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European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)

6th Western Balkans Civil Society Forum

Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina), 10-11/07/2017



After the 5th Western Balkans Civil Society Forum which took place in June 2014 in Belgrade in Serbia, the 6th Western Balkans Civil Society Forum was held in Sarajevo, in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Eurofedop had received an invitation to take part in the Forum through the mediation of Pierre Jean Coulon, Chair of Section TEN of the EESC. Fritz Neugebauer, President, and Bert Van Caelenberg, Secretary General, were present on behalf of Eurofedop.

The European Economic and Social Committee sets forward as its aim to act as a bridge between Europe and organised civil society. One of the means it has established for monitoring its relations with countries from the Western Balkans, is the Western Balkans Civil Society Forum, which takes place every two years. The participants in this forum are a great variety of representatives from civil society organisations from the region, representatives from EU institutions, NGOs, trade unions, employers, etc.

The Forum discusses subjects of interest to the region. The subjects discussed on the occasion of the 6th Forum were: perspectives of relations between the EU and the Western Balkans, the role of civil society in the promotion of sustainable growth and employment in the region, migration questions in the Western Balkans, freedom of expression and the media, rights and empowerment of women.

An item of particular interest to countries of the Western Balkans is their accession to the European Union. The EESC adopted in 2016 an opinion on EU enlargement in which it states that, although the EU underlines that none of the countries concerned will be ready to join the EU during the ongoing term-of-office, it is important that a clear perspective of EU membership is maintained for countries of the Western Balkans.

A final declaration was adopted at the end of the Western Balkans Civil Society Forum. Some of the observations made in this declaration are that most of the Western Balkan countries are making progress in preparing themselves for accession to the EU. Moreover, with regard to internal migration, governments are advised to develop rural employment programmes, especially for younger people, to counter trends of moving to the cities.