

Policy notes from the round table on Cross-border cooperation from Bor 26th May 2009

Speakers:

- Sanja Mesanovic, The office for EU integrations,
- Zoltan Pogatsa, The West-Hungarian University from Sopron, Hungary,
- Peter Nemeth, Regional development agency, Presov

Background:

Bor is one of the Serbian industrial towns located on the east Serbian border with Romania and Bulgaria. Currently there are two cross-border programs with Romania and Bulgaria. The Strategic Goal of the Romania-Serbia Cross-Border Programme is to achieve on the basis of joint cross-border projects and common actions by Romanian and Serbian stakeholders a more balanced and sustainable socio-economic development of the Romanian-Serbian border area. Within the Serbia – Romania cross-border program there were available funds in amount of 19,559,062.00 EUR from 2007 till 2009. The fields for support were and are: economic development, environment and Emergency Preparedness, promotion “people to people” exchanges and technical assistance. Overall objective of Cross-border cooperation programme Bulgaria – Serbia is to strengthen territorial cohesion of the Bulgarian–Serbian cross-border region, its competitiveness and sustainability of its development through co-operation in the economic, social and environmental area over the administrative borders. Within the Serbia – Bulgaria cross-border program there were available funds in amount 5,776,142.00 EUR from 2007 till 2009. ¹

The round table was divided in two panels. In the first panel Ms. Sanja Mesanovic explained what integration to EU means and defined what actually EU is. She reminded participants how the dialog with Serbia started in 2000 and what was agreed on summit in Zagreb in 2000. Ms. Mesanovic stated that compatibility of strong and modern country, voluntary basis approach of each approaching country and transition support are important pillars of whole EU integration process. According to her, transition period of a country can be empowered through EU integration process by using pre-accession assistance. In comparison with other Western Balkan countries in the EU integration process she pointed out that Serbia is the last in row. Additionally, she explained the whole process of accession to the EU.

Therefore, she outlined the rules for Serbia and spoke on Stabilization and Association agreement with Serbia. The outline was done to show participants Serbian hesitation in process which started in 2000 and the milestones of the EU integrations for Serbia. The next step for Serbia in this long term process is to ask for candidacy. Therefore Ms. Mesanovic explained what it means to become the candidate country. She explained what National program for integrations means and how obliging government program till 2012 is. Further on

¹ http://www.evropa.gov.rs/Evropa/PublicSite/CBC/NP_Programmes.aspx - figures taken from official web site for EU programmes

she stressed which the institutions and bodies responsible for European integrations are, as well as the role of Office for European integrations. In the first panel participants were mostly interested in legal framework of bodies from the EU, if Bulgaria and Romania fulfilled all the standards and procedures in EU integration programs to become full members, where is the balance between the political and actual reforms needed in society to become full member of the EU, how the euroatlantic integrations are connected with the EU integrations and finally how the situation with Kosovo and Serbian EU integration process will be solved.

The first speaker in second panel was Mr. Pogatsa who stressed the regional cooperation and defined what does it actually means. Further on he explained the goals of pre – accession assistance: democracy stabilization of the accession countries, enabling of state capacity, financing of administrative reforms, financing of legislative harmonization and preparations for full membership within EU. Afterwards he presented the goals of cross-border cooperation. He stressed that financial pre-accession instruments will not assist Serbia in public administration functioning or the functioning of one of the regions. These pre-accession funds can be used as funds needed for reforms, which are crucial for the accession to EU. He was giving to participants recommendations that small projects are much more effective than bigger scale ones at the beginning of using the CBC pre-accession assistance. According to him it is from crucial importance to harmonize the project activities with all municipalities where projects on CBC will take place, it is inevitable to have the intensive and effective cooperation with all the authorities where projects are implemented. Through the Hungarian experience of building castles and bicycle roads Mr. Pogatsa was trying to explain to participants the variety of projects which could be implemented by both sides as effective or less effective long-term means for the regions.

The last speaker within the second panel was Mr. Peter Nemeth from Regional development agency Presov who explained what the agency does in Slovakia and their cooperation with partners from Poland, Ukraine and Hungary. He outlined the programs from 2004 which took place in Slovakia from 2004 (Phare, Intereg, 5 programs of cross border cooperation, Central Europe program, Southeast Europe program, Interreg IV, Interreg II and ETC). He explained what the European territorial cooperation means and outlined the figures to participants. He showed comparison between past and today the improvement of project management within the CBC. He outlined 3 projects on cross border cooperation with Ukraine, Hungary and Poland. At the end of his presentation he gave recommendation to participants to: make analyses of real region's needs, to do strategic planning, to measure the cross border impact, to build partnership, to pre-discuss common projects with partners and to prepare related documentation (local plan development, architecture project e.g.).

Participants were interested in potential cooperation with Bulgaria and Romania and they were asking speakers the questions related to fields which can be supported by EU pre-accession funding. The speakers were strongly advised to divide domestic funding projects with EU funding. They challenged them to focus on tourism and labor market and explained them that education can be supported by EU pre-accession funding only if it is connected with education. They were interested to know how Slovakia and Hungary prepared their own capacities for project management. On this question Mr. Nemeth answered that they trained

400 people who were wrote proposals to the EU and outsourced services from private agencies.

The panel discussion was attended by 26 participants from the Serbian town of Bor, mostly from the local authorities of Bor and from the Serbian media.