



## European Cultural Cooperation Projects in the Western Balkans

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### Abstract

The EU and the Western Balkans are bound together by enduring cultural connections and a shared goal. In order to advance peace and good neighbourly relations, the European Commission decided in July 2019 to strengthen cultural cooperation in the Western Balkans. The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA II) launched an explicit call based on the Creative Europe Programme, encouraging applicants to suggest a consortium with the majority of partners from the Western Balkans in order to strengthen regional ties and increase local impact. Out of 350 entries, the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) chose 13 projects with 91 partners. In order to most effectively heal the wounds left by the wars in the former Yugoslavia and to foster a sense of common citizenship in Europe, these cultural efforts are instances of cultural soft power.

**Keywords:** European Union, Western Balkans, European policies and transitional and consolidation processes, Cultural cooperation

### 1. Introduction

With the aim of establishing viable, prosperous, and democratic societies on a gradual route towards EU membership, strong ties already exist between the European Union and the Western Balkan nations. Together, the Western Balkans and the EU are working to advance strong legal protections, effective political and economic governance, media freedom, and a thriving civil society. Reforms are necessary for the development of Europe, but perhaps even more so, they are needed to enhance how the countries provide for their citizens<sup>34</sup>.

The European Commission resolved in July 2019 to strengthen cultural cooperation in the Western Balkans as a tool for reconciliation and good neighbourly relations. A call was launched based on the Creative Europe Programme and supported by the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA II). Applicants were urged to establish a consortium comprised primarily of Western Balkan partners in order to strengthen regional ties and increase local effect.

The call's main goal was to promote reconciliation and good neighbourliness in the Western Balkans through cultural cooperation and production. The call's objectives were also to increase cultural cross-border cooperation within

<sup>34</sup> Western Balkans | EEAS Website (europa.eu)

the Western Balkans region and EU Member States; to strengthen the competitiveness of the region's cultural and creative industries; and to improve inter-cultural dialogue among artists, cultural operators, and the general public.

A proposal had to be submitted by a partnership of at least five organisations (project leader and partners) from countries participating in the EU Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance in order to be eligible. Organisations or associations, national councils, and public entities working in the culture and creative industries (except audio-visual) were eligible to apply. The project's leader and partners were required to be EU members and Western Balkan IPA II recipients (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia).

The partnership had to meet the following minimum requirements: at least two organisations (project leader and/or partners) from at least two different Western Balkan IPA II beneficiaries, and at least two organisations (project leader and/or partners) from at least two different EU Member States.

Activities had to begin between January 1, 2021, and March 31, 2021. The project had a minimum term of 24 months and a maximum duration of 48 months.

The total budget set aside for project co-financing was projected to be 5,000,000€. The minimum award amount for each project was 100,000€, while the maximum grant amount was 500,000€. The grant amount proposed may have represented up to 85% of the project's total eligible expenditures<sup>35</sup>.

Amongst 350 proposals, the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) nominated 13 projects with 91 partners. The selected projects have covered a diverse range of sectors (cultural heritage, publishing, translation, creative writing, storytelling, graphic design, graphic arts, digital arts, visual arts, photography, film, theatre, dance, music, libraries, museum, architecture), and contribute to the cross-cutting objectives of the European Commission, through the participation of organizations from several countries: Serbia, North Macedonia, Bulgaria, Germany, Slovenia, Montenegro, Albania, Croatia, Romania, Belgium, Greece, Netherlands, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Austria, France, Latvia, United Kingdom, Italy.

### 1.1 Projects

*Balkan Translations Collider* has worked in the fields of publishing, translation, and creative writing. The project has focused on developing literary managers' capacity while offering hands-on experience in multinational settings. It has provided prospective literary mediators with new professional contacts, knowledge of worldwide book marketplaces, and the motivation and confidence to function on a global scale. The project has aimed to provide a platform for conversation between the publishing business and Western Balkan policymakers. In the long run, the project has sought to improve the exposure of Balkan writers and contemporary literature in Europe across language boundaries. Project coordinator Fondacia Sledvashta Stranica (Bulgaria); partners: Društvo za Izdavanje, Promet i Uslugi Goten Grup Dooel Skopje (North Macedonia); Glavni Grad Podgorica (Montenegro); Poeteka (Albania); Sršen Ivan (Croatia); Udruženje Argh (Serbia). Runtime 01/01/2021 - 31/12/2024. Grant awarded 324.234€<sup>36</sup>.

*Comics Alliance Network for Balkans* has prioritised graphic arts, libraries, and museums. According to the consortium, Balkan historical comics have a history defined by nationalist discourse and communist propaganda. This is also true of many modern Balkan comics. This was something that the project's partners intended to change. In the spirit of the European Union's principles, they established a network to enable interaction between artists and specialists in the realm of historical comics in the Western Balkans and the European Union. To achieve this goal, the consortium has encouraged comic artists to explore history creatively in order to develop new works and original and unconventional contributions to the interpretation of European history in general and Balkan history in particular, with an impact on cultural spaces dominated by a cultural heritage with incompatible accents with European Union values. The initiative also promoted historical comics through cultural activities such as exhibitions, research projects, online platforms, and public debates on cultural and social clichés and stereotypes in the Balkan region. The project was aimed not only at professional target groups (artists, specialists, organisations) or comic enthusiasts but also at the general public and the local communities hosting the project through free access to cultural events (project exhibition itinerary in partner countries) and the online area (digital platform). Project coordinator Muzeul Județean de Istorie Brașov (Romania); partners: Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée Asbl (Belgium); Ministry of Culture (Albania); Strip Centar na Makedonija - Veles (North Macedonia); Udruženje Ljubitelja Stripa i Pisane Reči Nikola Mitrović Kokan (Serbia). Runtime 01/03/2021 -

35 <https://wbc-rti.info/object/link/23019>; [https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/grants/2014-2020/creative-europe/cultural-cooperation-projects-western-balkans-2019\\_en](https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/grants/2014-2020/creative-europe/cultural-cooperation-projects-western-balkans-2019_en); [www2.deloitte.com](http://www2.deloitte.com)

36 *Balkan Translations Collider* (npage.org); <https://wbc-rti.info/object/project/22998>; <https://coopwb.cultureinexternalrelations.eu/project/balkan-translation-collider/>

31/03/2023. Grant awarded 254.705€<sup>37</sup>.

*Immersive Storytelling* has taken into account storytelling, cultural legacy, and digital art. According to the project's backers, the significance of cultural heritage, rests in the opportunities it presents for telling stories. Visitors frequently lack opportunities for involvement, education, and effective, concise communication of pertinent information. Cultural heritage sites need to develop creative distribution strategies using cutting-edge technologies that are intended to improve the user experience in order to draw in new audiences in a competitive market. These difficulties are particular to the Western Balkans as a whole, rather than just the cultural heritage institutions of one particular nation. The project's objective has been to create more immersive narrative experiences for visitors to cultural heritage sites using digital technologies in order to draw in new audiences and spread the ideals of Western Balkan cultural heritage more widely. Project coordinator Association Centre for Social Innovations Blink 42-21 Skopje (North Macedonia); partners: Arheološki Institut (Serbia); Aristotelio Panepistimio Thessalonikis (Greece); Fondatsiya Balkansko Nasledstvo (Bulgaria); Muzej in Galerije Mesta Ljubljane (Slovenia); National Institution for Management of the Archeological Site of Stobi Gradsko (North Macedonia); Navipro D.O.O. (Slovenia). Runtime 01/01/2021 - 31/12/2022. Grant awarded 338.055€<sup>38</sup>.

*(Non)Aligned Movements: Strengthening contemporary dance in the Western Balkans* has addressed the dance and cultural heritage sectors. The goal of the initiative has been to foster a favourable environment and advantageous conditions for Balkan contemporary dance to thrive in a European setting. Furthermore, it has aimed to establish a collective curatorial practise in which co-working, co-creation, and co-learning drive new organisational forms and serve as a model for collaborative micro-politics. It has also aspired to strengthen the social impact of Balkan contemporary art and culture through dance, peer-to-peer learning, the preservation of endangered and unsystematized dance history, and knowledge systematisation. Project coordinator Station Service for Contemporary Dance (Serbia); partners: Lokomotiva - Centre for New Initiatives in Arts and Culture (North Macedonia); Nomad Dance Academy Bulgaria (Bulgaria); Tanzfabrik Kreuzberg Gug Haftungsbeschränkt (Germany); Umetniško Društvo Nomad Dance Academy Slovenija (Slovenia). Runtime 01/03/2021 - 31/12/2024. Grant awarded 499.657€<sup>39</sup>.

The themes of *Manifesta 14 Prishtina* included cultural heritage, museums, and architecture. The Internationale Stichting Manifesta, Amsterdam, which created Manifesta, the European Biennial of Contemporary Art, aims to advance modern art as a catalyst for political and social transformation. Prishtina, Kosovo, hosted the 14th edition in 2022. According to the consortium, unrestrained neoliberal policies of privatising open urban spaces have significantly altered Prishtina's landscape. The goal of *Manifesta 14 Prishtina* was to assist the locals in their desire to reclaim public space and to reimagine their city as an accepting metropolis in the centre of the Balkans. By creating a cross-regional collaboration platform that includes a wide range of artistic and civic activities across the Western Balkans, the initiative has sought to increase the reach and duration of the European nomadic biennial. Inspiring the creation of a new permanent institution for art and culture to further regional processes of reconciliation with a focus on minority groups, *Manifesta 14 Prishtina* connected architecture, urban planning, human rights, the arts, and culture. Project coordinator Internationale Stichting Manifesta (Netherlands); partners: European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (Germany); Institute of Contemporary Art Sofia (Bulgaria); Kosovo s Architecture Foundation (Kosovo); Kuvendi i Komunes se Prishtines (Kosovo); Meydan D.O.O. (Serbia); Ngo Aktiv (Kosovo); Nvo Apss Institut Podgorica (Montenegro); Qendra Harabel (Albania); Muzej na Sovremenata Umetnost, Skopje (North Macedonia); Udruženje za Postkonfliktna Istraživanja (Bosnia and Herzegovina); Rritu (Kosovo). Runtime 01/01/2021 - 01/01/2023. Grant awarded 429.884€<sup>40</sup>.

Museums, graphic design, and architecture have been the subjects of *ReCulture: Re-branding of cultural institutions in the Western Balkans*. The project's goal was to foster collaboration between the cultural and creative sectors in the Western Balkans and EU Member States in order to boost the visibility and update the appearance of

37 Comics Alliance Networking for Balkans - CAN for BALKANS; Cultural Cooperation in the Western Balkans ([cultureinexternalrelations.eu](http://cultureinexternalrelations.eu)); <https://wbc-rti.info/object/project/22997>; <https://coopwb.cultureinexternalrelations.eu/project/can-for-balkans/>

38 Immersium – Immersive Storytelling Driven Cooperation for Cultural Heritage Dissemination in Western Balkans; Open Call & Program- Hackathon Skopje- One Pager copy ([uklo.edu.mk](http://uklo.edu.mk)); <https://wbc-rti.info/object/project/22987>; <https://coopwb.cultureinexternalrelations.eu/project/immersive-storytelling/>

39 (NON)ALIGNED MOVEMENTS Strengthening contemporary dance in Western Balkans | Desk Creative Europe Serbia ([kreativnaevropa.rs](http://kreativnaevropa.rs)); (NON)ALIGNED MOVEMENTS Strengthening contemporary dance in Western Balkans - Creative Europe Desk Slovenia ([ced-slovenia.eu](http://ced-slovenia.eu)); (Non)Aligned Movements - Nomad Dance Academy; Blind Spots and Placeholders: Re-Aligning Non-Alignment | Tanzfabrik ([tanzfabrik-berlin.de](http://tanzfabrik-berlin.de)); <https://wbc-rti.info/object/project/22999>; <https://coopwb.cultureinexternalrelations.eu/project/non-aligned-movements/>

40 Manifesta 14 Prishtina Homepage – Manifesta 14 Prishtina; <https://wbc-rti.info/object/project/22988>; <https://coopwb.cultureinexternalrelations.eu/project/manifesta-14-prishtina/>

Western Balkan cultural institutions. Specific project objectives have been: restoring the visual identities of Western Balkan cultural organisations and learning new communication techniques; enhancing the skills of emerging Western Balkan designers through fostering cooperation within the Western Balkans; acquiring and using new design abilities shared by European and Western Balkan design professionals; promoting new marketing approaches and testing new models of revenue for Western Balkan cultural institutions through education on new business skills; producing limited-edition souvenirs and establishing online gift shops. Project coordinator Kulturni Centar Trebinje (Bosnia and Herzegovina); partners: Fakultet Dramskih Umetnosti (Serbia); Fiels Og (Austria); Ink Fest (Serbia); Muzej Savremene Umjetnosti Republike Srpske (Bosnia and Herzegovina); Umjetnička Kolonija Danilovgrad (Montenegro); Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée (France). Runtime 01/01/2021 - 30/04/2024. Grant awarded 466.852€<sup>41</sup>.

*Regional Lab's* project has built on existing experiences and collaborations on film and theatre productions to develop: regional and European exchange, creating a dynamic scheme of artistic interaction between cultural centres; generating evidence-based knowledge on new participatory models of operation; building the capacities and skills of artists and cultural operators to act regionally and internationally; and raising the visibility of regional collaboration both on a local and European level. Project coordinator Kooperativa - Regionalna Platforma za Kulturu (Croatia); partners: Anibar (Kosovo); Asociacija – Društvo Nevladnih Organizacij in Posameznikov na Področju Kulture (Slovenia); Asociacija Nezavisna Kulturna Scena Srbije (Serbia); Jadro - Association of the Independent Culture Scene Skopje (North Macedonia); Omladinski Kulturni Centar Abrašević Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina); Savez Udruga Operacija Grad (Croatia). Runtime 15/01/2021 - 15/01/2024. Grant awarded 424.010€<sup>42</sup>.

*Re:Play: Redesigning playscapes with children in the Western Balkans* has advanced the fields of architecture, film, and digital arts. In order to build playscapes that are driven by the community, children were included in the creation process, and their needs were taken into consideration. It has been working to reconsider play as a fundamentally human trait that urban design currently undervalues. In each partner country, five pilot projects have been carried out, putting the research and participatory designs into practise before being translated into a variety of dissemination products like co-creative design handbooks, movies, blogs, and other publications. The goal of the project was to change the current state of play design in the Western Balkans region, where social, political, and cultural barriers frequently result in segregated and privatised playscapes with uninteresting, risk-free standard equipment. In the long term, all children who live in urban areas will benefit from the project's greatly improved spatial conditions for stimulating natural and unstructured play. Project coordinator Kulturno Okoljsko Društvo Pazi!Park (Slovenia); partners: Kreativni Krajobrzi doo za Poslove Prostornog Uređenja (Croatia); Ngo Gradonica (Montenegro); Qendra Marrëdhënie (Albania); Udruženje Škograd (Serbia). Runtime 01/01/2021 - 31/12/2023. Grant awarded 424.947€<sup>43</sup>.

*Rise of Women in Culture in the Western Balkans* has addressed the visual arts, photography, and film. In order to encourage young female Western Balkan artists to create visual art, the project has worked to establish a network of regional curators and a virtual reality platform. Through two exhibitions, *Women about Women*, held both physically and virtually, it has also helped to promote and disseminate these artists' work throughout the Western Balkans and Europe. The project has increased awareness of the female perspective on observation and reaction to reality thanks to the liaison work of female curators and female artists. The project also included a residency programme with 30 female artists from the Western Balkans and Europe. Project coordinator Udruženje Fenomena (Serbia); partners Beoart Contemporary Association (Serbia); Nvo Spes (Montenegro); Organisation for Development of Culture and Ecology Sensus Skopje (North Macedonia); Udruga za Poticanje Razvoja Ljudskih Potencijala i Kreativnosti Prizma (Croatia); Lokarjeva Galerija (Slovenia). Runtime 04/01/2021 - 17/03/2023. Grant awarded 307.171€<sup>44</sup>.

Theatre and cultural heritage have been a concern of *Some Call Us Balkans* (SCUB). In order to dispel myths and misconceptions about the Balkans, SCUB has worked to improve intercultural theatrical interaction between artists,

41 *ReCulture: Re-branding of Cultural Institutions in Western Balkans* | Desk Creative Europe Serbia ([kreativnaevropa.rs](http://kreativnaevropa.rs)); *ReCulture: Rebrandiranje ustanova kulture na Zapadnom Balkanu* | FDU ([bg.ac.rs](http://bg.ac.rs)); <https://wbc-rti.info/object/project/22989>; <https://coopwb.cultureinexternalrelations.eu/project/reculture/>

42 *Regional Lab: New Culture Spaces and Networks as drivers of an Innovative and Sustainable Bottom-up Development of Regional Collaboration* | Desk Creative Europe Serbia ([kreativnaevropa.rs](http://kreativnaevropa.rs)); *Regional Lab - Creative Europe Desk Slovenia* ([ced-slovenia.eu](http://ced-slovenia.eu)); <https://wbc-rti.info/object/project/22990>; <https://coopwb.cultureinexternalrelations.eu/project/regional-lab-2/>

43 *RE:PLAY – Redesigning playscapes with children in Western Balkans – CED Slovenija* ([ced-slovenia.eu](http://ced-slovenia.eu)); *RE:PLAY – Pazi!park* ([pazipark.si](http://pazipark.si)); <https://wbc-rti.info/object/project/22991>; <https://coopwb.cultureinexternalrelations.eu/project/replay/>

44 *Rise of woman in culture in Western Balkans* | Desk Creative Europe Serbia ([kreativnaevropa.rs](http://kreativnaevropa.rs)); *ABOUT THE PROJECT AND THE PROBLEMS IT IS DEALING WITH – Biljana Jotić* ([biljanajotic.com](http://biljanajotic.com)); *Exhibition Rise of Women INFO.pdf* ([europa.eu](http://europa.eu)); <https://wbc-rti.info/object/project/22992>; <https://coopwb.cultureinexternalrelations.eu/project/rise-of-woman-in-culture/>

cultural producers, and the general public in the Western Balkans and the EU. In order to build spaces of encounter that transcend nationalistic boundaries, the project has brought together a sizable consortium of partners and local NGOs as an interdisciplinary collective from various regions of Europe. Project coordinator Icsé & Co (Italy); partners Biennale of Western Balkans (Greece); Kunstrepublik E.V. (Germany); Platform for Civic Engagement Through Artistic and Cultural Practices - Socio Patch (North Macedonia); Qendra Tulla (Albania); Rritu (Kosovo); Udruženje Građana Tačka Komunikacije - Dotkom (Serbia); Udruženje Nezavisnih Stvaralaca i Aktivista Geto (Bosnia and Herzegovina). Runtime 01/01/2021 - 30/06/2023. Grant awarded 312.467€<sup>45</sup>.

*#Synergy: Sharpening the capacities of the classical music industry in the Western Balkans.* The project's themes focused on music and cultural heritage. *#Synergy* has attempted to overcome the challenges that are currently threatening the Western Balkans' classical music industry, which are caused by the region's recent conflicts, limited and fragmented art markets, and uneven economic development. The initiative has highlighted the necessity for collaboration in the sphere of classical contemporary music between Western Balkan and EU nations in order to increase the recognition of this significant peripheral cultural and creative industry on a European scale. The project's main objectives are reflected in the title: sharpening participants' talents (in classical music, the sign "#" is referred to as "sharp") and coordinating the efforts of the project partners. The project has linked six important art music festivals from the area (Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia, and Croatia). Two composers from each festival, for a total of twelve, received co-commissions for brand-new works. Each composer participated in a residency programme in different project countries and created a work that offered an artistic response to an issue they felt was socially relevant. Selected young classical musicians from all the project nations performed these pieces to introduce the public to this new music. As a result, composers and performers have experienced significant worldwide growth, and festivals have profited from the global sharing of resources and expertise. In parallel, the project partners have been working on activities to strengthen their own abilities in cultural management. In six seminars (one for each couple), participants engaged in peer learning and experience sharing while discussing a variety of pertinent topics. Project coordinator Don Branko Sbutega Foundation (Montenegro); partners Asociacioni Kosovor Chopin (Kosovo); Centar Beogradskih Festivala (Serbia); Festival Ljubljana (Slovenia); Dubrovačke Ljetne Igre, Dubrovnik (Croatia); Vox Baroque (Albania). Runtime 01/03/2021 - 31/12/2023. Grant awarded 410.930€<sup>46</sup>.

The topics of *Translation in Motion* have been publishing, translation, and creative writing. The project, which was launched in February 2021, has been a collaboration between nine organisations (one European network, four literary organisations from the Western Balkans, and four from the European Union) and a number of associated partners. Its goals have been to support the development of the infrastructure, capacity, and skills necessary for literary translations to succeed in the EU and the Western Balkans and to promote a lively and balanced flow of translations from smaller European languages. The project's main focuses have been on literary translators as artists, cultural mediators, ambassadors of diversity and cultural dialogue, and vital contributors to the mutual enrichment of European literatures. Translation residencies have also served as centres for literary hospitality, for the professional development of aspiring translators, for the inclusion of translation centres in the Balkans, for their participation in a pan-European network, and for policy and public events devoted to the art of translation. Project coordinator Réseau Européen des Centres Internationaux de Traducteurs Littéraires - Recit (France); partners: Association pour la Promotion de la Traduction Littéraire (France); Doo Cetinje (Montenegro); Društvo za Izdavanje, Promet i Uslugi Goten Grup Dooel Skopje (North Macedonia); Fondacia Sledvashta Stranica (Bulgaria); Östersjöns Författar-och Översättarcentrum (Sweden); Poeteka (Albania); Sabiedrība ar ierobežotu Atbildību Starptautiska Rakstnieku un Tulkotāju Māja (Latvia); Udruženje Krokodil (Serbia); National Centre for Writing (United Kingdom). Runtime 01/02/2021 - 31/08/2023. Grant awarded 347.468€<sup>47</sup>.

*The Ways of the Heroes* has taken into account publishing, theatre, and the digital arts. The project team's goal was to engage on a multidisciplinary level in order to add dynamics to the public theatre sector and produce modern theatre that is based on neighbourhood needs. *The Ways of the Heroes* has sought to highlight those who are actively working to improve the ecosystem and to produce modern artwork that engages with socially relevant ecological issues. The consortium claimed that there are many people doing good deeds, but they are not well-publicised. The project's focus has been on making visible the stories of everyday heroes through theatre, public space performances, exhibitions,

45 SCUB-home – Some Call Us Balkans; Some Call Us Balkans – Cultural cooperation project; <https://wbc-rti.info/object/link/23019>; <https://coopwb.cultureinexternalrelations.eu/project/scub-2/>

46 *#synergy: Sharpening the capacities of the classical music industry in the Western Balkans - Creative Europe Desk Slovenia (ced-slovenia.eu)*; <https://wbc-rti.info/object/project/22995>; <https://coopwb.cultureinexternalrelations.eu/project/synergy/>

47 *About the project – RECIT – Réseau Européen des Centres de Traducteurs littéraires (re-cit.org)*; <https://wbc-rti.info/object/project/22993>; <https://coopwb.cultureinexternalrelations.eu/project/translation-in-motion/>

illustrated children's books, and online campaigns. It was inspired by Ibsen's play *An Enemy of the People*, which explores the impact of the individual on the community and vice versa. *The Ways of the Heroes* has also examined how artists' creative processes have an impact on the environment. During the course of the coproduction, an international crew assembled documentary materials and reinterpreted the play. In order to encourage local communities to emulate the heroic methods of the past, the consortium has also shared stories of successful practises. Project coordinator Macedonian National Theatre Skopje (North Macedonia); partners: Association for Promotion and Development of Cultural Activities - Studio Teatar (Bosnia and Herzegovina); Echo Animato (Serbia); La Dramaturgie (Italy); Loop (Greece) Publishing House Gavroche Dooel Skopje (North Macedonia); Studio za Raziskavo Umetnosti Igre, Zavod za Kulturno Dejavnost (Slovenia). Runtime 15/01/2021 - 15/06/2023. Grant awarded 395.183€<sup>48</sup>.

After this brief explanation, it's important to remember that EACEA has supported the 13 projects' dissemination in an effort to increase their international promotion, taking into account the Western Balkans' potential and the region's relatively low level of exposure for its cultural and creative industries. A project launch ceremony was held on May 19, 2021. A specific brochure has also been created as a multimedia publication with a wealth of information about the projects and the participating organisations, including project summaries, images, and videos, along with all necessary links to project partners, relevant websites, and social media accounts<sup>49</sup>. These outreach programmes were carried out with the help of the Cultural Relations Platform<sup>50</sup>.

## 2. Conclusions

As was already indicated, the 13 projects sought to strengthen local creative and cultural industries as well as cross-cultural collaboration. They also intended to construct inclusive and cutting-edge models for cultural projects based on the knowledge and expertise currently existent in the civil sector in order to promote long-lasting and stable cultural collaboration in the Western Balkans. The programmes have aimed at international solidarity and coexistence as well as expanding access to the arts and education, with a focus on gender identities and minority groups.

The programmes have given regional actors the possibility to lay a strong and long-lasting foundation for future regional cooperation by taking a more active part in the transition, reunification, and mutual support processes. They have presented an up-to-date map and analysis of existing arrangements relating to programme collaboration, management, and governance within the civil sector in culture, in addition to articulating this subject on a larger, multinational scale while maintaining ownership of bottom-up collaborative processes.

These cultural initiatives have made use of cultural soft power in order to most successfully heal the wounds caused by the wars in the former Yugoslavia and to encourage a sense of common citizenship in Europe. Relationships between the civil societies of the Western Balkan nations and those of the EU member states have been strengthened for the purpose of achieving this. Additionally, the initiatives were carried out in preparation for a time when the Western Balkan nations would also join the EU.

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<sup>49</sup> European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, *European cultural cooperation projects in the Western Balkans: 13 projects that strengthen cultural cooperation and improve the cultural and creative industries in the region*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/811941>

<sup>50</sup> Cultural Relations Platform (cultureinexternalrelations.eu)

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