



# **MIND THE GAP:** **Improving the Policy Impact of OSF Alumni Network in the Western Balkans**

**Dates:** June 8 and 9, 2017

**Venue:** Hotel Park, Njegoseva 2, Belgrade, Serbia



Regional Alumni Conference

**MIND** **the** **GAP**

Bridging Research and Policy Development  
in European Integration of the Balkans



For more than 15 years the Western Balkan region is a playground for multiple complex transformational processes. The democratic and economic transition are deeply intertwined with the EU accession process. However, there is a necessity to reinvigorate the enlargement agenda and amplify the efforts for deeper engagement of both the EU and the countries of the region in the process. The lack of evidence-based policy debate on reforms within EU accession process is apparent, both on national and regional levels. Political, rather than policy approach tends to prevail in decision-making processes and as such it diminishes positive impacts of EU integration process in long term perspective.

In such context the Belgrade Open School aims **to support development of the Western Balkan region founded in evidence-based policy making and regional cooperation**. The Berlin Process (2014-2020), launched in 2014, is envisaged as an opportunity to streamline the EU accession agenda of Western Balkan countries towards more inclusive and evidence-based policy dialogue on key developmental political issues.

Launched by five EU Member States under the lead of Germany, the Berlin Process has an aim to reinvigorate political commitment to the enlargement of the European Union towards the Western Balkans. The Berlin Process is a window of opportunity for strengthening pluralistic societies and advance engagement and impact of non-state actors in decision making processes.

**Mind the Gap: Improving the Policy Impact of OSF Alumni Network in the Western Balkans** conference aims to engage the potentials of Open Society Foundations Alumni Network (OSF Alumni) in developing and advocating policy solutions and answering to policy challenges, while the Berlin Process provides a concrete context for such engagement. The OSF Alumni accumulates a valuable pull of knowledge and expertise which could be utilized to impact policy areas which are recognized by the Berlin Process Agenda.

The conference strives to bridge the gap between policy and academia, aiming towards evidence-based policy solutions and connecting decision-makers with policy-practitioners and scientists. Moreover, the conference will contribute to discussion on challenges detected by the Berlin Process and at the same time support the establishment of a strong policy advocacy community among the OSF Alumni Network. Regional OSF alumni teams will deliver presentations of research papers produced during the project on three topics: (1) youth cooperation, (2) migration and borders and (3) energy, climate, environment protection.

The conference is the second regional conference of the Open Society Foundations Scholarship Programs alumni from the Western Balkans. It is organised by the Belgrade Open School, educational advising centre of the Open Society Foundations Scholarship Programs in Serbia.

#### **Aim of the event:**

To support development of the Western Balkans region founded in evidence-based policy making and regional cooperation.

#### **Objectives of the event are:**

- To increase the impact of Alumni Network of the Open Society Foundations in answering to policy challenges within the EU integration of the Western Balkan region
- To promote the role of the educational advising centres from the Western Balkans as facilitator of policy potentials of the OSF Alumni Network and interlocutor between OSF Alumni Network and decision makers

**Working language of the conference is English.**

# AGENDA

## DAY 1 Conference Day Thursday, June 8

**09:30 - 10:00** Registration of participants

**10:00 - 10:30** Welcoming remarks – OSF Alumni network in the Western Balkans

### Speakers:

**Brunilda Bakshevani**

Open Society Foundation for Albania

**Ana Stevanovic**

Academic Counselling , Belgrade Open School

**Vladimir Pavlovic**

Policy Coordinator, Belgrade Open School

Capacity building program: Developing effective strategies and communication tools for policy advocacy

**10:30 - 11:30** Building a framework for advocacy planning – why is communication important for your research?

**11:30 - 12:00** Coffee break

**12:00 - 13:00** Policy brief as a key communication research tool

**13:00 - 14:00** Advocacy from the day one – how to organize an advocacy campaign?

### Trainers:

**Stevan Vujasinovic**

Communication Policy Researcher, United Nations Development Programme

**Vladimir Pavlovic**

Policy Coordinator, Belgrade Open School

### Session description:

*Good communication framework for interacting with decision makers and stakeholders within policy advocacy campaigns is a necessary precondition for successfully advocating recommendations stemming from research. Policy papers are not the products which mark the end of research, but rather tools which initiate discussion on the possible solutions for the policy problem in question. This is why policy researchers should be good communicators of their researches as well. An overview of available communication tools and advocacy campaign process will be discussed, as well as their applicability in Western Balkan region.*

**14:00 - 15:00** Lunch break

**15:00 - 17:00** Poster session - OSF alumni research teams

### Session description:

*Six alumni research teams will present research findings from their policy briefs to peer researchers gathered at the conference. Through interactive poster presentation, each group will choose to present the most important findings – striking facts from the research, as well as recommendations developed in brief. This session will be introduction and serve as preparation of the teams for presenting papers at panel discussion forum next day. Policy and thematic mentors will provide feedbacks and facilitate discussion.*

## DAY 2

### Conference Day

### Friday, June 9

**10:00 – 11:30**    **Debate: Is there a space for evidence - based research in Berlin Process**

**Speakers:**

**Kristina Milosavljevic**

Regional Initiatives Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Serbia

**Igor Bandovic**

European Fund for the Balkans

**Marko Kmezc**

Centre for Southeast European Studies at the University of Graz, Austria

**Marija Bulat**

Member of the Working Group Regional Youth Cooperation Office

**Moderator:**

**Vladimir Pavlovic**

Belgrade Open School

**Session description:**

*The Berlin Process is envisaged as an opportunity to streamline the EU accession agenda of Western Balkan countries towards more inclusive and evidence-based policy dialogue on key developmental political issues. This session is dedicated to role and contribution of the civil society and academic community to inclusive, transparent and evidence-based decision making among the Berlin Process.*

**11:30 – 12:00**    Coffee break

**12:00 – 13:00**    **Panel discussion 1: OSF alumni as policy advisors in Berlin Process**

**Moderator:**

**Milica Skiljevic**

Youth Representative of Serbia in the Governing Board of RYCO, Belgrade Open School

- *From “brain gain” to “brain circulation” policy approach: How to bridge in sustainable way the Albanian scientific diaspora with the country of origin*

**Presenter: Geron Kamberi**, Sussex European Institute University of Sussex, UK

Albania is heavily affected by the large immigration waves after falling down the communist regime and the Brain drain is one the worst impact of such phenomena. Although Albania experienced the six year Brain Gain programme (2006-2011) such intervention did not always meet the expectation to be comprehensive and beneficial in the long run. A new policy approach from “Brain gain” to “Brain circulation” may prove to be more sustainable in long – term since scientific diaspora members who are already working for the public administration or scientific institutions in their host countries may be invited to contribute in Albania as visiting-experts or visiting-researchers.

- *Youth: WB6 Reconciliation through Youth Employment and Regional Cooperation*

**Presenter: Mimoza Telaku**, PhD, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel

Divided societies in the Western Balkans, high rates of unemployment among young people and brain drain are the main problems that this paper is dealing with. These problems can be solved by giving bigger responsibilities and more important role to the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO). This will foster cooperation among groups in different countries, reduce the unemployment rate among young people, and reduce hostilities between groups in conflict.

**13:00 – 14:00** Lunch break

**14:00 – 14:30** **Panel discussion 2: OSF alumni as policy advisors in Berlin Process**

**Moderator:**

**Stevan Petrovic**

Program for Energy, Climate and Environment, Belgrade Open School

- *Environment: Agricultural policy and environmental protection in Albania*

**Presenter: Entela Kallamata**, Urban Research Institute, Albania

Progress in biomass renewable energy from agriculture and organic farming in Albania is at a low level due to low incomes and lack of economies of scale in the agriculture sector. This results in slow growth rate in agriculture in this country, which is the main problem highlighted by this paper. In addition to this, current policies and measures of the agricultural sector and of the energy sector are not appropriate for resolving above mentioned problems. In order to deal with this problem, it is necessary to include professional support at the ground level in the policy in both sectors, in order to encourage large-scale undertakings and promote green growth agenda.

**14:30 – 16:00** **Panel discussion 3: OSF alumni as policy advisors in Berlin Process**

**Moderator:**

**Mirko Dautovic**

International Relations and Middle East Expert

- *Migration Crisis and Western Balkan Response: A crave for functional approach!*

**Presenter: Nina Brankovic**, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Political Science, University Zagreb, Croatia

The key issue that this paper addresses is the lack of joint approach of Western Balkan countries toward refugee crisis challenges that could cause economic problems in each country and destabilization of the whole region. The paper is directly related to the cooperation and development of Western Balkan countries as it measures their level of political collaboration in managing a long-term crisis, which has not only humanitarian aspects, but is closely tied to multitude of security, economic and cultural policies and practices.

- *The EU consistency imperative: Addressing Nationalistic and Xenophobic Sentiments in the Western Balkans Related to the Refugee Crisis and Migration*

**Presenter: Natasha Stamenkovikj**, PhD researcher and lecturer, Tilburg University, Netherlands

The main problem that this paper is dealing with is inconsistency of Western Balkan (WB) countries in responding to the refugee crisis. Support or lack of support of the EU to different countries in Western Balkans causes inconsistency of WB countries in responding to the refugee crisis, which is the main problem this paper is dealing with. The refugee crisis has put WB countries on the spot, testing their readiness for regional cooperation and as such their readiness for the EU future. In the light of the crisis, it was noted that the refugee crisis raised various nationalistic and xenophobic sentiments on one side, but also forced countries to react to the crisis through the provision of aid or public services.

- *Improvement of the status and situation of migrants remaining in Serbia and Macedonia*

**Presenter: Griselda Qosja**, Max Planck Institute for Comparative and International Private Law, Germany

Main problem that this paper is dealing with is the fact that The Common European Asylum System (CEAS) had not foreseen the importance of the Western Balkans, which de facto became one of the crucial factors in managing the crisis via what became known as the Balkan route. By ignoring the regional dimension of the problem and focusing only on the political borders of the EU, the CEAS failed to offer a choice that tackled the problem comprehensively throughout the continent, leaving much to the discretion of National Governments.