

RYCO Overview

Context

The Western Balkan societies share both common heritage and many common challenges.

Conflicts of the past decades have brought with them different forms of prejudice and intolerance, while its aftereffects have continued to be underlined by a lack of opportunities for youth resulting in massive youth unemployment figures and heavy brain-drain across the region. Additionally, young people are facing numerous obstacles often created as a consequence of administrative barriers and mental barriers caused by lack of trust, lack of information, and existing prejudice.

Time has shown that only through joint action in promoting tolerance, solidarity, mobility and cooperation we, as a region, can progress.

The establishment of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) puts the concepts of friendship, reconciliation and cooperation at the forefront. It is inspired by the experience of the Franco-German Youth Office, along with other successful European youth cooperation projects, which established new relationships and significantly improved cooperation.

Limited exchange experiences that youth organisations from the Western Balkans have been promoting indicate that young people place great value on regional understanding, networking and cooperation. At the same time they transmit another important message: without active institutional support from the highest levels of their governments, they will fail to fully accomplish their missions and goals. This understanding between governments and civil society in the region highlights the importance and necessity of this initiative.

Establishment of RYCO was initiated at the 'Western Balkans Summit' in Berlin in August 2014, as part of the 'Berlin Process', which aims to strengthen cooperation within the Western Balkans in conjunction with the European integration process of the region. The subsequent signing of the 'Joint Declaration on the Establishment of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office of the Western Balkans' at the 'Western Balkans Summit' in Vienna in August 2015 offered important moment towards the formalisation of a mechanism that will open the door for regional youth cooperation and exchange.

Mission

The Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) is an international organisation established by regional governments in partnership with the civil society to create the conditions and support activities that promote reconciliation, mobility, diversity, democratic values, participation, active citizenship and intercultural learning, with the spirit of the European integration process of the region in mind.

Vision

The vision of RYCO is a diverse region in which young people, as the group with the most interest in investing in the future, have an awareness of the past and play an active role in building their, and their societies more prosperous futures. RYCO, as an institutional mechanism for cooperation is established on values of peace, trust based on mutual understanding and acceptance, respect for human rights, diversity, dignity, solidarity, cooperation, tolerance, and respect.

RYCO aims to apply an inclusive and equitable approach to youth exchanges that will enable young people to use a supportive international mechanism to realise regionally owned projects that will make a strong contribution to meeting, making acquaintances, engaging in regional dialogue and improving their understanding of the realities of each other's societies and historical events.

We, in the region, share many similarities in our histories and have a clear interest in cooperating and creating stable societies to build trust and move forward in the European integrations process of the Western Balkans.