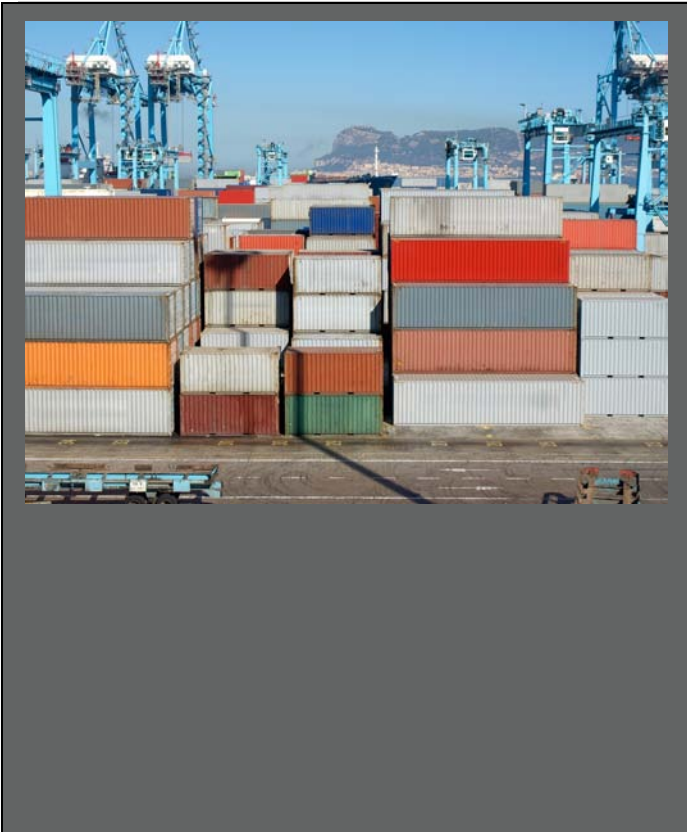


Open Regional Fund for Foreign Trade Promotion in South East Europe



Project Description

Title: Open Regional Fund for Foreign Trade Promotion in South-East Europe
Client: German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Country: South East Europe, supra-regional
Lead executing agency: Ministries of Economy and Trade in the participating countries as well as the appropriate executing organizations for single components
Overall term: January 2007 to December 2010

Context

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the pillars of South East Europe's economy. The EU accession of Bulgaria and Rumania and respectively the EU approximation of the Western Balkan countries offers these SMEs new potentials for the export of their goods and services. Target markets can be the neighboring countries in the region as well as the European single market. South East European companies have to face the specific market challenges and become more competitive in order to succeed on these markets. The Open Regional Fund (ORF) for Foreign Trade projects take an approach of strengthening competitiveness through multi-country cooperation among companies and institutions in the region and of marketing South East Europe as one economic area on the international stage.

Approach

The ORF is currently financing nine projects in various sectors with a term of approximately two years each and the participation of at least several countries per project. The projects financed by the ORF are generally initiated by stakeholders from Western Balkan countries such as national ministries, private sector associations, chambers of commerce and industry, clusters, or exporting businesses themselves. New project proposals are received continuously and evaluated according to their feasibility and strategic importance.

Results achieved so far

Focusing on sectors with export potentials, projects are implemented in the garment industry along with fashion design, the automotive supply and the IT sector, tourism, agricultural trade and the regional export consultancy market. To thrive on international markets, the relatively small national sectors regionalize their marketing as well as distribution structures in order to achieve synergy effects for the participating companies. The South East Europe (SEE) region is positioned as a brand, for instance by using the SEE abbreviation creating portals and websites like SEE-automotive, SEE-fashion, [balkan-treasures](#), or SEE-consultancy to market goods and services.

Other ORF projects provide businesses and institutions with advisory services and training to comply with quality standards or EU regulations. For example, the ORF IT-project is preparing 24 companies from six countries of the region for the certification under the international software standards IT Mark and CMMI. These certification schemes prove that companies are managing their internal processes efficiently and according to a standardized model. Increasing the number of certified companies in six Western Balkan countries will help to position the region as a hub for quality IT on the international market.

Stimulating and promoting both cross-border cooperation and institutions working on a regional level in SEE is a further goal of the ORF. To this end, ORF is supporting the implementation of the Central European Free Trade Agreement, CEFTA with a project on the reduction of non-tariff barriers to trade. The Standing Working Group for Regional Rural Development (SWG RRD), a policy platform gathering the Ministries of Agriculture from 10 countries of SEE, ORF cedes financial support, advice and men power. The SWG facilitates the annual "Agricultural Policy Forum", develops and implements cross-border events and training measures to promote the Balkans' rural areas and their people. With the support of the ORF, SWG has been registered as an international legal body in 2009 and can now be acknowledged as one of the few "regional" organizations in South East Europe.