



EU ENLARGEMENT

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BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN PEOPLE: PROMOTING REGIONAL COOPERATION

Cooperation is at the heart of the European Union - at European, at national and at regional level. It is cooperation that has served the EU in consolidating peace and stability across a continent that was scarred by division and strife. The enlargement countries too are expected to demonstrate the same willingness to work together - and high standards of regional cooperation are required before any of them can join the EU.

RESOLVING TENSIONS

The ambition is that the tensions in the region can be eased and resolved through cooperation. Good neighbourly relations are vital to creating the secure environment that is necessary for stability, for growth, for attracting investment, and for tackling common challenges. Effective responses to energy shortages, pollution, or inadequate transport infrastructure depend on regional cooperation.

It is also the pathway to reach agreement on sensitive cross-border issues such as war crimes, borders, refugee return, or organised crime and corruption. Difficult ethnic-related issues can be successfully addressed only through dialogue and compromise, and through working together in a constructive spirit.

EU SUPPORT

The EU provides funding, expertise and practical and political support to promote regional cooperation - although ultimately, it is something that has to come from the enlargement countries themselves. Some types of cooperation aim big - at common management of issues affecting an entire region, such as energy or transport networks, river basin management, or large-scale environmental protection. They can bolster infrastructure and improve the environment on both sides of a border through enhanced access, smarter information and communication services, and cross-border systems for supplying water or electricity, or cutting pollution or improving environmental protection.

EU funding of rehabilitation of railways on the Trans-European Corridor in Croatia, for instance, is providing an interface with the Serbian railway system.



Igor Lukšić, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro

"One of the key pillars of Montenegro's foreign policy is maintaining and developing good neighbourly relations. They are a precondition not just for domestic, but also for regional cooperation. Maintaining the dynamic of the Western Balkans countries' integration processes and their swifter overall development requires that the countries of the region build up their cooperation and improve the existing regional cooperation mechanisms."

Some are designed specifically to foster economic growth or boost competitiveness - by supporting innovation and new technologies or the development of product chains, by encouraging entrepreneurship and the emergence of start-ups, or by expanding cross-border business support. Others are focused

on better social cohesion and institutional cooperation, or on protection and management of natural and cultural resources in border regions, or to prevent technological and natural risks, or to safeguard biodiversity. Regional cooperation can promote a sense of sharing through support for human resources and labour market development, people-to-people actions, cultural exchanges, improvement of border accessibility or of waste disposal facilities, or assistance in emergencies caused by fire or flooding, epidemics, or food contamination.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

The EU encouragement and support to the enlargement countries has also taken the form of promoting formal intergovernmental initiatives that consolidate the progress towards regional cooperation. Some of these are at a strategic political level, such as the Regional Cooperation Council, a focal point among the countries of South East Europe that coordinates projects of a regional character, and creates a political climate conducive to implementing them.

The Central Europe Free Trade Association, with its agenda in trade liberalisation, is another organisation that has been promoted and supported by the EU - and there are many others, in public administration, environmental protection and climate change, energy, infrastructure investment, transport, and justice.



Goran Svilanović, Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council

“The South East Europe 2020 strategy, implemented under the auspices of the Regional Cooperation Council, will seek to enable better coordination of economic policies, both within and among the countries of the region. This process will move the governments towards articulating reform priorities clearly and transparently, reviewing these reforms multilaterally and with the European Commission, and reporting on the progress made in their implementation.”