

INTERREG IPA CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION
PROGRAMME "GREECE – REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA 2021-2027"

2nd PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE MEETING

MAY 31, 2021

Brief Minutes & Decisions

The Programme is co-funded by the European Union and national funds of the participating countries

The Programming Committee (hereinafter referred to as PC) of the Interreg IPA Cross-Border Cooperation Programme "Greece-Republic of North Macedonia 2021-2027" convened for its 2nd Meeting on May 31, 2021, via teleconference, following an invitation by the Managing Authority of European Territorial Cooperation Programmes (hereinafter MA of ETCP).

Mr. Zoran Dimitrovski, Deputy Minister of Local Self- Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, acting Chair of the PC, initially welcomed the participants, thanked the EC representatives, as well as the representatives of both countries and wished a fruitful 2nd Programming Committee Meeting. He expressed the readiness and desire of the partner country to conclude the 2014-2020 period with achieved indicators and continue the successful cooperation in the new Programming period.

The floor was then passed to the Co-Chair Mr. Giorgos Zervos, Special Secretary for ERDF & CF Programmes, Hellenic Ministry of Development and Investments, who highlighted the importance of the potential strategic project in Prespa's area and its added value in the macro-region. He explained that the feasibility and maturity studies of this project will be financed by the current 2014-2020 Programme and the outcome will be capitalized in the next period, when its actual implementation will start.

Ms Klaudia Feurle, Programme Manager at DG for Regional Policy and Urban Policy of the European Commission, took the floor and informed the participants that the regulatory package will be adopted by the end of June 2021. The SFC will be ready in the beginning of August the soonest. However, the 2021-2027 Cooperation Programme can be unofficially submitted earlier to the European Commission for comments. The adoption of the Implementing Regulations (which cover geography and budget) is planned for September 2021. The adoption of the Implementing Regulation of the IPA Multi-Annual Strategy Framework agreement is planned for October 2021. She mentioned that despite the aforementioned time-schedule for legislative adoption Programmes can and should be prepared as much as possible and she mentioned that the IPA fund will either match the ERDF fund or be slightly higher. Furthermore, Ms. Feurle mentioned that the programme development can and should go ahead even without knowing the exact amount of the IPA fund.

Ms Aggeliki Bouziani, Head of the MA of ETCP declared that quorum is achieved in the PC meeting and the Agenda is approved.

Mr. Alexandros Samaras, Head of Unit B1 of the Managing Authority, presented information on the previous PC meeting and its results and then Mr. Nikos Chatzissavvas, Programme officer in Unit B1, presented the current state of play and in particular the 2nd Deliverable (Territorial analysis & Public Consultation) of the external expert for the drafting of the new Programme, as well as the proposed Programme Strategy.

Mr. Anastasios Zafiridis, representative of the Hellenic Ministry of Interior (sector Macedonia – Thrace) intervened and supported the potential strategic project for the opening of the new border crossing point in the Prespa area in Policy Objective (PO) 3 and also mentioned that this project should be included in the strategic projects of the next period.

Ms. Mathilde Konstantopoulou, associate of the Special Secretary from the Hellenic Ministry of Development & Investments, following Mr. Chatzisavvas' presentation, agreed and supported the selection of the POs that will constitute the Priority Axes (PAs) of the future Programme. In addition she proposed the ISO 1: A better Cooperation Governance to be selected for the new Programme.

Then, Ms. Sofche Krstikj from the Secretariat of European Affairs (SEA) commented that –under the IPA III National Programme 2020-21- there is the "EU for Prespa" project in which 930.000,00€ funds are secured for the building of the border crossing point, in the side of the Republic of North Macedonia. During the past months, the Customs Administration worked intensively to achieve its maturity by preparing the technical documentation. The building permit will be issued by the end of year 2021 and in 2022 the project implementation will start. In parallel, and given the latest developments of the potential strategic project in the IPA CBC Programme, SEA will pursue further communication with DEU in Skopje in order to find the most suitable solution for the strategic project. In this respect, she noted that a joint discussion between SEA, MA and DEU is necessary.

Ms. Aggeliki Bouziani (later at the meeting) agreed on this joint discussion and guaranteed that all pre-actions of the Prespa's strategic project will be discussed in the Monitoring Committee 2014-2020 and the Programming Committee will be fully informed. She underlined that coordination is necessary to avoid double-financing of actions.

Mr. Nicola Bertolini from the Delegation of European Union in Skopje (later at the meeting) explained in detail that the 930.000,00€ funds from the "EU for Prespa" project will exclusively cover the building in the crossing-point in the side of the Republic of North Macedonia. Its construction could start in 2022. There are surely other infrastructure components, the water & sewage linkage, electricity, the asphalt road connecting the two sides and the police station building rehabilitation that can be financed by the Interreg IPA CBC Programme. The DEU in Skopje welcomes any joint meeting and is ready to coordinate and align its actions to the potential strategic CBC project.

Ms. Klaudia Feurle commented that in relation to PO4, it is important that the territorial analysis also includes information about this sector/policy areas. Regarding Interreg Specific Objective 1 (ISO1), she mentioned that the EC strongly recommends its use as it would be a way to strengthen not only the capacity of the MA but would be also particularly critical for the enlargement agenda of North Macedonia. ISO1 would be very much of advantage for the whole programme. She pointed the difference between

ISO1 and Technical Assistance (TA) by saying that "Technical Assistance is to make the cooperation programme work, to ensure better programme management. The TA is for programme authorities and partners to enable programme partners to attend the MC or to enable programme partners to take part in tasks of the MC. ISO1 is for better cooperation governance. ISO1 is a policy objective to make cooperation work. It is for better cooperation projects, it is for the (potential) beneficiaries, to support project partners to cooperate, to support project partners to prepare projects in substance. In 2021-2027, TA will be reimbursed on the basis of flat rate of eligible expenses. While ISO1 is on the governments and for the beneficiaries, TA is basically for the Programming Authorities". Concerning the inclusion of Kozani, she underlined that the consent of both countries is a prerequisite for this issue.

Ms. Mathilde Konstantopoulou, reassured that all decisions are definitely taken in common and this practice will continue in the next Programming period, as well. She continued that the ISO1 is closely linked to the EUSAIR macro-region, in which both countries belong to, and that it will help to enhance the EUSAIR priorities into the new Cooperation Programme and therefore, proposes to include ISO1 into the Programme".

Next, Ms. Aggeliki Bouziani confirmed that there was no objection by any PC member and she announced that PO2, PO3, PO4 and inclusion of ISO1 are adopted unanimously. She continued that due to the limited Programme budget in the next period, it is not wise to have numerous Priority Axes and cross-cutting themes should be sought. Nevertheless, the inclusion and the shaping of the adopted Policy Objectives in the Priority Axes will be elaborated and presented in the 3rd PC meeting. Thereafter, she confirmed that there was no objection by any PC member regarding the inclusion of Kozani in the Programme geography.

Mr. Alexandros Samaras concluded that the unknown and reduced Programme budget for the 2021-2027 period is a constraint factor, but the partner countries need to achieve more with less available funds,

Then the representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia Mr. Dimitar Mitrevski, took the floor and revisited an issue that was initially brought up at the 7th JMC meeting on March 19, 2021. In short, he requested that the denomination of both partner countries is alike. He explained that the Programme name (as such and in the visual logo) should either be "Hellenic Republic – Republic of North Macedonia" or "Greece – North Macedonia". Moreover, he referred to the Commission's practice, where the constitutional (long) name (Republic of North Macedonia) is mentioned once in the beginning of a document and all subsequent times the short name (North Macedonia) is used. He set the argument that the principle of equality should be respected and the European Commission's practice on the issue should be followed. In the same manner, he continued that the adjective "Macedonian" should be used for the language and the citizens. However, the adjectival reference to the State, its official organs, and other public entities shall be in line with the

official name or its short name, that is "of the Republic of North Macedonia" or "of North Macedonia".

Ms. Mathilde Konstantopoulou clarified that when referring to the citizens/nationality, then the official reference is "citizen of the Republic of North Macedonia". However, as regards the language and all these name issues concerned, she continued that the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs will be consulted and the Monitoring Committee will be informed accordingly..

Ms. Aggeliki Bouziani stated that the M.A. will follow the instructions provided by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the two countries.

Ms. Klaudia Feurle confirmed once again the European Commission's practice on the denomination of the partner country and that this practice also needs to be applied by the programme in all the programme related documents, latest for the new programme 2021-27.

Following the discussions, the Programming Committee (PC) decided unanimously to approve the following for the new IPA CBC Programme 2021-2027:

1. Adoption of Policy Objectives (POs):
 - PO 2: Greener Europe
 - PO 3: More Connected Europe
 - PO 4: More Social Europe
 - ISO 1: A better Cooperation Governance
2. Selection of Thematic Objectives:
 - Strategic focus in Prespas area
 - Transition to a low carbon economy
 - Conservation of Habitats and biodiversity and protection of the Natural Environment and Cross Border Assets
 - Upgrade of Health and Social Services
3. Programme Geography : Inclusion of Kozani, as part of the PRG Functional Area

**The Co-Chairpersons
of the Programming Committee**

Acting Chair
Mr. Zoran Dimitrovski

Co-Chair
Mr. Giorgos Zervos

Deputy Minister of Local Self
Government

Special Secretary for ERDF & CF
Programmes
Ministry of Development and
Investments

Attachments:

1. Agenda of the 2nd Programming Committee Meeting
2. List of participants
3. Presentations