

**INTERREG IPA III CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION
PROGRAMME "GREECE – ALBANIA 2021-2027"**

**2nd PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE
ONLINE MEETING**

1 March 2021

Brief Minutes & Decisions

The Programming Committee (hereinafter referred to as PC) of the Interreg III IPA Cross-Border Cooperation Programme "Greece-Albania 2021-2027" convened for its 2nd Meeting on March 1st, 2021, via teleconference, following an invitation by the Hellenic Managing Authority of European Territorial Cooperation Programmes (hereinafter MA of ETCP).

Ms. Tushaj, Head of the Programming Unit of the Albanian Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, who is Chair of the Committee, welcomed the participants, the representatives from the Albanian and the Greek side and wished a fruitful 2nd Programming Committee Meeting.

Ms. Konstantopoulou, Advisor for European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) Special Secretariat for ERDF & CF Programmes of the Ministry of Development & Investments, who is co-Chair of the Committee, welcomed the participants on her turn and conveyed the regards of the Special Secretary Mr. G. Zervos who wished us a fruitful meeting

Ms. Angeliki Bouziani, Head of the MA of ETCP welcomed the members of the PC and wished a successful meeting.

Ms. Sagona, Head of Unit B2 of the MA of ETCP, welcomed the members as well and proposed to start with the first presentation of the agenda.

The floor was then passed to Mr. Charitantis who presented the state of play of the Interreg IPA III CBC Programme Greece-Albania 2021-2027.

After the first presentation the floor was passed to Ms. Soulioti, external consultant for the drafting of the new programme, who presented the 2nd deliverable: '*Analysis - Consultation phase*' - Report.

The 2nd deliverable summarized the results of the analysis, research and consultation activities carried out in the framework of drafting of the new Programme Strategy. The aim of the report was to provide the required information and conclusions which will formulate the strategy of the new "Greece-Albania 2021-2027" Programme, which will be included in the 1st Chapter of the new Programming document. The report included five chapters. Annex 1 of the report includes the Programme strategy (Chapter 1) formulated from the analysis conducted in the current Deliverable.

Ms. Tushaj proposed to start the discussion about the first part of the 2nd deliverable -which is the report- and then continue with the presentation of Annex 1 of the report, which includes the Programme strategy.

Ms. Lenoel, EC representative, stressed the importance of the cross-border Programme, and stated that the European Commission intends to maximize the allocations of the IPA III Greece-Albania Programme. She also said that the whole package of the Interreg regulation (CPR included) is expected to be approved in summer 2021 (June-July). Two Implementing Acts, the list of the Programme areas and the allocation of funds per Programme will be also issued.

Ms. Sagona asked clarification from the representative of EC about the changes on the geography of the programme that identified in the letter of EC . More analytically she mentioned that in the proposed Interreg III IPA CBC Greece Albania 2021-2027: a) the regional units of Arta and Preveza have been merged into one unit, b) all NUTS III codes for Greece have been changed (in comparison to the 2014-2020 period), c) the regional unit of Grevena is absent, and d) the Regional Unit of Kozani has not been included, even though an official letter was sent from the MA to the EU on 15th of December 2020 after the decision of the Programming Committee for the inclusion of Kozani in the eligible area.

Ms. Lenoel, answered that there are indeed changes in the coding in the 2021-2027 period (which are reflected in the letter sent by the EC) and that the observations on the proposed geography is part of the dialogue that has started with the participating countries.

Ms. Bouziani pointed out that with the abovementioned letter, the Commission requests Member States to confirm or comment on the geographical coverage of Interreg programmes in which they will be participating. The members of the Programming Committee will decide on the final geography of the Programme and the decision of PC will be communicated to EC. Also she expects from the European Commission to dedicate increased IPA funds for the Greece-Albania programme in the new programming period more than ERDF funds.

Ms. Tushaj stated that she is not against the incorporation of the regional unit of Kozani in the new eligible area, and in order the Programme area to balance she proposed to also include the Region of Fieri in Albania, as eligible area of the new Programme.

Ms. Konstantopoulou took the floor and said that the Albanian National Authority should provide information regarding the description of the proposed area of Fieri (location, population, activities), in order for the PC to decide on its inclusion in the eligible area of the new programme.

Mr. Kapodistrias from the Region of Ionian islands, stressed that there should be a generous increase in allocation of resources for the new programming period. He also spoke about the issue of translation.

Ms Kalliopi Tesia, representative of the Region of Epirus, suggested that the allocation of funds regarding the new programming period should be as high as possible. Also she asked clarification of the EC about the the merging issue of the two regional units of Arta and Preveza, that belong to the Region of Epirus.

Moreover, Ms. Konstantopoulou stated that the relevant allocation will be few millions less than the current programming period (which was 18 millions), due to the overall reduction of the funds allocated for the ETC programmes for the

period 2021-2027. She continued by saying that the budget -ERDF funds- of the new Greece - Albania programme is under internal consultation. The Ministry of Development and Investments tries to do the best with the national part of the financing. The final amount will be communicated to EC on the 5th of March 2021 via an official letter.

Ms. Soulioti, external consultant for the drafting of the new Programme, continued with the presentation of the second part of the 2nd deliverable: 'Analysis - Consultation phase', which was about the Programme strategy (Annex 1- Programme Strategy).

After the presentation Ms. Konstantopoulou took the floor and wondered that four priority axes (PAs) are too many for a small Programme and proposed to merge two of them in order to decrease the number of PAs and facilitate the future management and implementation of the programme.

Ms. Tushaj also commented on the big number of PAs, the need to see again the fourth PA (Interreg Specific Objective), and that the merging of appropriate specific objectives within POs could be reviewed.

Mr. Papadopoulos agreed that four PAs are too many, and that a smart solution should be found so as to have an impact on the projects. Regarding Policy Objective 2 and 3 (PO2, PO3), he stressed out its importance for the Programme taking into consideration the implementation of the projects of the current programming period. Two (2) labelled under the EUSAIR projects are implemented in the current programming period and is a very good opportunity to examine the possibility to include the next phase of these projects in the new programming period. As far as the allocation of Funds, it is true that the initial ERDF allocation for the programme of the current programming period was 18 million euros, but we incorporated another 5 million from the Greece-Turkey programme. That's why the overall budget of the programme is now more than 54 million.

Ms Bouziani proposed the continuation, in the next programming period, of the projects related to connectivity (Railway connection between the two countries and vertical road axes of Egnatia from Igoumenitsa to Mavromati - within PO3). Furthermore, she proposed to send an official letter to both National Authorities regarding the identification of named projects, which can be included into the programme.

Ms. Lenoel clarified that, in principle, one PA is related to one PO, and that as far as PO3 is concerned, we should draw the attention to cross border obstacles (and participate in the related survey). If two PO are to be consolidated in one PA, it is necessary to take into account the scope of the POs.

Ms. Papachatzopoulou from the Ministry of Environment, stated that national strategies already exist, for example on biodiversity, as well as other documents concerning environmental and energy issues.

Ms. Katerina Koutsianou, on behalf of the Region of Western Macedonia, said that they would like to thank the Managing Authority for the excellent justification and try to incorporate the regional unit of Kozani in the new eligible area. She continued by saying that they are a region in economic activity transition due to the reduction of the lignite mining activity. So extra funds are needed to strengthen the local economy as much as possible.

Ms Bouziani mentioned that we need the reflection of the members of the PC regarding the incorporation of the region of Fieri as eligible area of the new Programme.

Ms. Tesia agreed in principal with the participation of the Region of Fieri and asked for the necessary data to be provided. Regarding the inclusion of nominated projects in the programme, the agreement of the PC's voting members will have to be given.

Mr. Kapodistrias agreed.

Mr. Ignatiadis from the Greek Exporters Association stated his positive opinion on the inclusion of the Kozani area.

Decisions - Conclusions

1. The 2nd deliverable: 'Analysis - Consultation phase' – Report, is approved by the PC.
2. The 2nd deliverable: 'Analysis - Consultation phase' – Annex 1- Programme Strategy, is approved by the PC. As far as the Priority Axes of the new programming document are concerned the consultant will elaborate a new proposal after the proposals for merging PO's in a PA
3. The Albanian National Authority will send to the MA by the 2nd or 3rd of March 2021, the justification letter about the region of Fier. Afterwards it will be sent to the Programming Committee for the final decision about the inclusion of the new Albanian Region. The reply letter to the EC will reflect the decisions of Programming Committee on the geography of the programme.
4. There is approval by the members of the PC on the incorporation of the regional unit of Kozani in the new eligible area.
5. The next PC meeting will be held in May 2021.
6. The submission of the new Programming document to the EC services, will take place after the finalisation and approval of the related Regulation.
7. An official letter to both National Authorities regarding the identification of named projects, which can be included into the programme will be send by the Managing Authority

At the end of PC meeting, brief Minutes and Decisions were drafted by the MA/JS.

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

Chair

Ms Brunilda Tushaj

Co-Chair

Ms Mathilde Konstantopoulou

Head of Unit
Programming Unit

Albanian Ministry for Europe and
Foreign Affairs

Advisor for European Territorial
Cooperation (ETC)
Special Secretariat for ERDF & CF
programmes
Ministry of Development & Investments

Attachments:

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