

# Franco-German relations as inspiration: Strengthening dialogue and joint action of young citizens across borders



Lessons Learned





## Contents

### **P.3 Foreword**

### **P.5 (A) Framework conditions**

- P.5** Political will and political dynamics
- P.6** Building on preparatory work and existing networks
- P.6** Learning from existing experience without copying it
- P.7** A team of facilitators to accompany and guide the entire development
- P.8** External support

### **P.10 (B) Procedures and instruments**

- P.10** Involving (youth) organizations in civil society from the outset
- P.11** Combining a bottom-up and a top-down approach
- P.12** Working group to prepare the cooperation in detail
- P.13** Clear mandate and clear time frame
- P.14** In search of common ground: defining the principles of cooperation
- P.15** Dealing with differences of opinion
- P.16** Communication and transparency
- P.16** Adequate financial resources
- P.17** The dimension of language
- P.18** Taking history and remembrance into account
- P.20** Paying attention to equal treatment and reciprocity

### **P.22 (C) Fundamental cross-sectional topics**

- P.22** Intercultural sensitivity to the development process on the part of all stakeholders
- P.24** Ensuring the principle of *ownership*

## Foreword by the Secretaries-General of the FGYO

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With this brochure, the Franco-German Youth Office (FGYO) would like to share the experiences that we have gained as facilitators and consultants in building a Balkan Youth Office that arose out of a cooperation between civil society and six governments of the Western Balkans.

In July 2016, the Prime Ministers of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, former Yugoslav

Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia signed the Agreement to establish the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO). This signature took place on the occasion of the 3rd Western Balkans Summit held in Elysée Palace in Paris in the context of the Berlin Process, which aims to strengthen regional cooperation within the Western Balkans within the context of moving closer to the EU. In the years to come, the establishment of this first regional youth office in Europe will give tens of thousands of young citizens in the countries of the Western Balkans an opportunity to get acquainted with one another across national borders, overcoming divisions, discovering differences and similarities, and creating a chance for reconciliation in the region.

The countries of the Western Balkans are still deeply marked by the aftermath of the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Life in the region is characterised by the difficult political, economic and social challenges of societies in transformation; by a lack of perspective, and particularly the stories about and images of one's neighbours; and by fears and prejudices. Often, there are no opportunities for personal encounters, personal experience with neighbours and questioning one's own 'certainties'.

Differences of interpretation and political instrumentalisation of the difficult history of this region – not just between countries but also between ethnic groups within some countries – create additional hurdles to peaceful and open dialogue.

The establishment of RYCO presents a great opportunity for the young generation to meet one another, examine prejudices, get better-acquainted with one's own and other cultures, and strengthen reconciliation and peaceful regional cooperation in the Western Balkans.

The FGYO had the opportunity to accompany representatives of civil society and of the governments of the six countries in the Western Balkans during the two-year process of creating this youth office. We were able to serve as facilitators for this process. This also included pointing to experience with Franco-German reconciliation, presenting

\*The references to Kosovo are without prejudice on its status. They are conform to United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) as well as with International Court of Justice decision on Kosovo's declaration of independence.

this not as a 'model', but as a strong source of inspiration and as a way to offer political European experience in the discussion process. Moreover, in more than 50 years, FGYO has developed lots of practical educational tools for intercultural youth encounters and peaceful dialogue among different cultures, and these can be an effective source of ideas and encouragement in other regions as well.

In this effort to serve as facilitator, the FGYO had the support of other youth offices as well as competence centres and funding agencies for European and international youth work; these organisations included the German-Polish Youth Office (GPYO), the Franco-Québécois Youth Office (OFQJ), Tandem – the Czech-German Youth Exchange Coordination Centre, and Stiftung deutsch-russischer Jugendaustausch gGmbH, a foundation for the support of German-Russian youth exchange. The governments of France, Germany and Austria also support the initiative from the Western Balkans to establish a regional youth office.

The result is a Balkan youth office that, although developed with outside assistance, is responsible for its own activities and was created on behalf of the young citizens of the region, in cooperation among the six governments and numerous stakeholders in civil society in the Western Balkans. It is not a copy of existing youth offices, or of competence centres and funding agencies for international youth work. As a regional youth office, it is oriented around the specific situation and the needs of the young target group in the countries of the Western Balkans. In addition, to this day, it is the only international organisation that has been successfully established by state stakeholders from the region, acting on their own.

In what follows, we would like to summarise some of the most important experiences to arise out of this process, and to share these with all those who are working with great dedication, every day, to foster and strengthen peaceful encounters among young people from different cultures. Specifically, this brochure is intended to provide encouragement to people in different regions of the world who are thinking about and working to build new structures and tread new paths to promote interaction among young people across national borders. Beyond youth policy, this may also provide suggestions for other political fields of action – not only in this region but also wherever the objective is to cultivate trust, build bridges and promote regional cooperation in a post-war situation.



**Markus Ingenlath**  
Secretary-General



**Béatrice Angrand**  
Secretary-General

# // The building blocks of creating shared and cross-border structures and deepening intercultural youth exchange:



## A Framework conditions

### 1. Political will and political dynamics

The main precondition for the successful establishment of cross-border structures for the promotion of intercultural youth exchange is a clear political will and the unambiguous and dedicated support of the governments involved in the countries and/or regions affected. Neither the FGYO nor the RYCO, nor any other youth offices, would have come about if not for this clear position and support from the political sphere. This is also an important part of overcoming difficulties and conflicting positions during the development process.

It is also helpful if this process can be embedded in a positive political context and source of inspiration. This is how the FGYO was created as part of the Franco-German Elysée Treaty. RYCO is a project of the 'Berlin Process', the purpose of which is to promote a positive dynamic in the Western Balkans.

#### **The experience with RYCO:**

› Even in the run-up to creation of the Balkan Youth Office, during their Vienna Summit in August 2015, the Prime Ministers of the Western Balkans signed a 'Joint Declaration' in which they agreed to establish a RYCO Working Group and to develop a joint youth office.

› A requirement for this was for the six States to agree – during a May 2015 meeting of the Foreign Ministers – upon Albania and Serbia as a kind of ‘spokesperson’ for the group.

› The RYCO Agreement and Statute were signed in July 2016 on the occasion of the Balkan Summit in Paris.

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## 2. Building on preparatory work and existing networks

As experience has shown, the desire and objective of strengthening cross-border dialogue and joint action by young citizens, and creating joint structures for this purpose, can build on existing structures and on more or less extensive experience with cross-border youth exchanges. These experiences are particularly valuable, and they should be used and integrated. With its Balkans initiative, the FGYO has more than 15 years of experience and knows that a large network of regional project sponsors exists within civil society.

### **The experience with RYCO:**

› The concrete work process for RYCO did not begin with the first meeting of the RYCO Working Group in November 2015.

› In June 2015, following the event to mark the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the South Eastern Europe Initiative of the FGYO, FGYO invited representatives from civil society and from ministries of youth in the Western Balkans to participate in a fact-finding mission to Paris, Berlin and Vienna. The same group met again in Tirana in July 2015 to develop a concept paper for the establishment of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office. This paper formed the working basis for the RYCO Working Group created after the summit in Vienna. As a result, the Working Group did not have to start from scratch.

› Several members of the fact-finding mission were also members of the RYCO Working Group, which contributed a great deal towards introducing the work already done and sharing this with the entire group.

› In addition, RYCO could and can rely on significant experience in cross-border youth exchange from the area of civil society. Some organisations in civil society have already been carrying out youth exchange programmes for more than 10 years; these organisations have considerable intercultural competence and experience to offer.

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## 3. Learning from existing experience without copying it

The experience of the FGYO does not form a model that can be easily and successfully transmitted to other regions. The FGYO was created developed against the backdrop of specific historical, geopolitical and bilateral relationships. A copy-and-paste and transfer to other regions would not succeed.

Nevertheless, successful Franco-German relations also provide a strong source of inspiration, encouragement and political European experience for other regions. Moreover, in more than 50 years, FGYO has developed lots of practical educational tools for intercultural youth encounters and peaceful dialogue among different cultures, and these can be an effective as a specific 'tool kit' in other regions as well.

#### **The experience with RYCO:**

› It was important for participants to deal with existing experience, such as support structures for youth exchange in Western and Central Europe, or with regional structures in the Western Balkans, such as the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC).

› The work of dealing with existing and diverse experience led to suggestions and ideas about the things that should be similar, but also different, in shaping the RYCO. On this basis, something new was created with RYCO – an office tailored to the specific situation, the specific needs and the specific context existing in the Western Balkans.

#### **4. A team of facilitators to accompany and guide the entire development**

The entire development – and particularly where many different stakeholders in civil society and governments are involved – calls for a dedicated and interculturally experienced (small) team of facilitators in which the different threads all converge. This facilitator team should meet the following requirements:

- The most important prerequisite is intercultural experience and competence on the part of the members of the facilitator team, and their knowledge of the cultures involved.
- The team of facilitators should be involved in the process right from the outset.
- Dedication and competence in the organisation, structuring and moderation of meetings (including ensuring that meetings are efficient) must be ensured, along with seamless and active communication with the Working Group and other stakeholders in between meetings.
- The facilitator team should be highly flexible and mobile (see building block 12: Communication).
- An important element is a constructive and productive working relationship and the creation of a relationship of trust between the facilitator team and the Working Group.
- The team of facilitators should be rather small but also in a position to rely on sufficient levels of organisational and structural support (organisation of events and travel, translations, financial settlement).



### **The experience with RYCO:**

- › During the RYCO development process, at the request of the six governments of the Western Balkans, after the conference in Vienna in 2015, the FGYO assembled a three-person facilitator team to work with the RYCO Working Group that the governments had set up.
- › The team assisted with the creation and implementation of the RYCO, from the first stages of planning until the moment the institution opened.
- › The experience and competence of the FGYO in general, and of the FGYO facilitator team in particular, was an important key to the process, particularly as an external and objective party with expertise and knowledge a) in the field of institutionalised international youth cooperation, b) in work with and in the Western Balkans, and c) in the methodological and substantive facilitation of international working groups.
- › The FGYO also contributed to this process by being a constant and efficient link between the working group and many other stakeholders.
- › It was also important to enlist an experienced external expert that would assist with development and completion of the various document drafts proposed by the six governments.



## **5. External support**

The work of creating a regional or bilateral youth office or similar structures cannot be considered in isolation. For example, Franco-German reconciliation and the Franco-German Youth Office represent an important contribution to the process of European integration. Bilateral or regional cooperation and deepening of youth encounters in the Mediterranean area, for example, would not only be of interest to participant countries but would also help promote stability in the region.

That is what makes it important to involve supra-regional and external political stakeholders in these processes and to solicit concrete political support.

### **The experience with RYCO:**

- › The support of the German, French and Austrian governments was crucial to the success of the process. RYCO was and is a specific project of the 'Berlin Process' that obligated the participant governments of the Western Balkans to take concrete political decisions between the annual summits.

› This commitment was also manifested through the constant support provided by the embassies of Germany, France and Austria in the countries of the Western Balkans during the process. This also helped resolve differences of opinion within the Western Balkans.

› The enormous support provided throughout the process by the FGYO was decisive as well. From the top level – the Secretaries-General – to the staff level, the process was facilitated by experts at FGYO.

› Worthy of special mention in this connection is also the active support provided by foundations – the ERSTE Foundation, the Robert Bosch Foundation, and in particular the Balkan Trust



for Democracy/German Marshall Fund – which provided funding for an important portion of the meetings of the Working Group; as well as the support of the EU and international organisations such as the OSCE.



## B Procedures and instruments



### 6. Involving (youth) organizations in civil society from the outset

The decision to involve (youth) organisations in civil society on an equal footing was crucial, as this made it possible to introduce the voice of these organisations in civil society directly into the process, with specific proposals and recommendations rooted in practical experience. The involvement of organisations in civil society was expressed through their direct participation in a preparatory Working Group, at the same level as the government representatives, and through extensive consultations conducted throughout the work process with other interested organisations in civil society that concern themselves

with youth. Based on its own experience in its founding years, FGYO had pushed very hard for this – in 1963, some of the representatives of civil society had initially felt dominated by the States.

#### **The experience with RYCO:**

› Distrust between civil society and governments is omnipresent in the countries of the Western Balkans. Right from the outset of development of RYCO, however, it was possible to involve civil society and governments on an equal footing.

› Today, the Governing Board of RYCO consists of 6 representatives of governments and 6 representatives of

youth organisations. This composition requires a learning process on the part of both sides; trust must first come about, and forms of constructive, critical cooperation must be practiced.

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## 7. Combining a bottom-up approach and a top-down approach

While a combination of both approaches is sustainable and promising, at the same time it calls for a high degree of communication and increases complexity and commitments of time. If, however, there is genuine interest in stable and sustainable development, this burden should not be spared. Combining clear political will and committed support by governments, while at the same time incorporating the experiences specific to civil society, on an equal footing and in a spirit of appreciation, will noticeably improve the quality, the chances of success and the sustainability of such a project.

### **The experience with RYCO:**

› The RYCO process was initiated by the highest political level in the region – the Prime Ministers of the States of the Western Balkans – and supported by the other political levels affected by the process (especially ministries of youth or their equivalents, foreign ministries, finance ministries).

› Nevertheless, for a wide variety of reasons, the process was repeatedly threatened by standstill and failure: these reasons ranged from insufficient or lacking – informal – communication channels between heads of government to a lack of skills or mutual blockage by the authorities.

› Here, it was important to remain in constant negotiations with the competent authorities. If necessary, these negotiations could be quickly escalated for decision by the heads of government, while also involving the authorities managing the Berlin Process in Germany, France and Austria (cf. the matter of the headquarters location and financing questions). A visit by the Secretaries-General of the FGYO to three heads of government at the outset of the process, and in close coordination with German and French authorities, also served as a catalyst.

› At the same time, the process was also welcomed and actively supported by representatives of civil society, youth representatives and other interested parties; this made a decisive contribution to the success of the process.

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## 8. A working group to prepare the cooperation in detail

First of all, this building block involves an important question: How does one deal with diversity among stakeholders with different backgrounds, experiences and interests? What preparatory structure is available to ensure that complexity is dealt with constructively?

### **The experience with RYCO:**

› As the example of RYCO makes clear, this initiative involved the participation of six different countries of the Western Balkans, each with specific histories, cultures and legislation, and there were many different stakeholders in each of the countries as well. This was seen particularly in the form of state structures, but also on the other side: the organisations in the youth area within civil society.

› A crucial prerequisite for managing this complexity was the constitution of a Working Group that reflects this diversity: all six countries of the Western Balkans

were represented in the Working Group, with each country was represented in the working group by a government representative and a representative of civil society in the youth area. From the outset, this ensured that each of the main stakeholders had a voice in this process.

› Another way to meet this challenge was to define a common basis and approach within the Working Group. An important point was also to take the specificities of the countries involved into account, and to respect the different legal procedures during the work process.

› The members of the Working Group were personalities who clearly dedicated their efforts to the process and shared the same principles and values with respect to regional youth cooperation. They had come from different national contexts and had different individual backgrounds, and yet they demonstrated that they were able to discuss openly, find solutions and agree on details and



questions of a more general nature. The fact that four four-day sessions were held within three months' time helped create a shared basis and a team spirit within the Working Group; beginning with the first meeting, this was also facilitated by confidence-building measures and informal activities conducted during meetings.

## 9. Clear mandate and clear time frame

The members of the preparatory Working Group – especially on the part of the governments – require a clear political mandate and a precise time frame for their mission.

Youth organisations should designate their representatives as part of a democratic and transparent procedure. This may encounter problems because the umbrella associations and representatives of youth organisations in different countries often have different levels of training and organisation. It is important, however, not to appoint any 'government-linked' representatives of youth organisations who will then lack support in their

youth organisations in terms of their role and the results of their work.

### **The experience with RYCO:**

› In their 'Joint Declaration' at the Vienna Western Balkans Summit, the six governments of the Western Balkans had given the Working Group a clear mandate to develop 'concrete proposals for the mission, structure, activities and financing of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office' – and set a clear time deadline, 1 March 2016, by which these proposals were to be completed.

› This made it clear to the Working Group what it had to do and by when; the members of the Working Group knew that not they, but rather the six governments, were the final decision-makers.

› They also knew, however, that the quality of the prepared documents had to be good enough to ensure that everything would be in place for signature of the Agreement and the Statute at the next Western Balkans Summit in Paris. This also included involving as many stakeholders as possible in the work process (various ministries within the governments, civil society, legislators) in order to ensure that the proposals would meet with the acceptance of all key stakeholders.

› It was possible to meet this time frame because, from the beginning, the facilitator team of the FGYO had developed a well-structured work concept with a clear time plan; it had paid attention to complying with this schedule both during and between meetings of the Working Group; and because it had adapted this time plan where necessary, and all involved in the





work process had adhered to the schedule.

› Representatives and youth representatives were selected in very different ways, depending on the country involved. Where governments 'appointed' youth representatives in the absence of transparency and consultation of youth federations (even if by way of exception), the youth federations raised intense political protest that impeded the entire process.

## 10. In search of common ground: Defining the principles of cooperation

The variety of backgrounds and experiences of stakeholders involved must be taken into account. Differences must be perceived, understood and respected, and this means making space and time available for this. To create a shared basis for action and decision-making, it is important for stakeholders to agree, at

their first meeting, on establishing shared aims and working principles to permit a constructive and productive work process.

### **The experience with RYCO:**

› In the development process for the creation of RYCO, many of these principles were inspired by the daily work and intercultural experience of FGYO.

› These principles also included a commitment to open-mindedness and listening to the arguments, proposals and opinions of others, as well as ensuring that all decision-making occurs by consensus.

› Informal activities such as joint visits or joint dinners during meetings also helped foster a team spirit within the Working Group. Throughout the work process, all members of the Working Group demonstrated a clear willingness to compromise and dedicated themselves to the motto 'Let us think regionally' as a way to overcome unilateral interests. To



answer difficult questions, the WG was also prepared to think 'outside the box', for example, through creative exercises suggested by the facilitator team.

› Another very important point was the constant interaction among the members of the Working Group, and with persons and organizations outside the Working Group, in both government and civil society, in order to constantly involve these players in the process.

## 11. Dealing with differences of opinion on some key points

During preparations and negotiations, certain issues arose that, despite or perhaps due to its mandate, the Working Group was not in a position to resolve. In order not to jeopardise the overall process, such an unresolved issue must be presented to the governments for flexible and quick decision.

### **The experience with RYCO:**

› For all the good will and commitment seen, both within the Working Group and by the governments in general, during an

initial phase, the six governments came to no agreement on two important questions.

› One of these involved the question of the headquarters of the future Secretariat – in this regard, various governments had made various proposals even before the Working Group went into operation. Another point concerned the question of the funding for RYCO – the amount of the budget and the contributions to be made by each Party to the Agreement.

› The Working Group dealt with this challenge as follows: Knowing that, in these two sensitive points, agreement can only be reached at the highest political level, the Working Group dropped these two questions from its own agenda and took the position that the six governments should exercise their responsibilities and resolve these issues quickly and directly, by joint resolution.

› At the same time, the Working Group asked external stakeholders, such as the FGYO and the governments of Germany, France and Austria, to support this process of communication and decision-making.

› Following this, the relevant decision-makers of WB-6 gathered twice for specific meetings that had been organised with the support of the FGYO and of the governments of Germany, France and Austria. A joint agreement on the organisation's headquarters location and financing was reached during these meetings.

## 12. Communication and transparency

Another very important building block is communication and the transparency of the process. Particularly in the case of cooperation between civil societies and governments, it is of the essence for all parties involved to communicate with one another, constantly and on an equal footing, and to communicate and be transparent about any developments that occur and any decisions taken. This concerns both 'external' communication and the transparency of the respective developments for the citizenry.

However, it is also particularly important to communicate with governments, as the respective intermediate steps and developments (and their possible impacts) must be fed back to the relevant ministries concerned. This must be taken into account in scheduling.

### **The experience with RYCO:**

- › Right from the outset, the Working Group was aware that it is not sufficient to limit its work to internal deliberations and proceedings, and that an external communication strategy needs to be developed instead.
- › This communication strategy was executed through a website developed for the purpose, through public discussions and through regular information activities between meetings in each of the countries of the Western Balkans.
- › Constant external communication with various stakeholders also contributed to public recognition of the work of the Working Group and gave its members

additional motivation for their work.

- › For the facilitator team, communication presented the most significant challenge and required a great deal of time and effort. In processes such as this, no party must get the feeling of being ignored, not heard or not involved. This could very suddenly lead to an interruption or sustained disruption of the process.

## 13. Adequate financial resources

Building joint, cross-border institutions to strengthen shared, intercultural youth exchange calls not only for a clear timetable (see building block 9 above), but also for a budget that is clear and adequate to supporting this structure.

### **The experience with RYCO:**

- › As the Working Group convened after the Vienna Summit in August 2015 had not been envisioned at the beginning of the year, no budget had been provided for its meetings, either.
- › The various governments explained that they had no resources available for the purpose (except to cover





the travel expenses of government representatives in the Working Group).

› The facilitator team responded quickly and efficiently by seeking alternative sources and actively engaging in fundraising and communication with various donors throughout the process.

› Multiple foundations responded quickly, positively and flexibly, and it was possible to hold the meetings of the Working Group as planned, in spite of the narrow time window involved. The FGYO stepped in and offered additional assistance where necessary.

#### 14. The dimension of language

Language does not only mean being able to communicate; it is also a medium of history, culture and cultural specificities. Language is a very important element of self-understanding; it is the 'key' and portal to another culture and an important foundation of identity.

If there are different countries involved in building structures for youth exchange,

for quite pragmatic reasons (of time, cost), this typically also means a need to agree on a communication language. This decision should be considered and treated with the utmost care, since actual access to this 'lingua franca' may be very wide-ranging and may create an imbalance in the negotiations, with ideas, positions and contributions not represented on an equal footing.

Even when designing a future structure for intercultural youth exchange, it is necessary keep an eye on the central dimension of language for future youth interactions. In its educational programs, and using a variety of educational tools, the FGYO favours and promotes curiosity and a desire to learn one's neighbour's language. This strengthens the actual intercultural quality of the exchange. English as the common language (particularly among the young generation) is a pragmatic selection, but it also increases the risk of a potential 'speechlessness'.

#### The experience with RYCO:

› The countries of the Western Balkans are characterised by linguistic diversity. Language itself is an issue fraught with political conflict and played an important (and in some cases strange) role in the formation of national identity, particularly following declarations of independence as a result of the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

› The Working Group that prepared RYCO at the conceptual level agreed on the use of English as a negotiation language for pragmatic reasons. However, the moderation team addressed the sensitive dimension of this question and

emphasised that it was legitimate for a participant to use his or her own language in discussions. All languages were used in the informal consultations of the group.

› In some cases, contractual texts were translated into the respective national languages in consultation with the respective ministries. In written communication with ministries in Germany, France and Austria, the texts remained in English; translation would have exceeded the time and organisational resources available, along with the capabilities of the facilitator team.

› As an intergovernmental organisation, RYCO agreed on English as an official language. This decision was and is not unproblematic; it is also primarily a political decision that recognises the potential for linguistic conflict in the countries of the Western Balkans. In its intercultural youth exchange programmes, RYCO will be all the stronger – so it is hoped – in promoting the key (inter)cultural dimension of language and curiosity for the language of one’s neighbours.

## 15. Taking history and remembrance into account

Youth exchange is usually organised between countries between which a historical burden exists. Youth exchange can help improve relationships that are fraught with historical burdens. This must be taken into account in several respects: First, history can be a disruptor within bi- or multilateral relationships, with memories of history leading to misunderstandings, confusion and dispute; secondly, sometimes there is also a tendency to

‘sweep history under the carpet’ as a way of avoiding potential problems. But this very suppression can also trigger reactions that are even more vehement. It is thus important to be mindful of the presence of a historical frame of reference and of its weight in decision-making – and to find a way to constructively broach conflicted interpretations of history and memories. This sensitive approach to history must be borne in mind not only with regard to future youth exchange projects, but also during the preparatory phase, during cooperation by representatives of governments and civil society from different countries: these representatives themselves are also characterised by different, and in some cases antagonistic, historical experiences; to different extents, they, too, can have been personally affected by past wars and their aftermaths.

### **The experience with RYCO:**

› The wars among the successor states to Yugoslavia during the 1990s are not even 20 years past. They have left deep trenches and very antagonistic memories within and among the countries of the Western Balkans.



› RYCO seeks to contribute to reconciliation, but it understands reconciliation not as a process in which the past is bracketed, but one in which interlocutors actively grapple with it, as this is the only way in which a process of genuine reconciliation can succeed. RYCO also explicitly stated this view in its Statute, where 'Reconciliation and constructive approaches of remembrance' are defined together as one of the aims of RYCO.

› Also in its selection of projects, RYCO seeks expressly to promote encounter seminars on 'History, remembrance and intercultural learning'. In this connection, RYCO is aware that the approach taken to difficult events in history is not a simple task. With this in mind, it intends to offer explicit training measures on

this subject that will help ensure that questions of remembrance and personal experience with the wars and their aftermaths are addressed in appropriate ways in the youth exchange projects.

› Just how sensitive the topic of history can be, was seen during the preparation phase of RYCO: For example, it was not a matter of course for representatives of Serbia and Kosovo to sit down at the same table, as relations between the two countries are extremely tense due to the recent past, and official contacts between Serbia and Kosovo are very rare. However, through direct, individual contact and practical, substantive and productive cooperation, it was possible to overcome possible reservations on both sides and to create a positive atmosphere.



## 16. Paying attention to equal treatment and reciprocity

Countries involved in building joint youth exchange structures are rarely equally large, and this imbalance gives rise to problems, particularly where the smaller partners do not feel adequately included. Participants must be aware of this at all times, and steps should be taken to ensure that all parties can meet 'at eye level', even if different in size.

### The experience with RYCO:

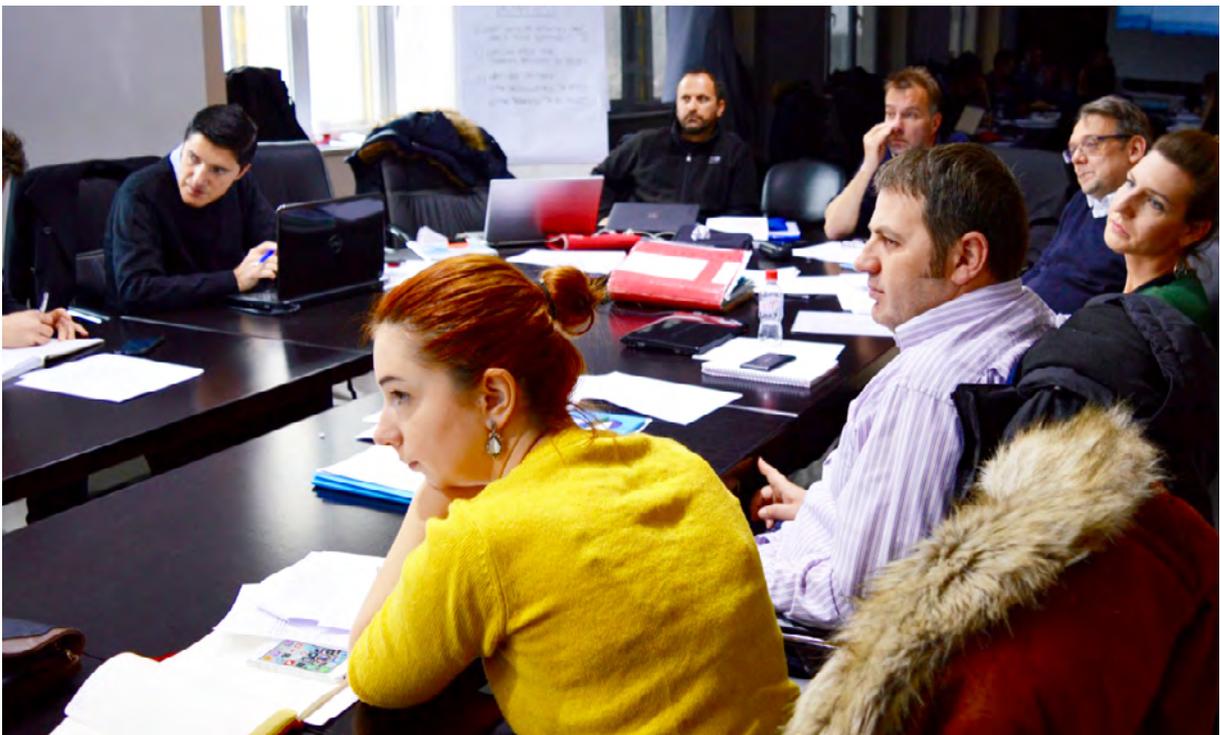
› The Balkan youth office RYCO is a collection of six countries of very different sizes: The population of Serbia, for instance, is ten times the size of the population of Montenegro.

› Nevertheless, the six governments involved decided that all countries should be represented by the same number of persons in the RYCO Working Group. The same rule was established for the RYCO Governing.

› When organising the meetings of the RYCO Working Group, care was also taken to ensure that each meeting would take place in another country. Such a rotation principle was also recorded for the selection of secretaries-general: Over the course of the first six mandates, the Secretary-General will come from each of the six countries involved.

› Conversely, this idea of equal treatment did not lead to a situation requiring each country to make the same contribution towards the budget: here too, the different sizes were taken into account; the participants agreed that each country's contribution to the budget should be calculated based on that country's gross national product and its population.

› Right from the beginning, a key part of all decision-making procedures was that the participants agreed that, both in the RYCO Working Group and then on





the RYCO Governing Board, all decisions would be taken not according to the majority principle but according to the consensus principle. At times, this led to extended decision-making processes,

but at the same time, this principle of consensus meant that matters would be truly discussed, with all positions taken seriously into consideration, with no party feeling disregarded in decisions.



## C Fundamental cross-sectional topics



### 17. Intercultural sensitivity to the development process on the part of all stakeholders

A central element of this kind of cross-border intercultural cooperation consists in sustained, shared, process-based learning with different levels of competency, enabling us to understand – in a context in which (others’) different rules are either not plausible or plausible only up to a point – one’s own and others’ cultures as well as possible, and, working together, to negotiate rules of cohabitation or cooperation. In the effort to understand one’s own and other cultures, great importance attaches to understanding historically evolved systems and understanding development contexts.

Those who fail to consider history will not be in a position to understand a particular culture (see building block 15). Accordingly, the learning field of ‘interculturality’ must be integrated into the process of cooperation. In everything we think and do, we are the reference for ourselves. Everything we perceive, all the decisions we make, exist in a context of, and are dependent upon, influences and acquired routines. Intercultural learning is inextricably linked to intercultural action, i.e. interaction with others.

Intercultural learning must therefore do more to heighten awareness of the fact that confrontation with the ‘foreign’ also always entails an opportunity to deal with



one's 'own system'. Critically examining one's own values and influences is not an easy task, as it is also strongly linked to emotions. Still, constant practice of the ability to see the world through the eyes of another, the ability to shift perspectives, creates new freedoms, points of view and development opportunities relative to one's own and others' culture(s). In dialogue with the Other, this gives rise to a dynamic and the possibility of creating a 'third' viewpoint along with a viewpoint held in common.

### **The experience with RYCO:**

› The Working Group began with a course of intercultural training; after all, at first glance, the group had 'only' a technical mission (development of the statutes, etc.). The main contribution of this training course was to create basic theoretical knowledge and curiosity for intercultural learning processes while encouraging participants to engage in dialogue. Fundamental topics here included development of a shared definition of the term 'intercultural learning'; knowledge about the role and (psychological) function of prejudices; the dimensions and pitfalls of language in intercultural

learning processes (particularly where communication occurs mainly in English and thus in a language foreign to all participants); learning about foreign and one's own culture (mirror); debates with very divergent cultural dimensions; ways of dealing with frustration and crises in intercultural processes; or the challenges of intercultural communication. Discussed at the outset, these topics were repeatedly revisited over the course of the entire work process and in specific situations. This permitted a connection between theoretical foundations, on the one hand, and the intercultural (learning) process actually experienced, on the other.

› The intercultural dimension and challenge not only applied to meetings of representatives of different nationalities or (unaccustomed) cooperation 'of the culture of civil society' and 'of the culture of government representatives', but it also increasingly directed attention to differences and similarities among individual cultural influences.

› Because an explicit political goal behind the creation of RYCO is to strengthen 'regional cooperation' between the countries of the Western Balkans, the RYCO Working Group devoted much of its time to breathing life into this aspiration: in the conceptual design of the Working Group, the rules of cooperation developed, and the moments of decision-making. What kind(s) of thinking does genuine 'regional cooperation' require? In controversial debates, how can one begin by suspending judgement on the position of one's interlocutor, to create space for an understanding of the background context and sources of the

other position? These and other questions entered into the rules of cooperation devised by the group and the facilitators.

› In the further course of work and in the substantive design of the meetings of the RYCO Working Group, space and time were regularly created for reflection upon intercultural processes within the group itself. This applied to formal and informal aspects of cooperation alike. This reflection was not confined to substantive aspects of the Working Group but also included observation and evaluation of processes in group dynamics.

› Strengthening trust, an emergent curiosity to discover the other's culture, and the opportunity to see one's own culture through the eyes of 'the Other', became a driving force in the development process of the Working Group. There were recurrent crises here as well. These crises might be political or structural in nature (a [lack of] understanding for the approaches taken, framework conditions or values of the Other, seemingly calling the shared objectives into question), or they might stem from very personal experiences / images / fears, for instance personal experiences from the time of war. Although the mood within the group was distanced, cautious and very formal at the beginning of the work process, in the course of increasing trust, deepening shared experiences and knowledge of one another, the group developed pivotal intercultural skills and applied these in cooperation among the members.

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## 18. Ensuring the principle of 'ownership'

If creation of a structure for regional youth exchange is to succeed, it is crucial for the regional stakeholders involved to accept responsibility and ownership of this structure and its development. External facilitation and external support are certainly instrumental in setting the process in motion, keeping it running, and helping overcome any problems among the stakeholders involved (see particularly building blocks 4 and 5 in



this connection). A youth exchange structure cannot be viable, however, if it is essentially not desired, designed and supported by the stakeholders involved, and is instead simply the result of the work of external stakeholders. Even if external stakeholders assume a very active role as facilitators and coordinators during the start-up phase, their aim must be, first, even during the initial stages of creation, to leave decision-making to the regional stakeholders; and, secondly, to make themselves superfluous over time, thus ensuring that ownership of the new youth exchange structure truly lies with the affected regional stakeholders. This does not mean that the external stakeholders

formerly involved cannot provide advice and support even after the new regional youth office has gone into operation. Even then, though, the external experts must take care not to jeopardise the principle of regional responsibility and ownership.

**The experience with RYCO:**

› From the beginning, the governments of Germany and France, the FGYO and the facilitator team emphasised to governments and stakeholders in civil society from the Western Balkans that they will gladly assist in setting up RYCO in various ways, but that the actual decisions relative to the creation and design of RYCO must be taken in and by the region itself.

› The team of FGYO facilitators exercised advisory and supportive functions during the creation of RYCO, but substantive decisions were always taken by the regional RYCO Working Group or the six governments and, following

signature of the RYCO Agreement, by the RYCO Governing Board.

› The FGYO facilitator team or its successor, the Joint Coordination Team, disbanded as soon as a functional 'executive' for RYCO had been created through the RYCO Secretariat in Tirana and its offices in Belgrade, Podgorica, Pristina, Sarajevo and Skopje.

› The principle of regional ownership was also implemented in the decision-making structures and in the RYCO budget. The RYCO Governing Board, the top decision-making authority within RYCO, consists exclusively of representatives of the Western Balkans, whereas international stakeholders are also represented in the Advisory Board. As regards the RYCO budget, given the difficult financial situation of the States of the Western Balkans, consideration was periodically given to having a large share of the



budget provided through international financing. Then, however, a conviction prevailed among the participants that the governments of the region must also assume corresponding financial responsibility if they are serious about RYCO and truly view it as their own structure: thus, in the binding Statute

the governments specified that at least 50% plus 1 euro of the annual RYCO budget should be provided by the six governments of the Western Balkans. This sent a clear signal that regional responsibility and ownership constitute a central principle for them.





## Photo legend

[Photo 1](#) (cover): Western Balkan Summit on July 4<sup>th</sup> 2016 in Paris at the Elysée Palace / The heads of state and government from France, Germany, the WB6 with members of the RYCO working group and the FGYO Secretary-Generals.

[Photo 2](#) (cover): Members of the Fact Finding Mission prepare the creation of RYCO during the Western Balkan Summit from August 25<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> 2015 in Vienna.

[Photo 3](#) (cover): Second meeting of the RYCO Working Group from December 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> 2015 in Tirana.

[Photo 4](#) (p.5): Third meeting of RYCO's Governing Board from March 20<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> 2017 in Berlin (Discussion in the federal Chancellery).

[Photo 5](#) (p.6): Prime minister, Edi Rama, meets the Secretary-Generals of the FGYO, Béatrice Angrand and Markus Ingenlath, and the Southeastern Europe special representative, Frank Morawietz, for preparatory talks in February 2015 in Tirana.

[Photo 6](#) (p.7): The RYCO Fact Finding Mission meets FGYO Secretary-Generals, Béatrice Angrand, in the FGYO head office in Paris in June 2015.

[Photo 7](#) (p.8): The members of the FGYO Joint Coordination Team, Nicolas Moll, Bujar Luma and Frank Morawietz.

[Photo 8](#) (p.9): Prime minister, Aleksander Vucic, meets the Secretary-Generals of the FGYO, Béatrice Angrand and Markus Ingenlath, for preparatory talks in February 2015 in Belgrade.

[Photo 9](#) (p.10): First working session of the RYCO working group at the FGYO in Berlin, November 23<sup>rd</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> 2015.

[Photo 10](#) (p.11): Third working session of the RYCO working group in Sarajevo, January 25<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> 2016.

[Photo 11](#) (p.12): Albania's Prime minister, Edi Rama, with youth representatives from the Western Balkans at the Western Balkan Summit in Vienna in August 2015.

[Photo 12](#) (p.13): Reunion of the heads of state and government during the Western Balkan Summit in Vienna in August 2015.

[Photo 13](#) (p.14): Working session of the RYCO Fact Finding Mission during the Western Balkan Summit in Vienna in August 2015.

[Photo 14](#) (p.15): Working session of the RYCO Fact Finding Mission at the FGYO in Paris in July 2015.

[Photo 15](#) (p.16): RYCO Fact Finding Group dining with the FGYO Secretary-Generals during the first meeting in Paris in June 2015.

[Photo 16](#) (p.17): Working session of the RYCO Fact Finding Mission at the FGYO in Paris in June 2015.

[Photo 17](#) (p.18): Youth representatives of RYCO's Governing board discuss with the FGYO Secretary-Generals, Markus Ingenlath, in the FGYO office in Berlin in Mai 2018.

[Photo 18](#) (p.19): Done! The heads of the WB6 governments sign the „Joint Declaration on the Establishment of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office of the Western-Balkans“ at the Western Balkans Summit from August 26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> in Vienna.

Picture: Djuro Blanusa, Serbian Youth Ministry, Kreshnik Loka, Albanian Youth Ministry and Bujar Luma, part of the FGYO Moderation Teams with Johann Sattler, Austrian Foreign Ministry (currently Austrian Ambassador in Tirana).

[Photo 19](#) (p.20): Second working session of the RYCO Working Group from December 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> 2015 in Tirana.

[Photo 20](#) (p.21): These heads of state and government from Austria, Germany, France, the WB6 and the EU during the Western Balkan Summit from August 26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> 2015 in Vienna.

[Photo 21](#) (p.22): Second working session of the RYCO Working Group from December 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> 2015 in Tirana.

[Photo 22](#) (p.23): Working session of the RYCO Fact Finding Mission during the Western Balkan Summit in Vienna in August 2015.

[Photo 23](#) (p.24): One of the first RYCO-Projekts: Young musicians from the Western Balkans during the Western Balkan Summit in Trieste in July 2017.

[Photo 24](#) (p.25): Working session of the RYCO Fact Finding Mission at the FGYO in Paris, June 2015.

[Photo 25](#) (p.26): First meeting of the RYCO Governing board on December 8<sup>th</sup> 2016 in Tirana: FGYO Secretary-Generals, Béatrice Angrand, with six youth representatives of RYCO's Governing board.

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