

CESCİ Balkans' 2025 Summary Activity Report

CESCİ General Assembly 2026

For CESCİ Balkans, 2025 was an extremely active and professionally significant period, focused primarily on the implementation of large-scale international projects, strengthening transnational partnership networks, and supporting development policy and cross-border cooperation processes in the Western Balkans and the Danube region. The organisation's activities were particularly strengthened in the areas of climate adaptation, water resilience, the development of functional urban areas, local development based on cultural heritage, rural innovation, and cross-border institutional and legal harmonisation cooperation.

One of the most significant features of 2025 was that CESCİ Balkans took on active partnership, expert and coordination roles in several major Interreg and other European cooperation projects with substantial budgets simultaneously. The organisation also represented the cross-border development interests of the Western Balkans and the Danube region at numerous international conferences, policy forums and institutional consultations.

Implementation and preparation of international projects

In recent times, CESCİ Balkans has placed particular emphasis on the implementation of larger-scale cross-border and transnational projects, as well as the preparation of new project initiatives. In 2025, the organisation participated in the following projects and professional processes:

INTERREG IPA ADRION

- Empowering ADRION rural communities to innovate – ADRURAL

INTERREG DANUBE REGION PROGRAMME

- Enhancing Climate Data Cooperation for Evidence-based Adaptation Policy Making in the Danube Region – Danube-ADAPT
- Innovative Water Retention for Climate Change Mitigation, Sustainable Agriculture and Flood Protection – InnoWATCCH
- Functional Danube Areas – FUNDA
- Community-based heritage valorisation and tourism development – COMMHERITOUR

AEBR / b-solutions 3.0

- Serbian members in an EGTC
- Serbian members in an EGTC pilot action

The above projects and initiatives clearly demonstrate that CESCİ Balkans' activities cover increasingly complex areas of development policy, which are simultaneously linked to climate adaptation, territorial cohesion, institutional cooperation, cultural heritage and sustainable economic transition.

ADRURAL – Rural Innovation and Community Resilience in the ADRIAN Region

CESCI Balkans actively participated in the technical implementation of the IPA ADRIAN project entitled **ADRURAL** – Empowering ADRIAN Rural Communities to Innovate, which aims to strengthen innovation capacities in rural communities across the Adriatic-Ionian region. The project focuses on addressing the social, economic and environmental challenges affecting rural areas, with particular regard to an ageing population, depopulation, the digital divide, infrastructure deficits and the impacts of climate change. As part of the 2025 project activities, CESCI Balkans contributed to the implementation of the technical tasks of Work Package 1, with a particular focus on the innovation challenges and development potential of rural areas in Vojvodina. As part of this, regional analyses and stakeholder-based background materials were prepared, aimed at mapping community-led innovation models, rural social resilience, and local development needs. We participated in the preparation of the Smart Rural Living Labs approach, as well as in the identification and analysis of community-led innovations and initiatives that can contribute to the social and economic strengthening of rural areas. The good practices analysed included community-based social services, social enterprise models, agricultural cooperative partnerships, community health initiatives and local resilience models. Within the framework of the project, the organisation paid particular attention to issues of digital transition, social cohesion and economic diversification in rural areas, as well as to the involvement of stakeholder networks in Vojvodina and the promotion of transnational knowledge transfer within the ADRIAN region.

On 24 September 2025, CESCI Balkans took part in the third partner meeting of the ADRURAL project in Pomurje, Slovenia, where the partners reviewed the project's progress, local pilot activities and opportunities for further developing rural innovation models.



Danube-ADAPT – Development of adaptation policies based on climate data

The implementation of the Danube-ADAPT project officially began in 2025 under the Interreg Danube Region Programme. The overall aim of the project is to strengthen the Danube region's resilience to climate change through the development of harmonised climate databases, common vulnerability assessment methodologies, and data-driven policy and spatial planning tools. The project is of particular importance for the cross-border and functional regions of the Danube region, as the risks arising from climate change – particularly drought, water scarcity, extreme weather events and heatwaves – are increasingly influencing regional development and spatial planning processes.

On 19–20 June, Cesci Balkans took part in the project's official launch event and first transnational partner meeting in Bratislava, organised by the Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute. The event featured technical working groups on the development of climatological databases, technical workshops on



vulnerability assessment, and methodological consultations. The partners began the joint definition of climate vulnerability topics, indicators and methodological frameworks for adaptation relevant to the Danube region.

During the implementation of the project, our association primarily played a role in regional coordination, stakeholder engagement and policy support. The organisation contributed to the preparation and structuring of Serbia's technical contributions on climate risks, which facilitated the development of the joint transnational project output entitled 'Climate Risk Inventory and Risk Map of the Danube Region'. The technical contribution encompassed the summarisation and systematisation of climate risks in Serbia, spatial vulnerability patterns, and relevant strategic and policy documents. In addition, we took on an active coordinating role in supporting institutional cooperation related to Serbian climate data, with particular regard to facilitating professional liaison and data reconciliation processes with the Hydrometeorological Service of the Republic of Serbia. We contributed to strengthening institutional communication and stakeholder coordination regarding the joint climate observation databases currently being developed within the project, thereby supporting the more effective functioning of transnational data-sharing and methodological cooperation.

InnoWATCCH – Innovative water retention solutions in the Danube Basin

The aim of the project is to develop an integrated, transnational approach to water management in the Danube Basin, with a particular focus on the development of innovative water retention solutions, nature-based groundwater management technologies and monitoring systems. The project focuses in particular on managing the increasing risks of drought, water scarcity and flooding resulting from climate change, as well as on strengthening water security and territorial resilience in border regions.

The project's official online kick-off meeting took place on 23 April 2025, followed by the official international kick-off conference and partner meeting in Budapest on 24 June 2025. All project partners attended the events, and work began on jointly developing the project's technical and methodological framework, with particular focus on methodologies for collecting historical hydrological data, preparing monitoring systems, and harmonising environmental impact assessment approaches.

CESCİ Balkans plays a primarily policy, institutional coordination and regional cooperation role in the project. The organisation has undertaken an active role in preparing the legal and institutional background analyses for the project, particularly in mapping the regulatory and institutional environment related to the application of nature-based water retention technologies. At the kick-off meeting, CESCİ Balkans presented the technical framework for the preparation of the 'Legal and institutional background analysis related to the application of nature-based water retention technologies' work package and an overview of the related activities. During the project, we initiated numerous contacts with relevant local authorities and regional stakeholders to prepare for future pilot site activities. The technical focus of the InnoWATCCH project lies in investigating the hydrodynamic connections between paleochannels and the Danube, developing embankment stability monitoring systems, and analysing the applicability of innovative water retention technologies. The long-term objective of the project is to develop a joint Danube Region Action Plan that supports the wider application and policy integration of nature-based water management solutions. CESCİ Balkans also contributed to the project's communication and stakeholder engagement activities, with a particular focus on strengthening knowledge sharing among professional, local government and regional development actors operating in the Danube region. The project places particular emphasis on raising social and institutional awareness of sustainable water management solutions, as well as promoting the integration of climate adaptation and water retention measures into policy. The total budget for the project is €2,014,105, of which CESCİ Balkans is contributing €61,900.



FUNDA – Development of Functional Danube Regions

The initial phase of the project's implementation was hampered by significant institutional challenges, which fundamentally affected the stability of the partnership structure and the operational coordination of the project. The Vojvodina Development Agency was originally a project partner in the FUNDA project; however, following the dissolution of the organisation, it became necessary to reorganise the partners' responsibilities and involve a new institutional actor. In light of these circumstances, at the end of 2025, CESCİ Balkans took over a significant

portion of the former partner's professional and coordination tasks, thereby ensuring the continuity and professional stability of the project's activities in Serbia. The organisation quickly integrated into the project's strategic and operational workflows and played a significant role in restructuring the project activities in Serbia, particularly in coordinating the professional tasks related to the Subotica Functional Urban Area. We prepared the analytical section of the project's baseline study relating to Vojvodina, Serbia, which provided a detailed assessment of the region's demographic, economic, institutional and spatial development characteristics, as well as the structural challenges affecting the development of functional urban areas. The study paid particular attention to the economic links of border regions, infrastructure development gaps, and the institutional conditions for regional cooperation. As part of the project, we also developed the "Business Infrastructure Pilot" activity, a pilot project for business infrastructure development, for the Subotica Functional Urban Area. Its aim was to develop a participatory business infrastructure planning model that could contribute to strengthening the economic integration of the functional urban area, improving the investment environment and enhancing business development capacities. The document provided a detailed analysis of the economic structure, logistical conditions, industrial and business infrastructure of the Subotica Functional Urban Area, as well as the opportunities for territorial cooperation that could contribute to increasing the region's competitiveness in the long term. Particular emphasis was placed on the application of an integrated spatial planning approach, which interprets economic infrastructure development not as a standalone investment issue, but as a complex process of spatial development and regional cooperation.

CESCI Balkans' technical contribution in 2025 focused in particular on analysing the functional links between border and polycentric regions, strengthening multi-level governance, and preparing territorially-based economic development models.

On 15 May 2025, we took part in the project's launch event, which took place in Budapest.



COMMHERITOUR – cultural heritage, craft traditions and sustainable tourism

In 2025, CESCI Balkans took on an expert role in supporting Serbian activities related to the COMMHERITOUR project. The aim of the project is to promote the economic, tourism and community-based utilisation of traditional craft activities linked to cultural heritage in rural and peripheral areas of the Danube region.

On 10 October 2025, a professional workshop to prepare a local action plan supporting the valorisation of cultural heritage was held in Novi Sad, organised in cooperation between the

Novi Sad Science and Technology Park and the Vojvodina European Affairs and Development Fund. The event focused on the development policy utilisation of cultural heritage, community involvement and opportunities for sustainable tourism.

On 9 December 2025, another professional workshop was held in Novi Sad, which addressed the development of products and tourism models based on cultural and craft heritage. The aim of the event was to share knowledge and establish a professional foundation for local heritage-based development models.

Within the framework of the project, the technical development of the action plan has been successfully completed, and the detailed elaboration of the related policy recommendations and intervention proposals is currently underway.



Expert support for the removal of cross-border legal barriers b-solutions 3.0

CESCI Balkans played an active role in the implementation of the pilot action project entitled “Serbian members in an EGTC” under the b-solutions 3.0 initiative coordinated by the AEBR, with an implementation period running from 7 July 2025 to 6 July 2026.

The aim of the project is to identify the legal and institutional barriers preventing Serbian local authorities and institutions from becoming EGTC members, and to develop solutions for legal harmonisation and institutional development. CESCI Balkans is carrying out technical, coordination and stakeholder consultation tasks within the project in cooperation with the Banat–Triplex Confinium EGTC and CESCI.

Within the framework of the project, institutional consultations, legal background analyses, stakeholder engagement processes and policy consultations were carried out, with particular attention to establishing the legal conditions for the participation of the Serbian EGTC— , developing bilateral cooperation frameworks and strengthening cross-border institutional cooperation.

On 22 October 2025, CESCI Balkans organised a professional roundtable discussion in Subotica with the aim of developing the legal framework for EGTC membership in Serbia. The purpose of the event was to discuss the legal and institutional



conditions hindering the EGTC membership of Serbian local authorities and institutions.

The event was attended by Péter Kiss-Parciu, Deputy State Secretary for Regional and Cross-Border Economic Development at the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Predrag Rajić, State Secretary at the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government of the Republic of Serbia.

Over the course of last year, we began a systematic mapping of the legal and administrative barriers affecting cross-border cooperation in Serbia, in the course of which more than 34 relevant barriers have so far been identified and analysed. The professional standard and effectiveness of the work carried out is demonstrated by the fact that the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) has entrusted our organisation with the promotion and professional support of the Serbian B-Solutions programme. As a result of this cooperation, we will participate in the development of further case studies throughout 2026 as a professional supporter and contributing partner.

New project proposals

We have remained active **in the development** and submission of numerous **international grant applications**. We have focused primarily on calls for proposals under the Horizon Europe and Interreg Danube programmes. Of these, we would highlight:

- HORIZON-MISS-2025-01 - HeatHaven: Building Resilience to Extreme Heat through Systemic Digital, Social and Financial Innovations for Health and Adaptation
- HORIZON-CL6-2025-01 – ENGAGE - Empowering citizens, Nurturing understanding of the biodiversity crisis, Generating knowledge, Assessing communication strategies, Guiding policy-makers, Ensuring a biodiverse future

International professional engagement and partnerships

In 2025, CESCI Balkans actively participated in numerous international professional conferences, workshops and partnership meetings focusing on cross-border cooperation, territorial cohesion, climate adaptation, EGTC models and development policy challenges in the Danube region.

On 3 April 2025, the ADRURAL project was presented at the international conference ‘S.E. Europe and Cross-Border Cooperation’ held in Thessaloniki, as part of the ‘Digital innovation and CB areas’ expert panel. The conference provided an important professional platform for presenting cross-border cooperation and innovation models in South-East Europe.

On 27 June 2025, the organisation took part in the professional conference titled “Talking Money – The Added Value of Minority Communities in Cross-Border Regions”, held in Novi Sad and organised by European Minority Communities. The event focused on the economic and social role of minority communities and the development opportunities in cross-border regions.

Between **2 and 4 September 2025**, CESCO Balkans took part in the 34th Economic Forum held in Karpacz, Poland, which is one of the most significant economic and development policy forums in Central and Eastern Europe. The organisation participated as a panellist in the expert panel entitled 'How do Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes Impact the Development Opportunities of Border Regions?', where it presented the link between cross-border cooperation programmes and innovation, with particular reference to the experiences of the ADRURAL project. At the event, we signed a long-term partnership agreement, which ensures our continued participation in future economic forums and local government meetings.

On 7 October 2025, CESCO Balkans took part in a conference organised as part of the Strategic b-solutions programme on cross-border labour mobility and EU integration in the Western Balkans ("Strategic b-solutions Conference – Cross-border Labour Mobility and EU Integration in the Western Balkans") in Osijek, which addressed the European integration of the Western Balkans, labour mobility and the management of cross-border legal barriers.

On 10 September 2025, the CESCO study trip to Serbia took place, and we assisted the participants from the Budapest office with its organisation. During the study trip, we gave a presentation to the participants at a professional workshop entitled "The Specifics of Processes Taking Place on the Serbian–Hungarian Border"

On 14 October 2025, as part of EURegionsWeek at the European Parliament in Brussels, a delegation of decision-makers from Vojvodina took part in a professional programme entitled '' (a round-table meeting of 25 decision-makers from Vojvodina), organised in collaboration with CESCO Balkans. The organisation presented the role and results of territorial cooperation programmes, with particular reference to the ADRURAL, Danube-ADAPT and InnoWATCCH projects.



On 5 November 2025, the conference entitled "Practical Solutions for Climate Change Adaptation in Agriculture", which focused on practical solutions for agricultural climate adaptation and on strengthening synergies between the ADRURAL, Danube-ADAPT and InnoWATCCH projects.

In 2025, CESCO Balkans further strengthened its professional ties within the CESCO network, as well as with institutional stakeholders in the Danube region, the Western Balkans and South-Eastern Europe. Our organisation participated in various project kick-off meetings, professional workshops and international conferences, which contributed to increasing the organisation's professional visibility and international integration.

Overview of major projects running in 2025

The table below provides a summary of the most important projects and professional commissions running in 2025 or currently in preparation.

Project	Duration	Total budget	CESCI Balkans
ADRURAL	36 months	€1,712,866.87	€155,630.00
Danube-ADAPT	36 months	€2,682,939.50	€91,519.50
InnoWATCCH	36 months	€2,014,105.00	€61,900.00
FUNDA	30 months	€2,540,082.00	€161,100.00
COMMHERITOUR (expert role)	24 months	-	€10,690.00
b-solutions Serbian members in an EGTC	4 months	-	€7,058.00
b-solutions 3.0 (coordination and policy support)	10 months	€21,987.68	€14,987.68

The fact that such a large number of international projects with significant budgets are running in parallel represents a major professional recognition for the organisation and reinforces CESCI's regional role in the Balkans. At the same time, this presents significant organisational, professional and financial challenges, particularly in terms of meeting pre-financing obligations, ensuring project management capacities and managing parallel professional implementation processes.

We would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to our parent organisation, CESCI, for the outstanding professional and institutional support provided during the project implementation, which has enabled CESCI Balkans to further strengthen its organisational and human resource capacity through the recruitment of two new staff members.

Overall, in 2025, CESCI Balkans further strengthened its regional role in cross-border cooperation processes in the Western Balkans and the Danube region. The organisation's activities contributed simultaneously to supporting territorial cohesion, climate adaptation, water resilience, cultural heritage-based local development, the green economic transition and European integration processes.