ideas for Peace" which stood under the patronage of the German Federal Foreign Office and the Mission du Centenaire de la Première Guerre mondiale (MdC). As a result, in November, in Berlin, 50 young people from the region met young people from Germany, France and the European Union, as well as from the EU accession candidates and the European Union's Southern and Eastern neighbours and discussed topics like war and peace together as part of an international, intercultural meeting. This venue was preceded by a preparatory meeting, held in Belgrade, in October, supported by the Youth Initiative for Human Rights.

In cooperation with **Crossborder Factory** and **Youth Initiative for Human Rights**, RYCO youth GB members participated in the first preparation meeting within the program: Supporting regional cooperation: Role of RYCO Governing Board. The main goal of the program was to empower the role of Youth Representatives in RYCO Governing Board as unified voice of the Western Balkan youth. It also aimed to identify the meaning of political thinking and acting, and was a unique opportunity to discuss future steps and actions needed to be taken within the region in cooperation with other stakeholders, in order to enhance the idea of regional cooperation in the WB region. As a result of this meeting, three bilateral events were organized by the Youth Representatives, in cooperation with RYCO LBOs. Two were realized in December 2018 (the first in Tirana brought together RYCO GB members and RYCO LBOs from Albania and Montenegro, while the second one was organized in Belgrade, following the same format,

between Serbia and Macedonia), while the third will be held in March 2019, between Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The bilateral meetings were implemented in cooperation with Crossborder Factory, OFAJ, and with the support of the German Federal Foreign Office. In cooperation with the **Franco-German Youth Office, Crossborder Factory and Youth Initiative for Human Rights**, and with the financial support of the German Federal Foreign Office, RYCO started building a fruitful partnership with the WB6 parliamentarians within the program entitled: Supporting RYCO as an idea through regional cooperation: Role of members of parliament in the support of Youth Agenda of WB6.

In the framework of the first RYCO open call for project proposals and the regional youth exchange as a result, RYCO cooperated with **Crossborder factory** in the frame of the Participatory-observation-research – project about “remembrance and reconciliation”. This project is financially supported by OFAJ, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany and RYCO, with a total value of 20,000 EUR, out of which around ¼ is RYCO contribution. It envisaged involvement and cooperation with intercultural youth researchers and youth workers from the WB6 region. The final aim was to support RYCO in better quality of program development and contribute to a sensitive, conscious and professional approach to topics such as dealing with the past. Also, in November, in cooperation with Crossborder factory Memory Lab – Trans-European Exchange Platform on History and Remembrance, Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft and the Franco-German Youth Office, RYCO Head Office organized panel discussion on “Who Cares About History? Connecting young people from Albania and the post-Yugoslav space through dealing with the past”. The main discussion points were related to interest and involvement of young people in Albania in regard to the topic of dealing with the past, to what extent the situation is different or similar from other parts of the Western Balkans and Europe in general, and how international youth exchange contributes to processes of dealing with difficult pasts.

RYCO started building partnership with the Deutsche **Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)**, committed to support RYCO by providing expertise in the field of finance and fundraising. **GIZ** supported RYCO local branch offices, in terms of equipment and furniture, amounted to the value of around 15 000 EUR in total. The most significant of activity organized in cooperation with GIZ in the reporting period was the joint organization of the third Regional Youth Forum, event that brought together young opinionated leaders, action-oriented and socially active individuals from the WB6, in order to engage in discussions on salient topics and develop solutions, based on previous knowledge and active social participation. The conclusions of the forum were presented on the Berlin Process Summit in London in July, and the 2018 Young Bled Security Forum. Furthermore, supported by GIZ, and in cooperation with the University of Vienna, a possibility for a joint multiannual research project was explored. In order to support RYCO’s objectives in the long-term, the necessity of 3 strands of research were identified, which range from scientific support and monitoring of RYCO projects, through researching potential participants and developing future formats and projects and perception of RYCO.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and RYCO implemented the youth exchange “Western Balkans meet Japan: A Bridge into the Future”, in frame of which 17 undergraduate or graduate students from RYCO contracting parties, aged from 20 to 30 years, enjoyed the opportunity of personal and professional growth through one week long intercultural learning visit to Japan. The program aimed to deepen participants’ understanding of Japan and its policy, to increase knowledge and promote mutual understanding through intellectual and cultural exchange, and build a basis for future friendship and cooperation between Japan and the WB.

RYCO Advisory Board: establishing and first meetings

The role of the Advisory Board Members as allies is significant for RYCO overall performance improvement. Upon their formal appointment by RYCO Governing Board, two meetings of the Advisory Board were realized in 2018. These meetings were an important step in setting the interests of consistency, institutional memory and effectiveness of the Advisory Board upcoming work, and served as an excellent opportunity for the members to assemble their rich expertise and contribute to content improvement of the forthcoming RYCO call for project proposals. During the meetings, Advisory Board members put significant efforts in shaping their role, functionality and duties, and designed the Advisory Board Rules of procedure, with the final purpose to proactively assist RYCO in objects achievement.

Programme activities

Supported by the Balkan Trust for Democracy (German Marshal Fund) and the Agency for Youth and Sports of Macedonia, one of RYCO core activities during the first half of the year was the **Strategic conference**. Estimated as a high profile activity, this conference showed to be well thought model and methodology for gathering inputs from a large target group. The conference provided RYCO with the platform for consultation and consensus building on strategy among RYCO Secretariat, Governing Board, Advisory Board, specialist organisations, and other relevant stakeholders. It served as a direct way of understanding the values, needs and concerns of a wider well targeted audience, especially young people and their key workers, regarding RYCO's core business related to intraregional mobility, capacity building among youth and intercultural relations.

In the framework of the strategic planning process, **local strategic dialogues** were organized in each contracting party. The aim was to collect inputs from relevant stakeholders on RYCO specific role, on which opportunities can RYCO can offer to the youth in the region. Moreover, this opportunity was used to present and discuss RYCO vision, program mission, organizational values and two out of three strategic priorities, as defined in the Strategic Plan. The collected inputs were used for further development of the Strategic Plan and will be used for programme development, creation of the Call for Proposals 2018, and Action Plan for 2019.

The development of the **Balkan Lab project idea** marked its progress in the reporting period in the direction that the French civil society organization SOS Pulse (previously named GINKGO), member of SOS Group submitted the concept note French Agency for Development (AFD). With the support of the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of France and the French Institute, this organization was identified as a potential main applicant. This concept note was approved by French Agency for Development (AFD) in October 2018. The full project proposal, which will cover 3 years implementation period, was submitted when this report was being produced.

As a result of the Secretary General visit to Ministry of Foreign Affairs and German Federal Parliament, the Secretariat started drafting a concept note for the project for **German Federal Government**. The project will allow modalities for sub-granting of high school projects.

During the year, RYCO negotiated the content of the partnership between RYCO and **France Volontaires** for the volunteering mission "Supporting projects enhancing regional youth mobility,

intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding and reconciliation". The partnership finds its foundations in a negotiated construction, which organizes the exchanges of resources for a common object, on the basis of shared values: altruism, the equity, the humility, the solidarity, the knowledge of other cultures, the citizenship and the reciprocity. The volunteer will be in charge of supporting RYCO in terms of creation and implementation of projects and programmes enhancing regional youth mobility, intercultural dialogue and learning, and reconciliation.

In the frame of the **first RYCO Open Call for Project Proposals** a total of 33 projects were supported by RYCO. The signing of the grant contracts happened in the period May-June, after which the implementation phase started. The total number of partner organizations and high schools in the region that will implement the projects is 84. The total number of organizations and high schools (lead applicants + partners) that will implement activities supported by RYCO is 117. In the reporting period, 9 of the total number of supported projects concluded the implementation phase. The total amount of the eligible costs for the projects implementation equals to 1,007,741.90 €.

Upon the approval of the Governing Board, the **second RYCO Open Call for Project Proposals** was launched on 3 December 2018. During the month of December, in order to promote the call, 50 info sessions across the Western Balkans was organized. The sessions gathered over 900 representatives of high schools and civil society organizations interested in applying for the call. This Call for Project Proposals was built upon the results and experiences of the previous RYCO Open Call. Findings from 2017 were incorporated, while the process was designed as more inclusive, especially obtaining relevant inputs from RYCO Governing and Advisory Boards.

Starting in the second quarter 2019, in the duration of 18 months, RYCO Governing Board approved the project proposal of UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF offices based in Albania and RYCO, entitled "Supporting the Western Balkan's Collective Leadership on Reconciliation: Building Capacity and Momentum for the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO)", supported by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund will support RYCO to work in partnership with civil society, education systems and schools, youth institutions and youth in general. The final purpose is consolidation of RYCO as a regionally owned mechanism, with the capacity to promote mobility, diversity, democratic values, participation, active citizenship and intercultural learning. The same project will support RYCO to enhance mutual trust and reconciliation in the WB6, issues that extend beyond the aims of this project to form the core of PBF regional investment strategy. The joint work will also enhance the visibility and communication related to RYCO and attract additional technical and financial support. This project is estimated as an important peacebuilding and sustaining peace endeavour in the Western Balkans.

RYCO Governing Board also approved the proposal for financial support from Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, regarding the project ROUTE WB6, upon which approval, the grant contract was signed. The project is implemented during the period from January 2019 to November 2021. Through implementation of this project, RYCO will use cross-border long-term and short-term volunteering as a tool that will contribute to reduction of social and ethnic distance among young people in the region, as well as to rise their pro-social and European values that will lead to reconciliation, stability and prosperity.

The year was successfully closed with concluding the grant contract on external actions with the European Union, represented by the European Commission. The Governing board approved the action, under which the proposed activities will contribute to increasing levels of youth participation in informing priorities of RYCO work, increasing awareness of young people about opportunities for youth cooperation

across the region, and by strengthening capacities of civil society organizations in the region, for implementation of regional youth projects. RYCO was awarded of a grant to finance the implementation of the action entitled: Enhancing youth cooperation and youth exchange in Western Balkans 6, which shall begin in March 2019, in the duration of 26 months.

Head Office activities

During the reporting period, the Head office was represented in many public events during which RYCO's great potential in the region was firmly acknowledged. As a main organizer, or partner in those events, RYCO is being recognized as a good practice of regional cooperation, not only in the Western Balkans, but also across Europe. Round tables, workshops and conferences in which Head office took part proved the importance of fostering people to people connectivity for the region's development, and advocated for involvement of young people in decision-making processes. Some of the most significant events were marked with debates on making the EU enlargement a more credible process, discussions on how to harness the potentialities of the regional community of innovators and in that manner, reflected the role of youth in fostering youth mobility and cooperation of young people. Besides having youth engagement as a central topic, the Head office was tackling also youth employment, enterprise and brain drain, fake news and disinformation and reconciliation and legacies of the past.

As a result of the meetings held with diplomatic core high representatives, possible ways of cooperation were explored, and concrete actions were realized and in the same time, RYCO was assured that the unequivocal support provided by the governments leading the Berlin Process, as well as the European Commission will continue. In addition, pointing out how political foundations can stimulate pro-development views among the wider public as well as from decision-makers was one of the outcomes from the relevant venues on which RYCO was represented.

The EU-Western Balkans summit in Sofia resulted with EU leaders agreeing on Sofia declaration, with which puts special emphasis in one of the priority areas entitled "Supporting socio-economic development and putting a special focus on youth" and aims to expand the scope and reach of RYCO, and introduce an intra-regional mobility scheme. In terms of participation on eminent international venues, RYCO was present at the 5th Berlin Process Summit, held in London. On the Summit, which gathered heads and ministers of WB governments and EU Member States, RYCO exercised an important role on the panel discussions and high-level political meetings. The important work of RYCO in promoting reconciliation and increasing regional cooperation between young people was clearly evidenced, while the support was reaffirmed, as well as the need to underpin RYCO's engagement with sufficient resources, in order to realize the full potential. Also, the Bled Strategic Form was an excellent occasion from where RYCO invited the Western Balkan leaders to join their forces and start thinking about the creation of joint comprehensive strategy of the sustainable development of the Western Balkans.

The OSCE Regional Meeting of Heads of Field Operations in South-Eastern Europe, held in Durres, was an excellent opportunity for RYCO to present the achieved results in and highlight RYCO Strategy development process, while the European perspective of the Western Balkans within the Berlin Process – Youth Cooperation brought together important decision-makers, partners and stakeholders interested in the Berlin Process - process that encourages reforms in the Western Balkans, on its path towards the

EU. RYCO signed the Platform for Peace, which promotes acceptance of peace-building and reconciliation processes among ethnicities and religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The declaration is a document developed as part of USAID's PRO-Future project which is being implemented in 70 municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As a conclusion of 2018, RYCO was present at the EU-Western Balkans Summit organized by Friends of Europe in Brussels. The event addressed the political, economic and social issues that affect the region; the role of independent media as guarantor of democracy and in encouraging reconciliation, increasing connectivity and encouraging mutual understanding. Finally, as a member on the Steering Group of European Platform on learning mobility, organized by the EU-CoE Youth Partnership, RYCO had the possibility, with other stakeholders, to focus on learning mobility of young people and of practitioners in the youth field.

Local Branch Offices activities

Local Branch Officers play a crucial role in dissemination and promotion of RYCO values and activities, and serve as first contact point in supporting possible applicants during the Open Call. They are also first contact points for local and regional organizations/institutions interested in cooperation with RYCO. With the type of activities to which LBO are directly participating in, or supporting, RYCO is active participant in all larger national and regional processes that tackle youth issues. Major focus of the LBOs in promoting RYCO brings as a result the presence and integration of RYCO within national institutions, strategies as well as processes in the contracting parties related to youth. For this purpose the RYCO LBOs took part on more than 200 meetings, events, and various venues, organized with the most relevant stakeholders in the region.

Local Branch Office in Albania

In the reporting period, LBO in Albania was focused on strengthening partnerships, coordinating the work between RYCO LBOs and the Head Office, monitoring RYCO projects implemented in Albania, closely communicating with RYCO future possible beneficiaries and raising capacities for high schools in Albania. With the purpose to contribute to the context, LBO in Albania organized meetings with local and international stakeholders (several NGOs, international organizations, students unions, informal networks, embassies and ministries), and participated in diverse conferences and seminars organized by: UNICEF, EU, Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, Children Rights Centre Albania, Albanian National Youth Network (ANYN), Cooperation and Development Institute, Albanian Group for Human Rights, etc.

LBO in Albania presented the work of RYCO and moderated several events such as Human and Minority Rights Academy organized by the Albanian Group for Human Rights and the OSCE PiA; Western Balkans Follow-up Committee meeting organized by European Economic and Social Committee; Youth Trail organized by the OSCE PiA in cooperation with RYCO and the Municipality of Tirana; Discussion on Berlin Process organized by Qemal Stafa Foundation; Discussions on drafting the Youth Law organized by ANYN. During the first half of 2018, LBO in Albania participated in the Seminar held in Dijon, which

brought together important stakeholders (public, private and civil sector) from the Western Balkans to share synergies with the work done so far from the Municipality of Dijon. The two-day seminar served as an important place for networking and exchanging of experiences on local government level.

LBO in Albania was invited together with RYCO GB Youth Representative from Albania to the trilateral exchange "*Ideas and Actions for Europe: Energy and Environment in the 21st Century*", to present the work of RYCO by putting a special focus on youth exchanges. On a meeting with the Commander of the Allied Joint Force Command Naples, possible ways of cooperation were discussed, with the aim to bring young people of the Western Balkans together. The LBO participated on the seminar "Reconciliation and remembrance" between Poland, Germany and the Western Balkans - exchange organized by the respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Poland and Germany, aiming to share the reconciliation process between their countries with the Western Balkans. LBO in Albania coordinated the youth exchange "Western Balkans meet Japan: A Bridge into the Future" organized in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (activity described in: *Cooperation and partnerships*).

Local Branch Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Activities for the reporting period include successful events, communication and initial meetings with relevant RYCO stakeholders and partners in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The LBO maintained good relations with relevant stakeholders from local, regional and international level, keeping in the same time, the main focus on monitoring RYCO granted projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

On the occasion of the 55th anniversary of the Elyse Treaty, LBO in BIH, in partnership with French and German Embassies, organised meeting between BIH Minister of Civil Affairs, and the respective ambassadors. In cooperation with UNFPA, the LBO contributed in defining the status and needs of young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. LBO BIH had the possibility to moderate a panel discussion on legal framework of youth in BIH, which gathered more than 40 people from governmental, non-governmental and international sector. With the aim to strengthen and highlight possible collaboration on future activities with various stakeholders, the LBO was present on events, organized by: Youth Council of Republic of Srpska and Ministry of family, youth and sport of Republic Srpska, Embassy of Sweden and the Directorate for Development of International Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden, Institute for Youth development KULT, Youth Council of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mission of OSCE in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

The LBO took part at the final conference deriving from the Structured University mobility between the Balkans and Europe for the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region; and on the Summer Academy for Youth: Digitalisation, Culture and Environment and concluded the reporting period as a member in the working group in the Western Balkan Civil Society Organizations for Youth Employment Support – WeB4YES, First Regional Forum for Youth Employment - WEB4YES project, organized by the National Youth Council of Macedonia and Belgrade Open School. In conclusion of the reporting period, and as preparation of the 2019 Winter European Youth Olympic Festival, with the support of the French Embassy in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Social Innovation Incubator MUNJA, RYCO started a special project within the EYOF 2019, which included YOUNG PR TEAM (young people/volunteers) from the Western Balkans that will volunteer on EYOF and through their eyes tell the story about European youth event, intercultural cooperation and peace building.

Local Branch Office in Kosovo

The LBO work in Kosovo was mainly focused on building partnerships and co-organizing activities on local level, with the special attention on RYCO Strategic Plan. The LBO contributed to the design of the program 'Role of MPs in the support of Youth Agenda of WB6' (activity described in: *Cooperation and partnerships*). With the participation in different venues (regional and national), the LBO discussed opportunities that RYCO can provide to increasing youth role in local level decision making process, as well as the perspectives of the Western Balkans within the Berlin process in terms of youth cooperation. The monitoring of the projects granted in the frame of the first open call for proposals was an ongoing activity.

LBO in Kosovo held regular meetings with RYCO GB Members, with the purpose to constantly inform and coordinate RYCO in local level and to plan joint activities. Also, LBO in Kosovo had meetings with Deputy Prime Minister of Kosovo to discuss RYCO performance, current challenges and the planes for years to come. Such meetings are planned to be organised regularly in order to share information on RYCO developments jointly support the process. Possible activities were also discussed with the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany, while the Ambassador of Austria was informed on the results of RYCO open call and issues related to local context, such as the need to support small youth organizations and to better prepare high schools for the second RYCO open call, launched in December.

LBO in Kosovo contributed to the Strategic dialogue process, and realized several meetings with different partners and stakeholders and also participated as a speaker at events organized by other partners on local level, and was in charge of organizing RYCO Advisory Board first meeting. In cooperation with OSCE Mission in Kosovo, the LBO organized the first capacity building training for high schools (project cycle management and intercultural learning and dialogue). The reporting period closes with proposal of calendar of activities for 2019, under Kosovo Chairmanship of RYCO Governing Board.

Local Branch Office in Macedonia

In the reporting period, the work of the LBO was focused on several major directions: office set up and opening; contributing to RYCO institutional development; preparing and organizing capacity building trainings and finally, promotion, lobbying and advocacy. In this regard, beside hosting and organizing RYCO Strategic Conference entitled: "Strategic Dialogues – A better region starts with youth", it is relevant to mention the 2 large public debates, with more than 150 participants, organized in cooperation with the office of the Prime Minister; the public debate organized by FES, and both Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Macedonia and Germany; as well as presence in different seminars, conferences, workshops and receptions organized by the different interrogators of RYCO in Macedonia. These events were an excellent opportunity to make the activities of RYCO more visible, and at the same time to establish communication with new stakeholders. Considerable engagement was invested in monitoring and supporting the projects granted from RYCO first open call for proposals, as well as in selecting participants for regional and international initiatives.

With the direct support of the GIZ, and in cooperation with the Ministry of Information Society and Administration in Macedonia, RYCO brought relevant participants from the region on the Western Balkan Digital Summit 2018. The Summit brought together experienced speakers, experts and

Government representatives which raise the awareness and assessed the dominant challenges for digital integration of the region. In this manner, RYCO also contributed in the process of developing regional solutions, supported by the international community and the European Union. As a side event to the Digital Summit, a Start-up camp was organized by GiZ for young entrepreneurs working on digital small businesses, with key lines of activities in how to work with an investor, how to pitch competition and how to open an innovation lab (with the aim to create exchange between companies and start-ups). RYCO had the possibility to suggest participants, young digital entrepreneurs for this venue.

Numerous courtesy and introductory meetings with main stakeholders of RYCO in Macedonia were held, while local and region wide, RYCO LBO in Macedonia participated on various events, forums and conferences. RYCO local branch office also served as hub for youth activities, working facilities as well as premises were given to youth organizations.

Local Branch Office in Montenegro

In 2018, RYCO LBO in Montenegro achieved concrete results in organizational strengthening of the office, as well as realization of program activities that are in accordance with the Strategic Plan. The LBO continued with excellent communication and cooperation with the competent Ministry of Sports and Youth, as well as with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education with which more intensive cooperation was agreed for the next 2019. The support from the French and the German Embassy and the established partnership relationship resulted in concrete agreements and projects that will be implemented in 2019. With the support of the OSCE Mission, the LBO managed to implement a full range of activities related to the realization of the strategic directions of RYCO. In that direction, the capacity building of target groups, primarily civil society sector and secondary schools, has been in the LBO focus through the capacity building training of the beneficiaries of the First RYCO Open Call, as well as two additional capacity building trainings for the potential applicants for the Second RYCO Open Call.

The LBO organized the Second Advisory Board meeting, as well as the LBO coordination meeting in Montenegro, which contributed to the strengthening of the internal capacities and coordination of the overall RYCO Secretariat. At the end of 2018, a major national conference named "Youth Exchange as Motor for Regional Cooperation" was organized, which gathered all the most important stakeholders in Montenegro. At this conference, the successes of RYCO LBO work in 2018 was presented, but also the expected challenges and obstacles for the year to come. LBO MNE established good communication with the Prime Minister's Cabinet and organized a meeting of RYCO Secretary General and the Prime Minister of Montenegro, which resulted in stronger support of the Cabinet and the Government for the LBO office and entire RYCO Secretariat.

Local Branch Office in Serbia

LBO in Serbia was actively participating in the process of strategic planning and designing RYCO second call for project proposals, while in the same time monitoring and supporting the 12 ongoing granted project in the frame of the first RYCO call for proposals. The most significant meetings throughout 2018 were related to the Regional Youth Capital project with OPENS 2019, Steering Committee Meeting for the 2019 WB Digital Summit, UNICEF and UNFPA support, cooperation with French and German

Embassies as well as meetings with governmental representatives from the Cabinet of Prime Minister, Ministry of Youth and Sport, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Coordination Body of the Republic of Serbia for Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja. LBO in Serbia participated on events organized by various CSOs, international organizations and state institutions representing RYCO and delivering speeches and presentations on social inclusion of young people, youth employment in the WB, vision of regional cooperation for quality education and training, youth participation in local communities, challenges and perspectives, regional initiatives on reconciliation and similar.

LBO in Serbia marked the 2018 by meetings with several stakeholders in Serbia that were held in order to introduce them to RYCO and/or explore possibilities for joint cooperation, which resulted with: KAS for full support for initiatives and activities that RYCO plans to organize in the future; OSCE Mission to Serbia has allocated around 10 000 EUR for the support of LBO in Serbia and organized a capacity building training for high schools and CSOs from Serbia as well as the evaluation meeting for the 1st Open Call; ORF GIZ allocated around 6 000 EUR for the renovation of the office space in Belgrade; French Embassy has invited RYCO to jointly organize regional youth meeting with President Macron during his official visit to Serbia and National Youth Council of Serbia is planning to reinforce regional cooperation with other youth councils from WB6.