

Interreg - IPA CBC
Greece - Republic of North Macedonia

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INTERREG IPA CBC PROGRAMME (nie-Shkup)

"GREECE – REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA 2014-2020"

5th JOINT MONITORING COMMITTEE MEETING

December 12th, 2019

Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia

Brief Minutes & Decisions

The Joint Monitoring Committee (hereinafter referred to as JMC) of the Interreg IPA Cross-Border Cooperation Programme "Greece – Republic of North Macedonia 2014-2020" convened for the 5th Joint Monitoring Committee Meeting on December 12th, 2019 in the city of Skopje of the Republic of North Macedonia, following an invitation by the Managing Authority of European Territorial Cooperation Programmes (hereinafter MA of ETCP), in agreement with the co-chairs.

The meeting started as Mr. Goran Milevski, Minister of the Ministry of Local Self Government and co-chair of the Committee welcomed the participants and expressed his wishes that the day would prove fruitful and productive.

Ms Dominic Zaralidou, who represented Ms Niki Dandolou, Special Secretary for ERDF, CF & ESF Programmes as co-chair of the Committee, also welcomed the participants and expressed her belief that the projects implemented under the auspices of the Programme are projects of particular value and quality. In addition she briefly elaborated upon the need for an economical and prudent use of the available, programmatic resources and she welcomed the Coordinator to be.

The chair then passed to Minister Milevski who, as co-chair, asked whether the agenda of the meeting was accepted by the assembly. The agenda was accepted without changes and the Minister then announced that the quorum was achieved as the meeting was attended by thirteen (13) members with voting right (from both countries), in line with the attached list of participants and informed the members to declare any conflict of interest if there is such. No conflict of interest was declared.

The presentations were delivered by the Managing Authority and the Joint Secretariat, as foreseen in the Agenda.

The MA/JS then proceeded with the following presentations and according to the approved agenda:

1. Project's Implementation, presented by JS Officer Mr. Zhupan Martinovsky
2. Financial Flows, Payment Claims & N+3 Rule, presented JS Financial Officer Mr. George Papapostolou,
3. Performance Framework, presented by Mr. Nikolaos Chatzisavvas, MA Programme Officer.
4. JS Support to final Beneficiaries, presented by JS Officer Mr. Naxhi Ismaili,

5. Follow-up: Potential Strategic project for the opening of the Prespes border crossing point, presented by the Head of the Unit B1 of the MA ETCP, Mr. Alexandros Samaras,
6. Information on the 2nd Call for Proposals & Application Package, presented by JS Officer Ms. Konstantina Koullali,
7. Information & Publicity, presented by Mrs. Eleftheria Votsari, JS Communication & Technical Assistance Officer
8. Activities of the Antenna office, presented by Mr. Adnan Emîni, JS Antenna Officer.

On the presentation regarding the N+3 rule Ms. Panagiota Mavria, of the National Coordination Authority, remarked that, even though the N+3 goal for 2020 appeared indeed achievable, the Managing Authority and Joint Secretariat should take the appropriate measures in order to ensure that in the years to come the goal would also be equally attainable, as the rate of fund absorption needed to be increased significantly.

On the Presentation regarding the JS' support on the final beneficiaries Ms. Zaralidou commended the Joint Secretariat's effort to provide efficient assistance to the Beneficiaries.

On the presentation regarding the potential strategic project Mr. Samaras concluded his presentation by remarking on the fact that technical issues not initially observed had caused unavoidable delays and that the project was running the risk of not being functional by the end of the eligibility period.

Co-chair Ms. Zaralidou questioned the speaker on the steps needed to be taken in order to ensure that such risk was avoided.

Mr. Samaras elaborated on the fact that the project needed to mature and for the common expert committee to be established.

Ms. Aggeliki Bouziani, Head of the Managing Authority of ETCP commented that the complexity and level of maturity of the project was such that to exactly pin-point the state-of-play of the Project was difficult.

Mr. Bertolini Nikola of the EU Delegation in Skopje commented that the project needed to set realistic deadlines and that it represented a project of significant importance for the cross-border region. Furthermore the representative of the Delegation elaborated that the project needed to enjoy a succinct and achievable road-map and expressed the opinion that, given the satisfaction of said conditions, the project would be achievable in the available time, i.e. until the 31st of December 2023.

Mr. Giacinti Karl of the EU Delegation in Skopje commented that the Project needed to set realistic deadlines and that it represented a project of significant importance for the cross-border region. Furthermore the representative of the Delegation elaborated that the project needed to enjoy a succinct and achievable road-map and expressed the opinion that, all conditions can be met, and the Project would be achievable in the available time, i.e. until the 31st of December 2023.

He also stressed the need for more effective coordination and cooperation among the potential beneficiaries of the project in order for them to conclude as soon as possible the final requirements.

Mr. Samaras commented that the intricacies of the project could not be easily addressed or dismissed. The current EU legal status for the Schengen area and the relevant national procedures should be fully respected during the planning of the project. Given the complexity of the requirements, an appropriate amount of time and technical support should be allocated in order to efficiently deal with technical and environmental issues and permission.

Mr. Georgios Emmanouel of the Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reconstruction of Greece took the stand and commented on the issue that the committee of experts will be meeting in January 2020. To that end he called upon every stakeholder present to facilitate the committee's work, while expressing his

organization's intent and willingness to cooperate on the issue inasmuch as was needed in order to carry out the project. To that end, he proposed that this project should become a bridge project, spilling over into the next programming period.

Mr. Dimitrios Gertsos, Project Officer of the MA of ETCP, remarked on the issue that the environmental issue alone represented an important problématique that needed to be addressed with the necessary earnestness since the Prespes ecosystem was characterized by unique complexity and delicacy. To that effect, he elaborated that EU Directives regarding Smart Borders and other, relevant legislation regarding the protection of the area should be respected and adhered to.

Ms. Bouziani remarked that it is essential that the project maintained, in all stages of implementation, its cross-border identity while Minister Milevski remarked that the interventions planned on the side of the Republic of North Macedonia were more modest in scope.

Mr. Dimitrios Voulgarakis of the Economic and Social Council – Greece remarked that it was clear that the project was desired by all parties involved and that they remained dedicated in the implementation effort.

Mr. Dimitar Mitrevski of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs contributed that even though they remain close observers of the procedures, the primary implementation effort remains with the Ministry of Local Self Government and other, relevant authorities. In addition, the representative of the Ministry expressed the notion that the project's fruition would benefit the cross-border, local populations substantially and posed the question whether additional funds could be secured by the Programme, to which Ms. Bouziani replied that the funds already allocated by the Programme could not be enriched further.

On that point, co-chair Ms. Zaralidou intervened and stated that decisions on policy and policy-making do not fall within the purpose and scope of the Committee and

asserted that the discussion concerns only the possibility and the functionality of the project.

After the Ms Zaralidou remark, the Mayors of the cross-border region of the Municipality of Resen of the Republic of North Macedonia & the Municipality of Prespas in Greece both took the stand in order to emphasize their willingness to cooperate and to verify the importance of the project for the local, cross-border populations.

On that note Mr. Giantsis for the Region of Central Macedonia also remarked that the requirements set by the European Union and the complexities imposed by the environmental issues introduced an added level of complexity.

Mr. Vasilis Ambas, on behalf of the Region of Western Macedonia, also contributed that he agreed with the notion put forward that the project be distinguished in two (2) stages, with the option of the 2nd stage being implemented in the next programming period.

On that note, Ms. Nadine Lakhel of the European Commission Territorial Cooperation Unit (B1) Directorate General Regional Policy remarked that, indeed, a succinct road-map should be established in order to prioritize future actions accordingly.

Lastly, Ms Elouziani remarked regarding the issue that an external expert could be assigned to further assist with the project and on that note Minister and co-chair Mr. Milevski called for a completion of talks regarding the issue.

Following the above, on behalf of the MA/JS Mr. Samaras informed the JMC on the begin and end dates of the 2nd call of Proposals and proposed that the JMC approved the Project Implementation Manual regarding the 2nd Call of Proposals, with all adjustments made for that purpose, and any other, relevant, call documentation.

Following the discussions, the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) decided unanimously to:

- The JMC acknowledged all the presentations and were duly informed about their content
- Approved the Project Implementation Manual and the relevant call documentation and technical adjustments.
- The JMC was informed regarding the preparatory activities and the planning of the strategic project of the Prespas Crossing Point. It will examine the project scope, management and execution proposal of the project when the potential beneficiaries partner scheme will conclude their works. The MA/JS will continue facilitating the procedure of project planning.

The Joint Monitoring Committee authorizes the MA/JS to proceed with all of above and to take the necessary actions.

This document is signed digitally by the two co-chairpersons.

**The Co-Chairpersons
of the Joint Monitoring Committee**

Chair
Mr. Goran Milevski

Co-chair
Ms. Dominic Zaralidou

Ministry of Local Self Government Co-

Ministry of Development and Investment

Attachments:

1. Agenda of the 5th Joint Monitoring Committee Meeting
2. Participants' list of the 5th Joint Monitoring Committee Meeting