**IN THE WESTERN BALKANS, WE LIVE IN A POISONOUS CLOUD**

*Balkans United for Clean Air - citizens and civic organizations of the Western Balkans prepared to engage in a joint, solidary struggle for clean air in every street, neighborhood, village, and city in our region. We act in the entire Western Balkans: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Serbia.*

Western Balkan countries have the lowest air quality in Europe, which is why the European Fund for the Balkans is launching the "Balkans United for Clean Air" regional campaign, which calls upon the competent state institutions and citizens in the region to prevent up to 13,500 premature deaths every year. Most of those cases are attributed to the exposure to a particulate matter, which is mainly produced by coal-fired thermal power plants in the Western Balkans.

The “Balkans United for Clean Air” campaign is initiated by the European Fund for the Balkans and it will be realized across the region in partnership with the Right to the City from Belgrade (Serbia), Environmental and Territorial Management Institute from Tirana (Albania), Ekoforum from Zenica and for Ecology and Energy from Tuzla (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Sbunker from Pristina (Kosovo), Air Care from Skopje (North Macedonia) and OZON from Podgorica (Montenegro). "Balkans United for Clean Air" emphasizes the regional cooperation as a necessity for the transformation of the energy sector and the environment protection system, which would improve both the economy and public health. Together, we will make available all the campaign’s materials for the citizens of the Western Balkans, whom we expect to take active part in the campaign.

In the course of three months, we will address and make publicly visible topics such as: air pollution and its effects on public health and increased mortality; consequences on fertility; pollution caused by industry and big polluters; air quality in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as other topics that can help citizens inform themselves about the importance of air quality. The materials created during the campaign will be publicly available to all citizens for further use and dissemination. The idea is to initiate a wake-up call for the region’s citizens so that they jointly stand up for clean air in the Western Balkans.

The “Balkans United for Clean Air” campaign belongs to all of us and is open to all civil society organizations, informal groups, civic movements, and individuals who want to join a solidarity-based struggle for clean air in the Western Balkans. Become part of the “Balkans United for Clean Air” campaign, because only by joining forces can we improve air quality in the Western Balkans, and polluted air knows no borders, religion, nation, sex, or age.

Background:

*First topic in the focus: Air Pollution in the Western Balkans*

The citizens of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, Serbia and North Macedonia are equally exposed to airborne pollutants. These stem from fossil fuel-powered heating plants and factories, one of the main factors also being the obsolete heating technology in households.

In a study published by HEAL, Sandbag, CAN Europe, CEE Bankwatch and Europe Beyond Coal, it is stated that in 2016, sixteen coal-fired thermal power plants in the Western Balkans, which remains their number to this day, have emitted more sulfur dioxide (SO2) than all 250 such plants operating in the European Union combined. While thermal power plants in the EU are subject of mass closures, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina remain committed to their plans for opening new ones.

With the "Balkans United for Clean Air" campaign, we demand that decision-makers refocus their policies and take urgent steps to reduce air pollution, in accordance with their commitments to the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, adopted by those very decision-makers in Sofia on November 10, 2020. The Green Agenda for the region implies regulating the cross-border impact of air pollution, adopting strategies for the improvement of air quality, raising the capacity of air quality measuring systems, and the total elimination of coal subsidies. Abandoning the use of coal for the purpose of electricity production is the most important measure for improving air quality. Additionally, replacing heating boilers in households with environmentally cleaner solutions, solar panels on houses’ and buildings’ rooftops, as well as projects that help improve energy efficiency – these steps could also have a significant role.

For more information on the campaign visit our [website](https://www.balkanfund.org/general-news/start-of-the-efbs-regional-campaign-balkans-united-for-clear-air)