

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

**5th PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE
ONLINE MEETING**

24 December 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" (hereinafter referred to as the "Programme") convened for its 5th Meeting on December 24th 2021, via teleconference, following an invitation by the Hellenic Managing Authority of European Territorial Cooperation Programmes (hereinafter MA of ETCP).

Ms Katia Sagona, Head of Unit B2 of the Managing Authority (MA), after confirming that the essential quorum from both sides exists, passed the floor to the Chair of the meeting Ms Mathilde Konstantopoulou, Advisor to the Special Secretary of ERDF & CF of the Ministry of Development & Investments, who represented Mr Georgios Zervos, Special Secretary for the ERDF & CF. Ms Angeliki Bouziani, Head of the MA of ETCP, also acknowledged the existence of the essential quorum.

Ms Konstantopoulou welcomed the participants and acknowledged that the final details of the strategy & architecture of the Programme are about to be fine-tuned; subsequently, the goal of the unofficial submission of the draft version of the Programme document to the European Commission is feasible until the end of the year 2021, thanks to the efficient work performed by the MA so far.

The floor was passed to Mr Vassilis Charitantis, officer of Unit B2 of the MA, who presented the progress achieved so far in the drafting of the Programming document, the new additions to the programme, with emphasis on the inclusion of the Specific Objective 1.4 (hereinafter "SO 1.4") "Promoting the transition to circular and resource efficient economy."

Following the presentation by Mr Charitantis, Mr Rando Kote, representing the Albanian National Authority, expressed his concerns about the insertion of two more strategic projects, which had not been explicitly presented in the 4th draft and have not been properly discussed yet in dedicated meetings. Moreover, Mr Kote expressed his concerns about the addition of the SO 1.4, which serves to nothing but aid a specific strategic project.

Ms Konstantopoulou clarified that (i) SO 1.4 was added because it is interlinked with two of the strategic project ideas (ii) the additions to the strategic projects are to be discussed during the present meeting (iii) the planned budget reflects initial rough estimations.

Ms Bouziani specified that there have been meetings involving both sides about Circular Economy and Smart Cities. Regarding the Thematic Tourism, Ms Bouziani mentioned that the idea came from the Greek Regions involved, following the need for actions on the specific area and that the MA believes that the interest by the Albanian side is equal. Regarding the Digital Tools, Ms Bouziani underlined that despite the fact that the proposal came from two Greek Regions, the idea was also a product of the discussions with the Albanian side and that the proposal tackles needs that were identified during these discussions. Regarding SO 1.4, Ms Bouziani stated that the existence of a

distinct Specific Objective is necessary to challenge the needs related to circular economy project ideas. About the financial allocation, Ms Bouziani stated that the MA is open to suggestions about reforming the planned budget.

Ms Paraskevi Christopoulou, on behalf of the Region of Western Macedonia, asked whether the Digital Tools project was proposed by the aforementioned Region or by Diadyma S.A.

The floor was passed to Mr Kote who stressed on the need of constant consultation with the Albanian side in order to formulate project ideas and inquired whether there were additional meetings without his presence. In addition, Mr Kote raised his concern about the increase in the indicative budget for Circular Economy from 3 million EUR to 4.9 million. Ms Konstantopoulou recognised the need that bilateral discussions should take place regarding all four strategic project ideas and that these discussions need to incorporate the interests and priorities of all involved parties.

The floor was passed to Ms Kalliopi Tesia, representing The Region of Epirus, who inquired why the two proposals regarding Circular Economy and Digital Tools do not merge. In addition, about the Thematic Touristic Routes strategic project idea, Ms Tesia clarified that the project idea focuses on two axes of the Programme.

Mr Konstantinos Kapodistrias, representing the Region of Ionian Islands, echoing Ms Tesia, suggested that Thematic Touristic Routes strategic project can be categorised even under all relevant axes. In addition, Mr Kapodistrias suggested that Circular Economy and Digital Tools strategic project ideas could potentially be merged.

Ms Bouziani underlined the fact that the current phase of discussions aims at the unofficial submission of the draft version of the Programme to the European Commission and the completion of the Annex III. Further details can be defined at a later stage, during the preparation of the Calls for Proposals. In reply to Mr Kapodistrias, Ms Bouziani agreed to merge the project ideas in case the majority of the participants wishes so. Ms Bouziani assured Mr Kote that no additional meetings have taken place. Ms Bouziani repeated that Thematic Touristic Routes incorporates the needs of the majority of the eligible areas; hence it was accepted as an idea following the suggestion by the Region of Epirus.

Ms Katerina Koutsianou, representing the Region of Western Macedonia, in reply to Ms Christopoulou, clarified that Circular Economy idea first came from Diadyma, nonetheless it was a product of multilateral consultation, and added that Circular Economy should not be merged with the Digital Tools idea.

Ms Bouziani identified one after one the initiators of each strategic project idea (Circular Economy a common suggestion after identifying the needs of the regions, Smart Cities suggested by the Albanian side, Thematic Touristic Routes suggested by the Greek Regions and Digital Tools again from the

Greek regions of Western Macedonia and Ionian Islands), underlining in the same time that who came up with the project idea first, is of limited importance and that the current concentration of proposals is a non-exclusive list.

Mr Kapodistrias and Ms Tesia overall expressed their concerns about the existence of two strategic project ideas of a similar thematic. Mr Kote further expressed his own concerns about insertion of additional strategic project ideas after composing the 3rd version of the draft version of the Programme which had not included them. In addition, more strategic project ideas pose the threat to drain the allocated budget for strategic projects.

In response, Ms Konstantopoulou stated that the indicative budget allocation proposal was a fair suggestion by MA and it was preliminary accepted by the Albanian side. Notwithstanding, the technical details will be discussed by the respective Monitoring Committees after the approval of the new Programme. In addition, the issues of the present discussion will be included in the Annex III of the draft version of the Programme as references; the technical details will be defined in the phase of the composition of the Calls for Proposals.

Ms Bouziani explained to the participants the reasoning behind the allocation of 30% of the total budget for the strategic projects: by having a higher amount that would pose a risk to jeopardise a large part of the budget in case something goes wrong. In case of a lower amount dedicated to strategic project, there is the danger of fragmentation to too many small projects. In addition, the strategic project ideas need to be related to mature projects so that the implementation can start immediately after the approval of the Programme.

In reply to a query by Ms Tesia, Ms Sagona clarified that the 30% allocation to strategic projects is not an institutional obligation but instead a modality agreed between involved parties. Ms Tesia also suggested an increase of one million of the budget allocated to SO 1.4.

Mr Kote agreed with the idea behind the 30% allocation and once more questioned the possibility to insert further strategic projects. In addition, Mr Kote questioned the equal balance amongst the priority axes, especially the limited budget allocated to infrastructure related actions (Priority Axis 2: Improving accessibility in the cross-border area).

Ms Sagona explained that Priority Axis 2 was considered third level priority during the consultations where the policymakers representing the two countries participated. In addition, there was no interest from any Greek involved entity for a strategic project in the Priority Axis 2. Ms Bouziani added that Interreg as a programme is not the ideal tool to implement heavy infrastructure projects due to limited budget. In addition, Ms Bouziani reminded to the participants that during the implementation phase of the programme, there is the possibility of internal budget reallocations.

Ms Konstantopoulou confirmed the comments of Ms Bouziani, expressed her disappointment about the fact that these negotiations should have been

defined already prior to the present meeting, invited Ms Sandra Soulioti, representing the consultant Topos A.E., for the presentation of the 3rd Deliverable and eventually in reply to Mr Kote recognised the possibility to have some minor increase of budget of Priority Axis 2.

Ms Soulioti presented the last (5th) version of the Programme document chapters, along with the amended complementary document 'Methodological document – Indicators framework'.

During the presentation, Ms Tesia inquired whether the field of energy efficiency is included in the present draft and suggested that it should be included to SO 1.1, to which Ms Bouziani replied that it can be possible, nonetheless there is a chance that the European Commission will provide comments on this inclusion.

Following the presentation, Ms Tesia inquired the percentages amongst SO 1.1 and 3.1 that are allocated to small-scale projects and to what extent this allocation will be amendable. In response, Ms Sagona clarified that the Programme is obliged to include small-scale projects, for which the projected allocation cannot exceed one million for the two envisaged small scale projects under the SO 1.1 and 3.1 respectively.

To wrap-up the meeting, Ms Konstantopoulou concluded that:

- i. There is a consensus about the 5th version of the draft version of the Programme, the intervention logic and the way the indicators will be used during the implementation of the Programme.
- ii. There is a pending issue regarding the budget allocation amongst Priority Axes, which can be tackled via a transfer of no more than half a million towards Priority Axis 2.

Ms Tesia and Mr Kapodistrias advocated for SO 3.2 to be the budget line where the aforementioned funds should be redirected towards Priority Axis 2, instead of SO 3.1 as initially suggested by the Chair and echoed by Mr Kote, who emphasised that a decrease in the amount allocated to health sector should not lead to percentage less than 10% of the total budget allocated to SO 3.2. In response, Ms Tesia suggested to deduct 100.000 EUR from each of the remaining Specific Objectives towards SO 2.1.

Ms Bouziani eventually suggested to transfer 150.000 EUR from SO 1.1, 150.000 EUR from SO 1.4 and 200.000 EUR from 3.1 towards SO 2.1. The participants agreed to amend the budget accordingly.

Ms Bouziani listed the final conclusions of the meeting as:

- i. The Draft of the Chapters is adopted and will be unofficially submitted to the European Commission during the following week with the amended amounts. The document will be subsequently shared with the participants of the present meeting.

- ii. There will be attempts to hold a meeting with physical presence within January and further meetings to reflect on the comments by the European Commission.

Ms Sagona completed the wrap-up by stating that the Sustainable Environmental Assessment (SEA) final draft will be submitted to the Greek Ministry of Environment on the week from 27 -31 December and the involved parties will be kept informed about the consultation that will be held by the competent authority

Decisions - Conclusions:

1. The 5th version of the Programming document is approved, under the conditions of no 3.
2. The amended version (23/12/2021) of the 'Methodological document - Indicators framework' is approved.
3. The reallocation of the amounts in the budget of the Programme consists of the increase in the budget of S.O. 2.1 by €500,000.00, and the decrease in the budgets of S.O. 1.1, S.O. 1.4 and S.O. 3.1 by €150,000.00, €150,000.00 and €200,000.00, respectively. These changes have to be incorporated in the Programming document.

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

Chair



Ms Mathilde Konstantopoulou
Advisor to the Special Secretary
for ERDF & CF
Hellenic Ministry of Development &
Investments

Co-Chair



Ms Anis Lamllari
Head of Operative Structure Albanian
Ministry for Europe
and Foreign Affairs

Attachments:

1. Agenda of the 5th Programming Committee Meeting
2. List of participants