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# Countering Serious Crime in the Western Balkans

## About the Project

The people of the EU and the Western Balkans region have traditional, long-standing ties. The EU has supported many reform activities in the Western Balkans during the last two decades. Despite this, addressing reforms in the rule of law, fundamental rights and good governance remains the most pressing issue for the Western Balkans and a great concern for the global community (European Commission, 2018).

The Western Balkans (consisting of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia) continue to face major challenges in the area of the rule of law. This is particularly true for law enforcement institutions tasked with fighting organised crime and terrorism. In order to address these challenges, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the European Commission (EC) and the Italian Ministry of Interior are jointly funding the project Countering Serious Crime



COUNTERING  
SERIOUS CRIME IN  
THE WESTERN BALKANS

<b>Project name</b>	Countering Serious Crime in the Western Balkans
<b>Beneficiary Countries</b>	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia
<b>Funding</b>	European Commission (DG NEAR): EUR 15,8 million German Government (BMZ): EUR 1.5 million Italian Ministry of Interior: 900,000 EUR
<b>Duration</b>	07/2020 – 06/2023
<b>Implementing Partners</b>	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ), Italian Ministry of Interior, Center for International Legal Cooperation (CILC)

*Countering Serious Crime in the Western Balkans is an operational project and supports work at the frontline.*

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

Implemented by



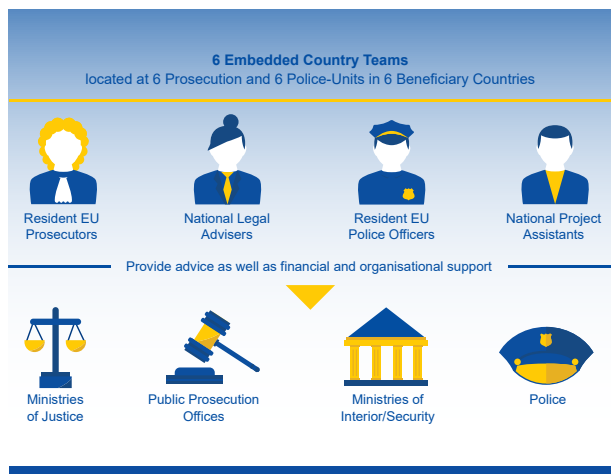
in the Western Balkans, which is implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH together with a unit of the Italian Ministry of Interior and the Center for International Cooperation (CILC) from the Netherlands.

*"The special thing about working together with the Countering Serious Crime project is the combination of expertise and practical implementation: practice-oriented exchange and advice from experienced experts are put into practice on specific cases. This means that ongoing cases are solved more quickly, but also allows prosecutors and investigators from different countries to share knowledge in the long run."*

Lenche Ristoska,  
the first prosecutor from North Macedonia at Eurojust, on the added value of this partnership

## Objectives

The overall objective of the project is to support our partner institutions in the Western Balkans in overcoming barriers on their path to EU accession and to enable them to arrest or prosecute criminals in line with EU rules and regulations. We achieve this by (1) providing operational support, by (2) strengthening strategic cooperation and by (3) boosting the interoperability of information systems.



## Key activities

1. **Operational support:** Countering serious crime across borders requires international experience, a multidisciplinary approach and the use of special techniques. Therefore, together with the partners in the region our experts work on concrete investigations, promoting relevant investigation tools such as the Joint Investigations Team (JIT) or the use of Europol's Secure Information Exchange Network Application (SIENA). The experts support our partners to participate in the so-called European Multidisciplinary Platforms Against Criminal Threats (EMPACTs), a security initiative driven by EU Member States to identify, prioritise and address threats posed by serious crime. Aiming to accomplish the operational support, we offer EU wide expertise (flexible and on demand) through our Technical Assistance Facility (TAF). 2. **Strategic cooperation:** As the fight against serious crime can only be successful when working together across borders, we facilitate the cooperation with EU agencies such as Europol and Eurojust and networks such as the European Judicial Network (EJN) or the Regional Network on National Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism (P/CVE). In order to operate more strategically, the project provides support in developing Regional Integrated Threat Assessments on serious crime (RITA) and Terrorism (WB TE.SAT). 3. **Interoperability of information systems:** Secure and efficient communication and exchange of data is a key factor to prevent, detect and investigate terrorism and other forms of serious crime. Thus we support the upgrade and extension of the already existing systems as well as the implementation of two EU directives on advanced Air Passenger Information (API) and the use of air Passenger Name Records (PNR).

*The project offers EU wide expertise to our partner institutions - flexible and on demand (Technical Assistance Facility, TAF).*

## Approach

The project is unique in its practical approach. Each country is supported by a prosecutor and a police officer from EU member states as well as legal advisers and assistants from the respective countries. These six so-called Embedded Country Teams advise the partner institutions in their ongoing operations and support them to better investigate and prosecute serious and organised crime cases. This approach is advantageous because it allows the partner institutions to receive quick, high-quality advice that takes EU best practices into account.

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