



Greece – Bulgaria

Brief Minutes and Decisions of the 2nd Monitoring Committee Meeting

online

10th of January 2024

The Monitoring Committee (MC) of the Cross Border Cooperation (CBC) Programme INTERREG VI-A “Greece-Bulgaria 2021-2027” was conducted online, on the 10th of January 2024, to discuss and take decisions on the following topics of the proposed agenda:

- 1st Call for Common Projects Proposals
- Project Selection Methodology/Evaluation Criteria
- Timetable of Planned Calls

The MC meeting was attended by 87 participants: members with and without voting right from both countries and staff members of the Managing Authority (MA), the Bulgarian National Authority (NA) and the Joint Secretariat (JS) of the Programme.

Mrs. Maria Nezeriti, Head of the Managing Authority INTERREG 2021-2027, welcomed the participants, confirmed the quorum, and informed the participants that the meeting would be recorded to facilitate the drafting of the meeting’s minutes.

Opening speeches were delivered by Mrs. Angelina Todorova-Boneva – Deputy Minister of Regional Development and Public Works of Bulgaria and chairperson of the MC meeting, Mrs. Mathilde Konstantopoulou - Advisor to the Special Secretary for ERDF & CF Programmes of the Greek Ministry of Economy and Finance, Mr. Georgios Zervos, and co-chairperson of the MC meeting and Mrs. Maria Sioliou – Programme Manager, representative of the European Commission (DG REGIO)

To initiate the meeting, the Head of the Managing Authority requested the approval of the meeting’s agenda from the MC members, which was approved with the addition of the topic “Post 2021-2027” proposed by the EC representative. There was no conflict of interest declared by the participants prior to the meeting deliberation.

- **Presentations on the 1st Call for Common Projects Proposals and on the Project selection Methodology/Evaluation criteria**, by Mrs. Rozanna Semerdjian, Unit A - Programming and Evaluation – Managing Authority Officer.

The 1st Call for Common Projects Proposals was briefly presented, including the Call’s main objectives, its context, the eligibility of the partnership/expenditures, the submission

procedure and the applicant's package. In addition, the evaluation procedure was presented, which will be carried out in two steps, one per submission phase.

The EC representative, Mrs. Sioliou, informed that comments on selection criteria and process were communicated to the MA before the MC and commented positively the existence of an eliminatory selection criterion concerning the cross-border character of the proposals, increasing the projects' added value and made a remark concerning the role of the MC members, who according to the regulation select the projects for funding and not only approve the projects based on the results of the evaluation procedure. Thus, the MC should have adequate time to examine the submitted project proposals and the results of the evaluation conducted by the assessors, before selecting and approving the project proposals for funding. The MA agreed and ensured the EC Officer that the MC members will receive sufficient time and all needed documents to review the project proposals before selecting – and not just approving – the ones that will receive funding.

- **Presentations on the Timetable of Planned Calls**, by Mrs. Evelpisti Karagianni, Head of Unit A: Programming and Evaluation of the Managing Authority

The timetable of the six (6) in total calls for project proposals that are scheduled to be launched within the first semester of 2024 was presented, along with the key elements of each call: Type (for common, targeted, strategic or small-scale projects via SPF), Priority, Specific Objectives and Budget.

The EC representative suggested that a more detailed calendar representing the evolution of each Call's phase, especially for common projects calls that have a two-stages selection procedure, would be more helpful to the MC members to follow the implementation procedure and to the MA/NA to keep track of the milestones set (start and end dates of the submission and the evaluation phases; signing of the Subsidy Contracts). Concerning the SPF (Small Project Funds instrument), the EC representative expressed her interest in discussing bilaterally the launching and the implementation of this tool.

The MA commented that according to the milestones set the estimation is to have the first Subsidy Contracts signed in October/November 2024, however, this depends on the quantity and the quality of the submitted project proposals. Concerning the SPF Call, the MA informed the MC that a methodology on simplified costs option is being elaborated, the first draft is ready and is under process by the MA, afterward it will be sent to the NAs for comments and to the Audit Authority for its consent, before finalizing it and launching the SPF Call.

Mrs. Angelina Todorova-Boneva - Deputy Minister of the Bulgarian Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (Bulgarian National Authority - NA) stated that in the spirit of the bilateral cooperation, for the elaboration of the required by the EC more detailed timetable, the NA will cooperate with the MA to prepare it jointly. The NA also expressed the opinion that the complaint (appeal) procedure by the applicants for both stages of the evaluation process is considered unnecessary and it will possibly delay the signing of the Subsidy Contracts (Oct/Nov 2024). The MA commented that procedure for a complaint submission has a duration of seven (7) calendar days which is a short period of time, and it should not be skipped for transparency reasons. The NA clarified that the question was

addressed to the EC, explaining that since the MC selects the projects, this means that it is a collective body, not an administrative act to be appealed, thus the appeal may not be normatively required. If the MC rejects a project, then the applicants may receive recommendations and apply again in future Calls. However, if the appeal step is required and improves the transparency of the selection procedure then it is understandable and acceptable. The EC representative clarified that the complaint procedure is necessary, and it cannot be omitted. The applicant should have the opportunity to file a complaint and the complaint procedure must be part of the selection process and rules.

The Bulgarian NA also requested the applicants to be given at least 40-45 days to submit their proposals during the first Stage of the application procedure (concept note), to have enough time to familiarize with the new procedure, form their partnerships, and develop their project proposals. The MA clarified that according to the time schedule the call will be open for 45 days for the applicants to submit their concept notes.

- **Post 2021-2027 consultation phase**

The MA informed the EC officer that they have received the toolkit for Interreg post 2021-2027 consultation phase, however the NA should coordinate with the National Coordination Authority (NCA- Hellenic Ministry of Economy and Finance) who is responsible for all EU funded Programmes. The procedure for post 2021-2027 has started by forming a Special Committee of experts who has elaborated a list of issues to be defined and could be included in the next programmes, however, the consultation phase hasn't officially started yet and there is no accurate information available on when the discussion for the next programming period will start. In any case, the MA/NCA will participate in the process.

The EC representative informed the MC members that the Commission Services have reflection and work on the future cohesion policy started with the publication of the 8th cohesion report in 2022; the cohesion forum's conference on the challenges for the future cohesion policy and the setup of a group of high-level specialists on the future of cohesion policy, who have already had seven (7) meetings and two (2) more meetings are scheduled to take place in 2024. This whole process will feed into the post 2027 framework of cohesion policy. The outcome of the specialists' group will feed the 9th cohesion report which will be published in 2024 and will present the Commission's vision for cohesion policy post 2027. In April 2024, the cohesion forum will be organised in Brussels.

The EC is also launching a comprehensive consultation process in the Member States and part of this process is the consultation for the future Interreg – post 2027. It was launched at the annual Interreg event in October 2023, and it is scheduled to run throughout 2024 with the following milestones: (1) the Interreg Knowledge Fair in March to exchange information and best practices between Programmes; (2) the Interreg Community event in November where the first results of the public consultation are expected to be delivered. The process will close in February/March 2025 at the Annual Interreg event that will take place in European Capital of Culture Nova Gorica – Gorizia to discuss the outcomes and publish the results.

The general consultation of citizens and stakeholders is to be organised and coordinated in 2024 by the Interreg Programmes, with the support of the toolkit, sent by the Commission,

which is a tool designed to provide practical guidance on how to conduct a consultation and can be adapted to each territory. The EC representative pointed out that the most important thing is that, through the public consultation, all citizens and stakeholders are given the opportunity to provide their feedback and contribute to shaping the cohesion policy for post 2027. Therefore, the EC is expecting to receive a lot of participation and interesting results.

The MA commented that the Programme will contribute gladly and with all available means to the whole process, but first, they must coordinate at a national level, hopefully within 2024, and will follow closely the procedure for the future Interreg.

Finally, the EC representative recommended taking advantage of the Interreg Volunteer Youth (IVY) initiative to assist in the consultation process. The MA has already benefitted from this initiative during previous years.

Conclusions – Decisions

The Monitoring Committee **UNANIMOUSLY DECIDED to approve:**

1. the 2nd MC meeting's Agenda;
2. the 1st Call for Common Projects Proposals, the Programme and Project Implementation Manual and its Annexes;
3. the Projects Selection Methodology and the Evaluation Criteria;
4. the Timetable of Planned Calls.

END OF MEETING

THE CO – CHAIRING PERSONS OF THE MONITORING COMMITTEE

Mrs. Angelina Todorova-Boneva
Deputy Minister

Mrs. Mathilde Konstantopoulou
Advisor to the Special Secretary for
ERDF & CF Programmes

**Ministry of Regional Development and
Public Works**

**Hellenic Ministry of Economy and
Finance**