

Press Release
10/07/2023

Dynamic “presence” from representatives of universities, professional and business organisations and local authorities at the Conference for the Promotion of Entrepreneurial Innovation in the Cross-Border Area held at the end of the cross-border Co Working project

In the presence of representatives from higher academic institutions and from the whole range of business and professional institutions of the city and the regional unit of Central Macedonia, as well as from the neighbouring country Bulgaria, the Conference **“Enhancing Business Innovation in the Cross-border Region: Lessons, Challenges and the Contribution of Local Institutions”**, organised by the [Alexander Innovation Zone](#), was held on Friday, July 7th, at the end of the cross-border project [Co Working - “Promotion entrepreneurship by supporting promising innovative ideas through pre-incubating mechanisms”](#) -INTERREG V-A Greece - Bulgaria 2014 -2020.

The Conference, which was held in the Municipal Council Hall of Thessaloniki, was greeted by the Vice Governor of Development and Environment of Central Macedonia, Mr. Konstantinos Gioutikas, the Vice-Mayor of Environment, Greenery and Sustainable Mobility of West Thessaloniki, Mr. Socratis Dimitriadis, Mrs. Anna Malcheva, representative of the National Company Industrial Zones based in Sofia, Mr. Mr. Anastasios Kapnopolis, President of the Thessaloniki Chamber of Crafts, Mrs. Chrysanthi Georgiadou-Granouzi, First Vice President of the Thessaloniki Chamber of Commerce and Mr. Ioannis Tsitsopoulos, President of the Standing Committee for Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship and Innovation, on behalf of the Technical Chamber of Greece-Central Macedonia Section.

The speakers then took the floor, starting with the host of the event, Dr Panagiotis Ketikidis, President of the Alexander Innovation Zone, who spoke about the development strategy of Thessaloniki’s innovation ecosystem. They were followed by Mr. Nikos Theodorakis, Professor of Sports Management of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Mr. Dimitrios Goulas, on behalf of the Greek Exporters Association (SEVE), Mr. Georgios Kostaras from the Special Programme Management Service of Central Macedonia, Mrs. Jenya Dinkova, Project Manager of the Joint Secretariat of the INTERREG V-A Greece - Bulgaria 2014 -2020 Programme, Mr. Spyros Skotidas, General Manager of the company “KEPA-ANEM”, Mr. Manolis Vlachogiannis, First Vice President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Thessaloniki and Mr. Ioannis Tsoukalidis, special associate of the Municipality of Paggai.

Both in the speeches and in the discussion that followed, a number of very important issues were raised and highlighted:

It was pointed out that the reference countries are ranked very low in the innovation index (Bulgaria in the 26th place in Europe and Greece in the 20th place), a finding that is intensified when referring to the cross-border region. However, it was estimated that closer cooperation between business stakeholders, within a distinct planning framework and with clear roles, can contribute to a better understanding and ultimately strengthen business innovation. In this coordinated dialogue and with regard to Thessaloniki in particular, the Alexander Innovation Zone can play an essential role, which it has committed to do.

Also, in the context of strengthening the qualitative characteristics of entrepreneurial innovation in South-East Europe, it was considered essential to undertake a comprehensive effort to network innovation zones in this region.

The discussion further highlighted the role of innovation ecosystems in entrepreneurial discovery and the importance of the quadruple helix in the content and direction of innovation for each region. In this

respect, and in discussing spatial capital, the crucial role of local government in supporting entrepreneurship in general is brought out, either in regulating spatial arrangements, or in accelerating licensing procedures (e.g. urban planning permits) and reducing bureaucracy, but also in clear strategies to support entrepreneurship and innovation locally.

The representatives of the participating services managing the funding (OP Central Macedonia, INTERREG Special Service, IME "KEPA ANEM"), pointed out that it is particularly important to use the respective funding challenges based on the needs and not opportunistically. Participants were encouraged to move from taking advantage of the funding opportunity to funding tactical objectives.

It was also established that the management weaknesses of co-financed projects can be considered as residual, which affects their carrying capacity and dynamics.

An important addition to the work of the Conference, which highlights the contribution of similar projects in strengthening entrepreneurial innovation and start-ups in the cross-border region, was the presentation of 3 of the business ideas by their own initiators, who participated in the seminars of the programme. These 3 presentations, one from the side of the Greek project beneficiaries, one from the side of the Bulgarians and one from a guest group of young, promising entrepreneurs from Thrace Incubator, were a small and indicative part of all the business ideas developed in the project and presented on Thursday July 6th, at the 2nd Start-up Business Mission held at the Alexander Innovation Zone, which was attended by more than 15 beneficiaries. The 3 presentations were respectively on a) online booking of video and photography services, b) sustainable wine production and c) an educational application, via mobile or tablet, aimed at primary and secondary school children.

Please be reminded that the aim of the Co Working project, which was completed with the Conference, after 27 months, was the development of entrepreneurship in the cross-border region between Greece and Bulgaria and the enhancement of cooperation between the businesses of the two countries through the establishment of support mechanisms for the pre-accession of businesses in Greece and Bulgaria. During the project, 130 beneficiaries participated in the training seminars and 43 of them developed with the help of their mentors viable business ideas, various activities were carried out, such as workshops, 2 start-up business missions in Greece and Bulgaria, etc., while also, units and tools for pre-testing and analysis of business ideas were created, which will remain in use after the completion of the project.

In addition to the [Alexander Innovation Zone](#), which was the lead partner of the project, the [Special Account for Research Funds of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki](#), the [University of National and World Economy](#) and the [National Company Industrial Zones PLC.](#) from Bulgaria were the implementing partners.



The project is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the national funds of the countries participating in the Cooperation Programme INTERREG VA "Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020".

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