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SUPPORT TO REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION



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SUPPORT TO REGIONAL
ECONOMIC INTEGRATION INFO

Editorial:

Fostering Collaborative Partnerships for Regional Economic Integration

We are thrilled to provide you with an update on the project's recent developments. As a brief reminder, the project aims to promote regional economic integration by supporting various actions and objectives, such as trade facilitation, trade in services, quality infrastructure, e-commerce, and startups. These initiatives are all geared towards fostering cooperation and mutual confidence among our partners. Over the past months, we worked diligently to elevate the cooperation between Customs administrations and business to new heights. This involved establishing Authorized Economic Operators (AEO) Working Groups to facilitate regular consultations and establish a robust partnership between regulatory agencies and business. The AEO Programmes serve as a prime example of the Customs-Business partnership model, which continuously improves and evolves.

Our efforts are now expanding to strengthen the quality infrastructure in the region, address technical barriers to trade, and facilitation of market integration. Additionally, we have been dedicated to enhancing e-commerce capabilities and promoting digital trade in the region. This includes

boosting e-commerce through enhanced Customs-Post cooperation and piloting of Electronic Advanced Data (EAD) between them to expedite the customs clearance process of postal consignments. Although much of our work is still in progress, we have witnessed significant strides made by Western Balkans e-commerce associations and the valuable connections they have established with industry leaders.

Equally important is the progress achieved in supporting a successful startups ecosystem. The project continues to provide support for startups through networking activities, facilitating peer-learning among alumni, and creating a supportive environment for new businesses to thrive independently.

In the months ahead, we will continue to share more detailed updates through our newsletter and on the CEFTA [website](#). We invite you to stay informed and join us in championing the value of regional cooperation and closer integration.

We hope you enjoy the reading!

ORF FT Team

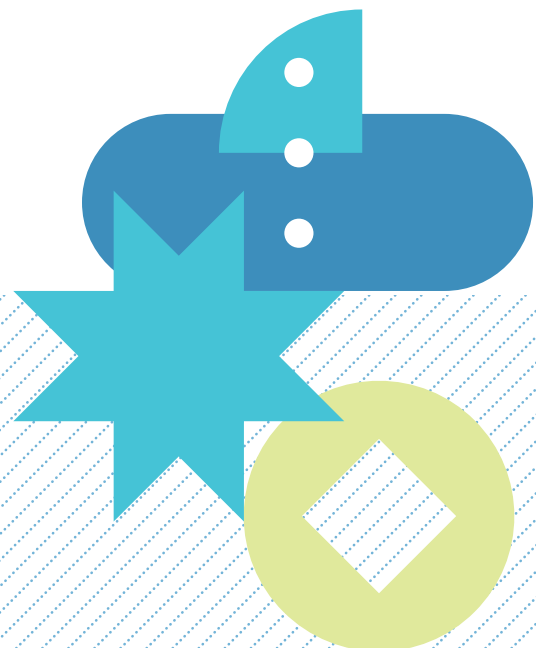
• IN THE FOCUS •

Partnerships and Networking: Boosting E-commerce Growth and Trust

The e-commerce sector in the region is experiencing rapid growth and requires continuous development to reach its full potential. To facilitate this growth and foster trust, it is crucial for e-commerce professionals to establish a strong network and collaborate effectively. By creating a platform where they can share experiences, exchange information about market developments, and collaborate on common interests, e-commerce associations in the Western Balkans can significantly enhance the e-commerce environment.

Five e-commerce associations in the Western Balkans recently joined forces to discuss the power of networking. They recognized the advantages of a united approach in achieving shared objectives. During their second meeting, they discussed concrete steps to establish a regional network of e-commerce associations. This includes creating a Memorandum of Understanding, Operational guidelines, and defining the network's governance structure and membership.

The official launch of the network is planned for the autumn, with the initial focus on increasing consumer trust and promoting e-commerce between regional markets. This will be accomplished by introducing a Regional Trust Mark. The Trust Mark will serve as peer-to-peer recognition for companies with good business practices, providing consumers and merchants with valuable information and boosting trust in verified online shops.



• TRADE FACILITATION •

Elevating Collaboration Between Companies and Customs Administrations to New Heights

Cooperation between companies and Customs administrations reaches new heights with the establishment of Authorized Economic Operators (AEO) Working Groups, poised to enhance collaboration in the region. These groups will bring together the private sector, Customs and other government agencies to jointly plan and implement effective cooperation. The primary goal is to promote national and regional harmonization, easing the trade burden on both

business and governments. During a regional meeting in Banja Luka, AEO Association member companies gathered with the representatives from Customs administrations to discuss further enhancements to the AEO Framework. It was agreed that the establishment of AEO Working Groups in each CEFTA Party will strengthen coordination with the agencies operating on crossing points, expediting the implementation of the AEO Framework in all economies.



Unlocking Efficient Customs Operations

CEFTA Parties recently came together in a regional workshop with the objective of bolstering customs risk management and improving trade facilitation. The focus of the workshop was to harness the potential of data analytics and incorporate new data sources and analytical tools for more effective customs risk management. Participants explored innovative techniques to enhance data analytics, adopt risk-based approaches, and selectivity criteria. The workshop aimed to enhance their ability to target large quantities of data and employ new techniques to improve cargo targeting performance. This approach was also reinforced during the national meeting in Skopje, where the goal was to establish a common understanding of the current risk management processes.

Building on the workshop's success, the project will continue supporting customs officials to use the potential of structured and unstructured data in the international supply chain, and other extensive data sets, to unlock the full potential of a data-driven approach to risk management and customs operations. This approach aims to strike the right balance between regulatory control and trade facilitation.

The journey doesn't end here. CEFTA Parties are working collaboratively to develop common risk profiles and strengthen risk management capacity at the regional level. These profiles will be piloted within the SEED+ system, making use of the functionalities of Rapid Alerts and Inspection Reports.

By embracing data-driven strategies and collaborative risk management, CEFTA Parties are paving the way for enhanced efficiency in customs operations. This approach will result in smoother trade processes while maintaining necessary controls.



Strengthening Capacities: Montenegro's Progress in AEO Programmes

We are pleased to share the latest developments in our ongoing efforts to strengthen the capacities of Customs Administrations in the region, with a particular focus on the implementation of Authorized Economic Operators (AEO) Programmes.

In June, representatives from the Revenue and Customs Administration of Montenegro actively participated in a dedicated workshop aimed to further advance the AEO Framework. This active engagement holds significant importance, especially considering the remarkable interest shown by companies in Montenegro to obtain the esteemed status of Authorized Economic Operator. As of now, four companies from Montenegro have already been granted this prestigious certificate. Moreover, the Revenue and Customs Administration of Montenegro is diligently working on initiating the CEFTA AEO Programme validation procedure. This step aims to facilitate faster, more efficient, and secure trading opportunities within the CEFTA economies.

Revenue and Customs Administration of Montenegro is showcasing remarkable commitment in promoting the AEO Programme. Their dedication to streamlining trade processes and ensuring the security of supply chains plays a pivotal role in fostering economic growth and regional integration.

Photos: @Revenue and Customs Administration of Montenegro



Mesopromet Franca: A Proud AEO Success Story from Montenegro

During the week dedicated to strengthening the AEO Framework in Montenegro, we had the privilege of visiting Mesopromet Franca, a company that has achieved the esteemed status of Authorized Economic Operator. Their commitment and hard work have made them an exemplary model within the AEO community. Mesopromet has been awarded the prestigious certificate of Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) by the Revenue and Customs Administration of Montenegro. This remarkable accomplishment validates Mesopromet's outstanding achievements in the field of international trade, establishing them as a reliable and safe partner in the global business arena.

As an AEO, Mesopromet Franca enjoys the benefits of simplified customs procedures and faster trade flows, both domestically and internationally. Their dedication to maintaining high supply chain security standards and compliance with regulations sets them apart as a leader in their industry. During our visit, we witnessed firsthand the efficient processes and seamless coordination with Customs Administration that Mesopromet Franca has implemented. Their success story serves as an inspiration to other companies aspiring to obtain AEO status, emphasizing the importance of investing in supply chain security and fostering collaboration with government agencies.

GIZ continuously supports companies in the technical process of obtaining this prestigious status. We collaborate with companies in CEFTA economies, assisting them in strengthening their capacities for international markets.



• TRADE IN SERVICES •

Advancing Statistical Cooperation for Economic Development in CEFTA economies

The recent CEFTA Workshop on Trade in Services Statistics, FATS, and FDI Statistics aimed to enhance cooperation and data compilation among CEFTA Parties. The workshop brought together experts, statisticians, and stakeholders convened to focus on three key areas: the Decision on Enhancing Cooperation on Trade-Related Statistics, compilation of Financial Services and Financial Services Indirectly Measured (FISIM), and EU requirements for Foreign Affiliate Trade Statistics (FATS), Mode of Supply and Services Trade by Enterprise Characteristics (STEC).

The updated decision serves as a framework for collaboration, addressing challenges in data compilation and improving the quality of trade-related statistics. It lays the groundwork for effective statistical cooperation, supporting evidence-based policy planning and fostering growth of CEFTA economies.

During the workshop, CEFTA Parties shared their approaches to compiling Financial Services, including FISIM, which encouraged cooperation, identified challenges, and explored potential solutions. The discussions facilitated knowledge sharing and identified follow-up actions to improve statistical practices. Furthermore, Parties presented their efforts to meet EU requirements for Foreign Affiliate Trade Statistics (FATS), Mode of Supply and Services Trade by Enterprise Characteristics (STEC).

By promoting collaboration and adopting best practices, the outcomes of the workshop will result in more accurate and reliable trade-related statistics. This, in turn, will empower evidence-based policy planning, driving economic growth and prosperity in the region.



Bilateral Meetings Advance Draft JC Decision for Trade in Travel Services

Bilateral meetings were recently held as part of the project aimed at streamlining trade in services provided by travel agencies and tour operators within CEFTA Parties. The main objective was to discuss and reach a consensus on a draft Joint Committee (JC) Decision. Participants in these meetings included representatives from relevant ministries, institutions, associations of travel agencies, and specific agencies.

The key discussions revolved around Chapters 2 and 3 of the Decision, which dealt with commercial presence/establishment and temporary inter-party provision of services. The meetings were highly successful in achieving a high level of consensus among the Parties, significant substantial progress. The draft Decision is expected to be ready for adoption within CEFTA structures soon. The project will continue providing support during the implementation period.

These meetings highlight the stakeholders' commitment to enhancing trade facilitation in the travel services sector. By reaching a consensus on the draft Decision, CEFTA Parties aim to promote efficient and harmonized trade practices, benefiting agencies, operators, and consumers. The project and stakeholders eagerly anticipate the upcoming adoption of the Decision, as we work towards fostering economic growth and regional integration within CEFTA.



• STRENGTHENING OF THE
QUALITY INFRASTRUCTURE SYSTEMS •

Empowering Quality Infrastructure: CEFTA Parties unite to strengthen capacities and cooperation

Quality Infrastructure (QI) serves as a cornerstone in promoting a sustainable economy, playing a crucial role in setting standards and regulations for products on our markets. Although often overlooked by the general public, QI is essential for ensuring the safety and quality of goods. It not only safeguards consumers but also facilitates seamless access to international markets.

In effort to further develop QI systems, key stakeholders from CEFTA Parties gathered over the course of two days in Durres, Albania. This meeting aimed to explore strategies for enhancing capacities and fostering collaboration among industry players. The primary focus was on providing support to manufacturers and conformity assessment bodies (CABs) in evaluating product conformity, with a specific emphasis on electrical products and machinery. The discussions held

during the event underlined the significance of harmonizing QI practices among CEFTA Parties. By aligning standards and enhancing cooperation, these economies can collectively elevate the quality and safety of products circulating within the region. Furthermore, the collaboration enables businesses to navigate international markets more efficiently, fostering economic growth and prosperity.

The importance of robust QI systems cannot be overstated, as they contribute to building consumer trust, promoting fair competition, and safeguarding public health and safety. The commitment shown by CEFTA Parties in prioritizing the enhancement of QI capacities reflects their dedication to fostering sustainable economic development. Their determination to advance QI practices will undoubtedly pave the way for a more resilient and prosperous future.



Advancing Quality Infrastructure in the Region

After the successful regional meetings with Quality Infrastructure (QI) institutions, we have expanded our efforts through a series of impactful local events. These events bring together diverse stakeholders from the electrical and machinery products sector, recognizing the vital role of public-private dialogues in fostering robust QI systems.

In collaboration with stakeholders from Pristina, Podgorica, and Tirana, we have organized engaging local events, providing a platform for in-depth discussions, knowledge sharing, and collaboration. These gatherings aim to enhance Quality Infrastructure within our region and facilitate collective progress. The enthusiastic participation of stakeholders from various sectors further enriches these events, ensuring comprehensive and inclusive conversations. Moving forward, we plan to extend this initiative to other CEFTA Parties in the coming months.

Through these strategic endeavours, we aspire to foster an environment of continuous improvement and excellence in the electrical and machinery products sector, driving regional growth and prosperity.



• IMPROVING MARKET ACCESS
FOR E-COMMERCE PROVIDERS •

Piloting Electronic Advanced Data (EAD) sharing within the region

The project is continuously working on implementing adopted recommendations to facilitate and expedite customs procedures and shipments for electronic trade (e-commerce). All CEFTA Parties have expressed their interest in establishing the process of electronic sharing of information between Customs and Postal Operators.

In the recent past, we have successfully organized four bilateral workshops focusing on Piloting Electronic Advanced Data (EAD) sharing within the region. This step is essential for implementing the EU VAT e-commerce package and simplifying customs procedures related to e-commerce.

During these workshops, Customs Authorities and Postal operators came together to discuss various aspects, including data integration, legal and regulatory considerations, workflows, and necessary procedures for establishing the EAD process. This collaborative effort paves the way for enhanced e-commerce in the region. The implementation of EAD brings not only a significant boost to e-commerce but also opens up opportunities for further discussions on improving risk management procedures and implementing Import Control System 2 (ICS2).



Photo: @eCommerce Association of Serbia

Catalyzing Growth: Western Balkans E-commerce Associations Unlock New Opportunities at Shop Talk Europe

In a resounding demonstration of their commitment to fostering cross-border trade, the Macedonian E-commerce Association, eCommerce Association of Serbia, Albanian E-commerce Association, E-comm Association in BiH, and eCommerce Association in BiH embarked on a transformative journey at the highly anticipated [Shop Talk Europe](#) event. Over the course of three dynamic days from May 9th to 11th, 2023, these visionary e-commerce associations sent nine representatives to participate in the event, gaining unparalleled access to a wealth of business opportunities and invaluable insights into the latest trends and developments in the e-commerce landscape.

Shop Talk Europe proved to be an extraordinary platform for these e-commerce associations, offering an immersive environment where they could forge connections, establish partnerships, and propel their respective sectors forward. The event facilitated numerous meetings between the associations' representatives and a diverse range of attendees, predominantly consisting of leading brands, retail companies, and tech innovators in the e-commerce space. These fruitful encounters led to engaging discussions,

collaborations, and the exchange of expertise, fostering a spirit of growth and innovation within the Western Balkans e-commerce ecosystem.

The study visit to Shop Talk Europe has set the stage for remarkable achievements and progress in the Western Balkans e-commerce sector. With a newfound network of industry pioneers and access to cutting-edge solutions, the participating associations are poised to drive their member businesses towards new frontiers of success. This pivotal experience has invigorated their mission to catalyze inter-partycommerce and propel the region's e-commerce landscape to new heights.

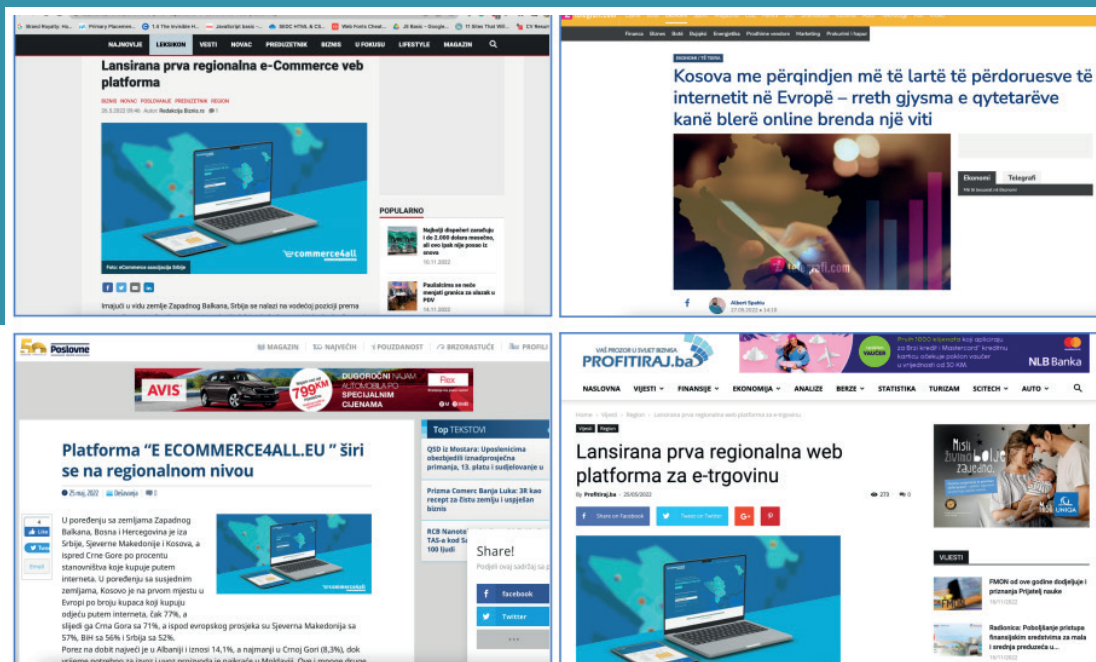
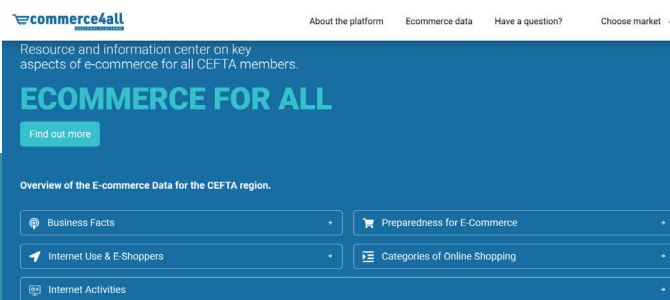


eCommerce4all Regional Platform: Resource Center for CEFTA Markets

The regional [eCommerce4all](#) platform is a comprehensive resource center providing key information on eCommerce in CEFTA markets. This web platform offers relevant data, interactive graphs, and resources on eCommerce trends, market development, regulatory frameworks, success stories, e-payment, and delivery in eCommerce.

The platform was developed in three phases, tailored to each of the seven CEFTA markets based on available resources. Modules were created for “eCommerce data,” “Regulatory framework,” and “Success stories” across all seven CEFTA markets, while “E-payment” and “Delivery in eCommerce” modules specifically cater to North Macedonia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. All modules are available in both local languages and English.

Since its launch in April 2022, the eCommerce4all.eu platform has gained significant traction. By end of January 2023, it had attracted a total of 29,822 users and 70,297 page views, with a continues increase in visitors each day. The platform’s promotion through press releases and social media ads, has garnered recognition from the public, media, and businesses in the CEFTA region. The positive feedback received from various businesses and institutions has led to partner requests for updated data and further enrichment of the modules.



• IMPROVING MARKET ACCESS
FOR START-UPS •

Partners Showcase Western Balkans Startup Ecosystem at Podim Conference: Fostering Collaboration and Growth

Nine of our esteemed partners, who are passionate about startups in the Western Balkans, recently participated in the [Podim Conference](#) held in Maribor, Slovenia. It was an exceptional opportunity for them to contribute to a panel session centered around 'Developing a winning startup ecosystem'. Their participation allowed them to showcase the latest advancements in the startup ecosystems of the Western Balkans, as well as highlight the valuable work of the [Western Balkan Startup Alliance](#).

Furthermore, this event served as a valuable platform for our partners to connect with investors, ecosystem builders, and startups from the Alpe Adria region. The networking opportunities offered at the conference fostered meaningful collaborations and discussions, further strengthening the startup community.



PODIM

Panel

NEDA TRIFUNOVIC, Digital Serbia Initiative, Serbia
ARIJAN YMERI, Oficina Innovation Hub, Albania
MIRYANA JOKSOVIC, BlitzzIO now Arcion Labs, Croatia & USA
OR HAVIV, Arieli Capital, Israel
GREGOR REBOLJ, Silicon Gardens Fund, Slovenia

HOST: **NINA NIKOLICH**, Founding Member, WBSA,
Nord Macedonia

PODIM

Startup & tech
conference

tech
ce

The Western Balkans Startup Alliance (WBSA): Growing Stronger Together

Since its establishment in 2022, the [Western Balkans Startup Alliance](#) (WBSA) has been actively driving impactful initiatives and building a solid foundation. By fostering collaboration among key stakeholders, establishing Keystone teams, and enhancing brand awareness and public relations efforts, the WBSA has made remarkable progress in supporting startups across the region.

The founding members, hubs representing the WB6 countries, have consistently come together over the past years, offering mutual support and contributing to various projects and events. This collaborative spirit has laid the groundwork for the WBSA's expansion, as the Alliance eagerly welcomes five new members who share the same mission, vision, and can bring valuable experience, expertise, and networks to the table. With the latest gathering of WBSA members, strategic planning took center stage. This meeting aimed to provide updates on ongoing initiatives and future plans. Furthermore, the primary goal was to collectively shape the mid-term strategy for the next three years and outline the yearly program for the Alliance.

The WBSA's commitment to fostering collaboration and sharing knowledge is instrumental in unlocking the potential of the Western Balkans startup ecosystem. By harnessing the collective power of diverse talents and resources, the Alliance is poised to accelerate the growth and success of startups in the region. Together, the WBSA members will shape the future of entrepreneurship, innovation, and economic development in the Western Balkans.



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