

Regional Cooperation for EU-Integration

Context

The Western Balkan economies, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia, are all **candidates or potential candidates for accession to the European Union (EU)**. One of the key requirement for their EU accession is stronger regional cooperation. While the **Berlin Process**, a platform which brings together high-level EU and Western Balkan representatives, has contributed to this goal, further efforts are needed. Regional authorities can still greatly benefit from knowledge-sharing and specialized trainings, while institutions require ongoing capacity building and improved coordination.

At the same time, the region faces specific digital challenges related to infrastructure, limited access to digital services, and insufficient regional digital cooperation. These issues are critical, as digital transformation is increasingly central to modern governance, economic development, and alignment with EU standards.

Objective

This project therefore focuses on **enhancing regional cooperation** as a driver for **accelerating EU integration**, while addressing underlying gaps in digital connectivity.

Our approach

To achieve its goals, the project supports four established regional networks: **the Network of Ministries of Foreign Affairs, EU integration authorities, IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession) structures, and Parliamentary Committee Secretariats responsible for EU integration**. These networks collaborate to develop unified positions on EU integration and regional cooperation, particularly within the Berlin Process.

Project name	Regional Cooperation for EU Integration
Commissioned by	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project region	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia
Lead executing agency	Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)
Duration	2012-2027

Through following measures the project helps develop a shared strategic approach to EU integration:

- The project facilitates alignment among Western Balkan authorities on EU-related policies by **encouraging joint positions** toward the European Commission and EU member states.
- It supports agreement on **common minimum standards** like the National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA), enabling countries at various stages of the accession process to fulfill EU requirements in a coordinated and stable manner.
- **Capacity-building** activities are a core part of the project, with tailored training programs to strengthen institutional expertise and enhance the ability of decision-makers to manage complex reform agendas.
- The project also promotes inclusive policy development by facilitating regional **dialogue on gender and social inclusion**, ensuring these priorities are better integrated into EU accession efforts.

EU4Digital

Digital development is a priority across the Western Balkans. In response to ongoing challenges, such as **limited infrastructure, poor access to digital services, and fragmented regional**



Regional Conference on the Effective Role of Parliaments in EU Integration Process

2024 Vlora, Albania



Gender Equality Forum
within the Berlin Process
2024

2024 Berlin, Germany

cooperation in the digital sphere, the project has introduced a dedicated digitalisation component— EU4Digital.

EU4Digital is a multi-donor action, co-financed by **the European Union** and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). It aims to improve regional digital connectivity, accelerate digital transformation, and prepare the Western Balkans for integration into **the EU Digital Single Market**. The component is embedded within the broader RCEI project, aligning digital advancement with the region's EU integration pathway.

EU Empower ME

Montenegro is furthest along in its EU accession process, having opened all 33 negotiation chapters. Yet, to close many of them and fully align with the EU acquis, the country still requires significant support. Recognizing this need, the project includes a dedicated component focused exclusively on Montenegro.

The multi-donor action „EU Empower ME“ co-financed by the EU and BMZ, has been incorporated into the overarching project framework. This component offers targeted support to Montenegro **through knowledge transfer, capacity development, and by helping to fill persistent resource gaps**. By addressing the country's remaining priorities and strengthening its reform implementation, this focused assistance gives Montenegro the final push it needs to complete its accession journey.

An example from the field

On September 19, 2024, we organized the **Gender Equality Forum** within the Berlin Process on behalf of the BMZ, that also hosted this event. The event gathered various representatives from the Western Balkans, including government officials, local-level participants, and civil society members. They engaged in

discussions on gender-based violence, women participation in decision-making, and the role of feminist perspectives in reconciliation processes. The Forum concluded with recommendations: creation of a **regional funding mechanism** to provide sustainable resources for gender equality initiatives and **institutionalization of the Gender Equality Forum** as a permanent component of the Berlin Process.

On October 14th, 2024, during the Berlin Process Summit, the Western Balkans heads of government endorsed **these recommendations** ensuring that gender considerations are integrated into the Berlin Process. For the project this was a crucial step toward promoting a more equitable and inclusive approach to EU integration for the Western Balkans.

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