



HELLENIC REPUBLIC

Ministry of Development & Competitiveness

PROJECT:

“Consultant for:

i) the Ex-ante Evaluation

ii) the Strategic Environmental Assessment

of the European Territorial Cooperation Programme Greece – Bulgaria 2014-2020”

NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY

Study for the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the European Territorial Cooperation Programme Greece – Bulgaria 2014-2020

Contractors:

EUROTEC S.A.



OMIKRON Ltd Environmental Engineering & Technical Works Design, Study and Management



SEA Implementation:



OMIKRON LTD

Working Team

Stergios Diamantopoulos, Forester – Environmentalist

Antonis Mantzavelas, Dr. Forester – Environmentalist

Foteini Mergou, MSc Biologist

THESSALONIKI

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Programme Eligible Area

The present study aims on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Cross Border Cooperation Operational Programme, Greece – Bulgaria for the period 2014-2020. The area of the cross-border cooperation includes the Region of Eastern Macedonia-Thrace (Regional Units of Kavala, Rodopi, Xanthi, Drama, and Evros) and the Region of Central Macedonia (Regional Units of Thessaloniki and Serres) in Greece and the South-Central Planning Region and South-West Planning Region (Districts of Kardjali, Smolyan, Haskovo and Blagoevgrad) in Bulgaria.



Picture 1. Eligible area of the Cross-Border Cooperation Operational Programme Greece–Bulgaria 2014-2020” (Reference: www.interreg.gr)

The Programme area is characterized by a varied natural environment, ranging from continental, Mediterranean and alpine zones. The area is densely forested and offers habitat to numerous species including large mammals. Natural resources and biodiversity are protected within a dense network of protected areas (86 NATURA 2000 sites, 1 UNESCO World Heritage, 8 National Parks, 6 Wetlands of international Interest and numerous Important bird sanctuaries). Additionally many flora and fauna species naturally occurring in the area are classified as “threatened” by the IUCN.

Agriculture, industry, urban activities, transportation and large hydraulic constructions are the largest environmental threats. These activities are concentrated in the coastal zone and on the northern side of the Rhodopes Mountain. The rivers of the area (Struma/Strymon, Mesta/Nestos, Maritsa/Evros-Ardas) are important elements for nature and humans but also cause natural disasters due to natural phenomena but also due to human interventions.

In the following table a strategic overview of the trends and the likely evolution of the main environmental issues, as it came out through the elaborated strategic environmental assessment of the Programme, is outlined and the necessity of cross-border intervention is justified.

Environmental Issues	Trend and likely evolution	Cross-border cooperation Justification
<u>Biodiversity, Fauna and Flora</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The protection status for the natural environment will contribute to the protection of fauna, flora, biodiversity and natural habitats. Transport networks, land-take (encroachment) and agriculture are expected to have rising impacts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cooperation between management bodies of protected areas and other stakeholders in sites' protection and promotion and conduction of cross-border environmental assessments can improve the protection of the environment
<u>Human health and population</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disturbance due to road transport is expected to rise, especially along the main axes. Flood disasters along major river systems will periodically reoccur and forest fires are also a major threat. The dimension of impacts on population and infrastructures will arise due to global climate change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotion of monitoring stations, provision of alternatives to road transport and development of service economy could assist in improving air quality on a cross-border level. Development of alternative transport modes and promotion of public transport could limit negative effects. Effective flood management and integrated water management systems should be implemented on a cross-border level. Protection and prevention of fire risk and activation of volunteering and local civil protection teams must be promoted across borders.
<u>Soil</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Soil is in general in good condition. Agriculture and industry are constant threats. However, the implementation of the new CAP poses new opportunities such as organic agriculture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of cross-border networks and markets for organic products and promotion of tourism oriented services can provide incentives for extensive and biological agriculture and the relief of the soil and subsoil.
<u>Water</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Groundwater and surface water can be designated as of incomplete to good status. Cross-border rivers Nestos and Evros are polluted with urban and industrial effluents. The adoption of related EU Directives will further improve this situation. Nevertheless improvements can be effective if coordinating actions on the upper and lower part of the rivers had been taking place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Main rivers flowing across the area are transboundary. Bilateral agreements and monitoring systems are required to guarantee mutual adaptation to the norms and requirements. Cross-border cooperation should be used to secure the coordination of investments in infrastructure.
<u>Air, climatic factors</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of air is generally good. High pollution levels occurred in sites of industrial or extractive-mining activities but they are of limited impact. Emissions due to transport and consumption patterns are expected to rise. Centers such as Thessaloniki and Kavala will be especially affected. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The promotion of monitoring stations, the provision of alternatives to road transport and the development of service economy could assist in improving air on a cross-border level.
<u>Landscape, cultural heritage</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land use and land taking will be intensified, development of tourism activities will be strengthened and cultural heritage will be further enhanced as one of the regional assets to be extensively promoted. Some uses are contradictory and conflicts along with damages on the landscape can be expected. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotion of sustainable and alternative (ecological and cultural) tourism can be addressed as a single product for the entire area, hence increasing the sensibility for the development value of landscape and cultural heritage. Creation and promotion of synergies through networking and cooperation between the public and private sectors can increase the added value of areas

Programme is designed to address the main challenges in the cross-border area, identified by the diagnostic report of the Expert Consultant on the Programme's preparation. Collaboration is either necessary or is expected to produce significant added value. Programme is formulated into the following four priority axes and nine thematic objectives.

❖ **Priority Axis 1: A competitive and Innovative Cross-Border area**

Thematic objectives:

- Promoting entrepreneurship, in particular by facilitating the economic exploitation of new ideas and fostering the creation of new firms, including through business incubators
- Supporting the capacity of SMEs to grow in regional, national and international markets, and to engage in innovation processes

❖ **Priority Axis 2: A Sustainable and climate adaptable Cross-Border area**

Thematic objectives:

- Promoting investment to address specific risks, ensuring disaster resilience and developing disaster management systems
- Conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage
- Protecting and restoring biodiversity, soil protection and restoration and promoting ecosystem services including NATURA 2000 and green infrastructures
- Promoting innovative technologies to improve environmental protection and resource efficiency in the waste sector, water sector, soil protection or to reduce air pollution.

❖ **Priority Axis 3: A better interconnected Cross- Border area**

Thematic objectives:

- Enhancing regional mobility by connecting secondary and tertiary nodes to TEN-T infrastructure, including multimodal nodes.
- Developing and improving environmentally-friendly (including low-noise) and low-carbon transport systems, including inland waterways and maritime transport, ports, multimodal links and airport infrastructure, in order to promote sustainable regional and local mobility.

❖ **Priority Axis 4: A socially inclusive Cross-Border area**

Thematic objective:

- Investing in health and social infrastructure which contribute to national, regional and local development, reducing inequalities in terms of health status, promoting social inclusion through improved access to social, cultural and recreational services and the transition from institutional to community-based services.

❖ **Priority Axis 5: Technical Assistance**

Programme's Relationship with the EU thematic environmental strategies

Relationship of the Programme with the current EU thematic environmental strategies was also studied.

Strategies for biodiversity

- Directive 92/43/EEC about “the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora”
- Directive 2009/147/EC about “the conservation of wild birds”, as codified by Directive
- An EU biodiversity strategy to 2020

Strategies for human health and population

- EU’s strategy for sustainable development
- Strategies for dealing with natural disasters
- Directive 2007/60/EC «on the assessment and management of flood risks»
- Forest EU Strategy: for forests and the forest-based sector

Strategies for soil

- EU’s thematic strategy for soil protection

Strategies for water

- Directive 2000/60/EC "establishing a framework for the Community action in the field of water policy"
- Directive 2008/56/EC “establishing a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy (Marine Strategy Framework Directive)”

Strategies for air

- EU’s thematic strategy on air pollution
- Directive 2008/50/EC "on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe"

Strategies for the climate factors

- EU’s strategy on adaptation to climate change

Studying all the above it is obvious that programme’s priority axes and thematic objectives are in coherence with the existing european environmental policies.

Programme’s environmental impact assessment – Presentation of proposals for impacts’ prevention, reduction and response

From the impact assessment of this Programme the following results per priority axes came out. About all identified adverse impacts aroused from the implementation of the foreseen priority axes of the Programme, proposals for their prevention, reduction and response will also be presented.

❖ **Priority Axis 1**

Results of Priority axis 1 primarily concern the socio-economic features of the eligible area. In this issue, the overall effect of this priority axis is assessed as positive.

Priority axis 1 is not expected to have a primary effect on the natural environment. However impact on natural environment cannot be excluded if the benefited businesses are located in ecological sensitive areas, without taking all appropriate measures for environmental protection, restoration and monitoring and without compliance with the existing legal provisions on using natural resources.

Implementation of eligible actions of this Axis requires compliance with the existing environmental legislation of each country (where appropriate) on environmental permissions, approval and maintenance of any required specific environmental conditions and also preparation and approval of all required environmental studies.

It should be noted that:

- this axis, during evaluation and selection of eligible projects, could promote and strengthen business activities with environmentally friendly production processes, cooperation of businesses on adopting new technologies (industrial emission control facilities) and improving their environmental character;
- for strengthening businesses competitiveness, aid actions for participation in eco-management and audit schemes (EMAS) or adoption of certifications (ISO) by companies could be provided. These actions also provide improvement of their environmental performance, while also improving their market image.

❖ Priority Axis 2

Priority axis 2 is expected to have positive effects on protection of flora and fauna species from any threats they face and any potential risks. Positive effects are also expected from networking collaboration and efficient management of the protected areas, especially those of the NATURA 2000 network.

Impacts may occur if projects for protection and improvement of natural environment will be implemented without taking all appropriate precautions to reduce any disturbances to the natural environment. However these impacts are considered to be weak and negligible.

Implementation of eligible actions of this Axis requires compliance with the existing environmental legislation of each country (where appropriate) on environmental permitting and approval and maintenance of any required specific environmental conditions and also preparation and approval all required environmental studies.

Considering the implementation of this priority axis and thematic objectives it should be noted that focusing on common rules and standards for protection and upgrading and integrated management of transnational environmental resources of high regional importance will improve the Programme's results and contribute effectively to its objectives' achievement. Creation and operation of partnership networks of private and public actors will contribute additional benefits towards this direction. Assistance to this will be also provided by voluntary groups for preventing and dealing with natural disasters.

❖ Priority Axis 3

Actions for transportation improvement are expected to positively contribute to the stimulation and trade of commercial activities as well as the strengthening between the two countries.

Priority axis 3 is not expected to primarily affect the natural environment. However impacts on biodiversity cannot be excluded if interventions locate in ecological sensitive areas, without taking all appropriate measures for protection or restoration of the environment.

Implementation of eligible actions of this Axis requires compliance with the existing environmental legislation of each country (where appropriate) on environmental permissions and approval and maintenance of any required specific environmental conditions. In these cases preparation of all required studies (studies for environmental assessment, congestion studies etc) ensures compatibility with the environmental legislation.

❖ Priority Axis 4

Implementation of priority axis 4 is not expected to cause adverse environmental impacts.

❖ Priority Axis 5

Priority axis 5 is a tool for enhancing management and operational structures of the Programme. Its implementation is not expected to have any immediate impact on the external environment of the Programme.

Consultations' Process

❖ Greek side

According to the greek legislation consultation includes two phases:

i. Consultation with public authorities

Send of study to Relevant Public authorities

- Relevant Ministries: Ministry of environment, energy & climate change, Ministry of Development & Competitiveness, Ministry of Infrastructure, Transport and Networks, Ministry of Culture and Sports etc.);
- Relevant departments of Hellenic Ministry of environment;
- Government of the Republic of Bulgaria;
- Relevant decentralized administration and regional departments.

Duration: 45 days

ii. Consultation with the public

Publication of a procurement notice in at least two newspapers of national coverage.

Duration: 30 days

❖ Bulgarian side

Consultations' process in the Bulgarian side includes consultation with Ministry of Environment and Water, programme department/authorities and identified as interested representatives of the public and third parties.

Duration: 30 days