

# Balkan Children & Youth Foundation



# International Youth Foundation



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This e-newsletter is produced on a regular basis by the Balkan Children & Youth Foundation and the International Youth Foundation to keep you informed of their activities in the Balkans.

**D**ear Friends,  
With this Update, the staff of the Balkan Children and Youth Foundation extends warm holiday greetings to all of you who have followed, encouraged, and supported our efforts to promote the positive development of young people throughout the Balkan region.

Here, you'll find news of our signature event of the year: BCYF's Annual Balkan Youth Forum. Held on the Croatian coast, this year's conference was attended by more than 130 youth NGO leaders from 10 countries. The event reconfirmed the enormous power of the region's young people to serve as a potent force for positive change.

Also highlighted is our most recent Board meeting held in Tirana, Albania on November 19-20. Coinciding with the meeting was a special event which brought together nearly 50 local business leaders, Ambassadors, and Bilateral Aid Agency Mission Directors, in an effort to increase understanding of and investment in effective approaches to meeting young people's needs, with a special emphasis on youth business entrepreneurship.

As we plan for a busy year ahead, we thank you for your continued interest and support of BCYF's mission.

Best regards, Agon Demjaha, Executive Director

## BCYF Welcomes New Board Member

At its November meeting, BCYF's Board of Directors approved a new member, Branka Minic, Director of Workforce Development at Manpower, Inc. A world leader in the employment services industry, Manpower specializes in permanent, temporary, and contract recruitment; training; career transition; and organizational consulting services. Headquartered in the U.S., the company's network spans 4,300 offices in 67 countries and territories.

In her role as Director of Workforce Development, Branka has helped to develop and implement Manpower's highly regarded TechReach program, a comprehensive effort to enable un- and under-employed workers to assume career-path technical and professional positions. The effort has been endorsed by the Ford Foundation, the Aspen Institute, Boston College Center for Corporate Citizenship, The International Business Leadership Forum, and the U.S. Department of Labor, and has involved dozens of private sector, governmental, and nonprofit partners.

Branka holds a MSEE degree in Computer Engineering from the University of Belgrade, Yugoslavia, and MSCS degree in Computer Science from the University of Miami.



## BCYF 2nd Annual Balkan Youth Forum Held

From September 6-12, more than 130 youth NGO representatives from 10 nations throughout the Balkan region participated in BCYF's 2nd Annual Balkan Youth Forum. Held near the historic city of Trogir on the Croatian coast, the Forum provided those youth leaders present with the opportunity to step away from their daily demands, to network with their peers across the region, and learn from each other and an impressive array of guest speakers. With its focus on convening diverse youth leaders around areas of common interest, the Forum underscored BCYF's ongoing role in providing opportunities for dialogue, reflection, and shared action among youth NGOs throughout the region.



The six-day event, comprised of plenary sessions, small group presentations, and training workshops, centered around four key themes: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship, Youth Engagement and Leadership, Youth Policy, and Life Skills Learning.

Sessions focused on knowledge-sharing around these core themes and the development of recommendations for advancing work around these vital issues at the local and regional level. To further enhance the knowledge and skills of participants, training workshops were offered in the areas of networking and regional cooperation, organizational branding, community services, youth research, mobilizing volunteers, and launching public campaigns, among other topics.

"You represent hope for the future," underscored Jacques Moreillon, former Secretary General of the World Organization of the Scout Movement, in welcoming participants on the Forum's opening day. Today's young leaders in the Balkans are united by four primary qualities, said Moreillon, including their commitment to a set of core values and ideals; their responsibility in taking action to achieve those ideals; their support and concern for others; and their ability to act autonomously, both as individuals and members of society. Moreillon urged participants to press for national governments to adopt youth policies, "because a long-term youth policy will provide the critical infrastructure you need for your work to last."

Chuck Howell, Head of the Office for Democracy and Social Transition at USAID/Croatia, emphasized that

"There is much more that unites us than sets us apart. Cooperation and network building are the only way out of today's problems. Borders across the world are falling. We can't afford to erect new ones. Only when the human family sees itself as one, can it advance in peace and prosperity."

– Muhamed Mešić,  
*Ambassador of the World Youth Peace Summit*

"Young people are their own solutions," and should be given greater opportunities to "shine." Howell encouraged cooperation among those NGOs present as a means of strengthening services for young people throughout the region and democracy-building efforts as a whole.

Dietrich Rometsch, the European Commission's Directorate General for Education and Culture, described its support of more than 300 youth-related initiatives throughout Europe and the Balkans. The EC is now engaging over 7,000 young people in seminars, workshops, and exchanges. "Democracy without young people is not democracy," said Rometsch. "We want to contribute to peace and stability in the region by helping to build tolerance, promote democracy, and build up the NGO sector."





### *Framing the Issues*

In framing those issues to be discussed and debated throughout the Forum, four guest speakers were invited to set the context for why youth employment/ entrepreneurship, youth engagement, policy-making, and life skills learning are so critical within the region.

Andrew Fiddaman, Associate Director of Youth Business International (YBI) emphasized the urgent challenge of youth unemployment worldwide, and YBI's role in providing aspiring youth entrepreneurs with access to financing and mentors within the business world.

Ashok Regmi, Manager of YouthActionNet, a youth leadership initiative sponsored by the International Youth Foundation (IYF) and Nokia, spoke to the critical role of young people in leading positive change in society. For their efforts to have lasting impact, youth leaders need to think in terms of achieving systemic change. "Remember: It's not just about developing programs," cautioned Regmi. "The ultimate test of your impact is whether people have started thinking or acting differently."

Peter Lauritzen, Head of the Council of Europe Division for Education, Communications, Documentation, and Research underscored the challenges inherent in developing and promoting effective youth policies, and emphasized the importance of fostering dialogue among governments, NGOs, and researchers. Lauritzen pointed to research currently being conducted by the COE in reviewing national youth policies and offering recommendations.

**"Democracy without young people is not democracy."**  
– Dietrich Rometsch,  
*Directorate General for Education and Culture,  
European Commission*



“Learning life skills means understanding that there is a very close connection between our private and public lives,” said Sonja Licht, Head of the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence in her opening remarks. In this respect, life skills education can be summed up in terms of responsibility for one’s self and the community, emphasized Licht, adding that “if we want to change our region, we need a value system with a high level of sensitivity for others, especially those who are ethnically different and socially-vulnerable.

“This forum is an opportunity to renew old acquaintances, and meet new people. It’s a chance to brainstorm about ways to engage youth, to trade stories, to learn about yourself, be open, and create solutions.”

– Chuck Howell,  
*Head of the Office for Democracy and Social Transition, USAID/Croatia*



### **Recommendations and Conclusions**

Following four days of case study presentations and intensive dialogue, participants presented their perspectives around each of the Forum’s four core themes.

**Youth Engagement and Leadership** – Youth engagement was deemed critical in the region to promote young people’s roles as active citizens, to strengthen fragile democracies, and promote broad-based social transformation. Youth are presently more actively engaged in programs that promote recreational, educational, and environmental activities. By contrast, young people lack opportunities to be actively involved in decision-making and policy-making processes. The group recommended that businesses look at ways of contributing to youth initiatives beyond monetary donations (e.g., through mentoring or volunteering), and that governments strive to include youth perspectives in their decision-making processes.

**Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship** – Participants outlined a range of ways in which NGOs can actively promote youth employment/entrepreneurship, including providing skills training, career guidance, internships and exchanges, and working at the policy level to create greater vocational training and employment opportunities for youth. Current deficits in the area of entrepreneurship include: lack of practical education; lack of initiative in rural areas; limited access to credit; predominating cultural values; and entrenched bureaucracies.

**Youth Policy** – Participants stressed that government youth policies should emphasize a cross sectoral approach and incorporate youth advisory bodies to ensure young people’s perspectives are integrated into public sector approaches and initiatives. Areas of

special concern for governments in the region should be greater health education (e.g., reproductive health and substance abuse prevention efforts), and more in-depth research into current youth challenges and opportunities. Specific recommendations were made that the European Union support greater youth mobility and cross border partnerships in the region, while providing more funding to youth-led initiatives as well as business opportunities.

**Life Skills** – The process of developing essential “life skills” begins early in a child’s life and continues throughout adulthood, according to participants. Key life skills to be stressed in the region include: empathy, tolerance, flexibility, critical thinking, self-confidence, managing of emotions, and effective communication.

The Forum concluded with addresses by former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari and Muhamed Mešić, Special Advisor to the Mayor of Tuzla and an Ambassador of the World Youth Peace Summit. Said Mešić, “The Balkan region has some of the most engaged and passionate young people in the world,” adding that “the only way to make a huge fire is to light a lot of sparks.” Muhamed stressed the importance of recognizing and appreciating cultural differences, while striving to achieve greater harmony and a shared vision of the future. “Throughout this Forum, we’ve seen that cooperation and building networks is the only way out of [present] problems.”

President Ahtisaari, who also serves as BCYF Board Chairman, encouraged participants to continue to enthusiastically promote change. “The better you do your work as an NGO, the example spreads. If you do the work you want to do, you’ll do it well,” he said, while endorsing participants’ recommendations that the donor community trust more in emerging NGOs. Don’t give in to cynicism, he cautioned, adding, “It’s important not to give up.”

*For the complete Forum report: [jpi@iyfnet.org](mailto:jpi@iyfnet.org)*