



REGIONAL YOUTH COOPERATION OFFICE – RYCO

**ANNUAL REPORT
2017**

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1. Executive Summary

This Report is a comprehensive overview of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office's (RYCO) activities covering the period from the date when the RYCO Head Office started working, 4 July 2017, until the end of 2017.

The year of 2017 for RYCO has been a year of consolidation of the Secretariat by finalizing the appointments of Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General, selecting the staff, building the financial stability, administrative set-up and development of the programming and internal procedures. A lot of energy has been invested in the RYCO visibility by creating and making RYCO official webpage, as well as the official social media accounts functional.

RYCO has dedicated special focus in obtaining recognition from relevant stakeholders in the region as well as across Europe. In the first 6 months of its operations, considered as the most demanding, and in the same time, very important period for the consolidation process, RYCO has faced different difficulties and challenges, ranging from inexistence of internal rules and procedures, absence of financial resources until late August 2017, due tardily registration and lack of support from local authorities, and obstacles in the procedures correlated with opening of the bank account.

Insufficient institutional support and lack of initial commitment from the Host Government, caused mainly by the sensitive elections process in Albania in June 2017 and the long post-elections period, was reflected with the scarcity of interest in setting solid legal base for RYCO status as a legal entity and international organization. The 2017 was concluded with still not clear indications of the Host Country Agreement status. The circumstances were additionally complicated taking into account the huge expectations from the Western European partners, including European Commission, as well as youth sector in the region, and finally, sensitive political relations in the Western Balkans. (More on challenges you may find in the paragraph 5 of this Report).

Despite all above-mentioned challenges, Secretariat continued the activities and became fully operational in a short period of time. Additional efforts were made in fundraising activities, in order to overcome the vacuum situation between the moment of becoming operational, and the moment of disbursement of the first financial contributions in late summer 2017. Significant number of relevant partner organizations and institutions, such as the European Commission, Council of Europe, the Governments of France and

Germany, the Franco–German Youth Office - OFAJ, Balkan Trust for Democracy, Youth Initiative for Human Rights - YIHR, PeaceNexus Foundation, OSCE Missions in the region, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and many others, supported Secretariat's work during 2017 through activities mainly focused on RYCO's capacity building, promotion, political recognition and investment in understanding of the Secretariat's role. In parallel, these activities enabled RYCO Staff to develop the first Open Call, prepare the strategic planning process and draft its first provisional internal procedures and regulations.

2. Operations

2.1 RYCO Human Resources

2.1.1 Staffing process

Appointment of the Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General, as well as selection of the RYCO staff was a prolonged process that lasted until almost the end of the year. It started in April 2017, with the appointment of the Secretary General, which was followed by the appointment of the Deputy Secretary General in May, and finally, concluded in December 2017, by the selection of the Local Branch Officer for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Significant efforts were invested to ensure geographical reflection of Secretariat's composition, while keeping the focus on the merit-based system in the recruitment process.

2.1.2 Capacity Building

Bearing in mind the fact that RYCO staff is composed of personnel with various professional and geographical backgrounds, it was considered as necessary to organize capacity building activities, focusing on different topics and with content relevant to RYCO Statute.

The following capacity building activities were organized within 2017:

- *Ljubljana, Slovenia, 8 – 10 July*; capacity building activity facilitated by the Franco-German Youth Office, welcomed the Secretary General (SG), Deputy Secretary General (DSG) and youth representatives of the Governing Board. In parallel, the first RYCO youth exchange was organized, which included 6 musicians from the WB6. In that manner, they will be noted as the first beneficiaries of RYCO who performed during the Trieste Summit, 4th gathering within the Berlin Process.
- *Belgrade, Serbia 17 – 21 July*; capacity building in implementing exchange programs (in cooperation with the Youth Initiative for Human Rights) and recognizing RYCO needs in the core work processes (in cooperation with the PeaceNexus Foundation). The retreat aimed to explore RYCO's context, mandate and thematic focus. The participants of the retreat were nine already selected/appointed RYCO staff members – SG, DSG, three international Head Office staff and four LBOs. Second part of the retreat sought to explore how RYCO will translate its mandate into practice, and how to plan its setting up in the following months.

- *Kolašin, Montenegro 21 – 26 August*; organized with the Franco-German Youth Office and the PeaceNexus Foundation and dedicated to further development of the basic documents related to the two priority areas: Open Call and Internal Procedures. Performed exercises helped in enhancing team building between new and the already appointed members of the RYCO Team. The key results defined RYCO's priorities and basics of intercultural learning, and resulted with:
 - Draft of the working plan for the LBOs until October 2017;
 - Better understanding of the role of RYCO in the region;
 - Draft of the communication plan on LBO level.
- *Tirana, Albania 21 – 22 November*; supported by OSCE and the PeaceNexus Foundation. This activity brought together OSCE youth focal points, RYCO staff and youth representatives of the Governing Board of RYCO to discuss current and future ways of cooperation for 2018. Topics on internal communication and procedures were thoroughly tackled and provisional action plans for 2018 were produced. Youth representatives of the Governing Board of RYCO discussed about their roles with regard to RYCO establishment and functioning, and cooperation provisions for 2018. The support provided by each OSCE mission in the RYCO Contracting Parties and the possibilities for further collaboration and support from OSCE were also discussed.
- *Berlin, Germany 4 – 8 December*; (Study visit) RYCO Secretariat met a significant number of stakeholders, decision-makers from Germany, including meeting with Michael Roth, German Minister of State for Europe, representatives of international organizations and experts in order to get more information on practices, experiences and challenges on organizing intercultural youth work. In the frame of the same study visit, a “research meeting” was organized between experienced researchers and representatives of organizations working in the field of youth policies from all the WB6, one per each Contracting Party.

A visit to the German Bundestag and a meeting with German MP Mr Josip Juratovic was held. The possibilities of the promotion of RYCO within the German institutions as well as its promotion on the European level were discussed. Within the program, the Memorandum of Understanding, aiming to foster the cooperation between the Deutsche Welle (DW) and RYCO, was signed, and in that manner, the “Balkan Booster”, common project of DW and RYCO preparations were discusses

2.2 Financial sustainability (contributions disbursements)

When it comes to the financial sustainability, in first five months from the appointment of RYCO Secretary General, RYCO Secretariat struggled with enabling basic functionality. First three months, period April-June, was partially covered with limited financial resources by JCT (Joint Coordination Team). An official request for disbursement of contributions was sent to each Contracting Party on 10 August 2017. First contribution was disbursed by the Government of Kosovo* on 24 August 2017, followed by the Government of Serbia on 4 September 2017 and the Government of Montenegro on 5 September 2017. The Government of Macedonia disbursed its contribution on 6 October 2017, followed by the Government of Albania on 24 November 2017, while Bosnia and Herzegovina announced execution of the disbursement in early 2018 both disbursements in one (2017 and 2018)¹.

Another unexpected challenge that Secretariat had to deal with when it comes to financial sustainability, was the “situation” with the EU grant of 500.000 euro, announced and committed during 3th Meeting of the Governing Board in Berlin (March 2017). The problem occurred when representatives of the European Commission (DG NEAR) introduced and clarified their decision on direct grant for RYCO, not as direct budgetary support, but the special financial envelope and financial support that can be available only if RYCO apply for this amount by preparing and submitting a very complicated project application. The EU grant has still not been disbursed on the RYCO bank account and it is expected to be executed in first quarter of 2018.

2.3 Budget revision in 2017

Secretariat has prepared a revised Budget for 2017 which was adopted by the Governing Board on 5th GB meeting, as an attachment to Provisional Staff Regulation. Revised Budget was made based on the assumption that EC grant, including contributions of all 6 CPs will be executed by the end of 2017.

More information on the total expenditures and comparison with Budget for 2017 is provided in the Annual Financial Report.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence

¹ BH made both disbursements, for 2017 and 2018, in late January 2018.

2.4 Cooperation and partnership building

As already and operational organization, RYCO has put a strong emphasis in creating and consolidating partnerships. During 2017, RYCO Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General, as well as the Local Branch Officers realized meetings with state institutions, foundations, think-thanks, international organizations, diplomatic missions, local and regional youth organizations operating in the RYCO Contracting Parties, in order to create a basis for future cooperation.

RYCO SG has met with the Director of Western Balkan Department in the European Commission (DG NEAR), EU Ambassador in Albania, as well as with German, French and Austrian Ambassadors, representative of the UK Embassy, Ambassadors of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro in Albania, Head of the Council of Europe Office in Albania; UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Albania; Ambassador of OSCE Presence in Albania, relevant governmental and nongovernmental representatives of Contracting Parties to further develop ways of cooperation between RYCO and the above-mentioned institutions. RYCO DSG also had bilateral meeting with representatives from the Swedish Embassy in Albania to discuss possible ways of cooperation through the youth councils in the Nordic countries, as well as with number of different but relevant representatives of local authorities in Albania.

RYCO has put a strong effort in building partnerships and cooperation through bilateral meetings held on high official level but also through its LBOs.

In August, RYCO partnered with the OSCE Presence in Albania and the Municipality of Tirana in the organization of the “*Youth Trail: Promoting OSCE values in the Western Balkans*”. The event was organized from 13-17 September to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the OSCE Presence in Albania. The Youth Trail gathered 40 young participants from the region in the course of four interactive days of promoting and exchanging successful practices between participants and guests.

During 2017, RYCO has strengthened and continued the collaboration with the Balkan Trust for Democracy (BTD), which supported RYCO since its establishment phase. BTD has been actively supporting RYCO in the process of strategic planning which aims to result with the creation of Strategic Plan 2018-2020 to be adopted in the first half of 2018 by the Governing Board. Moreover, as a part of the process, BTD supported the on-going desk research review.

RYCO started building partnership with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). GIZ is committed to support RYCO by providing expertise in the field of finance and fundraising. A CIM expert is expected to be located in the premises of the RYCO Head Office. A number of activities in cooperation with GIZ are planned to be organized in 2018.

Cooperation with the PeaceNexus Foundation is one of the very first and concrete partnerships and supports that RYCO developed. The PeaceNexus Foundation provided external expertise in drafting of RYCO internal procedures, project application for EU grant, and well as general capacity building and organizational development of RYCO as intergovernmental institution.

Cooperation with Deutsche Welle (DW) – On 7 December 2017, RYCO and DW signed the Memorandum of Understanding in order to show the willingness of cooperation in the future in the form of visibility performance of RYCO and its activities.

Cooperation with the Western Balkan Fund (WBF) was formalized by signing a Memorandum of Understanding in order to structure the future cooperation on strategic level, aiming to reach common ground in areas of intervention. This cooperation will serve to both organizations not to overlap in their activities and scope of work. The both organizations are prepared to closely cooperate.

Several meetings with the purpose of future cooperation have been held between RYCO and the British Council. Having in mind that London will host the next Summit within the Berlin Process in July 2018, different ideas on joint activities were introduced and announced to be jointly realized in 2018.

OSCE missions in WB6 supported local activities of LBOs in each Contracting Party. A more concrete cooperation with the OSCE Mission to Montenegro has been reached. The concluded cooperation with this mission goes beyond the support of activities in Montenegro. This support is provided to RYCO beneficiaries from first Pilot Call for Proposals from entire WB6 region. The activity idea is the organisation of a regional capacity building training for the grantees of the Pilot Call for Proposals in April 2018.

2.5 Procurement

As outlined in the Budget 2017, which was adopted on the 5th Governing Board meeting, Secretariat identified 2 (two) main procurement priorities, which were in tight correlation with the real operative work of RYCO. The two priorities were:

- IT and office equipment, and
- Supply and delivery of vehicle for RYCO

The predicted Budget line for the first priority was 16.160 EUR. After detailed market research and technical specification preparation phase, the first procurement procedure for the IT and office equipment was launched on 29 September 2017, but failed due to the incomplete tender documentation submitted by interested economic operators. Procedure had to be re-launched in late 2017; execution of the contract was done in early 2018.

The second priority was budgeted in the frame of 20.000 EUR. After detailed market research and technical specification preparation phase, the procurement procedure for the supply and delivery of vehicle for RYCO was launched on 22.12.2017. Based on the official letter number 10110, issued on 03.07.2017 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Albania, Directorate of the State Protocol, in which RYCO diplomatic privileges and immunities are declared, and following the instructions issued by the same Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorate of the State Protocol on 11.01.2018, in official letter number 481, that clearly defines RYCO as a **subject to tax exemption** for this concrete procurement, this activity was concluded on 18.01.2018, by contracting the winning economic operator, with the contract value of 19.990 Euros.

Although the procurement activity was conducted based on the mentioned official letters, the tax exemption status was not recognized by the Customs authorities in Albania. Therefore, RYCO was obliged to necessarily proceed with signing an annex to the contract on 09 February 2018, by increasing the contract value to 23.988EUR. Besides the fact that RYCO tried to align with applicable eligibility rules, the Budget remaining difference is still featured in the financial report.

Considering the prescribed by Article 48 from the Statute, that all tendering procedures of the Secretariat will be based on the guidelines outlined in the latest available European Commission Procedures and Practical Guide (PRAG), in the period of the writing of this Report, and with the final purpose to adequately implement PRAG rules in the future,

tailored training on PRAG rules for all Secretariat staff was conducted in early February 2018.

The next year of RYCO's work in this domain will be mainly focused on reviewing all areas of possible risks in contractual and tender procedures implementation and will be accurately reported to the Governing Board. As a conclusion, it is evaluated that in order to ensure compliance with the actual needs from one side, and real financial requirement from the other side, RYCO would require significant support from the Contracting parties expertise in developing its own financial rules and procedures.

2.6 Internal processes

RYCO started the procedures of registration as a legal entity in Albania in mid-June 2017 and was officially registered as a public entity by Registration certificate issued by the Ministry of Finance of Albania, Directorate for General Taxation 11 July 2017. It is necessary to recall on the already mentioned letter number 10110, issued on 03 July 2017 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Albania, Directorate of the State Protocol, in which RYCO diplomatic privileges and immunities are declared, which clearly shows the contradictory of the actual RYCO legal status.

Very shortly after the registration was realized, RYCO was fined for not declaring health and social contribution (for the months of July and August, on the name of the only employed in that time, the Secretary General), as well as personal tax incomes for the new employees in August (Local Branch Officer for Albania and Finance and Administration Assistant).

That fact implied an obligation for RYCO, as a public entity, to declare and cover personal income tax for the local Head office staff members (4 in total: Deputy Secretary General, Finance and Administration Officer, Finance and Administration Assistant and Local Branch Officer for Albania).

The current status is that the only registered employee in front of the National Labour Office in Tirana is the Secretary General, who enjoys diplomatic immunities and privileges, issued by Serbia, and recognized by the Host Contracting Party, Albania.

As for the international RYCO Head Office staff members (3 in total: Program Officer, Communication Officer, Office Manager), there is a persistent incoherence of their status in front of the Ministry of Interior - Office for Migration in Tirana. Namely, being not recognized as international staff working for a regional organization, nor supported by official decision by none of the relevant state institutions, they are not able to appropriately regulate the residence in Albania on a long term. They are entitled only to temporary residence permits, with validity of 60 days.

In addition, since remaining with the status of a public entity, RYCO will be obliged to declare the 2017 financial balance in front of the Taxation office, at the end of the first quarter of 2018. Due to not concluded signing process of the Host Country Agreement, which for sure will regulate RYCO employees' status, and will allow adequate stability and recognition of RYCO Head Office in relation towards Host Contracting Party institutions, 2017 was closed with no progress, nor change in this regard.

On the other hand, the opening of the RYCO official bank account was realized on 7 August 2017, at the Raiffeisen Bank Albania. The cooperation is being satisfactory from a daily collaboration point of view, but when it comes to the implied bank fees, correlated with the bank transfers outside of Albania, RYCO will consider eventual change of the bank in 2018.

It is necessary to add in this chapter that one of the main priorities of RYCO in 2017 was utilizing best practices in the Internal procedures domain, and invest employees' capacities to develop own Staff Regulation, Contracts of employment, and Travel rules and procedures. The same documents were adopted by the 5th Governing Board meeting, and were effective immediately after. Beside the fact that they embody only the fundamental conditions of service, duties, obligations and rights of RYCO staff members, they serve as a solid base to further set out the applicable principles of personnel policy, recruitment, evaluation and administration of RYCO human resources. For that reason, in the second half of 2018, RYCO will canalize the support provided from the partners, to reach relevant expertise and upgrade the existing internal documents to a level to reflect and equally meet the regional context with regard the the labour legislation in the Western Balkans, as well as the reality of RYCO daily activities.

3. Programme activities

3.1 Strategy development

Strategy development process aims to:

1. Create RYCO's inaugural strategic plan for the 3 year period from 2018 - 2020 including the target group and potential beneficiaries in a strategic approach;
2. Create an evidence base for such a process, by the means of a strategy conference and a research project concerning attitudes and needs of young people from the WB6 and key actors;
3. Underscore and support the development of RYCO's inclusive and transparent organizational culture by favouring both an outcome oriented and participatory strategic planning approach.

Roadmap for the Strategy development process was drafted in July 2017, by hired international consultant, in collaboration with the Secretary General and the LBO in Serbia. From August 2017, the Strategy development team was joined by the RYCO Program Officer (PO). By the end of August 2017, a project proposal for BTDFund was drafted in order to co-fund organisation of the Strategic Conference and desk research. RYCO was granted a project in November 2017 through which hiring of facilitators of the Strategy Conference and researcher was enabled.

RYCO Strategic Conference

The conference was initially supposed to take place beginning of November 2017. Following the initial roadmap, the international consultant on strategic planning, facilitation team composed of three hired facilitators from WB6, RYCO PO and LBO Serbia, gathered in Berlin from 17-18 September 2017. The meeting resulted in the draft program of the conference, draft list of participants and technical specifications for the organisation of the conference. Instead of the initial plan, due to internal procedures of the Agency for Youth and Sports, counterpart for the organisation and funding of the Strategy Conference, the conference is expected to take place in March 2018 in Skopje, Macedonia. The conference will gather around 100 stakeholders and will provide RYCO with the platform for consultation and consensus building on strategy among RYCO Secretariat, Governing Board, Advisory Board, specialist organisations, and other relevant stakeholders.

A roadmap plan for the Strategy development is already designed and remains to be implemented during the first half of 2018

Other possible ways of understanding the values, needs and concerns of a wider audience of potential target audiences, especially young people and their key workers regarding RYCO's core business related to intraregional mobility, capacity building among youth and intercultural relations have been and are to be further explored.

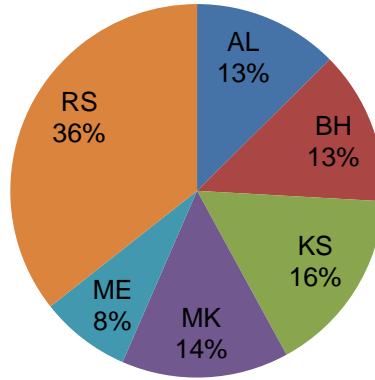
3.2. Open Call process

RYCO's first Open Call has been created in a collaborative manner. The work of Open Call preparation started in July 2017 during the kick off capacity building held in Belgrade (17-21 July). It was developed with the direct support of the PeaceNexus Foundation. The group worked jointly until the retreat held in Kolašin (21-26 August 2017) during which first drafts of TORs for consultants on the development of the call were drafted. From September 2017 on, two consultants were contracted by the PeaceNexus Foundation. Together with the RYCO working group, the consultants have worked on development of the first RYCO grant scheme, call for the selection of assessors and the development of tender for technical support in capacity building activities of key workers.

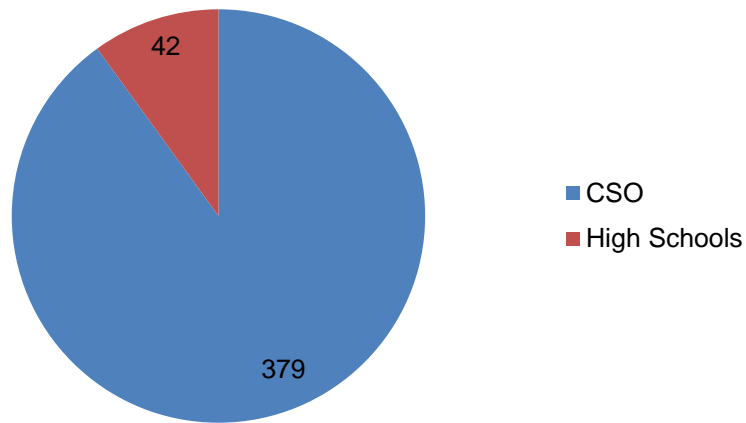
A group of 16 different institutions and organizations (mainly grant makers working in the Western Balkans 6 among which are Council of Europe, SALTO, EC, USAID, UN as well as some local and regional grant makers) have been identified and contacted to support RYCO with their feedback on these materials. They contributed *pro bono* and provided comments to the draft documents.

The Open Call was launched on 16 October 2017 and closed on 15 November 2017. All together were received 421 applications. An administrative and eligibility check was done by the RYCO team. In parallel, the Call for Assessors was launched and the selection committee for External Assessors have worked in evaluating and shortlisting assessors.

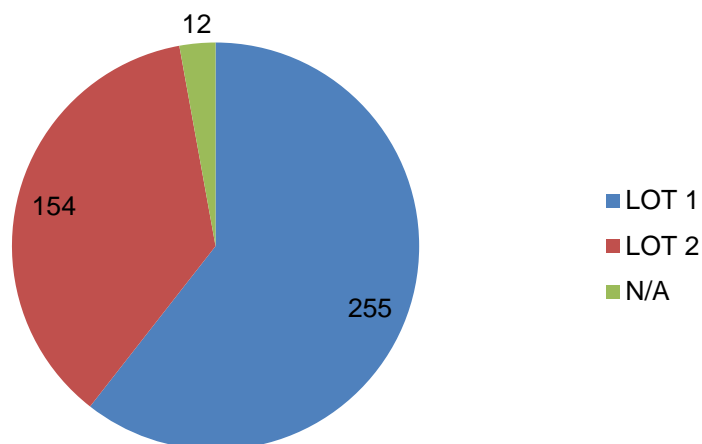
Out of the total number of the applicants (421), 379 are civil society organizations (CSOs) and 42 high schools (HS). Divided by LOTs, out of 421 applications, 255 applications (60.57%) are in the LOT 1 (Intercultural Learning), 154 application (36.58%) in the LOT 2 (Active Participation and Social Inclusion) and 12 applicants (2.85%) did not specify the LOT.



Graphic 1. Distribution of the received applications between the RYCO Contracting Parties



Graphic 2. Distribution of the received project proposals between the types of the applicant



Graphic 3. Distribution of LOTS among the received project proposals

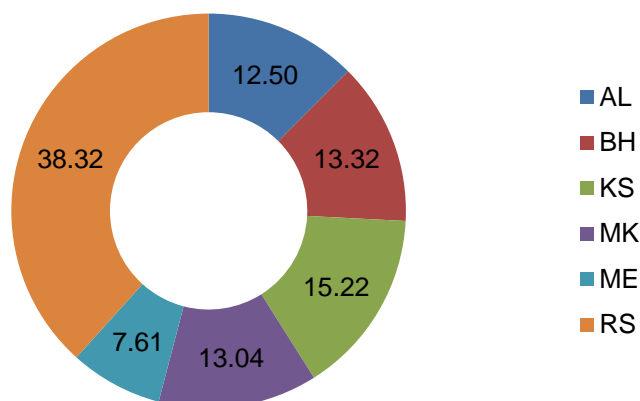
The evaluation of proposals implied three phases:

- the administrative and eligibility check,
- assessment of project proposals
- decision-making on the shortlisted assessed projects by the Evaluation Committee.

In the first phase, screening of each and every application on the basis of the grant Application Form and criteria contained within relevant check list was performed by RYCO Secretariat. *Out of 421 applications, 368 passed the Administration Check* which was done in order to see if the applicant has fulfilled the seven following criteria: (1) the correct grant application form has been used; (2) the Declaration by the Applicant and Mandate for all partners has been filled out and signed; (3) scanned Declaration and Mandate are included in electronic version; (4) the proposal is typed and is in English; (5) an electronic version of the proposal is prepared for sending by e-mail; (6) the budget is enclosed, presented in the requested format, and stated in EUR; (7) checklist for the application form has been duly completed.

Divided by the contracting party (after the Administration Check):

- 46 applicants (12.5%) are from Albania
- 49 (13.31%) from Bosnia and Herzegovina
- 56 (15.21%) from Kosovo
- 48 (13.04%) from Macedonia
- 28 (7.60%) from Montenegro
- 141 (38.31%) from Serbia



Graphic 4. Distribution of the received applications between the RYCO Contracting Parties after the Administrative Check

Out of 368 applications which passed the Administration Check, 304 passed the Eligibility Check. The Eligibility Check, as defined by the Guidelines on CfP and the Application Form was consisted of the thirteen following criteria: (1) the applicant is legal entity; (2) the applicant is non-profit making; (3) the applicant is a CSO or secondary school; (4) there is not more than 5 partners; (5) partners are legal entities; (6) partners are non-profit making; (7) partners are CSOs, secondary schools, cultural institutions or sport associations; (7) location of activities is the Western Balkans 6; (8) duration of the project is between 3 and 9 months; (9) activities take place between 01/02/18 and 31/10/2018; (10) project relates to Priority Area 1 or Priority Area 2 (only 1 PA and maximum 2 Specific Objectives under one PA); (11) the target group are young people from 15 to 30 years old; (12) requested contribution is in line with the Guidelines on CfP; (13) requested contribution is between 75 and 95% of total costs (only for CSOs).

Process of assessment of project proposals by external assessors

As a preparation for the second phase, RYCO launched the 1st Call for Assessors to identify and select qualified and experienced professionals to join RYCO Pool of Assessors set up for project assessment. In total 99 candidates applied to an open call available at RYCO website to be part of the RYCO Pool of Assessors. The selection of 8 candidates was made by three RYCO Secretariat staff members who assessed the received applications by taking into account the fulfilment of the requirements set by the Call for Assessors, regional distribution, the number of applications that passed administrative and eligibility check and the set deadlines for making the decision on financing of project proposals. The first selected 6 assessors, coming from each RYCO contracting party, participated at Preparatory meeting on the Call for Proposals, held on 24/11/2017, EU Info Centre Library, Palace of Congress, in Tirana. Local Branch Officer in Serbia and Programme Officer provided the assessors with technical information on the process of assessment, presented the Call for proposals and the Guidelines for Assessors. Due to resignation of one of the 6 selected assessors, additional 3 assessors were hired until the end of the process.

Quality insurance of the management of the grant making scheme

As part of quality insurance, Secretariat plans to provide a capacity building activity in April 2018, for granted beneficiaries in order to ensure a successful implementation of the projects. RYCO will organise capacity building programmes for youth organisations and

high schools which have received grants with focus on sound project management and narrative and financial reporting, but also on relevant thematic areas such as intercultural learning, dealing with the past, youth participation in decision making processes and similar.

3.3 Proposals for cooperation on development of project *Balkan Lab*

Upon the invitation of Florence Mangin, Director for Continental Europe of Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs of Republic of France, Secretary General and Programme Officer attended a meeting which has been held in Paris, in November, with the purpose to discuss the *Balkan Lab* project idea, singled out during the Trieste Summit (12 July, 2017) and included in Trieste Summit conclusions, as well as to make an initial plan on sending a volunteer who would be placed in the Head Office for the period of one to two years through the program France Volontaire (Le Volontariat de Solidarité Internationale - VSI).

It was agreed that from February 2018 on, RYCO will make a concept note of Balkan Lab project, on the basis of discussions with stakeholders who have been designing program *Lab citoyen* (<http://www.institutfrancais.com/fr/labcitoyen>), implemented with young people and CSOs in several countries. In order to implement this project which on the basis of rough estimations would have a budget of minimum 100,000 Euros, possibilities of applying for an EU grant in collaboration with partners from France (French Institute and others) and Germany (Goethe Institute) were explored. The invitation for the visit was a clear sign of interest of the French Government to strengthen RYCO's role by ensuring political support to RYCO in its inception phase and sharing expertise in areas of strengthening youth activism and intercultural dialogue.

4. Participation in conferences, round tables, meetings

4.1. Head Office

Western Balkan Summit in Trieste (12 July 2017) – RYCO SG Mr Đuro Blanuša participated at this year's Western Balkan Summit in Trieste on 12 July. Upon the invitation of the European Commission (DG EAC), RYCO participated at the EU Western Balkan Youth Forum in Trieste. RYCO DSG Fatos Mustafa participated at the Civil Society Forum. RYCO was presented on high level meeting of the WB6 MFAs within the Summit main event. RYCO became a part of the official Trieste Western Balkan Summit Declaration issued by the Italian Chair.

Participation in Discussion at DokuFest (8 August 2017) – RYCO Secretary General Mr Đuro Blanuša and RYCO Deputy Secretary General Mr Fatos Mustafa discussed together with the OSCE Dialogue Academy alumni the role of youth in shaping the region's social and political landscape, as well as new ways of participation in public life and their role in promoting dialogue and reconciliation. The panel discussion "*Connecting, Leading, Changing: Youth Building our Future*" was held at Dokufest in Prizren, Kosovo on Tuesday, 8 August 2017.

Meeting with representatives of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports of Kosovo (9 August 2017) – RYCO Secretary General Mr Đuro Blanuša, RYCO Deputy Secretary General Mr Fatos Mustafa RYCO and the Local Branch Officer in Pristina Ms Krenare Gashi met on 9 August with Secretary General of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports of Kosovo Mr Veton Firzi and Head of Youth Department of the Ministry Mr Xhevat Bajrami.

Word Café, Tirana (11 August 2017) – RYCO Secretary General participated on 11 August in the Integration Word Café "*Connecting Youth – Moving Forward*" organized by the EU Info Network in Tirana in the eve of the International Youth Day where he presented RYCO establishment process and moderated a working group on Mobility, Exchanges and Broadening of Horizons.

Meeting with Mayor of Tirana (14 August 2017) - RYCO Secretary General, RYCO Deputy Secretary General and the Local Branch Officer in Albania Mr Kreshnik Loka met on 14 August with the Mayor of Tirana Mr Erion Veliaj. The meeting served to initiate a strong collaboration between the Municipality of Tirana and RYCO on youth issues.

Human Rights Youth Forum (14 August 2017) – RYCO Secretary General, together with RYCO Local Branch Officer in Albania Mr Kreshnik Loka, participated in the Human Rights Forum in Tirana on 14 August. The Human Rights Youth Forum is organized within the framework of the OSCE Mission to Serbia's project: Enhancing regional connectivity among Serbian and Albanian youth actors.

Meeting with UN Resident in Albania (29 August 2017) – RYCO Secretary General Mr Đuro Blanuša met on 29 August with United Nations Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Albania Mr Brian J. Williams with whom he discussed possible ways of cooperation between RYCO and UN agencies in Albania and the Western Balkans.

Meeting with Head of OSCE Presence in Albania (30 August 2017) – RYCO Secretary General met on 30 August with Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania Ambassador Bernd Borchardt. They discussed joint projects of RYCO and the OSCE Presence as well as further ways of cooperation between the two organizations.

Meeting with representatives of the Embassy of Sweden to Albania (6 September 2017) – Support for the work of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office was the key topic discussed between RYCO Deputy Secretary General Mr Fatos Mustafa and the Local Branch Officer in Albania Mr Kreshnik Loka and representatives of the Embassy of Sweden in Tirana. The meeting was held on 6 September.

Meeting with UN Resident Coordinator in Serbia (8 September 2017) – RYCO Secretary General Mr Đuro Blanuša, together with the RYCO Local Branch Officer in Serbia Ms Marija Bulat, visited the United Nations Head Quarter in Belgrade on 8 September. They met with UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative Ms Karla Hershey and UNDP Deputy Resident Representative Ms Steliana Nedera and discussed possible ways of cooperation.

Opening of YouthTrail Program (13 September 2017) – In the presence of Head of OSCE Presence in Albania Ambassador Mr Bernd Borchardt, Ambassador of Austria to Albania Mr Johan Sattler, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Albania Ms Odeta Barbullushi, Deputy Mayor of Tirana Mr Arbjan Mazniku and RYCO Secretary General Mr Đuro Blanuša, the program *Youth Trail* was opened on 13 September in Tirana.

International Youth Conference – Krusevo (16 September 2017) – RYCO Deputy Secretary General Mr Fatos Mustafa participated in the 15th International Youth Conference – Krusevo on 16 September. Mr Mustafa took part in the panel discussion entitled *Youth in the decision making process* together with Mr Vukašin Grozdanović from Serbia, Coordinator of Novi Sad European Youth Capital 2019, Ms Kristen Airgo from Estonia, Board Member of the European Youth Forum and Mr Darko Kaevski from Macedonia, Director of the Agency of Youth and Sports.

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (14-18 September) – RYCO Secretary General participated in this year's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Europe's largest annual human rights conference organized by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), which took place in Warsaw, Poland from 11 to 22 September 2017.

Round table: After Trieste Summit – Albania's Achievements and Challenges on its road to EU (19 September 2017) – RYCO Deputy Secretary General Mr Fatos Mustafa participated in the round table for Albanian achievements in Berlin process. Mr Mustafa has presented where RYCO stands and its so far achievements and plans for the forthcoming period. In the roundtable, European Parliament reporter for Albania, Mr Knut Fleckenstein was present. Round table was organised by Cooperation and Development Institute (CDI) in Albania. There were also present Ambassadors of Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Slovenia and others.

Meeting with Head of Council of Europe Office in Tirana (22 September 2017) – RYCO Secretary General Mr Đuro Blanuša met on 22 September with Head of the Council of Europe Office in Tirana Mr Claus Neukirch. They discussed possibilities for the joint cooperation and agreed that the two institutions should work together in the forthcoming period.

Western Balkans Platforms on Education and Training and Research and Innovation (28-29 September 2017) – RYCO Secretary General Mr Đuro Blanuša participated in the meeting of the Western Balkans Platforms on Education and Training and Research and Innovation organized by the Directorate for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission. The event took place in Belgrade on 28-29 September 2017.

Meeting with French and German Ambassadors to Albania (5 October 2017) – RYCO Secretary General Mr Đuro Blanuša and the Deputy Secretary General Mr Fatos Mustafa met on 5 October in RYCO Head Office with Her Excellency Mrs Christina Vasak, Ambassador of the French Republic to Albania and Her Excellency Ms Susanne Schütz, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Albania when they discussed RYCO activities and continuation of French and German support to RYCO.

Meeting with Director for Western Balkans of DG NEAR and EU Ambassador to Albania (6 October 2017) – RYCO Secretary General Mr Đuro Blanuša and the Deputy Secretary General Mr Fatos Mustafa met on 6 October Director for Western Balkans of DG NEAR Ms Genoveva Ruiz-Calavera and Head of the EU Delegation to Albania Ms Romana Vlahutin when they discussed RYCO activities and support of the European Union to the institution.

Meeting with Representative of the British Embassy in Tirana (10 October 2017) – The Second Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs in the British Embassy in Tirana Mr Martin Banks expressed his interest in RYCO's resources, as well as proceeding correlated with the first pilot open call.

Meeting with Ambassadors of Slovenia and Macedonia to Albania (12 October 2017) – Ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia to Albania Her Excellency Ms Lea Stančič visited the RYCO Head Office and Tirana on 12 October 2017, assuring Slovenia's advocacy in front of the EU institutions, when it comes to RYCO. In the same time, the support from the Ambassador of Macedonia to Albania, His Excellency, Mr Stojan Karajanov is present as through the Head Office, also in the cooperation with the state institutions from the Contracting Party.

Meetings with Albanian National Youth Network and Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation (13 and 18 October 2017) – On 13 October 2017, RYCO Secretary General and Local Branch Officer for Albania discussed the opportunities of collaboration between Albanian National Youth Network-ANYN, while on 18 October 2017, possibilities for future cooperation were explored during the meeting with Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation.

Participation of RYCO SG in Seminar Organized by Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania (19 October 2017) – The Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania put the main focus on the regional cooperation and the EU integration process of the Western Balkans during the seminar organized in Tirana. In this

occasion, RYCO Secretary General was one of the key speakers in the discussion on the topic “Berlin Process and Regional Cooperation in the Western Balkans”.

RYCO 4 Future (23 October 2017) – The event organized by the EU info centre in Belgrade, Serbia in cooperation with the RYCO Local Branch Office in Serbia was an excellent platform to inform a wide range on audience on RYCO work and activities.

The last week of October was marked by meetings realized with *GIZ, Integrated Sustainable Development of the Southern Coastal Region*, the *Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung*, as well as the introductory meeting with *Head of Office and Deputy Head of Mission of the British embassy in Tirana*, Mr. Sean Melbourne, during which RYCO’s future priorities were explained, in the frame of the next Western Balkans Summit, that will be hosted in the UK, in summer 2018.

4th Youth Summit in Zagreb (6 – 9 November 2017) – The event assembled relevant participants discussing important challenges and experiences in advocating respect and acknowledgement of human rights and democracy.

World Forum for Democracy (8 – 10 November 2017) – RYCO was represented at the event in Strasbourg by the participation of its Deputy Secretary General Mr Fatos Mustafa. It was a unique platform for political decision-makers and activists to debate solutions to key challenges for democracies worldwide.

Meeting with German Special Envoy (9 November 2017) – Dr. Christian Hellbach, Special Envoy for South East Europe, Turkey and EFTA countries in the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, met RYCO Secretary General and assured the importance, focus and interest in RYCO.

Participation in Annual Conference of Regional Convention on European Integration of the Western Balkans (10 – 11 November 2017) – Held in Skopje, Macedonia, the event was an opportunity for RYCO to show its aims for fostering the partnership between Visegrad Group countries and the Western Balkans on the path towards the EU membership. As a speaker, RYCO Secretary General, had the possibility to raise observations on EU funds absorption in the region.

10 – 14 November 2017 was an excellent occasion for RYCO delegation to meet a wide range of relevant institutions and stakeholders in Paris, such as: Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs - Directorate of Continental Europe, Delegation in charge of relations

with civil society and partnership, International cooperation Operator of the French Ministry of home affairs, Secretary General of the Committee dedicated to the prevention of crime and radicalization, as well as French Institute. The main purpose of the visit was general presentation and context of the “Balkan Lab” project, steps and methodology in question, and how to reach European funds in favour. A significant part of the agenda was dedicated to road-map of the young French volunteer seconded to RYCO, exchange of expertise and potential partnership about the project dedicated to preventing radicalization.

Bridging the Gap Between Youth Policy, Youth Participation and Parliamentarians in the Western Balkans (20 – 21 November 2017) – RYCO delegation was present on the seminar that was held at the European Parliament in Brussels. The seminar is one of the key follow-up activities discussed in the framework of the Trieste EU-Western Balkans Summit Youth Forum, where the idea of a platform for dialogue between the Parliaments in the region and youth organisations was widely supported.

Balkan Booster - Balkan Dialogue on Social Media (15 December 2017) –The panel discussion, as a part of the closing conference of the DW project, the event is financed by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs and implemented by the DW (Deutsche Welle) in cooperation with RYCO. The purpose of the panel discussion was to discuss the role of the media and the youth in the Balkans as well as expectations and recommendations for the future, involving best practices from the EU and the region. The President of Albania His Excellency Mr Ilir Meta addressed the public, while more than 100 guests, diplomats, journalist and students are followed the event.

Roundtable on RYCO in Montenegro (18 December 2017) – The event organized by RYCO Local Branch Office in Montenegro in cooperation with the FORUM MNE and the OSCE Mission to Montenegro was an opportunity for RYCO Secretary General to present the organization’s work. On the margins of the event, RYCO Secretary General met Montenegrin Minister of European Affairs Mr Aleksandar Andrija Pejović, who concluded that RYCO was an excellent mechanism for youth networking in the Western Balkans that fosters cooperation, and strengthens youth policies on national level. The same visit in Montenegro was an occasion to meet the Head of the EU Delegation in Montenegro Mr Aivo Orav with whom the importance of RYCO for the region as well as the support of the EU for its work was discussed.

Signing of Memorandum of Understanding with Western Balkans Fond (22 December 2017) – The both organizations are prepared to closely cooperate on strategic level, aiming to reach common ground in areas of intervention. This cooperation will serve to both organizations not to overlap in their missions, visions and scope of work.

4.2. Local Branches

Local Branch Officers play a crucial role in dissemination and promotion of RYCO values and activities, serve as first contact point in supporting possible applicants during the Open Call. They also serve as the first contact point for local and regional organizations/institutions interested in cooperation with RYCO.

Based on the RYCO Statute, the premises of each LBO are to be provided by the respective contracting party. The LBO in Albania is situated in the Head Office in Tirana. The LBO in Montenegro was inaugurated by RYCO SG in the presence of the Minister of Sports in Montenegro and together with LBO in MNE, on 7 July 2017.

The premises of the LBO in Kosovo are provided by the Kosovo Government, and the inaugural opening happen on 10 October 2017, in the presence of RYCO SG and DSG.

LBO premises in Serbia are still under renovation and an official opening day has not been defined. LBO premises in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been allocated. There are on-going negotiations with Macedonian Government regarding the premises for the LBO in Skopje.

Despite the fact that two out of six LBOs worked and are still working without local office, the entire team of LBOs all together have realized a remarkable number of activities at Contracting Party, regional and European level. Some of the quantitative data can be found in the following table:

LBOs' activities	Number of activities	Comment
Local level	93	
Regional level	18	
European level	8	
Info sessions/meetings	41	
TOTAL activities for 2017	159	

In the following section, information for each Local Branch Office will be provided. Data is various due to several reasons and circumstances. It is obvious that LBOs have realized over 150 of activities, but in the following are shown all the activities in quantitative manner, and most important ones with concrete and clear outcomes.

Local Branch Office in Albania

RYCO LBO in Albania during 2017 have intensively worked in setting up the communication with local NGOs, youth networks, stakeholders in Albania, and not only. During 2017, LBO in Albania have organized and participated in various activities in national, regional and European level. Some more visual details are in the following table:

LBO Albania activities		Number of activities	Comment
Local level	Meetings with local NGOs to promote RYCO and establish direct bridges of communication with potential beneficiaries	11 Meetings with local partners	A tour of meetings has been undertaken from all LBOs based on the working plan agreed in Kolasin Retreat. A list of potential partners has been established online.
	OSCE "Youth Trail: Promoting OSCE values in the Western Balkans"	2 Facilitations	RYCO partnered with OSCE Presence in Albania and the Municipality of Tirana to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Presence. The event gathered 40 youngsters from the WB6.
	Participation on events organized by other stakeholders	2 Conferences	Panelist at the opening ceremony of "Human Rights Youth Forum" to discuss the human rights across the region and youth cooperation between Serbia and Albania. Closing remarks on OSCE/ODIHR: "Leveraging New Technologies to Transform Youth Political Participation" on how new technologies and social media platforms can encourage young peoples' political participation by creating avenues for youth voice and influence.
Regional level	Participation on events organized by other stakeholders	1 Conference	Panelist in the conference OSCE Youth Conference: Regional Connectivity & Millennials
	RYCO Team meetings and Retreats	3	Retreats with Peace Nexus in Belgrade and Kolasin and Team Meeting on the CfP in Tirana
European level	Study visit	1	Study visit in Berlin organized by OFAJ
Info sessions	Organization of six info sessions aiming to promote RYCO first Open Call for Proposals	6 Info Sessions	The meetings included brief presentation of RYCO and presentations of the main points of the guidelines for application. In Albania there were almost 200 participants that attended the meetings.
TOTAL activities for 2017		26	

RYCO LBO in Albania has facilitated the City Quest session organized for the “*Youth Trail: Promoting OSCE values in the Western Balkans*”, on 15 September. RYCO LBO in Albania together with the RYCO Program Officer have facilitated the session “Youth Regional Cooperation” under the organization of the “*Youth Trail: Promoting OSCE values in the Western Balkans*”, on 16 September, in Tirana. It is important to mention that at the end of this activity, RYCO, OSCE and youth participants, in-front of RYCO HO premises discovered the RYCO branded signs and distances of each capital of the WB6 from the RYCO Head Office address.

LBO in Albania delivered the final remarks at the OSCE/ODIHR Conference: “*Leveraging New Technologies to Transform Youth Political Participation*” organized on 17 November in Tirana. In his speech LBO in Albania Mr Loka mentioned the importance of having mobility of young people throughout the region and the additional support that new technologies are providing in shortening distances between them. It was concluded that the importance of technology in getting people connected is of high importance.

Local Branch Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina

LBO BiH activities		Number of activities	Comment
Local level	Meetings	3	Mainly introductory meeting have been organised with GB member/representative of Ministry of Civil Affairs, Youth Initiative for Human Rights in BiH and AEGEE (European Students' Forum).
European level	Study visit	1	Study visit in Berlin organized by OFAJ
Info sessions	Organization of three info sessions aiming to promote RYCO first Open Call for Proposals	3	The meetings included brief presentation of RYCO and presentations of the main points of the guidelines for application. The meetings were held in Banja Luka, Mostar and Sarajevo.
TOTAL activities for 2017		7	

Initial meeting with representatives of Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina (19 December); LBO in BiH Ms Bukva held a meeting with government representative Mr Adnan Husic, which was the first introduction meeting. They mutually agreed to talk about joint activities in the upcoming period. During this meeting, the RYCO

LBO shared the information about on-going processes and results of the first Open Call and the next steps in the phase of communication with applicants.

Communication with the representative of the AEGEE – European Students' Forum (21 December); RYCO LBO Bosnia and Herzegovina and RYCO HQ Office Manager held a meeting with Networks Commissioner of AEGEE-Europe, Ms Marina Klanjchic and discussed on possibilities of future collaboration on national, as well as in regional level.

Local Branch Office in Kosovo

RYCO LBO in Kosovo from July – December 2017 held a tour of meetings with different national institution and international organizations operating in Kosovo in order to establish strong basis for cooperation.

LBO Kosovo activities		Number of activities	Comment
Local level	Meetings	15	Meetings have been organized with different stakeholders in order to present RYCO and discuss models of cooperation.
	Participation on events organized by other stakeholders	3	Events organized by relevant stakeholder where LBO was invited to speak about topic related to RYCO and present RYCO.
	Coordination meetings	4	Meetings between LBO and members of the Governing Board of RYCO
Regional level	RYCO Team meetings and Retreats	4	Retreats with Peace Nexus in Belgrade and Kolasin, Team Meeting on the CfP in Tirana and meeting with HQ during budget clearance of the shortlisted project proposals.
European level	Participation in events organized by other stakeholders	1	Participation in EU-WB Summit in Brussels
	Study visit	1	Study visit in Berlin organized by OFAJ
Info sessions	Info sessions on the Call for Proposals	8	Nine Info Sessions for CSOs and high schools on the CfP organized in 8 different regions in Kosovo (Ferizaj, Gjakova, Gjilan, Mitrovica South, Mitrovica North, Peja, Prishtina and Prizren) in cooperation with OSCE Mission in Kosovo and YES program of GIZ. There were around 200 participants.
TOTAL activities for 2017		36	

Meeting with Deputy Special Representative of Secretary General of UNMIK (26 July 2017); RYCO LBO in Kosovo held a meeting with Deputy Special Representative of Secretary General of UNMIK Mr Christopher Colman where the need of coordination

between UNMIK and RYCO for inclusion of young people, in particular those that are part of marginalised groups, in future RYCO activities was highlighted.

Meeting with Ambassador of OSCE Mission in Kosovo Mr Jan Braathu (4 August 2017); RYCO LBO in Kosovo has held a meeting with Ambassador of OSCE Mission in Kosovo Mr Jan Braathu and several meetings with his team, as well as with GIZ representatives that resulted with financial support for the info sessions during the Open Call process. OSCE, provided support in terms of office equipment for RYCO LBO in Kosovo.

Local Branch Office in Macedonia

Upon the start of the Local Branch Office in Macedonia with selection of the RYCO LBO in November 2017, the activities for this reporting period of two months were focused on successful implementation of the Open call. As well some other issues such as: communication with all relevant stakeholders; identification of the premises of LBO; organization of the strategic conference; nomination of a new Youth Representative at the Governing Board of RYCO; nomination of two persons at the Advisory Board.

LBO Macedonia activities		Number of activities	Comment
Local level	Meetings	15	Meetings have been organized with different stakeholders in order to present RYCO and discuss models of cooperation.
Regional level	Events organized by other stakeholders	1	OSCE Youth Conference: Regional Connectivity & Millennials
Info sessions/ meetings	Info sessions	5	Six Info Sessions in six different cities of Macedonia were organized in November 2017 (Skopje, Tetovo, Struga, Bitola, Shtip) with more than 150 participants.
TOTAL activities for 2017		21	

Besides the above mentioned activities, the main energy was focused on collaboration with the OSCE mission to Skopje, and securing the support for furnishing the LBO office with computers, projector, printer, camera etc. The support has been approved and the furniture will be allocated once the premises are appointed.

Local Branch Office in Montenegro

Local Branch Office in Montenegro is the first RYCO Local Branch Office which started to work and be fully operational in July. The official opening of the first local branch office of RYCO happened on 7 July 2017 in Podgorica. The office in Podgorica was officially opened by the Minister of Sports of the Government of Montenegro which is in charge for Youth Mr Nikola Janović and RYCO Secretary General Mr Đuro Blanuša.

LBO Montenegro activities		Number of activities	Comment
Local level	Meetings	7	Meetings have been organized with different stakeholders in order to present RYCO and discuss models of cooperation.
	Round table Organized by RYCO LBO	1	Round table organized in cooperation with Forum MNE and with the support of OSCE Mission to Montenegro to present results of RYCO in MNE.
	Round Table/ Conferences participated as speaker	4	Events organized by relevant stakeholder where LBO was invited to speak about topic related to RYCO and present RYCO.
	Trainings organized by RYCO LBO	1	One capacity building training organized for potential beneficiaries in cooperation with Forum MNE and with support of OSCE Mission to Montenegro
	Interviews	6	Interviews for RYCO presentation in MNE
Regional level	Meetings	2	Regional Meeting with OSCE field Missions in the Region and Working meeting in RYCO HQ
	Retreats	3	Retreats in Belgrade, Kolašin and Tirana.
European Level	Study visits	1	Study visit for RYCO staff organized in Berlin.
Info sessions	Info sessions in MNE	9	Nine Info Session on the OC organized in 9 different towns in MNE (North, South and Central Region) in cooperation with Forum MNE and with support of OSCE Mission to Montenegro
TOTAL activities for 2017		34	

Meetings with several international organizations operating in Montenegro were held in order to introduce them to RYCO and explore possibilities for joint cooperation. The most significant were with ambassadors of France, Germany and Consul of Austria, as well as OSCE that resulted with concrete support.

Initial meeting with representatives of the OSCE Mission to Montenegro (15 August); LBO in Montenegro Mr Koljenovic held a meeting with the head of the OSCE mission in Montenegro, who expressed the strong will that these two organizations begin concrete cooperation.

Second Meeting with OSCE representatives and Directorate for Youth (3 September); RYCO LBO organized meeting with representatives of the OSCE Mission to Montenegro, Director of Youth Directorate and RYCO GB member and representatives of Forum MNE. During this meeting RYCO LBO and OSCE Mission to Montenegro have defined cooperation and joint activities in order to promote first RYCO Open Call in Montenegro and present RYCO works and achievements.

RYCO LBO in Montenegro participated at the Humanitarian Football match for marking the International Day on Human Rights (9 December); Humanitarian Football match was organised by the NGO Youth Initiative for Human Rights as one activity within three day program for marking of the International Day of Human Rights 10 December.

RYCO Round table “RYCO achievements in 2017” (18 December); On 18 December RYCO LBO has organized National Round table on the Achievements of RYCO LB Office in first six months of its work. This event has been organized in cooperation with NGO Forum MNE and with the support of OSCE Mission in Montenegro. This event was an opportunity to present results of RYCO work in 2017 and to announce plans for upcoming period. Round table was opened by the Minister of Sports of the Government of Montenegro Mr Nikola Janović, Minister of European Affairs of the Government of Montenegro, Head of the OSCE Mission to Montenegro Ms Maryse Daviet and Secretary General of RYCO Mr Đuro Blanuša. During this visit, RYCO Secretary General took the opportunity to meet couple of other relevant stakeholders and partners in Montenegro.

During 2017 LBO in Montenegro made several steps to increase the visibility of RYCO and LBO in Montenegro towards youths in Montenegro, this through different appearances in national and local media in Montenegro by presenting RYCO at national and regional level.

Local Branch Office in Serbia

LBO in Serbia was appointed in July 2017 when it started operations of RYCO on local level. Different meetings have been organized and LBO in Serbia participated at various events representing RYCO. Although there hasn't been an official opening of the branch office in Serbia due to the fact that premises have not been provided yet, LBO in Serbia managed to implement a certain number of activities and ensure visibility of RYCO among stakeholders in Serbia.

LBO Serbia activities		Number of activities	Comment
Local level	Meetings	9	Meetings have been organized with different stakeholders in order to present RYCO and discuss models of cooperation.
	Participation on events organized by other stakeholders	5	Events organized by relevant stakeholder where LBO was invited to speak about topic related to RYCO and present RYCO.
	Coordination meetings	5	Meetings between LBO and members of the Governing Board of RYCO
Regional level	Meetings	1	Regional Meeting with OSCE field Missions in the WB
	RYCO Team meetings and Retreats	3	Retreats with Peace Nexus in Belgrade and Kolasin and Team Meeting on the CFP in Tirana
European level	Meetings	2	Two meetings in Berlin – preparatory meeting for the strategic planning and meeting on the role of researchers in RYCO
	Study visit	1	Study visit in Berlin organized by OFAJ
Info sessions	Info sessions on the Call for Proposals	9	Nine Info Sessions for CSOs and high schools on the CFP organized in 7 different towns in Serbia (Belgrade, Kragujevac, Zajecar, Bor, Nis, Novi Pazar and Novi Sad) in cooperation with OSCE Mission to Serbia. 300 participants took part.
TOTAL activities for 2017		35	

LBO in Serbia met two times with the representatives of the Ministry of Youth and Sport of Serbia to discuss on the LBO premises in Belgrade and other important issues and three times with the Youth Representative in the Governing Board of RYCO to share information and coordinate joint work on the local level.

Meetings with several international organizations operating in Serbia were held in order to introduce them to RYCO and explore possibilities for joint cooperation. The most significant meetings were with:

- UN Resident Coordinator Ms Karla Hershey and Ms Steliana Nedera, UNDP Deputy Resident representative whom offered to host a meeting between UN Coordination Team in Serbia and RYCO.
- British Council regional director, Ms Clare Sears to discuss common points of interest and share their current projects in order to see if future cooperation is possible. During the meeting RYCO LBO and BC representative identified several meeting points such as communication with schools and regional researches. Also, BC offered support for the development of RYCO's first Call for Proposals. The London Summit was also one of the topics and some possibilities for joint presentation were discussed.
- Representatives from Balkan Trust for Democracy to discuss their involvement in the strategic planning and research processes in RYCO. Acknowledging the high importance of these processes for the future development of RYCO, BTM also offered financial support in this regard.
- Director of Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS) to discuss possible ways of cooperation. KAS will support RYCO with promotional and capacity building activities in Serbia and Montenegro in 2018.
- Representatives from OSCE Mission to Serbia to discuss potential financial support for the promotion of the first Call for Proposals and capacity building of potential beneficiaries, schools and CSOs.

LBO in Serbia coordinated the process of the CfP development including intensive communication between RYCO team and external consultants, as well as with the PeaceNexus Foundation. Also, LBO Serbia was in charge of collecting feedback from 16 international and regional stakeholders on the first draft documents for the CfP among which are Council of Europe, European Commission, USAID, SALTO, British Council etc.

RYCO LBO in Serbia opened the exhibition in the French Cultural Institute in Belgrade, supported by the French Institute in Montenegro and the Njegos Petrovic Foundation, on short-term residencies of young photographers from the WB6 who had the opportunity to shoot photographs by travelling the region.

5. Challenges faced and solutions proposed

During the period July-December 2017 and beginning of 2018, RYCO has and will work in parallel on its institutional consolidation (creation and implementation of procedures, practices of internal communication and building of a remote, diverse and new team) and development of programs and projects. These demanding processes have been occurring in unfavorable circumstances which will be explained hereinafter.

Insufficient human capacities and financial resources

Development of programs and projects will occur for more than a year without prior creation of a Strategic plan since its adoption has been postponed until July 2018. The beginning of functioning of organization has been marked by significant interest of different stakeholders for cooperation with RYCO. These partners have most often been involved in the creation of organization and have invested their resources and efforts in order for the organization to start functioning. Despite the relevance of the proposals for partnerships, it is challenging for RYCO Secretariat to respond to the interest in an adequate manner due to its limitations in terms of number of staff engaged on program and finance and administration.

During the third meeting of the Governing Board, the European Commission committed to support RYCO with a grant of 500,000 euros. Due to the fact that the grant was not allocated as direct budgetary support, RYCO had to go through a demanding project application for which external expertise was needed. EU grant has still not been disbursed on RYCO bank account and it is expected to be executed in first quarter of 2018.

The process of completing recruitment of Secretariat staff has been delayed for several reasons, such as lack of quality applications, postponements required by the Governing Board members etc. As a result of it, the first open call and several procedures with financial impact have been launched without Finance and Administration Officer, with low in house capacities and knowledge on PRAG rules. RYCO finalized the staffing process in beginning of December, with the employment of the Local Branch Officer in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The open call for this position was launched twice. Since the info sessions on the Open Call in Bosnia and Herzegovina took place prior to hiring of Local Branch Officer, Head Office promoted the Call with significant support from local CSOs in Sarajevo, Mostar and Banja Luka.

Launching of the first RYCO Open Call

During the implementation of first open call many challenges have been faced, such as incomplete staffing process at the moment of the launching, uncertainty of the workload related to the call and consequently the already tight timeline needed for the completion of the tasks was subject to change. Still, postponement of launching the pilot Call until recruitment process is over and EU grant is disbursed, was not an option, due to the significant external pressure and expectation that RYCO will deliver concrete outcomes already in 2017.

Furthermore, challenges have been identified in the legal inability of secondary education institutions (high schools) in Albania and Kosovo to apply to the Call as lead applicants. Enhanced cooperation and support from the Ministries of Education in these contracting parties is needed to overcome the obstacle prior to the launching of the second open call in October 2018.

Lack of adequate working conditions and administrative barriers

Based on statutory regulations the hosting contracting party has the obligation to provide RYCO with proper premises and other necessary utilities for adequate realization of daily activities. With the designation of the first premises at the Palace of Congress, RYCO faced many issues with the working conditions due to the use of almost half of the premises by the Vetting Commission, engaged with law reform processes in Albania. Hence the lack of suitable premises hindered the work of RYCO Secretariat. After considerable lobbying towards the hosting CP, including diplomatic demarche delivered by Ambassadors of France, Germany and UK in Albania, new premises with adequate working conditions were appointed to RYCO through a Decision of Council of Ministers in late December 2017.

Challenges in fulfilling their duties have been also faced since the allocation of the premises for RYCO LBO in Serbia and Macedonia has not yet occurred. Local Branch Officer in Serbia has been working from her home since July whereas Local Branch Officer in Macedonia has been working work from his home since November. The inadequate working environment will have greater negative impact once the contracting of grantees of the First Call for Project proposals begins since frequent encounters with the beneficiaries will be needed.

The Host Country Agreement has not been signed yet between RYCO and the Host Contracting Party. This is affecting several dimensions of administration of RYCO regarding the registration of employees and clearly defining legal status and privileges/immunities of both RYCO as legal entity and international organization, and international staff in Albania.

Further challenge is the drafting and adoption of the Financial Regulation. Support from the Contracting Party and Governing Board members through expertise and knowhow is necessary to finalize this process.

During the everyday work of RYCO, several limitations and ambiguities were identified with regard to the Statute. Particularly, challenges have been faced because of ambiguous or insufficient definitions of the roles of different bodies. The participation of Governing Board in decision making related to the implementation of activities has sometimes slowed down the finalization of the on-going processes.

One of the main limitations has been related to the restriction of 15% of overall budget for the operational costs. Since the budget of RYCO is stated in the Statute, consequently all the calculations have been done accordingly, ending up with several financial restrictions due to low financial resources.

Hence it is of the paramount importance and one of the top priorities in 2018 for both Governing Board and Secretariat to work jointly on the comprehensive revision of this document.

The Staff Regulation was only adopted the last week of December. The document was crucial to finalize the contracts of staff, needed also for working permit of the international employees of RYCO and registration of local employees in national instances.

Political challenges

One of the most pertinent political challenges that RYCO Secretariat has been facing emerges from a tendency that at times the interests of respective contracting parties tend to prevail over a joint regional vision that is in line with the purpose of establishment of RYCO