

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

**3rd PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE
ONLINE MEETING**

28 May 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 3rd Meeting on May 28th ,2021, via teleconference, following an invitation by the Hellenic Managing Authority of European Territorial Cooperation Programmes (hereinafter MA of ETCP).

Ms. Angeliki Bouziani, Head of the MA of ETCP welcomed the members of the PC and wished a successful meeting. She also informed the PC that Mr. Zervos due to an emergency circumstance would not be able to attend the meeting and that she was authorised (by Mr. Zervos) to represent the Special Secretariat for ERDF & CF Programmes of the Ministry of Development & Investments, as Chair of the Committee, for the works of today's (3rd) meeting.

Ms. Brunilda Tushaj, Head of the Programming Unit of the Albanian Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, who is Co-Chair of the PC, welcomed the participants, the representatives from the Albanian and the Greek side and wished a fruitful 3rd Programming Committee meeting.

Ms. Magali Lenoel, EC representative, welcomed the participants and said that the new regulatory package [including the ETC regulation] is expected to be adopted by the end of June. By that time, the SFC model will be also ready for the submission of the new Programmes [*Update – SFC module will not be available before August 2021*]. She informed the participants regarding the Interact event, -which will take place on 1 June 2021 online- concerning the 2021-2027 regulatory framework and Interreg IPA: strategic orientations and policy discussion, and encouraged the managing authority, national authority and joint technical secretariat them to join the event. Additionally, Ms. Lenoel stressed the fact that MA/JS should accelerate the work on the new Programme.

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

The floor was then passed to Mr. Charitantis, officer of Unit B2 of the MA, who presented the state of play of the Interreg IPA III CBC Programme Greece-Albania 2021-2027.

After the first presentation Ms. Bouziani sought information on the IPA funds and said that the MA should know the dates regarding the financial data of the Programme's funds.

Ms. Lenoel replied that the Implementing Acts that cover budget themes are most likely to be approved in September 2021, but the new Programmes can be submitted, via SFC, as soon as the main Regulations are adopted. In addition, IPA CBC programmes should be in line with the IPA multi-annual strategy framework document to be adopted in the course of the autumn 2021. Regarding the budget of the new Programme, she said that the IPA (Albanian) share will at least match the ERDF (Greek) share probably be a little bit more (few percentages more), that this cannot compensate for the fall in the total budget of the new Programme in comparison to the current budget. She ended by saying that she could not be more specific for the IPA envelope, as it is correlated with the completion of the respective ERDF one. Indeed, as already indicated to the MA last April, the Commission has been collecting information and comments from Member States as to the proposed geography of programmes, and their ERDF allocations to the different ETC strands and individual programmes. Once the definite ERDF allocations to strands and programmes are known, the Commission will proceed with proposing IPA allocation per programme.

Ms. Bouziani took the floor to reply that feedback from the EC is essential in order to speed up the drafting of the new Programme, that the Programme cannot be submitted without knowing the budget, and that even two or three million euros more is very significant for the specific Programme. She asked whether the recent reply letter from the EC reflects only the Greek part, as nothing is mentioned about the Fier region.

Ms. Lenoel replied that the letter was addressed to the Greek part of the Programme and that a separate letter will be sent to the Albanian authorities. *[Update on 14.06.2021 - The Commission's position regarding the Albanian part of the programme will be included in the second reply to the Greek authorities on the geography for ETC programmes.]*

Ms. Brunilda Tushaj asked when the letter will be expected to arrive.

The answer (from Ms. Lenoel) was soon, but firstly she needs to check for it.

Mr. George Papadopoulos, Coordinator of JS, expressed his disappointment for the EC reply regarding the IPA funds, asked to know the percentages of the IPA amounts, described the characteristics of the disadvantaged area of the GR-AL Programme and encouraged them to strengthen their efforts.

Ms. Lenoel replied that preparation works may take place (1) on the basis of the assumptions that are already known i.e. the ERDF part of the programme allocation (with IPA part at least matching) and (2) taking into account the multi-annual strategy framework for IPA which is already finalised. Other IPA CBC programmes face the same uncertainty (in terms of IPA allocation) yet the Commission has already received mature drafts from other IPA CBC programmes.

The floor was then passed to Ms. Alexandra Soulioti, external consultant for the drafting of the new programme, who presented the 3rd deliverable: 'Analysis – 2nd Consultation phase' and first draft (Draft 1) of the Chapters of the new Programme. The 3rd deliverable contains the first draft of the chapters of the new Programme and a report which summarises the results of the analysis, research and consultation activities carried out in the framework of the 2nd Consultation phase for the drafting of the new Programme's final strategy. The two main topics which will be elaborated and decisions need to be taken are:

- 1) the selection of Policy Objective 5 and the aspects for the development of a territorial strategy or the selection of Policy Objective 4 and the specific objective "Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation", and;
- 2) the selection of Interreg Specific Objective 1 "A better cooperation governance" as a separate Priority Axis in the Programme Strategy.

Ms Lenoel explained that tourism related actions can be supported under the specific objective 4.5 of Policy Objective 4 which aims at enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation. PO 5 is a new type of Policy Objective for this programming period. It is linked to a territory (functional approach). In addition, it gives programmes the opportunity to have a more ambitious, holistic/integrated approach i.e. to tackle tourism from different angles (i.e. transport, bio-diversity etc.). Also, it has a 'bottom-up' dimension and requires the involvement of local authorities, stakeholders and civil society. Interact has organised several workshops to assist with the preparation of the territorial strategy. The European Commission is also available for other meetings. It is important to dedicate enough time to the prepare of the territorial strategy which should meet the criteria set up in Article 28 (1) Common Provisions Regulation i.e. (1) geographical area covered by the strategy; (2) an analysis of the development needs/potential of the area (3) a description of an integrated approach to address those needs/potential as well as (4) a description of the involvement of partners. The development of the strategy as such can be funded from ISO 1.

Ms. Koutsianou Katerina, on behalf of the Region of Western Macedonia, mentioned that they fully agree with Mr. Papadopoulos. The Region of Western Macedonia is a poor region in a situation of a coal transition. They need all the support to be able to face the problems, economic, social ones, that have already procured. All the above should be taken into serious consideration. Besides, she expressed many thanks to the MA for all the efforts for including Kozani to the programming area. Additionally, Ms. Koutsianou, voted for Policy Objective 4 which covers their already recognised basic needs. In this stage they don't think they have enough time for a new strategy. Too ambitious!

Ms. Iosif Lila, on behalf of the Ministry of Tourism in Greece, suggested PO4 to be selected, because they believed the role of culture and sustainable tourism development is of high importance, is one of the Ministry's priorities and goes along with EUSAR Pillar 4 Flagships.

Mr. Plessas Dionisios, on behalf of the Region of Ionian Islands, agreed also for PO4 to be selected.

Ms. Lenoel on the issue of Technical Assistance mentioned that it would be reimbursed on the basis of flat rate of the eligible expenses. So there should be no separate priority axis on TA in the new Programme.

Ms. Mariela Alickolli, from the Regional Council of Korça, on behalf of the Head of the region, agreed on Policy Objective 4 'A more social Europe' Enhancing the role of Culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation".

Mr. Konstantinos Vlachos: "Integrated territorial investment ('ITI') that will be implemented under PO5 may also receive support from other POs and several Programmes. Given this, in my view, the Programme could have the opportunity to contribute to existing or future ITI strategies adopted within the participating regions of this Program, which involve investments in culture/ tourism projects. Could Mrs Lenoel confirm this?"

Ms. Lenoel confirmed that they could contribute to an ITI under PO 5 according to Article 24 Integrated territorial investment 1. Where a strategy implemented in accordance with Article 23 involves investments that receive support from one or more Funds than one Fund, from more than one programme or from more than one priority of the same programme, actions may be carried out as an 'ITI'.

Ms. Tesia, on behalf of Region of Epirus, said that clarifications are needed on developing a territorial strategy.

Ms. Sagona added that according to the results of the consultation, the sustainable tourism and culture shown as major priority in the eligible area. Therefore, it is better the aforementioned needs to be covered under the umbrella of the PO4 than the PO5, that different types of actions could be implemented in a specific identified functional area. Also the experience from other Cooperation Programmes shows that the field of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development are linked with PO4. The final decision is, of course, up to the PC members.

Ms. Tushaj referred on the state of play of the territorial analysis on both sides of the Programme and that PO4 can cover more or less the same needs. More information is needed, however, for the PC members in order to reach a decision.

Ms. Bouziani strongly recommended for PO4 and suggested to the PC members to go for a written procedure in order to decide on PO4 versus PO5.

Ms. Lenoel then referred to the European Code of Conduct on Partnership with a specific emphasis on transparency. In that context, it was pointed out that the information on the web page of the programme regarding the new programming period 2021-2027 is limited and sometimes outdated. We understand that the public consultation was sent by the MA to a number of entities. Unfortunately, the link to the consultation on the website is missing. Ms Lenoel also asked whether any spontaneous feedback had been received. It was also noted that the Albanian participation in the workshop was limited and Ms Lenoel asked what actions had been taken to increase their participation. Ms Lenoel also invited the MA to get inspiration from other programmes which include on their respective website a much more comprehensive list of documents that can be consulted by stakeholders such as: rules of procedure, documents discussed during programming task forces, consultations of stakeholders, territorial analysis, information on the timeline and preparation of the programme, preparations for the Strategic Environmental Assessment etc. By way of example, she noted that the territorial analysis discussed at the last programming committee was not yet available on the website. Therefore, she invited the MA to improve the transparency with regards to the work of the Programme Committee in order to allow wider participation of stakeholders.

Commenting on the possible selection of PO4 by the PC members, Ms Lenoel emphasised that when assessing the programmes, the Commission will pay particular attention to the intervention logic. This means that the summary of the socio-economic analysis supports the choice of policy objectives, specific objectives and related types of actions. There should be a clear link between the identified needs and the proposed actions. On indicators, Ms Lenoel reiterated the call to use common indicators wherever possible as well as indicators which capture the cross-border dimension. This is necessary in order to aggregate data from different programmes on the Open Data Platform and improve the 'narrative' on the results achieved by Interreg programmes.

Mr. George Papadopoulos took the floor and agreed that the issue under discussion (decision on PO4 vs PO5) should better be arranged via a written procedure.

Ms. Tesia referred to Specific Objective 1.3 on 'Promoting access to water and sustainable water management' and how did it derive from the results of the 2nd consultation phase, asked for clarifications and proposed another one output indicator for Priority Axis 1.

Discussion on the water management topic followed, as well as on the specific output indicators that should be included.

Ms. Bouziani told the PC members that we all agree on Priority Axes 1 and 2, for actions on sustainable tourism and culture, that serve recognised needs and are included in PO5, can be addressed by PO4 as well, and that Interreg

Specific Objective 1 can be seen as a cross-cutting theme on all policy objectives.

Ms. Sagona added that taking into consideration all the discussion among the PC's members, a justification letter will be prepared by MA and will be sent to the PC members explaining all the arguments for the inclusion of the PO4 instead of PO5. Moreover in the same justification letter will be explained how the ISO1 will be incorporated as cross cutting issue to the other PAs of the Programme

Ms. Tushaj agreed the same suggestion for the ISO1, to be as crosscutting issue that could be in support in the POs Activities and PAs. Given this, we will not need an allocation for one PA, but it would be better for this allocation to be distributed to existing PAs.

Ms. Tushaj proposed that discussion on the percentages of the budget to be allocated in each Priority Axis should be initiated, given that there are no data on figures.

Ms. Koutsianou, from Region of Western Macedonia, agreed with the non-inclusion of ISO 1 in the Programme's final Strategy. "We see no need for us ISO1 to be a separate PA. We already have a lot PAs. Maybe it can be included in an existing PA".

On ISO 1, Ms Lenoel emphasised that the objective is to reduce administrative and legal obstacles, to build knowledge and trust across borders, to enhance institutional capacity, support civil society, support implementation. It also aims at supporting the dialogue between both sides of the borders through studies, concrete actions, pilot projects, exchange of experiences, people to people projects. ISO 1 can also support the preparation of the territorial strategy for PO 5.

Ms. Lenoel took note of the date communicated by the managing authority indicating that a draft of the new Programme would be sent to the EC before 15/09/2021. She also, encouraged the MA/JS to accelerate the work and reminded the PC members to participate in the Interact seminar.

Decisions - Conclusions

1. A Report - Justification letter will be prepared concerning the Priority Axes of the new programming document on: a) which actions from Interreg Specific Objective 1 can be integrated and served through the other three Policy Objectives of the Programme, and b) a description, advantages and disadvantages, and specific characteristics from the replacement of Policy Objective 5 by Policy Objective 4.
2. The Report - Justification letter will then be sent to the PC members, in order for them to be informed and decide, via written procedure, on the two proposed modifications.

3. The 3rd deliverable: 'Analysis – 2nd Consultation phase and first draft (Draft 1) of the Chapters of the new Programme' will be submitted for approval via the same written procedure.

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

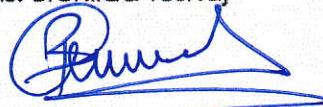
**The Co-Chairpersons
of the Programming Committee**

Chair
Ms. Angeliki Bouziani



Head of the Managing Authority
MA of ETC Programmes
Ministry of Development &
Investments

Co-Chair
Ms. Brunilda Tushaj



Head of Unit
Programming Unit
Albanian Ministry for
Europe and Foreign Affairs

Attachments:

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