

# Supporting Democratization and Reconciliation Process in the Western Balkans

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## Regional Cooperation and Intra-state Reconciliation

### Introduction

One of the prominent issues in the Western Balkan (WB6) countries is the detrimental effect of historical enmities and recent conflicts on intra-state cooperation. Labour markets in the Western Balkans suffer from chronically low employment as well as lengthy unemployment periods<sup>1</sup> and a relatively low level of development.<sup>2</sup> There is also a significant lack of connecting infrastructure between the WB6 countries.

We call for the development of a comprehensive and all-encompassing tourism program that can lead to economic increase and cultural exchange. Through the development of regional exchange tours with cultural and historical elements as well as cross-border cooperation on ecological initiatives, reconciliation can take place between the citizens of the WB6. Connecting infrastructure can play a key role in reconciliation processes as it facilitates direct exposure to 'others' which may, in turn, lead to the dissolution of stereotypes. We posit that the role of civil society is crucial in streamlining this initiative and consolidating the peace process.

A comprehensive regional framework for tourism and green transition can allow for the formation of common ground between the WB6 countries. Through the establishment of shared cultural and historical tourism programs, regional exchange tours and joint bodies for the promotion of reconciliation, WB6 countries can collectively solve their issues of unemployment, withering economy and hateful rhetoric towards 'others'.<sup>3</sup>

Having their recent past marked by violent conflicts, dissolution of countries, sanctions, fall of the communist regimes and slow process of democratization, the countries of the region of Western Balkans have been focused on rebuilding politics and economies within the countries' borders. However, since none of the countries can be self-sustainable, there is a need for cooperation with other countries, which starts with the immediate neighbours. Although there has been some progress regarding economic cooperation between WB6 countries (e.g. "Mini Schengen" Zone Initiative<sup>4</sup>), opening a discussion on the recent past that would bring different nations living in the region closer together has not yet happened. While it seems that the economy is the most important factor when improving the lives of the people in the region, nationalism and hatred towards others represent a considerable burden on the relations between WB6 citizens. We propose that by working on reconciliation processes on all societal levels, intra-state cooperation is likely going to improve.

Our understanding of reconciliation goes in line with the following definition: *"in its simplest form, reconciliation means restoring friendship and harmony between the rival sides after conflict resolution, or transforming relations of hostility and resentment to friendly and harmonious ones."*<sup>5</sup> This means that "reconciliation is a psychological process, consisting of changes in motivations, goals, beliefs, attitudes and emotions of majority of society members."<sup>6</sup> Changing attitudes of societies is the most difficult yet the most important advocacy goal, and we believe that it is possible to achieve it by starting from the recommendations advised in this policy proposal.

1 'Western Balkans Labour Markets | UNDP In Europe And Central Asia' (UNDP) <<https://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/sustainable-development/Inclusive-and-sustainable-growth/Western-balkans-labour-markets.html>> accessed 21 April 2021

2 Dzafic Z, 'The Key Indicators Of Economies Of Wbcs Pg 77' (Econstor.eu, 2014) <<https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/193840/1/econ-review-v12-i2-p073-089.pdf>> accessed 21 April 2021

3 Moufakkir O and Kelly I, Tourism, Progress and Peace, 1st Edition, Chapter 15, CAB International, 2010, p.228-241. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307855347\\_Tourism\\_and\\_Reconciliation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307855347_Tourism_and_Reconciliation) accessed April 2021.

4 'In The Western Balkans, A Mini-Schengen Begins To Take Shape - Emerging Europe' (Emerging Europe, 2020) <<https://emerging-europe.com/news/in-the-western-balkans-a-mini-schengen-begins-to-take-shape/>> accessed 5 April 2021

5 (Ackerman, 1994; Kreisberg, 1998a; Phillips, 1998; Arthur, 1999; Gardner-Feldman, 1999; Kelman, 1999a; Bar-Tal, 2000b in Bar-Siman-Tov, 2004, p. 4)

6 (Lederach, 1997; Shonholtz, 1998; Wilmer, 1998; De Soto, 1999; Kelman, 1999a, in Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2004, p. 17).

## Analysis of the data

The region of the Western Balkans includes six economies: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo\*,<sup>7</sup> Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. According to national statistics, there are 17.741.928 inhabitants living in six economies that cover 218.721 sq km.

The analysis indicates lower levels of economic development in comparison to most EU Member States. Current macroeconomic data confirms a higher unemployment rate in all six Western Balkans economies when compared to the EU average.<sup>8</sup> The average unemployment rate in the six economies is 16.85%,<sup>9</sup> ranging from 12,72% in Serbia<sup>10</sup> to 24,60 % in Kosovo\*.<sup>11</sup> The high unemployment rate is particularly damaging to the Western Balkans' young population: on average, 39,32%<sup>12</sup> of youth in the Western Balkans are unemployed, with the highest rate in Bosnia and Herzegovina (57,5%)<sup>13</sup> and the lowest in Albania (28,76%).<sup>14</sup> These numbers by far exceed the EU average.<sup>15</sup> The average monthly salary in the region of the Western Balkans is below all the EU

member states.<sup>16</sup> With 620,25 EUR per month,<sup>17</sup> citizens of the six Western Balkans economies enjoy a modest standard of living compared to their EU neighbours.

According to recent studies,<sup>18</sup> WB6 young people (14-29 years old) rate employment and economic welfare as the most important socio-political values, apart from North Macedonia, in which "human rights" are rated higher than the aforementioned two.<sup>19</sup> In this connection, youth find that the most important tasks of the national governments are to focus on the reduction of unemployment, economic growth and development.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the young generation shares concerns about work opportunities and whether they will be able to find a job after graduating from university.

There are three main issues identified by youth as alarming in all the countries of Western Balkans: unemployment, disappointment and migration.

The economy directly influences the political orientation of the youth, who desire to have a strong state that would ensure equality among people. WB6 youth are strong

7 This name does not prejudge the status of Kosovo and is in line with UN Resolution 1244 and the decision of the International Court of Justice on Kosovo's declaration of independence.

8 'Unemployment Statistics - Statistics Explained' (Ec.europa.eu, 2021) <[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics)> accessed 5 April 2021

9 Calculated average rate:

Statista. 2021. Bosnia-Herzegovina - unemployment rate 1999 to 2020 | Statista. [online] Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/453933/unemployment-rate-in-bosnia-herzegovina/>> [Accessed 5 April 2021].

'Albania - Unemployment Rate 1999-2020 | Statista' (Statista, 2021) <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/444445/unemployment-rate-in-albania/>> accessed 5 April 2021

'North Macedonia Unemployment Rate 1991-2021' (Macrotrends.net, 2021) <<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/MKD/north-macedonia/unemployment-rate>> accessed 5 April 2021

'Montenegro - Unemployment Rate 1999-2020 | Statista' (Statista, 2021) <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/808795/unemployment-rate-in-montenegro/>> accessed 5 April 2021

10 'Serbia - Unemployment Rate 2020 | Statista' (Statista, 2021) <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/440532/unemployment-rate-in-serbia/>> accessed 5 April 2021

11 'Kosovo Unemployment Rate | 2001-2020 Data | 2021-2023 Forecast | Calendar | Historical' (Tradingeconomics.com, 2021) <<https://tradingeconomics.com/kosovo/unemployment-rate>> accessed 5 April 2021

12 Calculated average rate:

'Serbia Youth Unemployment Rate | 2008-2020 Data | 2021-2023 Forecast | Historical' (Tradingeconomics.com, 2021) <<https://tradingeconomics.com/serbia/youth-unemployment-rate>> accessed 4 April 2021

'Job Opportunities for Youth In Kosovo: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?' (World Bank, 2019) <<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2019/03/15/job-opportunities-for-youth-in-kosovo-two-steps-forward-one-step-back>> accessed 4 April 2021

'North Macedonia - Youth Unemployment Rate 1999-2020 | Statista' (Statista, 2021) <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/812208/youth-unemployment-rate-in-macedonia/>> accessed 4 April 2021

'Montenegro - Youth Unemployment Rate 1999-2020 | Statista' (Statista, 2021) <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/812253/youth-unemployment-rate-in-montenegro/>> accessed 5 April 2021

13 'Why Bosnia Has The World's Highest Youth Unemployment Rate | Youth Economic Opportunities' (Youtheconomicopportunities.org) <<https://youtheconomicopportunities.org/blog/2971/why-bosnia-has-worlds-highest-youth-unemployment-rate>> accessed 5 April 2021

14 'Albania - Youth Unemployment Rate 2009-2020 | Statista' (Statista, 2021) <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/811614/youth-unemployment-rate-in-albania/>> accessed 5 April 2021

15 'Unemployment Statistics - Statistics Explained' (Ec.europa.eu, 2021) <[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment\\_statistics#Youth\\_unemployment](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics#Youth_unemployment)> accessed 2 April 2021

16 'Average Monthly Salary In European Union 2020' (Reinis Fischer, 2021) <<https://www.reinischfischer.com/average-monthly-salary-european-union-2020>> accessed 5 April 2021

17 Calculated average salary:

'Albania Average Monthly Wages | 1993-2020 Data | 2021-2023 Forecast | Historical' (Tradingeconomics.com, 2021) <<https://tradingeconomics.com/albania/wages>> accessed 5 April 2021

'Montenegro Average Monthly Wages | 2003-2021 Data | 2022-2023 Forecast | Historical' (Tradingeconomics.com, 2021) <<https://tradingeconomics.com/montenegro/wages>> accessed 3 April 2021

'Serbia Wages | 2000-2021 Data | 2022-2023 Forecast | Historical | Chart | News' (Tradingeconomics.com, 2021) <<https://tradingeconomics.com/serbia/wages>> accessed 3 April 2021

'Macedonia Gross Wages | 2003-2021 Data | 2022-2023 Forecast | Historical | Chart' (Tradingeconomics.com, 2021) <<https://tradingeconomics.com/macedonia/wages>> accessed 4 April 2021

'Bosnia And Herzegovina Average Monthly Wages | 2005-2021 Data | 2022-2023 Forecast' (Tradingeconomics.com, 2021) <<https://tradingeconomics.com/bosnia-and-herzegovina/wages>> accessed 4 April 2021

'Kosovo Average Monthly Wages | 2005-2018 Data | 2020-2021 Forecast | Historical' (Tradingeconomics.com, 2021) <<https://tradingeconomics.com/kosovo/wages>> accessed 4 April 2021

18 Mirna Jusić, Miran Lavrić and Smiljka Tomanović. (2019). Youth study Southeast Europe 2018/2019. p.46. Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

19 Ibid. p. 25

20 Ibid. p. 46

supporters of the welfare state, however, they do not oppose free markets and show high consumerist values that all together characterize “millennial socialism”.<sup>21</sup>

The issue of low level of economic development is two-sided: it affects the prosperity of citizens in each of the six economies on the one side and drives a productive workforce toward the wealthy EU Member States on the other. Emigration connected to brain drain from all six economies has been one of the key issues since the fall of communist regimes in the early 1990s. Another issue is whether or not the relevant local laws and actions of political structures favour the movement of the workforce within the region. There is very little data on successful movement and exchange of workforce within the region and development of locally-led economic initiatives to support intra-state cooperation.

The transition to better intra-state cooperation and reconciliation is predetermined by the development of modern road, rail and aviation systems for the transportation of people and goods. Rail infrastructure is neglected across the region.<sup>22,23</sup> The WB6 countries have underdeveloped transport, power, and telecom networks compared to the European Union’s average.<sup>24</sup> Only two capital cities enjoy direct connection via the modern highway system: Belgrade and Skopje.<sup>25</sup>

Rail infrastructure has been neglected in all WB6 economies, with some signs of investment in rail infrastructure in Serbia,<sup>26</sup> North Macedonia<sup>27</sup> and Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>28</sup> Currently, only three capital cities enjoy direct passenger service: Belgrade-Skopje and Belgrade-Podgorica. Previous direct lines have been out of service (Sarajevo-Belgrade) while cargo railway service is still active between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia, Serbia and Montenegro, Serbia and North Macedonia and Kosovo\* and North Macedonia.

Another issue that limits intra-state cooperation and reconciliation in the Western Balkans is the poor development of aviation and air connections between six WB economies. Prior to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, Belgrade was the only capital city that offered a direct non-stop service to all WB capital cities but Pristina.<sup>29</sup> All other capitals had only one direct non-stop flight offer within the region.

The low level of development of road, rail and aviation infrastructure limits cross border cooperation and development of the tourism sector, which can be observed through modest numbers of domestic (regional) tourists visiting one of the WB6 economies. For example, the data shows that only 11,37% of tourists<sup>30</sup> from the region visit Bosnia and Herzegovina as opposed to 34,14% in Montenegro.<sup>31</sup>

In a post-conflict region, such as the Western Balkans, tourism has the potential to not only contribute to economic development, expand infrastructure and generate both direct and indirect employment but would also be a great opportunity to foster reconciliation. It is important to acknowledge that tourism would not only act as a source of sustainable development but also as a factor bolstering social change. Tourism tends to flourish in peacetime rather than in wartime, and it is assumed to form a bridge between cultural differences and create better cooperation by sharing culture and knowledge. Experiences possibly nurturing reconciliation processes in the Western Balkans and worldwide include sharing culture, connecting through gastronomy, celebration through music and art, as well as travelling tours within the post-conflict countries.<sup>32</sup>

Tourism is one of the world’s largest industries, and it certainly has the capacity to boost economic stability. In turn, this would help the WB6 countries to overcome prejudices and stereotypes they have towards each other by having common development missions for the region.<sup>33</sup> Tourism

21 Mirna Jusić, Miran Lavrić and Smiljka Tomanović. (2019). Youth study Southeast Europe 2018/2019. p.47-48. Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.  
 22 Bulić E, 'Izblijedjeli Sjaz Zlatne Željeznice' (Balkans.aljazeera.net, 2017) <<https://balkans.aljazeera.net/teme/2017/2/4/izbljedjeli-sjaz-zlatne-zeljeznice>> accessed 21 April 2021  
 23 Railway Reform In The Western Balkans (World Bank: Transport Unit, Infrastructure Department Europe and Central Asia Region 2005) <<http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/ar/596211468282880617/pdf/420090ECA0WestansRailway01PUBLIC1.pdf>> accessed 21 April 2021  
 24 Atoyan R, and Benedek D, 'Public Infrastructure In The Western Balkans: A Highway To Higher Income' (2018) <<https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2018/02/01/na020818-public-infrastructure-in-the-western-balkans-a-highway-to-higher-income>> accessed 21 April 2021  
 25 'Western Balkans Transport Network' (Unece.org) <[https://unece.org/DAM/trans/main/SDGs/Develop\\_Resilient\\_Infrastructure/N-Hoxha\\_Development-of-Resilient-Transport-Networks-in-Western-Balkans-6\\_.pdf](https://unece.org/DAM/trans/main/SDGs/Develop_Resilient_Infrastructure/N-Hoxha_Development-of-Resilient-Transport-Networks-in-Western-Balkans-6_.pdf)> accessed 21 April 2021  
 26 Rosca O, 'EBRD Lends €100M To Srbija Voz To Buy New Trains' (Ebrd.com, 2019) <<https://www.ebrd.com/news/2019/ebird-lends-100m-to-srbija-voz-to-buy-new-trains.html>> accessed 22 April 2021  
 27 'Investments Worth EUR 600 Million For Macedonian Railways Projects - Finance.Gov.Mk' (finance.gov.mk, 2015) <<https://finance.gov.mk/investments-worth-eur-600-million-for-macedonian-railways-projects/?lang=en>> accessed 22 April 2021  
 28 'Bosnia And Herzegovina - Rail Transportation' (International Trade Administration | Trade.gov, 2020) <<https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/bosnia-and-herzegovina-rail-transportation>> accessed 22 April 2021  
 29 'Belgrade Nikola Tesla Airport-Serbia'S Gateway To Eastern Europe And The World' (anna.aero, 2019) <<https://www.anna.aero/2019/07/11/belgrade-nikola-tesla-airport-set-to-reach-six-million-passengers-in-2019-15-average-capacity-increase-among-top-10-carriers/>> accessed 21 April 2021  
 30 Calculated average:  
 (Bhas.gov.ba, 2021) <[http://bhas.gov.ba/data/Publikacije/Saopštenja/2019/TUR\\_02\\_2018\\_12\\_0\\_EN.pdf](http://bhas.gov.ba/data/Publikacije/Saopštenja/2019/TUR_02_2018_12_0_EN.pdf)> accessed 1 April 2021  
 31 Calculated average:  
 'Istraživanje O Dolascima I Noćenjima Turista, Ukupno 2018. Godina (P)' (Monstat.org, 2019) <<https://www.monstat.org/userfiles/file/turizam/din2018/ukupno2018/Istra%C5%BEivanje%20o%20dolascima%20i%20no%C4%87enjenja%20turista%20ukupno%20-%202018.pdf>> accessed 2 April 2021  
 32 Alluri,R.M. (2009): The role of tourism in post-conflict peacebuilding in Rwanda, Swispeace, [online] Available at: <[https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/111583/wp2\\_2009.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/111583/wp2_2009.pdf)> [Accessed 22 April 2021].  
 33 Creaco, S.; Querini, G. (2003): The role of tourism in sustainable economic development, 43rd Congress of the European Regional Science Association: "Peripheries, Centres, and Spatial Development in the New Europe", 27th - 30th August 2003, Jyväskylä, Finland, European Regional Science Association

and travel act as a catalyst for sustainable development by improving and expanding infrastructure for more effective cross-regional connectivity and transportation of goods. We believe that the “Cultural & Tourism Exchange Programs and Regional Tours” might be the solution to these problems and may eventually contribute to the depolarization of the WB6 young generations, increase the income coming from tourism (which will have a positive effect on economic development), strengthen social cohesion, and build a more tolerant generation which has broader horizons and is more open to compromises. Cultural tourism aims to immerse the people in the region in a unique first-hand intercultural experience, learning about other WB countries’ culture, history, daily life characteristics, gastronomy and other significant elements that constitute the respective state in which they reside.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, we believe that civil society may play a key role in the promotion and streamlining of these cultural and economic exchanges, and its efforts to support different reconciliation events will serve to create stronger bonds and foster better regional cooperation and intra-state collaboration. The end goal is to decrease the divisive rhetoric in the public discourse and create one that is more inclusive of the whole region.

## Identification of policy options

The policy options identified in this brief are two-fold: first, the establishment of joint regional tourism infrastructure and network, and second, promotion of this network by political entities, civil society and grass-roots campaigns. The development of regional tools is an end in itself, but it is also a means to develop sustainable economies for WB6 countries and promote a supra-national regional identity. Solidifying the connecting infrastructure between WB6 countries is a solution for the two intersecting problems of 1. unfavourable economic opportunities and 2. negative images of ethnic or religious ‘others’ in the region.

## Regional exchange

The so-called **Balkan bus** represents an idea of an interconnected transportation system between WB6 countries. Since the transportation system is not centralized and the transport infrastructure is insufficient, it is necessary to make efforts to form such a base. If the **base of transport possibilities** was generated, it would enable faster and cheaper connections between the countries. Not only would there be an economic benefit to such an endeavour, but if the standard of transportation was raised, the supply of lines between cities would likely improve. This symbol of the Balkan bus represents not only the physical vehicle but also an **opportunity to engage and encourage citizens**, especially young people

of WB6, to take part in excursions, study visits and tourism-purpose travels.

The formation of **regional historical tours** of local landmarks, with visits to museums and to gastronomic and entertainment spaces, can be an effective tool to bring people together and **create a cohesive narrative of the past**. By this initiative, citizens from WB6 would learn closely the hand-to-hand information about the history of a particular nation or culture. Consequently, this would serve as a prerequisite for reconciliation and tourism boost. In addition, such an initiative can highlight the similarities between the WB6 countries and shed a positive light on their differences.

**National parks** can serve as **cross border spaces for education**. Outdoors education can be a powerful tool to generate productivity and social skills, and the **nature-conservation approach** is a segment where all individuals can contribute. The approach to follow the merge between education and ecology is using non-formal elements. Therefore, every participant can feel represented.

A similar approach would be a creation of a voluntary program called **“Hosted by local families”** including identification of potential families, entry of applicants, implementation of a short-stay period of time for selected individuals and creating a follow-up communication. Communication would be structured through a tailor-made digital platform fostering volunteer work and exchange of visitors from WB countries. **Students staying in local homes** through exchange programs can facilitate the integration of young people into different local cultures through host families and therefore expose them to local customs and culture. This process leads towards faster dissemination of Western Balkans ethnicities, language, culture and similarities.

**The Student Exchange Fund** is highly important because its main purpose would be to create scholarships programs for the students of WB6 for studying in one of the WB6 countries. Such Fund would give the opportunity to students to stay in the region, get proper education and make connections with their peers in other WB6 countries. Responding to the brain drain problem in the region and tackling the issue of intercultural exchange and connectivity between nations living in WB6, the Student Exchange Fund would be one of the solutions.

(ERSA), Louvain-la-Neuve, [online] Available at: <[https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/115956/1/ERSA2003\\_084.pdf](https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/115956/1/ERSA2003_084.pdf)> [Accessed 22 April 2021].

34 Kumar, R. (2018): Sustainable tourism development and peace: A local community approach.13. [online] Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326302785\\_SUSTAINABLE\\_TOURISM\\_DEVELOPMENT\\_AND\\_PEACE\\_A\\_LOCAL\\_COMMUNITY\\_APPROACH](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326302785_SUSTAINABLE_TOURISM_DEVELOPMENT_AND_PEACE_A_LOCAL_COMMUNITY_APPROACH)> [Accessed 22 April 2021].

## Inclusion of Civil society

As for tackling the issue of a lack of inclusion of civil society, this policy proposal recommends the following:

Formation of intergovernmental **Regional Reconciliation Foundation (RRF)**. The **RRF** would be an organization that would fund only joint WB6 projects of the civil society organizations. Furthermore, it would be primarily focused on projects promoting the importance of reconciliation and intra-state cooperation and regional exchange initiatives, as well as a promotion of cross-border ecological projects and tourism. The RRF would contribute to the sustainability of CSOs working in the region, respond to the problem of a shrinking space for civil society, and an absence of major donors.

The creation of **Western Balkans Reconciliation Media Platform** would connect all the media that want to join with the aim of promoting **cooperation, friendship and tourism** between citizens of the WB6. This platform's goal would be a creation of positive narratives about other nations and the promotion of examples of good relations of different nationalities on the local, national and regional levels.

Establishing **Balkan's Peace Week** in the region of WB6 countries would present a compelling case for the national political figures to make this symbolic step that would show the will to engage justification for the reconciliation process. The regional Peace Week would be a cross-sectoral event celebrated in all WB6 countries in a way that promotes reconciliation through symbolic acts, such as positive political speeches, decorating memorial sites and organizing cultural manifestations, which would show the similarities between the WB6 citizens. Tackling the culture of remembrance, we propose creating the same monuments in all six countries honouring all the recent war victims. This would contribute to overcoming the past traumas and would initiate a process of creating a joint regional identity. One day during the Peace Week would be a regional holiday in all WB6 countries called **Regional Peace Day**.

## Recommendations

### General Objective

Enhancing regional cooperation and intra-state reconciliation

### Specific Objective 1

Improve people-to-people contacts via exchange programmes with a special emphasis on individuals with different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Youth exchange, labour force exchange, and tourism exchange would serve to overcome prejudices and stereotypes in the long term.

### Recommendations:

- ▶ Enhancement of student exchange through WB6 Student Exchange Fund supported by WB6 governments
- ▶ Creation of a voluntary program called "Hosted by local families."
- ▶ Labour exchange
- ▶ Promotion of positive past examples of cooperation and mutual understanding

### Specific Objective 2

Promoting regional cultural assets as a unified tourism offer across the region. Using tourism capacity in the WB6 would serve to boost economic stability, improve poor road infrastructure and air connections, as well as economic barriers which negatively contribute to the limitation of regional cooperation and intra-state reconciliation. The current state of infrastructure renders the desired improvement in the tourism sector in the Western Balkans extensively demanding.

### Recommendations:

- ▶ Establishment of the "Balkan bus" network
- ▶ Launch of campaigns to advocate for new regular low-cost flights connecting all the WB6 capitals
- ▶ Improvement of railway infrastructure and provide an eco-friendly solution to the transportation of people and goods
- ▶ Creation of Balkan tours with historical, gastronomical and ecological elements with the aim of promoting similarities between the WB6 and joint efforts to tackle problems affecting the region.

### Specific Objective 3

Involvement of the civil society as well political figures in the process of reconciliation in the Western Balkans.

#### Recommendations:

- ▶ Designing and organizing Peace Week on multiple levels: political representatives, civil society, cultural events, business community, etc.
- ▶ Establishing Regional Reconciliation Foundation to enhance joint WB6 civil society projects
- ▶ Positive media campaigns about “others”, our immediate neighbours, and eradicating hate speech
- ▶ Education programs that would shed light on misinformed arguments, propaganda, and hate speech
- ▶ Informal education on media literacy: language classes and audiobooks. Free Albanian, Serbian/Croatian/Bosnian/Montenegrin and Macedonian language classes, and a collective archive of audiobooks.