

A brief report of the CESCI Balkans 2023 Activities

Prepared for the CESCI General Assembly Meeting 2024

The financial capacity of the organisation was still limited during this period, but it upheld its main activities and supported cross-border cooperation in the Balkans through the following activities:

Study on "The concept of Pannon EGTC's expansion to the Western Balkans"

CESCI Balkans has been commissioned to develop the "Concept for the Pannon EGTC Western Balkans Expansion"

The analysis answered the following questions:

- What are the benefits of expanding the Pannon EGTC to the Western Balkans?
- Assessment of the regulatory environment for the involvement of institutionalised bodies
- Assessment of the regulatory environment
- A concept for the extension of the Pannon EGTC to the Western Balkans, with a preliminary outline of possible further directions for institutional development to strengthen the EGTC's role.

Fostering a cooperation framework in the Balkans on the verge of 2030				
General objective	Harmonized development of cross border areas in the Balkan region			
Specific objectives	The legal background of CB cooperation and CB planning and the capacities of local actors are improved Framework conditions for enhanced CBC and good governance are created Support to joint development planning of cross-border areas in the Balkans			
Fields of intervention (FoI)	Legal Background of CBC and CB Planning	Capacity Building for CB actors	Joint development planning of the CB Areas	Dissemination of best practices
Activities	A1_Comprehensive analysis of the legislative background of CB cooperation and CB planning in the Balkan countries A2_Information platform on the legal background of CB cooperation and CB planning A3_Compilation of recommendations to amend legislation A4_Comprehensive development strategy for CBC in the Balkans	B1_CoE Leadership Academy trainings along each Balkan border B2_Mentoring CB processes B3_Series of seminars (regional planning, e-solutions, resilience) B4_Neighbours' visits in border areas B5_PILOT trust-building actions of Balkanic CB actors	C1 Analysis of the past and existing CB initiatives on the CB territories C2 Information platform of the CB initiatives in the Balkans C3 Series of trainings on CB territorial planning C4 Three Pilot CB plans developed together with list of joint actions	D1.Online and offline publication: booklet on CB structures in the Balkans D2_Study tours to western European euroregions D3_Series of regional conferences on CBC D4_Publication on available tools, e-solutions, CoE tool-kit on CBC, and other instruments

Strategic partnership with the EGTCs in Greece

CESCI Balkans participated in the Sofia conference on The Future of Europe (The role of Cohesion Policies and European Territorial Cooperation) and was subsequently invited by the Greek Helicas EGTC to launch a long-term strategic partnership. The aim is to develop a common strategy between the two institutions, in cooperation with the EGTCs in Greece.

Concrete steps were agreed upon: identification of actors and their roles, joint assessment of the need and design of a roadmap, definition of strategic objectives, and development of the Helicas EGTC's strategic and operational plan.

A special joint meeting in Thessaloniki is also planned, with the signing of a framework cooperation agreement.



Activities with the Council of Europe in the Serbian-Bulgarian border region continued

- Continuation of the strategic planning process: the activity packages have been further developed and updated in line with recent events and their requirements.
- Support for the implementation of the activities foreseen in the Activity Plan.
- Further harmonisation and ensuring synergistic implementation with the IPA SRB-BLG 2021-2027 CBC programme.
- Support in legislative perspectives: initiatives to support legislative perspectives foreseen in the legal roadmap will help strengthen the legal basis for cross-border cooperation.

The concept of the Western Balkans Centre of the University of Pécs

On the request of the Foundation of the University of Pécs, CESCI Balkans developed the concept of the University of Pécs Western Balkans Centre with the assistance of leading experts from the University. The nearly 100-page expert study contains a number of analyses and evaluations:

- Assessment and analysis of the existing organisational, human, relational, research and training capacities of the University.
- Mapping available and accessible Hungarian national and local capacities and resources.
- An evaluation of the "Western Balkans Centre" function in terms of the value proposition of the University, from an international perspective and in terms of the potential third mission of the University.
- To present the needs at national level, from a foreign affairs-diplomatic, economic-development and national defence perspective.
- A detailed presentation of the role that the University can play in the EU integration process of the Western Balkans through the development of the Centre.



Within the framework of the study, concrete measures and decisions were formulated, which, if implemented, will enable the Centre to be established and its mission to be launched. The study was presented earlier this year at the conference "Hungary and the Western Balkans" at the Institute of Regional Studies of the Centre for Economic and Regional Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

International projects

During the past year, the organisation has attached particular importance to the development of and participation in large-scale cross-border, transnational projects. The following projects have been developed in the last period:

INTERREG IPA ADRION programme

- Empowering ADRION rural communities to innovate- ADRURAL
- Integrating circular Bio-based Solutions in the Adriatic Ionian Rural Areas- CIRUBIO
- Onsite digital technologies for BioDiversity preservation of protected Areas and blue and green infrastructures- BIODIVA

HORIZON-CL6-2024-COMMUNITIES

- Convivial Farming Innovation for Post-growth Transition- CoFarmIn

INTERREG DANUBE REGION PROGRAMME

- Enhancing Climate Data Cooperation for Evidence-based Adaptation Policy Making in the Danube Region- Danube-ADAPT
- Danube Sustainable Tourism Lab Model - Building a better tourism future - Danube Tourism Labs
- Green Mindset Danube Community for Accessible, Inclusive and Effective Danube Labour Market- GreenMind
- Innovative Water Retention for Climate Change Mitigation, Sustainable Agriculture and Flood Protection- InnoWATCCH
- Shaping the future- Innovation in the field of social economy and remote work- Socialinnov Duna

Of these, only the projects prepared for the Adrion programme have been evaluated so far, and of the three projects submitted, the **ADRURAL** project was selected for support. The project aims to empower rural communities by applying a variety of tested and innovative smart solutions and other innovation models to address key social and environmental rural challenges.

The three-year project, worth more than €1.7 million, will be implemented by 10 partners. Cesci Balkans has a budget of EUR 100,100.00 of this amount.