



Promoting Common Values Across Europe

(PROCOVE)

Project Handbook

*Funded
by the*



Table of content

“Common values”	4
Participating partners	5
Opening events	8
Hungary.....	8
Local launch event in Szeged	8
Local launch event in Pécs	8
Local launch event in Budapest	9
Kosovo	10
Local launch event in Prishtina.....	10
North Macedonia	11
Local launch event.....	11
Romania.....	12
Local launch event in Cluj-Napoca	12
Local launch event in Constanta	13
Public debates.....	15
Hungary.....	15
Europe and us - A community of shared values, a point of reference or something different?	15
Annual Conference to Celebrate the Global Anti-corruption Day	16
Opportunities to fight corruption within the European Union	17
Kosovo	17
Implementation of the EU sustainable development agenda - A challenge for Kosovo.....	17
North Macedonia	18
Public debate	18
Romania.....	19
Public debate in Cluj-Napoca	19
Public debate in Constanta	21
Essay/photo competition.....	23
Hungary.....	23
Infographics competition	23

Kosovo	24
Prizes awarded for the best essay on "How can EU funds be spent for the benefit of the community where you live?"	24
Romania	25
Public speaking competition for the youth	25
North Macedonia	28
Photo contest winners	28
Guided tours.....	31
Hungary.....	31
Virtual guided tour with Ákos Hadházy	31
Virtual guided tour in Pécs	31
Virtual guided tour in Szeged	32
Kosovo	33
Six visits in Lipjan and in Mitrovica to EU-funded projects.....	33
North Macedonia	35
Guided online tour.....	35
Romania	36
Architectural treasure hunts	36
International workshop.....	40
Fake news during COVID-19 - How disinformation undermines EU values and what NGOs can do to stop it?.....	40
Research.....	42
Project closing ceremony.....	45
Hungary's EU membership under review: debate between former EU Commissioners László Andor and Tibor Navracsics.....	45
Kosovo	46
Project closing event in Prishtina	46
North Macedonia	48
Strengthening the judiciary in the fight against corruption, 11 June 2021	48
Romania.....	48
Closing event	48

“Common values”

The primary aim of this project to promote European values such as the rule of law, democracy, transparency, press freedom, equality, and solidarity across Eastern Central European Member States and in potential Candidate Countries. Furthermore, the project's goal was to encourage participants to become active citizens and engage in the democratic process at local, national, and international level. We find it of utmost importance to ask the citizens about their attitude towards the EU and its values, while we also wanted them to identify the challenges the organization is facing, and, if possible, offer their solutions.

We intended to reach these goals through the implementation of interactive debate events that explored EU-related topics like the use of EU funds, sustainability, the future of the EU, citizen attitudes towards EU-membership and values, and tools of active citizenship. The project also fostered citizens' understanding of the EU as a community of shared values, and there was a special focus on the active involvement of citizens with both proven and new formats like guided tours and competitions. In these activities, we intended to engage them in a creative thinking process on the major challenges of the EU and ask their opinion on how to tackle these. Furthermore, we used live quizzes, and we created an online survey on EU challenges and the vision of the EU.

Participating partners

Transparency International Hungary

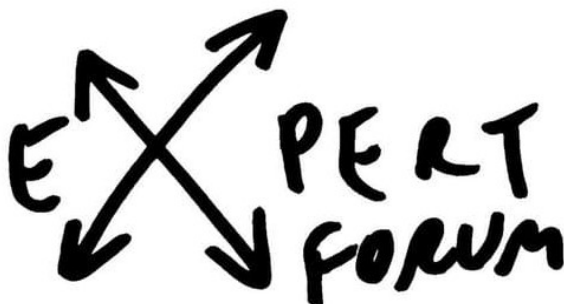


The Transparency International Hungary Foundation was registered in October 2006 and was granted TI's "Chapter in formation" status in May 2007, becoming a full member of Transparency International in 2009. Our goal as an independent professional

organization is to contribute to mitigating corruption, promoting transparency and accountability in the public sphere of decision making processes as well as allocation of public funds, moreover to improving accessibility of public interest information.

TI Hungary participated in the project as coordinator. 12 events were organised, with more than 600 registrations. The events provided a good opportunity to discuss issues related to the role, values and the future of the European Union. Several leading politicians and academics shared their experiences and views on issues such as the EU budget, freedom of the press, the rule of law, European identity, the activities of EU organisations in the fight against corruption and the fight against fake news in the context of the pandemic. Virtual corruption tours were held in three locations in response to the epidemic. Audience engagement was an important element of each programme, with debates, quizzes, and online games at the end of the presentations, allowing participants to get involved. During the project, we launched an infographic competition on the achievements of EU accession.

Expert Forum – Romania



Expert Forum (EFOR) is a think tank based in Bucharest that was established by four well-known experts of public policy and government reforms. The organization's main areas of activity include administrative reform and the integrity of the public sector; decentralization, regional development, public financing; judicial and anti-corruption reforms; and energy and transport policy. Expert Forum members have been involved in the most important evaluations

of institutional reforms in the public administration and have analyzed the policy process in recent years in Romania and neighbouring countries (particularly in the Western Balkans and Moldova),

in collaboration with the European Commission, Council of Europe, World Bank and United Nations Development Programme. The think tank has obtained support from a series of international donors to promote transparency and good governance in Romania and the region, as well as to monitor the proper, transparent use of public budgets. Expert Forum is also a member of the Open Government Partnership initiative, which supports governments in ensuring increased transparency of public interest information.

During the project, Expert Forum has used its previously gained experience in engaging citizens at local level to support the democratic engagement of citizens in two Romanian cities (Cluj and Constanta). With the help of local partners, Expert Forum engaged local citizens in debates around priorities at local level such as the importance of transparency in public institutions, urban mobility and energy efficiency. Expert Forum also made use of public speaking competitions on issues of importance for young people at local level to promote European values and encourage engagement in public life.

Transparency International Macedonia



Transparency International – Macedonia (TI-M) was established in December 2006. Since its establishment, TI – Macedonia has had a visible impact on the creation of an anti-corruption policy and the development of the

good governance based on transparency, accountability, and responsibility. In the beginning of 2011, Transparency Zero Corruption got accreditation as a full member of the global coalition against corruption Transparency International and changed the name to TI – Macedonia. The organization has become a reference point for the media and other activists working on anticorruption and accountability in the Republic of Macedonia and wider. The progress in the fight against corruption is visible through the increased transparency, adopted legislation and the level of awareness of the citizens.

TI-M was a project partner in this project. Within the framework of the project, TI-M organized one opening event with high-profile guests, two public debates and presentation of the possibilities provided by EU funds. More than 200 people attended these events. TI-M also organized a photo contest where three winning photographs were selected.

Kosova Democratic Institute



Kosova Democratic Institute (KDI) was founded on 14 April 2005 as a non-governmental organization upon the initiative of local staff of National Democratic Institute's (NDI's) civic participation programs with the mission to support the development of democracy through the engagement of men and women in the policy-making process and

through enhancing the transparency and accountability of public institutions. As a chapter of global anti-corruption movement, Transparency International, KDI contributes to a corruption free environment where institutions, business and citizens exercise their rights and roles with integrity and dignity.

Over the past 15 years, KDI has developed a distinct identity and portfolio as of the most active, credible and influential CSOs in Kosovo. KDI is well-known to the public for leading and engaging in a wide range of activities - from parliament monitoring, election monitoring and electoral reforms to influencing good governance policies and practices, promoting, and demanding institutional transparency, integrity and accountability, scrutinizing public procurement processes, and empowering youth and women participation in political processes.

In this project, KDI was engaged as a project partner. Within the framework of the project, KDI organized four public activities and one essay competition with roughly 200 people engaged in these activities. Several EU policy experts, civil society representatives and students shared their views on EU values such as the rule of law, democracy, transparency, press freedom, equality and solidarity; the active participation of citizens, especially young people; broaden citizens' knowledge of the rights and responsibilities that come with EU membership and discussed the future of Europe. KDI organized visit with civil society representatives and students to six localities in two cities of Kosova where EU-funded projects have been implemented. During the project, we launched an essay competition on how EU funds can be used for the benefit of the community.

Opening events

Hungary

Local launch event in Szeged

On 29 September 2020, Transparency International Hungary and the Horizont Freedom Research Association (Horizont Szabadságkutató Egyesület) jointly organized [an event named Is the new EU budget benefitting Hungary?](#), where an expert from Transparency International and lecturers from the University of Szeged discussed the EU's new budget, approved in the summer of 2020, from several aspects. Participants had the chance to learn more about the domestic and international political context of the budget's approval and its economic implications, such as the Recovery Fund launched in order to help with the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic, or the restricting EU funds to the maintenance of the rule of law.

Following the roundtable discussion, an EU-themed pub quiz awaited those up for the challenge. Questions ranged from exciting trivia to ones requiring lexical knowledge about Europe and the EU. The four competing teams had a good-spirited match and finished with close results. The winning team of five young locals won a gift box compiled by TI Hungary.



Local launch event in Pécs

[The launch event](#) in Pécs, held online on 30 September 2020, addressed the situation of the freedom of the press in Hungary. Gábor Polyák, associate professor at the Department of Communication and Media Studies from the University of Pécs, Attila Babos, Editor-in-Chief at Szabad Pécs and József Péter Martin, Executive Director at Transparency International Hungary discussed the most important aspects and connections between the situation of the media and the rule of law in Hungary.

The Hungarian media market has had challenges related to the freedom of the press for a long time, but with the independent media's shrinking from 2010 and the new, increasingly state-

controlled media structure from 2014, the suppression of the press reached a new level. According to Gábor Polyák, the main theme of these processes is the concentration of state advertisements within pro-government media, while introducing measures that hinder independent press. In Polyák's summary of the new media structure, "this was the perfect system for destroying positions in the market". He also noted that while public money has become a major source of media funding, independent media sources are no longer able to sustain themselves from traditional market revenues.

According to Attila Babos, 2010 was not the year when the freedom of the press ended, but the year when its decline really began, accelerating significantly from 2014. He added that the period between the autumn of 2016 and the spring of 2018 played a vital role in the destruction of the free press, as this was when the closure of the major left-leaning Hungarian newspaper Népszabadság happened, as well as when county newspapers were taken over.

During the discussion, József Péter Martin stressed that the erosion of press freedom accelerated after 2016. He added that although the levels of press freedom and corruption are both difficult to quantify, approximate models indicate that the two phenomena are highly correlated. They show that Hungary, along with Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia and Greece, is among the EU countries with high levels of corruption and low media freedom.

Local launch event in Budapest

The event series kicked off on 1 October 2020 in Budapest, with a [discussion](#) held at Tranzit Art Café between Katalin Cseh (MEP, Momentum Movement, Renew Europe) and Balázs Orbán (Strategic Secretary of the Hungarian Prime Minister's Office), regarding the new EU budget and the rule of law. The discussion was moderated by József Péter Martin, Executive Director at Transparency International Hungary.

Although there was some agreement between the two parties when it came to the new EU budget and its positive properties for both Hungary and the European community as a whole, the differences on the topics of the rule of law and corruption proved to be irreconcilable. Balázs Orbán argued that the EU's institutions are more interested in demanding the application of political ideologies rather than the rule of law in Hungary. On the other hand, Katalin Cseh pointed out that there would be no need to worry about examining the condition of the rule of law, or joining the European Public Prosecutor's Office, if everything were fine in the country. The discussion also revealed that the two participants have entirely different views on the issue of the freedom of the press in Hungary.



Transparency International Hungary considers creating these meaningful discussions on serious issues a great achievement, hoping that the revival of the declining debate culture in Hungary will last.

Kosovo

Local launch event in Prishtina

By the end of September, KDI officially launched the project “Promoting Common Values Across Europe” funded by the European Commission’s programme ‘Europe for Citizens’. Although it was planned to take place as a public activity with the physical presence of the participants, the launch of this project was organised in an online format due to the Covid-19 situation. Around 50 people participated in this discussion.

In the online event with the youth, the professor of European Integration at the University of Prishtina, Jehona Lushaku – Sadriu, and a lecturer at the Faculty of Law, Artan Murati, spoke about the position of Kosovo in relation to the EU’ integration process, who among other things stressed the importance of undertaking reforms for the Kosovo integration process and the need for a more serious approach by Kosovo institutions during this process.

Speaking about European common values in terms of political criteria, the need for the functioning of democracy’s principles within institutions and political parties was mentioned, while from an economic aspect, it was said that there is an urgency to build Kosovo’s relations with all European initiatives in order for economic reforms to have results and to benefit from EU funds.

The students and other participants, on the other hand, expressed their views on where Kosovo stands in relation to embracing European values, and the EU's unfair approach to Kosovo regarding the visa liberalisation process.

North Macedonia

Local launch event



The project's [promotional event](#) was held on 21 October. The speakers were: Ms. Slagjana Taseva, President of Transparency International-Macedonia, H.E Mr. Nikola Dimitrov, Deputy Prime Minister in charge of European Affairs, H.E Mr. David Geer, Ambassador of Delegation of the European Union and H.E Ms. Anke Holstein, Ambassador of Germany. The event was opened by the President of TI-M, Ms Slagjana Taseva. She gave an overview of the project, its goals and results, and the activities that will be implemented. High level speakers involved in EU integration were invited to the discussion. They shared their perspectives on the situation within the EU, the accession of new countries, as well as the accession and the negotiation process involving Macedonia. The total number of participants was 39, mainly from various state institutions and organisations.



Romania

Local launch event in Cluj-Napoca



Expert Forum together with its local partner in Cluj-Napoca, Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD), hosted a debate online on 25 November 2020 with representatives of the local administration in Cluj-Napoca to discuss the directions of development for the city in the following years. Having just had local elections in September 2020, the debate was a great opportunity to discuss priorities for the new local public administration in terms of using EU funds to advance on digitalization, mobility, urban development and transport.

The speakers were: Ovidiu Câmpean, Manager with Cluj-Napoca City Hall, Adriana Cristian, Local councillor, USR Plus Party, Cluj-Napoca, Ovidiu Vaida, Local councilor, National Liberal Party, Cluj-Napoca, Vasile Dâncu, President of the National Council of the Social Democrat Party, moderator Laura Ștefan, Executive Director, Expert Forum.



Local launch event in Constanta

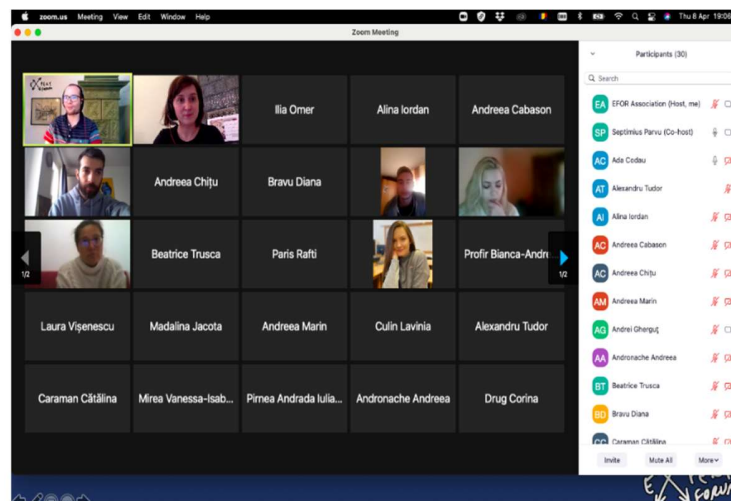


On 8 April 2021, journalism students from the Ovidius University in Constanta participated in the launch event entitled “Do we know what we don't know? How do we make public data transparent to get out of the fog?”. The event took place online, discussing the importance of transparency and access to public information for journalists and citizens alike. Septimius Pârvu and Cezara Grama from Expert Forum presented the conclusions on two case studies on accessing public information – political financing and sanctions imposed by the police during the COVID-19 lockdown. On the topic of political financing, Septimius Pârvu explained how the process of financing political parties has changed in recent years in Romania. At this moment in Romania, it is not possible to talk about an open data monitoring system on funding political parties. There is no real transparency, most documents are still in formats such as Excel and scanned PDFs, which are difficult to connect and often incorrect. However, the situation is better compared to the period before 2015, as more information began to be published.

A good practice example in this regard would be a platform developed recently by Expert Forum – www.banipartide.ro, a platform that monitors the financing of parties and electoral campaigns and on which monthly reports are published. Available information includes those relating to all party revenues and expenditures in 2020, but also to the names of natural and legal persons who donated sums of money to the party in the period 2006-2020. The information is structured in graphics for easier viewing and faster understanding.

Cezara Grama talked about the monitoring that Expert Forum did last year, during the state of emergency, regarding the sanctions applied by the Romanian Police and Gendarmerie. One of the conclusions was that there is no clear data on the number of fines imposed and on the number of warnings, but only related to the total number of sanctions given. After requesting access to this information from the Police and being denied access to it because the Police does not collect this data, EFOR initiated a strategic litigation in all 42 tribunals around the country to establish unitary practice regarding access to public information

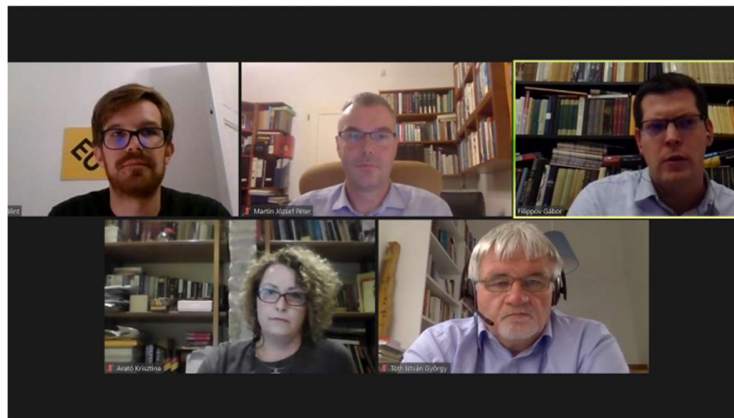
The students and the speakers debated about the need to increase transparency within public institutions and how citizens can make use of these very valuable instruments.



Public debates

Hungary

Europe and us - A community of shared values, a point of reference or something different?



The [online presentation](#) entitled “Europe and us - A community of shared values, a point of reference or something different?” was held on 25 November 2020, which was also combined with a roundtable discussion. In his opening speech, István György Tóth, CEO of the polling firm TÁRKI, addressed how Hungarians think of the European Union and of Europe in general. According to Eurobarometer surveys, the Hungarian population’s European identity and their support of the EU is relatively strong. Additionally, the proportion of those who think that the state is acting in their interest has increased significantly since the fall of communism in Hungary. However, many still think that voting is not particularly important, as elections do not represent the interest of the voters. István György Tóth said that in a “competition of systems”, liberal systems are always more efficient in the long run than authoritarian systems, and that “checks and balances” are essential parts of the common good, and prerequisites for freedom, competition, and prosperity.

Following the opening speech, a panel of experts examined the Hungarian society’s relationship with Europe and the EU from several aspects. Gábor Filippov, Research Director at Equilibrium Institute, initiated the conversation by saying that Hungarians regard the EU and Europe inseparable from the notions of Western integration, development, transparent fiscal policy and reducing public debt. According to Krisztina Arató, professor at ELTE University and the president of the Hungarian Political Science Association, the Hungarian government’s communication is targeting Brussels and not the EU because the EU is a stable institution that people trust, which makes it more difficult to attack. In her view, Hungarian and European identities are not mutually exclusive.

József Péter Martin, Executive Director at Transparency International Hungary, contemplated the possible reasons behind the significant improvement in Hungary's perception of the European Union. He said that the positive perception change in terms of the EU's usefulness may have happened because Hungarians feel a great sense of closeness to the Western world. The vast majority of the Hungarian population identifies as European as well, however, the most decisive explanation is the economic factor. When asked why the EU is useful for Hungarians, the general answer was that it creates jobs, helps to provide growth and achieve a higher standard of living – aspects such as peace, cooperation or political freedom were rarely mentioned

Annual Conference to Celebrate the Global Anti-corruption Day



Transparency International Hungary held its [annual end-of-year conference](#) celebrating Global Anti-corruption Day on 9 December 2020. Unfortunately, due to the virus, only the speakers were able to attend the event in person, but anyone could join through Zoom or Facebook, too.

The first section of the two-part conference examined how the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), which is the Council of Europe's anti-corruption monitoring body, as well as various other EU entities, like the recently established European Public Prosecutor's Office, can help in the fight against corruption in individual countries like Hungary. The speakers of this section were Marin Mrčela, President of GRECO, and Ákos Hadházy, independent Hungarian MP. Following their presentations, a panel of experts analysed the roles and potentials of the European Public Prosecutor's Office. This discussion involved Petra Bárd, Péter Hack, Zoltán Fleck and Miklós Ligeti.

In the second part of the conference, constitutional lawyer Péter Tölgyessy gave a speech entitled Politics above all - the place of the rule of law in Viktor Orbán's system. Then, a panel discussion assessed the year in terms of transparency and exposure to corruption, while examining the effects of the coronavirus on various sectors, including the government, the healthcare system and the economy. The participants were professor Dóra Györffy, medical lawyer Zsombor Kovácsy, political analyst Péter Krekó and József Péter Martin. Both panel discussions were moderated by Ágnes Lampé.

Opportunities to fight corruption within the European Union

On 30 March 2021, Transparency International Hungary organized an [online discussion](#) for students at Budapest's Alternative Secondary School of Economics (Alternatív Közgazdasági Gimnázium). The main purpose of the event was presenting the organisation to the students, after which they were able to ask questions from the discussion's organiser, Bálint Mikola, project manager at Transparency International Hungary. Participants had the opportunity to learn more about TI's origin, work and goals, as well as about the nature of its main activities and the related funding options. The other most important topic was corruption as a phenomenon: its definition, what activities it includes and how it can be measured. In addition, there was a discussion about the Corruption Perceptions Index and its findings from recent years.

Among other things, students wanted to know how the EU can control corruption in Hungary, and what tools there are to reduce it. The activities of OLAF and the potentials of the European Public Prosecutor's Office were also discussed in this regard. Furthermore, there were questions about the recently adopted rule of law mechanism, and about its potential impacts on domestic corruption, as well as whether it could limit its prevalence. The fake party (kamupárt) phenomenon, which is specific to Hungary, was also mentioned in connection with the elections of 2014 and 2018, as well as the misuse of campaign funds, and TI Hungary's proposal to solve this problem. The event came to an end with a discussion on ways students can contribute to the work of Transparency International Hungary in the form of voluntary activities and suggestions.

Kosovo

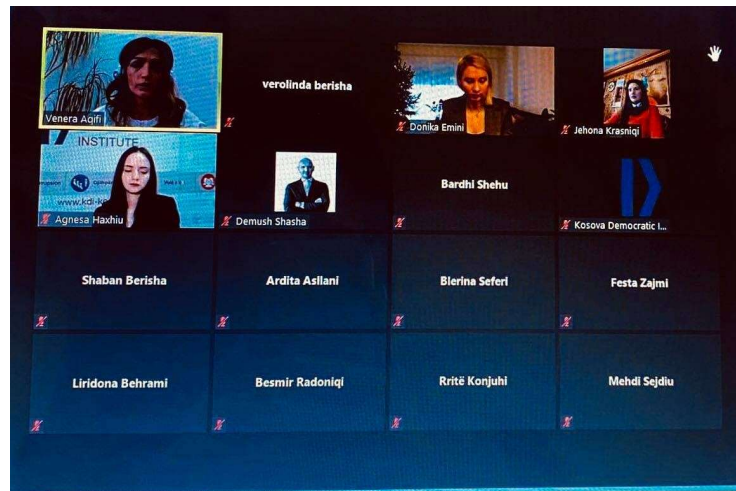
Implementation of the EU sustainable development agenda - A challenge for Kosovo

The Kosovo Democratic Institute held an online discussion entitled "EU Perspectives on Sustainable Development: Kosovo's Opportunities", with the participation of EU policy experts, representatives of the civil society and students.

The virtual roundtable examined the policies of the European Union regarding the promotion of sustainable development inside and outside of the EU. Furthermore, experts of this field gave their perspectives on what the opportunities and challenges are for Kosovo to implement these policies, as well as the link between sustainable development policies and the EU accession process.

Demush Shasha from EPIK Institute, presenting the content of the 2030 agenda approved by the United Nations Assembly, said that it has been adopted by the EU and from the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals. In 2019, the European Commission has organised them into 6 political priorities for 2019-2024, including the green agenda, the inclusive economy, the transition to digital economy, European standards, the EU as a global power for democratic standards for

third countries, and the promotion of European democracy in the EU countries themselves. In his speech, he also emphasized the fact that Kosovo has two main challenges in the implementation of this agenda, which, according to him, are the lack of political will and the lack of administrative capacity for the complex planning required by this process.



On the other hand, Donika Emini from CIVIKOS said that the implementation of this agenda is a challenge for the EU itself, because it lacks a long-term strategy and there are no sanctioning mechanisms in place against countries EU countries that do not implement this agenda. She also stressed the fact that the lack of political will is a challenge for all Western Balkan countries and especially for Kosovo. Although Kosovo is committed to the implementation of this agenda and its objectives, she said that Kosovo institutions have not shown a serious approach to the implementation of these policies, which directly affects the lives of citizens.

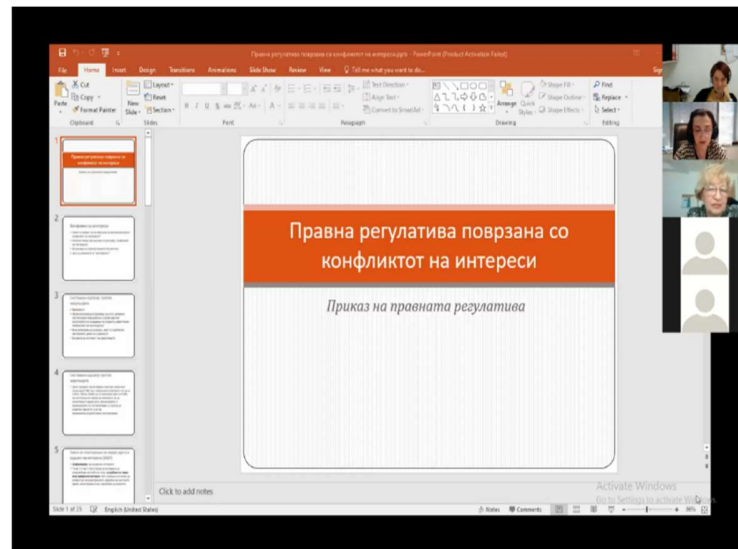
Venera Aqifi from GIZ, while talking about the connection between the European integration process and the agenda for sustainable development, said that these two processes are related to each other because the results of one field affect the results of the other field. Presenting the EU plan for the Western Balkans in terms of the green agenda in accordance with the EU Green Pact, she praised the work of the Assembly in overseeing the implementation of this agenda by establishing the Council for Sustainable Development, and the Parliamentary Group of Greens overseeing this process.

North Macedonia

Public debate

On 4 June 2021, a debate was held regarding conflicts of interest and the protection of whistleblowers. The speakers were: Ms. Natasha Gaber Damjanovska, Director at Academy for

judges and public prosecutors, Ms. Sofka Pejovska- Dojcinovska, Member of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) and Ms. Irena Popovska, Head of sector, State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC). The debate included presentations from the experts, and a discussion among the participants afterwards.



First, a general overview was given on the legal framework that regulates conflicts of interest. Ms. Natasha Gaber Damjanovska introduced the Law on prevention of corruption, the criminal code, the Law on courts and the Law on public prosecution. Then practical cases of conflicts of interest were discussed, and an overview of the implementation of the Law on whistleblowers was given. The aim of the debate was to strengthen the internal and external staff capacities responsible for disclosure. It is one of the mechanisms that needed to be further strengthened in order to detect irregularities and possible cases of corruption in the functioning of state institutions. Since chapter 23 is of special importance once Macedonia starts the negotiations with the EU, it is good to contribute with these kinds of debates on the improvement of the rule of law and the implementation of anticorruption measures. The debate's participants were young judges and public prosecutors from the Academy of Judges and public prosecutors, employees from SCPC and the State Audit Office, as well as students and members of other relevant institutions.

Romania

Public debate in Cluj-Napoca

On 2 June 2021, Expert Forum together with its local partner in Cluj-Napoca, Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD), hosted a public debate on the topic of the Green Deal package, adopted at the level of the European Union, and its impact on public policies at the local level regarding energy efficiency and environmental protection.

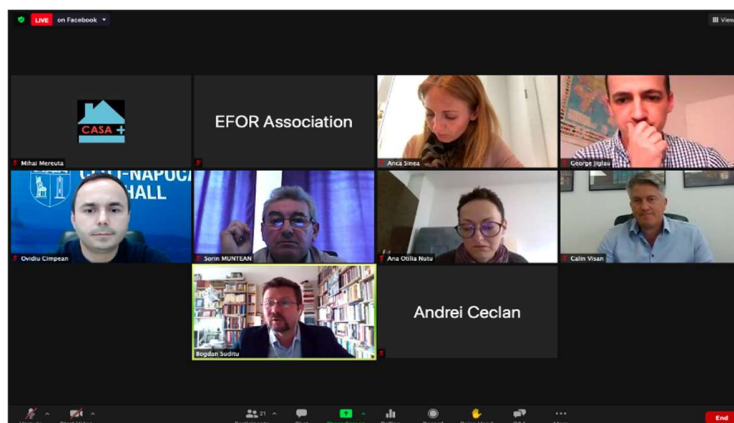


The European Green Deal brings profound changes for citizens and communities across Europe. Still evolving, but also facing social and environmental problems that come with rapid expansion, Cluj will have to go through ambitious social and economic transformations to meet the new challenges. The ways of producing, distributing and using energy, both at the level of the authorities and at the level of households and citizens, are key elements for achieving the ambitious goals that Cluj and the EU as a whole have assumed.

We discussed the challenges related to energy efficiency and heating in the residential environment in the context of real estate developments, in order to understand how the quality of life can increase for the people of Cluj with the least possible impact on the environment.

Anca Sinea (Researcher and expert in energy policies, Center for the Study of Democracy, UBB Cluj) made a short presentation on the philosophy of the EU Green Deal and the targets assumed, focusing particularly on Romania. Ovidiu Cîmpean (Manager of the General Directorate of Communication, Local Development and Project Management, Cluj-Napoca City Hall) continued with a discussion on progress and challenges in the development of Cluj with an emphasis on the residential environment and the impact on the environment from the perspective of local administration.

Andrei Ceclan talked about evolutions and challenges regarding energy policies in the context of Cluj's urban development (President, Romanian Society of Energy Auditors and Managers, Urban Energy Manager) while Bogdan Suditu (Associate Professor at the Faculty of Geography of the University of Bucharest) discussed housing challenges for a city like Cluj in the context of the European Green Pact.



All of these presentations created the context for a very fruitful debate with relevant stakeholders on this topic, such as Ana Otilia Nuțu (Energy Expert, EFOR), Mihai Mereuță (President, League of Habitat Owners Associations, Romanian Association for Housing Plus) Sorin Muntean (President of the Federation of Owners Associations Cluj Napoca, Vice President of the Habitat League) and Călin Vișan, (Business Development Manager, Solaris Real Estate Development, Cluj).

Public debate in Constanta

On 6 August 2021, Expert Forum together with its local partner, the Civic Resource Center in Constanta (CRC), hosted a public debate on the topic of the Green Deal package, adopted at the level of the European Union, and its impact on the development of the sustainable urban mobility system in Constanța and its surroundings.

The city of Constanta can easily become suffocated by traffic and cars. The new parking lot regulation in Constanța was established to discourage the use of cars in the city, while bicycle lanes are arranged over a distance of 5 km, but is this enough to be able to talk about sustainable urban mobility? How can we use the recently adopted European Green Pact for the benefit of the

community of Constanta? These were the main aspects to be discussed with representatives of the civil society in Constanta and of the local administration.



Suzana Carp (Director of EcoDobrogea and expert on climate policies at European level, Bellona Foundation) made a short presentation on the targets set out by the Green Deal at EU level and particularly for Romania. She then turned to the situation in Constanta and what the main priorities should be in the next 10 years for the local administration towards a sustainable urban mobility system.

Cristiana Popescu (Local councillor, Constanta local council) and Adrian Craciun (Director of the Constanta Metropolitan Area Association) spoke about the main priorities and challenges from an institutional point of view. NGO representatives also joined the conversation and discussed the main challenges when it comes to a sustainable urban mobility system.

Essay/photo competition

Hungary

Infographics competition

Transparency International Hungary's infographics competition aimed to shed some light on the following topic: What has Hungary achieved since joining the EU? The winners were announced at [an online award ceremony](#) by József Péter Martin, Executive Director at Transparency International Hungary the 30 June 2021.

Many question how well Hungary has been utilising the support and the advantages offered by the EU, despite the fact that most Hungarians see the 2004 accession as a historic opportunity, and the population has demonstrated an unprecedented support towards Hungary's EU membership. The works submitted to the competition reflected on what goals have been achieved since the 2004 accession, what is yet to be achieved, or where the country has deviated from its previous direction.

The submitted infographics were evaluated anonymously by independent data visualisation specialists. Among other things, they evaluated the works based on the rules and principles of data-based information representation, the elaborateness of the design, the logical structure of the work, the clearness of the presentation and statements, and the demonstration of appropriate information. The members of the jury were Attila Bátorfy, editor at Átlátszó.hu, Máté Fillér, director of animated films, graphic designer, and employee at Telex.hu, Kata Schiffer, graphic designer, and Ervin Zsubori, editor-in-chief at Infotandem.

A wide variety of topics were covered by the received applications, ranging from agriculture to comparing the performances of the Visegrad Group countries. However, the jury decided that none of the entries were impeccable from a professional standpoint, so they only chose two winners, for the second and the third places. The second place went to Tímea Cseh and Szabina Iván, whose project was named *Is Hungary doing better? – The state of the healthcare system since joining the EU*. The third place went to Raszti Lilla for her project *Corruption Perception Index in EU countries*, which analysed the data of Transparency International's Corruption Index.



Based on the evaluation of the jury, the focus of the young applicants in this competition were the topics of environmental protection, improving air quality, creating recreational spaces for young people, developing tourism, increasing energy efficiency, etc.

Romania

Public speaking competition for the youth

In May 2021, Expert Forum organised a public speaking competition dedicated to the youth in Romania using a method we have already used in our projects before, focusing on giving young people a platform to speak out about issues important to them and to their communities. The theme of the competition was “What is an important issue that affects you and your community?” and its purpose was to empower the voice of the youth and to support them in making their priorities and issues heard, while encouraging realistic solutions and active citizenship.

The participants had to deliver and video record a 3-minute speech around this theme and explain how the EU community (its policies, its instruments, its institution and its citizens) could help in addressing their concerns. Either by identifying an issue that affects them at the European Union level, or by understanding how the EU or other Member States approach the issue they identified, students had to understand the inner workings of the EU, what our shared values are, and how we can work together to ensure democracy, equity and human rights. In order to achieve this, students first used resources such as the EU & Me to have a better understanding of the EU and

the Learning Corner to consolidate the information. To support them in their education journey, we prepared a folder of useful information in Romanian.¹

To integrate the EU community in an informed manner, students used tools such as the Eurobarometer to include trustworthy information about their issues and to compare different perspectives and approaches by the Member States.

20 high school students from various communities in Romania (Roman, Tecuci, Mizil, Targoviste, Alexandria, Buzau, Timisoara, Galati and Constanta) entered the competition. Expert Forum supported them by providing workshops and feedback sessions.

The problems identified were for example women's rights, access to quality education, bullying and climate change.

Their speeches were evaluated by a jury made up of 3 experts:

- Alina Constantinescu, coordinator of projects in the field of education, civic involvement and promoting respect for diversity
- Andreea Rusu, executive director of the FILIA Center, a feminist organisation
- Monica Loloiu, member of the Political Department at the Representation of the European Commission in Romania

Based on the very close competition, we awarded multiple prizes for the 1st, 2nd and 3rd places. The prizes consisted of:

- 1st prize – eBook reader Kindle 2019
- 2nd prize – a 200 RON voucher for Carturesti
- 3rd prize – a one-year subscription on SkillShare

Special prizes by the jury were awarded for the best solutions, the best call for action, the best arguments and the best delivery of speech.

The winners of the competition were:

1. Bianca Stoian – 1st place
2. Roxana Cazacu – 1st place
3. Marius Chiriac – 2nd place
4. Oana Maria Ene – 2nd place
5. Andreea Lungu – 2nd place
6. Adriana Patrichi – 3rd place
7. Dara Ciubotaru – 3rd place
8. Cristiana Galateanu – 3rd place
9. Adriana Ciobanu – 3rd place
10. Ana Maria Marin – 3rd place

¹ <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1qiJisNIIY2tuTOq0Bp5UKqk7g-Y24h0w?usp=sharing>



Based on the feedback of the participants, they appreciated the opportunity not only to learn more about the European Union, but also to feel closer to its values and the community. 100% of the respondents said they felt safe and listened to within the competition, and 90% of them said that they wish to be active within their communities and parts of the solution for the issues they identified.

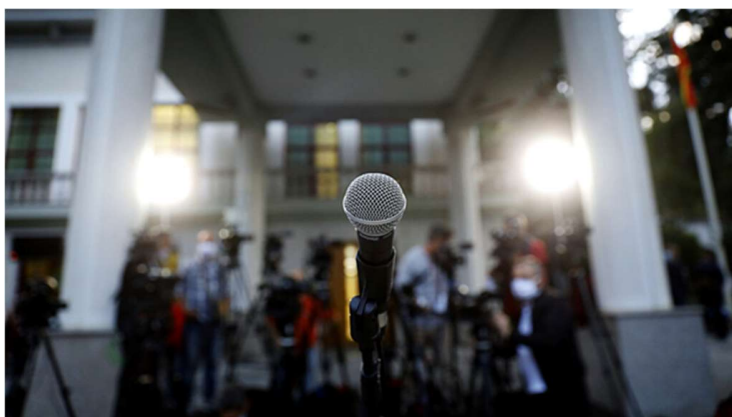
North Macedonia

Photo contest winners

Within the framework of the project Promoting Common Values Across Europe – supported by the European Union’s programme Europe for Citizens, Transparency International Macedonia published a contest for the best photography.

The overall objective of the project was the promotion of EU values such as: rule of law, democracy, transparency, media freedom, equality and solidarity among Eastern-European countries and the candidate countries. Additionally, the project envisaged the inclusion of citizens on a local, national and international level.

A total of 10 photographs were submitted for the contest, out of which three were chosen for awards in the following manner:



First place (€500 gross): Ivana Batev

“This photograph illustrates the importance of the freedom of speech and expression, as well as the responsibility of the media to deliver the truth in a healthy society that grows, learns and develops. This photograph was taken on 12 June 2020, in front of President Stevo Pendarovski’s cabinet”.



Second place (€300 gross): Kristijan Kocev

“We reflect back to the humble beginnings and the bridge towards today’s prosperity with widened opportunities for a more modern and better life”.



Third place (€200): Damjan Kozarov

“Promoting Common Values Across Europe – This picture illustrates the St. Gjorgji monastery in the village of Magarevo in the city of Bitola. This monastery was built in 1871, and it’s a heritage of the formerly known Magarevski monastery, i.e., women’s monastery that existed previously on that place. Our country is known for the large number of churches and monasteries that date back to the 14th century and are among the oldest on the Balkans. Over time, those buildings were torn down and their value decreased. With the help of EU funds, a reconstruction could be done to the old and demolished religious objects, and tourism in the country could be developed, while also bringing the old building “back to life”.

Guided tours

Hungary

Virtual guided tour with Ákos Hadházy



Due to the pandemic, [the guided tour](#) was held online via Zoom on 14 April 2021, organised with the help of independent Hungarian MP Ákos Hadházy. The event focused on how Hungary has been dealing with the subsidies received for boosting the economy, if the country has gotten any closer to Western living standards, or if at least it has paralleled the development of those in the region. József Péter Martin, Executive Director at TI Hungary and MP Ákos Hadházy both gave speeches on related to these issues.

Kisvaszar, Pusztatottlaka, Kétpó, Ludas, Nyírbogdán, Tófalu. These are some of the settlements mentioned by Hadházy in connection with the misuse of EU subsidies. He found a number of corruption cases in the above-mentioned locations, where EU subsidies were wasted tremendously. “Grassland octopus”: this is how Ákos Hadházy described the system that was established to consume EU subsidies.

At the end of the virtual journey, viewers had the chance to ask the MP some questions. He was asked about the consequences and effects of the uncovered cases, and whether he has also encountered positive ways of using EU subsidies. Unfortunately, he could not name an example for the latter aspect, as he was not able to recount any cases where the funds were used without overpricing. The answer to the first question was that none of his reports have effectively led to judicial proceedings.

Virtual guided tour in Pécs

The online corruption tour series continued on 29 April 2021, [exploring the city of Pécs](#). With the help of Attila Babos, the editor of the local news source Szabad Pécs, TI Hungary investigated

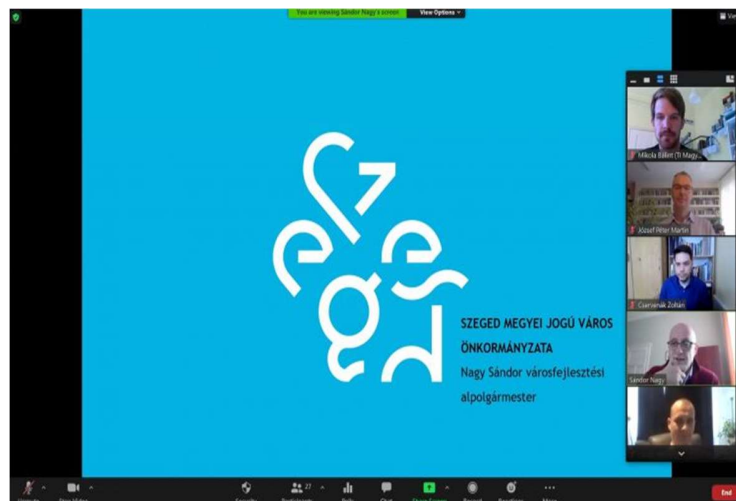
the most emblematic projects implemented with EU subsidies in and around Pécs, and whether these projects have served meaningful purposes for the local community. The most serious cases of misuse when it comes to these funds were also considered.

Attila Babos first pointed out some controversies surrounding the city's transformation into a cultural capital, mentioning that numerous pre-planned projects have still not been completed to this day. Another interesting case is that of the Pécs market hall, which was established with domestic sources instead of EU subsidies, but the construction of which has been delayed for a long time. The next highlight was the famous case of public lighting in Pécs, which, unlike other public lighting tenders won by the company Elios, was not investigated by the OLAF. The controversial Volvo-gate case, which has been the subject of many articles ever since, was also discussed. As Attila Babos put it, the Volvo bus purchase could be the city's most serious corruption incident from the last twenty years.

Lastly, the university development program of Pécs was also a topic of discussion, which was completed with several years of delay and a significant amount of additional costs – as Szabad Pécs mentioned before. However, the added billions are not entirely intended to make up for the shortfall due to higher construction costs, but are also used for equipment for the medical faculty's new theoretical block, as well as a parking lot.

Virtual guided tour in Szeged

[TI Hungary's virtual tour exploring](#) the use of EU funds in Szeged and its surrounding areas on 20 May 2021 was carried out with the participation of Sándor Nagy, Deputy Mayor of Szeged responsible for urban development, as well as Zoltán Cservenák, journalist at Szeged.hu and an employee at Szeged TV.



The first presentation was given by Sándor Nagy, Deputy Mayor of Szeged responsible for urban development. He introduced specific projects implemented in Szeged, including green city projects and the SaSMob (Smart Alliance for Sustainable Mobility) innovative transport development project. As he explained, a running tread was supposed to be established as part of

the green city projects, but a new tender opportunity that had become available in the meantime excluded it from this project. The awaited running treat was inaugurated last year as part of the grove project. Sándor Nagy also presented a project with a completely different structure: the so-called Urban Innovative Actions project, with a budget of 3.2 million euros and implemented within the framework of SaSMob.

The next speaker was Zoltán Cservenák, journalist at Szeged.hu and an employee at Szeged TV. He presented a number of cases where misuse of EU subsidies occurred, whether it comes to the ELI-ALPS laser centre, the Szeged Game Park, or other examples from small settlements outside of Szeged. He also discussed the renovation of the Faculty of Law at the University of Szeged, which has not been completed to this day.



Kosovo

Six visits in Lipjan and in Mitrovica to EU-funded projects

By the beginning of April, KDI organized an all-day visit with civil society representatives and students to several locations in Lipjan and Mitrovica. The purpose of this activity was to visit projects that were supported by the EU financially in the municipalities of Kosovo, and that have directly helped to improve the well-being of citizens. This visit served as a good opportunity for participants to have an overview of local EU investments and the use of public funds, but also as a forum to meet with representatives and decision-makers from the respective municipalities.

With a group of 25 participants, we first visited the Library and Archive in the municipality of Lipjan, where we were received by the Head of the Cultural Centre, Mr Selman Jashanica, and the Head of the Archives Sector, Mr Enver Haziri. The two representatives of the municipality presented the two projects that were funded by EU institutions, including their construction processes, the conditions offered by these facilities and the benefits that such constructions have brought to the municipality and citizens of Lipjan. Meanwhile, participants wanted to know more about students' and pupils' interest to use the services provided by the new library, and its capacities to satisfy the demands, and the aforementioned municipal representatives answered their questions.

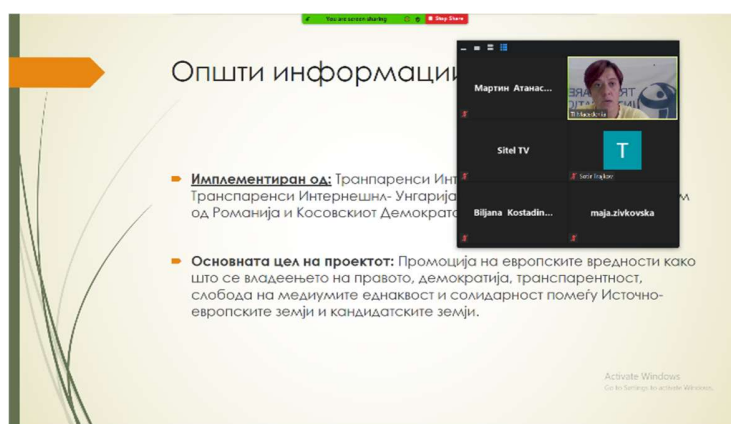


A visit of a similar nature was paid to the municipality of Mitrovica, i.e., in four different locations, with regard to projects built with the EU's financial support, during which we were received by the Head of the Infrastructure Department, Mr Fisnik Ibrahim, and the Head of the Urbanism Department, Mr Florent Abrashi, from the Municipality of Mitrovica. Projects such as the Iber River Bridge, the Iber River promenade, and the town square, were presented by the municipal representatives, who, *inter alia*, also explained the investments' costs, backgrounds and benefits to the participants.

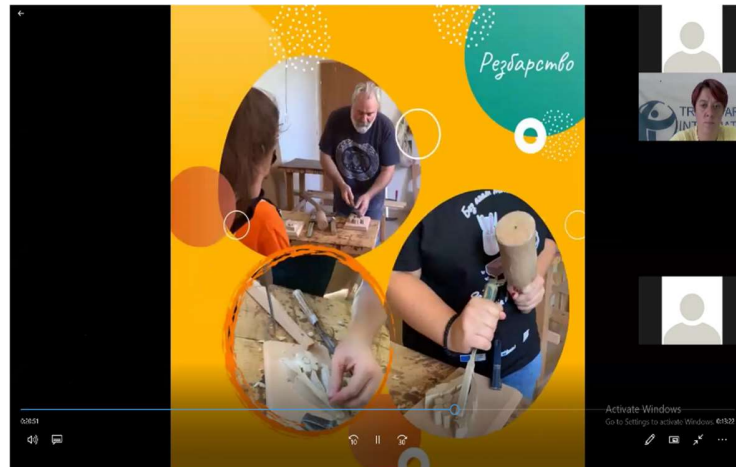
Meanwhile in the POE Multifunctional Centre “Omni Sport”, which was the fourth project visited, the Chief Executive Officer of the POE Multifunctional Centre “Omni Sport”, Mr Sami Zeka, informed the participants about the services this centre offers to citizens, and especially to students, for the development of the courses of many types of sports. Among other things, he mentioned the great interest of citizens from all municipalities of Kosovo to use this centre’s space and services, given it is one of the largest centres of its kind in Kosovo. He also mentioned the challenges they face as an enterprise, i.e., the financial cost needed for proper maintenance and operation.

North Macedonia

Guided online tour



Within the framework of the project, guided tours were organised about landmark projects funded by the EU. Due to the restrictions established as precautionary measures regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, this tour was organised as an online event examining the implementation of EU funds in Macedonia. Martin Atanasov, a representative from the National Agency for European educational programmes and mobility, was the guest on this event. The goal of the National Agency is to promote the implementation of European programmes in the field of education, training, youth and sports in the Republic of Macedonia. By implementing these programmes, the National Agency contributes to the development of the community as a society based on advanced knowledge, with sustainable economic development, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, while providing environmental protection for future generations, and, most importantly, promoting cooperation and mobility in the field of education and training. The participants had the chance to share their experiences about the implementation of projects supported by EU funds.



Romania

Architectural treasure hunts



During the weekend of 26-27 June 2021, Expert Forum organised two architectural treasure hunts in Constanța and Cluj Napoca, as part of the project.

Instead of a classic guided tour, we chose a more interactive format, which allowed citizens to discover the city and its “treasures” at their own pace. An architectural treasure hunt is an urban competition game which challenges participants to find as many architectural clues / treasures as possible in a limited amount of time.

While Constanța and Cluj are two very different cities from multiple points of view (socio-economic, history, geographic position, etc.), both of their architectures are fascinating, telling the stories of all the various ethnic minorities who have lived there and who contributed to their development. But what is the present situation? Is this heritage still part of the life of the

community – how is it protected and valued, what projects are there that try to bring it back to the community, is it a priority for the local administration? How is cultural diversity reflected in our society nowadays?

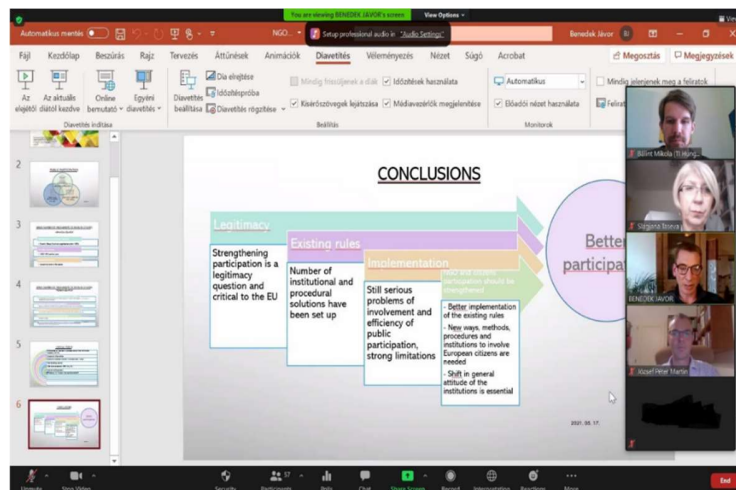
Participants entered the treasure hunt in teams and had around two hours to try to find as many of the clues as possible. Throughout this journey, they discovered various ethnic minorities that exist in these communities and the architecture of the cities.



At the end, EFOR, together with partners, held a storytelling event in discussion with regional experts and historians about the history of the city and many of the buildings discovered, but also about how these buildings could be revived once again in the centre of the community. This discussion also led to debates about the challenges of protecting cultural heritage, as well as how EU funds could be used to protect and conserve such buildings and public policies.

International Action

European Integration and Civil Society – The Role of NGOs in the Rule of Law Mechanism of the European Union



Transparency International Hungary held an international conference on European Integration and Civil Society – The Role of NGOs in the Rule of Law Mechanism of the European Union. The [online conference](#) took place on 17 May 2021. The conference was opened by József Péter Martin, Executive Director at Transparency International Hungary. He said that there have been substantial problems in all four areas in the European Commission's rule of law reports about Hungary. The Commission's report stated that even though the Hungarian Criminal Code offers a criminal law framework for tackling corruption, there is a systematic lack of determined action to investigate and prosecute corruption cases involving high-level officials and those around them. TI Hungary has criticized the serious erosion of the rule of law and the performance of the prosecution.

In his keynote speech, former Hungarian MEP Benedek Jávor gave an insight into EU policymaking. He claimed that civic participation in European politics must be increased, and he outlined key methods to achieve this. Consulting with NGOs in the framework of the rule of law is extremely important, as they are essential for the Commission to provide information to member states. German MEP Daniel Freund also shared some thoughts regarding EU policymaking. He pointed out that there are several member states where the rule of law crisis is directly linked to corruption. The NGOs and the civil society must work together to achieve change. He mentioned that the European Parliament put a lot of pressure on the Commission to use the rule of law mechanism in member states, including Hungary. Freund emphasized that yearly reports have helped immensely with making the necessary changes more visible.

Miklós Ligeti, Legal Director at Transparency International Hungary said that Hungarian legislature does not allow anyone to criticize their decisions. He added that he hopes that this will

not be the last word we hear from the Commission about the rule of law records. Arben Kelmendi, Project Manager at KDI/Transparency International Kosovo said that Kosovo is monitoring basic and complicated cases of corruption, too, making sure to learn from the examples of their neighbours. Marija Sunchevska from Transparency International Macedonia shared that Macedonia has been preparing for its accession to the EU for 15 years. In Macedonia, the biggest problem is the implementation of the proposed reforms, but she believes that with the support of the Commission, they can bring positive changes for the country.

COVID-19's effects on these countries were also discussed. Miklós Ligeti said that the Hungarian government saw the pandemic as an opportunity to further strengthen its power. Cezara Grama, a representative from Romania's Expert Forum, said that the pandemic put a lot of pressure on the judicial and the democratic systems. This demonstrated how institutions perform in these situations at keeping in line with the rule of law.

International workshop

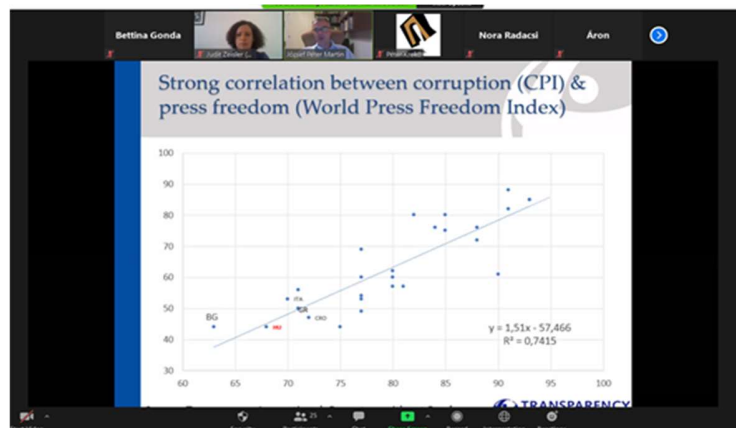
Fake news during COVID-19 - How disinformation undermines EU values and what NGOs can do to stop it?

How has the pandemic affected the spread of fake news? How is the freedom of the press linked to corruption? What can civilians do against the spread of disinformation? These were some of the topics discussed at Transparency International Hungary's [international workshop](#) on 28 June 2021. Péter Krekó, Executive Director at Political Capital, and József Péter Martin, Executive Director at TI Hungary both gave speeches at the event.

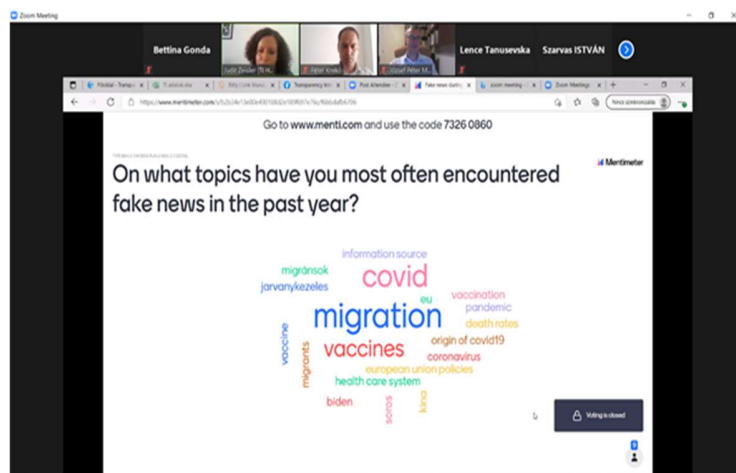
The EU faces unprecedented challenges and tragic losses last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The situation has been exacerbated by the spread of fake news about the pandemic worldwide, which has made combatting the crisis a lot more difficult both in the EU as a whole, and on the national level, too. Among other things, the workshop aspired to find answers to how NGOs can take action against fake news in these difficult times, what they can do to stop disinformation campaigns, and what tools they have to help them.

Péter Krekó addressed the topic of disinformation campaigns against civilians. He pointed out that those in power are responsible for providing transparent information to the public, and not doing so can have serious consequences. Citizens' trust in democracy, the state and the media has been shaken to the core during the pandemic. In Hungary, politics and state media have themselves become a source of disinformation and are often in confrontation with NGOs. At the end of his speech, Péter Krekó said that when organisations are attacked by disinformation, it is crucial to respond with an ethical attitude, which audiences will appreciate as well.

József Péter Martin discussed the connections between the freedom of the press and corruption. He explained that the spread of corruption brings about the deterioration of independent media, while consuming corruption-related news affects one's perception of corruption. The chances to uncover cases of corruption have been decreased as independent media shrinks in size, which disallows the citizens from getting clear information about this phenomenon. In addition, news about corruption increasingly fails to reach the thresholds of media consumers, often due to the complexity of the topic.



Following the speeches, the workshop's participants could share their experiences by answering interactive questions. As revealed by this segment, participants encountered fake news on social media the most, and on television the second most. Apart from the pandemic, disinformation is most often spread about immigration, according to the respondents. Many also expressed their worry about the deliberate distortion of the messages and claims of NGOs. In relation to this, one of the most important topics was the question of when it becomes necessary to take action when an organisation falls victim to disinformation attacks. The experts at the event agreed that it is worth responding to allegations when false information has been widely shared in mass media.



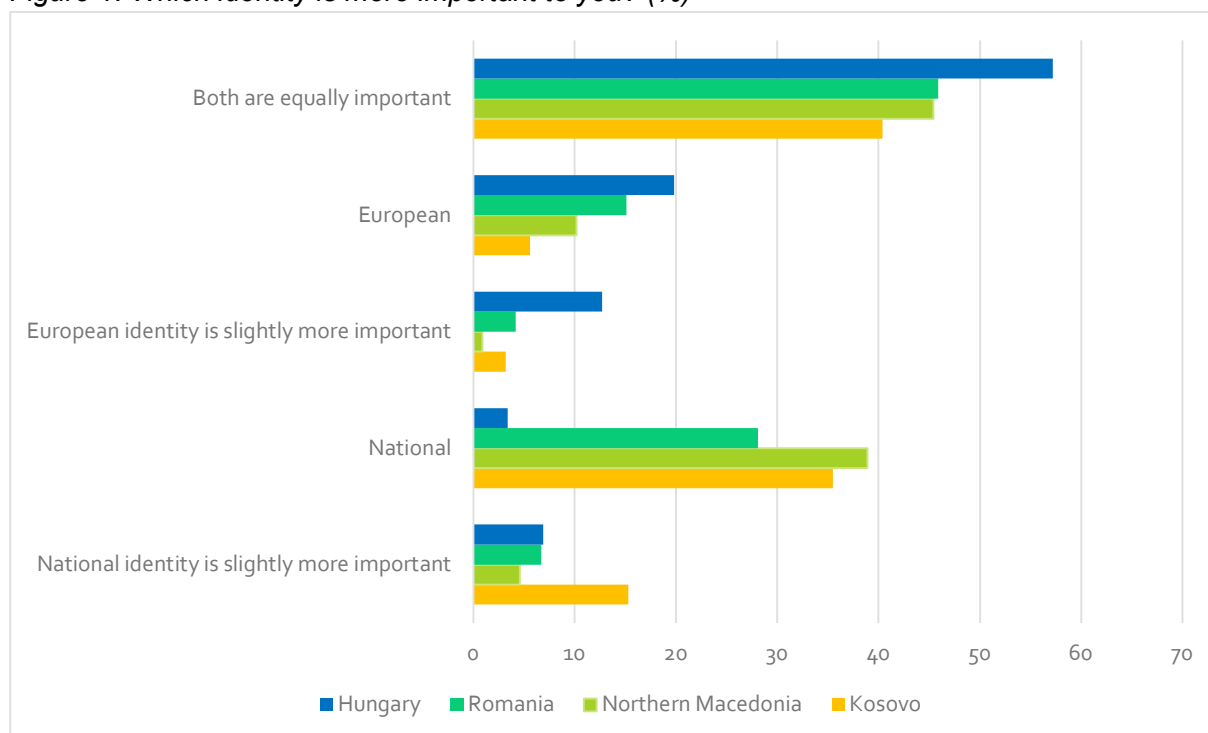
Research

Survey about our common European values

Through our project "Our Common Values", we initiated a dialogue on issues related to European integration and the European Union. To this end, an identical online anonymous questionnaire, different only in language, was shared between the four organisations. The non-representative survey was completed by 551 people in Hungary between 10 May and 1 June 2021. In Romania, 477 people completed the questionnaire, while 500 people completed the questionnaire in Kosovo, a potential candidate for EU membership, and 100 people completed the questionnaire in Northern Macedonia, a candidate for EU membership.

More than half of Hungarian respondents said that European and national identity are equally important to them. One third of respondents said that European identity was more important, while only one in ten said that national identity was more important. In the other three countries (Figure 1), dual identity was also the most popular choice, but in all three countries, a higher proportion of respondents felt national identity was more important than in Hungary, and a lower proportion of respondents in Hungary felt more European than in Hungary.

Figure 1: Which identity is more important to you? (%)

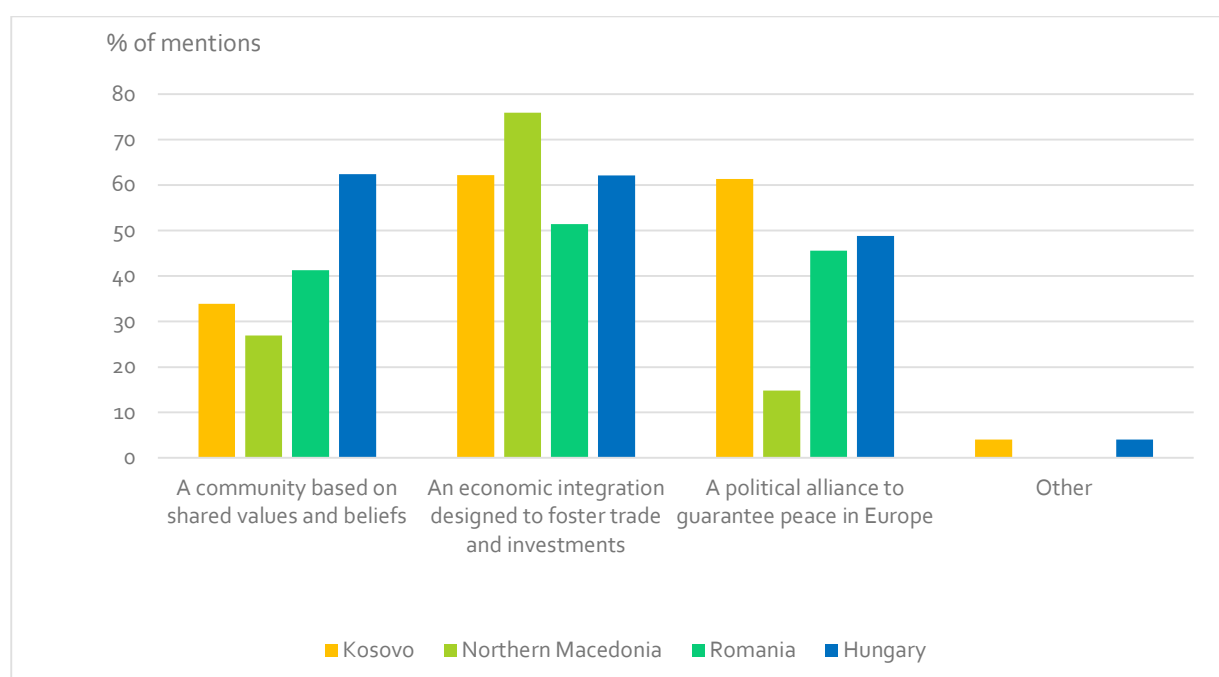


The value of democracy, the rule of law, freedom of the press and the protection of human rights were described as very important by a large majority of Hungarian respondents, while the

importance of the free movement of labour and capital was rated slightly lower. According to the respondents, however, it is inversely proportional to the values that European Union is able to guarantee: free movement of labour and capital are the most important, while freedom of the press and the rule of law are the least important. With an average score of 5.4, Hungarian respondents are least confident that the EU can guarantee these values. Confidence in the enforcement of EU values was rated highest in Northern Macedonia (7.5 on average), followed by Kosovo and Romania with an average of 6.1 and 5.6 respectively.

The European Union was identified as a community based on common values and as an economic integration by the majority of respondents (62-62%). Almost half of them saw the EU as an organisation responsible for guaranteeing peace in Europe, while 4% of respondents identified the organisation with other characteristics. (Respondents were allowed to indicate more than one answer when answering the question.) The three other countries (Figure 2) also had a high proportion of respondents who mentioned economic integration, but significantly fewer than in Hungary agree that the European Union is a community based on shared values and beliefs.

Figure 2: Which of the following definitions best describes the European Union for you? (You can select more than one option)



Respondents were asked to assess the results of EU accession and the EU's role in several aspects. Respondents were particularly divided on how much the EU institutions can do to prevent corruption within Member States. On a scale of 1 to 5, domestic respondents rated the EU's capacity to fight corruption as medium on average. Respondents in the other three countries were slightly more optimistic with the majority of responses rating the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures as average or better.

Hungarian respondents would support Hungary's accession to the European Public Prosecutor's Office by an exceptionally high 96.4%. 74% of respondents in Kosovo and 67% of Romanian respondents also said yes, while less than half of Macedonian respondents would support joining the Office.

Nearly the same proportion (95.5%) of Hungarian respondents would again vote yes if a referendum on EU membership were held. The second highest proportion is in Kosovo, where 78% of respondents would support EU membership, while 67% of respondents in Romania and 65% in Northern Macedonia would vote in favour.

Project closing ceremony

Hungary

Hungary's EU membership under review: debate between former EU Commissioners László Andor and Tibor Navracsics



Former EU Commissioners László Andor and Tibor Navracsics discussed the results of Hungary's accession to the EU at Transparency International Hungary's closing event. The opening speech was given by Mátyás Maksi, Head of Communication at the European Commission Representation in Hungary. He explained that the EU is facing a number of challenges, so finding a common vision for the future is essential. József Péter Martin, Executive Director at Transparency International Hungary gave the next speech, in which he briefly presented the Common Values project.

Tibor Navracsics and László Andor covered three main topics during the two-hour event. Firstly, they discussed whether the European integration process was a success. Secondly, they talked about the rule of law and corruption. Finally, they expressed their views on the relationship between the Hungarian society and the EU. Tibor Navracsics sees a positive change in the EU becoming present in public discourse, developing from a topic of foreign policy into an everyday matter, and a major debate topic. According to László Andor, the entire Central and Eastern European region is showing signs of catching up economically. However, he is less optimistic about the situation in Hungary, as the countries in the region have not only come close to the Hungarian economy, but have gotten slightly ahead of it, too. He explained this phenomenon with public debt, which has long hindered the country. The lack of a common view of Europe was also discussed during the discussion. As mentioned, there is a sense of political uncertainty about the role of the EU, which could cause problems for the future.

Regarding the implementation of the rule of law mechanism, László Andor claimed that "the EU has become softer". To illustrate his point, he mentioned that Slovakia had previously been

excluded from the first round of the accession process due to the violation of minority rights – based on this, Turkey should not be in the position to negotiate, or to be accepted as a candidate. According to him, the efficiency of the rule of law mechanism is set back by the fact that the respective EU staff is continuously being replaced. There is always a new team handling it for a period of time, and then they are let go, which makes the process much more difficult. However, he emphasized that the EU has always been trying to operate with apprehension. Tibor Navracsics believes that the country being examined by the rule of law mechanism by the EU will always be a matter of political consideration. He said the process is complicated by the ambiguity of the rule of law as a concept. The debating partners both ruled out the Hungary would leave the EU in the coming years.

A lively and dynamic dialogue took place between the participants during the discussion. At the end of the online conference, the speakers received a multitude of questions.

Kosovo

Project closing event in Prishtina



The Democratic Institute of Kosovo (KDI) held an online thematic discussion entitled "How the citizens understand the process of Kosovo's integration into the EU", marking the end of the 1-year project "Promoting Common Values Across Europe". Preliminary findings from an online questionnaire that KDI conducted regarding the stance of citizens on European integration in general, and on the European Union in particular, were presented during this discussion.

In the virtual roundtable with EU policy experts, civil society representatives and students, there was a discussion about the attitudes of the citizens of Kosovo when it comes to European integration. Among other things, experts in the field presented their views on the challenges and the way ahead for Kosovo in the integration process, and to what extent citizens are informed about what the EU offers in economic, social, political and cultural terms.

While presenting the findings, Agnesa Haxhiu, project manager at KDI, said that the online questionnaire was launched in early May and was conducted with 500 respondents, adding that the same questionnaire is being conducted in three other countries involved in the same project,

which are Hungary, Northern Macedonia and Romania, and said that the full report will be published in the coming days. Preliminary data from this questionnaire show that about 78% of respondents stated that they would vote positively in case of a possible referendum on EU membership, while over 67% of respondents believe that Kosovo would benefit greatly from this membership. About 60% of respondents believe that the EU has done little to promote Kosovo's path to EU membership, but a percentage of about 47% think that the EU's influence in shaping policies in Kosovo has been huge.

Eraldin Fazliu from Prishtina Insight, speaking on the attitudes of citizens regarding European integration, said in the public discourse in Kosovo that on the one hand, there is no alternative to European integration, but on the other hand, there has been a lack of debates in Kosovo on why the EU accession is useful. According to him, citizens are not informed about the economic, political and cultural impacts that the EU membership could have, despite the fact that they support European integration. He stressed that although it has always been proclaimed in the public discourse that we are on the road to the EU, if they look at the socio-economic aspect, Kosovo has been constantly stalled. For this reason, according to him, the citizens of Kosovo see visa liberalisation as very important because they consider it as an opportunity to leave Kosovo in search of a better development perspective for them.

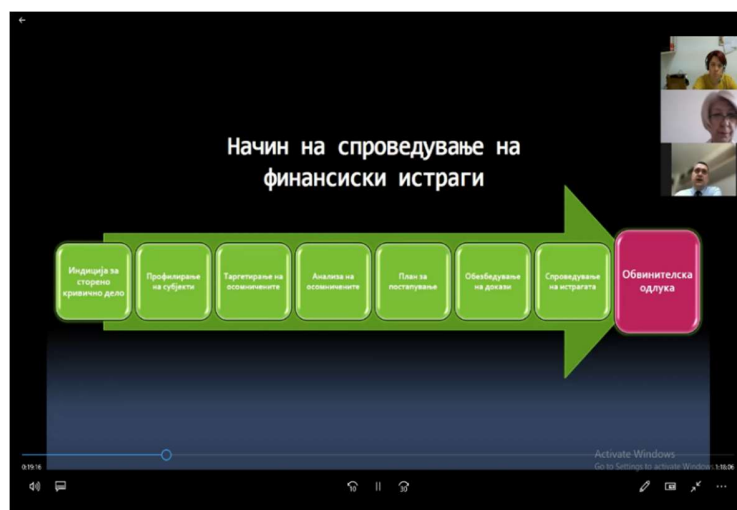
On the other hand, Besnik Vasolli, expert on the European integration process, said that the EU is not building on the trust that the citizens of the Western Balkans have in the European perspective, which is also reflected in the EU members not showing interest in the expansion process. This approach of the EU, according to him, has encouraged Western Balkans countries to not prioritise the necessary reforms, and to continue with state capture, crime, and corruption. Regarding Kosovo's progress in undertaking reforms within the integration process, Mr. Vasolli assessed the performance of institutions as poor in this regard, pointing out that there has been little progress in the implementation of the SAA so far.

In contrast, Senem Safçi from KCSF spoke positively about the high level of trust that the citizens of Kosovo have in the European perspective and in the values promoted by the EU, such as democracy, the rule of law, the protection of human rights, the freedom of the media, etc. According to her, a distinction should be made between the proper implementation and efficiency of these values by Kosovo institutions, and the importance given to these values by the citizens of Kosovo. Therefore, according to her, the active participation of citizens in the implementation and strengthening of these values is important, while institutions should create mechanisms to inform and build the capacity of citizens to be involved in these decision-making processes.

The discussion was organized within the project "Promoting Common Values Across Europe" funded by the 'Europe for Citizens' programme and implemented by KDI together with three partner organizations, Transparency International Hungary, Transparency International Macedonia, and the Experts Forum from Romania.

North Macedonia

Strengthening the judiciary in the fight against corruption, 11 June 2021



An event was held to discuss how to strengthen the judiciary system in the fight against corruption. The debate focused on anticorruption policies and practices in the country in general. These were compared with international standards and practices, and how the legal framework and the implementation of laws should be improved was also discussed. Furthermore, the speakers talked about the risks of corruption in the judiciary system. Speakers on this debate were: Ms. Fatime Fetai, Public prosecutor; Ms. Sofka Pejovska- Dojcinovska, Member of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC), Mr. Nuri Bajrami, Member of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) and Mr. Risto Bojadziski, Public Prosecutor. The members of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption introduced the National strategy for prevention of corruption and conflict of interest with focus on the judiciary system. This was useful for the young judges, the public prosecutors and for the students who plan to be active in the field of the rule of law, to be introduced with anticorruption policies, their effective implementation and how each institution can contribute to the fight against corruption.

Romania

Closing event

On 29 July 2021, Expert Forum held an online closing event for the project that brought different stakeholders that took part in the project activities together.



Firstly, it was an opportunity to present the results of the project, and secondly to award the prizes of our public speaking competition to the youth. Last but not least, it was an opportunity to discuss the main challenges faced at EU level with the participants, from their perspectives as active citizens in their communities.

Cezara Grama, project coordinator on behalf of Expert Forum made a short presentation about the project, its activities and its results.

Maria Cezar, youth trainer with Expert Forum then presented the concept of the public speaking competition organised as part of the project, and introduced the members of the jury. The three members of the jury in turn introduced themselves and offered general feedback for the participants on the issues and solutions identified, as well as their techniques. Andreea Rusu, executive director of the FILIA Center, a feminist organisation in Romania and Monica Loloiu, a member of the Political Department at the Representation of the European Commission in Romania joined the event and spoke shortly about how impressed they were with the participants' speeches and the responsibility with which they addressed this task to identify an issue important in their communities, but most importantly the solutions they identified. They concluded that many of the issues identified affect communities in Romania, but also across Europe, and that it is important to be actively involved as citizens.

The event continued with the presentation of prizes and the winners of the competition. Special prizes of the jury were awarded for the best solutions, the best call for action, the best argument and best delivery of speech.

Next, the competition's participants took the floor to talk about what it was like to be part of this contest and the process of becoming aware of the issues affecting their communities, and trying to understand the decision-making processes at local, national or EU level so that a realistic solution could be identified.



The project has been funded by the European Commission. Any publication made on this site reflects the views only of the authors, and the European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained herein.