Third Meeting of the WeBER Platform

The 3rd WeBER Platform meeting was held on, 1st and 2nd of November 2017, in Skopje.The event was organised and hosted by the European Policy Institute (EPI).

This meeting enabled the dialogue of all stakeholders on public administration reform (PAR) processes in WB. It was also the occasion for further regional consultations on the monitoring work performed within the WeBER. WeBER Advisory Council and Steering Committee meetings were held on the margins of the WeBER Platform meeting. Participants in the meeting were WeBER Platform members, government and media representatives from the Western Balkan countries, members of the WeBER Advisory Council and representatives of regional and EU level stakeholders - Regional School of Public Administration - ReSPA, Regional Cooperation Council – RCC, and SIGMA/OECD.

The meeting was opened by Simonida Kacarska, EPI Director, followed by key note speeches the WeBER Advisory Council members.

Jan-Hinrik Meyer Sahling, Professor of Political Science from the University of Nottingham, spoke about civil service professionalisation in the Western Balkans and administrative capacity building as one of the key conditions for EU membership. "**Civil society should draw lessons from Central Eastern European countries,"** stressed Sahling. Post-doctoral Researcher at ETH Zurich, **Natasha Wunsch,** presented strategies for civil society involvement in the light of the EU accession, drawing attention to the three stages of this process – pre-accession, accession negotiations, and post-accession. She highlighted that the "EU accession process is a formidable opportunity for empowerment of civil society actors both in procedural & substantive terms."

Thomas Prorok, Deputy Manager Director from KDZ Centre for Public Administration Research, contributed to the panel on topic of quality management in the public sector, stressing that quality managementis at the centre of PAR as it contributes to performance improvement within administration. He explained that quality management tools and techniques can be used by public administration bodies for assessing their own work, on the example of the Common Assessment Framework – CAF.

After the keynote speeches, participants engaged in regional exchange of experience in interactive sessions in the format of a *World Café,* exchanging opinions and discussing questions related to sustainability and fundraising for the WeBER Platform and PAR Monitor.

Closing session of the day one was dedicated to media – civil society relations, and cooperation in improving media communication of PAR to the public in WB. Media representatives at the were **Zoran Sekulić,** Director and Chief Editor of FoNet News Agency in Serbia, and journalist Marina Kostova from Macedonia (Sakam da ti kazam). They advised that creating an educated audience must be the first step toward: **"It is important to translate PAR to the level of ordinary citizens, because they will only start to care if the benefits are understandable to them,** Sekulić emphasised**."** Kostova stated that choosing *when* and *on which topics* to speak can contribute to positioning a CSO as a credible source of information. **Nataša Ristić**, WeBER Communication Officer, moderated this panel.

The second day of the meeting was opened and moderated by **Milena Lazarević,** CEP Programme Director and WeBER Project Manager, at the panel focusing on PAR developments in WB, and modalities of cooperation betweeb civil society and regional and EU stakeholders. **Brian Finn** and **Timo Ligi** from SIGMA/OECD, presented the latest PAR developments in the Western Balkans according to the SIGMA 2017 assessment. Finn

stressed how important medium-term budgeting is, but also added that people's perception of SAI independence is predominantly low in the WB, mostly due to unrealistic expectations. **Zorana Gajić**, ReSPA Programme Manager**,** presented the ways of ReSPA's cooperation with civil society and elaborated on ongoing regional projects, including WeBER. She stated: **"We need to keep an eye on areas in which civil society is most productive and focus on their development."** In the same fashion**, Radu Cotici** from RCC, spoke about current and future activities RCC implements in cooperation with civil society, but also reported on the newest developments relevant to PAR in WB, such as results of the [Balkan Barometer](#) survey results.

The meeting was closed with the sessioon *"In search of best practices between government bodies on PAR and civil society inclusion"*, moderated by **Ardita Abazi Imeri**, EPI Programme Coordinator and WeBER Grant Manager. This session gathered representatives of Western Balkans state authorities in charge of the PAR process. **Ljiljana Uzelac** (Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self Government, Serbia) said that proper methods of cooperation between the CSOs and government are still being explored and emphasised the importance of CSOs having clear evidence and good arguments. **Ana Gojković** (Ministry of Public Administration, Montenegro) stated that building citizen trust in public administration has become a key goal of the Montenegrin Government. **Gordana Dimitrovska** (Ministry of Information Society, Macedonia) explained how she received a positive response from both civil servants and the CSOs who worked together on developing the PAR action plan. **Burim Balaj** (Ministry of Public Administration, Kosovo) said that the Government proactively consults CSOs in the process of developing an action plan for Kosovo's Open Data Portal. **Vedrana Faladzić** (Public Administration Reform Coordinator's Office, Bosnia and Herzegovina) stated that there is willingness to improve the transparency of the Bosnian Government and that PARCO works jointly with CSOs to achieve this. **Lejla Ramić** Director of Foreign Policy Initiative – FPI (WeBER partner organization), also contributed to the discussion and explained that there is a high demand for more extensive consultations at every stage of the PAR process, but also that we need to be aware of both the strengths and weaknesses in cooperation with CSOs.