

Europe Regional Program Summary

The collapse of authoritarian regimes across Central and Eastern Europe created a unique opportunity to increase the proportion of the world's people who live in free societies. The International Republican Institute (IRI) has worked in the region since 1989, conducting a broad range of democracy support programs. These efforts—including party training, coalition development, civic education, policy forums and governance training—have helped support emerging democratic leaders and institutions.

Launched in 1999, IRI's Regional Program continues to respond and adapt to changing circumstances in Central and Eastern Europe. In recent years, IRI has focused on developing the political potential of young leaders, political parties and their associated institutes and foundations. The Institute achieves this through a uniquely effective cross-border approach that draws upon talent from across Central and Eastern Europe.

Cross-border Approach

IRI's Regional Program continues to help consolidate gains made by democratic parties and to more firmly establish other institutions of democracy across the region. It has established itself as an important mechanism for promoting cross-border cooperation and information sharing on a broad range of issues related to institution building, political processes, policy development, government communication and citizen participation. The program also provides an important forum for meetings between political and civic leaders from the more advanced new democracies and those from countries with less developed democratic systems. Today, the Regional Program concentrates its efforts in the Balkans, where the transition to democracy has been slower and more complicated.

Support for Young Leaders

The Regional Program has instituted a regular series of “political boot camps” for up-and-coming young leaders from across the region as part of its Leadership Institute for Central and Eastern Europe (LICEE). LICEE trainings have helped school the next generation of party and elected officials in modern campaign and communications techniques. Policy conferences and workshops examine issues of concern on both sides of the Atlantic, such as the role of values in politics, the use of the Internet and new technologies in campaigns, and the critical role of women in political transitions. IRI has conducted more than twenty LICEEs over the course of the Regional Program and many of its alumni have gone on to run for and hold elected office at the local and national levels.

Building upon its successful LICEE model, the Regional Program has co-organized a series of Euro-Mediterranean Leadership Institutes (EMLI) that jointly train youth from Southeastern Europe and Turkey. The EMLI program is conducted in close partnership with the Eduardo Frei Foundation of the Netherlands, the political party foundation of the Dutch Christian Democratic Appeal. This unique cross-border initiative provides linkages between young leaders from a variety of political and cultural backgrounds in addition to the tradition LICEE curriculum.

Support for Political Parties, Foundations and Institutes

Through its European Political Party and Foundation Initiative (EPPFI), the Europe Regional Program has launched a network to assist parties in the region to establish, develop, and – where possible – expand the work of foundations and institutes that provide training and analytical support to the parties and their leadership. The Regional Program organizes regular seminars and conferences on topics such as internal political party management and skills development for candidates. In addition to the further development of the EPPFI network, IRI has also worked with EPPFI members to build their own training capacity through the establishment of a nascent Trainers Academy.

The Regional Program also serves as a focal point for IRI's interaction with western European political parties, institutions and democracy promotion foundations. Building on longstanding relationships with institutions such as the British Westminster Foundation for Democracy and the German political party foundations, the Regional Program has expanded that network by developing new partnerships with organizations such as the Austrian People's Party, the Swedish Moderate Party, the Norwegian Conservative Party, the Dutch Christian Democratic Appeal and the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, Spain's Foundation for Analysis and Social Studies, the Robert Schuman Institute, as well as the European People's Party and its new Centre for European Studies. These partnerships have led to a variety of joint conferences and workshops and helped more than 200 European politicians and experts to lend their services to IRI training missions and election observations.

