

STRENGTHENING CAPACITIES FOR EU ENLARGEMENT: EU POLICIES, FUNDING MECHANISMS, AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT

5-7 MAY 2026

Study visit to Zagreb, Croatia

Venue: Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, Đorđićeva 4



BACKGROUND

The Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA) is an international organisation based in Montenegro that supports public administration reform in the Western Balkans and, as of 2026, in Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia. ReSPA activities are funded by the EU. Under its thematic area dedicated to EU Integration/EU Accession, ReSPA supports administrations in their efforts to build capacity and establish professional networks in the regions and with EU Member States to strengthen their ability to further advance in these processes.

The "Strengthening Capacities for EU Enlargement: EU Policies, Funding Mechanisms, and Strategic Development" is a capacity building activity that is designed to address the key aspects of EU funding, explore the examples of best practice of the absorption of EU funds in the Member States and in the Western Balkans region and derive lessons learned for Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia that can be implemented to smoothen the process. The aim is to support participants in exchanging with their peers, learning about best practices, and creating lasting professional networks for future cooperation. In addition, the selection of topics aims to contribute to the discussions related to the preparations for the new Multiannual Financial Framework, specifically based on the experience related to the application of the Reform and Growth Facility, the Growth Plans and the Reform Agendas for the regions, structure and sources of EU funding and coordination and implementation of the funds.

The program is designed for mid-career to senior-level civil servants who work in the field of coordination of the EU funds, from planning to implementation and monitoring of projects, coming from ministries/departments/agencies in charge of EU integration/accession, ministries of finance, institutions in charge of implementation of major EU-funded projects, regional development or other civil servants who can benefit from gaining in-depth knowledge in relation to the EU budgetary matters and development funding.

The program is developed in cooperation with ReSPA's partner organisation, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia, and the participants will be able to learn from the Croatian experts and civil servants specialised in these matters through the support of the Service for Knowledge Transfer, as well as other experts and researchers from the WB region.

PROVISIONAL AGENDA

DAY I: TUE 5 MAY 2026

08.45-09.00	<i>Registration of participants</i>
09.00-09.30	Welcome and Introductory Addresses
09.30- 11.00	The European Union Budget as a Framework for EU Policies <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Structure, Sources, and Funding Priorities of the EU Budget• Advantages and Disadvantages of the EU Budget• The Future of the EU Budget after 2027
11.00-11.30	<i>Coffee Break</i>
11.30-13.00	The National Strategic Planning System and Its Link with EU Funding <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Key Features of the Strategic Planning System in the Republic of Croatia• Functioning of the System at Different Territorial Levels• Strengthening Institutions and Lessons Learned
13.00- 14.00	<i>Lunch Break</i>
14.00- 15.30	EU Regional Policy and the National Framework <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Objectives and priorities of the current EU regional and cohesion policy• Overview of the new EU Multiannual Financial Framework and key development priorities• Instruments and programmes relevant for EU Enlargement Countries• The role of regional and local institutions in project preparation
15.30-16.00	<i>Coffee Break</i>
16.00-17.00	Monitoring the implementation of the Reform and Growth Facility in the Western Balkans, methodology, bottlenecks and oversight <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preparedness to fulfil membership obligations• Lessons Learned and Recap that can be used in the East• Expected adaptations with regard to the new MFF
17.00-19.00	<i>Free Time</i>

DAY II: WED 6 MAY 2026

09.00- 10.30	Funds Transforming Croatia: From the IPA Programme to the National Recovery and Resilience Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none">• IPA Funds (2007–2013) – Preparing the System and Institutions for EU Funds• Cohesion and Structural Funds – Infrastructure Projects (e.g. the Pelješac Bridge), Regional Development, and Innovation• National Recovery and Resilience Plan – Digitalisation, Green Transition, Support for SMEs and Agriculture• EU Funds – System of Pre-financing and Co-financing, Loans and Guarantees, Working Capital, and Thematic Funds for Sustainable Projects
10.30-11.00	<i>Coffee Break</i>
11.00-12.30	Preparation and Implementation of Projects Funded by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overview of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP)• Institutional Framework for the Implementation of NRRP Projects• Preparation of Project Proposals and Application Procedures• Common Challenges in Project Implementation• Best Practices and Lessons Learned from NRRP Projects
12.30- 13.30	<i>Lunch Break</i>
13.30-15.00	Recovery and Resilience Plan – The Croatian Experience as a Model for the Implementation of the New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans and the East <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Similarities between the “EU Recovery and Resilience Facility” and the “Reform and Growth Facility”• Opportunities for Using EU Funds• Challenges in Project Implementation and Institutional Capacities for the Effective Use of Funds
15.00-15.30	<i>Coffee Break</i>
15.30-17.00	Programmes of European Territorial Cooperation <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Concept and Objectives of European Territorial Cooperation• Legal and Institutional Framework for ETC in the European Union• Participation of the Republic of Croatia in ETC Programmes• Types of ETC Programmes: Cross-Border, Transnational, and Interregional Cooperation• Funding Mechanisms and Financial Instruments
17.00-19.00	City Tour of Zagreb

DAY III: THR 7 MAY 2026

09.00- 12.30	Visit to an EU-Funded Project <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Restoration of Cultural Heritage with Support from EU Funds – Visit to the Renovated Croatian Natural History Museum, Co-Financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) – Presentation and Museum Tour
13.30- 14.00	<i>Lunch Break</i>
14.00-15.00	EU Funds in Practice – Experiences from the Zagreb County Development Agency <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Role of Regional Development Agencies in the Use of EU Funds• Support for Local Governments, SMEs, and Institutions in Project Preparation• Examples of EU-Funded Projects in Zagreb County• Challenges in Using EU Funds at the Regional Level• Cooperation with National and EU Institutions• Lessons Learned and Recommendations for Future Projects
15.00-15.30	<i>Coffee Break</i>
15.30-16.30	Green and Digital Transition at the Local Level <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduction to the Fund for Environmental Protection and Energy Efficiency (FZOEU) – Role and Mission• EU and National Funding for Green Transition Projects• Renewable energy, energy efficiency, waste management, and sustainable mobility.
16.30-17.00	Closure of the training module <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluation• Final words

DAY IV: FRI 8 MAY 2026

Departure of participants