



YOUTH

21 INTERNATIONAL
YOUTH
CONFERENCE



21st INTERNATIONAL YOUTH CONFERENCE

DEAR READER.

Welcome to the world of ideas, cooperation and inspiration as we unfold the pages of the brochure for the 21st International Youth Conference. The conference has been standing as safe spot for the young leaders to implement the European Values as the future of the South-Eastern European Countries, providing platform for cooperation and networking among them.

At this year's conference, the young people played a special role during the various sessions. They had the opportunity to engage in face-to-face discussions with our inspiring speakers, express their thoughts, and take on the role of speakers themselves, to motivate their peers. They transformed their innovative ideas into concrete initiatives and solutions that are poised to generate positive vibrations throughout our region. This year's participants came from a range of countries, including North Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Kosovo, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia and Türkiye, with the same goal – building future of the region based on European Values.

Without further ado, we hope that you enjoy our recap of the 2023 International Youth Conference, and inspired to support the youth voices in the mission for a brighter region of SEE region!

2023 IN

426 APPLICATIONS

16 COUNTRIES FROM SEE
REGION AND EUROPE
WERE REPRESENTED

58 YOUNG
LEADERS

12 SPEAKERS

4 IPG
MEMBERS

NUMBERS

176

MEETINGS HELD FOR THE
PURPOSE OF ORGANIZING THE
CONFERENCE

75245

REACHES WERE ACHIEVED
THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA
CHANNELS

3

INITIATIVES FOR
POSITIVE CHANGE
WITHIN THE REGION

1

ACTION
PLAN

YOU
YOU
YOU

THE OPENING CEREMONY

MR. METODIJA STOJCHESKI

President at Youth Allinace – Krusevo

MR. OTTO GRAF DEPUTY

Head of Mission, of the German Embassy

MS. ELENI SIAPIKOUDI

Project Assistant at Friedrich Naumann Foundation
for Freedom for Greece and Cyprus



DAY I.

18:00 – 20:00.

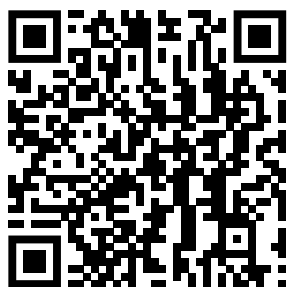
05.10.2023

From the very beginning, we wanted to create a platform based on values. Our idea was not only to talk about European Union as political and economical structure, but to talk about the system of values that is based the idea of European integration, and how to bring closer to the young people the basic democratic values.



**MR. METODIJA
STOJCHESKI**

PRESIDENT AT YOUTH ALLIANCE
– KRUSEVO



The best way to bring young people together, to meet each other, to build trust and friendships, and then to discuss issues. Therefore I think it is a very good starting point to bring the young people together, because these problems could shape your life, and it is also good that you discuss how you can think you can address it to make it happen, that there would be change.

21 INTERNATIONAL
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MR. OTTO GRAF

DEPUTY HEAD OF
MISSION, OF THE
GERMAN EMBASSY

We believe that exchanging ideas and discussing about difficult topics, but also everyday topics can bring the dialogue. We need to fight for our values, we need to support each other and we need to support freedom, democracy and liberal values.



MRS. ELENİ SIAPIKOUDI

PROJECT ASSISTANT AT FRIEDRICH
NAUMANN FOUNDATION FOR
FREEDOM FOR GREECE AND CYPRUS

REAL TALK:

DAY II.

10:00 – 12:00.

06.10.2023

FREE-RANGE CORRUPTION OR NOT? UNRAVELLING THE IMPACT OF CORRUPTION ON SOCIAL COHESION AND TRUST IN THE WESTERN BALKANS



MS. ANETA ARNAUDOVSKA

RAI Anti-corruption Expert,

MR. MIRZA SOFTIC

Independent journalist

MS. FRANČESKA MUČO

Executive Director Young Professionals Network

MS. BILJANA DUKOVSKA

President of the Macedonian Anti-Poverty Platform



In the Western Balkans, where corruption stands as a prominent and pressing issue, the exploration of solutions, such as implementing whistle-blower laws, reveals persistent challenges. The region grapples with the absence of designated officers, and entrenched stereotypes inherited from the communist era, which pose substantial hurdles to effective corruption reporting.

One of the main fighters against corruption are the journalists, the watchdogs of our societies.

With their vital role, they also present one of the most vulnerable groups – a target of the corrupt actors who aim to silence them. This concern proves to be cross-border, with variations evident in different countries. The Serbian example sheds light on media landscapes influenced by the governing party, rendering independent journalism a rare commodity. Financial struggles and susceptibility to manipulation further complicate the role of journalists, impacting citizens' ability to discern credible information.

What's important to mention is that corruption isn't just bribery. It's multifaced. Examples such as the lack of services, limited access to information, environmental concerns, and economic factors like bailouts take center stage. Where from this problem stems seems difficult to identify, but it can be said that some of it stems from historical democratic deficits, and the remnants of he previous regime.

Despite the somewhat pessimistic reality we're in, there isn't a lack of optimism in the region. A unifying message this session sent is that we need collective efforts to address corruption challenges. Acknowledging the challenges, the commitment to fostering transparency and accountability remains central to building a more resilient and just society.

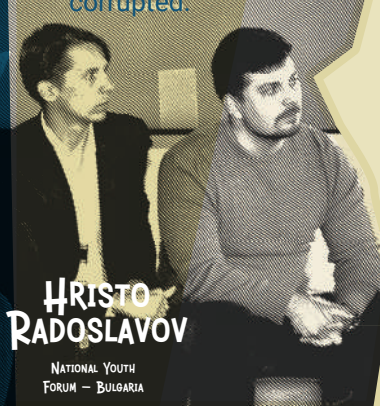


The media seems to be promoting some sort of propaganda or plagiarism and that has resulted to create offensiveness between the countries, especially in the Balkans.

I wish to address the fact that corruption in our region is sustained and it is sustained by foreign influence. We have discussed with my colleagues that in some countries the interest is to keep this region distant and corrupted.



TAXIARCHIS KORNEZOS
YOUTH ACTIVIST



HRISTO RADOVLAVOV
NATIONAL YOUTH FORUM — BULGARIA

If you strengthen the people, if you build a safety network, if you don't allow people to get lost in the system, then you can build new skills, new opportunities to strengthen them to fight against corruption and to say NO to any activity if it is on individual level.

What I am wondering myself all these years, how can we as citizens prevent corruption, is that we never be participants of corruption. If we all act like that, the corruption will come to the level that is more acceptable than the level that we have right now.



BILJANA DUKOVSKA
PRESIDENT OF THE MACEDONIAN ANTI-POVERTY PLATFORM



MIRZA SOFTIC
INDEPENDENT JOURNALIST

We need to be in relations with the youth. We need to be open and to provoke open dialogue about corruption and to build mutual trust between the different generations and we need also to engage youth organizations. Please believe in youth organizations!

**ANETA
ARNAUDOVSKA**

RAI ANTI-CORRUPTION
EXPERT

Democracy is not only about rights, it is not only about benefits, it is also about responsibility, that you as citizens have, to act, to be resilient and accountable.

Society is made by a summary of individual behaviors and we should keep continuing to be resilient as much as we can in our daily life and to continue to educate ourselves. Every society and every country has their own problems and let's try not to glorify other countries. Keep it positive and continue to be resilient!

FRANCESCA MUCO

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR YOUNG
PROFESSIONALS NETWORK

DROP THE MIC:

DAY II.

12:45 – 14:00.

06.10.2023

NATURE VS NURTURE OF CORRUPTION. ROLE OF INDIVIDUAL DISPOSITIONS AND SOCIAL FACTORS

As one of the big questions of life, we ponder:

Is corruption just part of being human, or is it something we learn along the way?

Answering the question isn't as easy as it may seem at first glance. There's different sides to the answer and they provide various perspectives. Now, picture those early encounters with corruption – slipping a few bills to a traffic cop or to those administrative workers navigating bureaucratic mazes to get a passport. These stories echo a common narrative – corruption isn't hardwired into our DNA; it's a learned dance, a skill picked up along life's journey. It's simply the system and our surrounding that makes us corrupt. But is it really? Perhaps, it's the selfish human nature and need for self preservation are the roots of corruption. Like in the mentioned examples, there's a selfish drive in our actions - giving the cop money so you don't have to deal with the consequences of your In the Nature versus Nurture debate, opinions zig-zag. What unites these musings is a shared acknowledgment of corruption's pervasive influence and a call for collective action against it. Amidst these profound discussions, we navigate the dance with corruption – a delicate interplay between personal choices and the currents of the world around us.



DARJA MILJANIC

[Student]

TEA MURATOVIC

[Student]

INES FRULJCKOVIC

[Law student]



Our societies have been nurturing corruption but we can nurture something else (being honest, not being fraudulent, not silently bowing our heads and allowing corrupt politicians and journalists to deceive us). Everything is in the culture, in the way how are we raised.



Something that is in the human nature is need for justice, to fight for what you believe. The justice is something in the human nature and because of that we tend to corrupt, to get involved in corruption. We believe that the system is not providing us something that we deserve and because of that we tend to use the methods that are not good but we think that it's the only way we can get what we deserve.



The biggest problems that the people who are supposed to make and control the rules, they don't even respect them. The key for fighting the corruption is unity. We can't fight corruption as individuals. As humans it is not just me, it's us.



REAL TALK:

DAY III.

10:00 – 12:00.

07.10.2023

YOUTH PRESSING FORWARD: HARNESSING GEN Z AGENCY IN THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE TO SHAPE NEW NARRATIVES IN THE WB6

In navigating the intricate tapestry of Balkan complexities, youth media and youth creators embark on a mission to unravel biases through the compelling narratives they craft. Their journey is intricately woven with technology, and the paths they walk on are uncharted paths leading them to new horizons and undiscovered possibilities. Despite all the challenges that come with youth taking their spot in the media field, there's still a beacon of hope—the younger generation is emerging as the catalyst for peace-building, while using the dual forces of globalization and digitalization to their advantage.

While reaping the benefits of living in a tech-driven and information-filled world, the youth actors also grapple with the dangerous presence of hate-fueled bots and cancel culture. In such a surrounding, building bridges without facing cancellation becomes an art—an endeavor to form connections and express thoughts in a proper manner without siding with propaganda. More than ever, the need to articulate ideas in a manner that encourages constructive dialogue and mutual understanding has become paramount. Especially in a region like the Balkans, the impact of social media is strong, with historical revisionism and fake news demanding critical discussions.

But regardless, the future of youth activism converges with social media, a powerful ally for connectivity and building brighter futures. It also allows for diverse activism methods to be recognized, acknowledging the potency of each new approach. In unison, the voices of the youth in the Balkans hold the transformative power to shape the destiny of the region, so let's use our voices!



MS. EVA HASEL

Freelance Multimedia Author in the Field of History and Politics

MS. KRISTINA ATOVSKA

Anchor and War reporter - Free press

MS. MARIJA TODOROVIĆ

Culture editor of Oblakoder magazine

MR. ARBER GASHI

Founder of Balkanism



Young people are not passive, we just maybe we don't give them enough space in the media representation. Or when we give them, it is like the thing that the older people are talking about the youngsters without consulting with the young people. How do you know what is interesting for the young people if you don't ask them?



**MARIJA
TODOROVIC**

CULTURE EDITOR OF
OBLAKODER MAGAZINE

Digital media can be sometimes seen in two ways, one as a savior or the other as totally inappropriate when dealing with sensitive topics.



EVA HASSEL

FREELANCE MULTIMEDIA AUTHOR
IN THE FIELD OF HISTORY AND
POLITICS

I see the younger generation, especially the young people who are on faculties as the only hope, because the older generations are starting all the wars. The only hope that I see is the youth, to step forward and to start to build trust, to build peace.



**KRISTINA
ATOVSKA**

ANCHOR AND WAR REPORTER -
FREE PRESS

The young people in the Balkans are those that could really change the region and change the way we were engaged in interethnic issues and these conversations which are necessary to be changed. And just express yourself, everyone has a platform and if you feel like that you already passionate about something and you feel like it is the correct thing to post or present, please don't feel like you can't. If it something that helps the region, helps the people and has progressive people, definitely do it.



**ARBER
GASHI**

FOUNDER OF BALKANISM

We need to be more careful when we are talking about human rights and "cancel" culture.



MARKO VUKCEVIC
HOST AT RADIO KRS

We as young people can contribute to shape an idea as young generation. On other hand, we can also put pressure to the officials and also to people that bring the changes here.



KRISTIJAN POPOVSKI
PRESIDENT OF MACEDONIAN STUDENT
ASSOCIATION IN SLOVENIA

CHITCHAT WITH A SPECIAL GUEST:



FROM SELFIES TO SOLIDARITY –
SOCIAL MEDIA'S INFLUENCE ON
YOUTH CULTURE AND FOSTERING
A UNITED EU IDENTITY

DAY III.

07.10.2023.

12:45–14:00



**JOVAN DZOLI
ULICEVIC**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AT 'SPEKTRA'



Is it difficult to have your own identity and to be on social media with your identity? Does it have some positive or negative aspects or you don't care about all negative or positive comments that are happening on social media?

I would lie if I said that I don't care. Community in general is very important to me. The negative side is that you feel the impact of different comments and that you can't just say I don't care about this. If you ask me is it difficult to have different identities? I don't think it is difficult, because you have them. I would say it is difficult to navigate through society with them. It is important to discuss how to express different identities while staying rooted in your community.

What is harder, the inner fight or the fight with society?

The hardest things are to fight battles which are in your head because of the messages you got from the society. What we lack is connecting in a way of supporting each other.

If you had the power to change something, what would it be?

The first thing that I would change is to increase the ability for people to connect. This society is empowering of being superficial, individualistic and selfish.

If you have any recommendations or experiences of how we can transfer activism to decision making?

First we need to work on empowering more idealists and not opportunists. In my country, the loyalty to the party is priority and if you are not loyal, you lose all the privileges. We need to work on what are the dominant values among young people who are going to be decision makers tomorrow as young people are being discouraged because they can't valorize their knowledge.

REAL TALK:

DAY IV.

08.10.2024.

10:00 – 12:00

SUSTAINABLE FOOTPRINTS – THE BALANCING ACT WITHIN THE EU-WB6 SUSTAINABILITY ALLIANCE COLLABORATION. COMPETITION OR COMPROMISE

Imagine our world as a canvas, and the spaces we inhabit as brushstrokes shaping the masterpiece of our existence. With this analogy in mind, the concept of sustainability emerges as a brush that touches upon three vital dimensions: environmental responsibility, economic growth, and social equity. Yet, in the Western Balkans, this canvas requires an additional layer — political sustainability. To achieve a sustainable future, the region must secure its inhabitants, combat corruption, and enforce the rule of law, echoing a legacy for generations to come.

A prominent issue that surfaces in the Balkans is the absence of the rule of law that allows environmental transgressions to go unchecked. And even if there are laws set in place, they aren't properly enforced. The call then seems clear: the region needs a stable political system, good governance, and robust rule of law to pave the way for sustainability. This isn't just a theoretical proposition; it's a necessity for the prosperity of the region.

And how do we get there and turn our sustainable ideas into action? Social media can be used as the first step, a platform where mobilization can transcend the complexities of expert language, making it accessible to all. It's no secret that the future lies in the hands of the youth, armed with knowledge, and the will to drive impactful change. A sustainable community, once an abstract concept, becomes tangible through their efforts.



MS. DAJANA BERISHA

Executive Director at Forum for Civil Initiatives (FIQ)

MS. IVA PETRUNOVA

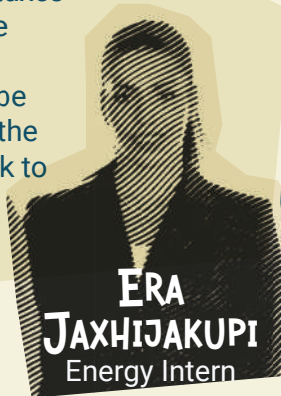
Architect and Urban Sociologist

MR. BOJAN SIMISIC

Founder of Ekostraza

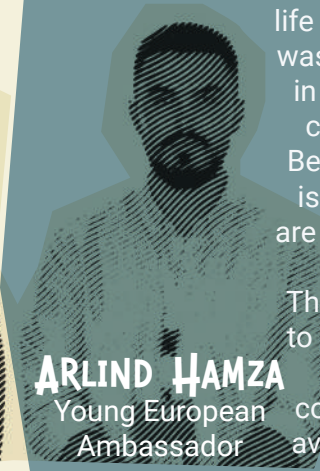


Energy may be cheaper, but if you put carbon emission taxes may be even more expensive for the citizens, and maybe that is a push for the citizens to go back to renewables.



ERA JAXHIJAKUPI
Energy Intern

During the session, I was shocked because all of my life I thought that Prishtina was the most polluted city in the world, but then you came here and said that Belgrade, Kumanovo, that is a bad competition. We are challenging each other who are more polluted. That is why I want to stop to talk about the pollution and to talk about to concrete situation and to avoid this behavior of the Western Balkans.



ARLIND HAMZA
Young European Ambassador

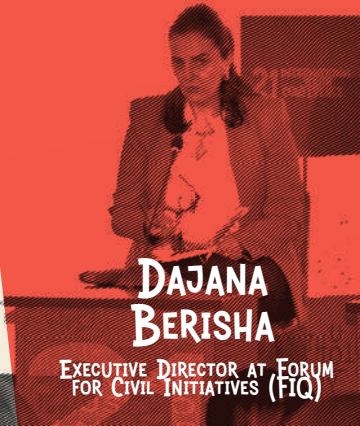
What is different for the WB is that in order to reach any kind of sustainability we need political sustainability. The region itself needs to provide for its inhabitant's security, it needs to fight corruption and it needs to enforce rule of law. Sustainability is the legacy we want to leave to our children and grandchildren. The region needs rule of law and to be corruption free. We also can't do anything without economic sustainability. We cannot mention sustainability without social equity. Stable political system, good governance and rule of law are also necessary to have sustainable region.

So, everybody is waiting for someone else to deal with the problem, but everybody has to take his part of the responsibility, but also he has to take his fight for activism. Let's say that we are responsible and not just responsible for doing something that is environmental friendly, but also responsible for not being quiet about this. Be loud!

To create sustainable community, we need to have cooperation between younger and older generations. Youth needs to conquer the space, and they can do that by using the public space. We must combine sustainable cities and sustainable communities in order to have a brighter future.



IVA PETRUNOVA
ARCHITECT AND URBAN SOCIOLOGIST



DAJANA BERISHA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AT FORUM FOR CIVIL INITIATIVES (FIQ)



BOJAN SIMISIC
FOUNDER OF EKOSTRAZA

OPEN MIC:

DAY IV.

08.10.2024.

12:45 – 14:00

FUTURE – PROOFING THE EU: FROM YOUTH VOICES TO LONG-LASTING EU INTEGRATION

Embarking on the path toward EU membership, we see the European Union as a beacon of freedom and civil rights—a destination that promises a brighter future. This journey, however, is a complex and unpredictable one, influenced by various factors within the EU, our countries, and the broader regional landscape.

As we set our sights on integration, the practical side comes into play as well. Strengthening our nations economically and politically before joining the EU becomes a strategic move, a way to navigate the challenges that may arise during the accession process. This endeavor is not merely about joining a union; it signifies a transformation from developing to developed country.

Guided by clear goals, we navigate the intricate path toward integration, recognizing that success hinges on more than just gaining entry. The focus extends beyond accession, encompassing a thoughtful consideration of what comes next—a post-joining phase where proactive planning shapes our narrative within the EU.

In the end we should remember, the EU stands not only as a destination but as a partner in our shared ambitions, propelling us toward a future defined by success and prosperity.



It is not just a dream about it and do nothing about it. We should work it. Having a goal, for example my goal would be my country to enter the EU in 2 years, it will be easier for me to work on it and not to wait 10 years to reach that goal.



The process of EU integration is what matters. We need to make some reforms for ourselves, for our society, not only for the EU.

**ADRIJANA
NIKITOVIC**

YEA NETWORK ENTITY,
COORDINATOR FOR SERBIA

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As young people, as activists, as people from political parties and NGOs, we work for the same thing, to be part of the EU and what should be focus on is to improve the country, so the country could be strong enough and stable enough so when we enter the union to give more things as country.

**DAMJAN
ZLATESKI**

YOUNG EUROPEAN AMBASSADOR

I think that maybe we should think about what goals do we set for ourselves once that the EU goal is reached, is there is something else that we want to achieve, except the act of getting a job in the EU. Is there something that we can use once again to help our citizens and our governments to prosper and get better?

**DARJA
MILJANIC**

STUDENT

ACTION PLAN



INTRODUCTION

The action plan outlines a comprehensive strategy for driving positive change and fostering collaboration among young leaders across the South East European (SEE) region. The plan encompasses three distinct initiatives, each spearheaded by participants from the conference, aimed at addressing key challenges and advancing shared goals. The implementation of these initiatives will unfold through a systematic approach, with participants taking on active roles in research, advocacy, and community engagement. Guided by mentorship from experts in their respective fields, teams will navigate the complexities of project execution, leveraging digital platforms and innovative strategies to maximize impact.

By fostering a culture of collaboration and inclusivity, the action plan aims to empower young leaders to become catalysts for positive change in their communities and beyond. Through ongoing evaluation and adjustment, teams will adapt their strategies to emerging needs and challenges, ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of their initiatives. Together, participants will embark on a transformative pathway, driven by a shared commitment to advancing European values and building a brighter future for the SEE region. Through collaboration, dedication, and perseverance, they will leave a legacy of impact and inspiration for generations to come.

INITIATIVE 1: VIRTUAL PLATFORM

The Virtual Platform initiative aims to create a vibrant and inclusive online community that fosters meaningful connections and conversations among individuals across the Balkans. By establishing this platform, we seek to promote cross-border collaboration, cultural exchange, and mutual understanding among members of diverse backgrounds. The establishment of the platform represents a significant step towards fostering unity, collaboration, and mutual support among individuals across the Balkans. By providing a platform for meaningful interactions and cross-border connections, we aim to build a strong and resilient community that celebrates diversity and promotes solidarity. As we move forward, we remain committed to continuously improving the group experience based on member feedback and evolving needs, ensuring that the virtual platform remains a valuable resource and source of inspiration for all its members.

INITIATIVE 2: INTERACTIVE CAMPAIGN FOR PROMOTING THE EU VALUES

This initiative aims to utilize innovative social media campaigns to transcend boundaries, expand knowledge, counteract misinformation, and bolster civic engagement regarding EU values. By leveraging the power of digital platforms, we seek to raise awareness, educate the public, and promote a deeper understanding of the fundamental principles and ideals upheld by the European Union. The “Campaign for EU Values” represents a concerted effort to harness the power of social media and digital communication channels to promote awareness, understanding, and engagement with EU values among diverse audiences. By implementing a strategic content strategy, fostering community engagement, and leveraging partnerships with influencers and experts, we aim to achieve meaningful impact and contribute to a more informed and connected society. As we continue to assess and refine our approach based on feedback and data-driven insights, we remain committed to advancing the cause of EU values and promoting a culture of active citizenship and democratic participation.

INITIATIVE 3: RESEARCH FOR THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF YOUTH

The third initiative aims to delve deep into the intricacies of youth-related data to provide valuable insights for informed decision-making and impactful interventions. By conducting comprehensive research and engaging with stakeholders, we seek to understand the unique challenges faced by youth and identify opportunities for positive change.

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TEAM

**MS. BILJANA
STOJCESKA**
SECOND PROJECT
ASSISTANT

MS. AMINA IBISEVIC
SUPPORT STAFF

MS. ANELIJA MITROVA
FIRST PROJECT ASSISTANT



**MS. NINA
JOVANOVSKA**
OPERATIONS
ASSISTANT

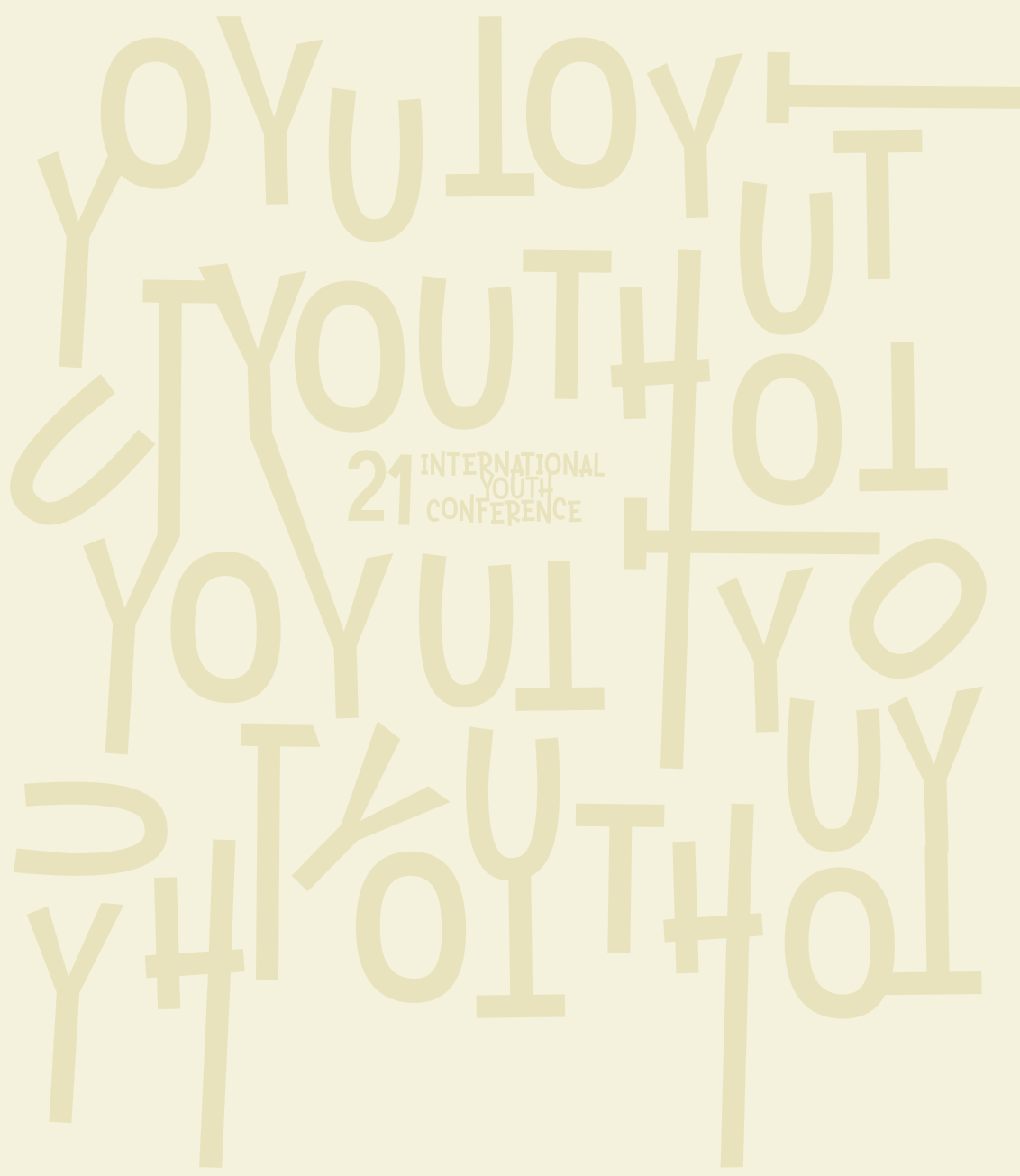
**MR. ANDREJ
STOJKOSKI**

OPERATIONS
ASSISTANT

**MS. BOJANA
KOCEVA**
VOLUNTEER

**MR. METODIJA
STOJCESKI**

PROJECT
COORDINATOR



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