



Minutes

2nd Joint Working Group for preparation of – IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2014 – 2020

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| Date: | 23 April 2014 |
| Venue: | TCC Grand Plaza Address: Bul. Oktomvrijska Revolucija No. 2/2 Skopje, Republic of Macedonia |
| Participants: | According to the registration list (JWG members and guests) |
| Opening of the meeting and agreement on the agenda | |
| <p>The chairperson of the Joint Working Group Mrs Mjellma Mehmeti Petersen opened the meeting and welcomed all the members and guests of the Joint Working Group (JWG) and wished a successful meeting. She stressed the importance of the Bulgaria – the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia IPA cross-border cooperation programme for the border region involving 27 municipalities with more than 500 000 inhabitants on Macedonian side who were the final beneficiaries of the programme. Participants were greeted by the Ambassador of the Republic of Bulgaria in Skopje H.E. Mr Ivan Petkov and by the co-chairperson of the JWG Mrs Dimana Sadonkova. After the presentation of the objectives of the meeting and since there weren't any proposals for adjustment the agenda of the meeting was approved.</p> <p>The representative of DG Regional and Urban Policy of the European Commission, Mrs Ann - Jasmin Krabatsch presented the progress in the adoption of the IPA II legal framework for the 2014 - 2020 period. She reported that the IPA II Regulation was</p> | |



adopted on 14 March 2014 and the Implementing regulation was approved by the IPA Management Committee on 23 March 2014.

Mrs Krabatsch informed that the model of IPA CBC programme was developed and distributed for use by the programme structures.

She also announced that INTERACT was organising Programming Workshop for IPA II Cross-border cooperation programmes in Brussels, Belgium on 7 and 8 May 2014. The objective of this event was to provide the Managing Authorities, Joint Technical Secretariats, National Authorities and the Programming Committees / Task Forces as well as representatives of the European Commission the opportunity to address some of the main challenges for the finalization and submission of the 2014 - 2020 CBC Programmes between Member States and IPA Beneficiary Countries.

Part A

Presentation of the situation analysis and SWOT analysis, findings from consultations with stakeholders (on-line survey and regional consultative forums)

The Team leader of the external consultancy team, Mr Manfred Kojan made a brief overview of what had been done since the project for preparation of the CBC programme between the two countries was signed on 28 November 2013 and the experts' team started with its activities.

1st JWG meeting was already attended by the Team leader on 14 November 2013 and good working relations were established with the beneficiary system.

Based on a common methodology and work plan, a regional analysis and mapping of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as well as needs and challenges were undertaken and the documents were prepared by the programming team in their final revised version (Regional Analysis: 08 March 2014, SWOT Tables: 05 March 2014) and circulated to the JWG members via the MRD task manager (11 March 2014).

An on-line survey among regional stakeholders was organized for exploring their opinion on the focus of the future programme (in the period 03 – 14 February).

Regional consultations with regional stakeholders were held on the findings of the



SWOT and the regional analyses as well as to explore the expectations related to the future programme. In this course also 5 Regional Consultative Fora were held in the border region with about 180 participants (26, 27 and 28 February 2014 - in Strumica, Stip and Kumanovo / 6 and 7 March 2014 - in Kyustendil and Blagoevgrad). Reports from the on-line survey and the 1st round of regional consultations were published on the Programme website and also communicated to the JWG members.

An expert proposal - discussion paper on the thematic concentration of the future programme was prepared and submitted to the MA (24 March 2014). This document was distributed among the JWG members on 08 April 2014 and was meant to be presented and discussed on the second JWG meeting.

Mr Kojan presented the strategic framework of the programming – legal framework, macro-regional strategies, Partnership agreement, national and regional strategies. Ms Krabatsch confirmed that as Bulgaria with its whole territory is a part of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, a short reference to it should be made in the future CBC programme.

After making this introduction Mr Manfred Kojan gave the floor to the key expert from the Project Planning and Management Consortium Mrs Jasminka Taseva to make review of the SWOT analysis and the main challenges and needs of the border region. Mr Kojan presented the results from the on-line survey and Regional Consultative Fora and drew attention to the fact that there were only slight differences in the preferences of the respondents from the two countries.

The JWG members were acquainted before the meeting with the situation and SWOT analyses of the border region, the reports from the on-line survey and Regional Consultative Fora and, as no comments were received, the documents were considered as approved.

Part B

Presentation of the programme strategy: thematic priorities and intervention logic

Mr Kojan presented the experts' proposal for thematic concentration with three options and a proposal for intervention logic of every thematic priority (TP) included in



the proposal, namely:

Option 1 - very focused (a programme strategy based on two thematic priorities):

TP 2 Protecting the environment, promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management.

TP 4 Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage.

Option 2 - pretty broad (a programme strategy with four thematic priorities):

TP 2 Protecting the environment, promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management.

TP 4 Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage.

TP 5 Investing in youth, education and skills.

TP 7 Enhancing competitiveness, business environment and the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, trade and investment.

Option 3 - a compromise (a programme strategy comprising three thematic priorities):

TP 2 Protecting the environment, promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management.

TP 4 Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage.

TP 7 Enhancing competitiveness, business environment and the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, trade and investment.

Mr Kojan invited the participants to comment on the experts' proposal for selection of thematic priorities, encouraging them to share their points of view and make suggestions having in mind the requirement for thematic concentration so that the future programme could provide visible results with very limited resources. Mrs Krabatsch confirmed that there would be only 19 million euro available for the programme and although there were three options the JWG should carefully choose so as the choice to be coherent with the ESI and IPA funds, not so much to invest in people but to create opportunities. Mr Kojan encouraged the JWG members to take the final decision on the future programme priorities.

Part B

Discussion on the thematic priorities, intervention logic and decision

The chairperson Mrs Mehmeti opened the discussion and stressed that the National



Authority would be in favour of continuing the cooperation in the same thematic fields as the in the current period.

Mrs Desislava Stefanova from the Ministry of Environment and Waters of Bulgaria raised attention to two important documents that needed to be taken into consideration when defining the future programme strategy. The first one was named “National Prioritized Action Framework for Natura 2000, Bulgaria” that under priority 4 “Establishing, developing and maintaining of shared vision for ecological network Natura 2000 in Bulgaria” stipulates measures like: Support for partnership in the management of Natura 2000 sites; Exchange of experiences and best practices related to Natura 2000 within projects funded by different programmes operating in 2014 – 2020; Training of fire brigades and volunteers; Organizing and campaigning to promote funding opportunities for projects related to Natura 2000, funded by the territorial cooperation programmes. The second document was “Analysis and risk assessment and vulnerability of the Bulgarian economy sectors to climate change”, part of the National Adaptation Strategy. The document makes an analysis of the most common types of disasters that could affect the following sectors: agriculture, water, urban planning, energy, biodiversity etc. More information could be found on the web site of the Bulgarian Ministry of Environment and Water – Section Public consultations (in Bulgarian language only). These documents should be consulted also and see what are their proposed measures with amounts relevant for this CBC region. Complementarity is needed to be foreseen when proposing activities under the CBC Programme and overlapping – to be avoided. CBC Programme has to be complementary to documents on national level and focus on gaps and possibilities.

The representative of the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria (CITUB) Mrs Diana Naydenova said she was extremely pleased with the analysis and the question of social cohesion. She wanted to express the position of the CITUB on youth activities – the importance of raising and aligning competencies of young people to keep them in the region, enhancing skills to comply with the requirements of the labour market.

Mr Ivan Karakashki, District governor of District Kyustendil, shared his observation that the border regions on both sides of the border had the same problems – mountainous relief, lack of jobs and low employment rate, declining birth rates, emigration, aging population. He supported the inclusion of measures for young



people, jobs creation and economic development. He expressed his desire available programme funds to be spent for beneficiaries from the border region, not from Sofia and Skopje.

A question was raised why transport was not included as a thematic priority in the three options of programme strategy (as during online survey it appeared of higher importance for regional development). It was explained that the amounts available for this Programme are quite limited so that could not cover big investments for transport projects. Small investments related to accessibility could be included in other priorities, for example for tourism and environment.

Mr Aleksandar Georgievski from the Secretariat of European Affairs of Macedonia expressed his opinion that activities such as networking, increasing cooperation between countries, strengthening links between project beneficiaries should be foreseen in the new programme also. He supported option 3, but he raised the issue of necessity of envisaging measures for preventing submission of many similar projects and lack of creativity among the applicants.

Mr Kojan suggested that creation of list of indicative activities for each programme specific objective could be a measure for avoiding lack of creativity. However, list of potential projects would help creativity but could not protect from repetition or overlapping of project proposals.

Mr Yordan Belovodski from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Kyustendil supported option 3 for selection of 3 thematic priorities, but instead of thematic priority 2 "Protecting the environment, promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management" to include thematic priority 5 "Investing in youth, education and skills".

Both the chair and the co-chair confirmed their position for the proposed option 3 (TP2, TP4 and TP7) and selection of 3 thematic priorities in the new programme. In addition, it was underlined that youth and social element as well as marginalized groups will be included as horizontal elements in the selected priorities.

Mrs Snezhana Smilovska from the Council of Ministers' Administration and Mrs Mima Stanoevska from the South East Planning Region Development Centre expressed their support to option 3 for selection of programme thematic priorities including activities for investment in youth.

After the discussion a decision was taken by consensus and option 3 with thematic



priorities for cooperation 2, 4 and 7 was approved making sure that adequate consideration for youth is in place.

Further discussion went on about the proposed list of activities under the selected thematic priorities presented in details by the consultancy team. It was stated that the programme intervention logic, including indicative list of activities, will be further developed and it will be presented during the second round of regional consultative forums. The logic of intervention will be incorporated within the first draft of the Programme document which will be presented to the JWG for consideration in second half of June 2014.

Part C

Joint Secretariat location

On behalf of the District governor of District Kyustendil the co-chairperson of the JWG, Mrs Dimana Sadonkova read the proposal for retaining the location of the Joint Secretariat for the next programming period. Mr Nikolay Dochev, Head of the JTS for the current CBC programme, made a short presentation of the team, functions and assets of the JTS with main office in Kyustendil and a branch office in Strumica, and of the recent developments for recruitment of additional staff. As the role of the JTS was assessed to be crucial for the smooth implementation of CBC projects in the region since 2005, especially in the context of IPA CBC Programme shared management, many letters of support were received and favourable opinions from the JWG members were expressed at the meeting, it was unanimously decided the Joint Secretariat with main office in Kyustendil and a branch office in Strumica to continue working for the programming period 2014 – 2020.

Part D

Road map for the work ahead

Mr Milen Obretenov, Head of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Programming Department at the MA, made a review of the planned activities for programme



preparation until 22 September 2014 when is the deadline for submission of programme to the European Commission. The next Joint Working Group meeting was proposed to be organised in Sofia in the end of July / beginning of August 2014. Mr Manfred Kojan thanked for the constructive work and announced the planned for the beginning of June 2014 (along with the JMC meeting) regional consultations with local stakeholders on the Programme strategy. The chairperson thanked to all JWG members for their active participation and closed the meeting.

Annexes: 1. List of participants

2. Presentations

3. Summary of positions about the location of the future JTS