

Policy notes from panel discussion in Vrsac  
22<sup>nd</sup> April 2009, 10h – 16h

### **Background:**

There are about 40 thousands people in Vrsac and it is the eighth biggest town in Vojvodina, the north province of Serbia. It is located 14 km away from the border with Romania and 150 km from Belgrade. The Municipality consists of the town of Vrsac and 23 villages. Thanks to USAID and program MEGA in Vrsac the local development agency was established which works under the local municipality of Vrsac.

It is of crucial importance for Vrsac to have good cross border cooperation with Romania. That's the reason why European commission is investing in [Romania-Serbia IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme](#). The Programme financed by European Commission is focused on increasing the overall competitiveness of the economy in the Romania-Serbia border area and on the improvement of the quality of life for the border communities in both countries.

Vrsac Industrial Technology Park project was selected among 100 applications and 14 projects short-listed by EAR, to receive direct EU grant valued at 3.3 million euros. The Program provided technical assistance in the preparation of the feasibility and tender documentation which was the basis for project selection and obtaining funding. Today, this industrial park is spread on the space of 27 ha, owned by state and private owners, intended for SMEs, suitable for metal and prefabrication work, limited chemical and textile industries and adjacent to the railway line Belgrade – Vrsac – Timisoara (Romania) and M1.9 principal road Belgrade – Vrsac – Vatin. As it is located 15 km from the Romanian border it provides access the EU market.

The chairman of local council opened the panel discussion. The speakers were Ana Perisic, the director of section for international cooperation in the sector for regional development policy of the Serbian Ministry of Economy and Regional Development, Andrej Steiner from the Carpathian Development Institute from Kosice and Zoltan Pogatsa from the West-Hungarian University from Sopron, Hungary.

Ms. Perisic, in her presentation explained the cohesive policy of the European Union and existence of structure funds. Later on she provided them with framework for cohesive policy: Lisbon agenda, European strategy of employment and strategy of sustainable development. Further on she listed 7 new member EU countries and their structural funds for 2007-2013 as the example. She listed all the stakeholders who are involved in the process of European integration, such as: Office for European Integration, The cabinet of deputy prime-minister for European integrations Bozidar Djelic, the ministries, delegation of European commission from Belgrade, European commission from Brussels, Mission of the Republic of Serbia in

Brussels, the representatives of international organizations and embassies in Belgrade, donor projects within the EU projects and final beneficiaries. She also pointed out the priorities of Serbia in the process of EU integrations. She explained the accessibility to pre-accession assistance and the two basic components of the assistance for Serbia, which are important for building institutions and cross-border cooperation. Serbia is eligible in 2009 for 194,8 mil. EUR. She also showed as good case studies positive examples from the EU – Ireland, Sweden, Poland, Finland and Italy. At the end of her presentation, she challenged participants to disseminate in their communities' information on opportunities to travel to EU through different programs and opportunities to gain more information on EU from various resources.

The presentation of Mr. Steiner from the Carpathian Institute from Kosice served as a great opportunity for participants to find out what a good development plan should include to lead to dynamic and effective development on the local level. According to him, the socio-economic development of cities and municipalities should always be updated, with the goals of development plans reflected clearly in the action plans and in strategic projects. Serbian municipalities and towns should be prepared for the very demanding EU requirements within project management. Mr. Steiner pointed out that local economic development can be partly secured externally – in cooperation with private and non-governmental subjects.

Mr. Pogatsa explained the goals of pre – accession assistance, which are based on: 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 explained the goals of cross-border cooperation. The projects are decreasing decline of bordering regions and through facilitated cooperation, decreasing cross-border alienation. Common planning leads to patch-up of people on both sides of the border. He stressed that financial pre-accession instruments will not help Serbia in public administration functioning or the functioning of one of the regions. They can be used as an expedient on needed reforms, which are inevitable for the accession to EU.

The panel discussion was attended by 30 participants from the Serbian town of Vrsac, mostly from the Municipality of Vrsac and from the Serbian media. The questions were mostly related to Slovak and Hungarian experience with cross-border cooperation. One interesting question popped up whether Vojvodina as north province should or should not open the office in Brussels before Serbia as a state will have the official one.