



The New Democratic Wo/Men of the Western Balkans

FINAL NARRATIVE REPORT

December 2021.

The aim of the project was to increase the interest of young people in democratic processes and how they can contribute to their community. In our previous work with the young people, we had often heard that they had solutions and ideas but those remained unheard of. As initially suggested, young people are passionate about actual political and social issues, but this does not necessarily transform into votes. The project wanted to give the youth in BiH, Montenegro and North Macedonia a voice and platform to propose their solutions to fictitious, yet real issues. In order not to remove the mental restrictions given by real countries, the youth developed their own countries based on characteristics given by the mentors. The characteristics resembled the six Western Balkan countries.

>> Specific results

Increased interest of young people from project countries in participation in decision-making and democratic processes.

The setup of project activities aims to popularize democratic processes among youth and to motivate them to take an active part in decision-making in their societies. The project also aims at sharing knowledge about democratic processes and thus raising understanding among young people in the order they are more capable of making qualified political decisions based on a better understanding of their needs as citizens of project countries.

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Within the project, the participants developed their fictitious countries, and stemming from the lectures during the workshops, they learned how to govern a country which has helped them better understand the functioning of current democracies. The participants learned not only about democratic processes and the importance of active participation in them but also about leadership, project management, human rights, the role of civil society, media, business sector, and their role within a democratic society. The participants are now better equipped to understand the processes around them and use the knowledge and the skills. 106 young people who participated in this project are now better prepared to comprehend the democratic processes in their real countries and are ready to participate in solution-making and democratic processes in their communities. The participants have been taught about the importance of European integration and that no country exists in a political vacuum and that the processes on domestic turf are closely connected to international happenings.

>> First International Online Meeting

19/02/2021–21/02/2021

During the workshop, 50 young people participated in the event from BiH, Montenegro, and North Macedonia, and learned about the following topics: Pillars of Democracy; Democratic challenges in multi-ethnic societies; Political polarisation as a threat to democracy; Legislation shaping the business environment; Gender-based politics; Division of powers – comparative politics; Lobbying I; Lobbying II – a case study on international cooperation in lobbying (education). The participants also distributed an outline of 6 fictional countries with the basic characteristics.

The partners from Montenegro and North Macedonia coordinated the participants' participation at the event. All organizations provided relevant experts to cover the pre-agreed topics during the training. The strong point was a diversification of topics since the experts were from V4 and the WB.

>> Participants' teamwork - 2nd national rounds

22/02/2021–22/04/2021

Under the online mentorship of mentors from all the partner organizations, the teams worked on two tasks: first, they invented their fictional countries based on the characteristics given by the project consortium. The focus was on the diversity of the roles within a state, such as government, political opposition, civil sector, media, business sector, etc. Once they had developed their countries, the participants were given a second task which they should solve from the perspective of their own country.

As a result, we had 17 fictional countries (6 prototypes) that were governed by young people. The participants elaborated the countries' constitution, flag, anthem, the position of different actors in great detail.

The partners from all organizations provided a mentor to guide the participants. The strong point was a diversification of topics since the experts were from V4 and the WB, as well as that no expert was mentoring the participants from his/her country. Moreover, the mentors shared their experiences from the sessions with groups among each other and consulted further with each other to request similar results from each team. The mentoring was done via individually scheduled Zoom meetings between the mentor and group within a set timeframe.

>> 2nd International Online Meeting

07/05/2021–09/05/2021

During the first part of the workshop, the participants covered the following topics: 1. Human rights and human wrongs, 2. The civil sector as a watchdog of democracy, 3. Public speaking, rhetorics, and persuasion in elections, 4. Innovative public management, 5. Tools for inclusive decision-making, 6. Guide to selling your ideas, 7. Public finances and the state budget. During the workshop, the participants also had online negotiations from the perspective of their fictitious countries and had to negotiate the international financial help for "Ereb" communities.

The event and each lecture were shared at HIA BiH Facebook profile: <https://www.facebook.com/hiabih> and Twitter profile as well as partner organizations' social media accounts: ALFA Centar: <https://www.facebook.com/alfacentarniksic> and <https://twitter.com/ALFACentarNK> Euro-Atlantic Council of Macedonia: <https://www.facebook.com/EACMacedonia> and https://twitter.com/ATA_Macedonia Strategic Analysis: <https://www.facebook.com/StrategicAnalysisSK> and <https://twitter.com/StratAnalysisSK>

The partners from Montenegro and North Macedonia coordinated the participants' participation at the event. All organizations provided relevant experts. The strong point was a diversification of topics since the experts were from V4 and the WB.

>> Participants' teamwork - 3rd national rounds

10/05/2021–10/05/2021

During their last national round, the participants solved the issue of pandemics from the point of view of their fictitious countries. Under the mentorship from the partner organizations, the participants considered a real-life event to which they could provide solutions from their position. It provided the project consortium with a unique insight into the solutions to the current pandemics that the young people proposed. Also, the final national round was preparation for the final simulation to which only the selected team representatives were invited.

The solutions to the pandemic from the perspective of fictitious governments were an internal part of the project and were not public. However, the project consortium used them as a basis for the final in-person workshop and meeting with the stakeholders in Sarajevo (July 2021).

The partners from all organizations provided a mentor to guide the participants. The strong point was a diversification of topics since the experts were from V4 and the WB, as well as that no expert was mentoring the participants from his/her country.

>> Third international Online Meeting

10/05/2021–10/05/2021

During the last workshop, the participants learned about the following topics: 1. Fake news and disinformation, 2. Situational analysis, 3. Active listening, 4. Building a stakeholdersmap, 5. People and event management, 6. Argumentation, and 7. NGOs and CSOs project management. One part of the workshop was dedicated to a simulation of negotiations during which the participants had to negotiate a common strategy of all their countries to the international community. The participants learned how to negotiate, about the practice of shadow diplomacy. The final meeting included a meeting with the stakeholders where the participants had an opportunity to present and discuss their ideas with the representatives of embassies, international organizations, the NGO sector, and foreign youth activists.

The event was streamed live on Zoom, other members of national teams were able to join the event online. Information about the event was published on the webpage of the leading organization as well as partners and was promoted via social media.

The lead organization coordinated the overall organization of the event in the country - especially the logistics and communication with local suppliers of services. Partners from MKD as well as MNE provided young participants selected from national teams and coordinated the logistics and necessary PCR testing. All three partners as well as V4 partners provided experts who acted as lecturers and facilitators of simulation.

>> The achieved results and insights

The project has shown a great interest of young people in the democratic and social processes surrounding them. This can be demonstrated in a high number of applications and high turnout for the project when we had 106 participants overall. The participants mainly valued the simulations of negotiations and an opportunity to design their fictitious countries based on given characteristics from the mentors. They appreciated having been able to govern their countries and represent them on both national and international levels. We aim to build on this project in our future projects, mainly to keep its interactive element. International experts outside of the Western Balkans and their peers from other Balkan countries represented an added value of the project. The participants were confronted with new insights into already existing issues and could benefit from the shared experience of similar countries, such as Visegrad countries. Due to Covid-19 pandemics, young people have lost contact with their peers and become more enshrined in their homes. As already suggested, we would like to keep physical meetings in the projects if possible in the future. Another element that we would like to build on is the international cooperation among the project partners and their interaction with the participants. During the project implementation, we realized that there is a gap in projects aimed at young professionals and leaders in the Western Balkans. Another important result of this project is a network of young active participants that we and the partner organisation can include in our future work and projects.

To grow up a new generation of democratically sensitive young people in the project countries, we estimate that continuous work is needed. Formal education lacks the connection to the practice, and informal education can step in here. Young people need expert lectures with practical exercises to better illustrate any given topic. For instance, we received the best feedback to the lessons dealing with project management, planning, or presenting ideas. Apart from listening, they also welcome active participation with a platform to present their ideas and learn the soft skills of public speaking, negotiations, or communication. As any other organization in the Western Balkans, we are also struggling with brain drain. Many active young people have already left or plan to leave the country, and when designing future projects, it is always finding a balance between equipping them with the skills to succeed abroad and inspiring them to stay in their home countries. In our wide alumni network, we see many of our alumni go study and work abroad, yet they return. In our view, it is necessary to keep working with the youth and the marginalized communities, to listen to their ideas and feedback, and to educate them to become more engaged citizens who will be able to advocate for change in their communities.