Open Regional Fund for South-East Europe – Promotion of EU Integration

The challenge

The countries of South-East Europe have declared membership in the European Union to be their top political priority. The region’s countries have progressed in the accession process to differing degrees. However, they face numerous common challenges, above all with regard to economic and political reforms and reform in public administration. The European Commission has declared regional cooperation in South-East Europe to be a key condition for joining the EU.

In-depth regional cooperation in economic and social development, infrastructure, energy, the legal system, the media and security has already led to considerable progress. Nevertheless, there are still opportunities to improve the knowledge and abilities of the authorities, both with regard to coordinating and controlling the EU accession process through regional learning and with regard to the application of tried and tested procedures in the respective countries.

Goal

The project is putting the relevant authorities in South-East Europe in a better position to steer national processes of EU accession.

Our approach

The project is coordinating, advising and supporting a total of three regional networks – the Network of Ministries of Foreign Affairs, the Cooperation platform of EU integration authorities and the Network of IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance) structures. These networks bring together specialised colleagues from similar national institutions who discuss and decide on important areas of intervention within the scope of the project.

In addition to this, the project is promoting the visibility of the efforts of the Berlin Process, a multilateral initiative of the German Federal Government to promote the EU accession reforms through regional cooperation. This includes supporting the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) as one of the key results of the Berlin Process.

The project is supporting the region’s accession countries, for example with regard to implementing the agreements reached in the context of the Berlin Process. It is encouraging them to work together to tackle challenges that arise in terms of translating EU Community Law and the procedure involved in EU reporting.
The cooperation entails the joint organisation of training and seminars on issues relating to EU integration, study trips and the deployment of advisors on specific issues.

**Results**

As a result of the close cooperation with representatives from partner organisations, this project has created platforms for regional learning and regional dialogue that reflect the requirements of the ministries of foreign affairs, EU integration authorities and the IPA structures. Thanks to the formats for sharing experience and the work in the regional networks, the countries are able to provide mutual support, establish synergies and thus accelerate the accession process. The establishment of trustful relationships and an increased mutual understanding of the challenges contribute towards stability and reconciliation in the region.

The increased visibility of the efforts of the Berlin Process helps to make political events more transparent, while making the Berlin Process easier to understand and easier for the general public to follow. With a view to supporting economic development in the Western Balkans, the project has developed recommendations for reform efforts that place an emphasis on vocational training relating to digitalisation processes. The intensive exchange between civil society, local institutions and national and regional experts and partners in conjunction with the Berlin Process has made it possible to address regional developments at all levels.

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