



HELLENIC REPUBLIC  
MINISTRY OF ECONOMY, DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM



MANAGING AUTHORITY OF EUROPEAN  
TERRITORIAL COOPERATION PROGRAMMES  
JOINT SECRETARIAT  
INTERREG V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020  
Cooperation Programme

**DECISIONS  
and BRIEF MINUTES  
of the Monitoring Committee**

**1<sup>st</sup> Meeting, Sandanski, Bulgaria,  
4<sup>th</sup> of November 2015**

The Monitoring Committee of Cooperation Programme INTERREG V-A Greece- Bulgaria 2014-2020, convened according to the invitation document number 301741/MA4455/14-10-2015, assembled on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 2015 in Sandanski, Bulgaria, in order to discuss the following programme issues:

- Approval of the Agenda
- Internal Rules of Procedure of the Monitoring Committee: presentation, discussion and approval
- Internal Rules of Procedure of the Joint Secretariat: presentation, discussion and approval
- Presentation and approval of the Communication Strategy
- Presentation and approval of the Technical Assistance Plan
- 1st Call: presentation, discussion and approval
- 2nd Call: presentation, discussion and approval. Restricted for Strategic Project Proposals under Priority Axis 3
- 3rd Call: information on the progress for Strategic Project Proposals under Priority Axis 2
- Conclusions – Decisions

The meeting was attended by 52 members, 18 with voting right and 34 without voting right, according to the list of participants attached. The same list includes the members who participated as observers/experts. The meeting was attended by Mr. Z. Szokolai, Programme Manager, European Commission (EC).

After the opening speeches, the voting members approved unanimously the agenda, and the following items, presentations were made accordingly:

- a. Internal Rules of Procedure of the Monitoring Committee: Mr. D. Liatsis, staff member of Unit B1, Managing Authority (MA)
- b. Internal Rules of Procedure of the Joint Secretariat: presentation, discussion and approval: Mr. D. Gertsos, staff member of Unit A, MA

- c. Presentation and approval of the Communication Strategy: Mrs. A. Aritzi, Communication officer, Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS)
- d. Presentation and approval of the Technical Assistance Plan: Mrs. A. Lioliou, staff member of Unit D, MA
- e. 1st & 2nd Call for proposals: Mr. G. Charalampoys, Mrs. J. Dinkova and Mrs. G. Georgieva, JTS Project Officers

After the completion of the presentations, the following remarks/comments were made:

- *Internal Rules of Procedure of the Monitoring Committee*

Issues were raised by Mr. Szokolai regarding the specific articles procedures such as the set up a Steering Committee. As there were several issues raised, the co-chairperson Mrs. Bouziani, Hellenic Ministry of Economy Development and Tourism, requested that Mr. Szokolai sends his recommendations in writing.

Mr. Emmanuel, Head of the Managing Authority of the European Territorial Cooperation Programmes, proposed that the Rules of Procedure were approved with their current structure and all issues raised would be discussed and integrated through a written procedure.

The members of the MC were asked to declare their impartiality related to the decisions taken by the MC. All members of the MC declared their impartiality.

- *Internal Rules of Procedure of the Joint Secretariat*

Following the presentation, Mr. Szokolai requested for the status of the Joint Secretariat (JS) set-up in order to ensure the seamless implementation of the Programme.

Mrs. Bouziani, confirmed that the willingness of the Hellenic Ministry of Economy Development and Tourism is that the current members of the JTS are transferred to the JS of the Programming period 2014-2020. However, a modification of the existing National Greek Law regarding the Cooperation Programmes needs to be introduced in the respective articles regarding the procedure of the JS recruitment, since the current text includes an open procedure that will delay the set up of the JS.

Mr. Szokolai stressed that JS structure should be established on a permanent basis according to the deadlines of the EC because otherwise the Programme will not be able to provide the Payment Claims for the new Programme.

Mrs. Nikolova, Deputy Minister of the Bulgarian Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, endorsed the transfer of the current members of the JTS to the JS structure of the Programming Period 2014-2020 since, in case of any delays, the successful implementation of the new Programme will be at risk.

Mr. Emmanuel expressed his satisfaction for the effectiveness of the JTS structure and officers' contribution to the successful implementation of the current Programme and supported the timely transfer of the JTS members to the new Programming period.

Until the amendments in the Greek Law are approved and the procedures for the JS recruitment are modified for the transferring, the Monitoring Committee gave its consent to the continuation of the provided services of the current members of the JTS until 31/12/2016 to:

- a. close the current Programming Period 2007-2013, and
- b. activate the new Programming Period 2014-2020

The Monitoring Committee agreed with the implementation of this decision by the Greek National Authority and the MOU SA .

The expenses for the JTS staff members will be reimbursed by the Technical Assistance budget of the Programming Period 2014-2020.

- *Presentation and approval of the principles of the Communication Strategy*

Following the presentation, Mr. Mladenov, Head of Unit, Bulgarian Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, expressed his concerns about the support of the Programme to the Macro-regional strategies since the two countries are part of different strategies.

Mrs Aritzi explained that the use of the term "Macro-regional strategies" during the presentation was used in a broader context and that was done to underline the continuous efforts made by all Programmes in the communication field in order to tackle common challenges such as to raise the awareness of the Interreg Programmes in general.

Mr. Szokolai underlined the importance of the Euro-barometer findings (Survey entitled: Citizens awareness and perceptions of EU regional policy) as an important indicator regarding the degree of awareness in the cross-border area. He also presented briefly the public consultation that is up and running until the end of the year and invited the participants to take part in this initiative.

Mrs. Bouziani pinpointed the importance of the Communication Strategy and the presentation of the results from the communication campaign on the current Programming Period, in order to advertise and highlight the added value of the Programme to its target groups.

The Monitoring Committee discussed and adopted the principles of the Communication Strategy.

- *Presentation and approval of the Technical Assistance Plan*

The Monitoring Committee approved the Technical Assistance Plan.

- *1st Call for proposals*
  - *Presentation of the Call for Common project proposals documents*
  - *Call for Common project proposals application guidelines*
  - *Evaluation procedure for the Call for Common project proposals*

After the presentations, on a question raised about the set maximum period for project implementation of 2 years, Mrs. Bouziani and Mr. Fotiadis, Coordinator of the JTS, explained that in all cases when the project could not be completed during the set implementation period, an extension could be granted upon a proper justification of necessity. Extension is granted in exceptional cases only.

Mr. Plamenov, Ecoforum for Sustainable Development, proposed that all types of stakeholders in the eligible area should be covered. He proposed that NGOs are included as eligible beneficiaries for Investment Priorities 6f and 9a. He also asked about the possibility to apply with a project proposal via Internet only.

Mrs. Bouziani explained that the beneficiaries are explicitly mentioned in the Programme. Mr. Emmanuel declared that a beneficiary could be included as eligible applicant upon a proper justification proving its coherence to the Programme and Call's rules as well as relevant capacity.

Ms Bouziani stated that at this stage an on-line submission has not been envisaged. Mr. Samaras, Head of Unit in the Managing Authority of the ETCP, added that may be for the next call next year this option will be available, also for PR submission and other documents.

Mr. Szokolai mentioned that the EC has issued an indicative list of beneficiaries and the MC can decide specifically. He also encouraged the MA/JS to review all possibilities to request most of the documents electronically only, as there is such decision of the EC. He also suggested some guidelines for the complaints procedure to be included.

Mr. Fotiadis declared that such reference is already made in the evaluation procedure.

Mrs. Gerdjikova, Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science, asked about a specific procedure for avoidance of double financing check.

Mr. Fotiadis explained that all applicants should sign such a declaration which is requested within the initial package. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> level controllers also execute control on this issue and may imply corrections. The MA and the National Authority (NA) have the responsibility to execute a control for double financing, too.

Mr. Petrov, Bulgarian Road Infrastructure Agency, requested a 6 months period of returning unused funds to give opportunity for modification that could be submitted by the remaining partners.

Mrs. Georgieva clarified that any request for modification will be considered upon proper justification as the main goal is to have good projects with fully achieved results.

Mrs. Nikolova suggested that, in case of lack of specific capacity during the evaluation process, external experts are involved following a procedure for their appointment.

Mr. Fotiadis explained that if such a case arises then the JS will send a request to the MA and the NA to appoint such experts.

Mrs. Nikolova asked about the opportunity for the BG partners to receive advance payment from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) advance received on Programme level.

Mr. Samaras answered that the advance issue will be a subject of the Memorandum of Understanding to be signed between the two countries. A meeting concerning advances is planned in Athens and the Bulgarian competent authorities are welcome to participate as well.

Mrs. Bouziani stated that advance payments require certain guarantees. She also suggested that the NA directly transfers the national co-financing to BG beneficiaries.

Mrs. Nikolova declared that the state participates in the Programme which is the best guarantee. She insisted on equal treatment of partners from both countries and appealed for learned lessons from the mistakes in the current period. The NA will participate in the Technical meeting in Athens with regard the issues concerning transfer an advance payment of the ERDF financing to all beneficiaries and procedure for the ensuring the Bulgarian national co-financing to the Bulgarian beneficiaries.

The following open issues were discussed:

1. Beneficiaries outside the eligible area

Two options were presented as follows:

- Beneficiaries registered outside the eligible area but in Greece or Bulgaria could receive up to 20% financing of the project budget, or

- Beneficiaries located outside the eligible area are not eligible.

Ms Bouziani stated that the Greek side supports the 1st option. The participation of such beneficiaries is not unconditional – their activities should be inside the eligible area and they should have specific capacity related to the project substance.

Mrs. Nikolova supported the 1st option, too.

The members of the MC accepted the first option.

#### 2. Authorities for which the 20% budget limit does not apply:

The members of the MC accepted that the 20% budget limit will not be applicable for the National Public Authorities.

#### 3. To reduce the limit of the 50% of staff costs at a beneficiary level when calculated as real costs:

The members of the MC accepted that for budget line 'staff' the two options - flat rate and real costs could be used. The option selected applies on a project level. (i.e. All beneficiaries of the same project should follow either the flat rate or the real costs calculation option).

#### 4. Soft and investment projects

Three options were presented as follows:

- No distinction between soft and investment projects, or
- Up to 50% of the project budget for investments will classify the project as soft, above 50% of the project budget for investments will classify the project as investment, or
- Up to 35% of the project budget for investments will classify the project as soft and min 70% of the project budget for investments will classify the project as investment.

Mrs. Bouziani suggested not discussing about investment projects but about substantial projects in the region. The Greek side supports the investment activities. These activities cover about the 60% of the Programme. The separation makes planning more difficult for the potential beneficiaries and the gap in the third option is unjustified. She suggested that a recommendation is made in the guidelines and also in the criteria to have investments in each project.

Mrs. Nikolova emphasized the separation based on the experience in the current period. The NA also supports the infrastructure activities. The projects with soft activities only and projects with investment components up to 35% should be considered as soft projects with a lower budget ceiling.

Mrs. Nikolova suggested that the JS prepares a list of already made studies, strategies, etc. under the previous Programme, to avoid double financing and unnecessary repetition of soft activities.

Mr. Harris Vourkas stated that if a distinction between soft and investment projects is introduced, it complicates unnecessarily the evaluation process and will be subject to claims.

The members of the MC agreed that there would be no distinction between soft and investment projects. They agreed that the minimum budgets of the projects for all investment priorities to be 250 000 euro.

The members of the MC authorized the MA and the NA to define the maximum budgets of the projects per investment priority and to organize a written procedure of the MC to approve the Call for common projects documents.

- *2<sup>nd</sup> Call for proposals*

The Call for Strategic project proposal was approved by the members of the MC.

The Monitoring Committee:

**UNANIMOUSLY DECIDED:**

1. Approves the Agenda.
2. Approves the Internal Rules of Procedure of the Monitoring Committee and declared their impartiality.
3. Approves the Internal Rules of Procedure of the Joint Secretariat and the extension of the JTS Member contracts until the 31st of December 2016, authorizing the Greek National Authority and the MOU SA to proceed with the implementation of this decision with the use of the Technical Assistance budget 2014-2020.
4. Adopts the principles of the Communication Strategy. The fully elaborated communication strategy document will be submitted for discussion and approval to the next MC meeting.
5. Approves the Multiannual Technical Assistance Plan and the budget allocations.
6. Approves the Call Package for common project proposals and authorizes the MA, NA and JS to define the maximum budgets of the projects per investment priority and organize a written procedure of the MC to approve the necessary adjustments to the final documents of the call for common projects.
7. A beneficiary could be included as eligible applicant upon a proper justification proving its coherence to the Programme and Call's rules as well as relevant capacity.
8. Approves that for budget line 'staff' the two options - flat rate and real costs could be used. The option selected applies on a project level. (i.e. All beneficiaries of the same project should follow either the flat rate or the real costs calculation option).
9. Approves the Call Package for Strategic project proposal under the Priority Axis 3 that is going to be addressed to the specific partners who are mentioned in the call.

It must be noted that all decisions taken by the MC are final.

**THE CO – CHAIRING PERSONS OF THE MONITORING COMMITTEE**

**Ms Denitsa Nikolova**  
**Deputy Minister**

**Ms Angeliki Bouziani**  
**Special Secretary Advisor**

**Ministry of Regional Development  
and Public Works**

**Ministry of Economy, Development  
and Tourism**

**Attachments:**

1. Table – Attendance Sheet of Monitoring Committee Members from the Greek and the Bulgarian side

APPROVED