

Sharing the Experiences of Visegrad Cooperation in the Western Balkans and the Eastern Neighborhood Countries

Objectives

The general goal of this two-year project is to contribute to strengthening the basis of democracy, partnership and regional cooperation in two of the regions situated at the external border of the EU. The specific objective is to share the political and sectoral experiences of Visegrad cooperation in the Western Balkans and the Eastern Neighbourhood – among them GUAM – countries in order to help support and advance cooperation in and among these regions by forging new links and projects that facilitate the resolution of common problems and the attainment of common objectives in the context of European integration.

Background

Countries in the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo under UNSC 1244, grouped under the EU's Stabilization and Association Process–SAP) have similar strategic objectives in terms of Euro-Atlantic integration. Regional cooperation is a condition of EU integration and thus these countries can put targeted assistance in building institutionalized cooperation – of which the Regional Cooperation Council serves as the focal point – to use. The GUAM countries (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova) started institutionalized cooperation under the aegis of the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development, and can also learn from the lessons learned and best practices of the Visegrad experience: it is in the common European interest, as reinforced by the Eastern Partnership initiative (a larger EU framework that includes Armenia and Belarus beside the GUAM countries) that these countries go through the necessary reforms and become stable and economically progressive democracies since their problems affect the common market and have security policy implications as well.

Project

Part of the outcome is a Preparatory Study focusing on the presentation of the Visegrad experience. Core activities of the project are organized around four regional workshops in the partner regions (two each in the Eastern Neighbourhood and the Western Balkans) where representatives of relevant regional stakeholders from both target regions (such as GUAM and the RCC and specialized regional institutions as applicable) participate along with government and civil society experts and representatives of the EU and other relevant international organizations. Workshops are built around key topics, such as regional security and intergovernmental cooperation, economic cooperation, cooperation among civil societies and cross-border cooperation, with the applicable Visegrad experiences and lessons learned and European standards as cross-cutting themes. The outcome of the workshops is presented in thematic assessments that contain the summary of proceedings and lessons learned during the workshops, with special regard to the initiatives proposed to strengthen regional cooperation. The impact of the project will be summarized at a final conference, where a Final Study will also be presented and issued as a publication to summarize the impact of the project. Finally, a web page linked to the project has been developed and launched under <http://interregional.icdt.hu> to publish and disseminate all relevant information on the actual implementation of the project.