



**OPEN REGIONAL FUND
FOR SOUTHEAST EUROPE FOREIGN TRADE**
Support to regional economic integration

INFO

No. 7, June 2024



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

ONE REGION, COMMON VISION

Meeting of Western Balkans Ministers
of European Affairs and Finance and
Regional Leaders' Summit

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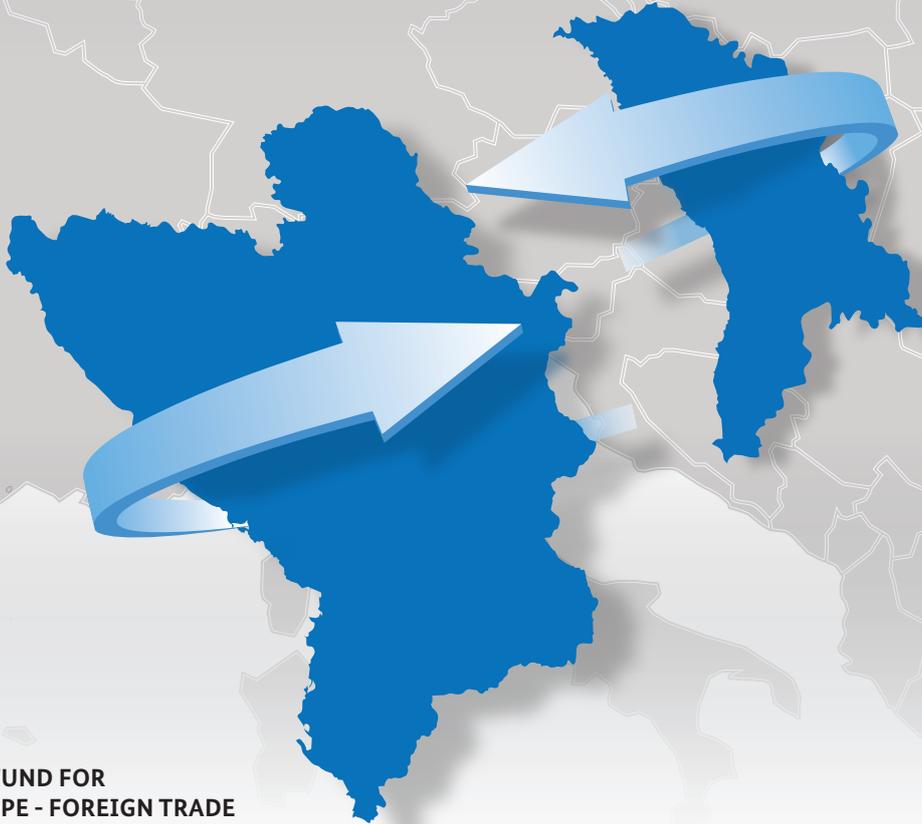
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SUPPORT TO REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION



**OPEN REGIONAL FUND FOR
SOUTHEAST EUROPE - FOREIGN TRADE**

**SUPPORT TO REGIONAL
ECONOMIC INTEGRATION INFO**

Editorial:

Our efforts to enhance and facilitate trade are steadily gaining momentum. Through strategic collaboration and tailored support, we are fostering an environment where the flow of goods across the region is smoother and more efficient. Recognizing the important role of services in all CEFTA economies, we maintain a strong focus on further strengthening them. The internet, particularly through e-commerce, is reshaping trade dynamics, and we are actively assisting businesses, especially small ones, to leverage online opportunities effectively.

Quality infrastructure ensures products meet standards and customers are safe and happy. Through comprehensive training and support, we are dedicated to ensuring that infrastructure across the region meets the highest standards.

Keep an eye out for inspiring success stories and news! Stay connected as we remain committed to advancing economic cooperation and fostering trade opportunities for all.

ORF FT Team

• IN THE SPOTLIGHT •

Meeting of Western Balkans Ministers of European Affairs and Finance and Regional Leaders' Summit “ONE REGION, COMMON VISION”

GIZ Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro has played a part in organizing the Ministerial Meeting and Regional Leaders' Summit on the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, held under the theme “One Region - Common Vision”. This important event brought together Ministers of European Affairs and Finance, as well as regional leaders, to engage in comprehensive discussions on joint actions, policies, and initiatives aimed at ensuring the successful implementation of the New Growth Plan and advancing the EU accession process.

The discussions underscored that this plan, in conjunction with EU mechanisms, will expedite reform processes and EU accession. Regional leaders showed commitment to continuing their efforts to transform societies and prepare for EU membership. Key topics included trade facilitation, conformity assessment for free movement of industrial goods, digital services, and securing critical medicine supplies. Dr. Tanja Bošković, Sector Fund Manager at GIZ, presented our endeavors to streamline these processes and emphasized the region's need in accelerating them.

The Summit clearly signaled a new momentum in the EU accession process for the entire region. It recognized the need for a revised EU approach towards the Western Balkans and identified key challenges faced by the region. Leaders emphasized viewing the Growth Plan as part of a broader vision for a better future for our region and the EU as a whole. While having high expectations for the Growth Plan, they highlighted the need for further clarification on certain aspects of support to achieve full efficiency.

Throughout the Summit, we showcased our dedication to supporting the region in achieving European standards. This commitment aligns with our goal of fostering progress and prosperity across the Western Balkans.



• TRADE IN GOODS •

Advancing Trade in Goods Across the Western Balkans

Our ongoing efforts in promoting trade in goods continue to bear fruit. Through collaborative initiatives and capacity-building programmes, we're facilitating smoother trade flows and fostering economic growth across the Western Balkans.

Within our focus to support the businesses in advancing the mechanisms for the regional trade agenda, the Authorized Economic Operators (AEO) Association reached a significant milestone during its inaugural quarterly meeting of 2024.

A major focus of the meeting was the election of the AEO Association's Board of Directors. The newly elected members include Genc Celi, Goran Cerovina, Olgica Nakova, Dragana Stajovic, Betim Kryeziu, and Jovan Mutavdžić. The Board of Directors of the AEO Association has elected a new President, **Mr. Genc Celi, Trade and Customs Expert**, to represent the AEO Association for the next two years. He will replace **Tijana Stefanovic** from RED SPED who led the AEO Association



from its incumbent and has been instrumental in steering the organization towards its goals.

Regarding public sector support, we are in crucial momentum for advancing the effective implementation of the Decision on Facilitating Trade for Fruit and Vegetables in our region. Experts from CEFTA parties convened in Montenegro, to deliberate on key aspects of plant health and food safety and streamlined trade practices, aiming to accelerate movement and trade of agricultural goods within CEFTA economies, as well as further improvement of food safety aspects within the region.

The initiative on consumer protection was deepened on a regional meeting of experts from Customs Administration and Market Surveillance Authorities across CEFTA Parties in Skopje, focused on enhancing cooperation and ensuring consumer safety.



• TRADE IN SERVICES •

Enhancing the Services Sector: Focus on Tourism, Construction, and Regulatory Harmonization in CEFTA economies

The services sector plays a vital role in regional economies, and our focus remains steadfast on enhancing its competitiveness. From facilitating cross-border service provision to advocating for regulatory harmonization, we're committed to unlocking the full potential of trade in services. We plan to provide additional support to CEFTA Parties to address gaps in the tourism and construction/engineering/architecture sectors. Our efforts will also focus on enhancing the capacities of CEFTA Parties to establish a reliable internal network for communication and information exchange. This will promote better regulatory transparency and foster a more cohesive and efficient regulatory environment within CEFTA. By addressing these areas, we aim to support economic growth and integration across the region.



• E-COMMERCE •

Empowering E-commerce in the Western Balkans

The digital revolution is transforming trade, with e-commerce leading the way. Our initiatives empower businesses, especially SMEs, to thrive online and collaborate with public institutions to create a supportive digital commerce environment.

We've been actively supporting the public sector in aligning regulations with EU standards to improve the e-commerce climate. During CEFTA Week in December 2023, Customs and Inter-Party parcel delivery experts discussed the CEFTA Action Plan. The Inter-Party parcel delivery group prepared Terms of Reference for establishing a Working Group and began implementing non-regulatory measures from the draft Joint Committee Decision on parcel delivery. Efforts continued in 2024 with bilateral meetings, workshops, and a study visit to Croatian Regulatory Authority for Network Industries (HAKOM) to learn about key aspects of e-commerce, including postal standards, promoting collaboration and simplifying procedures.



Additionally, we are improving transparency in Inter-Party parcel delivery prices and regulatory frameworks. We've organized bilateral workshops to prepare CEFTA Parties for EU Acquis harmonization. Workshops in Skopje, Podgorica, and Sarajevo focused on transposing CEFTA regulatory measures, discussing postal standards, and implementing postal standard EN13850 for universal postal service quality.



Private sector initiatives are vital for developing valuable tools for companies engaged in digital trade and their involvement is crucial for creating solutions that facilitate market access in the Western Balkans and beyond. Through our collaborative efforts with the Lab of Tomorrow programme, we support innovative e-commerce solutions in the Western Balkans. Over 20 companies formed four groups to develop marketable ideas through Design Thinking process. Two teams are now refining their ideas before presenting them to potential investors in Skopje.

We're also dedicated to making markets accessible to regional companies and we are supporting digital commerce associations. The "Let's Do E-commerce" conference, hosted by the Association for Internet Trade "E-comm" in BiH, promoted e-commerce and provided networking opportunities for industry players. It also facilitated valuable connections for the BalkanHop team, enhancing cross-border e-commerce delivery solutions.



• QUALITY INFRASTRUCTURE •

Advancing Quality Infrastructure and Safety Standards in the Western Balkans

Quality infrastructure is essential for international trade, ensuring products meet regulations and consumer expectations. We're strengthening institutions and promoting cooperation to facilitate trade integration and market access across the region.

In this our ongoing commitment, Customs and Market Surveillance Authorities (MSAs) collaborated to enhance industrial product control. The aim was to establish collaborative risk management, identify challenges, and outline steps for a Pilot Joint Customs-Market Surveillance Action (JCMSA) to ensure compliance.



The Joint Market Surveillance action is a key method for CEFTA Parties' market surveillance authorities (MSAs) to harmonize compliance methods and improve product safety. Supported by our project, MSAs collaborated on identification of non-compliant and dangerous products. MSAs from all seven CEFTA Parties sampled and tested these products according to harmonized standards at KONCAR, an accredited lab in Croatia. In April MSA representatives visited the lab to observe testing and deepen their understanding of electrical product compliance.



Following this, a comprehensive training session on Risk Assessment of Non-Compliant Products took place in Skopje. As the joint action concludes, MSAs will now take appropriate measures and share relevant information via the SEED+ system. The initiative continues to foster enhanced cooperation and product safety.

In late 2023, an assessment of the construction sector within CEFTA parties was conducted and the findings were presented at a regional event in Skopje. The event gathered experts from all QI institutions of CEFTA Parties, with presentations by renowned international experts, and established the foundation for future capacity-building measures, with specific focus to support economic operators and manufacturers of construction products in the WB 6 CEFTA Parties. Starting in May 2024, a support package will aid manufacturers in understanding regulations and aligning with CE marking requirements.

Finally, supportive actions for QI institution's standardization and digitalization efforts, were undertaken to align with EU practices. This includes making international standards available in local languages and standardizing accreditation scopes, promoting accessibility and consistency across CEFTA Parties.



Regional breakthrough



The e-commerce associations from North Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Albania have signed a Memorandum to establish the Balkan E-commerce Alliance (BECA). Supported by our project, BECA aims to facilitate and promote regional e-commerce. BECA will create policies, lobby for change, and tackle challenges in the e-commerce chain, such as customs fees, administrative hurdles, and regulatory frameworks. The Alliance will also facilitate information and knowledge sharing among members.



Upcoming Events for June – July 2024

Mark your calendars for upcoming events and webinars, where we'll delve deeper into key trade-related topics and facilitate knowledge exchange among stakeholders. Don't miss out on valuable insights and networking opportunities!

**CEFTA AEO
Validation Mission**

June 2024
Montenegro

**Regional Meeting on
the Market Surveillance
Authorities and Customs
Administrations**

June 2024
Montenegro

**AEO
Association Meeting**

July 2024
Montenegro

Get Involved



Your engagement is crucial to our collective efforts in promoting sustainable trade and economic development. Whether through partnerships, feedback, or participation in our activities, we warmly invite you to join us in driving positive change and prosperity in the region.

Stay connected with us on our website and social media channels for the latest news and updates:



cefta.int/projects/support-to-regional-economic-integration
www.aeoassociation.com



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HIGHLIGHTS December 2023 - June 2024



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