

Reinforcing border management

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Phare 2000/CARDS 2001

Country

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Implementation period

2000-2003

Funding

€8 million

Results

Supply of technical equipment for improved border management. Training in use of equipment and further development of strategy for integrated border management.

Coordinators

Dept. for International Cooperation and European integration,
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Partners

European Agency for Reconstruction
European Commission

Stemming illegal trafficking of goods and persons

Encircled by Albania, Serbia and Montenegro, Bulgaria and Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia forms a natural crossroads to a number of major European destinations. As the volume of traffic between it and its neighbours rises, so too does its need to run an effective border management system. Cases of illegal immigration and human trafficking, mostly in the direction of the EU, are frequently reported by the authorities on the northern and eastern borders of the country. Besides drug and tobacco smuggling are not uncommon at all entry points into the territory.

Controlling and improving the situation was made more complicated by the lack of a single authority with full administrative or operational responsibility for the management of the state border.

The government, as part of its reform process towards greater integration with EU standards, cooperated with the European Agency for Reconstruction on a number of activities geared to tightening the country's frontiers and raising the efficiency of border staff management. Besides presenting a danger to public safety, corruption and inefficiency at customs points also results in loss of state revenues (e.g. import tax).

Equipping border points with up-to-date technology

In 2000, the EU, through its Phare programme, contributed to the process of improving control of border crossings, with a large-scale project to supply updated IT and search equipment at border entry points around the country. Some €4 million was allocated to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Customs Administration for the purchase of technical equipment.

During the project's initial phases, training in computing and telecommunications systems, vital for creating a functioning border crossings network, was provided by instructors selected by the EU to representatives of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia involved in computing and crypto protection. In spite of delays caused by procedural difficulties, the EU has also supplied a range of equipment, from 50 PCs and 50 passport readers, 10 Land Rovers, 14 passenger buses and 2 patrol boats to the border services. The new equipment is now helping border control staff in identifying forged documents and passports, and patrolling its frontiers.

Creating a strategy to manage border police

Following border services assessments carried out under the project, further funds were granted by the CARDS programme for additional improvements to border management in 2001.

These have been targeted at more strategic work, namely in creating a single professional police border service, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, as opposed to the Ministry of Defence. The transfer of duties to the Ministry of Internal Affairs requires changes at other levels too: legislation relating to management of the police, internal affairs and border control needs to be amended, and the security of the state border, currently overseen by the Army, will have to be transferred to the new border police by the end of 2005.

In 2003, the government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia set up an inter-ministerial group dedicated to preparing and coordinating these changes, under its national strategy for integrated border management.

Linking border points to databases of wanted persons

Another significant aspect of ongoing CARDS programme funded border work was the development of a computerised communications system to link all border crossings. The system will enable border points to access relevant databases on problem documents and wanted persons, and submit migration cases from the police to the competent authorities.