

Terms of Reference

Request for Services

Senior specialist in European Integration and Accession Negotiations for supporting ReSPA programmatic actions to the Western Balkans

1. Background

The Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA) is an inter-governmental organization for enhancing regional cooperation, promoting shared learning and supporting the development of public administration in the Western Balkans. ReSPA Members are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, while Kosovo* is a beneficiary. ReSPA's purpose is to help governments in the region develop better public administration, public services and overall governance systems for their citizens and businesses and prepare for membership in the European Union.

ReSPA establishes close cooperation with Ministers, senior public servants and heads of units in Member countries. ReSPA also works in partnership with the European Union, specifically Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), other regional actors such as OECD/SIGMA and Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), as well as agencies and civil society organizations. Since its inception, ReSPA, as an international organization and a key regional endeavour in Public Administration Reform, has contributed to capacity-building and networking activities through on-demand support mechanisms, peering and the production of regional research materials.

The European Commission (EC) provides directly managed funds for the support of the ReSPA activities (research, training and networking programmes) in line with the EU accession process. Currently, ReSPA is implementing its fifth EC Grant Contract "Support to the Regional School of Public Administration for implementing PAR Agenda and facilitating EU accession process in the WBs" which is active as of 1 January 2023.

ReSPA works primarily through regional networks which operate at three levels: Ministerial, Senior Officials, and networks/working groups of experts and senior practitioners. There is one network – Programme Committee composed of the senior civil servants representing the ministries responsible for the Public Administration, ministries of Finance, and institutions in charge of the European Integration process coordination of the ReSPA Members and four regional thematic groups: (1) Policy planning, better regulation and coordination of Centre of Government, **(2) European integration and accession negotiations**; (3) Human Resources Management and Professional Development; (4) Service Delivery (digitalization and quality management).

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and ICJ Advisory opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of independence.

2. Problem statement and description of the assignment

For the period 2023-2026, ReSPA will develop, design and deliver capacity building programmes and activities in the thematic area “European integration and accession negotiations (with specific reference to PAR and governance aspects)”. ReSPA’s focus in this area will be to further promote good governance and support administrative capacity of the administrations in the Western Balkans to take on the obligations of the EU membership in particular public administration reform (PAR) at all levels of government by reforming the administration (processes, practices, modus operandi) and improving the knowledge and skills of public servants dealing with European Integration process (including accession negotiations). The challenging accession negotiation process which is now a reality in four out of five ReSPA members requires knowledgeable and skilled public service which shall bring the process forward with a satisfactory pace. Therefore, ReSPA will devote to this process a specific focus aiming to enhance and promote regional co-operation and exchange of experiences and knowledge in the domain of European integration and accession negotiations with specific reference to PAR and governance aspects.

PAR challenges in the Western Balkans include, among others, lack of coordination capacities related to European Integration planning and implementation. All administrations in the region have established the critical functions for co-ordination of European Integration (EI) activities and processes as well as have developed required guidelines to support implementation of these critical EI functions.

All administrations in the Western Balkans have established the necessary legal and regulatory basis to achieve harmonized planning of EI work, but adoption implementation and monitoring have been inconsistent and slow. The status of EI planning documents is clearly established, and the roles and responsibilities of key institutions are defined in regulations in all administrations. Challenges remain in the actual implementation, as a large number of EI-related legislative commitments were not adopted as planned. Even when adoption takes place timely, implementation is fragmented and slow while deadlines deriving from EU integration-related obligations are often not met. It is crucial that policy planning in Centre of Government takes into account the “EU policy first” approach for designing policies and programmes which are in synergy with the accession process and further accelerate it.

Despite the different stages of accession process, ReSPA Members and Kosovo face similar challenges in meeting a number of conditions defined in the frame of the European accession process and reforming their public administrations, which could more efficiently address through peer review and sharing of good practices at regional level. Efficient co-operation among different institutions within the administration remains essential for managing the accession process, even though the main “burden” falls to the “Centre of Government”, mandated with coordinating the EI process. On the other hand, cooperation and coordination among the institutions that form the ‘Centre of Government’ is yet to be strengthened and enhanced.

All ReSPA Members are facing challenges and delays in programming, implementing and absorbing EU funds, in particular the Instrument of pre-accession assistance. This is often caused by weak administrative structures and capacities, inadequate programming and management capacity and limited project design skills. Additional burden is also caused by the inability to retain trained, qualified staff within the IPA structures, which can be overcome by designing and putting in place adequate staff retention policies. ReSPA shall support its members in increasing their capacity to programme, manage and implement the operational programmes and have access to further funding instruments of the Union.

ReSPA actions in this area will be concentrated in the following building blocks:

- Strengthening the capacities of public servants and relevant institutions on the EU integration process, coordination, tools, methods as well as on the accession negotiations process and skills (focused on specific clusters and chapters of the acquis as well as horizontal aspects);
- Supporting effective alignment of national legislation with the EU acquis and its implementation, monitoring and evaluation;
- Enhancing administrative and human capacities in the WBs administrations for processing and managing EU funds and design mature projects;
- Improve internal co-ordination of accession process within the administrations of ReSPA Members (communicating the European integration process, improving reporting quality, etc.)

The improvement of public administration efficiency is crucial for the success in the EU accession process and the *link among the accession process and principles of Public Administration remains direct*. The Enlargement methodology reconfirms the central role that public administration reform plays among the fundamentals of the enlargement process. According to the methodology, negotiations on the fundamentals will be opened first and closed last and progress on the fundamentals will determine the overall pace of negotiations. In this regard, it is a necessity to make additional efforts to operationalize and systematically use national structures and instruments for EU integration co-ordination, planning, monitoring and reporting, including strengthening the capacities of public servants engaged in this process and especially the accession negotiation talks.

The ambition of ReSPA in this thematic area is to create a critical mass of public servants throughout the region who will be equipped with a set of knowledge and skills for dealing with the accession process in the region for driving and leading future change in the Western Balkans.

By means of these Terms of Reference (ToR), ReSPA is seeking one Specialist, an expert in European Integration and accession negotiations, who would support ReSPA design its programmatic actions to the Western Balkans administrations and boost its work in knowledge management within this area.

3. Tasks and responsibilities

The expert will be a part of the team of specialists engaged for different thematic areas. The expert shall work closely with the Programme Manager in charge of **European Integration and Accession Negotiations (EUIAN)** thematic area and will provide support during May 2023 – March 2024 in upgrading the concepts of programme activities, designing thematic topics and activities, conducting brief analytical snapshots on selected topics in the respective thematic area, assisting in analysing and screening the needs pertaining to specific topics in the thematic area, providing comments at analytical papers/documents, etc. The expert might occasionally assist at the meetings of the regional thematic working group by streamlining the technical discussion into the conclusions of the meeting, preparing technical part of the panels, discussions and other events that require specific expertise. For each specific task within the assignment the expert will provide information

on the good regional and EU practices, existing networks, work of other international organisations or CSOs in the region that might be relevant for the envisaged programme activity.

The expert will be engaged for up to 15 days and will perform the following indicative tasks:

- Assist in analysing and screening the needs in the specific topics within the EUIAN thematic area;
- Provide support in the upgrading of programme activities within EUIAN thematic area and support in co-designing capacity-building actions of ReSPA in the area;
- As requested, conduct brief analytical snapshots on the selected topic within the EU thematic area;
- Identify topics of interest and relevant experts for organization of e-classes with participants from ReSPA Members;
- Provide comments on the analytical papers/documents that will be developed within the EUIAN thematic area;
- Occasionally assist at the meetings of the EUIAN regional thematic group by streamlining the technical discussion into the conclusions of the meeting;
- Prepare technical part of the panels, discussions and other events that require specific EU expertise;
- Occasionally meet other specialists online and boost the synergy among thematic areas.
- Additional tasks agreed with the ReSPA programme Manager in charge.

The abovementioned tasks and responsibilities represent the milestones of the assignment, but the expert and ReSPA Programme Manager in charge can propose changes/adaptations upon mutual agreement.

4. Timing and Location

The assignment foresees the work from home/office – most of the support will be provided online (through electronic communication, e-mails and e-meetings) and participation in at least one meeting face to face. The work will be performed during **May 2023 – March 2024**.

5. Remunerations

The assignment foresees up to **15 (fifteen) expert days** in the amount of up to 7.500EUR.

The payment will be made in two instalments (two phases), the first following the submission of the report for implementation of the 7 days of the assignment and the second one following the submission of the report on the implementation of the remaining 8 days. Both reports are subject to the approval of the relevant ReSPA PM.

Note: No other costs will be covered apart from the expert cost per day. The expert cost per day comprises of expert's fee per day and (if needed) a lump sum for covering related costs which include travel, accommodation, local transport, meals and other incidentals.

6. Necessary qualifications, experience and skills of the required expert

The expert needs to have **diverse but compatible experience in working for or with the public sector**, preferably on positions/assignments and tasks related to EU integration and accession negotiations, capacity development, coordination of pre-accession funds, etc. More specifically, the expert shall possess the following profile:

Qualifications and skills:

- At least Master degree in EU Affairs, Public Policy and Management, Public Administration, or other related fields;
- PhD shall be considered an asset;

General professional experience:

- At least 10 years of professional experience working in or with the public sector and related assignments/positions;

Specific professional experience:

- At least 7 years of specific professional experience related to EU integration and accession negotiations, management of EU pre-accession assistance, regional cooperation;
- Proven experience related to development / design / delivery of capacity building programmes in the area of EU Integration;
- Prior experience in conducting analysis and needs assessment;
- Previous experience and work in the Western Balkans will be considered an advantage.

Skills:

- Strong presentation and moderation skills;
- Excellent written and oral communication skills in English;
- Ability to write clear and coherent guidance documents;
- Ability to work with people of different nationalities, religions and cultural backgrounds.

7. Reporting and Final Documentation

The Expert will be requested to deliver the following documents in the English language before the payment is conducted (for each phase):

Outputs (indicatively):

- Analytical snapshots in the relevant area, analytical papers with comments, conclusions from the meetings, inputs for the panel discussions, curricula/programme development, PPTs prepared, etc.

Documents required for payment

- Invoice (original and signed);
- Timesheet (original and signed);
- Report in English on the performed tasks.