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## **CEF Marks 25 Years of Advancing Reforms and EU Integration Across South East and East Europe**

### **Regional leaders reaffirm strong institutions as the foundation of reform and resilience**

**Ministers of finance, central bank governors, and senior public officials from South East and East Europe gathered today in Skopje for the Annual Meeting of the Governing Board of the Center of Excellence in Finance (CEF), reaffirming that strong institutions are essential for advancing reforms, accelerating EU integration, and delivering results for citizens.**

The meeting brought together high-level representatives from Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The Governing Board approved the CEF Annual Report and financial statements for 2025 and reviewed future strategic and program directions of the CEF in strengthening public financial management, central banking, reform implementation, and institutional resilience across the region.

Addressing the Governing Board, Prime Minister of North Macedonia **Hristijan Mickoski** emphasized the importance of cooperation and knowledge exchange in strengthening public institutions and advancing reforms.

*“One of the greatest strengths of the CEF lies in its ability to connect institutions and people around a common goal – creating more efficient, transparent, and accountable systems of governance. In a world where challenges know no borders, no institution can have all the answers on its own. This is why partnerships, cooperation, and the exchange of experience are so important. It is precisely through platforms like this that new ideas emerge, good practices are shared, and institutions prepared for the future are built.”*

As the CEF celebrates its 25th anniversary, the meeting highlighted the organization's growing contribution to helping countries translate reform commitments into measurable progress. Since its establishment, the CEF has engaged more than 30,000 public officials, supported over 120 institutions, delivered more than 2,000 learning events. CEF-supported initiatives have contributed to stronger reform governance and EU accession efforts across the region, including support for reforms in North Macedonia linked to an estimated EUR 1.2 billion in green investments and up to 6,000 jobs, reform implementation support in Albania connected to EUR 914

million in renewable-energy investments, and assistance to Montenegro in advancing reforms that contributed to the provisional closure of EU Chapter 32 on Financial Control.

**Gordana Dimitrieska-Kochoska**, Minister of Finance of North Macedonia and outgoing Chair of the CEF Governing Board, emphasized the importance of regional cooperation in strengthening institutions and delivering reforms.

*“Strong, credible, and resilient institutions are the foundation of sustainable economic growth, fiscal stability, and successful European integration. At a time of increasing global uncertainty and rapidly changing challenges, no country can advance reforms alone. Regional cooperation, the exchange of knowledge and experience, and continuous investment in people and institutions are essential for building public sectors that can deliver results for citizens. Over the past 25 years, the CEF has shown that by learning together and working together, our countries can transform reform commitments into tangible progress, strengthen governance, and move closer to our shared European future.”*, said **Dimitrieska-Kochoska**.

The chairing of the CEF Governing Board was formally handed over to Romania. **Leonardo Badea**, First Deputy Governor of the National Bank of Romania: *“Therefore, in this complex context, the partnership relation between CEF and its members is an important platform for cooperation and joint actions. It brings together institutional expertise, the necessary resources and the capacity for specialized professional training.”*

Presenting the organization's achievements, CEF Director **Jana Repanšek** stressed that the region's progress depends not only on policy choices but on institutional capability. **Jana Repanšek**, Director of the CEF: *“EU integration is ultimately delivered by institutions. For 25 years, the CEF has helped governments build the capabilities, partnerships, and leadership needed to turn reform commitments into tangible results. Strong institutions are one of the region's most valuable assets for navigating uncertainty and sustaining progress.”*

Reflecting on the importance of regional cooperation, Montenegro's Minister of Finance **Novica Vuković** underscored the CEF's role in supporting reforms and strengthening institutional resilience across the region. *“For us, the CEF is not only a partner in strengthening knowledge and capacities, but also an important ally in building reform leadership and implementing demanding institutional reforms on the path to the European Union,”* Vuković said.

## **CEF Forum 2026: Governing in Uncertainty and Building Resilient Public Institutions**

Following the Governing Board meeting, the CEF hosted the **CEF Forum 2026: Governing in Uncertainty and Building Resilient Public Institutions**, bringing together senior policymakers, central bankers, public administration leaders, and reform practitioners to discuss how governments can continue delivering results in an increasingly complex environment.

Discussions featured high-level contributions from **Leonardo Badea**, First Deputy Governor of the National Bank of Romania; **Tina Žumer**, Vice Governor of Banka Slovenije; **Ahmet Ismaili**, Governor of the Central Bank of the Republic of Kosovo; **Goran Minchev**, Minister of Public Administration of North Macedonia; and senior representatives of public institutions from Slovakia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Greece.

The Forum focused on two key themes: leadership and decision-making under pressure, and the institutional capabilities needed to turn strategy into results. Participants agreed that resilient institutions, strong leadership, and continuous learning are essential for sustaining reforms, strengthening public trust, and advancing EU integration.

As the CEF enters its next chapter, participants reaffirmed the importance of regional cooperation in helping governments respond to increasingly complex challenges and deliver tangible benefits for citizens.

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## **Background information**

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### **Ministry of Finance, Republic of North Macedonia**

The Ministry of Finance of the Republic of North Macedonia is the central government institution responsible for managing public finances and shaping the country's fiscal and macroeconomic policies. It oversees the budget, treasury, tax and customs systems, public debt, financial sector regulation, and other areas essential to economic governance. Through sound public financial management and evidence-based policymaking, the Ministry promotes macroeconomic stability, sustainable economic growth, and improved quality of life for citizens. Guided by its vision of a knowledge-based, innovative, and sustainable economy, it plays a key role in advancing reforms and supporting the country's long-term development and European integration aspirations.

### About CEF

The Center of Excellence in Finance (CEF) is an international organization based in Ljubljana, Slovenia, serving ministries of finance, central banks, tax administrations, and other public institutions from Southeast and Eastern Europe. Established in 2001, the CEF has become a globally recognized knowledge hub supporting institutional capacity development in public financial management, central banking, and economic governance. It goes beyond training delivery by acting as a trusted learning partner helping countries align reforms with EU priorities through peer learning, collaboration, and practical knowledge transfer. The CEF empowers public officials to connect, learn, and act — transforming reforms into measurable institutional improvements.