

**INTERREG IPA CBC PROGRAMME
"GREECE –NORTH MACEDONIA 2021-2027"**

**2nd MONITORING COMMITTEE (MC) MEETING
Online**

April 25, 2023

Brief Minutes & Decisions

The Monitoring Committee (hereinafter referred to as MC) of the Interreg IPA Cross-Border Cooperation Programme “Greece – North Macedonia 2021-2027” virtually convened for its 2nd Monitoring Committee Meeting on April 25, 2023, following an invitation by the Managing Authority INTERREG 2021-2027 (hereinafter MA).

The overall coordination of the Meeting was carried out by the substitute member on behalf of the Hellenic Ministry of Development and Investments, namely **Mrs. Mathilde Konstantopoulou**, Advisor to the Special Secretary for ERDF & CF programmes. She announced that quorum is achieved, in line with the attached list of participants and informed the members to declare any conflict of interest and subsequently confidentiality and impartiality. No conflict of interest was declared. The Agenda was approved. Interpretation services in three languages were offered during the entire online meeting and the proceedings were recorded.

On behalf of the Ministry of Local Self Government, Mrs. **Nade Petrusheva Neshkovski** welcomed the new colleagues in MA and JS and existent colleagues in their new roles and expressed the belief that an effective and efficient cooperation will be accomplished.

Mrs. Gaby Hagmüller, representative from the European Commission, Regional and Urban Policy, noticed that this MC meeting will include presentations of key documents which are central to the implementation of the Programme for the coming years. The selection methodology and criteria are key elements for successful implementation and selection of qualitative proposals that foster cooperation in the cross-border region. She expressed the appreciation to the fact that the MA has decided to organise an actual MC meeting to discuss those important documents. It is vital for the partnership, which is the basis of this Programme, that all the MC members receive a comprehensive presentation and also have the opportunity to express their views. In a similar vein, she encouraged both voting and non-voting MC members to be actively engaged and to use this opportunity to ask questions and share their views. The partnership principle is at the heart of Interreg and it means that all those who are concerned and affected by the Programme, are also involved and consulted in all stages of the programming cycle. In this context, she pointed out that there is still a need to involve more representatives from economic, social partners and civil society in this Monitoring Committee and she invited the MA and notable the NA to look into this and make sure all the relevant stakeholders are on board in this important decision making body. She also welcomed the new colleagues that recently joined the MA and JS.

Mrs. Mathilde Konstantopoulou underlined that the major objective in the near future is to launch the 1st Call that will attract project proposals with a measurable added-value for the cross-border area. She confirmed that the representation in the Greek part of the Monitoring Committee is inclusive.

The first presentation on JS rules of procedure, was delivered by **Mrs. Maria Nezeriti**, Head of MA. She also informed the MC members that employment contracts for the existent JS staff in Greece are concluded under Greek law and will be renewed until the end of the 2021-2027 Programming period. *The respective document [JS rules of procedure] was approved without any objections.*

Next, **Mr. Alexandros Samaras**, MA/Unit A Programme Officer, presented in detail the project selection methodology and evaluation criteria. He mentioned the novelty in this programming period, namely the two-step selection procedure of project applications.

The **Chair** highlighted that the comprehensive two-step selection procedure will allow project selection to be concluded in a shorter period of time and possibly avoid large differences in project scoring.

Then, the **Head of MA** provided an outline of the Registry of Assessors. The Ministerial Decision for the development of the Registry of Assessors has already been drafted. *The Registry will be common for both partner countries* and will include assessors that possess significant experience in EU Programmes, cross-border cooperation and know English and at least one of the national languages of the Programme. The Ministerial Decision will be soon signed and the Call for assessors is likely to launch during summer 2023. Later in the discussion, Mrs. Nezeriti added that assessors will be included in the Registry not only based on their general knowledge and experience in EU and Cross-border Programmes, but they will be further categorized under the Programme's Specific Objectives based on their particular expertise in the thematic area.

Mr. Todor Efremov, MC member with voting right from Municipality of Kavadarci, proposed to include a term according to which project partners should have the obligation to declare that they have no objection concerning the names/titles of the organisations used by other partners. He mentioned a case in 2nd CfP/2014-2020 Programme that a project was approved and reached the stage of budget negotiation and at that point the Lead beneficiary raised objections regarding the name used by another partner (i.e. an NGO not using the official country name in the acronym of the organisation).

Mrs. Mathilde Konstantopoulou replied and provided a short history regarding that project which was eventually not funded under the 2nd CfP/2014-2020 Programme. She added that these situations will be directly tackled at the 1st stage of the 2021-2027 Programme selection procedure, thanks to the Concept note principle that is introduced during evaluation of the proposals and she expressed the belief that no such problem will arise in the future, provided that the Prespa Agreement is respected.

The Chair then passed the floor to **Mrs. Gaby Hagmüller**, who fully agreed that as long as the Prespa Agreement is fully respected by project applicants and assessors, no problems will arise. She mentioned that assessors should bring a very good understanding of the thematic areas in the Calls and the cross-border cooperation element in order to take a good selection of projects to be proposed for funding. Notably, with regard to this aspect of cross-border cooperation, the European Court of Auditors (ECOA) published a special report on Interreg¹ and even though the outcome of this report was very positive for Interreg, one point that was highlighted by the ECOA was the need for increased cross-border cooperation and criticism for many “mirror projects” that were implemented through Interreg programmes (ie. same activities implemented in both sides of the border but without much cross-border cooperation, which is the key feature that justifies Interreg programmes). She concluded that projects that have no or very weak cross-border cooperation in their activities should not be eligible at all for funding under this Programme.

Next, the floor was passed to **Mrs. Asimina Misouli** from the National Coordination Authority. She noticed that the selection procedure is useful but rather complicated and specific deadlines should exist in order to avoid delays. She asked for further clarifications regarding the Complaints Committee and the way of its establishment.

The **Chair** agreed that the selection procedure in the 2021-2027 Programme may seem “heavier” than the respective procedure in 2014-2020, however she mentioned that the new Programme is front loaded, focused on financial absorption. She estimated that all CfPs will have been published in the following two years at maximum, allowing sufficient time for project implementation and completion.

Mrs. Eva Karagianni, Head of Unit A/MA, clarified that the Concept Notes will have to be submitted by applicants approximately 1 month after the launch of the Call. The Concept

¹ *Special Report 14/2021: Interreg cooperation: The potential of the European Union's cross-border regions has not yet been fully unlocked*, available at <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/publications?did=58917>

Notes will be evaluated in 1-1 ½ month and only successful project ideas will be evaluated under the 2nd stage. This means that considerably smaller number of proposals will be evaluated in the next stages. Possible delays in the beginning, because of the two stages evaluation, will be compensated in stage B, where proposals for evaluation will be less in number. The Complaints Committee will operate according to its RoPs and will consist of MA and NA members with no conflict of interest.

The Project Selection Methodology and Evaluation criteria were adopted by the MC members.

The timetable of planned Calls of proposals was presented by **Mrs. Eva Karagianni**. In a nutshell, one strategic, one common and two Small Project Funds Calls are scheduled.

The **Chair** mentioned that if the budget is not fully covered, due to a small number of project proposals of satisfactory quality, then another Common Call will be launched.

Mr. Semir Veli, deputy voting member from the Secretariat for European Affairs, made a remark on the timeframe of evaluation for the strategic project. He questioned whether the timeframe of two months is sufficient for the preparation of the application and submission of the strategic project.

Mrs. Mathilde Konstantopoulou noted that the 2021-2027 strategic project capitalizes and builds upon the 2014-2020 strategic project with the acronym BorPres. Therefore, major preparatory actions between the partners will have taken place until the end of year 2023.

Mrs. Eva Karagianni agreed that a 2-month period is sufficient for the development of the application for the strategic project, since the same partners already collaborate in BorPres. Moreover, the MA will organize targeted preparatory technical meetings before the launch of the Strategic Call.

Mrs. Gaby Hagmüller took note of the proposal to launch only one Common Call and understood that this stems from the lessons learnt in the 2014-2020 period and the need to secure adequate time for project implementation. Nevertheless, she said that this decision comes with certain risks because some beneficiaries might not be ready at the time of the Call and submit project proposals that are not mature but risks can be mitigated by communicating well on the Programme objectives, by providing coaching and assistance to potential beneficiaries and finally by the flexibility to launch a second common Call at a later stage if the quality of the proposals is not sufficient.

Then, **Mr. Karl Gianciti**, representative from the Delegation of European Union (EU) to North Macedonia, commented that November 2023 might be a good time for launching the

Strategic Call but agreed with Mr. Veli that 2 months is short period for the Call to be open, given that festive season is included. DEU in Skopje notices a delay in the preparatory work for the technical documentation on the side of North Macedonia. He suggested that a “reality check” is carried out in November 2023 before launching the Strategic Call.

Mrs. Konstanstopoulou and **Mrs. Karagianni** fully agreed that the timetable can be adjusted if deemed necessary and the available period for submitting the strategic proposal will be revisited and finalized in October-November 2023.

The MC approved the presented timetable of planned Calls for Proposals. Especially for the Strategic Call, the launch date and submission period will be reviewed in October- November 2023.

The MC authorized the MA to proceed with any future necessary updates / minor adjustments of the Timetable of planned calls required from article 49 par. 2. Regulation (EU) 2021/1060.

Mrs. Gaby Hagmüller informed the MC members that there is a final draft of the Financing Agreement which is in line with the Prespa Agreement and asked MA and NA colleagues to provide their feedback in order to proceed with its signature.

The members of the Monitoring Committee decided unanimously to approve the:

- 1. Joint Secretariat’s Rules of Procedure**
- 2. Project Selection Methodology and evaluation criteria**
- 3. Timetable of planned Calls for proposals.**
 - a. For the Strategic Call, the launch date and submission period will be reviewed in October- November 2023.**
 - b. Authorization of MA to proceed with any future necessary updates / minor adjustments of the Timetable of planned calls required from article 49 par. 2. Regulation (EU) 2021/1060.**

Following the above, the 2nd Monitoring Committee meeting was adjourned, with the Co-Chairpersons' instructions of its decisions to come into force.

This document is signed by the two co-Chairpersons.

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

Mrs. Mathilde Konstantopoulou

Mrs. Nada Petrusheva Neshkovski

On behalf of Mr. Georgios Zervos
Special Secretary for ERDF and CF
Programmes, Ministry of Development and
Investments

On behalf of the Minister of Local Self-
Government, Mr. Risto Penov

Attachments:

1. Agenda of the 2nd MC online meeting
2. Participants' list of the 2nd MC online meeting
3. Presentations delivered during the meeting
4. JS Rules of Procedures (.pdf)
5. Project Selection Methodology (.pdf) and Selection Criteria (.xls)
6. Timetable of planned Calls for Proposals (.xls)