

How can the EU's Lisbon Agenda help Bosnia's Stabilisation and Association process?

The signing of the SAA demonstrated that Bosnia is now a serious candidate for EU accession and needs to make rapid progress against clearly defined goals of the Stabilisation and Association process SAA. Now that the agenda for accession is clear, the question still remains as to how these changes might be made and where policy makers and stakeholders can look for examples of good practice that will bring Bosnia closer to accession.

The Lisbon Agenda provides an important resource for this purpose¹. Agreed in 2000 it is how the member states of the EU swap good practice to make the EU “the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment by 2010”. Anyone can explore these good practices and the performance of member states is annually scrutinised in public. This transparency improves the implementation of competitiveness and social inclusion policies by identifying problems early, exchanging good policy practice and developing shared responsibility. The EU calls this process the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) and it shows that the EU is committed to improving efficiency through greater transparency. For pre accession states there are also funds (Twinning and Twinning “Light”) that can be used to aid policy transfer between member states and accession states like Bosnia.

What needs to be pointed out here is the significance of meeting the obligations arising from the SAA. Efficient implementation of these commitments and the continuation of the reforms are required in order to make progress towards the next stages in the European integration process, particularly aiming towards candidate country status., Osman Topcagic, BiH Directorate of European Integration

¹ The Commission has already made this link explicitly in its 2006 Communication ***The Western Balkans on the road to the EU: consolidating stability and raising Prosperity*** COM(2006) 27 final, Brussels, 27.1.2006

The Lisbon Agenda in Bosnia

The Business Bus is the final stage of a project exploring the lessons of the Lisbon Agenda and their relevance in Bosnia. The first stage was a series of interviews with key policy makers in the both entities to establish policy priorities and define topics. For the second stage a week long conference of international policy makers, leading experts and training materials was held in Sarajevo in December 2007. Attendance was poor so the majority of the following stage was explicitly designed to bypass BH's public administration: one part was to train MPs, one part was the Business Bus and the final strand was to train key officials in market surveillance and regulatory compliance to improve BH company access to EU markets. The market surveillance session failed as a date could not be secured from MOFTER² but the MP³ session was well attended.

The Business Bus and "Good Practice": 1 Inspiration

Innovation is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration, and so it proves for policy. The inspiration for the Business Bus was from the UK's Business Link Model that the EPIC consultant knew well. Business Links were set up to coordinate business support at a time when enterprise policy was underdeveloped and public and private suppliers competed to meet government targets. As described in a previous policy paper, the innovation was to introduce a problem diagnostic model that would allow small businesses to benefit more from existing suppliers. It also improved resource allocation and allows the quality of service provider to be monitored.



² MOFTER – Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina

³ MP – Member(s) of Parliament

The Business Bus and “Good Practice”: 2 Perspiration

The Business Bus’ implementation strategy also placed considerable emphasis on engaging with policy recipients and feeding their responses into the projects design. The kind of business support required in each locality could therefore be carefully defined, the impact of the experience for the businesses and consultants could be analysed and the frank views of business people was received on up to three occasions. Over half the project resources were committed to the inception visit and the evaluation to gather the views of recipients and to ensure that there was a clear evidence base to contribute to further debates about business support.

The main resources for the Business Bus went into the implementation of the pilot in Bosnia. Most of the budget went to Populari who provided research for the Business Bus. Their local knowledge of specific regions and contacts derived from previous research projects were invaluable for the project. Expert knowledge of small business support was provided by Senada Keserovic who also identified and organised the large number of consultants required for the project. John Pyres from the Commission delegation and Sabina Djapo from the Embassy provided constant advice, support and introductions.

The Business Bus has shown that good practice from EU member states can inspire progress for the SAA process. But to do so it requires effective capacity building in Bosnia so that public, private and social economy agencies can draw on these policies and implement them in a way that is relevant and properly coordinated. This way Bosnia will start to benefit from the SAA process long before accession occurs.