Improving Cooperation in South-East Europe by Actions for Strengthening the Regional Cooperation Council

Project Fiche

This project is funded by the European Union

A project implemented by the Central European Initiative
## Introduction

The project **Improving Cooperation in South-East Europe by Actions for Strengthening the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)** was designed by the Central European Initiative (CEI) with the aim to make a concrete contribution to the regional cohesion in South-East Europe (SEE) and to the process of EU enlargement in the Western Balkans (WB).

This goal perfectly suits the CEI institutional mission that can be summarised as follows: Regional Cooperation for European Integration.

The project envisages an intense calendar of activities meant to strengthen the impact of the RCC.

The ultimate beneficiaries of this action will be the SEE countries, in particular the WB plus Turkey and Moldova, as they still face significant challenges and are called to quickly pursue EU-related reforms to speed up the process on the path towards the EU.

The project is financed by the European Union through the Instrument of Pre-accession Assistance – IPA Regional Programme 2010 and will last 24 months (December 2011 – November 2013).

The total budget of the project amounts to 890,000 euro.

## The Applicant: Central European Initiative

The CEI, established in 1989 by Italy, Austria, Hungary and Yugoslavia, is the oldest intergovernmental forum for regional cooperation: its current membership includes 18 countries of Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, nine of which are members of the EU while the remaining nine are in different stages of their path towards EU integration.

Since its inception, the CEI has been assisting its Member States in developing transnational, interregional and cross-border projects aimed at reducing gaps between EU and non-EU countries: therefore, the CEI effectively plays the role of a bridge between macro-regions.

## The Target: Regional Cooperation Council

The Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) was officially launched in Sofia (2008) at the meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP), as the successor of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

Through a regionally owned and led framework, the RCC focuses on promoting and enhancing regional cooperation in South-East Europe (SEE) and supports European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the aspiring countries. The RCC provides operational capacities to, and works under the political guidance of, the SEECP. The work of the RCC relies to the priority areas of economic and social development, energy and infrastructure, justice and home affairs, security cooperation, building human capital, and parliamentary cooperation as an overarching approach.

## Project Rationale

In the last ten years, the number of Regional Initiatives (RIs) and Task Forces (TFs) has grown significantly, showing the strong demand for regional cooperation in various priority areas. At the same time, lack of communication and coordination has frequently originated overlaps, gaps and ineffective management of resources: hence, the strategic importance of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) as a recognized coordinator, supervisor and catalyst of regional cooperation acting as *trait d’union* with the international community.

The Central European Initiative (CEI) intends to support the strengthening of the RCC Secretariat as the driver of regional projects generation, coordination and monitoring, thus achieving a number of relevant objectives for the ultimate benefit of South-East Europe (SEE) as a whole and of all Western Balkan Countries (WBCs) within the region.

The action aims at making a contribution to the implementation of the RCC Strategy and Work Programme 2011 – 2013, while initiating a dialogue on the forthcoming Strategy and Work Programme 2014 – 2016 with the involvement of all stakeholders at regional, European and international level.

All proposed activities will seek to spread knowledge on, and increase visibility of, the RCC and its decisive role in the region.
WP1: Project Management
Overall coordination of the action will be responsibility of the Central European Initiative (CEI). Staff organization counts on two offices, one in Sarajevo (BiH) and one in Trieste (I), both will be led by the same Project Manager.

WP2: Enhancing RCC Operational Capacity
The main goal of the action consists in strengthening the effectiveness and the impact of the RCC Secretariat and its sector strategies and in steadily feeding its strategic perspectives with high quality regional approaches. WP2 will capitalize on existing regional projects funded by EU operational programmes of European Territorial Cooperation objective and by EU framework programmes (in particular FP7 RTD and Competitiveness and Innovation FP-CIP). This will help RCC to fit strategic priorities in its areas of intervention. Moreover, study tours to other Intergovernmental Regional Organizations will provide RCC with relevant examples and best practices of regional cooperation.

WP3: Raising Awareness and Consensus on RCC Activity
The activities proposed under WP3 aim at increasing the effectiveness and the efficiency of regional cooperation in South-East Europe (SEE) under the supervision and guidance of a stronger Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) able to promote, coordinate and rationalise regional cooperation along the lines of common needs and shared objectives. By rallying top relevant stakeholders at national level WP3 will promote the bottom-up identification of new sector priorities to be integrated into feasible multi-beneficiary/regional projects, to be streamlined for funding by international financial schemes at the occasion of four Sector Stakeholders Conferences.

WP4: Innovation of RCC Operations through the design of a pilot ICT platform
A seminar focused on e-diplomacy tools, to be held in cooperation with the DiploFoundation, provides for promoting and developing flagship project-ideas for innovative proceedings in the realm of regional cooperation. A study on the feasibility of a Digital Proceedings Eco-system (DPE) to be carried out and the implementation of a pilot Video-Conference Platform will provide the development of an e-RCC concept, aiming to establish a pilot model in the field.

WP5: Dissemination and Communication
The WP5 aims at drawing attention on the role of the RCC as the catalyst of regional cooperation in South-East Europe (SEE). This will be achieved through top-down and bottom-up activities, including partner institutions and public and private stakeholders from the SEE community and IFIs. Kick-Off Meeting and Final Conference, the Promotional Event to be held in Brussels and a sub-grants for the SEE media on the theme “How do I see my neighbour?” will contribute to enhance the worldwide territorial marketing of SEE by raising awareness on the features of its regional path to EU as a playground for the overall development of Europe.

Objectives and Results
Being the CEI aware of the importance of regional cooperation in South-East Europe as a framework condition for economic and social development and for further enhancing the EU integration process, the project addresses the overall objective of strengthening the RCC Secretariat.

This will be pursued by promoting capacity building for: improving strategic planning; identification of priorities for general and sector strategies; capitalisation on lessons learned; follow-up of results achieved by recent and current initiatives; match-making of regional problem-solving approaches with donor resources.

The current and further increasing role of the RCC Secretariat in the promotion and coordination of regional cooperation in SEE will constitute an effective, efficient and dynamic boost for SEE Countries, and in particular the WBCs, to tackle more and more their common horizontal issues within a multilateral/regional perspective.
**Project Manager:**  Mr. Ugo Poli  
Tel: +39 040 7786 758 / 749  
Mobile: +39 3386612797  
email: poli@cei.int

**Technical Advisory Unit (Trieste Office):**  
Ms. Ana Sinkovic  
Project Officer  
tel: +39 040 7786 758  
email: sinkovic@cei.int  
Mr. Bogdan Birnbaum  
Project Assistant  
tel: +39 040 7786 749  
email: birnbaum@cei.int  
Fax: +39 040 360640

Central European Initiative - CEI  
Via Genova 9 - 34121 Trieste  ITALY  
www.cei.int

**Twining Unit (Sarajevo Office):**  
Ms. Maja VITALJIĆ  
Project Officer  
Tel: +387 33 29535 1  
email: vitaljic@cei.int  
Ms. Sanja LEPIC  
Project Assistant  
Tel: +387 33 29535 0  
email: lepic@cei.int  
Fax: +387 33 29535 2  
UNITIC Business Center, Fra Andela Zvizdovica 1, in building B, 21st floor – Sarajevo (BiH)

**Disclaimer**

This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of the Central European Initiative and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.

This project is funded by the European Union and implemented by the Central European Initiative.