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Newsletter

## [Focus Article] Launch of the Western Balkans Platform on Culture

### A key result of the 2022 Ministerial Meeting of the WB Platforms on Culture, Research and Innovation & Education and Training

On 27 and 28 June 2022, the [Ministerial Meeting of the Western Balkans Platforms on Culture, Research and Innovation, Education and Training](#) took place in Tirana, Albania, with the participation of the relevant Ministers from the Western Balkans. The meeting was co-chaired by the European Commission, the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU) and the Albanian Ministries of Culture, Education and Sport. POLICY ANSWERS supported the organisation and implementation of the event in close collaboration with the European Commission.

The [Western Balkans Agenda on Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport](#) has set the Western Balkans on a solid path towards closer cooperation in these policy areas. In this respect, the Ministerial meeting in Tirana, marks a crucial time in the collaborative effort to preserve the Agenda's political momentum, as well as to discuss progress on its implementation and communicate on its main measures and their impact. European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, Mariya Gabriel, attended the Ministerial Meeting of Tirana.

With culture as a key topic of EU external relations, the European Union supports the Western Balkans' culture and creative sectors through the [Creative Europe programme](#), as well as through actions funded by the [Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance](#). In this context, [the Western Balkans Ministerial Platform on Culture was officially launched by Commissioner Gabriel](#) and represents one of the main achievements of the Ministerial Meeting. The Commissioner called on the ministers to take full advantage of the future Platform meetings and invited the partners to collaborate and develop further the cooperation between the EU and the Western Balkans in this area, with a view to also contributing to the region's integration into the EU.

In Tirana, Commissioner Gabriel and the Culture Ministers of the region exchanged on the role of youth in the promotion and protection of cultural heritage. Cultural heritage is a cornerstone of our culture that plays an important role in our societies, our communities and in international relations. The discussion covered several topics including the shortage of skilled professionals, how to make heritage professions attractive to young people, fighting illicit trafficking of cultural goods, and the role of cultural heritage to give a sense of belonging to Europe.

In addition to the Ministerial Round Table Discussions, a variety of side events accompanied the Ministerial Meeting during the two days. The [Regional Cooperation Council's - Butterfly](#)



[Innovation Award](#) for innovative, scalable, and market-based solutions from the Western Balkans was awarded to six winning innovation ideas in a ceremony in Tirana. The Award aims to support the Western Balkans' economic development by embracing digital transformation and fostering environmental sustainability. Through showcasing successful innovative achievements and empowering sensitive groups such as youth and women, the award is promoting innovation culture in the Western Balkans.

As part of the Ministerial Meeting Commissioner Gabriel also launched the JRC [Science for Policy Report “Status of Environment and Climate in the Western Balkans](#), which summarises for the first time the status of air, climate, water, and soil in the context of the EU acquis in order to benchmark the progress in the accession process and support the implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, with a focus on depollution and decarbonisation priorities. The study provides an opportunity for the Western Balkans to assess the situation in the region and inspire research on innovation and digitalization in topics linked to the environmental protection and the green economy.

Through the [Western Balkans Agenda](#), the Union continues to put forward significant financial resources for innovation and research, amounting to around EUR 150 million over the next four years. In light of Horizon Europe Missions, three Western Balkans cities are involved in the [Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities initiatives](#). Other cities in the region are encouraged to join the initiative and share best practises in order to collaborate on a clean and green future for our children.

Education and training are drivers in achieving closer collaboration, and in contributing to the effective implementation of the Western Balkans Agenda. Education systems in the region are to be modernized and new possibilities for youth through the [Erasmus+](#) and [European Solidarity Corps](#) programmes created. The Commission continues to cooperate with the Western Balkans to further advance on implementing sustainability across education and training systems. Collaborating with the region in EU working groups, in the [Education for Climate Coalition](#) and through the Erasmus+ programme will further strengthen actions on the ground.

In such a context, the European Union (EU) has also launched a new 8 million EURO initiative in 2022, titled [“Culture and Creativity for the Western Balkans \(CC4WBs\)”](#). The initiative promotes peaceful relations and sustainable socio-economic development through the power of culture and creativity in the region and is implemented by UNESCO as well as the British Council and the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation. It aims at fostering the mobility of artists and cultural operators, strengthening the safeguarding, management and promotion of cultural heritage and supporting sustainable growth of the cultural and creative industries. Over a period of 48-month, CC4WBs will develop the capacities of cultural and creative sectors across the Western Balkans by acting at multiple levels. In particular, it will support stronger cultural policies for enhanced regional cultural cooperation, notably increased mobility of artists and cultural operators as well as financial and technical assistance for the growth of cultural and creative industries. It will also stimulate the protection, management and promotion of cultural heritage; as well as enhanced public-private partnerships in the cultural and creative sectors.

In conclusion, as underlined by OECD's recent report [“The Culture Fix: Creative people, places and industries”](#), cultural and creative sectors can be considered important drivers of the crisis recovery: employment and business growth, social cohesion, and local regeneration, supporting the development of artists, cultural leaders, and creative businesses through meaningful international connections.

Find more information on culture and creative sectors at our dedicated portal section [here](#).