

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

3rd MONITORING COMMITTEE (MC) MEETING

Online

November 7, 2023

Brief Minutes & Decisions

The Monitoring Committee (hereinafter referred to as MC) of the Interreg VI-A IPA Programme "Greece – North Macedonia 2021-2027" convened online for its 3rd meeting on November 7, 2023, following an invitation by the Managing Authority INTERREG 2021-2027 (hereinafter MA).

The **Chair**, Special Secretary for ERDF and CF Programmes – Hellenic Ministry of Economy and Finance, **Mr. Georgios Zervos**, delivered an opening address, emphasizing on the importance of the 1st Call for Proposals, and provided insight into the broader goals and aspirations of the Programme. He quoted that the preparation of the Call and the relevant application package is based on the lessons learnt from the previous Programming Period and stressed the need for the timely implementation of the Programme for 2021-2027.

On behalf of the Ministry of Local Self Government, the **Co-Chair, Mr. Vullnet Arifi** welcomed the participants and expressed the belief that the new Programme will provide unique and valuable contributions to the communities and region it covers.

Then, the overall coordination of the Meeting was carried out by the substitute member on behalf of the Hellenic Ministry of Economy and Finance, namely **Mrs. Mathilde Konstantopoulou**, Advisor to the Special Secretary for ERDF & CF programmes. She announced that quorum was 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. In response to a request from **Mrs. Gaby Hagmüller**, representative from the European Commission, Regional and Urban Policy, a new agenda item related to Technical Assistance budget allocation was added and the revised Agenda was approved. Interpretation services in three languages were offered during the entire online meeting and the proceedings were recorded.

Mrs. Gaby Hagmüller thanked the Managing Authority for the inclusion of the Technical Assistance work programme in the agenda of this meeting. She emphasised that the MC is an important actor to oversee the implementation of the Technical Assistance budget based on the actual capacities and needs of all programme partners. She further observed that this MC meeting features presentations of pivotal documents. She expressed the appreciation to the fact that the MA has drafted the 1st Call for common projects and a comprehensive Applicants' package, which set the framework for selection of qualitative projects. 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 involved and consulted in all stages of the programming cycle. In this context, she repeated her remark made in the 2nd MC meeting, by pointing 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 especially the National Authority to look into this matter. Finally, she commented on the new Programme website and its user-friendliness, congratulating the Managing Authority for the successful design of the website.

Mrs. Maria Nezeriti, Head of the Managing Authority Interreg 2021-2027, offered a concise overview of the scheduled activities, from the Call's initiation to the signing of Subsidy contracts. The timeline for the submission of proposals is presented below in a table format:

Activity	Timeline
Launch of 1 st Call for Common Projects	End of November 2023
Submission of Concept Notes	End of January 2024
Establishment of the Assessors' Registry	End of January 2024
Completion of Phase A Evaluation	End of March 2024
Deadline for Application Forms Submission in MIS	End of April 2024

The estimated period for the signing of Subsidy Contracts is end of September 2024.

Mrs. Zulieta Gjarkova, voting MC member representing the Southeast Planning Region in North Macedonia, raised concern about whether the 1-month period scheduled for proposal submission in MIS is sufficient. **Mrs. Eva Karagianni**, Head of Unit A/MA clarified that potential beneficiaries will acquire the required materials in advance, covering both Phase A and B, and emphasized on the intention to prioritize the selection of projects with a higher level of maturity. Nevertheless, the Co-Chair, **Mr. Vullnet Arifi**, strongly emphasized that the planned period for 1-month submission period is insufficient. To address the concerns raised by Mrs. Gjarkova and Mr. Arifi, **Mrs. Mathilde Konstantopoulou** proposed extending the 30-day period to 40 days. This proposal received unanimous approval from all members of the Monitoring Committee.

Mr. Alexandros Samaras, Programme Officer, Unit A/MA, provided a comprehensive presentation on the 1st Call for common project proposals, which stimulated a discussion among the members.

Mr. Dimitrios Voulgarakis, voting MC member representing the Hellenic Economic & Social Council, commented that the primary objective should be to draw and fund sustainable and innovative projects. The Programme should not merely be viewed as a financial support opportunity but rather as a developmental strategy opportunity. It is essential for the

beneficiaries themselves to demonstrate dedication so that the Programme can provide true added value.

Mr. Alexandros Mourouzis, substitute voting MC member representing the National Confederation of Disabled People (NCDP) of Greece, asked whether there is a difference in the assessment (and scoring) of horizontal principles in the period 2021-2027. He communicated NCDP's readiness to provide training to the assessors on the fundamental principle of non-discrimination, including accessibility.

Mrs. Gaby Hagmüller elaborated on the following:

- The choice to launch only one Call for common projects carries inherent risks. In the event of low-quality Proposals, it might become necessary to initiate another Call. Moreover, it would result in a prolonged period during which no Programme funding opportunities for common projects would be available. These risks need to be mitigated by communicating well on the objectives of the programme, by preparing potential beneficiaries and maybe providing some coaching and assistance. It is important not to select projects of inferior quality only to exhaust the programme budget early.
- The minimum budget of 120.000,00€ per Beneficiary specified in the 1st Call is notably substantial, especially for local NGOs which may be best placed to implement notably awareness raising activities but might not be able to absorb such an amount.
- The provision of "up to five (5) project proposals by each beneficiary in the 1st Call" appears quite extensive. It is recommended to diversify the pool of project beneficiaries.
- Following the promotion of the New European Bauhaus (NEB) initiative being noted in the Programme Document and the relevant presentation in the 1st MC, it is expected to take the NEB initiative into account the 1st Call, namely to include a reference and relevant links, particularly within the policy objectives of Greener Europe and Social Europe.

Mrs. Mathilde Konstantopoulou responded to the previously mentioned comments as follows:

- The ultimate objective is to attract and finance high-quality projects. If necessary, another Call for common projects will be initiated, depending also on the unspent budget that may remain from the 1st Call.
- The Programme management bodies are of the opinion that the minimum budget of 120.000,00€ per beneficiary is rational for well-founded and sustainable project

proposals. This amount provides adequate resources for the elaboration of solid project concepts.

- The provision of "up to five (5) project proposals by each beneficiary in the 1st Call" is reasonable, considering the variability in partnerships and project concepts, in which each Beneficiary may participate.
- The Bauhaus initiative is welcomed and explicitly referenced in the Programme Document. Assessors will be provided with guidance and training to ensure they consider this initiative when evaluating the project proposals. In addition to this point, **Mrs. Maria Nezeriti** emphasized that the Bauhaus initiative can be assessed within the A1b selection criterion.

The 1st Call for Proposals (ToRs, Programme & Project Implementation Manual and Applicants' Package) were adopted with the modification of extending the submission period (after Phase A and prior to Phase B) in the Management Information System (MIS) from 30 to 40 days. The MC authorized the MA to proceed with any minor adjustments/corrections proposed by DG REGIO.

Then, **Mrs. Eva Karagianni** delivered a presentation on the revised timetable of planned Calls, an updated version compared to the one that was approved during the 2nd Monitoring Committee.

The MC approved the presented and updated timetable of planned Calls for Proposals.

Following that, **Mr. Themis Chatzikonstantinou**, JS Coordinator, took the floor to provide a detailed explanation of the next agenda item concerning the Joint Secretariat (JS) staffing. He outlined how the responsibilities of the financial officer overlap with those of a) the JS Coordinator, b) the project officers' and c) the Managing Authority. Consequently, he proposed the elimination of the financial officer position and its substitution with a project officer position. Regarding the actual JS staffing, he referred to the decision made during the 1st MC meeting (Feb.3, 2023) concerning the "*Occupation of the JS 2021-2027 vacancies by the existing JS staff of the Balkan-Med Programme 2014-2020 (2 staff positions).*" He further informed that Mrs. Marija Kotevska and Mrs. Athina Kouloumpatsani will become part of the JS team as project officers. All MC members expressed unanimous agreement with his proposal.

The MC unanimously approved the 2nd version of the JS Rules of Procedure document and attested to the 1st MC decision related to the occupation of the two vacant JS project officers' positions by Mrs. Marija Kotevska and Mrs. Athina Kouloumpatsani.

Lastly, **Mr. Nikos Hatzisavvas**, Programme Officer, Unit B/MA, presented the budget allocation for Technical Assistance (TA) for the period 2021-2027.

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

- 1. 1st Call for project proposals and all its Annexes**
 - a. Including the extension of the submission period of project proposals (between Phase A and B) in the Management Information System (MIS) from 30 to 40 days.*
 - b. By authorizing the MA to proceed with any minor adjustments/corrections proposed by DG REGIO.*
- 2. Updated timetable of planned Calls for proposals**
- 3. Joint Secretariat's Rules of Procedure (version 2.0)**
- 4. Occupation of two vacant JS project officers' positions by Mrs. Marija Kotevska and Mrs. Athina Kouloumpatsani**

Following the above, the 3rd 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**

Mr. Georgios Zervos

Mr. Vullnet Arifi

Special Secretary for ERDF and CF
Programmes, Ministry of Economy and
Finance

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

Attachments:

1. Final agenda of the 3rd MC online meeting
2. Participants' list of the 3rd MC online meeting
3. Presentations delivered during the meeting
4. JS Rules of Procedures version 2 (.pdf)
5. Updated Timetable of planned Calls for Proposals (.xls)