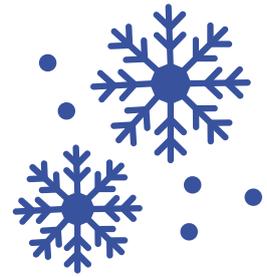


**24**  
December  
2024

# beeEFB BUZZ



**Dear beeEFB Alumni,**

Approaching the end of 2024, it is time to reflect on the past 4 years of the beeEFB Alumni Network and the last two years of our serving our community as board members. The new year brings changes, not only in the **beeEFB Board** but also in the network's personal connection to the EFB, **Elena Petkovska Gjorgjijevska**.

Therefore we want to express our deepest gratitude to all of you for your unwavering support and active participation in our organization's initiatives throughout the year. Your dedication has been instrumental in creating a vibrant and thriving community. Your engagement has enriched the experiences of fellow alumni and played a crucial role in fostering a sense of unity within our organization. We are specifically thankful to the **beeEffect Management Team** and mentors in that program who transmit this message to new members of our bee Network.

**We wish you a joyous holiday season and a successful New Year 2025!**

Warm regards,  
**beeEFB Board**



## Strategic Planning Meeting in Thessaloniki

On December 14–15, 2024, a Strategic Planning Meeting was held in Thessaloniki, Greece, bringing together former, current, and newly selected board members, national coordinators, and some of the most engaged alumni of the beeEFB Alumni Network. The meeting focused on reviewing the achievements and challenges of the 2021–2024 strategy while setting the groundwork for the **next strategic period, 2025–2029**. Discussions addressed key aspects such as alumni engagement, the network's ongoing plans, and ideas for enhancing future collaboration and sustainability.

**Aleksandra Tomanić**, Executive Director of the European Fund for the Balkans, attended the meeting and reassured continued support for the beeEFB Alumni Network. She highlighted the EFB's commitment to fostering stronger connections, supporting local initiatives, and promoting peace-building and reconciliation as part of its upcoming strategy. Moreover, she shared that starting from 2025, Jovana Nešić Jovanović, Programme Assistant at EFB, will replace Elena in the Network as a representative on behalf of EFB.

Alumni reflected on the importance of sustaining the network's growth, engaging alumni through innovative tools, and maintaining a balance between inclusivity and strategic focus. Ideas to optimize resources and encourage alumni participation were also explored, including the development of digital platforms, thematic workshops, and localized initiatives.

The outcomes of this strategic meeting will inform the direction of the beeEFB Alumni Network in the years ahead, emphasizing collaboration, engagement, and impact.

**Stay tuned for more updates on how the network plans to implement these exciting ideas.**



## Elena Petkovska Gjorgjijevska

New year, new faces. From January 2025 there will be changes not only in the beeEFB Board but also in a representative in the Network on behalf of EFB. Since EFB is adjusting its strategy and because of its new activities, Elena Petkovska Gjorgjijevska will solely focus on EFB communications, and her duties as a representative on behalf of EFB will take over Jovana Nešić Jovanović, Programme Assistant at EFB. We want to take a moment to celebrate and thank Elena for her extraordinary dedication, patience, and creativity. She has been a driving force behind countless initiatives, gatherings, and strategic decisions, leaving an enduring impact on the beeEFB Alumni Network. While we are sorry to see her leave her day-to-day role, we know she will remain part of our community.

Here are a few words from her:

**“How lucky I’m to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard”**



**“Saying goodbye to being passionately and wholeheartedly involved in the development of the beeEFB Alumni Network as a representative of EFB for the past 5 years, is just like in the title I chose for this short addressing to you all, the alumni and members of the so-called EFB family❤️”**

If I have to reflect on whether I feel more sad than lucky, then I choose the latter. 😊 Although I am still in the period of processing the news, and I may easily end up in a different emoticon state, this time of the year deserves some bright looking into 2025.

The past 5 years were an important part of thinking and envisioning the bigger picture that started to get its contours back in 2012 with the launch of the EFB Community (and the 100+ alumni at the Community Conference in Zagreb) and the amazing leadership and community spirit that was introduced by my forever and ever best colleague and mentor, **Branka Panić**, who managed to “infect” me with it at the very start of my work at the EFB by engaging me immediately in the organization of the Zagreb gathering.

Fast forward through the years, and all that was left from Branka Panić as a legacy to me and later to **Milena Stefanović** as well, 2019 started with the 4 “Ambassadors,” **Vladica, Evica, Irma, and Filip**, and their idea to revive the whole Network in a more structured way. 2020 was all about Covid-19, but also the many hours spent online in finding the best ways to move in the right direction. 2021 was about the strategic meeting in Bečići, the first in-person gathering for most of the 30 people that came to directly engage in planning the next steps. Imagine the excitement. The work on the Bee Vision board and brand, the energy, and the positive vibes were just part of the game, and we won because we worked as a team—me, Milena, the board, the assembly representatives, and all the engaged alumni, directly or indirectly.

The teamwork continued with the strategy for 2021-2024 being approved for implementation by the EFB Steering Committee. All the rest is history of many, many board meetings and discussions, online and offline, in-person brainstorming, annual events, action plans, meeting minutes, Excel, surveys, the Holy Drive, the ups, and the downs...

My biggest thanks goes to those with “code” names. V - Almighty Octopus a.k.a. The beeEFB Drive Goddess, E - The Double HR Agent a.k.a. The Good and the Bad Cop Always on Call, I— a.k.a. Queen Bee Gospođetina, F - the Secret Agent SuperConnector, M - The beeHeart of Montenegro, D - The Creative Master of Communication a.k.a. You’re a Doll, N - The Superheroine for Data Protection a.k.a. The Voice and the BeeEFB Dancing Queen, D - the beeEFB Salatica, D - The beeEFB Voice of Justicia, R - The designated beeEFB Board cross-pollinator, A - The happy-go-lucky Creative Bee, A - Fully agree with a smile, K - The beeAthena Goddess, H - Trading beeEFB to be a future Minister of Economy, I - beeEFB King of Hospitality, M - Queen of the Albanian Mini-Hive, and of course Milena Stefanović and Branka Panić, who may no longer work in EFB but are part of the whole story, and some connections are forever.

And as **Darius Polok** from **Bosch Alumni Network** said in his amazing presentation at the Annual Event in Skopje, we are all starlings belonging to the same beeEFB flock.

Wishing you all joyous and relaxing holidays, and don’t forget to keep on connecting, networking, and building the community spirit in 2025 and beyond, becoming active co-creators and the “glue” that makes the beeEFB Alumni Network stronger. And remember **#nopressure, #justdoitwithpassion.**”

**Elena – code name - beeEFB Follower Forever** 🐝😊

---



## THE BEE EFFECT PROGRAMME

# Closing event of the bee Effect Programme 2024

Thessaloniki, Greece

**The closing ceremony** for the 3rd cohort of the Bee Effect Programme was organized from 13 to 15 December 2024 in Thessaloniki, Greece. The closing event reunited new beeEffect participants, mentors, the Bee Effect Management Team, the EFB Board Alumni, and EFB alumni from the different generations.

It was an incredible two-day event filled with meaningful presentations from each team representing their professional development, the gradual steps forward, their dedication, their hard work, and the challenges, in accordance with the EFB's values.

Throughout the event, sincere insights about mentorship, professional and personal growth between the mentor and the mentees were exchanged between the participants. This experience brought them closer to the mindset of what it truly means to be a member of the EFB Alumni network.

The challenges, the feedback, and the lessons learned during the entire implementation period of the program will shape and further improve the beeEffect program for the next year's cohort.

The closing event of the program is also a moment of celebration of achievements, and the best mentorship pair was awarded. **The winning team** of the project, which encourages community members engagement to enhance corporate social responsibility, were the bee participants **Georgiana Horobeanu** (Romania) and **Tijana Savić** (Serbia), mentored by **their mentor**, our **EFB Alumni Faris Godinjak** (Bosnia and Herzegovina). In addition, the winner of Social Media Bee of the 3rd cohort is awarded to **Stephania Zourka** (Greece).

At the end of the event, 12 Bee Effect program participants become officially part of the EFB Alumni network and Robert Bosch Alumni Network as well.

**The Bee Effect programme aimed not only to foster professional development but also to build community of support and encouragement.**



## Meet the winning team

A part of 3rd edition of the bee Effect Programme was a developing of a project enhancing social impact initiatives, named **Communify**. The winning team is made of our new alumni Tijana Savić, Georgiana Horobeanu and their mentor Faris Godinjak. They shared with us their experience during this year programme.



### Tijana Savić

**What does it mean to be a part of the EFB alumni network?**

I'm excited to be an active member of the EFB alumni network and look forward to collaborating with fellow professionals, who are passionate about connecting, contributing, and making a positive impact within the broader alumni network and our communities.

**What is your favorite moment/memory within the beeEffect programme during this year?**

While there were many memorable moments throughout this year's cohort, my favorite was my team's in-person meeting in Malta. It was not only a productive time spent brainstorming and working on our project, but also an opportunity to explore the city together and strengthen our bond as a team.



## Georgiana Horobeanu

### How do you evaluate the participation in the Bee Effect programme?

Being able to be part of the Bee Effect programme was an achievement for me this year. I am deeply grateful for my team, Tijana and Faris, and the organizers, as they have greatly contributed to the beauty of the experience and helped me achieve significant professional and personal growth in the past few months.

In addition to enjoying the meaningful work of the program, I also got the chance to travel more and to experience new cultures. With immense gratitude, joy, and respect for the organizing board and the inspiring professionals I've met throughout BeeEffect, this journey has been nothing short of extraordinary!

### What is your favorite moment/memory within the beeEffect programme during this year?

In a short period of time, I was fortunate to create countless precious memories with both my team and other fellow "bees" in the programme. One of my favorite moments was the city tour in Podgorica, Montenegro, where I found myself chatting and debating ideas with amazing people I had just met, yet it felt like we had known each other for a lifetime.

## Faris Godinjak

### Please share your experience as mentor to the beeEffect programme for the 3rd cohort?

Mentoring was quite exciting and productive. I was lucky to have devoted mentees, so everything was going smoothly. My goal was to be direct, honest and useful, and the result came by itself.

### How do you value the teamwork?

Teamwork was a key to success. At the very beginning it was very important to recognize the exact potential and abilities of mentees and adapt the plans and activities to that. This was the way to get the best out of them and do the job properly.

### What is your favorite moment/memory within the beeEffect programme during this year?

First was our teamwork in Malta, when we gave our best to prepare ourselves for the final event in Thessaloniki. I was very satisfied to see our common energy and devotion. Second was the moment of our surprise when the winners were announced. It was very satisfactory to see that our efforts weren't in vain.

---

## Meet the new Board members 2025-26

After two terms of the beeEFB Board, it is time for a new team that will serve our network for the next two years. Being a member of the beeEFB Board that serves our community, made up of more than 500 members, is not only a responsibility and dedication but also an opportunity to meet, collaborate, and eventually become a friend with people from the region of the wider Balkans.

We present you the beeEFB Board 2025-26, constituted of 8 members: Arabela Iljaz, Bojana Marinković, Chrysa Petala, Drilon Shala, Hüseyin Silman, Mariola Çeku, Redi Saliasi, and Sinem Bağçe.



### Arabela Iljaz

**Senior Associate at the Ministry of Education and Science of North Macedonia**

Fellowship Programme for Government Officials from the Western Balkans 2019

“As a results-driven professional in educational policy, dedicated to fostering inclusivity, building relationships, and driving sustainable initiatives, I envision our Alumni Network as a dynamic community for collaboration and growth. Together, we can share experiences, strengthen connections between individuals and institutions, and contribute to shaping a more inclusive, united, and forward-thinking region—advancing progress and cooperation across the Western Balkans and beyond.”



### Bojana Marinković

**Lawyer, (LL.B.) Belgrade, (LL.M.) Newcastle University**  
beeEffect Programme 2022-23

She is fully qualified lawyer, chess player, and activist from Serbia and a receiver of a prestigious Chevening Scholarship. Last years he has been part of the Management Team of the beeEffect Programme 2024. She is a member of various networks, including the European Fund for the Balkans' beeEFB Alumni Network, the Robert Bosch Stiftung Alumni Network, the American Chamber of Commerce, and The Fund for American Studies.

As a Lecturer of Law at a university in the UK, she taught and mentored students on various topics, such as International Commercial Law, Business Law, and Human Rights. She is passionate about analyzing the legal aspects of technological developments and has recently conducted research exploring the impact of AI on privacy matters. She was involved in various causes, such as advocating and promoting youth activism. She hopes to use her legal expertise to make a positive impact in her community and beyond.



## Chrysa Petala

**Co-founder of among, Project Manager**  
beeEffect Programme 2022-23

“My vision for the network is to ensure that our discussions lead to practical applications on a local scale, creating tangible, positive change in our communities. By integrating the principles of Service Design into our services and events, we can make our actions more user-centered, efficient and impactful. Additionally, I am committed to fostering inclusivity, with a particular focus on empowering underrepresented groups within the network, including individuals with both visible and invisible disabilities, to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute and grow in a personal and professional level.”



## Drilon Shala

**Performance Auditor with the National Audit Office, (MBA) Sheffield University, UK, (MA) University of Birmingham, UK, (BA) Jönköping University, Sweden**  
Fellowship Programme for Government Officials from the Western Balkans 2014-15

As a Board Member of the beeEFB Alumni Network, Drilon envisions the network as a catalyst for empowering change-makers across the Balkans, fostering collaboration, and driving inclusive and sustainable growth.

By leveraging the collective expertise and commitment of its members, he aims to strengthen alumni participation and engagement, and advance innovative solutions that contribute to transparent, accountable, and equitable societies. Through his engagement as Senior Intervention Manager for the HELVETAS Decentralization and Municipal Support project, Drilon continues to champion initiatives that amplify marginalized voices and promote inclusive development, reflecting his unwavering commitment to sustainable change.



## Hüseyin Silman

**Project Manager**

LDP 2010/2011 - 5th Generation

"I am a senior Turkish Cypriot professional with over 16 years of experience in EU-funded projects and initiatives focused on fostering dialogue, transparency, and cooperation in divided communities. My work has always been rooted in the belief that collaboration and citizen engagement are key to creating lasting, positive change. With the beeEFB Alumni Network, my vision is to build a dynamic platform where like-minded individuals and organizations can come together to share ideas, resources, and expertise. I see it as a space for fostering innovative and inclusive solutions to the challenges our communities face, with a strong emphasis on empowering citizens to play an active role in shaping their future."



## Mariola Çeku

**A diplomat with expertise in international affairs, digital and cyber diplomacy, and the EU integration of the Western Balkans.**

beeEffect Programme 2022-23

She is passionate about advancing democracy, promoting human rights, and fostering regional stability, with a particular focus on combating disinformation, preventing conflict, and empowering women in security affairs, recognizing their crucial role in shaping peaceful, resilient societies.

A proud alumna of the beeEffect programme 1st cohort (2021-2022), Mariola is committed to fostering cross-border and cross-sector cooperation. She believes in the beeEFB Alumni Network's potential to drive meaningful change by empowering, connecting, and supporting each other. By expanding the network and strengthening its connections, the beeEFB Alumni Network can foster democracy, sustainability, and resilience, playing a crucial role in the Western Balkans' successful integration into the European family.



## Redi Saliasi

**Translator & Interpreter for the International Monitoring Operation (IMO), (BA) University of Tirana (MSc) the European Institute in Nice, France**

"I currently work as Translator and Interpreter for the International Monitoring Operation (IMO), a joint US-EU funded project that is monitoring the implementation of a pivotal justice reform in Albania. I also have extended experience as Public Relations Officer and Project Assistant in the private sector, international development firms, and international projects in my country. The 2010-2011 EU-SEE Leadership Development Programme was one of the most interesting programmes I have been part of. My vision for the beeEFB Alumni Network is that of a big family united in diversity, and one that we all feel we belong to."



## Sinem Bağçe

We are pleased to announce the continuation of a dedicated member on the board of beeEFB, who will serve into the new term starting June 2024. She is a recent alumna of the beeEffect Programme and currently holds a position as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Economics at Yeditepe University in Istanbul. Previously, she has enriched her academic career as a Visiting Researcher at the University of Helsinki. Her research primarily explores policies for inclusive economic development, with a significant part of her professional work involving the development and management of substantial EU projects and collaboration with various international institutions. She is eager to leverage her expertise to foster collaboration and share valuable insights within the beeEFB Alumni Network.

---

For your ideas, questions, comments - email us at [efbalumni@gmail.com](mailto:efbalumni@gmail.com).

May the hive  Bee with you!