

**Greece – Bulgaria****Brief Minutes and Decisions of the 4th Monitoring Committee Meeting****Sofia (hybrid) - 27 of January 2026**

The Monitoring Committee (MC) of the Cross Border Cooperation (CBC) Programme INTERREG VI-A “Greece-Bulgaria 2021-2027” was conducted in Sofia, on the 27th of January 2026. The MC meeting was hybrid and was attended by 58 participants (in person and online participation): members with and without voting right from both countries and staff members of the two National Authorities (NAs), the Managing Authority (MA), and the Joint Secretariat (JS) of the Programme.

The MC meeting was chaired by Mrs. Yura Iordanova-Vitanova, Deputy Minister of Regional Development and Public Works of Bulgaria, and co-chaired by Mrs. Vasiliki Pantelopoulou, Secretary General of Partnership Agreement of the Hellenic Ministry of Economy and Finance. Present at the MC meeting was also Mrs. Maria Sioliou, Programme Manager, representative of the European Commission (DG REGIO).

Opening speeches were delivered by the two co-chairpersons, Mrs. Yura Iordanova-Vitanova and Mrs. Vasiliki Pantelopoulou, Mrs. Maria Sioliou and Mrs. Maria Nezeriti, Head of the Managing Authority “Interreg 2021-2027”. Mrs. Yura Iordanova-Vitanova emphasized that this meeting is an essential step forward for the successful implementation of the programme especially following the challenges encountered during the assessment process. The Deputy Minister suggested that the agreed procedure for sharing the necessary information with the MC members as well as the review procedure demonstrated that MC’s decision on selection of operations are justified with solid arguments and sufficient amount of information. In that respect such procedure should be applicable in any relevant case in the future. In addition, Mrs. Vitanova expressed on behalf of the Bulgarian delegation their gratification with the recent opening of a new border crossing Rudozem-Xanthi which will open new opportunities for the free movement of people, goods and services and would undoubtedly contribute to the economic, transport and cultural connectivity between the two countries.

The quorum of the MC was confirmed, and the agenda of the meeting was approved by the MC members. The declared conflicts of interest of the MC voting members were confirmed, based on the written declarations received in December 2025, and the meeting proceeded according to the approved agenda.

Mrs. Rosanna Semerdjian, Programme Officer of Unit A - Planning and Evaluation of the Managing Authority, presented briefly the main objectives of the Call, some background information about the evaluation procedure, and the project selection methodology.

Mrs. Jenya Dinkova, Project Officer of the Joint Secretariat, presented an overview of Phase B1: Administrative & Project Eligibility Assessment of the project proposals submitted under the 1st Call for Common Project Proposals, including submission results during Stage B (number of projects per Specific Objective, requested vs available budget per SO, potential beneficiaries per country etc.), the evaluation procedure followed during Phase B1, the proposed permitted errors and reasons for rejection and finally the proposed list of projects to pass to Phase B2 or to be rejected in Phase B1.

The MC members approved the proposed permitted errors and reasons for rejection of Phase B1: Administrative & Project Eligibility Assessment of the projects submitted under Stage B of the 1st Call for Common Project Proposals, as well as the results of Phase B1 Evaluation. Therefore, out of the total 60 submitted application forms, 50 passed to Phase B2 Quality Assessment and 10 were rejected in Phase B1, with total rejection rate 16,7%.

Mrs. Rosanna Semerdjian presented an overview of the evaluation procedures followed in Phase B2: Quality Assessment, including the procedure followed in 3rd assessments, and the ranking list/scoring tables of the projects per Specific Objective.

Consequently, the GR NA proposed the approval of 21 projects in total to be funded (6 projects in SO2.6, 6 in SO2.7, 3 in SO4.2 and 6 in SO4.6). The Bulgarian NA agreed to this proposal. The other members of both Delegations raised no objections, so the proposal was accepted.

Regarding the issue of covering any overbooking amount remaining at programme closure relating to the selected projects under the S.O.s 2.6 & 4.6, GR NA assured the MC members that the Hellenic Ministry of Economy and Finance will cover the relevant amount of overbooking of all project beneficiaries (both Greek and Bulgarian). However, both NAs agreed that the overbooking rate/amount should be rational in order not to burden significantly the national budget of the two countries. This also applies to the complaint's procedure and the reserve list activation.

At this point, concerns were raised by the Greek Regions of Central Macedonia and Eastern Macedonia and Thrace regarding the re-assessment procedure applied to certain projects at Phase B2, as well as the outcome of the evaluators' assessment, which resulted in changes to the ranking of some projects and the approval of one project (POLLI-BEEs) that had initially been rejected. The GR-NA and the MA

responded that the re-assessment procedure, which had been approved by the MC, primarily addressed requests submitted by the BG delegation, mainly related to imbalances in budget allocation between GR and BG partners and to the justification of scores awarded under the maturity criteria. The re-evaluation results indicate that there were no material errors or significant mistakes during the qualitative assessment process of the proposals, since they did not lead to substantial changes in the initial scoring or ranking. In any case, the Beneficiaries have the right to submit a complaint and the Complaint Committee will take the final decision. The BG-NA reiterated that the Bulgarian delegation's observations in the review procedure focused on verifying whether the assessment methodology approved by the Monitoring Committee was applied correctly. Therefore, the relevant comments were made exclusively in relation to objective criteria which could be assessed on the basis of evidence, figures and facts provided in the attached project documentation.

Additionally, the remaining 20 projects that received a passing score but were not selected for funding, due to call's budget thresholds, will be added to a reserve list which may be activated by the end of 2026. In the event of tied projects, the selection will be carried out on the basis of a relevant, duly substantiated proposal by the MA and after approval by the MC.

The total requested budget of the selected projects amounts to approximately €36.6 million, which is expected to be reduced by an average of 10% after the budget optimization phase applied to all selected projects. Thus, the total budget of the selected projects is estimated to exceed the available budget of the Call by approximately €3,7M (2,67%).

NEXT STEPS

- ❖ 28/1/2026: the Beneficiaries will be notified about the results of their project proposals' evaluation. The Beneficiaries of the rejected projects or those not approved for funding will have the right to submit a complaint within 7 working days and the Complaint Committee will examine them by the end of February.
- ❖ To accelerate the contracting process, in parallel:
 - Phase B3: Beneficiaries Eligibility Check & State Aid Compliance for Project Proposals which have been positively evaluated in phases B1 and B2 will start immediately by the JS/MA and in parallel with the complaint procedure
 - In case of Bulgarian Beneficiaries for whom the issuance of a Letter of Support is required by their designated authority, in order to sign the

Subsidy Contract, the relevant procedure should be initiated by the respective partner.

- It is estimated that by the end of March 2026, the meetings between the projects and the MA/JS for their budget optimization will be concluded
- It is estimated that the projects will be contracted by the end of April, beginning of May, respecting the deadline proposed by the EC Officer to have contracted projects in May 2026.

As Mrs. Sioliou highlighted that the risk of decommitment still exists, considering that we are in 2026 and - apart from the 3 strategic projects - the Programme does not have any contracted projects. Therefore, all involved parties (NAs-MA/JS and the Project Beneficiaries) should accelerate and put extra effort to start the implementation of the projects the soonest possible and have results in 2027.

OTHER ISSUES:

- EX-PATRIATION ALLOWANCE

The BG-NA raised the issue of the expatriation allowance for the JS employees originated from other countries than Greece. The GR-NA replied that there is a horizontal fiscal rule in the national law, which applies with no exception, according to which, the employee should not be a tax resident in Greece to receive this allowance.

- POST 2027

Mrs. Sioliou informed the MC members that the Commission has already submitted their proposal on the regulation for the next Multiannual Financial Framework, which includes Interreg. Thus, Interreg Programmes should start planning their future. The next MFF is performance based (payments from the Commission are based on the fulfilment of milestones and targets).and Programmes should show results. After the approval of the regulation, the Managing Authorities will have six months to submit their chapters which also require a territorial analysis. The EC participates in a study with ESPON on border profiles to have evidence-based policy recommendations. The MAs should respond to this study by the 15th of February and are welcome to share their comments with the EC. These border profiles will feed in the Border-Orientation Papers by EC and could also be used as base for the territorial analysis of the Programmes.

The MA is currently elaborating a workplan to form the Task Force and start working on the new Programme, in March/April 2026. Setting the milestones and targets of

the new Programme seems to be the most difficult and crucial task, since there seems to be limited flexibility.

Mrs. Sioliou added that the members of the MC should work on the Intervention logic of the new Programme and identify investment with added value for the programme area. This is a challenging task given the fact that the Programme 2021-2027 for its mid-term evaluation will have results only from strategic projects and not from common projects. The ESPON profile could be very useful in that aspect, since it is rich in data and could provide the basis for evidence based policy choices for the GR-BG border area.

Mrs. Nezeriti suggested launching a written procedure to amend the programme's approved evaluation plan, postponing the programme's mid-term evaluation, which is supposed to take place in October 2026, due to lack of results from the common projects. Otherwise, the mid-term evaluation should be based exclusively on the results of the approved strategic projects. BG NA agreed on the 1st approach.

CONCLUSION – DECISIONS

The Monitoring Committee unanimously decided:

- The approval of the MC meeting **agenda**.
- The approval of the **permitted errors** and of the **reasons for rejection** concerning "Phase B1: Administrative & Project Eligibility Assessment" of the project proposals submitted under Stage B of the 1st Call for Common Project Proposals.
- The approval of the proposed **evaluation results of Phase B1: Administrative & Project Eligibility Assessment** of the project proposals submitted under the 1st Call for Common Project Proposals. **50 out of the 60 projects passed to Phase B2: Quality Assessment and 10 were rejected.**
- **The approval of the proposed evaluation results of Phase B2: Quality Assessment** of the project proposals submitted under the 1st Call for Common Project Proposals, including the procedure followed in 3rd assessment cases. **21 projects were approved for funding** whereas **20 projects that received a passing score will be added to a reserve list.**
- As a general principle, a 10% reduction in the budgets of the 21 projects, averagely, could be applied, while the exact amount of the reduction will be determined during technical meetings between each project's partnership and the MA/JS.
- The Greek National Authority (Ministry of Economy and Finance) will cover the overbooking amount of the certified budget of the selected 12 projects for funding under SOs 2.6 & 4.6 (concerning both Greek and Bulgarian partners),

in case the total certified expenditure exceeds the total available Programme budget.

END OF MEETING

THE CO – CHAIRING PERSONS OF THE MONITORING COMMITTEE

Mrs. Yura Iordanova-Vitanova

Deputy Minister

Mrs. Vasiliki Pantelopoulou

Secretary General of Partnership
Agreement

**Ministry of Regional Development and
Public Works**

Ministry of Economy and Finance