



REGIONAL YOUTH COOPERATION OFFICE – RYCO

**BIANNUAL REPORT:
JANUARY – JUNE
2018**

Tirana, June 2018

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* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

1. Summary

This Report presents a comprehensive overview of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office's (RYCO) activities covering the period from January till June 2018.

Beside the fact that 2017 was evaluated as year of administrative set-up and development of the programming and internal procedures, the beginning of 2018 for RYCO Head Office was marked with a significant support and commitment from the Host Government. The Council of Ministers of Albania on 27 December 2017, with decision number 816, granted RYCO Head Office new premises. Another good signal is the officially communicated preparedness of the Albanian Government to sign the Host Country Agreement, process expected to be realized later this year.

RYCO continued to dedicate special focus in obtaining recognition from relevant stakeholders in the region and across Europe. The circumstances are often additionally complicated, taking into account huge expectations from the Western European partners, including European Commission, as well as youth sector in the region, and finally, sensitive political relations in the Western Balkans.

The RYCO logo and slogan proved to be an integral part of the organization's visual identity. Energy, creativity and innovation are invested in RYCO visibility, by making RYCO official webpage, as well as the official social media accounts proper and successful communication channels.

In terms of building the financial stability, additional efforts were made in fundraising activities. Significant number of relevant partner organizations and institutions, such as European Commission, Council of Europe, Governments of France and Germany, Franco-German Youth Office - OFAJ, Balkan Trust for Democracy, Youth Initiative for Human Rights - YIHR, PeaceNexus Foundation, OSCE Missions in the region, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and many others, are supporting Secretariat's work through activities mainly focused on RYCO's capacity building, promotion, political recognition and investment in understanding Secretariat's role. In parallel, these activities enabled RYCO Staff to develop the Strategic Plan 2019-2022.

2. Operations

2.1 *RYCO Head Office premises*

The Council of Ministers of Albania on 27 December 2017, with decision number 816, granted RYCO Head Office new premises, located in the embassies' zone in Tirana. During January, serious preparations were undertaken to adapt, reallocate and enable working conditions. The institutions in charge, Councils of Ministers – Directorate for General Affairs and the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Directory for Services of Diplomatic Missions managed to procure and enable all necessary standards, so that the Head Office continued the activities and its operational work from February 2018 in the new premises.

As predicted by Article 3, paragraph 3 of the RYCO Statute, the Host Contracting Party Government provided the Secretariat Head Office, free of charge and without effect on the RYCO budget and contributions, the premises and utility services as deemed necessary for the effective and efficient performance of the duties of RYCO. The premises are located in Skenderbej Street, building 8, entry 2, first floor, with a surface of 231m².

2.2. *RYCO Local Branch Offices premises in Macedonia and Serbia*

The setup of the premises of the RYCO Local Branch Office in Macedonia is in process. A lot of direct communication with the Macedonian Agency of Youth and Sport has been carried out. The tendering procedure for renting the premises in Skopje was launched in February 2018, and the location is now being selected. Renovation period will follow, after which inauguration will be organized later this year.

On 1 June 2018, the Ministry of Youth and Sport of Serbia, officially informed RYCO that for the necessities of the RYCO Local Branch Office in Serbia, business premises were assigned in Belgrade, consisting of 77.24m² and partially equipped. In the forthcoming period, the handover will be carried out, after which inauguration will be organized later this year.

2.3 *Financial sustainability*

Secretariat has prepared financial information regarding Budget 2018. When it comes to the RYCO financial sustainability, an official request for disbursement of contributions was sent to each Contracting Party on 27 December 2017. The first contribution was disbursed by Bosnia and Herzegovina on 29 January 2018, followed by Montenegro and Serbia on 15 March 2018, while Macedonia performed the disbursement on 29 March 2018. The contribution from Kosovo was received on 16 April 2018, while Albania announced execution of the contribution in June 2018 through the National Youth Service from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport.

Another persisting challenge that Secretariat is still dealing with is the EU grant for 2017 estimated up to 500.000 euro. The challenge primarily emanates from the financial decision of the EC to grant RYCO with the above-mentioned amount, provided that it represents maximum of 25% of the overall budget of the project proposal. Therefore, in order to be able to obtain this amount, RYCO has to present the budget of 2 million eur, out of which its contribution is 1,5 million eur consisting of activity costs. This action will cover components of the RYCO activity budget in 2018, 2019 and 2020.

The EU grant has still not been disbursed on the RYCO bank account and it is expected to be executed upon the completion of Description of Action and other application documents by September 2018. As a result of discussions with EC DG NEAR representatives, in March 2018, it was decided to adapt the project proposal to the needs of RYCO by incorporating in the project proposal programmatic components other than Open Calls for proposals, such as capacity building of organizers of youth exchanges and other relevant stakeholders. Moreover, taking into account the workload of currently employed RYCO staff, it was agreed that staff needed for the implementation of the Project will be hired through the project. The process of completing of the project proposal is in its final phases. As soon as 2017 grant is contracted, negotiations on EU grant 2018 will be opened.

2.4 Internal processes

RYCO is registered as a public entity, according to the Registration Certificate, issued by the Ministry of Finance of Albania, Directorate for General Taxation of 11 July 2017. According to letter number 10110, issued on 03 July 2017 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Albania, Directorate of the State Protocol, RYCO diplomatic privileges and immunities are declared. That fact implies an obligation for RYCO, as a public entity, to declare and cover personal income tax for the local Head Office staff members (3 in total: Finance and Administration Officer, Finance and Administration Assistant and Local Branch Officer for Albania). On 09 March 2018, RYCO was re-registered in front of the Ministry of Finance of Albania, Directorate for General Taxation, due to the changing of the address of the Head Office. In the same time, the legal entity was preregistered from a public, into diplomatic mission.

On the other hand, RYCO official bank account is domiciled in Raiffeisen Bank Albania, which cooperation is satisfactory from a daily collaboration point of view. When it comes to the implied rates of bank fees, correlated with the bank transfers outside of Albania, RYCO will consider eventual change of the bank in 2018.

On the 6th meeting held in Sarajevo, on 13 March 2018, RYCO Governing Board invited RYCO Head Office Host Contracting Party, in cooperation with RYCO Secretariat, to finalize the Host Country Agreement, and as soon as possible, to have it signed. On 12 June 2018, the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Republic of Albania, officially communicated the Host Country Agreement. This document regulates legal personality of RYCO, immunities and privileges of

premises and of the international staff, exemption from duties and taxes, disposal of funds, the locally recruited staff and social security, as well as contracted experts.

As for the current status, international RYCO Head Office staff members, including Deputy Secretary General (4 in total: Program Officer, Communication Officer, Office Manager and Deputy Secretary General), are not obliged to apply for working permits. As for their status residence status in front of the Ministry of Interior - Office for Migration in Tirana, it was regulated with extended residence permits till November 2018, after which period, they will be obliged to reapply for new residence permits, with a 2 years validity period.

It is necessary to add in this chapter that one of the main priorities of RYCO still remains to utilize best practices in the internal procedures domain, and invest capacities to develop solid Staff Regulation, revise contracts of employment, and Travel Rules and Procedures. Beside the fact that the existing RYCO human resource management documents embody only the fundamental conditions of service, duties, obligations and rights of Secretariat staff members, they serve as a base to further set out the applicable principles of personnel policy, recruitment, evaluation and administration of RYCO staff. For that reason, in the second half of 2018, RYCO will canalize the support provided from the partners (PeaseNexus more precisely), to reach relevant expertise and upgrade the existing internal documents to a level to reflect and equally meet the regional context with regard the labour legislation in the Western Balkans, as well as the reality of RYCO daily activities.

2.5 External audit

Following the Governing Board decision, brought on the 6th meeting, held on 13 March 2018 in Sarajevo, Price Waterhouse Coopers Albania was approved as the company to perform expenditure verification and institutional auditing of RYCO. In order to initiate the process, RYCO signed the contract with the company on 14 June 2018 with the validity of 4200 eur, which defines the start of the external audit process starting on 1 July 2018 in RYCO Head Office in Tirana, and will last for one calendar month. The audited period will be the 2017 fiscal year, and will be performed by a local team, with national and international experience.

This approach is designed to front-end load evaluation of key issues and is structured in a manner to free up finance function and resolve all key judgment issues.

This will also include financial statement disclosure compliance, using RYCO process documentation to perform walkthroughs of transactions, from initiation to entry in the general ledger. This will allow the evaluation of the controls from a design and operational effectiveness prospective. Expected outcome is the Price Waterhouse Coopers opinion about the financial statements, in the direction of presenting true and fair view of financial performance of the organization, and that the same are free of material misstatement. At the same time, the company will give recommendations to the RYCO management in the areas that they consider worth improving, and for which RYCO would have to worked on until the upcoming year.

2.6 RYCO Staff capacity building activity

Bearing in mind the fact that RYCO staff is composed of personnel with various professional and geographical backgrounds, it was considered as necessary to organize capacity building activities, focusing on different topics, following capacity building activity that was organized in the reporting period.

As prescribed by Article 48 of the RYCO Statute, all tendering procedures of the Secretariat will be based on the guidelines outlined in the latest available European Commission Procedures and Practical Guide (PRAG). Aiming to adequately implement the PRAG rules in the future, a tailored training on the rules for all Head Office staff was conducted in early February 2018. This training offered an overall objective to the staff to generally gain understanding on eligible and indicative actions, financial allocation, timelines, concept notes, evaluation procedures, as well as selection and awarding criteria. More in-depth steps on contracting, types of procurement and detailed correlated procedures were predicted for the finance and administrative staff members.

RYCO's work in this domain will be mainly focused on reviewing all areas of possible risks in implement contractual and tendering procedures and the know-how to accurately report to the Governing Board. In order to ensure compliance with the actual needs from one side, and real financial requirement from the other side, RYCO would require significant support from the Contracting Parties' expertise in developing its own financial rules and procedures.

After the training, the finance team is working in transferring all financial data in the accounting system. By using the accounting system, a lot of time will be saved, reports will be downloaded automatically, the financial information will be managed easily, and chances for errors will be reduced.

On 11 – 12 May 2018, RYCO organised the 4th staff retreat in partnership with PeaceNexus Foundation and the OSCE Mission in Montenegro. The workshop was held with 12 RYCO team members – the Secretary General, Deputy Secretary General, 4 Head Office staff, all 6 local branch officers LBOs – and facilitated by PeaceNexus. The first day of the retreat was dedicated to an "organisational check-up", to give RYCO's secretariat staff the space to express their views on RYCO's evolution so far, the current situation and the near future. The second day focused on a discussion of RYCO's draft strategy, followed by a joint planning exercise.

In addition, the accounting system training was held in the RYCO Head Office from 23 until 25 May 2018. During these days, the RYCO's finance team learned how the accounting system QuickBooks works and common terms and features are used. Also, they learned how to open balances, enter donors/projects vendors, perform editing of chart of accounts, setting up budgets, allocate expenses of a specific project etc.

2.7 RYCO First Advisory Board meeting

On its 6th meeting held in Sarajevo, on 13 March 2018, RYCO Governing Board formally appointed all nominated Advisory Board members. The very first RYCO Advisory Board meeting took place in Pristina, Kosovo, on 4 May 2018. Fourteen (14) members participated, out of 18 appointed. The role of the Advisory Board Members as allies is significant to improve the overall performance of RYCO. In order to meet such expectations of the RYCO secretariat, they explained the need of identifying the role by AB members itself.

The meeting was organized in four working sessions which resulted to be efficient in terms of producing very concrete advices by the members, in the context of further development of RYCO. The specificity of the Advisory Board members is the diversified and extensive experience in youth related issues from different perspectives, inside and outside of the region.

During the meeting, a very special attention was drawn on RYCO hierarchy structure, discussing how to ensure quality and transparency in decision making process, as well as the lack of mechanisms. A joint meeting between Advisory and Governing Board was proposed aiming to initiate communication between the structures. Recommendations for the next period was delivered, especially on members' engagement, how to take decisions, whether to nominate a coordination person, and to consider the need for further legal framework on clarifying the role of Advisory Board.

2.8 Cooperation and partnerships

During the first half of 2018, various meetings were realized with state institutions, foundations, think-thanks, international organizations, diplomatic missions and local and regional youth organizations in order to create a basis for future cooperation. As a result of these efforts, RYCO has put a strong emphasis in creating and consolidating long-lasting partnerships.

The **PeaceNexus Foundation** remains a concrete partner, supporting RYCO development for the second year. The PeaceNexus Foundation provided external expertise in drafting RYCO internal procedures, the project application for the EU grant, the first meeting of the Advisory Board, as well as general capacity building and organizational development of RYCO as intergovernmental institution. This support for the whole 2018 is estimated to 40 000 CHF, expressed through various activities.

RYCO recognizes the **Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe - OSCE** as one of the crucial partners. Therefore, the cooperation continued and intensified in 2018, through realization and planning of a large number of concrete activities, especially at the level of cooperation between the RYCO Local Branch Offices and the OSCE Field Missions. A special focus was given to the support and cooperation in the realization of the program for strengthening the capacities of the beneficiaries, those who are supported through the first Open Call, but also the ones who will apply for the RYCO support in the future to implement concrete projects.

Communication and cooperation is structured through more intensive communication with the OSCE Secretariat in Vienna.

As a result of the above-mentioned, **OSCE Field Operations** and RYCO local branch offices jointly promoted a Scholarship Programme for young people from the Western Balkans to attend the European Innovation Academy (EIA), one of the world's leading summer entrepreneurship programmes in Turin, Italy. Out of 1035 applications and 166 motivational videos received, 11 females and 7 males, aged 18 to 28 successfully completed the competitive process. It was a real quality learning opportunity offered to young people from the Western Balkans. It signals that the economic future of the region is in the hands of young generations, which duty to support their efforts and invest in their skills was also recognized by RYCO. This is only another way to do the best to empower young people and leverage their potential to be ambassadors of positive change in their own societies.

In late June, in partnership with the OSCE Presence in Albania and the Municipality of Tirana, RYCO will organize the second edition of the "*Youth Trail: Promoting OSCE values in the Western Balkans*". Thirty participants aged 18-24 from the Western Balkans will engage in a program that combines sessions on discussing human rights, youth engagement, gender equality, fight against corruption and countering violent extremism. The programme will also include simulations and outdoor activities. The Youth Trail is part of a series of activities organized by the OSCE Presence in Albania to support regional connectivity among young people as a means of promoting peace and security in the region.

RYCO started building partnership with the **Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)**. GIZ is committed to support RYCO by providing expertise in the field of finance and fundraising. Based on the decision deriving from the 6th meeting of RYCO Governing Board, RYCO submitted an application to GIZ for a CIM integrated expert on 12 June. The predicted job title and position which is expected to be filled is senior finance and grant manager. The recruitment procedure will be completely guided as a joint operation between the GIZ and the German Federal Employment Agency. Upon finalization, one or more suitable candidates will be proposed to RYCO.

The future expert will be granted a 24 month Head Office local employment working contract from RYCO, with an estimation starting date from October 2018. In addition to the local salary for the expert, predicted in RYCO Budget for 2018, of the amount of 500 eur on a monthly basis, with all taxes included, GIZ will pay the integrated expert a monthly subsidy, in order to raise the total income, to a customary European level. These funds, GIZ receives from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

One of the most significant of activities in cooperation with GIZ planned to be organized in 2018, is the Third Regional Youth Forum (RYF), which will be held in Novi Sad, Serbia, between the 29 June and 1 July. RYF is organised by the European Movement in Serbia - Local Branch Novi Sad, the European Fund for the Balkans, the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence, in partnership

with RYCO, supported by the Provincial Government of Vojvodina, the City of Novi Sad and the Regional Cooperation Council.

The Regional Youth Forum will bring together young opinionated leaders, action-oriented and socially active individuals from the WB6 in order to engage in discussions on salient topics and develop solutions, based on previous knowledge and active social participation. They will take part in debates and dialogues, and form models of lasting equanimity in the region for the future, through reconciliation, trust and cooperation. The conclusions of the RYF will be presented at the upcoming "Berlin Process" annual Summit in London in July, at the 8th edition of the Belgrade Security Forum, and the 2018 Young Bled Security Forum in September.

Furthermore, supported by GIZ, and in cooperation with the Chair for European Studies (FVC), University of Vienna, a possibility for a joint multiannual research project was explored. In order to support RYCO's objectives in the long-term, the necessity of 3 strands of research were identified, which range from scientific support and monitoring of RYCO projects, through researching potential participants and developing future formats and projects and perception of RYCO. In 2016, FVC has completed a research project which resulted in a publication *The Children of the Balkan Wars: Getting to Know a Crucial Generation for Europe*, which served as an inspiration for RYCO related research project.

In cooperation with **Crossborder Factory** and **Youth Initiative for Human Rights**, RYCO youth GB members participated in the first preparation meeting within the program: Supporting regional cooperation: Role of RYCO Governing board. This event took place in Berlin, from 16-19 June 2018. The main goal of the program is to empower the role of Youth Representatives in RYCO Governing Board as unified voice of the Western Balkan youth. In addition it aimed to identify the meaning of political thinking and acting, and how to really translate it into the concrete terms in RYCO, in order to improve the regional cooperation. On the other hand, this event is part of the continuity of the content of the joint seminar of youth representatives in the GB in Ljubljana and Trieste in summer 2017, which has contributed greatly to defining their role in the GB and facing structural challenges. This meeting was a unique opportunity for Youth Representatives to discuss the future steps and actions needed to be taken within the region in cooperation with other stakeholders in order to enhance the idea of regional cooperation in the WB region.

In cooperation with the **Franco-German Youth Office** (DFJW/OFAJ), Crossborder Factory and Youth Initiative for Human Rights, and with the financial support of the German Federal Foreign Office, RYCO invited 12 members of parliaments from the Western Balkans on a meeting in Tirana within the program entitled: Supporting RYCO as an idea through regional cooperation: Role of MPs in the support of Youth Agenda of WB6. The event will take place from 25 to 27 June 2018.

Considering the fact that the involvement of the WB parliaments and their members has not been fostered as expected, with the aim to secure a sustainable success in the region, RYCO started building a fruitful partnership with the WB6 parliamentarians. It is necessary to ensure

the political support for RYCO that will not only be sustainable, but leading and inspiring in its strongest way for the regional cooperation. The main goal of this first meeting is to bring together members of parliaments who have already gave significant contribution to the process of the establishment of RYCO and to identify the meaning of political thinking and acting, as well as available individuals and groups in each of the parliaments for supporting RYCO in its further development. This meeting will be a unique opportunity for them to contribute directly in strengthening regional cooperation and finding new, innovative and positive solutions for the new generations.

The close cooperation with the **Western Balkan Fund (WBF)** aims to reach common ground in areas of intervention. This cooperation serves to both organizations not to overlap in their activities and scope of work.

During 2017, RYCO has strengthened and continued the collaboration with the **Balkan Trust for Democracy (BTD)**, which supported RYCO since its establishment phase. RYCO is finalizing the implementation of project supported by BTD in the process of strategic planning.

Having in mind that on 10 July 2018, the UK will host the Western Balkans Summit in London, the fifth summit convened under the Berlin Process, several meetings with the **British Council** were realized, with the purpose to explore future cooperation and RYCO's involvement at the Summit. As a result, and in order to contribute to making the London Summit a success, RYCO worked closely with civil society and youth groups to shape the priorities for discussion at the Summit, and to inform policy-making. This helpful consultation has included the British Council Youth Conference in Pristina in March and a preparatory meeting held with the Civil Society Forum and a number of youth groups from the region in Vienna in April.

The summit will focus on 3 important aims:

- increasing economic stability with a view to improving the business environment, encouraging entrepreneurship, addressing youth unemployment, and promoting regional inter-connectivity,
- strengthening regional security co-operation to help tackle common threats, including corruption, serious and organised crime, trafficking of people, drugs and firearms, terrorism and violent extremism,
- facilitating political co-operation – to help the region resolve bilateral disputes and overcome legacy issues stemming from the conflicts of the 1990s and strengthen democracy and gender equality.

RYCO delegation will be present at the Civil Society and Youth Forum at the Summit and will debate with Foreign Ministers from the Western Balkans and representatives from civil society and youth organisations.

Considering the commitment of the young generation is a core factor to a more resilient society, **Romanian Presidency of the EU Council** is determined to promote a positive agenda for the Western Balkans, using key resources for a long term investments in the future generations. That is why RYCO was approached by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, as

a the main partner for realizing the conference entitled: "How to better respond to European aspirations of young generations in Western Balkans?". This venue will be held in May 2019 in Bucharest, and aims at creative ways to inspire young people in finding/improving their professional paths in their own societies, while acting upon the European perspective of the Western Balkans.

3. Programme activities

3.1 Strategy development - RYCO Strategic Conference: "Strategic Dialogues – A better region starts with youth"

As one of RYCO core activities during the first half of the year, brought together in one place civil society and government representatives in WB6, in order to help RYCO build its strategy for the next 3 years. The Strategic conference entitled "Strategic Dialogues – A better region starts with youth" was held in Skopje, Macedonia, 20-22 March, estimated as a high profile activity, showed to be well thought model and methodology for gathering inputs from a large target group, including the OSCE Missions in the region, UNDP, European Commission, European Youth Forum, Friedrich Ebert Shtiftung, Konrad Adenauer Shtiftung etc. The Conference was financially supported by the Balkan Trust for Democracy (German Marshal Fund) and the Macedonian Agency for Youth and Sports.

The conference gathered around 100 stakeholders and provided RYCO with the platform for consultation and consensus building on strategy among RYCO Secretariat, Governing Board, Advisory Board, specialist organisations, and other relevant stakeholders. This 3 days activity served as a direct way of understanding the values, needs and concerns of a wider well targeted audience, especially young people and their key workers, regarding RYCO's core business related to intraregional mobility, capacity building among youth and intercultural relations. A roadmap plan for the Strategy development is already designed and implemented during the first half of 2018.

The Strategic conference developed key parameters and contents for drafting the new youth strategy (in terms of vision, key outcomes of RYCO programming, pathways for achieving the outcomes), and in the same time helped different stakeholder groups to understand their role in the implementation of the Strategic Plan. Not only that the conference created ownership among key stakeholders and implementers for a consensually developed Strategic Plan for the first 3 years of RYCO's operations, it also contributed to developing capacities of different stakeholder groups to work together and to set key content elements of the strategic paper. The participants also had the possibility to better understand different roles and division of responsibilities of RYCO management and governance system, and in that manner, to obtain a clearer picture of the challenges and risks associated with RYCOs consolidation.

Having collected inputs from participants of the conference, RYCO strategy drafting team, together with engaged consultants and under the supervision of the secretary and deputy secretary general, developed first draft of Strategic plan.

3.1.1 RYCO Local Strategic dialogues

In the framework of the strategic planning process, from 4 – 11 June, RYCO Local Branch Officers, in cooperation with the RYCO Governing Board youth representatives, and in coordination with the Programme Officer, organized local strategic dialogues in each contracting party. The aim was to collect inputs from the relevant stakeholders from a respective contracting party on the RYCO's specific role, on what RYCO can offer to the region's youth and the opportunities that the RYCO bodies, i.e. the Governing Board, offer. Moreover, this opportunity was used to present and discuss RYCO vision, program mission, organizational values and two out of three strategic priorities, as defined in the Strategic Plan. The collected inputs were used for further development of the Strategic plan and will be used for programme development, creation of the Call for Proposals 2018, and Action plan for 2019.

3.2 Open Call process

After successfully conducted administration and eligibility checks and assessment of project proposals by external assessors, the thirty-four projects were supported by RYCO. Their implementation started after the signing of the contracts with the grantees. The granted organizations are the following:

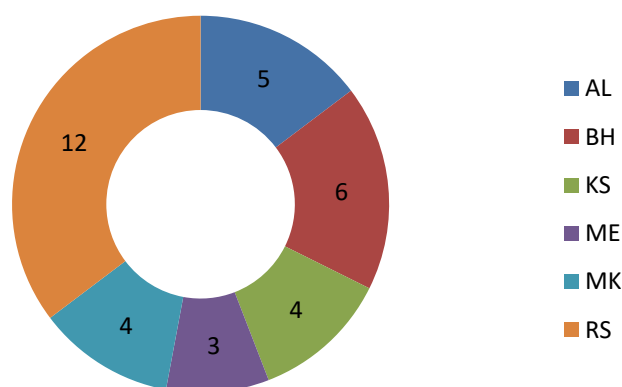
- | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Nisville Foundation | 12. Women's Network Equality in |
| 2. Novi Sad Humanitarian | Decision Making |
| Centre | 13. NGO EKO ZH |
| 3. Prva Gimnazija | 14. JU Srednjaekonomsko- |
| 4. PartnerpërFëmijët | ugostiteljskaškolaNikšić |
| 5. NGO ALPHA Centre | 15. Centre for democracy and |
| 6. CCIS - Centre for Comparative | human rights – CEDEM |
| and International Studies | 16. PL4Y International |
| 7. Grupa "Hajde da..." | 17. Municipal high school in Radovis |
| 8. Polytechnic school, Kragujevac | 18. Youth for Social Changes |
| 9. Udruzenjegradjana Libero | 19. Beyond Barriers Association |
| 10. Center for Social and Economic | 20. Environmentally Responsible |
| Development | Action (ERA) group |
| 11. JU Gimnazija "Musa ĆazimĆatić" | 21. Center for Holocaust Research |
| Tešanj | and Education – CHRE |

| | |
|---|---|
| 22. GAIA | 29. The secondary vocational school |
| 23. Youth Educational Forum | "4. Juli",Vrbas |
| 24. Zdruzenie KREATOR Kumanovo | 30. Hemijsko- |
| 25. Association "Center for ecology education and sustainable development" | prehrambenatehnološkaškola, Belgrade, Serbia |
| 26. First Nish Grammar School | 31. Foundation Education in Action |
| "StevanSremac" | 32. Dis –Youth theatre Banja Luka |
| 27. NGO Better Life in Kosova – BLINK | (BiH) |
| 28. Center for Intercultural Dialogue | 33. Youth for Peace |
| | 34. NGO Intermedia Blace |

The complete list of the granted organizations and high schools that contains the individual information on the origin of the organization/school, project titles, priority areas, name and origin of partners, total eligible costs of the projects, as well as their final score is available at the RYCO website.

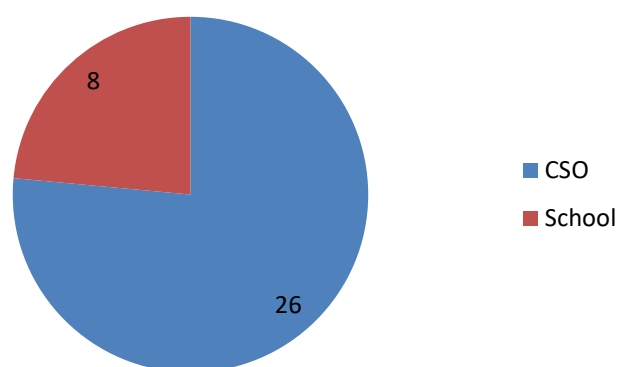
Divided by the Contracting Party, the number of the supported projects is as the following:

- Albania – 5 (14.71%)
- Bosnia and Herzegovina – 6 (17.65%)
- Kosovo – 4 (11.76%)
- Macedonia – 4 (11.76%)
- Montenegro – 3 (8.82%)
- Serbia – 12 (35.29%)



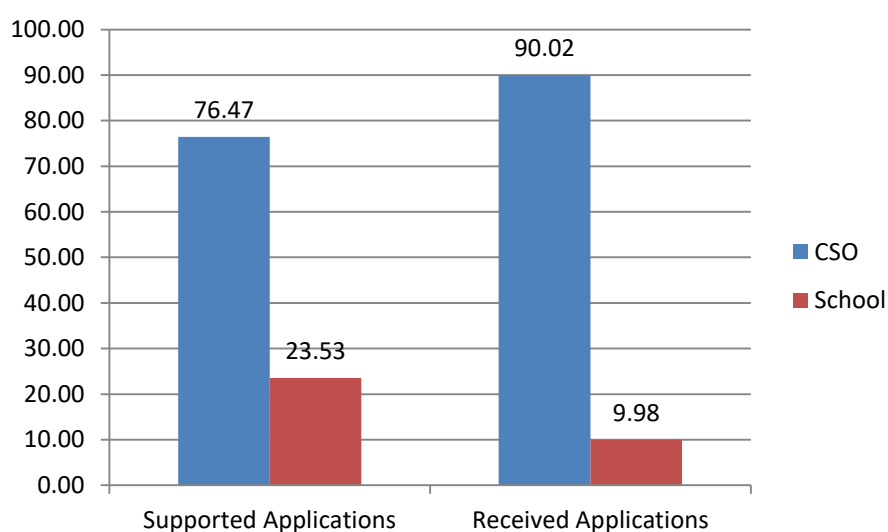
Graphic 1. Origin and number of supported projects

Divided by the type of the applicant, the number of the supported projects is as the following:



Graphic 2. Type of applicant and number of supported projects

It is important to mention that RYCO aimed to support the high schools from the region, as the organization consider these entities highly important for the fulfilment of the RYCO mission. The next graph shows the difference between the received and supported applications in relation to the type of the applicant.



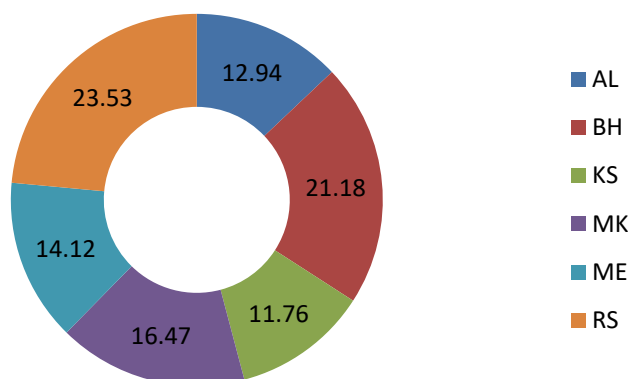
Graphic 3. Difference between received and supported applications in relation to the type of the applicant

The total number of partner organizations and high schools in the region that will participate in the implementation of the supported projects is eighty-five (85). The number of partners divided by the Contracting Party is as the following:

- Albania – 11 (12.94%)
- Bosnia and Herzegovina – 18 (21.18%)
- Kosovo – 10 (11.76%)
- Macedonia – 14 (16.47%)
- Montenegro – 12 (14.12%)

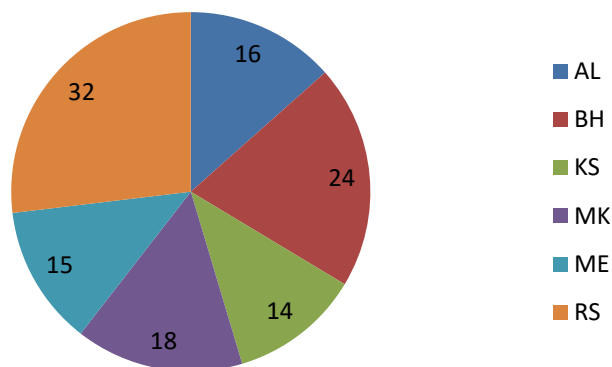
- Serbia – 20 (23.53%)

The following graph shows distribution of partners throughout Contracting Parties:



Graphic 4. Distribution of partners throughout Contracting Parties

The total number of organizations and high schools (lead applicants + partners) that will participate in the implementation of the activities supported within the first RYCO Open Call for Project Proposals is 119. The following graph shows the distribution of applicants and partners divided by the Contracting Party.



Graphic 5. Distribution of applicants and partners divided by the Contracting Party

The total amount of the eligible costs for the projects implementation equals 1,007,741.90 €. This amount is consisted of the costs approved by RYCO and contribution of the civil society organizations to the projects (requested contribution is between 75 and 95% of total costs, only for CSOs). Civil society organizations were obliged to contribute to the project activities by a percentage as defined in the point 2.9 Eligibility Costs of the Annex IV – Guidelines on CfP.

3.3 *Quality insurance of managing the grant making scheme*

As part of quality insurance, RYCO provided a capacity building activity for granted beneficiaries, in order to ensure successful implementation of the projects. This capacity building program had focus on relevant thematic areas such as intercultural learning, dealing with the past, youth participation in decision making processes and child and youth protection measures in youth exchange projects. RYCO pilot capacity building training was organized in Montenegro (07 – 11 May) which gathered representatives of 34 civil society organizations and high schools from the region, which are the lead applicants of the shortlisted project within the first RYCO Open Call.

The main aim of the training was to create a common understanding and common ground among the participants regarding RYCO in general, and more specifically, regarding the values of RYCO and the quality of the future projects. Moreover, the training aimed to live together an intercultural exchange and to enhance contact and exchange among the participants as project organizers and between them and RYCO and its representatives, but also to identify and to address key challenges for the organization of youth exchange in the Western Balkans and to jointly discuss approaches to deal with these challenges in order to ensure the quality of the future RYCO-projects.

3.4 *Cooperation proposals: development of Balkan Lab project*

The development of the Balkan Lab project idea included in Trieste Summit conclusions (2017) has been continued in 2018. Several meetings gathering representatives of the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs of the French Republic, French Institute, OFAJ and RYCO were held. In March 2018, a first draft concept note of Balkan Lab project, on the basis of discussions with stakeholders who have been designing program Lab citoyen has been developed. Further development of the project was done in order to submit it for co-financing to French Agency for Development in the framework of their Open call for proposals. The minimum requested amount for the 3 years long project can be 300.000 eur. In order to acquire project financing, the applicants must provide co-financing in the same amount as the one requested from the French Agency for Development. The main bulk of co-financing is expected from RYCO, with an announced financial contribution of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany.

The eligibility requirements of AFD imply that the main applicant for the grant can be a non-governmental organisation registered in France. With the support of Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs of Republic of France and French Institute, organisation GINKGO, member of SOS Group, has been identified as a potential main applicant. In order to bring in the expertise in implementation of social innovation projects aiming at reconciliation in the region, a representative of regional network South East European Youth Network was invited to join the

team which has been developing project proposals. The project concept note is expected to be submitted to French Agency for Development in July 2018.

3.4.1 Development of United Nations Peace Building Fund project

This project aims to contribute to the improved social cohesion and reconciliation across the Western Balkans through providing support to RYCO, as a mechanism which is endorsed by governments and citizens alike. The UN project will support RYCO to work in partnership with civil society, education systems and schools, youth institutions and youth in general, for the consolidation of RYCO as a regionally owned mechanism, with the capacity to promote reconciliation, mobility, diversity, democratic values, participation, active citizenship and intercultural learning.

The UN project will contribute towards strengthening the regional cooperation among youth institutions (mainly schools) and increase the inclusion and use of topics around intercultural learning such as peace building and conflict resolution. The UN project will enable sharing of best practices on inclusive education and peace building transformative pedagogies, enabling exchanges amongst schools and increasing the capacities of schools to embrace the above principles. In parallel, the UN project will work with grass root organizations, with a special focus on marginalized groups and young key populations (Roma, LGBT, people with disabilities), and advocate for the adoption of an inclusive life skills programme to peace building and conflict resolution. Exchanges amongst grass roots and youth, through the life skill lenses, will contribute to the (better) understanding of the realities of each other's societies by enabling young people to meet, make acquaintances, make friends and engage in regional dialogue on topics that will support them in building better future for all. Targeted schools, grass roots and young people will be capacitated to initiate and engage in regional activities supported by RYCO's grant facility and not only. All the activities will be implemented through rigorous gender sensitive lenses.

Being a new institution and operating in a volatile environment, RYCO will be supported to strengthen its internal capacities and will be enabled to achieve its mission. Considering that one of RYCO's main tools to achieve its mission is through financial support to regional projects and initiatives, its grant facility system will be designed through a tailor-made approach and consolidated. Keeping in mind the target groups, the grant facility will be simplified, increase outreach and inclusiveness, whilst at the same time ensure quality of activities it will support. RYCO will be equipped with effective tools to Monitoring and Evaluation, enabling it to keep track on challenges it faces and impact its interventions produce. Finally, RYCO will be supported with an increase of human resources, especially in view of its Monitoring and Evaluation activities.

3.4.2. Submitted project proposals

Project on volunteering in WB6 was submitted to Norwegian fund in cooperation with 6 organizations. Local partners have rich track record in the field: 4 out of 6 partners are National Volunteer Services; 5 out of 6 are recognized by stakeholders as leading organizations in volunteering policy at local level; all local partners are members of SEEYN and through it, they have membership in European Volunteer Centre (volunteering policy) and Alliance (international volunteer work camps). Almost all partners have had experience as the implementing partner of the RIVERSEE, long-term individual volunteer exchange program (2000 - 2005). Partner organizations exchanged more than 7500 young people, implemented more than 450 educational activities, delivered 4800 hours of peace education program, trained 280 peace-makers and delivered more than 70 000 volunteer hours to small WB communities.

Through this project, experienced partners will support establishment of the volunteer infrastructure in Kosovo. Partner organizations are responsible to implement activities at local level, to contribute to establishment of the Regional Volunteer Service as the regional resource centre for volunteering, to cooperate and share resources and capacities with other partners, to multiply and disseminate project results at local levels, to report on activities from their budget according to rules and procedures defines by applicant (narrative and financial reporting), to collect data from local level that will be used for evaluation (internal and external), to promote program at local level and do monitoring visits to granted CSOs.

The submitted project has three specific objectives:

- To strengthen capacities of the National Volunteer Services to advocate for volunteering policy at regional and local levels in order to make enabling environment for development of volunteering as the effective tool that contributes to reconciliation and mobility of youth in WB6 region;
- To establish regional volunteer infrastructure and youth intra-regional volunteer exchange programs that contribute to intercultural dialogue, societal reconstruction and bottom up approach in implementation of the reconciliation policy.
- To support CSOs and youth from the WB region to participate in the ROUTE WB6 program in order to facilitate intercultural dialogue, mobility and intra-regional cooperation of youth from the region.

4. Head Office activities

RYCO considers the Council of Europe as one of the most relevant partners in developing future programs and joint activities in the field of youth work, youth policy and human rights education. Having in mind that RYCO can be a valuable partner, 2018 started with a meeting held in Strasbourg, with high representatives of the Council of Europe, during which future joint cooperation was discussed, as well as exchange of already existing experiences and know-how in the fields of youth work and grant making processes. Council of Europe Youth Department has an invaluable experience in programs for youth, as well as in capacity building activities, which can help RYCO to make better and more efficient programs. Co-management, combating hate speech, programs for Roma youth in the region, youth mobility and social inclusion, as well as other fields of CoE's work were mentioned as fields of mutual interests. A memorandum of understanding will be considered to express the intention of cooperation in fields of common interest.

RYCO's participation on the 55th anniversary of the Elyse Treaty celebration in Belgrade was an excellent occasion to highlight that RYCO is a milestone of developing youth cooperation in the Western Balkans. It is an open window for young people from the region to be the leaders of reconciliation in the Western Balkans.

In February, the European Commission adopted the Western Balkans Strategy, which spells out the priorities and areas of joint reinforced cooperation, addressing the specific challenges the Western Balkans face, in particular the need for fundamental reforms and good neighbourly relations. The youth of the region was recognized as important partner in making the region a better place, while RYCO has been recognized as a concrete mechanism for this change. Within the Strategy, RYCO was acknowledged as a part of the six flagship initiatives – specific actions that the EU will take over the next years to support the transformation efforts of the Western Balkans in areas of mutual interest. RYCO will take part within the initiative to support reconciliation and good neighbourly relations, as stated by the European Commission. Moreover, it was pointed out that the initiative “will include supporting transitional justice, missing persons and increased cooperation in education, culture, youth and sport, and expanding the scope of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office”. In addition to increasing funding under Erasmus +, the European Commission will continue to foster the cultural links with the region.

The proper communication between the Secretariat and the Governing Board is highly important for a successful work and cooperation. RYCO and the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth of Albania, National Youth Congress of Albania and National Youth Service continued strengthening already good cooperation with RYCO in the field of youth policy in Albania.

Being recognized as a key player in bringing the Western Balkans closer through supporting the youth of the region and their exchange of ideas that should support the reconciliation in the region, RYCO continuously enjoys support from the ambassadors of France, Germany and the United Kingdom to Albania. Besides that, Italian Government is ready to support

the work of RYCO in the region and proposed idea of co-designing joint projects on mutual interests.

The Conference Youth Engagement in the Danube Region – Stakeholder Dialogue, held in end of March, in Stuttgart, during which RYCO was presented, provided an overview of the existing structures and networks, mapping the field of youth cooperation in the Danube Region. It also identified joint challenges faced by experts and project practitioners from civil society, national and regional administration, regarding the youth engagement in Danube Region.

Being a valuable partner of the European Union in the Western Balkans for the processes of reconciliation and enhancing and promoting the youth mobility in the region, on the occasion of the Europe Day, during a meeting with the EC high officials, RYCO was reassured with an unequivocal support to the organization. RYCO, through its work, is promoting the European spirit of cooperation in the region and it can contribute to informing the youth about the process of the European integration.

The EU-Western Balkans summit that took place in Sofia, in May 2018, resulted with EU leaders agreeing on Sofia declaration, with which the Western Balkans partners have aligned themselves. The Declaration puts a special focus on youth in the region. The Declaration reads, in its eight point, that a special emphasis will be put toward creating further opportunities for the youth, while ensuring that this contributes to the socio-economic development of the Western Balkans. The leaders agreed, in the Annex to the Declaration, that one of the priority areas is “Supporting socio-economic development and putting a special focus on youth” within is said they will aim to expand the scope and reach of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office, and introduce an intra-regional mobility scheme. Finally, they agreed to double Erasmus+ funding for the region, including establishment of a “Western Balkans Youth Lab” in 2018, providing space for innovative policy-making addressing the needs of young people, and tackling brain drain.

RYCO’s role is seen as crucial in the support of young people and their great innovative ideas on a local level. Local self-governance units in Kosovo are paying a special attention on a better and higher participation of young people in the urban planning, with the focus on consultation process in early steps. One of the examples is the Municipality of Ferizaj/Uroševac and their ideas for a better youth inclusion in advancing the level of networking and exchange of experience throughout Western Balkan cities, but also from the European Union.

The Second Europe-Western Balkans Youth Meeting: The Berlin process – a new impetus for youth work, that took place in Podgorica, was an event which focuses on youth work and youth policy in and with the Western Balkans in the fields of youth participation and engagement, social inclusion and civic/citizenship education. Looking at the overall context, especially at policy processes with relevance for the youth sector, it was stressed that a mechanism for structured dialogue with youth sector should be established in order to fully use the potential of the Berlin Process and the prominent place that youth has in it. This will assess outcomes of implemented projects and initiatives, share inspiring practices, and look into how to further explore the added value of European partnerships and projects in this context. Finally, key messages were defined

and addressed to policy makers, practitioners and programs, in particular Erasmus+, to inform the London Summit of the Berlin process in 2018, the new strategy of the European Commission for the Western Balkans, as well as other relevant processes.

The OSCE Regional Meeting of Heads of Field Operations in South-Eastern Europe, held in Durres, was an excellent opportunity for RYCO to present the achieved results in and highlight RYCO Strategy development process.

The European perspective of the Western Balkans within the Berlin Process – Youth Cooperation RYCO was an event held in Budva that brought together important decision-makers, partners and stakeholders interested in the Berlin Process - process that encourages reforms in the Western Balkans, on its path towards the EU.

As the partner of the “Youth for Peace – 100 Years After World War I, 100 Ideas For Peace”, RYCO will invite 50 young people from the Western Balkans to meet young people from Germany, France and the European Union, as well as from the EU accession candidates and the European Union’s Southern and Eastern neighbours and discuss topics like war and peace together as part of an international, intercultural meeting, from 14 to 18 November 2018 in Berlin. For the selected participants from the Western Balkans, there will be a preparatory meeting organized in Belgrade from 12 to 14 October 2018, as well.

5. Local Branch Offices activities

Local Branch Officers play a crucial role in dissemination and promotion of RYCO values and activities, serve as first contact point in supporting possible applicants during the Open Call. They also serve as the first contact point for local and regional organizations/institutions interested in cooperation with RYCO.

Despite the fact that two out of six LBOs worked and are still working without local office, the entire team of LBOs all together have realized a remarkable number of activities at Contracting Party, regional and European level. Some of the quantitative data can be found in the following table:

| LBOs’ activities | Number of activities |
|--|-----------------------------|
| Local level | 102 |
| Regional level | 22 |
| European level | 3 |
| TOTAL activities for the first half of 2018 | 127 |

In the following section, information for each Local Branch Office will be provided. Data is various due to several reasons and circumstances. It is obvious that LBOs have realized almost 130 of activities, but in the following are shown all the activities in quantitative manner, and most important ones with concrete and clear outcomes.

5.1 Local Branch Office in Albania

During the first half of 2018, LBO in Albania focused its resources in strengthening partnerships, coordinating process of contracting of grantees, coordinating LBOs and Head Office and closely communicating with applicants and partners part of RYCO Call for Proposals coming from Albania. LBO in Albania organized several meetings with local and international stakeholders establishing periodical correspondence to secure coordination on activities of mutual interest. LBO is strengthening the partnerships through constant exchange of information. One clear example is the regular meetings with the Governing Board Members from Albania, and the youth sector.

LBO in Albania participated in the Seminar held in Dijon, France in March that brought together important stakeholders (public, private and civil sector) from the Western Balkans to share synergies with the work done so far from the Municipality of Dijon. The two-day seminar served as an important place for networking and exchanging of experiences on local government level. LBO in Albania was invited together with RYCO GB Youth Representative from Albania to the trilateral exchange *"Ideas and Actions for Europe: Energy and Environment in the 21st Century"*, to present the work of RYCO by putting a special focus on youth exchanges. The event was organized in the last week of May.

As part of RYCO delegation, LBO in Albania met delegation from Germany, led by the State Counselor for Civil Society and Civic Participation of the State Ministry of Baden-Württemberg, to present the results of the first RYCO Open Call and to share some context analysis on working in the Western Balkans. Also as a part of RYCO delegation, LBO in Albania met with Ambassador of France in Tirana and delegation from French Agency for Development. The meeting highlighted the support of the French government to RYCO and the strong partnership with the Embassy of France in Tirana.

LBO in Albania met with Commander of the Allied Joint Force Command Naples Admiral James Foggo at the US Embassy in Tirana to present RYCO and its work. There, he had the possibility to introduce RYCO structure and its activities and to emphasize the strong impact that the exchanges of good practices between young people can bring to the region. The Admiral shared his trust in the youth and pointed out their role in promoting safety in the world. Possible ways of cooperation with the aim of bringing the young people of the Western Balkans together were also discussed.

Since the LBO in Albania is based in the premises of RYCO Head Office, it also serves as interlocutor between the LBOs and HO. His role facilitates the flow of information between HO

and LBOs in the region through weekly sharing of information. This process also strengthens the role of LBOs and their internal functioning.

One of the main tasks performed by LBO in Albania was the finalization of procedures for shortlisted applicants and partners coming from Albania. Therefore he was in constant communication with them to gather all necessary documentation requested to move forward with the process. At a later stage, LBO in Albania coordinated this phase with all the other LBOs in order to have all administrative set up prepared.

After completion of budget clearance of all shortlisted projects and collection of all documentation from applicants and partners in the RYCO CfP, each LBO hosted the Signing of Contracts for the final list of selected projects coming from respective Contracting Party. The grantees from Albania were gathered at RYCO premises, on 22 May, to sign the contracts. The event also gathered representatives from civil society, public institutions, International organizations and Embassies to celebrate the starting of the first projects. Other relevant activities by RYCO LBO in Albania are presented in grid below.

| | LBO Albania activities | Number of activities | Comment |
|-------------------------|---|-----------------------------|---|
| Local level | Coordination meetings | 1 | Meetings between LBO and members of the Governing Board of RYCO. |
| | Meetings | 10 | Meetings organized with various local, national and international stakeholders on possible cooperation or coordination of on-going activities. |
| | Participation on events organized by other stakeholders | 2 | Events organized by relevant stakeholder where LBO was invited to speak about RYCO or to represent RYCO. |
| | Training | 1 | PRAG training |
| | Events organized by RYCO | 1 | Official ceremony of signing the contracts with five grantees from Albania and representatives from national and international partners of RYCO |
| Regional level | RYCO Team meetings and Retreats | 1 | Retreat with Peace Nexus in Podgorica |
| | Conference | 1 | Strategic Dialogues in Skopje |
| | Training | 1 | Capacity Building Training with grantees in Podgorica |
| European level | Seminar | 1 | Participation at the "France-Balkans Cooperation Programme International seminar", organized in Dijon on 16-17 March 2018. |
| TOTAL activities | | 19 | |

5.2 Local Branch Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Upon the inauguration of the Local Branch Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the selection of the RYCO LBO in December 2017, the activities for the reporting period include successful events and meetings, as well as communication and initial meet ups with relevant stakeholder and RYCO partners in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Frequent communication was established with the Ministry of Civil Affairs of BiH, from where, depending on the nature of activity, supported in implementation was assured. It was agreed that in the next period, Ministry of Civil Affairs will managed to enable better space and utilities for Local Branch Office in Sarajevo.

LBO in BiH, in partnership with French and German Embassies in BiH, organised meeting between BiH Minister of Civil Affairs, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany and Ambassador of the French Republic in January 2018. This meeting was also the first official visit of the Ministry and the Embassies and it was on the occasion of the 55th anniversary of the Elyse Treaty.

UNFPA BiH representative and LBO in BiH initially met and shared information regarding data on youth in BiH and their status. After that, LBO in BiH took part in a working meeting organized by UNFPA in BiH in May, on defining the status and needs of young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This meeting was held after continuous dialogue between UNFPA, government institutions in BiH, civil society organizations and RYCO Local Branch Officer in BiH. LBO BiH had the possibility to moderate a panel discussion on legal framework of youth in BiH, which gathered more than 40 people from governmental, non-governmental and international sector.

Collaboration with OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina is on-going from the moment the LBO in BiH is appointed. Important thing to outline is the support from the OSCE Mission to BiH towards RYCO grantees from BiH, regarding travel costs for Capacity Building training in Podgorica. Other relevant activities by RYCO LBO in Bosnia and Herzegovina are presented in the grid below.

| | LBO BiH activities | Number of activities | Comment |
|--------------------|--|-----------------------------|--|
| Local level | Visit of BiH Ministry of Civil Affairs, Embassy of Germany and France in BiH | 1 | Visit of the RYCO BiH Office on the occasion of the 55th anniversary of the Élysée Treaty. RYCO BiH LBO held a meeting with respected officials in Sarajevo. |
| | Meetings with Governing Board member (government representative) | 6 | Meetings primarily related to collaboration with GB members in organising 6 th GB meeting in BiH, Sarajevo, Youth Scooping Mission UNDESA, UNFPA BiH and signing the contracts with selected BH grantees. |
| | Initial meeting, preparatory meeting and | 3 meetings | The meeting resulted in including LBO BiH RYCO in facilitation of one session of work meeting on defining the |

| | | | |
|----------------|---|---------------------------|--|
| | work meeting/panel session with UNFPA BiH | 1 facilitation of session | status and needs of young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was organised by UNFPA BiH. |
| | Meetings w. OSCE Mission to BiH | 2 meetings | Meetings related to RYCO BiH and OSCE Mission to BiH collaboration in next period and Mission's support to the BH participants in RYCO Regional Pilot Capacity Building Training. |
| | Youth Advisory Group at OSCE Mission to BiH | 1 | RYCO LBO in BiH presented and emphasized the presence of RYCO LBO in BiH, as well as information about ongoing RYCO activities, information on the First Open Call, the importance of the support and ongoing dialogue and partnership with the OSCE Mission to BiH. |
| | Meeting with Forum ZFD in BiH | 1 | Possible cooperation between the organizations were discussed. It was agreed on possible collaboration on strategic activities on both sides and promotion of RYCO's presence in the BiH/region in Forum ZFD newspaper (dealing with the past). |
| | Visit of Slovakia delegation to RYCO BiH Office | 1 | On the occasion of signing the Memorandum on youth policies in both - Slovakia and BiH, Head of the Youth Department of Slovakia Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport visited RYCO BiH Office. |
| Regional level | 6 th Governing Board meeting in Sarajevo | 1 | RYCO BiH LBO supported the technical and logistical part of the meeting. Also BiH LBO was present on 6 th meeting of Governing Board held in Sarajevo. |
| | Drafting the RYCO Strategic plan | 2 | RYCO BiH LBO is the part of the drafting strategy team which works continuously on strategic drafting and processes. Two important and relevant meet ups were held with external associate Yael Ohana in Skopje and Berlin. |
| | RYCO Pilot Capacity Building Training for grantees | 1 | Capacity Building training for first beneficiaries of RYCO's Open call was held in Podgorica and it lasted for 5 days. |
| | TOTAL activities | 20 | |

5.3 Local Branch Office in Kosovo

LBO in Kosovo held regular meetings with RYCO Governing Board Members, with the main purpose constantly inform and coordinate RYCO in local level and to plan joint activities. Also, LBO in Kosovo had meetings with Deputy Prime Minister of Kosovo to discuss RYCO performance, current challenges and the planes for years to come. The Office of Deputy Prime Minister Hoxhaj is in charge of following the process of RYCO. Such meetings are planned to be organised regularly in order to share information on RYCO developments and to see what can be jointly done in order to support the process.

OSCE Mission to Kosovo remains a strategic partner of RYCO in local level. Therefore activities such as capacity building training for high schools in Kosovo and some other events to increase the visibility of RYCO have been planned for this year. Possible joint activities were also discussed with the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany, while the Ambassador of Austria wanted to be more informed on the results of RYCO open call and issues related to local context, such as the need to support small youth organizations and to better prepare high schools for the next RYCO open call.

LBO in Kosovo realized several meetings with different partners and stakeholders and also participated as a speaker or participant at events organized by other partners on local level. LBO in Kosovo organized the ceremony of signing the contracts with four main applicants from Kosovo and was in charge of organizing RYCO Advisory Board first meeting, held in Pristina, on 4 May 2018. Other relevant activities by RYCO LBO in Kosovo are presented in grid below.

| | LBO Kosovo activities | Number of activities | Comment |
|-------------------------|---|-----------------------------|--|
| Local level | Coordination meetings | 6 | Meetings with RYCO Governing Board members in Kosovo. |
| | Meetings | 9 | Meetings organized with different stakeholders to update them with the latest new on RYCO development and also to find out new ways of cooperation, |
| | Participation on events organized by other stakeholders | 5 | Different events organised by other partners where RYCO was invited as a panellist or as a participants. |
| | Other events organized by RYCO | 2 | The first meeting of Advisory Board of RYCO which was organised in Pristina and official ceremony of signing the contracts with 4 grantees from Kosovo. |
| | Interviews | 3 | Interviews done for some French media, in order to share the vision and the mission of RYCO. |
| Regional level | Meetings | 1 | Finance Department in RYCO HQ in order to support the financial check up of shortlisted grantees. |
| | RYCO Team meetings and Retreats | 3 | Retreat with Peace Nexus in Podgorica and 2 Team Meetings on the strategic planning in Belgrade and Skopje |
| | Conference | 1 | Participated in the Strategic Dialogues in Skopje |
| | Seminar | 1 | Participation at the event 'Potential Cooperation between WB region and France, in Dijon, France. It was organised by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France from 16-17 March 2018. The idea of this conference was to bring together different stakeholders from WB6 and France to discuss the potential way of cooperation including here the regional youth cooperation of the region with France. |
| TOTAL activities | | 31 | |

5.4 Local Branch Office in Macedonia

Beside hosting and organizing RYCO Strategic Conference entitled: "Strategic Dialogues – A better region starts with youth", held in Skopje, 20-22 March, another core activity for RYCO LBO in Macedonia was the #YouthMKEU, Dialogue Engagement with youth, held in Struga, 18 May. It was a large open-air dialogue engagement of youth with Macedonian Prime Minister and two Vice Prime Ministers, one heading the European integration and the other Economy. More than 150 youth representatives had the opportunity to have a direct dialogue and conversation with the Macedonian Prime Minister and two Vice Prime Ministers, on youth issues. The event was organized in Cooperation with the cabinet of the Prime minister and two local NGOs in Struga.

With the direct support of the GIZ, and in cooperation with the Ministry of Information Society and Administration in Macedonia, RYCO brought 12 relevant participants from the region on the Western Balkan Digital Summit 2018, held in Skopje on the 18 – 19 April. The Summit brought together experienced speakers, experts and Government representatives which raise the awareness and assessed the dominant challenges for digital integration of the region. In this manner, RYCO also contributed in the process of developing regional solutions, supported by the international community and the European Union. RYCO LBO in Macedonia attended the venue, and was in charge for the coordination process of RYCO participants. As a side event to the Digital Summit, a Start-up camp was organized by GiZ for young entrepreneurs working on digital small businesses, with key lines of activities in how to work with an investor, how to pitch competition and how to open an innovation lab (with the aim to create exchange between companies and start-ups). RYCO had the possibility to suggest participants, young digital entrepreneurs for this venue.

Numerous courtesy and introductory meetings with main stakeholders of RYCO in Macedonia were held, such as the EU delegation, Embassies of Germany, France, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom; organizations like: Peacecorps, UNDP, OSCE, FES, KAS, meetings with government representative, journalists and similar.

Local and region wide, RYCO LBO in Macedonia participated on events and meetings organized by RYCO, but also on conferences, such as the Kick-off Meeting of the Western Balkans Alumni Association (Ohrid, Macedonia), the Second Europe – Western Balkans Youth meeting (Podgorica, Montenegro), Interreligious conference of Institute for cultural heritage. Interesting mentioning is the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA) event in Skopje, entitled 4th Youth Regional Forum "Creativity and innovations towards active youth participation in the Balkans", organized within the framework of the project Balkan Regional Platform for Youth Participation and Dialogue. This event gathered 60 participants, members of the Regional Network for Local Democracy, representatives of local authorities, ministries of youth and sports, youth workers and representatives of civil society organizations. Main focus on the education for active youth citizenship, democratic governance, culture of participation in policy and decision making,

youth cultural participation, regional co-operation and best practice exchange of CSOs and LA in furthering the EU integration.

To conclude, LBO in Macedonia fully participated in RYCO institutional processes, and successfully closed the reporting period by organizing contract signing ceremony for the 4 RYCO grantees from Macedonia, and organized the local strategic dialogues event for 20 representatives of youth and international organizations, as well as government representatives. This consultancy meeting was organized and hosted by OSCE Mission to Skopje.

5.5 Local Branch Office in Montenegro

Local Branch Office in Montenegro continued to work in good communication and cooperation with all relevant stakeholders. The Local Branch Officer has maintained fruitful and structured communication with RYCO Governing Board members, which has resulted with concrete achievements and results of this office. LBO has continued cooperation with OSCE Mission to Montenegro, which provides significant support to the process of RYCO development, with a special focus on Local Branch Office in Montenegro.

The Erasmus+ Office has shown the interest in cooperating with RYCO as it recognizes our organization as one of the key regional initiatives. During the meeting, concrete models of joint work are identified, especially in the field of visibility and promotion. During a meeting with German Ambassador to Montenegro, RYCO LBO was reassured that the German Government will keep supporting RYCO in the future and received concrete suggestions in organizing joint activities in order to promote RYCO and achieve a greater reach to young people. Taking into the account topics covered by the British Council through supported projects, during a meeting realized with RYCO LBO, both sides recognized common areas and valuable inputs for the next Open Call for Project Proposals, such as linking young people with more creative themes, joint work on designing new products in order to recognize their own personal interests, following modernization and new technology trends.

Worth mentioning is the round tables in Bijelo Polje and Budva on presentation and promotion of RYCO's work (11 and 13 March), organized in cooperation with Forum MNE. At the round table, representatives from non-governmental organizations, local youth offices, secondary schools and young people were present.

Underlining the RYCO strategic planning process that will determine particular directions for further RYCO development, during a meeting with UN National Coordinator's office in Montenegro, activities related to youth and youth issues with a focus on certain regional initiatives were pointed out, and areas for potential cooperation were identified, especially in using online platforms and new technologies, as well as other digital trends that are in the focus of the UN towards achieving the Millennium Goals.

The Youth Organizations Forum in Podgorica, on which RYCO LBO participated, gathered relevant stakeholders from the youth policy field, who presented possibilities for youth

cooperation among which the work of the Montenegrin Directorate for Youth of the Ministry of Sports, UN program for youth and RYCO. LBO was present as a speaker at the Association of European Border Regions Regional Conference held in Tivat. During the conference, various examples of cross-border cooperation were presented at various levels, but also different models of cooperation and stronger participation of young people were discussed in order to make these processes more intense and constructive. To conclude, RYCO signed contracts with three civil society organizations and high schools from Montenegro that got the support to organize the first youth exchange programs within the RYCO Open Call for Project Proposals.

Other relevant activities by RYCO LBO in Montenegro are presented in grid below.

| | LBO Montenegro activities | Number of activities | Comment |
|----------------|---|-----------------------------|---|
| | Coordination meetings | 7 | Meetings with RYCO Governing Board members in Montenegro. |
| Local level | Meetings | 5 | Meetings have been organized with different stakeholders in order to present RYCO and discuss models of cooperation. |
| | Round table Organized by RYCO LBO | 2 | Round table organized in cooperation with Forum MNE to present results and challenges of RYCO in MNE. |
| | Round Table/ Conferences participated as speaker | 3 | Events organized by relevant stakeholder where LBO was invited to speak about topic related to RYCO and present RYCO. |
| | Trainings organized by RYCO LBO | 1 | One Regional Pilot Capacity Building training organized beneficiaries- leading applicants from the First Open Call with support of OSCE Mission to Montenegro |
| | Other events organized by RYCO | 1 | Official ceremony of signing the contracts with 3 grantees from Montenegro |
| | Participation on events organized by other stakeholders | 5 | Different events organised by other partners where RYCO was invited as a participant or to represent RYCO. |
| | Interviews | 2 | Interviews for RYCO presentation in MNE |
| Regional level | Conferences | 1 | Regional Strategy Conference RYCO in Skopje |
| | RYCO Team meetings | 1 | Team building meeting organized with Peace Nexus by LBO in Montenegro |
| | Trainings organized by RYCO LBO | 1 | One Regional Pilot Capacity Building training organized beneficiaries- leading applicants from the First Open Call with support of OSCE Mission to Montenegro |
| | TOTAL activities | 29 | |

5.6 Local Branch Office in Serbia

LBO in Serbia marked the first half of 2018 by meetings with several stakeholders in Serbia were held in order to introduce them to RYCO and/or explore possibilities for joint cooperation, which resulted with: KAS for full support for initiatives and activities that RYCO plans to organize in the future; OSCE Mission to Serbia has allocated around 10 000 EUR for the support of LBO in Serbia and organized a capacity building training for high schools and CSOs from Serbia.

LBO in Serbia has been actively participating in the process of strategic planning, being a part of the "Drafting team". Three drafting meetings were held within this process with an external consultant. LBO in Serbia also contributed with inputs to a desk research and to the development of Call for Trainers for the capacity building training in Montenegro and program of the training, as well as in the design of program for the meeting with WB6 parliamentarians.

Beside regular meetings with the Governing Board members, LBO in Serbia also participated at events organized by other stakeholders on local, regional and European level, representing RYCO and delivering speeches and presentations. The most important were the reception on the occasion of the 55th anniversary of the Elyse Treaty at the French Residence in Belgrade, "The Western Balkans Strategy – Clearing the path towards EU accession?" – conference with Johannes Han, European Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Kick off meeting of the Western Balkans Alumni Association in Ohrid, Macedonia, Panel discussion "Regional Initiatives for Reconciliation" at the Faculty for Media and Communications in Belgrade, Youth exchange in Mali Idjos supported by OFAJ with the participants from WB6, Germany and France, Participation at the Seminar "Young people's citizenship and Europe: which ways forward?" organized by EU-CoE Youth Partnership in Strasbourg, France. To conclude, on 18 May, in cooperation with the Ministry of Youth and Sport, LBO in Serbia organized the ceremony when the 12 grantees from Serbia signed their contracts with RYCO. Other relevant activities by RYCO LBO in Serbia are presented in grid below.

| | LBO Serbia activities | Number of activities | Comment |
|--------------------|---|-----------------------------|---|
| Local level | Coordination meetings | 5 | Meetings between LBO and members of the Governing Board of RYCO. |
| | Meetings | 7 | Meetings organized with different stakeholders to share information, discuss latest developments and possibilities for cooperation. |
| | Participation on events organized by other stakeholders | 4 | Events organized by relevant stakeholder where LBO was invited to speak about RYCO or to represent RYCO. |
| | Training | 1 | Capacity building training for schools and CSOs in Serbia |
| | Other events organized by RYCO | 1 | Official ceremony of signing the contracts with 12 grantees from Serbia |

| | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|----|---|
| | Interviews | 2 | Interviews about RYCO |
| Regional level | Meetings | 1 | Kick of meeting of the Western Balkans Alumni Association in Macedonia |
| | RYCO Team meetings and Retreats | 3 | Retreat with Peace Nexus in Podgorica and 2 Team Meetings on the strategic planning in Belgrade and Skopje |
| | Conference | 1 | Strategic Dialogues in Skopje |
| | Training | 1 | Capacity Building Training with grantees in Podgorica |
| European level | Meetings | 1 | Meeting of the Drafting team in Berlin |
| | Seminar | 1 | Participation at the Seminar "Young people's citizenship and Europe: which ways forward?" organized by EU-CoE Youth Partnership in Strasbourg |
| TOTAL activities | | 28 | |

6. Challenges faced and solutions proposed

During the reporting period, RYCO has worked in parallel on institutional consolidation (creation and implementation of procedures, practices of internal communication and building of a remote, diverse and new team) and development of programs and projects.

Limited human capacities and financial resources

The beginning of functioning of RYCO has been marked by significant interest of different stakeholders to cooperate with the organization. These partners have been involved in RYCO's creation and have invested their resources and efforts in order to enable effective start. Despite relevant partnership proposals, it is challenging for RYCO Secretariat to respond to the interest in an adequate manner, due to limitations in terms of number of staff engaged on program, finance and administration.

Relevant partnerships and joint development of programs and projects occurred after more than a year without prior adoption of the Strategic and Action plans. Expected adoption of RYCO Strategic plan will enable RYCO executive team and programming staff to apply more strategic approach in terms of fundraising and project development.

During the third meeting of the Governing Board, the European Commission has committed to support RYCO with a grant up to 500,000 euros. Due to the fact that the grant was not allocated as direct budgetary support, RYCO had to go through a demanding project application procedure for which external expertise was needed. EU grant has still not been disbursed on the RYCO bank account and it is expected to be executed during summer 2018.

RYCO Secretariat is facing financial constraints and challenges with regard to operations/running costs budget. As is was presented during the 6th GB meeting, RYCO, for 2017 has received a budget of 1.021.500 Euro in total, which was -478.500 less than what was budgeted, due to missing amount of 500,000 Euro from EC (or -978.500 in total less than it is foreseen as annual budget according to the Article 35 of the Statute for the upcoming three years).

It already happened that the limit of the available operations money (15% of the currently available funds within the budget for 2018) was reached, and that financial means run. RYCO was put in a position to ask from the members of the Governing Board, the permission to "borrow" the existing and available amount from Grant money (from the portion of available 85%) and use them for the upcoming period.

As already announced during the above mentioned GB meeting, Secretariat is working hard in fundraising to reach the optimum level of the incomes as envisaged in the approved Budget of 2018. According to statutory provisions, GB also has the mandate and role to support Secretariat in fundraising efforts.

First Open Call: Budget clearance and administration of projects documentation

Challenges have been identified in the legal inability of secondary education institutions (high schools) in Albania and Kosovo to apply to the Call as lead applicants. Enhanced cooperation and support from the Ministries of Education in these contracting parties is needed to overcome the obstacle prior to the launching of the second open call planned for 2018.

Starting from February, until the signing of the contracts with the grantees, RYCO secretariat conducted the process of contacting 34 shortlisted projects and started negotiation procedures regarding budget clearance and gathering of necessary documentation for applicants and partners. During this phase RYCO faced various cases of withdrawal of projects and replacement of partners. In addition, this very demanding and time consuming phase was influenced with moving RYCO Head Office premises in Tirana to a new location, which action implied performance decrease.

Secretariat is working on the comprehensive assessment and evaluation of the first Open call. This process should result with list of recommendations on how to improve overall process and grant scheme in general.

Administrative barriers

Local Branch Officers in Macedonia and Serbia faced challenges in fulfilling everyday working duties, since the allocation of their premises is still to reach the final phase. The latest information is that both Contracting Parties ensured premises for LBO in Skopje and Belgrade.

Further challenge is the drafting and adoption of the Financial Regulations. Support from the Contracting Party and Governing Board members through expertise and knowhow is necessary to finalize this process.

During the everyday work of RYCO, several limitations and ambiguities were identified with regard to the Statute. Particularly, challenges have been faced because of ambiguous or insufficient definitions of the roles of different bodies.

One of the main constraints has been related to the restriction of 15% of overall budget for the operational costs. Since the budget of RYCO is stated in the Statute, consequently all the calculations have been done accordingly, ending up with several financial restrictions due to insufficient financial resources for operational costs.

Hence, it is of the paramount importance and one of the top priorities in the upcoming period for both Governing Board and Secretariat to work jointly on the comprehensive analysis of this document and finding adequate solutions for the future.

Taking into the account the local legislations, a detailed and wider review of RYCO Provisional Staff Regulation and its annexes, as well as employment contract revisit and alignment is more than necessary for this year. Also, performance management system, including staff evaluation instruments is crucial to be developed and put in place by the end of 2018, or as soon as the Action Plan 2019-2021 is adopted.