

EXPERT SUPPORT

Factsheet



May 2024

Balkans Group provides support and expertise in key areas such as dialogue and negotiations, security, foreign policy, regional cooperation, EU agendas and reforms, good governance, development, and law-making.

Within this component, we engage a large number of experts and consultants to support key institutions in key policy areas where there is a need and deficiency. We aim to enhance the capacities of these institutions, drive positive change, and streamline policy-making processes. Experts work on short-term and long-term policy issues, providing valuable policy support and advice. We aim to empower institutions and help them better prepare and advance policy agendas domestically, regionally, and internationally.

We believe solid institutions and better policy processes will benefit societies and make Western Balkans countries more prosperous and prepared for EU accession. Balkans Group thanks institutions for trusting and accepting support from engaged experts.

46 experts providing expertise to public institutions.

8 Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with public institutions in Kosovo.

1 MoU with public institution in North Macedonia.

1 MoU with public institution in Albania.

Expert support for the Government of Kosovo



Balkans Group signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Office of Prime Minister Abdullah Hoti and continued collaborating with the Office of Prime Minister Albin Kurti.

The expert support to the **Government of Kosovo** has significantly improved the government's policy-making and decision-making capabilities, directly enhancing diplomatic and operational efficiencies, particularly in the dialogue with Serbia and the broader international community. This support includes expert advice that led to better policy actions, expedited decision processes, and an informed understanding of complex geopolitical developments. It enabled Kosovo to respond to diplomatic needs quickly, formulate strategic communications for high-level meetings, and develop policies that align with European integration objectives. These efforts were instrumental in submitting Kosovo's EU Membership Application and the Visa Liberalization, showcasing the profound impact of expert support on Kosovo's path toward EU integration. Improved international advocacy also marks notable successes, contributing to a favorable view in the EC Country Report for 2022/23 and advancing strategic planning for critical developmental projects.

Expert support for the Assembly of Kosovo

The experts provided to the **Assembly of Kosovo** have played a critical role in enhancing its legislative functions and ethical standards. They've contributed significantly to advancing legislative and judicial reforms, helping to align the Assembly more closely with international norms. By analyzing insights from the Venice Commission, these experts have strengthened Kosovo's legal framework, particularly through developing and refining key legislation such as the Draft Law on Special Prosecution. Their involvement has increased transparency, credibility, and integrity within the legislative processes, ensuring these align with EU standards and Council of Europe principles. Additionally, the experts have driven efforts to improve parliamentary transparency and ethics. They were instrumental in developing the Open Parliament Action Plan, establishing the Forum for Parliamentary Transparency, and drafting a comprehensive Code of Ethics to guide the conduct of Assembly members.



Expert support for the President of Kosovo



The expert support **provided to the President of Kosovo** has significantly influenced both internal decision-making and external policy-making processes, reinforcing the President's office as a pivotal entity in shaping the nation's policy and legal landscape. Experts have played a crucial role in drafting policies and providing legal analyses that guide decision-making on constitutional competencies, justice reform, elections, international relations, security developments, and the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. Their policy advice vital in shaping a wide array of legal decisions by the President and the cabinet, ensuring that these decisions are well-informed and strategically sound. They were involved in drafting crucial legal instruments for local elections and influencing laws that pertain to national security, defense, the Foreign Service, transitional justice, and the rights of non-majority communities.

Expert support for the Ministry of Defense of Kosovo



The experts provided to the **Ministry of Defense of Kosovo** were instrumental in shaping significant legislative and strategic frameworks that support the enhancement of national security and defense capabilities. A key achievement includes drafting the Law for Military Armaments and Military Equipment, a pioneering piece of legislation in Kosovo that aligns with international standards and addresses the specific armament needs of the country. This law not only strengthens Kosovo's defense infrastructure but also aims to attract international investors and partners, thereby contributing to the growth of the country's military industry and budget. Moreover, the experts were actively involved in developing the Draft Defense Strategy of Kosovo and the Security Strategy for 2022-2027. By ensuring that these

strategies are coherent and comprehensive, the experts have played a crucial role in laying a foundation for Kosovo's future security posture, its defensive capabilities, and its alignment with international security norms.

Expert support for the Ministry of Communities and Returns in Kosovo

The Ministry of **Communities and Returns in Kosovo** has significantly benefited from expert support, particularly in enhancing its international engagement and diplomatic initiatives. The experts have maintained and strengthened contacts with international stakeholders, playing a vital role in supporting the ongoing Brussels dialogue, which is crucial for regional cooperation and stability. This includes active participation and coordination in dialogues that promote understanding and collaboration within the Western Balkans and broader international contexts.

Expert support for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kosovo

The expert support provided to the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** was instrumental in elevating Kosovo's public diplomacy and enhancing its engagement with the diaspora. Through daily advisory services, the experts have significantly advanced concept development, funding documentation, and the implementation of strategic initiatives, initially focusing on public diplomacy and progressively shifting towards diaspora-related matters. This strategic shift has involved a deep focus on developing and implementing the Law on Diaspora and associated strategies, through extensive research and collaboration with various consultants and entities to create a comprehensive approach. The impact of these efforts is evident in the consultations and engagements facilitated by the experts, which have fostered a proactive involvement of citizens, particularly those from the diaspora, in Kosovo's policy processes. This has enhanced citizen engagement and contributed to a richer, more inclusive dialogue on national and international matters concerning Kosovo.



Expert support for the Kosovo's Ministry of Industry, Entrepreneurship, and Trade (MIET)

The expert support provided to **Kosovo's Ministry of Industry, Entrepreneurship, and Trade (MIET)** was pivotal in advancing significant legal and organizational reforms to foster a conducive environment for sustainable investments and enhance institutional effectiveness. Experts made substantial contributions to the Law for Sustainable Investments, which plays a critical role in regulating and encouraging environmentally and socially responsible business practices within Kosovo. Their involvement was instrumental in navigating the approval process for this law, ensuring it aligns with Kosovo's economic development goals and sustainability standards. The experts helped create a streamlined and effective regulatory framework that supports investment and enterprise development in Kosovo by ensuring that the regulations are in sync with the newly established Law for Sustainable Investments.

Expert support for the EU Special Representative (EUSR)

The expert support was provided to the **EU Special Representative (EUSR)**, particularly in implementing the Integrated Border Management (IBM) agreement. This advancement was evident with the full implementation of IBM at the Merdare and Mutivode border crossings. Moreover, the consultant has regularly briefed EUSR Lajčák, keeping him well-informed of the on-ground realities and developments, effectively supporting his mediation and facilitation roles.

Expert support for the Municipality of Prishtina



The expert support provided to the **Municipality of Prishtina** profoundly impacted the city's governance and security landscapes. The creation and implementation of the Directory on Security and Emergencies significantly enhanced the municipality's capability to address and manage security concerns, contributing to a more systematic and coordinated approach to urban safety. This structural addition, alongside proactive scenario-building and the establishment of digital fines for noise control, not only streamlined operations but also reduced the need for human intervention, thereby increasing efficiency and compliance. Moreover, their role in fostering inter-departmental and inter-institutional collaboration has improved service delivery and more robust engagement with local and international stakeholders.

The project expanded in 2022 and 2023 in depth and geographically, by increasing the number of experts in Kosovo and launching expert support programs for North Macedonia and Albania. This project has become a regional one.

In 2024, Balkans Group signed a cooperation agreement with the **Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency – Sida**, to support the project - Elevate Peace, state-building agenda, and advancing the European Agenda. This project aims to strengthen institutions, provide expert support, advance the dialogue and support for peace, inclusive policymaking for the state-building agendas, enhance regional cooperation, and implementation of EU-related reforms and agendas.



Expert support to the Government of Albania

The expert support provided to the **Government of Albania**, particularly through its engagement with the Agency for Energy Efficiency, has played a transformative role in advancing sustainable transportation initiatives. The expert assisted in developing the Albanian Law on Alternative Fuel for Vehicles, a landmark legislation that marks a significant shift from diesel to electric vehicles. In addition to legislative development, the expert aided in the creation of secondary legislation related to alternative fuels. Furthermore, the expert provided invaluable guidance in preparing project proposals, particularly those aimed at securing EU funding. This guidance has significantly enhanced the Agency for Energy Efficiency's fundraising and project management capabilities, boosting its effectiveness and enabling it to implement projects supporting Albania's transition towards a more sustainable and energy-efficient future.

Expert support to the Government of North Macedonia

Through expert support, the Balkans Group strengthens the Government of North Macedonia's capabilities in Foreign and Security Affairs, EU integration, Regional Cooperation, Public Policy, Law-Making, Good Governance, OSCE chairmanship, and the South East European Cooperation Process (SEEC). It has strengthened the government's diplomatic capabilities and political strategy, positioning the country more favorably on the international stage and enhancing its European integration efforts. The experts played a vital role and were deeply engaged in diplomatic and political analysis, influencing various international and regional affairs. Their insights have shaped North Macedonia's policymaking, public communication, and strategic diplomacy. The strategic inputs provided by these experts were crucial in achieving favorable evaluations during the EU screening process, underscoring their vital role in North Macedonia's diplomatic and political advancements.



“The commitment and the support that has been extended to our country and its institutions in the framework of this collaboration has assisted immensely in strengthening our capacities by engaging qualified professionals that secured current and comprehensive expertise for designing undergoing policy reforms and inclusive processes of policy creation that have been inevitably needed for accelerating our accession into the EU. Without your support, it would not be possible to successfully conclude the screening process and the North Macedonia Government’s tasks envisioned within the EU Negotiating Framework, as well as to adequately deliver in the preparations of the Reform Agenda as a country’s response to the New Growth Plan of the European Commission for the Western Balkans.” – Bojan Marichikj, Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs, North Macedonia.

Dear Mr. Naim Rashiti,

On behalf of the Government of Republic of North Macedonia and especially the Secretariat for European Affairs, I would kindly like to express my gratitude and appreciation for the support that Balkan Policy Research Group and You personally provide to North Macedonia and its government institutions under the auspices of the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Balkan Policy Research Group and the Government of Republic of North Macedonia which establishes the basis for implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Norway.

The commitment and the support that has been extended to our country and its institutions in the framework of this collaboration has assisted immensely in strengthening our capacities by engaging qualified professionals that secured current and comprehensive expertise for designing undergoing policy reforms and inclusive processes of policy creation that have been inevitably needed for accelerating our accession into the EU.

Without your support it would not be possible to successfully conclude the screening process and North Macedonia Government's tasks envisioned within the EU Negotiating Framework, as well as to adequately deliver in the preparations of the Reform Agenda as a country's response to the New Growth Plan of the European Commission for the Western Balkans.

The Government of Republic of North Macedonia continues to work with high commitment and enthusiasm to fulfill its strategic goal for the country to become full-fledged member of the EU by 2030 and the continuation of your support on that path is of greatest need and importance.

Thank you very much once again for all you have done so far, for making it possible to bring Republic of North Macedonia closer to the European Union and I am very much looking forward to continuing our collaboration and joint actions in the future.

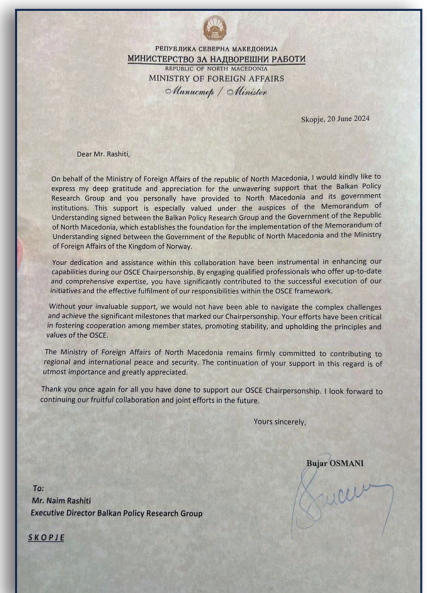
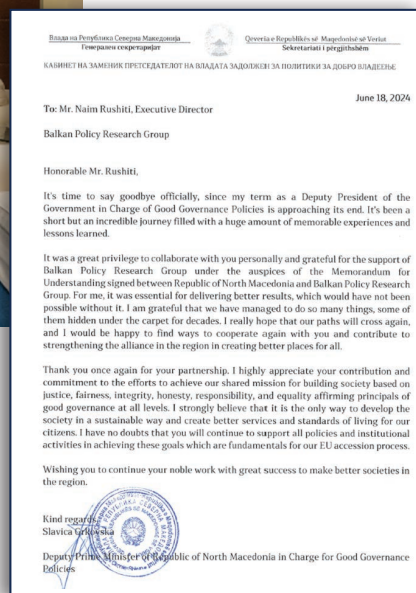
Yours sincerely,

Bojan Marichikj

Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs in the Government of Republic of North Macedonia



Moreover, the experts' involvement has significantly advanced North Macedonia's European integration process. They have enhanced the Secretariat for European Affairs by providing in-depth analysis and briefings on North Macedonia's EU integration process, evaluating the implications of EU policies and regional initiatives, and offering actionable recommendations for regional cooperation. This has led to developing a comprehensive Reform Agenda for the New **Growth Plan** for the Western Balkans. Additionally, the experts played a critical role while North Macedonia chaired the OSCE, promoting dialogue, consensus, and empowerment initiatives, which elevated the country's diplomatic profile.



Letters from beneficiaries.

The Balkans Policy Research Group is an independent, regional think-tank based in Prishtina, Kosovo. We provide timely policy analysis and recommendations on a wide array of state-building issues; institutional and democratic consolidation; minority integration and good neighbourly relations: European integration and policy change. We have decades of experience in policy reporting and development, strategic thinking, and advocacy with governmental, international, and non-governmental organisations.

Our rigorous, detailed, impartial reporting, always based on in-depth fieldwork, is the core of our work. We go beyond mainstream positions and seek to make change through creative, feasible, well-measured, and forward-looking policy recommendations to help develop strong, vibrant democracies, prosperous states, and societies based on the rule of law in the Western Balkans.

We engage in high-level advocacy, domestically, regionally, and internationally, impacting policy discussions and options with regard to the home affairs and European policies toward the Western Balkans.

Balkans Group has developed other tools and platforms to achieve this change:

The Expert Support Component provides policy support and experts to the governments and other key institutions on vital policy areas, including dialogue and negotiations, security, foreign policy, regional cooperation, EU agendas and reforms, good governance, development, and law-making.

Youth in Politics Programme aims to train and build the capacity of young people active in political parties in Kosovo in areas such as the rule of law, public policy, good governance, economic development and social policy, education policy, and regional cooperation.

The Women in Politics & Decision Making platform aims to create a gender-equal environment by increasing the representation of women in politics and decision-making roles across institutions.

The Western Balkans Policy Forum - a Think-Tankers High-level Advocacy Forum, is committed to enhancing the dialogue between civil society and institutions.

The Policy Dialogue promotes domestic dialogue in Kosovo, political consensus, and reform agendas.

The Dialogue Platform promotes the dialogue process between Kosovo and Serbia, by informing the wider public and generating debate about the agreements, benefits, and challenges of the Dialogue.

The Kosovo Serbia Policy Advocacy Group - a Cross-Border Civil Society Cooperation forum- aims to communicate, promote, and enhance dialogue toward full normalization between Kosovo and Serbia and their societies.

Constitutional Framework, Parliamentarism, and Membership to the CoE, aims to advocate for comprehensive reforms in Kosovo's constitutional framework, improvement of parliamentary procedures, and integration into the Council of Europe.

Energy, Green & Digital Policy Hub aims to bring together government officials, experts, and think tanks to jointly devise, develop, and advocate for the right solutions.

The Policy Idea Lab platform aims to create new policy tools and spaces where policymakers, members of institutions, advisors, experts, the CSO community, academics, etc., can share their knowledge, debate policy processes and topics, and devise solutions.