



The FGYO's
initiative
in Southeast
Europe

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Dear readers,

This issue devoted to the fifteenth anniversary of the "initiative in Southeast Europe" illustrates the FGYO's commitment to furthering European unification: the projects conducted by our institution in the Western Balkans contribute to intercultural learning, regional cooperation and a deeper awareness and feeling of European citizenship among youth in France, Germany and the Balkans.

Convinced of the benefits of these exchange projects in the reconciliation process, the governments of the countries concerned in Southeast Europe recently announced their intention to step up their support for youth exchanges. We are very pleased to see this wonderful Franco-German achievement! In the following articles, readers will discover the diversity and complexity of the work accomplished on-site. We hope you enjoy reading it!

Béatrice Angrand, Markus Ingenlath

Reconciliation as a source of inspiration





Following the war that raged through the Western Balkans in the 1990s, some ex-Yugoslavian states are still struggling to overcome the hostilities and the consequences of the conflict. Establishing democracy and civil society is proving to be a lengthy process. The Franco-German Youth Office's initiative in South-east Europe is encouraging dialogue with the region's young people. It also supports international and regional youth work in the Balkans. These gatherings help raise young people's awareness of their responsibilities in building a common European future.

The FGYO's initiative in Southeast Europe

8 000

young people have taken part in trinational exchange programmes in France, Germany and Southeast Europe since 2000.

In spring 1999, during the second phase of the Kosovo war, young musicians, mimes and artists from France, Germany and Slovakia entered Macedonian refugee camps with the FGYO's backing. Led by renowned pantomime artist Milan Sladek, they tried for several months to help children and youth (60% of Kosovo's refugees are under the age of 25) through this difficult period. On-site, they worked with the Children's Theater Center and the LOJA association, which today are still among the initiative's foremost partners in Southeast Europe.

300

partner organisations currently working with the FGYO

While the European Union endeavoured to bolster the development of democracy in ex-Yugoslavia, on 9 June 2000 the French and German governments tasked the FGYO with "developing its activities in this region and reinforcing its trilateral exchange programmes there in the future, as it has already done with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe". The two Foreign Affairs Ministers accordingly set aside special funds for the FGYO.

The programmes cover such varied topics as history, intercultural skills and the freedom of the press. Projects aimed at leveraging regional partnerships are being conducted concurrently. More specifically, they address any young citizen keen to shoulder his or her responsibilities for the future. The initiative, as a platform for dialogue, has been able to integrate young people from the Western Balkans into the European dialogue. These exchanges foster an understanding not only of history but also of the current political, social and economic situations. They have also enabled young people from France and Germany to discover a relatively little-known region of Europe and forge a fresh viewpoint on their home country, the European Union and Franco-German relations.

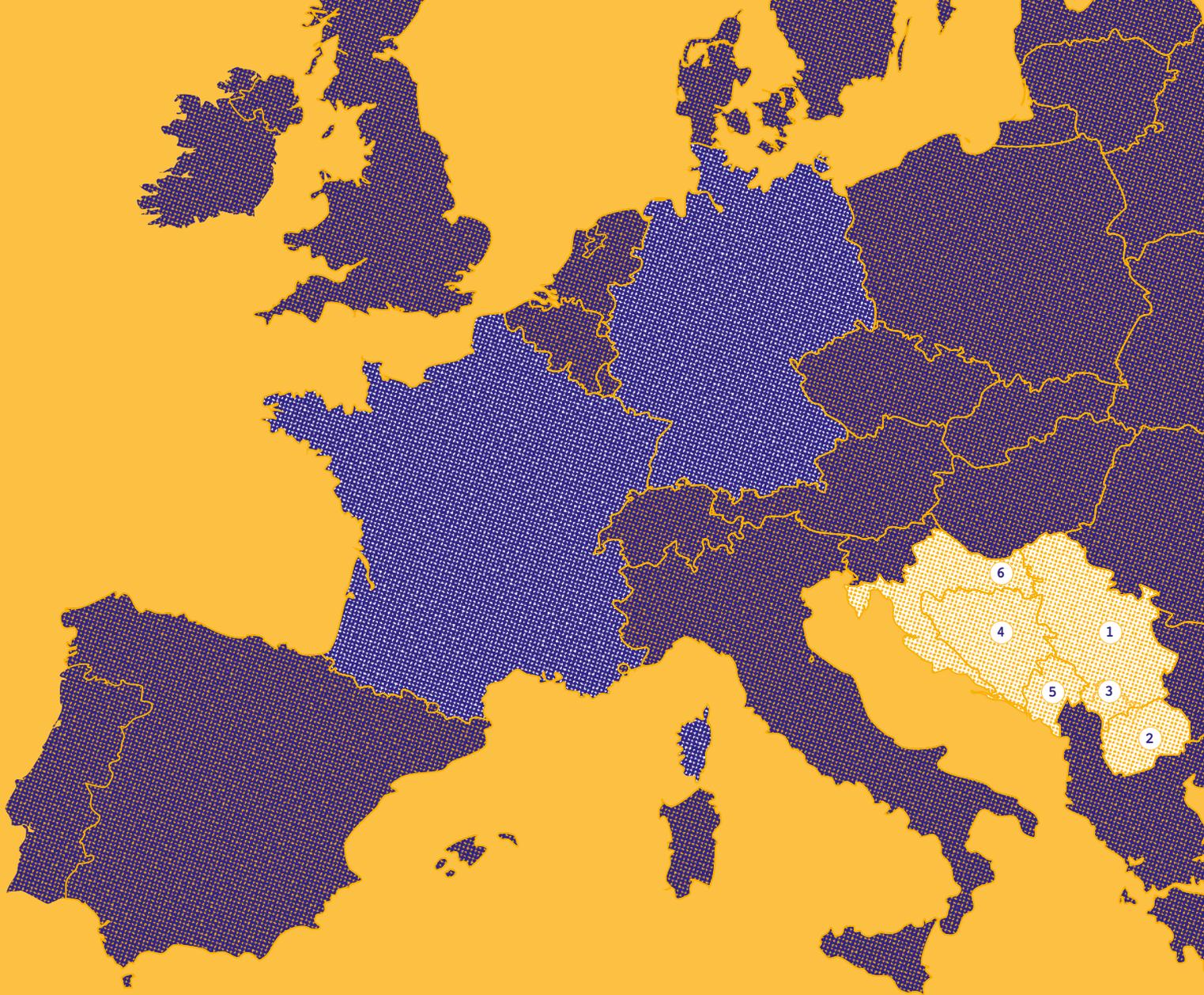
3 857 000 €

Special funds: 2000 – 2014

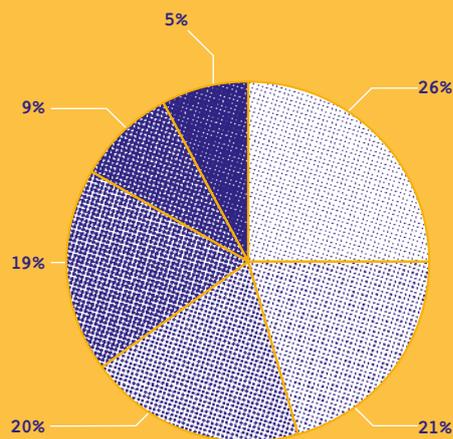
Over the next few years, the FGYO developed a lasting cooperation between civil society organisations in France, Germany and the countries of Southeast Europe.

The initiative took its roots in the varied experiences arising from Franco-German cooperation. They can be a source of inspiration and encouragement for the reconciliation process. Although they cannot be copied or repeated in their entirety, they have helped establish examples of best practices and practical tools that others will be able to adapt and deploy in the Western Balkans.

The initiative in Southeast Europe proves that establishing civil society and democracy in a region in crisis not only takes commitment, patience and enduring actions but also the political will to firmly support these complex processes over the long term.

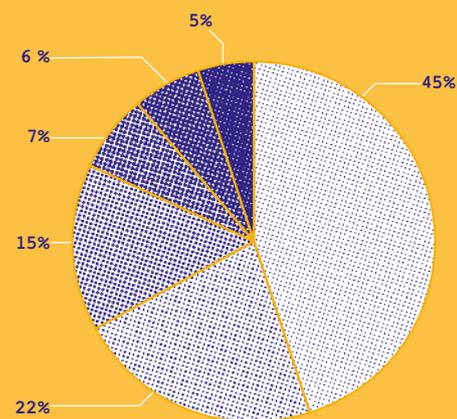


4



Origin of participants from Southeast Europe (%):

- 26% Serbia
- 21% Bosnia and Herzegovina
- 20% Macedonia
- 19% Croatia
- 9% Kosovo
- 5% local cooperations



Number of programmes in a third country, by country (%):

- 45% Serbia
- 22% Bosnia and Herzegovina
- 15% Macedonia
- 7% Croatia
- 6% Kosovo
- 5% local cooperations

Western Balkans (countries taking part in the initiative in Southeast Europe):

- 1 – Serbia
- 2 – Macedonia
- 3 – Kosovo
- 4 – Bosnia and Herzegovina
- 5 – Montenegro
- 6 – Croatia



A new dynamic

Almost a quarter of a century after the break-up of Yugoslavia and its internal wars, the reconciliation and political and economic future of the Western Balkan states are still the subject of heated debate. In cooperation with other European Union Member States, France and Germany are endeavouring to impart fresh momentum to their development through a variety of political initiatives. France and Germany are working hand-in-hand for peace and stability in the Balkans, cooperating closely in the fields of politics, humanitarian aid, security and civil society. This lasting commitment can be seen in the initiative led by the Franco-German Youth Office (FGYO) in Southeast Europe and financed by a special fund set up by the French and German Ministries of Foreign Affairs.

Encourage trilateral and multilateral youth exchanges For the past 15 years, the FGYO has been initiating exchange programmes for young people from Southeast European countries with the help of its civil society partners in Macedonia, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, France and Germany. To date, nearly 8,000 young people have taken part in these tri- and multilateral gatherings. The programmes are designed more specifically for young people keen to get involved in their respective countries by taking on greater responsibilities in the political sphere or civil society. The exchange programmes focus on topics that touch on the questions, needs and everyday life of youth. These topics include the question of reconciliation, cross-border work, the relationship to history, xenophobia, the acquisition of intercultural skills, the role of civil society (in the reconciliation process also), the duties of democracy and pluralism, and the future of Europe. For young people in the Balkans especially, the question of career opportunities and future prospects is uppermost: for all but a few, the hope of democratic evolution, social and material security, and interethnic cooperation has not been fulfilled. Their situation is marked by a lack of prospects, a wait-and-see approach in politics, and social immobilism. Over and above the differences specific to each country, young people are the most discontented with their possibilities for personal development, their career opportunities, or the way the rule of law and democracy work in their country. The stabilising effect produced by the EU enlargement strategy is wearing thin: the European Union's appeal is waning in the eyes of many young people and there is a real risk of losing youth's support for the European dream.

Lean on youth and civil society To effectively remedy this situation, we need to strengthen and support young people's involvement in Southeast Europe at national and European level, and within civil society. We need to encourage them to play an active, self-directed role in their country's democratic development and learn to use the existing instruments of democracy. The question of the relationship to history and the effort to preserve remembrance also takes on special importance, especially as it is a pan-European challenge. The goal is to present a multilateral vision of history to counter national representations, so that young people have a better understanding of their own history and can prevent the creation of national myths. It is also important to stimulate economic development in the Balkans, since economic prosperity and the development of democracy are closely linked.

The partner organisations of the initiative in Southeast Europe, which are based in France, Germany and the Western Balkans, have adopted these themes in recent years and set up a lasting network in civil society. The success of the FGYO's initiative rests on the competence, diversity and commitment of these partner organisations, in spite of often difficult economic conditions.



Frank Morawietz
FGYO Special Projects Officer for Southeast Europe

Strengthen regional cooperation Through the many multilateral projects it has undertaken, the FGYO's work in Southeast Europe has helped strengthen regional cooperation in the Balkans. The networks formed (and which interact with others) can make a valuable contribution to the work done with civil society, and underpin an institutionalised regional structure promoting youth exchanges between countries in the Western Balkans. The establishment of a "Balkans Youth Office" would help promote peaceful dialogue among the region's young people and make a significant contribution to regional stability and cooperation.

For the first time, there are also signs that the governments are willing to support such an initiative. In a memorandum of understanding signed on 10th November 2014, the Serbian and Albanian Prime Ministers set out their intention of boosting youth exchanges. To produce the desired results, though, this project must effectively involve all young people in the Western Balkans, so will entail joining forces with other States.

Through its involvement in the Western Balkans, the FGYO has acquired extensive political experience and a firm command of content and methods. It has also built up institutional and civil society networks in Southeast Europe, and acquired valuable expertise through 50 years' experience of Franco-German cooperation. Now, the FGYO is keen to guide and support the creation of this new structure.

Place in the European context The development of civil society and the reinforcement of young people's commitment to democracy cannot be considered an issue specific to the Western Balkan states. They must be placed in the European context. The democratic, social and economic development of these States - which are future candidates for EU accession - is a real European challenge. Moreover, many issues specific to the EU (political crisis, youth unemployment, security and stability) concern not only the future of young people in EU States but also that of young people in the Balkans. Europe concerns all of us!

Nationalism and populism are not specific to the Balkans. Europe is currently facing a resurgence of nationalism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and xenophobia, along with mounting populism. These anti-democratic positions, which strike at the heart of our societies, are among the greatest challenges to the European project.

It is vital that, in the future, young people in the Western Balkans and the European Union create, together, a new dynamic for the construction of European society or societies. Through its initiative in Southeast Europe, the FGYO has set out to actively contribute to this endeavour. •

This endeavour is a success

Foreword by Laurent Fabius, French Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Development, and Frank-Walter Steinmeier, German Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs – Special issue on the Franco-German Youth Office's initiative in South-East Europe, on the occasion of its fifteenth anniversary



Frank-Walter Steinmeier, German Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs



Laurent Fabius, French Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Development

Over the past 15 years, numerous young people from France, Germany and South-East Europe have met and forged invaluable ties: their friendship is a very vibrant and tangible sign of the dissipation of the tensions arising from the wars in the 1990s, and the unwavering determination to build a common future.

To mark the anniversary of the Franco-German Youth Office's initiative in South-East Europe, representatives from non-governmental organisations involved in these programmes will gather for a regional conference to be held in Sarajevo from 7 to 12 June 2015. This fifteenth anniversary will be an opportunity for the Franco-German Youth Office (FGYO) and the French and German governments to highlight past achievements and imagine an optimistic future.

The 75th Franco-German Summit held in Mainz on 9 June 2000 had tasked the FGYO with using its experience and expertise to bolster civil society in South-East Europe, help stabilise democracy and contribute to peaceful dialogue in the region, and promote European, intercultural dialogue between youth in the Western Balkans, France and Germany. Since then, over 8,000 young people have taken part in a wide variety of trilateral and multilateral exchange programmes.

The French government and the German federal government have provided substantial backing for the FGYO to carry out this action. Today, we are pleased to see that this endeavour

is a success. On this fifteenth anniversary, we would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the FGYO and to the committed organisers and participants from France, Germany and the countries of Southeast Europe for the work they have accomplished, which is an exemplary success.

This initiative also bears fruit in the political arena. The region's young people get to know each other better and are encouraged to work together. The gatherings organised by the FGYO give them an opportunity to mix with French and German youth, and see that they have a great deal in common. Attitudes are changing: many of the region's women and men, especially the younger generations, are now in favour of developing closer ties between their countries and Europe, and aspire to join the community of values that the European Union's heads of state and of government offered to the Western Balkan countries at the Zagreb Summit in 2000.

We are pleased to see today that civil society and political leaders in this region are working for reconciliation by trying to organise a youth exchange among the Western Balkan States. The region's societies can and must come together and establish close ties with France, Germany and other countries. We will continue to support them and guide them in this direction.



"The young generation needs to be mobile to overcome prejudices"

Can international youth exchanges help strengthen regional cooperation in the Balkans? Valdete Idrizi is the executive director of Platforma Civikos, an initiative that is laying the groundwork for formal cooperation between civil society and the public authorities in Kosovo. She talks about what the young generation in the Western Balkans wants and needs.

INTERVIEW WITH: VALDETE IDRIZI

What are the main obstacles and challenges for today's youth in the Western Balkans?

All of the Balkan states face numerous problems, such as fighting corruption, establishing the rule of law, the freedom of the press, mobility and many other issues. But youth in particular are in the most difficult situation. Youth were trapped and shaped by the conflicts, and have only ever known division. The main challenge now is to fight prejudices. The young generation needs to be mobile to overcome them. Young people in the Balkans still do not know each other. Young people in the Balkans, especially in divided societies, face the challenges of high unemployment rates, exclusion from decision making, and a restriction on their freedom of movement and expression. They are eager to learn, to study, to get involved, but lack the space to maximise their potential. They need to learn about their past, their history. In history, the whole truth can never be one-sided! To stop the ghosts of the past from shaping the future, it is important to understand history and create the future. Unfortunately, political leaders in our countries are still using history, ethnicity and religion to divide and manipulate people.

How can youth organisations help and support young people?

Active youth organisations from the Balkans can work through a variety of programmes to support and empower their peers to make their voices heard and engage in important processes in their respective countries. They will encourage young people to become active, and give practical tips about funding opportunities for youth organisations. The best way to make change happen is to bring people together.

What role can international youth exchanges play?

International organisations - and especially European youth organisations - can give youth organisations a lot of support to move closer to the European Union, to step up the dialogue between Balkan youth and European

youth, to learn from their own experiences and to work together to make their voices heard. I know there are initiatives and young organisations struggling out there, but it's not enough: we need more programmes, more exchanges - including university exchanges - in the Balkans, more mobility within the Balkans and all over the world. Kosovo is still an isolated country subject to a visa system. This is a serious problem, not only for young people but for society as a whole.

How have youth work and exchange programmes developed since the end of the Balkan war?

Over the years, there have been interesting projects both within and between the countries. For example, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights, with offices opened in almost every country in the Balkans. And from what I can see, young people need to get involved in different activities, they are eager to get to know each other, to find out

"The European perspective is the only way, so it is hugely important, especially for youth."

about their past and share their visions for the future. It's clear from their interactions that they feel comfortable in their surroundings and with their peers from different countries. For instance, having Kosovar, Bosnian and Serbian youth especially come together paves the way for a new cooperation, which is just as important as the actual political partnerships between the political leaders of their respective countries.

There are already a lot of programmes, but there is a huge need for even more new programmes in education, multiculturalism, human rights and for coming to terms with the past.

Why are multilateral exchange programmes so important?

From our experience with the Franco-German Youth Office, and in particular with youth from ethnically divided Mitrovica, it was obvious how important it was for them to learn, share, see and especially listen to the history of their peers in European countries and how the right programmes impacted their lives. It is indeed a great experience, which should be continued and even stepped up, reaching out to young people in rural areas as well to give them the opportunity to participate in various programmes.

How can the European context facilitate interregional dialogue?

All of the countries aspire to join the European Union, but we all know that we have to do our "homework" for this to happen. It is much easier when we talk about the European context because we see our "problems" and "homework" with the same eyes, and we see the necessity of cooperating with the neighbouring countries. "Neighbourhood" is not just a word in our region; it's about friendship, regional cooperation and accepting each other's truth and perceptions. There is an acute need to get more involved in supporting each other, and for our European peers to support us too.

How important is the European perspective for the region and especially for young people?

Once again, we all aspire to join the European Union. The European perspective is the only way, so it is hugely important, especially for youth. Balkan youth has tremendous potential. One of the most successful projects implemented is Our Future European Union, which therefore has a large and wide impact on various dimensions when it comes to understanding the processes, values and challenges involved in integration processes, and the social and political aspects within the Balkans and the EU. Europe needs young people to be more committed and involved; they should openly say what they want and need, and should claim their rights. We need to help youth make its voice heard and have a say in its future.

What kind of support would you need to be able to do your work?

In our region, we still have lots of problems and misunderstandings, but also big opportunities for youth. Youth make up a large percentage of the population. I think our top priority would be to simply create the conditions for people to meet and try to understand each other. Then to understand that they are the same as each other and basically to dispel the negative image they get from the media and politicians. Only in this way can they call for more jobs for young people, more education programmes, more exchange programmes and more responsibility.

What kind of measures would you suggest?

There is a need for further support for youth programmes, to bring Europe closer to the Balkans and vice versa. The regional exchange programmes are extremely important, bringing closer the young people who were born in the post-conflict countries of the western Balkans that are still burdened by the events of the recent, violent past. The Franco-German Youth Office, which was already active in the region, could concentrate even more on strengthening regional cooperation. It is a success story itself and could be a great success story in the Balkans as well. Hopefully, something concrete will be done shortly in this regard, as it is so urgently needed, especially for Kosovo and Serbia, as an ongoing political dialogue between those two countries. •

Valdete Idrizi was born and raised in the north of Mitrovica before being displaced to the south at the end of the war. She became an activist at an early age, initially through alternative theatre in Mitrovica in the 1990s. After the war, she founded and directed for 10 years the local grassroots multi-ethnic organisation Community Building Mitrovica (CBM), an NGO that seeks to bridge the divide between the different communities living in the Mitrovica region. She has received a number of international peace awards for her outstanding role in her community. They include the US State Department's International Women of Courage Award in March 2008, presented to her by the Secretary of State Ms. Condoleezza Rice. She also won the Soroptimist Peace Prize, awarded by the European Federation of the Soroptimist International network in Amsterdam on 12 July 2009. She is one of the founders of Mitrovica Forum, a body made up of local political leaders, businesses, and representatives of the media and civil society organisations. She is an active member of the International Forum for Cities in Transition.



Beauty is how you feel inside,
and it reflects in your eyes.

via Lore



Viewpoints in the Balkans

Author: H el ene Maillasson
Photographer: Stephanie Winkler



Viewpoints in the Balkans

In the "Mémoires vives" ("Living Memories") theatre project, young people from France, Germany and Macedonia took up the themes of war and its consequences, and of peacebuilding. After two sessions in Lyon and Berlin, they reunited for the last stage of their exchange in Tetovo, at once tackling an artistic challenge and delivering an uncompromising look at a divided society.



The association LOJA has been working with the FGYO since 1999 and is until now one of the most important partner of the initiative in Southeast Europe.

A joyful hubbub is coming from the premises of the LOJA association, situated in a backyard in Tetovo, in the east of Macedonia. The 30 young French, German and Macedonian people taking part in the morning's linguistic programme by no means understand all of the languages spoken by the others, but one thing is certain: they all have a gift for languages – even if, for some of them, it is limited to Breton, or the dialect spoken in Berlin or Tetovo. Elisa Meynier from the Centre Français de Berlin has written some basic vocabulary and polite phrases on the board, which the participants are repeating good-humouredly. Not only in French and German but also in Macedonian and Albanian. Why in Albanian too? That's one of the things the young people are about to discover during their stay in Tetovo.

Improv exercise in the centre of town The gathering in Macedonia is the third such meeting for the group. Last year, the young people had already met up in Lyon and Berlin. These three exchange sessions are part of the initiative run by the FGYO in Southeast Europe. Over the last 15 years, hundreds of children and teenagers from the Balkans have been lucky enough to take part in exchange programmes with young French and German people, and learn more about their cultures and the history of the European Union. For the young Western European people also, this intercultural dialogue is a good opportunity to get a fresh glimpse of their own country from a different angle. And the lasting memories don't stop there. "To come to Tetovo, I took the plane on my own for the first time," says Lois, from Lyon. Even if she was a little apprehensive, this 16-year-old girl wouldn't have missed being reunited with her German and Macedonian friends for anything.

The "veteran" participants are going to stage their experiences from the previous gatherings for the newcomers, who, unlike Lois, weren't at the Lyon and Berlin gatherings. Lois is confident: "I'm naturally quite shy. But in a group, it'll be OK." Even if it's only an exercise, it takes courage to perform here, on Tetovo's concrete-covered central square. At the end of the week, the whole group will present



the results of the theatre work created during the stay, at a public performance in the municipal theatre, for a large audience, including the German ambassador and the cultural attaché from the Institut français in Skopje. So, better start rehearsing straight away! After five minutes at most, the group's improvisation has already drawn a dozen or so bystanders. Tetovo's youngsters, who have stopped to watch, don't really catch the meaning of the performance being acted out in the town centre. Judging by the smartphones being pulled out, it is still considered worth filming, especially as you don't need to know the language to enjoy the show.

The FGYO: a valued partner And yet, in young Guxim's everyday life, these cultural and linguistic barriers are very real. Guxim belongs to Macedonia's Albanian minority, a community that represents roughly a quarter of Macedonia's total population. But in Tetovo, the Slavic Macedonians are in the minority. "Until I went to university, I was always in Albanian classes. Our country has a split education system: at the same school, some classes are taught in Macedonian and others in Albanian. Now I'm studying in Skopje, in the capital, and the classes are mixed. But all my friends are Albanian," says Guxim. In the theatre project organised on-site by the Center for Balkan Cooperation – LOJA association, he works alongside Srgjan, a Slavic Macedonian who understands the gist of Albanian but can't speak it. If it hadn't been for this project, the two youths probably would never have spoken to each other, even though they have the same interests. "During these projects, the participants develop a real awareness of their country's history and geopolitical context. But it goes deeper than that: a lot of close friendships are formed during these exchanges. A young person who sees first-hand how rewarding the contact with other communities is, will pass on the message around him," explains Elisa Meynier, the FGYO's educational officer at the Centre Français de Berlin and project coordinator. This approach was also one of the keys to Franco-German reconciliation after World War II, even if all that seems like ancient history for today's teenagers. Bearing this experience in mind, the FGYO has extended its activities to include trinational programmes such as the initiative for Southeast Europe. In the Balkans, the war is not so very distant. The theatre project that ends in Tetovo aims to make young people aware of the efforts to preserve the memory of war, from World War I through to the guerilla warfare between Albanians and Macedonians in the hinterland around Tetovo in 2001.



Srgjan from Tetovo (second from right) wants to show his new French and German friends the positive and the negative sides of the town.



Bujar Luma (on the left) from LOJA and Elisa Meynier (on the right) from the *Centre Français* are responsible for the project on-site.

Most of the participants, who are aged between 14 and 26, admittedly have only vague memories of this period, but they still sense the burden of this legacy on the society in which they live today. "There is a certain prevailing wariness and underlying tensions between the different ethnic communities living in Macedonia," reports Bujar Luma, executive director of the LOJA association. "At LOJA, we try to help the next generation of Slavic Macedonians and Albanians grow up hand in hand, not with a feeling of indifference to each other. This objective has scant support from local stakeholders. This is why cooperative projects such as those we conduct with the FGYO and associations in France and Germany, like *Peuple et Culture* and the *Centre Français*, are extremely valuable in our eyes."





The improvisation on Tetovo's central square arouses the bystanders' curiosity.

Last rehearsal before the public performance in the local theatre of Tetovo.



Guxim and Kreshnik (first and second from right) hope their country will join the European Union.

Discovering an unknown city In the play they put on, the young people will stage their experience and what they have learnt from discussions within the group, during conversations with the people of Tetovo, or by talking to the various experts they meet. A rally through the town gives them an opportunity to gather their first impressions. They set off in small groups to explore this unfamiliar town, each person focusing on a particular aspect of life in Tetovo. In the group that Inken from Berlin belongs to, Srgjan takes his role as guide very seriously. This 26-year-old Macedonian "wants to show the Germans and French the town as it really is, with both the good and the bad sides". Lois, from Lyon, is delighted. Inken also enjoys the customised tour of the town: "It's the perfect way to get a true picture of the town. And if someone wants to know something, they just have to ask Srgjan." Such as, for example, why the death notices are not published in a newspaper, as they are in Germany, but posted up at traffic lights all over town. "They are death notices for Slavic Macedonians. It's an Orthodox custom. Albanians are Muslims; they have different rites," explains Srgjan. While having lunch in a bistro where Srgjan's parents are regular customers, the trilingual group thinks about how to stage it... and discovers that comparing different viewpoints can also be very productive. Not like in the post-war years, when each side laid down its version of history as absolute truth. Srgjan's ideas for staging the rally results are different to those of Inken, the German music student. Jacqueline, for her part, sees things from yet another angle. She may be German, but she has been living in Tetovo for some months now, where she is doing her alternative civilian service at LOJA. Everyone shares their point of view and the patchwork of ideas gradually takes shape.

In another group, Kreshnik immerses himself in the German and French conversations going on around him and tries to make sense of them. When he wants to talk to his new friends, he prefers to speak English, because the others don't speak Albanian and it's just easier for him. But he "loves to hear people speaking French. It sounds like music." He's familiar with Germany: he has relatives there. "I've already been there, but I'd like to go back to learn the language and get to know some more Germans." The Germans he has met here during the project may have something to do with that: he says they're "cool". In Tetovo, Kreshnik is not the only one to have dreams of Western Europe. Just as the French and the Germans live side by side within the EU, the Albanians and the Slavic Macedonians live together in the same country. Many people in Tetovo think that, if Macedonia joined the EU, it would have a very positive effect on relations between the country's different ethnic groups. The way the French and the Germans – said to be sworn enemies – managed to put their conflict behind them last century thanks to a common commitment to building the European Union holds great promise for the Balkans, where young people today want to overcome the ethnic tensions that are still running strong. Guxim, Srgjan, Kreshnik and the others have already achieved that goal – in Lyon, Berlin and Tetovo. •



The initiative in Southeast Europe enabled the accomplishment of many projects thanks to the commitment of the FGYO's partners. Here are some examples:

Memory Lab

The Memory Lab Trans-European Exchange Platform brings together initiatives and people from the former Yugoslavian states, Western Europe and Central Europe, who are committed to building something out of what was a painful past. The platform was developed in 2010 by the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (Sarajevo), Documenta – Center for Dealing with the Past (Zagreb), the Centre Malraux (Sarajevo) and the FGYO. It has a many-sided objective: to bridge the gap between the former Yugoslavian countries, and with the rest of Europe; to foster a permanent, ongoing exchange of experience and knowledge in the effort to preserve remembrance; and to help build a culture of remembrance and a true, European-wide civil society.



The exchanges within the Memory Lab platform revolve around an annual study trip and workshop, which are attended by about 40 representatives of memorials, museums and NGOs. These events were held in Sarajevo in 2010, in Prijedor and Donja Gradina (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Jasenovac and Vukovar (Croatia) in 2011, in Péronne, Paris and Oradour (France) in 2012, in Berlin, Ravensbruck and Frankfurt on the Oder (Germany) in 2013, and in Pristina (Kosovo), Skopje and Tetovo (Macedonia) in 2014. The sixth edition is scheduled in Belgium in October 2015.

This cooperation has yielded many new bilateral or multilateral activities involving the various Memory Lab partners. One example is the FGYO's cycle of seminars for students on "war crimes and war crime trials". Find out more: www.memorylab-europe.eu

Nicolas Moll
Centre Malraux, Sarajevo

War crimes and war crime trials in Europe



The FGYO seminar cycle on "War crimes and war crime trials in Europe" took place in three phases from June 2012 to March 2014. It was designed and developed by four organisations that worked together as part of the Memory Lab platform: the Max Mannheimer Studienzentrums (Dachau), the Direction régionale de la jeunesse, des sports et de la cohésion sociale (Limoges), the Agency for Local Democracy from Osijek (Croatia), and the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (Serbia). Students in history, political science and law from France, Germany, Croatia and Serbia analysed and discussed the role of war crime trials and the political, social and legal issues at stake.

The seminars focused on how to manage the war crimes associated with the World War II and the conflict that led to the break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, and their legal resolution. Visits were organised to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague, the Memorium Nuremberg Trials, the Shoah Memorial in Paris, and the War Crimes Chamber of the Belgrade District Court. The programme also included interviews with historians, legal experts and representatives of NGOs whose work relates to war crimes and bringing war criminals to justice.

Another cycle of seminars on this theme will begin in autumn 2015, this time with students from France, Germany, Serbia and Kosovo.

Nicolas Moll
Centre Malraux, Sarajevo

Balkan Multimedia

The Balkan Multimedia project was established by the FGYO in cooperation with the Electronic Media School in Potsdam and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Berlin for young journalists from France, Germany and Southeast Europe. During the seminars held in Berlin, Potsdam and Southeast European countries, young journalists from the print press, radio and television receive in-depth training in multimedia journalism working methods and an extensive introduction to intercultural communication. It is an opportunity to learn more about the other countries involved in the project. The experience of a joint intercultural learning process will also help



them build their network of personal and professional acquaintances.

Recently, 13 young journalists spent four weeks in Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia doing research into freedom of the press. On-site, they recorded people calling for freedom of the press in countries where freedom of the press and freedom of speech are still heavily stifled. The multimedia platform Voice of the Balkans (www.voiceofthebalkans.com) went live in mid-December 2014.

The media play a prime role in rebuilding and stabilising civil society in the countries and regions of the Balkans. Solid basic training is vital for high-quality, independent journalism, which, in turn, contributes to the spread of democracy and the birth of a pluralistic society.

During the inaugural edition of the project in 2012, the participants focused on minorities in the Balkans. Find out more here: www.facethebalkans.com.

Interviews on youth exchanges with Serbia, Albania and Kosovo

On 19 and 20 February 2015, the FGYO's Secretaries-General, Béatrice Angrand and Markus Ingenlath, met with government representatives in Belgrade, Pristina and Tirana to discuss the foundations and objectives of youth exchanges. The Serbian Prime Minister, Aleksander Vučić, and the ministers of the neighbouring states, including the Albanian Prime Minister, Edi Rama, talked about what they expected from a cross-border dialogue between youths, which could take the form of a Secretariat for Youth Exchanges in the Balkans. This way, more peaceful ties could be developed and the deeply-rooted prejudice and resentment should gradually be shaken. The Secretaries-General have stressed the importance of civil society in creating a future regional youth organisation, which would operate on permanent funding and independently of government leanings.

Isa Mustafa, Prime Minister of Kosovo, inquired about the FGYO's activities and missions since its inception and since the beginning of its initiative in Southeast Europe. All of the parties agreed on the importance of regional youth exchanges and on the chances they give to democracy and peaceful development in the Western Balkans.

The Albanian Prime Minister, Edi Rama, said he intended to set up an inter-regional youth exchange organisation and meetings with Serbia would be scheduled shortly to this effect.

All of the political leaders have approached the FGYO to secure its support in the form of training, knowledge transfer and advice.

For the Secretaries-General, these discussions with government and civil society representatives underscore a keen awareness of the political significance of establishing a youth exchange institution to promote stability and peace in the region, and a very real political will to agree on tangible measures. Now it remains to decide how such an institution would operate, and its terms of reference. The FGYO will provide ongoing advice and support for passing on practical, easy-to-apply approaches.

Cultural melting pot

The Young Thinkers is a group of 20 keen students from France, Germany, Macedo-

nia, Kosovo, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The group's objective is to organise projects for and with young people, so that together they can help their respective countries better understand each other, cooperate more fully and form closer social and political ties. In the long term, the goal is to build a bridge between the Balkans region and the European Union, and more specifically France and Germany.

The hope is that mixing young people from different nationalities and ethnic backgrounds will generate an international dialogue in favour of keeping the peace, to combat Euroscepticism and xenophobia. The strength of the group lies in the cultural and academic diversity of its members.

The group is keen to carry out projects for young people and at the same time build their intercultural skills. It seeks to



foster regional cooperation and encourage a dialogue of peace between the young people and youth organisations in countries in the Western Balkans. As young adults, the Young Thinkers support the FGYO's initiative in Southeast Europe by contributing their expertise and their viewpoints.

Frank Morawietz
Projects Officer Southeast Europe for FGYO

"Memory and History" intercultural project

The idea of the "Memory and History" project stems from the commemoration of the outbreak of World War I: WW1 and the 1990s Balkans war link up France, Germany, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina. This project is designed for professional youth workers who are involved in leading youth meetings, and is broken down into several cycles.

The first cycle will take place in France. The seminar will be on history as seen through the destiny of one man, using notes on everyday life in the trenches made by a cooper from the Aude département called Louis Barthas. The second cycle will take place in Berlin and be devoted to the notions of commemoration and remembrance. The seminar will focus on the transmission of memory, and the links between institutions and history.



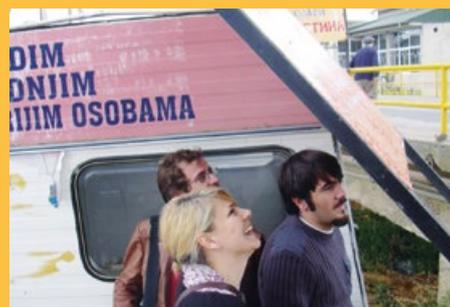
The third cycle will take place in Bosnia and Serbia. It will analyse the use of remembrance and past events for political purposes, by bringing out the relationship with the Balkans war. In addition to discussion and debate with political leaders on the role of history, the programme includes teaching workshops and methods for youth discussions on themes related to the past.

Rainhild Lenguin Hoppe
ROUDEL (Relais d'Ouverture et d'Échanges Culturels et Linguistiques)

Regional conference on youth exchanges in Sarajevo

To mark the 15th anniversary of the creation of the FGYO's initiative in Southeast Europe, a conference will be held from 7 to 12 June 2015 in Sarajevo. It will bring together the FGYO's partner organisations in France, Germany and Southeast Europe, along with the Ministries of Youth in the participating countries, which will play a decisive role in the creation of a youth office in the Balkans. They will discuss the situation of youth and the challenges represented by trilateral and multinational youth exchanges.

The participants will discuss the importance of international, regional and European youth gatherings with the representatives of the Ministries of Youth of the participating countries. Concrete projects and tried-and-tested methods will also be presented.



Florence Gabbe
Trinational Programme Projects Officer

"Thinking Europe – Youth academy for dialogue and cooperation"

When we use the word "Europe", what exactly are we talking about? What do young people in Serbia, Kosovo, France and Germany have in common? What is the future of the European Union? What role do young people have in that future? All of these subjects were covered by 30 young people from France, Germany, Serbia and Kosovo during the second edition of the Youth academy for dialogue and cooperation, entitled "Thinking Europe".



These gatherings took place in France, Germany, Serbia and Kosovo in 2014 and 2015. The young Europeans were able to talk to senior representatives of the various governments and NGOs, and exchange their ideas and experiences while working on documents published on the academy's website: www.daremoreurope.com.

Masa Milutinovic
Community Building Mitrovica, Kosovo

"Hatred is not an option" – One youth's experience

It was a very rewarding experience for me to be involved in the "Dare More Europe" project. I realised that there is no place for the "problems" in our region, and that stability and living in harmony with our neighbours really should be seen as priorities if our society is to move forward. We are the next generation and we must make an effort not to forget what happened. At the same time, we have to move on, build peace and become a member of the European family.

During the first phase in Berlin, the participants from Serbia and Kosovo were very interested in the example of the Franco-German relationship. How had two countries that had been at war with each other been able to become partners with a decisive role to play in EU policy-making?

The direct result of the 1999 war in Kosovo had been to abruptly cut off communication between Albanians and Serbs, especially in my home town of Mitrovica, where, even when the conflict was over, there was still unrest. The FGYO's exchange programme

helped me change the way I thought about this issue. Thanks to the interaction with the other French, German, Serbian and Croatian participants, we listened to each other and we tried to look at the events from every angle. We made the effort to take other people's problems into consideration, even if, in the end, we sometimes came to the same conclusion that we didn't agree. This was particularly true for the sensitive issues of Mitrovica and Belgrade. We also tried to talk about the fact that the war had changed our life: we had lost loved ones, had our homes destroyed, or missed opportunities. Meeting each other and seeing each other face to face meant a lot to us. It helped us deal with these sensitive issues and combat prejudice and preconceptions.

Today I have a better understanding of the importance of strengthening the cohesion of Kosovo society. It's not easy to face your past. In the end, we concluded that "hatred is not an option". We cannot go back in time and erase the conflict between Serbs and Albanians, but we can make the effort to live together and, in so doing, help build a better society. The aim is to commit to a future in Europe and a European identity.

Selvici Kurti,
Mitrovica, Kosovo

Gathering of young French, German and Serbian people on the topic of nursing

The projects conducted jointly by Europa-Direkt e.V. and the French association Gwennili combine vocational training and the examination of social issues. Thanks to the participation of Volonterski centar Vojvodine, the Serbian partner from Novi Sad, these two associations organised an exchange for young people either working or training in the healthcare and nursing sectors.

At a preparatory meeting held in spring 2014 in Brittany, representatives from the associations met the teachers from three nursing schools in the participating countries. Five months later, 40 project participants gathered for a week in France. Right from the beginning, the linguistic and other activities helped create a strong group dynamic.

It is impossible to learn a foreign language in one week and a gathering such as this could never aim to do so. The real benefits to be gained from a gathering of young people are to be found elsewhere: reaching out to other people while respecting their language, their culture, their specific features and also what they have in common. Meeting another person eases mutual understanding and, even if some lack of un-

derstanding persists, the two people can build a dialogue. The trilingual team uses this sharing and dialogue to question the other person and challenge themselves. It helps them get to know their neighbour and learn about everyday life and the world of work in the two partner countries. The young people usually learn more about themselves, too, through these exchanges.

The gathering gave participants the opportunity to explore a variety of topics, such as comparing the training systems, or becoming aware of sensitive cultural issues in the field of nursing care. For instance, they thought about how to approach a patient from a different cultural background, who speaks a foreign language or who doesn't have the same degree of modesty as they do. The city of Novi Sad in Serbia is home to a large Hungarian minority and the nursing school offers bilingual training in Serbian and Hungarian. Role-play exercises helped the participants come to grips with this topic. The discussions in three languages were a real challenge, even for the interpreters, but they were also very interesting and informative! Everyone was able to speak in their native language and, as is typical in trilateral meetings, a great diversity of opinions emerged and helped to broaden the debate.

After the second phase in Germany in May, a third and final week-long gathering will be held in Serbia. We hope this project will teach us to think in a European spirit, act together, and defend everyone's interests.



Michael Schill,
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