



BALKAN YOUTH VOICES

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A Word From the Editor

Greetings! And welcome, everyone, to your new newsletter, *Balkan Youth Voices*! I hope you like your title. Arbri Cungu, YES student from Shkoder, Albania, submitted this winning entry, which at...(checking my watch)...5:27pm on Friday, July 31, has received 33.7% of 181 votes.

Arbri, I'm going to have to apologize to you (and to those who voted for you) for switching your initial entry ("Youth Balkans Voice") around a little. As mentioned previously, the new title had to go through an approval process that involved American Councils Belgrade-based and Washington, DC-based staff as well as the US Department of State. During this process, your title underwent negotiation, and some compromises had to be made. *C'est la vie!* I would say you could rile an angry mob, but that's not quite feasible, as you live in Iowa and I an undisclosed location in Washington, DC.

As a second point, I wanted to take the opportunity to say that I am very excited about these two programs! A-SMYLE alumni have been incredibly active this past academic year, and the new batch, who just returned home in June, are very excited to keep that momentum going. I am also very excited because, as you all know, this is the premier year for the Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program in the region of South East Europe. Not only will this group and the new A-SMYLE students have a life-changing experience this coming year, they will see what possibilities await them on their return home as alumni.

CALLING ALL SUBMISSIONS!

I may regret this once your emails flood my inbox, but here it goes...

Thirdly, I wanted to announce that the format of this newsletter will be changing in

one more way: it will now be a participant-driven and participant-written newsletter. As the number of students and alumni increases by leaps and bounds, we here at American Councils (namely I) find the job of keeping up with you and reporting on all that you do to be a bit, shall we say,...overwhelming. Also, I notice that there may be some of you (Nemanja Vuksanovic ☺) who would like to have an event you take part in or an activity you complete written about. And we would like to give you the opportunity to have your projects recognized and possibly connect with others interested in similar projects.

Thus, if you have interesting activities or stories to report (or, heck, even you don't think they're *that* interesting), send them my way for possible submission in the newsletter. My email is: swallace@americancouncils.org.

I will send a reminder one month before the newsletter is published (every three months) to give you more details and some time to work on your article before the deadline.

This is your experience and your community that you build. And communities require communication to grow and stay strong. And this requires you. But fear not, I will continue as your fearless Editor-in-Chief of sorts.

OK, so that's enough from me. I look forward to hearing from you, and, until then, enjoy the school year!

Skye Wallace
Program Officer
A-SMYLE and YES
American Councils for
International Education
Washington, DC



3 Weeks, 3 PDOs

From June 23-July 12, the residents Belgrade, Sarajevo, and Ohrid had no idea what hit them as A-SMYLE and YES students flocked from all corners of the Balkans for their Pre-Departure Orientation. In a rockstar effort, really, American Councils Belgrade-based staff, Peace Corps Macedonia Volunteers, and four A-SMYLE alumni joined forces to impart key knowledge and experience on the young herd in preparation for the groups' August departure for their year in the United States.

The PDOs were a great success, it appears. Related American Councils Program Associate Elizabeth Raible, "In addition to the scheduled activities, the students were surprised by a visit from the US embassy in Belgrade and had the opportunity to talk with its staff informally for over an hour. In Sarajevo, we

were invited to the embassy Fourth of July party, where the kids were a big hit meeting people. The ambassador even mentioned them in his speech!"

"In Ohrid," which congregated YES Albania, Bulgaria, Kosovo, and Macedonia students, "having people from different places and experiences was nice because they could learn a lot from each other and contributed to our message that each person and family is different," she added.

Also leading the PDOs were Cassandra Payton, Regional Director for South East Europe, Peace Corps Volunteers Heather Tomlins and Jerry Wang, and—last, but certainly not least—A-SMYLE alumni Teaching Assistants Bojan Francuz, Filip Gujranov, Ana Brzakovic, and Hannadi Beganovic.



TA Bojan Francuz and Liz Raible don their fancy A-SMYLE hats and pose for a picture with incoming A-SMYLERS in Belgrade (left), while Liz and Cassandra Payton take time to pose for a picture with YES students and country director, Luljeta Koshi, in Sarajevo (below).





A-SMYLE Alumni Meet on Kapaonik

From May 11-13, 51 alumni took part in the first ever A-SMYLE Alumni Summit, held in Brzece, Serbia, on Kapaonik, a resort mountain.

The purpose of the Summit was to give alumni a forum to develop new skills and ideas through a three-day workshop. In addition to attending interactive sessions on various topics, alumni discussed what it means to be a member of the A-SMYLE community and brainstormed ways to make the network stronger and more effective in their home communities.

Also vital to the conference was the opportunity to form connections across all generations of A-SMYLE. Students from all corners of Serbia and Montenegro shared their experiences in running projects in their towns as well as the lessons they had learned in the process.

Leading the conference were American Councils Program Asso-

ciate Elizabeth Raible and Program Officer Skye Wallace, assisted by American Councils' Belgrade Office Director Sanja Ignjatovic and Office Manager Vesna Mitrovic.

Cassandra Payton, Regional Director for South East Europe, was slated to attend as well, after toiling for months on conference planning with Elizabeth and Skye. However, illness struck her down at the last minute, and she was unable to attend. Reports of everyone's hard work and smiling faces, though, reached her and revived her to good health!

The majority of the sessions at the conference were led by guest facilitators. Alumni from the US Department of State's Junior Faculty Development Program (JFDP) led two discussions at the conference. Borko Kovacevic, from Serbia, spoke about human rights; and Ana Frichand, from Macedonia, facilitated a discussion on non-violent communication.

Ana Rankovic, of Serbian NGO FRACTAL, spoke about youth political participation and was joined by her colleague Filip Pavlovic to talk discuss living in a multi-ethnic community.

Lastly, a session on HIV/AIDS education was led by Maja Nikolic, a volunteer from the Belgrade office of the International Red Cross.

Another special guest in attendance was Amy Schulz, Program Officer for A-SMYLE and YES South East Europe from the US Department of State. Amy had this to say of the event: "The alumni summit was an excellent opportunity for alumni from different years to meet each other and network. In my opinion, having alumni trainings can only strengthen their future projects, contribute to the successful implementation of the projects, and benefit local communities."





National Rhetorical Speaking Competition in Montenegro

Vlado Rakocevic, Fedja Pavlovic, the competition, the A-SMYLE program, and his experience in the US the 2008 generation, and Ivan Vuksanovic, 2007 and Alumni Co-

ordinator for Montenegro, were awarded a grant from American Councils to promote public speaking throughout the country of Montenegro from April-May 2009.

Four rounds of the competition, entitled "Civil Awareness", were organized in three different cities. On April 23rd, a qualification round of the competition was held in Bijelo Polje—the largest city in northern Montenegro. 20 high school students participated and were judged by two jury members with extensive experience in public speaking and debate as well as teachers of Montenegrin language and literature and sociology. Four finalists emerged with very close scores.

The second qualification round took place in Bar on the evening of April 28th. 21 high school students participated in this round; three students emerged for the

next round from this city. Jury members included two Serbian language and literature professors and a radio reporter from Bar.

The local media in Bar showed great interest in the competition, and representatives from radio, television, and the print media came out to cover it. Boris even gave a one-hour interview about

Podgorica, where finalists participated in two workshops and in lectures.

The third qualification round of the competition took place in Podgorica, Montenegro's capital

The last phase of the competition was the final round of public speaking, held in Podgorica on May 8th in the main hall of the Centre of Civil Education. The theme for the final round was "I Have an Idea How to Change Our Society". Finals were covered by Montenegro's "Dan" newspaper.

The alumni were thrilled about the success of their project. One reason for their excitement was the prospect of fostering relationships with high schools and their principals across Montenegro. The alumni believe that this will be beneficial when recruitment season starts this fall for the 2010-2011 academic year.



IMAM IDEJU.

RETORICKO TAKMICEenje SREDNjOSKOLACA

FINALE

8. MAJ, PODGORICA
SALA CENTRA ZA GRADJANSKO OBRAZOVANJE
20.30H

By and large, the advertising for the competition was effectively and inexpensively carried out by the creation and maintenance of a frequently updated group on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=78776147154>. Other publicity came from the extensive media coverage.



President's Volunteer Service Award Winners!

The numbers are in, and here is the list of the 2009 President's Volunteer Service Award winners from the A-SMYLE program. These students performed 100 (and often *more* than 100) hours of community service during their year in the United States.

The President's Volunteer Service Award was established in 2003 by the President's Councils on Service and Civic Education. The purpose of the award is to honor and thank those who help their communities not only by volunteering their time and effort, but who are an example to others who would do so.

Thank you, President's Volunteer Service Award winners, for being great examples of community leaders!



*Milan Andrejevic
Romana Arlov
Nikola Jovanovic
Milica Djukanovic
Iva Filipovic
Jelena Jezdimirovic
Mina Knezevic
Milena Koprivica
Miljana Kosovac
Boban Markovic
Ivan Markovic
Stefan Nikolic
Nina Tanaskovic
Ildiko Zsoldos*



Aleksandra and Stevan take time from their awareness-raising to pose for a picture.

Marathon Effort for the Environment

On May 9th, A-SMYLE alumni Boris Jovanovic, generation 2007, and Aleksandra Oletic and Stevan Perovic, both 2008, descended upon Fruska Gora National Park, in northern Serbia, for a Global Youth Service Day-themed environmental project.

These three alumni from Novi Sad organized their clean-up action on the same day as the Fruska Gora foot race. In an effort to harness the large crowds, which had gathered to enjoy the region's natural beauty, the alumni planted themselves on the starters' line prior to the event and handed out flyers on environmental degradation and contact information for local environmental NGOs.

In addition, the alumni gave out key chains with the A-SMYLE logo and talked with participants and spectators alike about importance of recycling and the protection of the environment. The A-SMYLEers also gave interviews to local television stations and newspapers covering the event.

After the race kicked off, Boris, Aleksandra, and Ste-



van followed the runners and picked up trash for the entire length of the run—20 kilometers. Quite impressive, guys, especially considering how much trash a race generates!

The clean up action was sponsored by a grant from American Councils.



Some A-SMYLE ladies take time after their burgers to pose for a picture in front of the Hard Rock Café in downtown Washington, DC.

In June, one of A-SMYLE's Placement Organizations, CIEE, held a re-entry workshop for their outgoing A-SMYLERS in the nation's capital.

The students, who arrived in the wee morning hours of Monday, June 15th, were treated to a civic education tour of Washington, DC by Julia Homstad, an American Councils Program Officer for Secondary School Programs. They then chowed down at DC's Hard Rock Café with Amy Schulz from

and Skye Wallace, Program Officer for A-SMYLE and YES South East Europe at American Councils for international Education.

Later, the students continued their tour at some of DC's most inspiring memorials.

Tuesday, before departing for the Dulles airport, A-SMYLE students participated in workshop activities with CIEE's Abby Swardlick and Frank Hall and with Skye, who went over the nuts and bolts

A-SMYLERS Take DC by Storm

of the US Department of State preparation for the kids' return to Serbia and Montenegro.

Hearing the students' perspectives on their time in the US—both good and bad—was a special experience for all involved. Emotions ran high and in all directions, as leaving behind loved ones here and the prospect of returning home is never easy.

Thanks for stopping by, everyone! Here's hoping you had a great summer.

Excited to return home, A-SMYLE guys leap jubilantly at the Air Force Memorial in Alexandria, Virginia.





Project “Rented Planet”

In April, Nemanja Vuksanovic, a 2007 alumn, led his NGO Nada (“Hope”) in an environmental action entitled “Rented Planet” in his town of Herceg Novi, Montenegro.

The purpose of the project was to teach the citizens of Herceg Novi how to preserve resources and how to take better care of the environment around them.

The NGO organized focus groups of all ages (kindergarten through high school) at every school in Herceg Novi and engaged kids and young adults in discussions about ecology as well as distributed materials that they had prepared.

The project was successful and well-accepted in the schools and by the town. Schools were not the only ones to involved, however. The group’s efforts were covered by the local newspaper and radio station. Additionally, the printing house that printed the ma-



terials for NGO Nada decided to print extra materials for Nemanja for free because it wanted to help to support the group’s efforts. Way to spread the spirit, guys!

Project “Rented Planet” was funded by a grant from American Councils.

POZAJMLJENA PLANETA
Deset ekoloških zapovjesti

- **Papir upotrebljavajte mudro. Pišite sa obje strane.**
Zašto? Papir se uglavnom pravi od drveta. Ako papir štedimo, manje će stabala drvceca biti posječeno, priroda će ostati bogatija i zdravija.
- **Izvore i rijeke zaštitite. Kada ste na plaži, održavajte je čistom.**
Zašto? Voda je, pored vazduha, osnovni izvor života. Sve je manje čiste vode za piće. Zbog toga je važno, gdje god možemo, da zaštitimo izvore vode i da vodu štedimo. Oko 3.5 milijarde ljudi je danas žedno, a oko tri miliona godišnje umire zbog zagađene vode za piće.
- **Energiju štedite. Svjetlo ugasite uvijek kada je to moguće.**
Zašto? Osim energije proizvedene u hidrocentralama, svi ostali proizvođači zagađuju prirodu, a da bi smo je imali u svakoj doba treba je štedjeti.
- **Za odlaganje otpadaka koristite stare kese.**
Zašto? Stare kese bi i onako ostale u otpad. Zbog toga ih je bolje isporučiti za pakovanje ostalog otpada.
- **Starijima preporučite da ne kupuju predmete od krzna, kože, reptila, stonovače i kornjačinog oklopa.**
Zašto? Da bi došli do krzna, kůže i kornja, ljudi odnose životinje i time narušavaju žvi svijet. Pogledni vrste životinja je čak isčezlo. Time se narušava priroda.
- **Vodu štedite. Ako u kući česma negdje curi ili zapazite oštećenu cijev, zamolite starije da to poprave.**
Zašto? Svaka kap vode je dragocjena, posebno u gradovima.
- **O drveću se brinite. Nova stabla sadite, a oštećena liječite.**
Zašto? Bilogija je mnogo. Posebno u gradovima, drveća su pluća grada, faksorska saseonika.
- **Pjakačite ili upotrebljavajte javni prijevoz. Roditeljima recite da što manje koriste automobil.**
Zašto? Pjakačenjem i bavijanjem sportom stize se korionija neopodno za razvoj i zdravlje. Da bi u gradovima vazduh ostao manje zagađen, potrebno je da se smanji količina izduvnih gasova iz automobila.
- **O planeti Zemlji čitajte i učite. Sa prijateljima znanje razmijenite.**
Zašto? Nova saznanja o planeti Zemlji oplemenjuju nas i dovode u bliskiju vezu sa cjelokupnom prirodom. Nemojte biti sebični i znanje zadržavati samo za sebe. Ako drugome obrujemo naša znanja o prirodi življenja i drugi će to isto učiniti prema nama.
- **Osnujte svoj klub ljubitelja prirode, pozovite drugare i zajedno očistite dio kraja u kome živite.**
Zašto? Klubovi ljubitelja prirode omogućavaju nam nova saznanja, druženja, putovanja, obilazak planina i prirodnih bogatstava. Nova prijateljstva se stizu druženjem. Isto možemo da postignemo ako svi sami radimo.

22. april
Dan planete Zemlje



ECO Workshop in Pljevlja

Ivana Kotlaja, an A-SMYLE alum of 2008, organized an eco workshop for children from an elementary school in Pljevlja, Montenegro for this year’s Global Youth Service Day.

Here Ivana describes her project, which was held on May 4th: “Since I was planning to organize a clean-up action in my home town, Pljevlja, I decided to start with educating the fifth graders about ecology and its importance.

“First of all, I handed out some fliers which contained all the information about pollution and Pljevlja. I also showed them the pictures of some places in our town

which are the most polluted. I talked about different ways and methods that can be used to fight the existing pollution and also to prevent some new ecological disasters.

“In the end, I talked about the importance of recycling. I tried to make my presentation very interesting, so they would understand that doing the ecological actions can be really fun and it can also benefit our environment.”

Thanks, Ivana, for your initiative and all your hard work!

Loznica Library Park Spruced Up

Nikola Mladenovic, A-SMYLE alum from the 2008 generation, carried out an environmental clean-up in the town of Loznica, Serbia. The project was sponsored by American Councils as a small grant project.

Nikola wrote of the action: “On April 11th, a group of alumni and young activists from Loznica gathered in the park behind the

Loznica library to clean it up. The weather was really nice, and the park was mostly clean because it is maintained by the city, but I can’t say that we didn’t have work to do.

“The project was very successful and many people who were just passing by were asking us what are we were doing and why, so we were explaining who we are

and why it is important to take care of the environment.”

“The most persistent participants went to clean river bank, which had a lot of trash around and the river itself is not maintained by local city organizations,” he added.

Way to motivate everyone, Nikola!

Photo(s) in the Spotlight!

In addition to you, dear A-SMYLEs and YES students, now submitting articles, we invite you to also send some of your best PHOTOS. Each quarter, when I issue a call for news stories, I will also request entries for a photo (or two) that you feel embodies the life and/or spirit of the A-SMYLE and YES programs.

Why? Well, sometimes a picture is worth more words than can fit easily into this newsletter. Witness these photos from the last quarter (*next page*). Not only are they great pictures, and not only were they taken during A-SMYLE and YES activities, they sum up just some of the emotions (happy, sad, excited) and experiences (both small and large) these programs bring.

So, to both alumni and new arrivals: keep those cameras ready to fire—American Councils can’t wait to see what you come up with!





This photo of A-SMYLErs, generation 2009, arriving home to Montenegro was taken by Ivan Vukсанovic, Alumni Coordinator for Montenegro, at the airport in Tivat.



Skye Wallace, Liz Raible, PDO teacher Heather Tomlins, and Teaching Assistants Bojan Francuz, Ana Brzakovic, and Filip Gujranov strut down the streets of downtown Kyiv, following their April PDO training session in the Ukrainian capital. This photo was taken by PDO teacher Jerry Wang.



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