

Bulgaria – Serbia IPA Cross-border Programme 2014 – 2020

Draft Programme

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I. STRATEGY FOR THE COOPERATION PROGRAMME'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE SELECTED THEMATIC PRIORITIES AND THE RELEVANT PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT AND COUNTRY STRATEGIC PAPER(S)

1.1 Strategy for the cooperation programme's contribution to the selected thematic priorities and the relevant Partnership Agreement and Country Strategic Paper(s)

1.1.1 Description of the cooperation programme's strategy for contributing to the selected thematic priorities and the relevant Partnership Agreement and Country Strategic Paper(s)

STRATEGIC POLICY CONTEXT

The Bulgaria-Serbia IPA CBC Programme (2014-2020) is designed in the framework of the European strategy for a smart, inclusive and sustainable growth and the relevant national strategic documents. The main policy framework at European, macro-regional and national level are reflected at the programme are as follow:

- ♦ **The Europe 2020: A European Strategy for Smart, Sustainable, and Inclusive Growth**

The Europe 2020 strategy is shared among the European institutions, the member states and the social partners in order to be taken the necessary action to help reach the Europe 2020 targets. The strategy puts forward three mutually reinforcing priorities:

- **Smart growth:** developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation.
- **Sustainable growth:** promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy and
- **Inclusive growth:** fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion.

It sets focus on five overarching headline targets that have to be reached by 2020. These targets require a mixture of national and EU action, utilising the full range of policies and instruments available. At Member State level, full ownership is essential from Heads of States and governments, including regional and local levels. The civil society, including social partners and other stakeholders, also have an important role to play, both in the development of the programmes and in monitoring follow-up on the ground. The same principle applies for the seven underpinning flagship initiatives.

In the context of the Bulgaria-Serbia IPA CBC programme 2014-2020, the synergy with the aforementioned national and EU actions is sought.

- ♦ **The European Territorial Cooperation strategy and the role of the Cross Border Cooperation**

The European Territorial Agenda 2020 identifies some key challenges and potentials for territorial development. These include increased exposure to globalisation, demographic

changes, social and economic exclusion, climate change, and loss of biodiversity, all relevant to the Programme area. It describes the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) and CBC Programmes, as “... a key factor in global competition... facilitating better utilisation of development potentials and the protection of natural environment”. Three categories provide a starting point for the typology of results of cooperation programmes, which reveals some crucial aspects of the ETC approach, namely¹:

- **Integration related results**, i.e. the establishment and implementation of joint territorial governance mechanisms for common assets;
- **Investment related results**, i.e. delivering socio-economic benefits similar to mainstream programmes either by direct investments or by preparing such investments; and
- **Performance related results**, i.e. inducing improvements on organisational and individual performance.

Complementary, the Commission working document “*Elements for a Common Strategic Framework 2014 to 2020*” describes a number of other characteristics of cross-border cooperation:

- Support the **joint management** and promotion of the shared major geographic features;
- Achieving a **critical mass** for success, especially in the field of innovation and ICT;
- Achieving **economies of scale** for more efficient investments in services and infrastructure;
- Providing support for the **coherent planning** of transport infrastructure (including TEN-T) and the development of environmentally friendly and interoperable transport modes in larger geographical areas.

The present Programme is fully compliant with the above cooperation programmes’ characteristics, while also adding the integration into macro area framework (e.g. the Danube Macro Region), that generates substantial challenges and opportunities of coordination and synergies.

♦ **The European Strategy for the Danube Region**

The Bulgaria-Serbia IPA CBC Programme contributes to and interacts with, the macro-regional strategy that the EU has devised for the countries and regions that share common needs and objectives in the Danube Region². The open-ended EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) was adopted in December 2010 and provides an overall framework for parts of Central and South East Europe area³, aiming at fostering integration and integrative development.

The strategy includes four pillars:

¹ INTERACT, working documents.

² Danube Region encompasses the entire eligible area of Bulgaria-Serbia IPA CBC Programme.

³ The Danube Region covers 12 countries (Austria, the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria as Member States of the EU, as well as Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and the Republic of Moldova) plus the ‘Danubian’ regions of Germany and the Ukraine.

- (1) **Connecting** the Danube Region,
- (2) **Protecting** the environment in the Danube Region,
- (3) **Building** prosperity in the Danube Region and
- (4) **Strengthening** the Danube Region.

It is accompanied by a “rolling” Action Plan breaking down **11 Priority Areas** into actions and project examples. The proposed list of the strategic actions under EUSDR was taken into account in elaborating the Bulgaria-Serbia IPA CBC Programme’s strategy, while substantial parts of it was fully embedded into the indicative action framework of the Programme.

- ◆ **EU strategic Frameworks: Bulgaria Partnership Agreement**

The last draft of the Bulgarian Partnership Agreement submitted to the EC in April 2014, highlights the central role of the CBC programmes participated by Bulgaria, for the contribution to the EU development strategy.

The Partnership Agreement emphasizes the importance of promoting the EUSDR, since the macro-regional strategies offer a new, more substantial and consistent cooperation platform. The CBC programmes should also emphasize the importance of promoting employment, improving tourism and promoting cultural heritage, while enhancing the connection between the communities of the border areas. Improvement of the environmental system is also to be promoted.

- ◆ **The National Plan for the Adoption of the *acquis communautaire* (2013-2016) of the Republic of Serbia.**

According to the National plan, the Republic of Serbia is highly motivated to develop relations with immediate neighbours and countries in the region of South-East Europe, thus affirming one of the priorities of its foreign policy – improvement of regional cooperation. In the strategy of Serbia, the regional cooperation, especially through regional fora and initiatives (although it not replacing the process of integration to the EU) represents a central contribution to strengthening of bilateral relations with the neighbours and the states from the South - East Europe region.

Republic of Serbia is actively contributing especially to the Danube macro-regional strategy, while assigning a special role to the Bulgaria-Serbia IPA CBC Programme for direct inputs to its Action Plan implementation, and the creation of an integrated framework for the achievement of the EUSDR objectives.

THE PROGRAMME AREA

The eligible border area of Bulgaria-Serbia IPA Cross-border Programme (2014-2020) covers **a territory of 43 933 sq. km**, or around 22% of the both countries’ territories (Bulgaria and Serbia). It borders with Romania to the North and with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to the South. The border length between the two countries is 341 km.

The Programme area **settlement structure** is characterized by sparse population, small size of settlements and limited number of bigger cities. The total number of settlements is 2754, distributed in 105 municipalities. The major urban areas are concentrated in the districts’ administrative centres.

The Programme area includes 13 administrative units: **6 districts in Bulgaria**, which correspond to NUTS level III (EUROSTAT), and the equivalent NUTS III **7 districts in Serbia**. The core area remains in larger part the same as in the period 2007 – 2013, with the

addition of 2 districts: on the Bulgarian side – the Vratsa district, and on the Serbian side – the Toplička district.

The possibility for inclusion of additional NUTS 3 regions to the eligible area of the Bulgaria-Serbia IPA Cross-border programme 2014-2020 was subject of discussion during the 1st Joint Working Group (JWG) meeting, held on 7th November 2013 in Sofia (BG). The JWG made a decision to provide an opportunity the interested regions (outside the so far eligible territory) to apply by justified proposals submitted to the Managing Authority – the Ministry of Regional Development of Republic of Bulgaria. The decision of including the two new regions in the eligible Programme territory was taken by the JWG on 14th December 2013 according to the Article 6 of the JWG Rules of Procedures, adopted on 25th November 2013.

The newly included district in the Programme area - **Vratsa district (BG)** - is located in the North-West part of Bulgaria, which is the most disadvantaged region of Bulgaria and EU. In terms of the eligible Programme area 2007-2013, the Vratsa district was considered into a zoning restriction, while the neighbouring districts - Vidin and Montana fell within the Programme's territorial scope. This restriction is considered as an obstacle to implementation of regional policies and applying flexible approaches for solving the common problems and to create special preferences. The regional analysis clearly demonstrates the same problems and threats to the three districts that have to be tackled together. The close location of Vratsa district to two of the border checkpoints of the eligible programme area (Vratsa-Kalotina 120 km and Vratsa-Strezimirovtsi 164 km in compare with Vidin-Kalotina 197 km and Vidin-Strezimirovtsi 241 km) is an asset for the cross-border cooperation under Bulgaria-Serbia IPA Cross-border Programme (2014-2020). In addition to its favourable geographic location, Vratsa district is rich of natural and culture heritage sites, and the local institutions and organisations have already developed partnerships and networks with their counterparts from Serbia. Vratsa district has expertise and administrative capacity for implementation of the CBC projects gathered during the pre-accession period and mainly in the programming period 2007 - 2013 on the base of the projects financed under the ETC OP Romania - Bulgaria (2007-2013). An argument in favour of Vratsa district inclusion in the Programme is also the presence of a pan-European transport corridors № 4 (Northern and Central Europe - Vidin-Sofia-Athens) and № 7 the Danube river. Vratsa district is also an eligible territory within the EU Strategy for the Danube Region as well is part of the Bulgarian region, which the Government of Bulgaria determined as a pilot initiative under the mechanism for application of Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI). In this context, the IPA CBC Programme Serbia – Bulgaria (2014-2020) is an opportunity to support projects and initiatives in the direction of convergence and overcome the regional disparities. Thus the financial resources of the Programme will be used effectively and efficiently.

The second new district, proposed for inclusion in the Programme - **Toplička district (RS)** - is located in the south of Serbia, 140 km away from the state border with Republic of Bulgaria, which is, at the same time, the closest EU member state in its proximity. The region is equivalent to NUTS III level of statistical classification and on the east it borders two districts which are already part of eligible Programme territory, namely Nisavski and Jablanicki districts. The demographic and socio-economic trends in Toplička district are seen to be identical to those of the cross-border area as a whole. It has economic, cultural and historical, infrastructural and natural connections with the districts bordering to the east. On the other side, the administrative, cultural, economic and educational centre of the Toplička district's municipalities is the City of Nis. In view of the last fact only, the extension of the Programme territory towards inclusion of Toplička district is seen more than natural, while also giving impetus to further balanced development of the eligible programme territory but also improving the strategic partnerships in various sectors.

TERRITORIAL ANALYSIS OF THE BORDER REGION

The Programme area is characterized by wide geographical and environmental diversity. The location **in the centre of the Balkan Peninsula** is its strongest asset, since the European transport corridors No.7 (Danube river), and No.10 cross the territory of both Serbian and Bulgarian part, while corridors No.4 and No.8 cross the Bulgarian part of the eligible territory.

A big area of the border region could be categorized as **economically underdeveloped rural area**. It is characterized by clean and preserved natural environment and large biodiversity. Numerous plains and valleys form a strong natural potential for the development of agriculture, forestry and tourism. A variety of unique natural landmarks, natural parks and protected sites, are also located in the area.

Population development is often seen as an indicator for the long-term economic development and attractiveness of a region for people and business. However, in both countries, Bulgaria and Serbia, these developments have been characterized by strong population decline over the last decades, and this is especially valid for their border regions. The total population of the Programme's area (as of 2012) is 2 144 054 inhabitants (14.7% of the total population of both countries) with average population density is 49 inhabitants per sq. km. It should also be recognized that **depopulation trends** of these peripheral areas is significantly higher than the core areas around the capital cities. In general, the demographic situation and development of the border area is characterized by a continuous tendency of decreasing birth rates and **aging population**, which coupled with significant outer migration, leads to a general trend of depopulation.

The restructuring of the industry following the transition to market-led economy and the agricultural reform have significantly affected the region thus resulting in **increased unemployment rates**, higher levels of long-term unemployment with severe skill depreciation of lay-offs from the closed down large industrial enterprises, as well as inadequate utilization of the available natural resources and industrial infrastructure. Therefore, **the economic structure of the border region could be described as outdated** - this is particularly expressed on the level of municipalities (the economic structure of most (smaller) municipalities is mono-sector).

Overall, the border area is characterized by **low level of employment** of the population, low wages and low mobility of labour force. The average employment rate in the Bulgarian border region as of 2012 is about 42%. Compared to 2009, the percentage remains stable. The activity rate is 47.7%, which is close to the 58.8% average for the country. On the Serbian side of the border region, the employment rate for 2012 is 29.9%. The most important sector in employment creation is agriculture, forestry and fishing, followed by manufacturing and wholesale and retail trade, repairs. However, the current situation of the labour market does not enhance the porosity of the border with respect to the migration between both parts of the border region. There are still **restrictions with respect to the labour regulation** between the two countries that make the economic permeability of the border very limited.

Officially, the **unemployment rate** in Serbia was 23.9% in 2012, while the border region with Bulgaria has the highest unemployment rate in the whole country (42.5%). Unemployment affects mostly the people in the age group between 18-24 and 25-34. In Bulgaria, unemployment rate is 12.03% (2012), which almost equals the average 12.3% for the country. 35% of the unemployed have been registered at the labour offices for more than one year. The unemployed not older than 29 years of age are 21.6%, and there are 33% unemployed at the age 50+.

The problem of **long-term unemployment** is particularly difficult to tackle given the fact that the bulk of long-term unemployed are people without professional qualification and with a low level of education thus in a particularly vulnerable position on the labour market. The highest share of unemployed is among the Roma population, with 80% or more officially unemployed. There is also an overall lack of employment opportunities, especially in rural areas and an increase in the grey economy. The similar, but very high unemployment on both sides of the border, does not enhance the permeability across the border and the young people from both sides are more willing to choose other survival strategies instead of looking for a job in the neighbouring country.

Long-term unemployment, coupled with low economic activity rates in the region, lead to an **increased risk of poverty**. Some 24.6% of Serbian citizens are exposed to the risk of becoming poor - those aged up to 18 being most at risk. Households comprising two adults with three or more dependent children had the highest at-risk-of-poverty rate in 2012 (44.4%), as well as single parents with one or more dependent children (36.2%). At the same time, Bulgaria has recorded the highest share of persons being at risk of poverty or social exclusion in EU - almost 49.3% of the population (the EU average for 2012 was 24.8%). The figures at national level for both Bulgaria and Serbia are proportionally equal to those in the border region.

The **educational development** in the eligible border region is bound within the established network of institutions at all educational levels. As of 2012, the existing educational basis of the border area includes 17 universities/faculties, 9 colleges, 172 vocational gymnasiums, training schools and special schools, and 1288 general (elementary) schools. The education, as a primary focus of every young person, is relatively good in the cross-border area. Though primary education infrastructure in Serbia is available in almost all cities, in small towns and villages the availability of secondary and tertiary learning institutions highlights disparities across the border. The **availability of teaching staff is also a problem** in rural and remote areas.

The initial situation analysis of the Programme's area showed that there is a **large migration from smaller towns (villages) to bigger cities because there is no opportunity for prosperity in smaller settlements**. There is no accurate data on number of youth that migrate, but it is suspected that there is a very small number of youth that returns after completed higher education (high school, university). However, the situation is not getting any better also in the cities, as there is a big competition and job offers are limited due to economic crisis; therefore, youth that migrated from villages to cities is "forced" to go back and start some private economic activity.

The IPA CBC Programme Bulgaria-Serbia (2007-2013) already proved to be a good starting point for collaboration among youth of both countries. It initiated **a large number of cross-border youth initiatives and there is a still a good interest**. However, a new focus on youth entrepreneurship is needed, while also promoting it as a cross-cutting issue in the educational systems. The territorial analysis have noticed that the Serbian educational system still does not recognise the entrepreneurship as a theme that needs to be included in the regular curriculum, while on contrary, the Bulgarian educational systems, especially the vocational schools, could provide a good know-how and practical experience on how to promote entrepreneurs amongst youths.

A common characteristic of the border regions is their **low economic development**, being clearly underdeveloped as compared to other partnering countries' territories. As a result, the cross-border economic cooperation is very limited, despite the existing regional development strategies developed so far.

The **industry** on both sides of the border is mainly represented by mining, being a leading sector in the past and still keeping its most important part in the regional industrial production. Other important industries are energy generation, metallurgy and machine engineering, chemicals, textiles, etc. In Bulgaria and partly in Serbia industrial production had a substantial drop during the time of transition to market economy with restructuring and privatization of major enterprises, and it has not yet recovered. **Agriculture** holds a substantial share in GDP for all border districts (average for the Programme's area 16.2%). Due to the fertile land and favourable climate conditions a great variety of agricultural crops are grown in the region – cereals and fodder, fruit and vegetables, vines, sunflower, sugar beet, etc. Stockbreeding covers all types of animals, involving also a wide use of mountain pastures. The region's geographical location and rich natural resources form an excellent base for development of the **service sector**, specifically international trade, transport and related services, tourism, thus becoming an important engine for boosting the socio-economic development of the border region. However, the underdeveloped transport links in the bordering region has predetermined the relative isolation of the area. The proximity to the Pan-European corridors and the major infrastructure projects to be completed in the coming years (the most important for the region being the highway Sofia-Niš) should become the driving force for the development of various trade and transport-related services – wholesale markets and showrooms, logistic parks, warehouse facilities, hotels and catering, repair services, etc.

Still, **investments in R&D** in the region are very low. Their predominant concentration is in the countries' capitals (Sofia and Belgrade). The **innovative capacity** of local firms operating in the cross-border area is still underdeveloped. Bulgarian firms spent 0.3% of GDP on R&D, compared to 1.23% for all EU firms; they ranked 71st out of 139 countries in productivity; and were 95th in business sophistication and innovation. Serbia is ranked at the meagre 144th place (as per World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index 2012/13). The reasons for this substantial gap between the EU average and Bulgaria-Serbia region (both national and cross-border) innovative capacities is the lower efficiency of the R&D systems due to limited institutional capacity, lack of commercialization expertise, low level of public-private collaboration in R&D and lack of incentives to do so. Government support in the form of R&D spending for the border area is inadequate, while the private R&D spending - or the lack of it - has a particularly strong effect on innovation. Studies have shown that the propensity of firms to innovate is positively and significantly correlated with their R&D spending and related investments in technological infrastructure; and that their output increases with their innovation efforts, whether or not the firm is new to the market.

The preservation and careful management of the **natural environment** is one of the key factors for the sustainable development of the border area and the improvement of its attractiveness as a tourist destination. It has wide-reaching social and economic implications in terms of added value to the quality of life in the region. The diverse relief (hills and mountains, but also wide plains), the rich forests (over 30% share of the total regional territory), the thermal springs, the outlet to the Danube river and the continental-temperate climate, favour the development of agriculture, forestry and woodworking, as well as various forms of tourism throughout the year.

Favourable natural and environmental characteristics, abundance of cultural and historical landmarks, as well as natural resources of the border area provide opportunities for diversification of the currently available tourist products and services for **sustainable development of tourism**. Tourism centres in the region include Belogradchik (cultural and eco-tourism), Chiprovzi (cultural tourism), Vurshez (spa), Vratsa (cultural tourism) and Vrachanski Balkan (eco and adventure tourism), Trun (eco-tourism and cultural tourism),

Zemen (cultural), Kyustendil (spa), Sapareva Banja (spa), Panichiste (mountain resort with skiing) and Rila monastery **in Bulgaria**; Gamzigrad (cultural tourism), Niš and Negotin (cultural tourism), Pirot (cultural tourism), Zvonačka banja (spa, district of Pirot), Vranjska banja (district of Pčinja), and Niška banja (spa, district of Nišava), Stara Planina (mountain tourism) **in Serbia**. These are complemented by cultural attractions, including various archaeological sites, monasteries, museums and galleries. **The Danube's potential as tourism resources** represents a common development asset to the Programme area as a whole.

Other biggest strengths of the border region are its **rich and unique culture** (both tangible and intangible heritage (e.g. traditions, festivals, etc.)), which is a key prerequisite for an attractive tourism product and could furthermore be easily utilized as a driving engine for regional development, regeneration and prosperity. Culture is among the most important factors in the cross-border cooperation framework, since it provides a clear view of common features and provides a common identity for the region. Professional institutes of culture are very well developed both in Bulgaria and in Serbia. Traditional cultural organizations such as libraries, museums, galleries, community and cultural centers, etc., have a long-lasting presence and are well recognized by local communities. Despite their very significant potential, the cultural and historical heritage monuments are in disrepair and require enormous investments for restoration and preservation. Funds have been invested in culture preservation since 2007 but still the need of investment in development of tourist attractions and cultural monuments exists.

Another distinctive feature of the Bulgarian-Serbian border region is its **wide biological diversity**. It is rich in **natural parks**, protected areas and natural reserves. Part of the largest national park of Bulgaria - The Rila National Park as well as Vitosha Nature Park and 'Vrachanski Balkan' Nature Park are located here. A smaller nature park "Belogradchishki Skali" is designated in 2004 as a result of local initiative. The area of Chuprene in Bulgaria is a natural reserve which is included in the UNESCO and UNO list of protected areas. Other protected sites are the Seven Lakes of Rila, and the Stob Pyramids. Special bird protection areas can be found on the Bulgarian side as well. Many natural areas have been proposed for inclusion in the NATURA 2000 areas.

The Djerdap National Park, located in the Serbian part of the region near the towns of Golubac, Kladovo and Majdanpek and the Nature Park Stara Planina are currently undergoing a procedure for designation as a **biosphere reserves**. Nature Park Sićevačka gorge and the landscape of outstanding qualities Vlasina are also located here. Area envisaged for protection in Serbia includes following sites (approximately 140.000 ha): Kučaj as National Park, Suva Planina as special nature reserve, Jerma as nature park and Radan as landscape of outstanding qualities. The Lazar Canyon is one of the most important centres of plant and trees diversity on the Balkans. The Mali and Veliki Krš mountains are interesting, being the habitat of 11 species of birds of prey that are endangered species in Europe.

Numerous geomorphologic phenomenon (caves, natural bridges, gorges and canyons), hydrologic (springs), dendrology monuments and smaller nature reserves are protected by formal instruments as well. Surrounding landscape of the archaeological site Gamzigrad is also formally protected as "Area of cultural and historical importance". The surroundings of the town of Bor represent one of the most interesting geographical locations in Serbia. The area has more than 200 explored caves, with two of them accessible for tourists. These natural beauties combined with the rich historical and cultural heritage of the region are unique regional assets which should be built on, invested in and further developed to

improve the **region's attractiveness as a tourist destination** and a place for living with good quality of life.

Expenditures on **protection and restoration of the environment** made during the past few years are significant. The municipalities in the eligible region are relatively active in applying for and obtaining financing for construction and reconstruction of the sewerage and water supply network, but still the region is lagging behind the national average indicators on environment – i.e. population with access to WWTP, waste collection, population connected to sewerage networks, etc. There are few WWT facilities currently in construction which are expected to significantly improve the environmental situation at the Bulgarian CBC region.

In terms of **environmental risks**, the situation in the eligible Programme's area could be summarised as follows:

- ♦ **Air pollution** (low risks): The decline of industrial enterprises which seriously damaged the environment, is determining the relatively low risks towards air pollution. However, a few regional black spots with heavy industrial pollution, mainly related to coal mining and heavy industries still exist. The industrial complexes in Negotin and Bor (Serbia), Sofia and Pernik (Bulgaria) still **impose serious air-pollution problems**.
- ♦ **Water pollution** (moderate risks): Apart from their commitment to comply with EU water and environmental legislation, Bulgaria and Serbia are effectively involved in trans-boundary cooperation within the frame of international conventions, particularly within the Danube river basin. As signatories to the Danube River Protection Convention, both countries have agreed to co-operate on fundamental water management issues by taking *"all appropriate legal, administrative and technical measures to at least maintain and where possible improve the current water quality and environmental conditions of the Danube river and of the waters in its catchments area, and to prevent and reduce as far as possible adverse impacts and changes occurring or likely to be caused."*
- ♦ **Droughts, floods, forest fires, landslides** (high risks): Due to the ongoing climate change, future increase of natural man-made disasters like droughts, floods, forest fires, landslides has to be assumed for the Programme area. The Central and Southern part of the area face greater risks from droughts, fires and landslides in the mountainous regions, while the Northern part of the area face greater risks from floods in the plains. Forests in the region preserve the majority of the area's protected plants and endangered animal species. In that respect the forest fires also represent a specific risk for the flora and fauna in the region. During the 2012, the territory of the state forests that are governed by the Public Company "Serbia Forests" has recorded a total of 328 forest fires on the surface of 11,462.73 hectares. According to the Department for Emergency Situations Ministry of Interior, the total damage was around 50 million EUR. The largest part of the fire engulfed areas was reported in the south-eastern part of Serbia (part of the cross-border area) - around 60%. Similarly, in Bulgaria a fire engulfed about 32000 ha of forests (only for 2012).

In view of the above, there is a persistent need for establishing joint initiatives towards **prevention and mitigation the consequences of natural and man-made cross-border disasters**.

Although it is strategically located in view of current and future international transport traffic flows, the border area is presently not in a position to fully benefit from this asset. The existing **transport infrastructure** is not adequate to the contemporary technical

requirements and needs substantial rehabilitation and reconstruction. It is distributed unevenly throughout the region's territory and is not sufficiently developed to meet the intensifying traffic needs. Furthermore, the connections between the two parts of the regions are incomplete and limited (no motorway connection, only one railway line); there are **5 border crossing checkpoints**, but only one of them (at Kalotina – Gradina) is suited for international traffic.

All these factors not only hamper the accessibility of the region thus increasing its relative isolation, but also impede the development of cross-border relations between the two sides of the border. A new positive trend for improving regional accessibility is the agreement for opening of three new border crossing checkpoints between the two countries: Salash – Novo Korito, Bankya – Petachinci, and Treklyano – Bosilegrad.

The main **roads** relate to the Pan European corridors crossing the region: No.4 – Greek border-Sofia-Vidin/Lom (with a Danube Bridge II at Vidin-Kalafat in Romania), No.8 – Gjeshevo (former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia border) – Sofia – Plovdiv – Burgas (with a highway between Sofia and Plovdiv – outside the border region) and No.10 with a section that crosses the Bulgarian – Serbian border region. Since 2007 there have been some positive tendencies in transport infrastructure development, but transport in the region still suffers from a lag in the development of combined transportation and modern logistic technologies as well as from a low level of information technologies of the transport systems.

The **railway network** of the region is very much identical to the road one in terms of its general layout – almost each main road link has as a parallel railway line. Along corridor No.4 this is the railroad Vidin-Sofia – Thessaloniki (Plovdiv-Istanbul), along corridor No.8 – Gjeshevo – Sofia – Burgas, and along corridor No.10 – Belgrade – Niš – Sofia. The only railway connection between the two countries (Sofia-Niš-Belgrade) is single-tracked; at present almost fully electrified but has several black points where the speed has to be seriously slowed down (parts of the Niš – Preševo and the Niš – Dimitrovgrad lines are designed for speeds of only 80 – 100 km/ h).

With the purpose of meeting the intensifying traffic needs, both countries have operated a joint railway crosschecking control at Dimitrovgrad since December 2006. Most of the railway lines inside the border area are quite old and need a complete overhaul. The situation is similar for the track equipment, the signals and the control system. The reconstruction of the rail infrastructure in the Bulgarian part of the cross-border region is already in progress.

There are two main **airports** in the border region where the quantity of commodities trade of is substantial (besides personal traffic) - international airport in Sofia-city (the capital of Bulgaria) and the international airport in Niš (Serbia). Though the city of Sofia is out of the eligible area, this still is the only airport on the Bulgarian side of the border region. There is one more airport located at Vidin (Bulgaria) but it has not been in operation since the beginning of the 1990s. The airport in Niš is a small but developing international airport (the second biggest in Serbia). It was designed for both cargo and passenger transport. In order to boost the development of the airport, the local-self-government subsidised the plane tickets and that attracted several low cost companies.

The **waterborne transport** provides opportunities for the development of environmental friendly and low cost transport services which makes it a viable alternative to road transport. Having an outlet to one of the most important European waterways – the Pan European Corridor No.7 – the Danube River, the region thus gains a significant advantage. Two of the Bulgarian ports with international importance are located in the border area – the ports of Lom and Vidin. Another important port in the region is the Serbian port – Kladovo. Their main

problem is the outdated facilities, lack of investments to improve and develop the ports infrastructure. As key barrier for the uptake of the (tourism) potential of the Danube could be mentioned the lack of public water transportation and a transport waterway connection between the two countries.

The **public transport** is mainly concentrated in the municipal centres. The transport connections are limited and do not correspond to the population needs. Most of the routes of the intercity transport are indirect in order to cover more settlements. The most developed public transportation in the border region is that of the City of Niš.

Summarizing, the main **socio-economic trends** of the border region between Bulgaria and Serbia are as follows:

- ◆ The GDP per capita is very low (EURO 3 422, as of 2012), as compared to EU27 (EURO 25 500);
- ◆ The economic structure of the border region could be described as outdated (mainly represented by the agriculture, trade and service sector);
- ◆ Low level of employment of the population, low wages and low mobility of labour force; increased risk of poverty;
- ◆ Large migration from smaller towns (villages) to bigger cities due to lack of opportunity for prosperity in the small settlements;
- ◆ The region is attractive as tourist destination, developed in various forms (eco, cultural, winter, spa) – a strong potential for the region, which currently is lagging behind compared to other areas both in Bulgaria and Serbia, but also in other neighbouring countries;
- ◆ The existing transport infrastructure is not adequate to the contemporary technical requirements and needs substantial rehabilitation and reconstruction;
- ◆ Investments in R&D in the region are very low;
- ◆ The innovative capacity of local firms operating in the cross-border area is still underdeveloped.

POTENTIALS AND BARRIERS THE BORDER AREA IS FACING

The identified **potentials** and **barriers** are mainly dealing with issues such as competitiveness, alternative forms of economic activities (i.e. tourism), coherence of the education with the needs of the regional labour market and investments in youth entrepreneurship, as well as improving the region's preparedness with reference to natural and man-made hazards and disasters prevention. The following sections describe the identified potentials and barriers, and explain them in more detail:

- ◆ **Existing Potential [EP1]: Define a common, international market for cross border products and services**

Within the eligible programme area, growth in business-related services can be identified, which is accompanied by a tradition for cross-border cooperation. Additionally, the area is located in a specific geopolitical position, which gained positive influence of proximity to TENs and European markets. These strengths, identified within the area, are positively influenced by the issue of the enhancement of competitiveness regulations which trigger especially the development of SMEs. This is additionally positively influenced of the policy support of co-operative economic activities as well as the development of clusters and

networks.

Through the enhancement of competitiveness it is assumed, that bordering districts can also benefit from overall EU and global developments. Especially co-operative economic activities may promote networking between local and regional SMEs at horizontal (for instance clusters) and vertical level (for instance supply chains).

- ♦ **Existing Potential [EP2]: Sustainable tourism and utilization of cultural, historical and natural heritage**

Tourism was identified as a main opportunity to balance regional disparities and job creation. The EP2 combines internal strengths such as the richness and diversity of landscape as well as the natural, cultural and historical heritage with opportunities such as the promotion of niche tourism development (e.g. eco-, ethno- gourmet- tourism) thus valorising the favourable conditions for diversified tourism in the border area. Additionally, the Programme area tourism development could substantially benefit the existing European brand that the Danube already is.

The construction of the TEN-networks improves the accessibility of former marginalised areas catching-up. Furthermore, the improvement of accessibility and the already existing specific benefits of the geographically attractive locations of the region would increase the attractiveness of the area. For instance, the possibilities for the border region to offer products that are naturally connected to Pan-European products – e.g. cycling routes (Eurovelo 6/the Danube Bike Path and Eurovelo 13/the Iron Curtain Trail), cultural routes (the Roman Emperors Route), hiking routes, etc.

Additionally, a well-protected environment – equipped with specific environmental infrastructure, and the containment of increasing land use (mainly due to enhanced reuse of deprived areas and brown fields) – preserve the richness and diversity of the landscape, which is one main location as well as economic factor of the touristic use of the region. It's assumed, that an environment, which is protected as well as fostered and used in a sustainable way, is generally more attractive for touristic use.

- ♦ **Possible Potential [PP1]: Co-operative initiatives and cluster development reducing employment deficits in peripheral regions**

This possible potential represents a combination of certain opportunities and weaknesses the border area demonstrates. Such a combination may create a possible and achievable potential for the future development of the cross-border area at hand.

The eligible programme area is marked by bad accessibility to service and employment in districts which are dominated by small villages and sparse population. In addition, the activity rate is low and the number of (youth) unemployment is increasing; so is the risk of poverty. This reinforces strong economic disparities which do exist between the BG and RS districts as well as inequalities in GDP. Additionally, the access to finance is out of line with current needs, especially for start-ups and small loans (micro credit), which are of high importance, especially for small and medium enterprises.

These internal weaknesses can be combined with the opportunity of policy provision for co-operative economic activities such as the development of clusters and networks as well as the opportunity/issue of tourism as a tool to balance regional disparities and job creation. Furthermore the increase in green employment and eco-innovations may be opportunities, which could reveal possible potentials of development.

Moreover improved connections – on various levels – can be positively linked with the current situation of unemployment rate and poverty, increasing accessibility, coming along

with new employment opportunities. Besides, the maturity of the European knowledge society and the exchange of knowledge and cultural values may influence positively the increasing number of youth unemployment on the one side and the risk of poverty on the other side. Knowledge transfer in marginalised regions may encourage new developments (employment, education, innovation-transfer, etc.).

Through improved accessibility, the adoption of alternative forms of employment green employment, eco-innovation and additional foreign investment within the border area, positive stimuli may increase employment and help improving the access to services; this avoids the risk of poverty and an increase in social diversity and polarisation. Especially for rural areas and small villages with the disadvantage of bad access to service and employment, cross-border co-operation can initiate positive regional development; these issues – also in combination with tourism – can display possible development potentials, overcoming unemployment and low activity rates by reason of increasing regional attractiveness and raising opportunities.

Marginalised regions – both in terms of accessibility and employment opportunities – may benefit from alternative employment forms and a more flexible labour market approach in addition to the improvement of cross-border connections and co-operations. The development of clusters and networks, represents an important opportunity (through the policy support of co-operative economic activities), which may be one important point, representing the unique position of marginalised, peripheral areas and one possible process of change.

♦ **Possible Potential [PP2]: Involvement of youth in development and progress**

Main weaknesses identified within the eligible Programme area are the out-migration of young and educated people, high level of early-school leavers due to poor perspectives of the region, high level of youth unemployment and low level of participation of youth in decision making, entrepreneurship etc.

Additionally, brain drain of young and creative people as well as increasing market competition, the pressure on economic productivity and disadvantages of peripheral areas (shrinking regions, depopulation etc.) represent major threats for the further development of the area. Underlying phenomena of demographic change such as the ageing society, shrinking population, brain drain occurrences and strong economic disparities – already existing in some peripheral border regions – are being intensified and positive development gets aggravated.

Therefore, it is imperative to engage youth to actively participate in all relevant levels of decision-making processes because it affects their lives today and has implications for their futures. In addition to their intellectual contribution and their ability to mobilize support, they bring unique perspectives that need to be taken into account. Numerous actions and recommendations within the international community have been proposed to ensure that youth are provided a secure and healthy future, including an environment of quality, improved standards of living and access to education and employment. These issues are of extreme urgency for the border area between Bulgaria and Serbia in view of declining demographic trends (aging of population and migration flows).

♦ **Possible potential [PP3]: Development of joint cross-border destination(s)**

The cross-border area between Bulgaria and Serbia is characterised by a broad heritage of dense and diverse histories, cultures and ethnicities. In line with international conventions in the field of culture (with special reference to the UNESCO Conventions), culture can promote values of inclusiveness, openness, and acceptance of the others based on mutual respect. It

can reinforce socio-economic development by strengthening of regional cooperation and intercultural dialogue while ensuring sustainability and joint action.

The areas of developing tourism, tourism infrastructure and improving tourism services, historical heritage and intercultural dialogue are typically inter-related topics. They benefit particularly from the integrated approach such is the development of joint cross-border destination(s), meaning common products, synchronized policy for developing the elements of the tourism product, joint management and marketing, etc. Tourist destinations are usually formed on the base of common resources, regional identity, products, management, etc., therefore it would be reasonable to expect (and support) the establishment of more than one destination (e.g. among the Danube, in the Balkan area, etc.)

The results of the territorial (situation) analysis indicate that tourism is a growing sector in the border region but the tourism growth is not associated anyhow with the CBC region as a popular tourism destination. On the one hand, the area have own problems and challenges in developing tourism that certainly affect negatively the development of overall tourism in the region. On the other hand, there is a potential that is currently not utilised and sometimes underestimated including niche tourism prospects and realities. Such potential is significantly correlated with the urgent needs to overcome challenges that the border region is facing.

- ♦ **Existing Barrier [EB1]: Increasing lagging behind of peripheral, badly accessible regions**

The EB1 points out the combination of several weaknesses and threats. Main weaknesses identified within the eligible border area are the partly low level of R&D as well as the insufficient technology transfer and lack in the access to R&D-results especially for SMEs. Furthermore, the insufficient access to services and employment especially in peripheral areas and in regions dominated by small villages being accompanied by high numbers of (youth) unemployment.

Supplementary, the accessibility is low – especially outside of agglomerations – and strong economic disparities in GDP can be identified (core-periphery pattern). These weaknesses can be linked with a number of threats, such as the lack of competitiveness, increasing embeddedness into global capital flows, which may threaten local market potentials, as well as the lack of investments in local infrastructure. These threats do not support the already existing deficits concerning R&D, accessibility, transportation and employment, but represent a major barrier for further development.

- ♦ **Existing Barrier [EB2]: Managing environmental risks**

The EB2 combines mainly three weaknesses: low level of disaster management systems and emergency preparedness; underdeveloped solid waste treatment infrastructure and waste-water facilities; and insufficient management systems of hazardous waste. Threats identified which may be combined with these weaknesses in a negative way are the insufficient financial sources from state budgets for financing environmental infrastructure and the related inefficient prevention and management of climate related risks in the border region.

- ♦ **Existing Barrier [EB3]: Raising social polarisation due to demographic change and lack of investment in peripheral areas**

The EB3 combines five internal weaknesses with three external threats, and combines therefore a variety of internal and external factors. Especially, the issue of an ageing population defines negative linkages to internal weaknesses, such as the increasing (youth) unemployment and poverty. The increasing social diversity as well as demographic change

increase problems of financing social and technical infrastructure especially in shrinking regions. Furthermore the still existing disadvantages for ethnic minorities such as social problems including lower levels of education and high rates of unemployment, making catching-up processes difficult.

Demographic change and the phenomenon of an ageing society as well as the disadvantage of peripheral areas (agglomeration advantages of cities tend to represent disadvantages for rural/peripheral regions) harden the already existing contrasts between urban and rural areas. Increasing disparities and the risk of poverty are tightened by shrinking regions. The intensified marginalisation tendencies do not attract investments or innovation within the public administration system or important transportation links (to increase accessibility of these marginalised regions).

The increasing number of (youth) unemployment leads to rising brain drain occurrences within peripheral districts; well-educated employees without job opportunities prefer urban agglomerations and their advantages – which on the other hand illustrate disadvantages for rural or peripheral areas. This tendency supports demographic change in a negative way – the ageing of the society in general and the migration of young well-educated employees outlines simultaneously the loss of regional know-how and experience.

- ♦ **Possible Barrier [PB1]: Brain drain occurrences due to disadvantages of shrinking areas**

The PB1 is based on the strength of skilful workforce, with industrial and agricultural tradition and good adult education system. These regional strengths of the eligible programme area can be negatively influenced by suburbanisation processes and the ageing society – issues such as the increasing number of depopulated areas and the increasing contrasts between urban and rural areas were identified as relevant linkages of a possible regional barrier.

Furthermore, the increasing level of education, lifelong learning as well as female education participation and the consequence of a qualified workforce can cushion the negative effects of an ageing population. These identified connections may illustrate a constant danger of demographic processes. Regions, in which a high level of experience – mainly in industrial and agricultural sectors – exists, may be endangered by demographic processes such as shrinking population and brain drain occurrences. The regionally and locally existing knowledge of employees will be at risk. If a region, which is partly based on the experience and know-how of its employees, is scarred by an ageing society and declining opportunities, the trend of shrinking population figures and emigration may be an important and challenging issue.

- ♦ **Possible Barrier [PB2]: Loss of border region attractiveness by reason of environmental quality decline, demographical change and lack of investment**

The PB2 combines some region's strengths with possible threats. The tradition of cross-border cooperation on institutional, political and administrative level and within projects can be negatively influenced by a lack of investments in regional infrastructures which increases the core-periphery disparities as well as the phenomenon of ageing, brain drain occurrences and disadvantages of rural areas due to agglomeration advantages of cities.

The issue of the richness and diversity of landscape and natural and cultural heritage as important location factors are endangered by on-going desertification and increasing aridity as well as by negative effects of climate change and unsustainable use of environmental resources. Furthermore these strengths can – linked with aridity as well as with natural disasters – represent a possible barrier.

Regions which are oriented towards their touristic potentials and the richness and diversity of landscape and nature (as is the BG-RS border area) are endangered by natural disasters, climate change and its effects such as increasing aridity. This affects the entire natural and cultural heritage, which represents an important location factor for tourism usage.

PROGRAMME STRATEGY

Based on the situation and SWOT analyses described in the previous chapter, the border between Bulgaria and Serbia still should be considered a noticeably segmented space from the economic point of view, where the substantial development axes does not cross or connect, while it seems to have quite a potential in social and cultural similarities. In these specific circumstances, the border really functions as a barrier, which does not allow any expansion of such development axes.

The highly **fragmented economy** together with **depopulation trend** represent the main challenges to be faced by the border area when, at the perspective of Serbian accession in the EU, a major cross border dynamism is utmost required. The cross-border cooperation will have to mitigate these negative trends by facilitating economic, social and institutional integration and by creating a desirable economic and social environment in the border area. This will contribute to a general socio-economic stabilization of the whole region and mostly contrast its abandonment and depopulation.

Improved cross-border collaboration between the two countries, working together on common problems and challenges, in the many different fields, such as: economy, environment protection, public services and social security contribute to better cohesion at local and regional level in the border area. At this specific extent, the IPA cross-border cooperation aims to turn borders from being a barrier to defend different and opponent interests into a dynamic contact point to develop common measures to achieve same aims.

To create a positive socio-economic environment, necessary to the development of the border area, two main challenges have to be faced. They are to be considered as pillars of this Programme, since it result from the deepened analysis of the whole border area and stand before the precise definition of the strategy and actions through which the cross-border cooperation is going to be implemented.

The first challenge is referred to **invest in the effective valorisation and the efficient management of the territory**, which is related to:

- Promoting the development of niche tourism activities (e.g. eco-, ethno- gourmet-tourism) thus valorising the favourable conditions for diversified tourism in the border area;
- Improving access to sites of touristic interest thus stimulating the utilisation of natural, cultural and historical heritage;
- Exploiting various forms of tourism as a potential generator of new products and employment possibilities;
- Improving the image of the border area as touristic designation through creating common cross-border touristic brand;
- Promoting traditional productions, leading to cross-border area specialization (branding, trademarks, certification) thus utilising proximity to markets;
- Promoting joint territorial management by the regional authorities;
- Balancing the conserving and developing aspects of natural resources in creating

sustainable tourist attractions used to improve the quality of visiting environment and also to contribute to the quality of living environment.

The second challenge is to **increase cross border networks, interactions and connections both at the social, economic and environmental spheres**. This is related to:

- Developing entrepreneurial attitude in the society already from the early school years via adding entrepreneurial or business approaches to curricula;
- Initiating partnerships between school and economic units in order to achieve a better integration on the labour market of the graduates from vocational and technical schools;
- Promoting cooperation between universities / research institutes and entrepreneurs in order to identify activities with high value added which provide best chances to foster local competitiveness;
- Identifying common interests (on the basis of clusters of different economic sectors) and further develop and market those clusters to achieve new markets;
- Engaging citizens and local communities in local decision-making and service delivery thus developing a sense of ownership;
- Improving exchange of know-how, best practice and information between the relevant administrations from both sides of the border, as well as development of joint integrated territorial cooperation plans both on regional and macro-regional level;
- Promoting initiatives for decreasing environmental vulnerability to natural hazards (reforestation, land improving etc.), including establishing joint risk management structures;
- Increasing the accessibility of combined emergency (rescue) services in rural areas;
- Raising awareness for commune environmental resources at the level of cross-border area).

The above represent decisive factors to make the area more attractive for investments, to stimulate internal demand and to enhance general development in the border area.

Hence, the overall aim of the Bulgaria-Serbia IPA CBC Programme (2014-2020) is: **to foster territorial cohesion and cross-border relations through the implementation of joint interventions on the border territory and support of the inter-linkages among the local actors and the local communities for encouraging the regional development.**

Such overall objective is the basis for elaborating the Programme's strategic framework, which refers to three thematic priorities⁴, namely:

- **Thematic priority (d):** Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage;
- **Thematic priority (e):** Investing in youth, education and skills;
- **Thematic priority (b):** Protecting the environment and promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management.

⁴ REGULATION (EU) No 231/2014 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 11 March 2014 establishing an Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II), ANNEX III - Thematic priorities for assistance for territorial cooperation

The selected thematic priorities are structured into **three priority axes**, reflecting the needs and challenges as identified in the territorial (situation) analysis of the Programme area:

♦ **PA-1: Sustainable Tourism**

Specific Objectives related to PA-1:

- **Tourist Attractiveness:** Supporting the development of competitive tourist attractions that contribute to the diversification of tourist product(s) in the cross-border region.
- **Cross-Border Touristic Product:** Valorising the favourable conditions for diversified tourism in the border area through creating common cross-border touristic destination(s).
- **People-To-People Networking:** Capitalise the effect of cultural, historical and natural heritage tourism on border communities.

This priority axis contributes to all three pillars of the **EU 2020 Strategy** since it aims at encouraging entrepreneurship and networking, incl. through implementation of innovative approaches in the area of tourism, and at the same time at developing and protecting nature and culture heritage.

The **EU strategy for the Danube region** accents on the development of stronger synergic connections between the authorities on all levels aiming the optimization of the impact of activities and financing. The PA-1 is fully corresponding to its **Pillar "A": *Connecting the Danube Region*** and the **Priority Area 3 "To promote culture and tourism, people to people contacts"**.

The PA-1 is in line with the **Partnership Agreement of the Republic of Bulgaria**, which defines the natural and cultural heritage protection, as well as investments in "green" growth, economy, and tourism as one of the main objectives for territorial and cross-border cooperation.

NPI (National programme for integration with the European Union, Republic of Serbia), (2009) highlights the importance of strengthening local capacity in preparation and implementation of infrastructure projects and better coordination between local and central level, together with more investment in infrastructure and development projects in order to promote balanced regional development. According to the **Strategy for Development of Tourism in Serbia for the period 2006-2015**, the main goal is to provide conditions for creation of quality tourist product/-s, namely:

- Serbia must stimulate, thanks to tourism, especially foreign tourism, economic growth, employment and quality of life of the population;
- Through tourism, Serbia must ensure development of positive international image of the country;
- By means of tourism, and in the best interest of the development of tourism, Serbia must ensure long term protection of natural and cultural resources;
- Serbia must achieve international quality standards, and first and foremost protection of tourist consumers, in accordance with the present European practices.

According to the **National Strategy of Sustainable development for Republic of Serbia (2008)**, the fourth key priority of this Strategy is development of infrastructure and harmonized regional development, improvement of attractiveness of the country and

ensuring a corresponding quality and level of services. The fifth key priority is protection and improvement of the environment and rational use of natural resources.

♦ **PA-2: Youth**

Specific Objectives related to PA-2:

- **Skills & Entrepreneurship:** Creating an attractive environment for development of young people in the border region.
- **People-To-People Networking:** Promote sustainable, long-term and collaborative initiatives for and with young people, including enhancing mobility of young people.

This priority axis directly aims at achieving the objectives of the **EU 2020** and in particular the following priority: „*Inclusive growth: fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion*“, focusing on education and skills.

The **EU strategy for the Danube region** accents on the investments in young people and making best use of border's area human capital. The PA-2, therefore, corresponds to its **Pillar "C": Building Prosperity in the Danube Region**; and the **Priority Area 9: "To invest in people and skills"**

It contributes also to achieving the **Partnership Agreement of the Republic of Bulgaria** objectives for territorial cooperation aimed at supporting joint actions in the field of education, skills and life-long learning initiatives for young people in order to promote the linkage between education and labour market; exchange of good practices to reduce the level of early-school leavers; implementation of new methods and forms of education and training; setting up of networks between business entities, institutions and schools, exchange of training and educational practices and internships, incl. development and implementation of joint training programmes.

This priority is in line with the **Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Republic of Serbia** (Title VIII, Cooperation Policies, Article 102 – Education and Training) stating that the aim of cooperation is to raise the level of general education and vocational education and training in Serbia as well as youth policy and youth work, including non-formal education. In addition, this priority follows the **National Priorities for International Assistance in the Republic of Serbia 2014-17**, with projections until 2020, especially the Priority 1 aimed at enhancing the effectiveness, targeting and coverage of ALMPs, further developing in-place local mechanisms to stimulate activation and employment in underserved areas, promoting youth employment and entrepreneurship (especially the NEET group) and increasing on-the-job safety.

♦ **PA-3: Environment**

Specific Objectives related to PA-3:

- **Joint Risk Management:** Preventing and mitigating the consequences of natural and man-made cross-border disasters.
- **Nature Protection:** Enhancing the capacity of regional and local stakeholders for improved environmental and natural resources management in the border region.

This priority axis contributes to the **EU 2020 Strategy**, in particular to “sustainable growth” priority: promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy with eligible activities related to environment protection, risk prevention and management.

The CBC dimension is extremely relevant, for the integrated and interdependent environmental systems both for the border region as a whole, but also with reference to the

Danube Basin as formulated in the **EUDRS**. The PA-3 corresponds to the **Pillar “B”**: *Protecting the Environment in the Region*, and the **Priority Area 5**: *"To manage environmental risks"* as well **Priority Area 6**: *"To preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils."*

It is also in line with the **Partnership Agreement of the Republic of Bulgaria**, which states as one of the main priorities for territorial, incl. cross-border cooperation, environmental and nature heritage protection. In addition, it contributes to the achievement of the following priority area for cooperation: development of joint strategies, coordinated investments, actions and systems for efficient resources management, adaptation to climate change and prevention and risk management.

This priority axis contributes to the **European Partnership with Serbia** from 18 February 2008 (2008/213/EC) (under: Sectorial policies – Environment), which sets out a number of short and medium term priorities, including: strengthening of the administrative capacity within the relevant government bodies and further alignment with EU standards in the environmental sector, with the emphasis on implementation of environmental policy. The **Stabilization and Association Agreement** (Title VIII, Cooperation policies, Article 111 – Environment) states that cooperation shall be established with the aim of strengthening administrative structures and procedures to ensure strategic planning of environmental issues and coordination between relevant actors and shall focus on the alignment of Serbia's legislation to the Community acquis. Special attention shall be paid to the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol. Under Article 116, financial assistance may cover all sectors of co-operation, paying particular attention to *“approximation of legislation, economic development and environmental protection”*. By adhering to the **Energy Community Treaty** signed in October 2005, Serbia agreed to respect EU environmental acquis and Kyoto protocol. **Convention on protection of trans-boundary watercourse and international lakes of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)** (ratified by Serbia in 2010) is the base of cross-border cooperation regarding waters, both bilateral and multilateral.

1.1.2 Justification for the choice of thematic priorities, based on an analysis of the needs within the programme area as a whole and the strategy chosen in response to such needs, addressing, where appropriate, missing links in cross-border infrastructure, taking into account the results of the ex-ante evaluation

Table 1: Justification for the selection of thematic priorities

Selected thematic priority	Justification for selection
Thematic priority (d): Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage	<p>The Thematic Priority is chosen to encourage the existing potential of the region since the natural and cultural heritage is a significant comparative advantage of the area and an important development asset stretching across the border.</p> <p>The choice of TP is based on identified needs and potential of the eligible border area, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> [+] Good quality, attractive natural environment offering favourable conditions for diversified form of tourism; [+] Availability of historical, ethno and cultural sites;

	<p>[-] Limited access and lack of infrastructure at a number of natural, cultural and historic tourism sites;</p> <p>[-] Lack of common touristic identity and image;</p> <p>[-] Low integration of cultural heritage in the border area tourist products' development;</p> <p>[+] Possibilities for development of cross-border products;</p> <p>[+] Established past cooperation and high interest for future cooperation in tourism sector.</p>
<p>Thematic priority (e): Investing in youth, education and skills</p>	<p>This priority is selected to encourage the possible potential of the region, namely: youth to become more actively involved in making decisions. When young people have the opportunity to identify the problems that affect their lives and, most importantly, find and implement the solutions, it builds their self-confidence and encourages them to value the positive impact they can have on the lives of others.</p> <p>The choice of TP is based on identified needs and potential of the eligible border area, namely:</p> <p>[-] High level of early-school leavers due to poor perspectives of the youth;</p> <p>[-] Educational /Training system not corresponding to labour market demands;</p> <p>[-] High level of youth unemployment;</p> <p>[+] Opportunities for development of mechanisms for career counselling and guidance for young people;</p> <p>[+] Availability of youth support institutions such as youth centres in a number of municipalities;</p> <p>[-] Low level of participation of youth in civil society.</p>
<p>Thematic priority (b): Protecting the environment and promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management</p>	<p>The third priority is selected to overcome the existing barriers in the field of managing environmental risks. Its relevance is predetermined since the protection of the environment and the elimination/mitigation of existing environmental hotspots and hazards, and the adaptation for new risks, is considered an absolute prerequisite for any development strategy. Environmental protection and risk management are by definition cross-border initiatives.</p> <p>The choice of TP is based on identified needs and potential of the eligible border area, namely:</p> <p>[+] Partnership of public, private and civil sector in implementing of environmental protection initiatives;</p> <p>[-] Low level of disaster management systems and emergency preparedness;</p> <p>[-] Inefficient fire fight management and fire prevention</p>

	<p>measures across the border;</p> <p>[-] Insufficient cross-border cooperation in management of natural resources;</p> <p>[+] Potential for efficient and sustainable use of natural resources (e.g. toward sustainable tourism).</p>
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1.2 Justification for the financial allocation

The main objective behind the financial allocation to Programme thematic objectives (priorities) is to effectively achieve the Programme results with resources available.

The Programme is financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). The total EU support to the Programme is EUR 28.986.914,00 (of which maximum 10% shall be allocated to the Technical Assistance).

Main arguments behind the financial commitment for each priority include expected results to be achieved, planned types of actions under each priority, as well as types of investments to be made (if any). Additionally, when defining the allocations towards thematic priorities, two aspects were taken into consideration based on the lessons learned from previous Bulgaria-Serbia IPA CBC Programme (2007-2013), namely:

- The estimated relative importance of the thematic priority/priority axis based on the identified needs and the estimated long-term impact on the border region socio-economic situation, and
- The estimated absorption capacity of the potential project holders to develop feasible projects including the magnitude of needs of resources of typical projects.

♦ PA-1: Sustainable Tourism

Approximately 40 % of the Union Funds is planned to be given to thematic priority (d): *“Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage”* because of the significance of the region’s natural and cultural heritage as among its most valuable assets. Capitalisation of these assets could contribute to the economic development of the area by promoting environment-friendly tourism. Importance of the priority axis is undoubtedly high also in terms of creating employment opportunities in the border region.

Establishing the basic conditions for an increased exploitation of the cultural and natural assets may involve substantial costs. Especially tourist infrastructure development – even if only small-scale investments are foreseen to be financed – may demand relatively high level of funds. Furthermore cross-border cooperation is an evident precondition for effective approaches to preservation and management in particular when it comes to large-scale bio-corridors such as the Western Stara Planina or the wetlands along the border Danube River.

Moreover, the financial allocation to this priority is aligned with the high interest shown by the relevant partners in the consultation process. All partner regions expressed their interest in this priority, the potential interest expressed in consultation meetings during programming has been significant. This is the field where cooperation between stakeholders on different sides of the border has already been successful and where there is also scope to further exploit on this cooperation. Active cooperation led to advanced capabilities to develop and manage projects, improving the absorption in this intervention field.

In order to maintain a proper balance of funding between potential actions to be funded under this thematic priority, an indicative allocation of 25% of the programme’s resources has

been set to be allocated to the soft-type of interventions aimed at developing tourist destinations and innovative touristic products, as well as further strengthening the networking activities of local border communities.

♦ **PA-2: Youths**

Approximately 20 % of the ERDF funding is proposed to be allocated towards thematic priority (e): *“Investing in youth, education and skills”*. Although clear needs have been identified to investing in education, training, including vocational training, the relative costs of these type of projects are significantly lower than the cost of investments in touristic and/or environmental risk prevention infrastructures and existing absorption capacity – with special regard to really meaningful projects – seems to be also moderate, justifying a relatively low allocation to this priority axis.

♦ **PA-3: Environment**

30% of the Programme’s budget will be allocated to thematic priority (b): *“Protecting the environment and promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management”*. The priority is viewed to have the potential to cover quite a broad range of solutions in the field of sustainable environmental management, depending on the local specificities of the environment, risk prevention and disaster management, as well as the community and other interests. For this reason, sufficient resources are needed to meet the demand.

Table 2: Overview of the investment strategy of the cooperation programme

Priority axis	Union support (in EUR)	Proportion (%) of the total Union support for the cooperation programme	Thematic priorities	Result indicators corresponding to the thematic priority
PA-1 “Sustainable Tourism”	11.594.765,60	40%	Thematic priority (d): Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage	RI 1.1.1 Increased visitors to the cross-border region
				RI 1.2.1 Increased level of touristic valorisation of natural, cultural and historical heritage
				RI 1.3.1 Increased cross-border networks operating in the field of sustainable tourism
PA-2 “Youths”	5.797.382,80	20%	Thematic priority (e): Investing in youth, education and skills	RI 2.1.1 Increase of the share of modernized educational institutions in the border area
				RI 2.2.1 Percentage of youth participation in networks across the border (sports clubs, leisure time or youth clubs/associations and cultural organisations)
PA-3 “Environment”	8.696.074,20	30%	Thematic priority (b): Protecting the environment and promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management	RI 3.1.1 Status of preparedness to manage risks of transnational dimension
				RI 3.2.1 Joint initiatives related to nature protection and sustainable use of common natural resources
PA-4 “Technical Assistance”	2.898.691,40	10%	N/A	N/A

II. PRIORITY AXES

2.1 Description of the priority axes (other than technical assistance)

2.1.1 Priority axis 1 - Sustainable Tourism

ID of the priority axis	1
Title of the priority axis	SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

<input type="checkbox"/> The entire priority axis will be implemented solely through financial instruments	
<input type="checkbox"/> The entire priority axis will be implemented solely through financial instruments set up at Union level	
<input type="checkbox"/> The entire priority axis will be implemented through community-led local development	

2.1.2 Fund, calculation basis for Union support and justification of the calculation basis choice

Fund	Union funds (ERDF and IPA)
Calculation basis (total eligible expenditure or public eligible expenditure)	Total eligible expenditure
Justification of the calculation basis choice	

2.1.3 The specific objectives of the thematic priority and expected results

ID	1.1
Specific objective	TOURIST ATTRACTIVENESS: Supporting the development of competitive tourist attractions that contribute to the diversification of tourist product(s) in the cross-border region
The results that the partner States seek to achieve with Union support	R 1.1.1 - Increasing the tourist attractiveness of the cross-border area through better utilisation of natural, cultural and historical heritage and related infrastructure

	<p>The development of sustainable cross-border tourism as a tool for socio-economic growth is closely linked with initiatives to improve accessibility, transport and communications at the regional and local level. Furthermore, the creation of competitive tourist attractions is an important factor for increasing the competitiveness of the Programme's area through sustainable and balanced utilisation of its cultural, historical and natural resource potential and increasing the effectiveness of cross-border tourist product(s).</p> <p>Therefore, the Programme will focus on overcoming existing challenges in the eligible area, namely through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supporting conservation of natural, cultural and historical heritage, linked where appropriate to tourism, including the restoration of heritage buildings and the maintenance of traditional landscapes; - Improving the accessibility to touristic sites in the region, in line with the overall concept for sustainable tourism development; - Improving the integration between different types of transport service and ease of use by tourists; - Ensuring wide access to public sector tourist information (including open data e-Tourism).
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ID	1.2
Specific objective	<p>CROSS-BORDER TOURISTIC PRODUCT:</p> <p>Valorising the favourable conditions for diversified tourism in the border area through creating common cross-border touristic destination(s)</p>
<p>The results that the partner States seek to achieve with Union support</p>	<p>R 1.2.1 – Strengthen joint and integrated approaches to preserve and manage the diversity of natural and cultural assets in the border area as a basis for sustainable development and growth strategies</p> <p>In the present global competitive environment, tourism development should be based on knowledge, innovation and promotion, whereas development of cross-border area can be based on mutual development of cross-border tourism as innovative model of tourism development in general. In response to that, careful destination planning and management is required to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Influence the scale, nature and location of development, to ensure that tourism is

	<p>integrated with existing activities and that the cross-border community remains in balance;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Check that proposed new development is in line with market trends and future demand; - Give priority to types of products and services that reflect the special character of the cross-border destination(s), minimise environmental impact and deliver value to the community (economic and employment); - Maximise the proportion of income that is retained locally and other benefits to local communities, through strengthening local supply chains and promoting use of local products and services. <p>Through the actions to be supported, the Programme will facilitate the development of local tourism environment thus establishing a portfolio of the joint touristic destination(s) in the cross-border area. Some of the major challenges to be faced are the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of joint tourism territorial management plans; - Adoption visitor management plans to ensure that tourism does not damage natural and cultural resources; - Development of monitoring programmes to measure trends and impacts, and facilitate adaptive management of natural, cultural and historical heritage in the region. <p>It is important that Programme's work to promote sustainability is based on sound evidence regarding the interface between tourism and sustainability, and visitor and business demand for sustainability. Innovation, therefore, is of crucial importance for the cross-border tourism, for its impact on tourism demand as well as supply.</p>
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ID	1.3
Specific objective	PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE NETWORKING: Capitalise the effect of cultural, historical and natural heritage tourism on border communities
The results that the partner States seek to achieve with Union support	R 1.3.1 - Enhanced community involvement and awareness about sustainable use of cross-border tourist resources The main precondition for sustainable tourism

	<p>development in the Programme's area is the engagement of a wide range of stakeholders within and at the level of the border region, so as to take advantage of numerous possibilities provided by dynamic cross-border cooperation in this field.</p> <p>The development of a sense of ownership and responsibility regarding sustainable tourism in host communities is a key issue for tourist managers and planners in the border region. Neither of these elements is easily achieved in the short term without a strong focus on awareness building, engagement of community and ultimately, empowerment of the individuals so they can recognise and understand the direct and indirect benefits of a sustainable approach to tourism and how to become involved. The key is a participatory approach which empowers the local community and the tourism industry so they can develop an appreciation and knowledge regarding local and individual issues and costs associated with developing tourism.</p> <p>There is a need for a continuous engagement of local community stakeholders, through a series of networking actions, in order to develop responsibility in sustainable tourism development. Besides local, there are a number of other agencies that can have an influence on local decision making, e.g. national government authorities and educational institutions, tour operators (outgoing and incoming), transportation and other tourism-related companies serving the destination, the media, the tourist market and the tourists themselves.</p> <p>Building awareness regarding sustainable tourism practice in the border area requires a strategic approach if long term attitudinal change and engagement is to be achieved.</p>
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2.1.4 Elements of other thematic priorities added to the priority axis

ID	
Contribution to the specific objective of the priority axis	
The results that the partner States seek to achieve with Union support	

2.1.5 Actions to be supported under the thematic priority (by thematic priority)

- 2.1.5.1 *A description of the type and examples of actions to be supported and their expected contribution to the specific objectives, including, where appropriate,*

identification of the main target groups, specific territories targeted and types of beneficiaries

Thematic Priority	TP(d): Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage
<p>The indicative actions⁵ to be supported under <u>specific objective 1.1</u> are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preservation of natural and cultural heritage (e.g. restoration and maintenance of sites of historical and cultural importance; conservation and protection of both tangible and non-tangible natural, historical and cultural heritage, etc.). - Development of small-scale support infrastructure to touristic attractions (e.g. rehabilitation of access roads; upgrade of public utilities related to natural, cultural and historic tourism sites; small touristic border crossings and related facilities; ICT facilities development/upgrade, etc.). - Development of additional small scale technical infrastructure, encouraging the visits to the tourist attractions (playgrounds; recreational and sports facilities; landscaping; signing and lighting; other support facilities serving tourist attraction and visitors). - Development of joint transport access schemes and adventure routes (e.g. cross-border public transport to touristic sites; tourist paths and health paths, climbing, horse riding and biking routes, etc.). - Development of tourist attraction accessible to persons with disabilities (e.g. encouraging the modification of access points, washrooms, stairs, transportation vehicles, rough paths, etc.). - Development of information access facilities (e.g. info-centres and/or kiosks to guide potential visitors; joint GIS platforms; joint platforms for online reservations, payment, etc.). <p><u>Target groups:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Residents of the cross-border area - Visitors and guests of tourist attractions and cross-border destinations - People with disabilities (improving of the accessibility will contribute to their social inclusion) - Touristic organisations and associations - Administrations of protected areas <p><u>Potential Beneficiaries:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All levels of regional/local authorities - Regional and sector development agencies - Central and regional offices and structures of relevant government institutions/administrations 	

⁵ List is not complete, further specific actions to be identified under each Call for Proposals

- Public cultural institutes (museum, library, community centres, etc.)
- Non-government organizations and tourist associations

The indicative actions to be supported under specific objective 1.2 are:

- **Development of joint cross-border touristic destinations** (e.g. improve development strategies and action plans through the joint design and promotion of cross-border tourist destinations based on innovative service concepts and products; carrying out joint researches on tourism demand for new tourist destinations; adoption of joint visitor management plans to ensure that tourism does not damage natural and cultural resources; risk management plans for cultural and natural heritage sites exposed to climate change; elaborating joint monitoring programmes to measure trends and impacts, and facilitate adaptive management of natural, cultural and historical heritage in the region, etc.).
- **Development of sustainable cross-border touristic products and services** (e.g. research activities to identify tourist products with potential for cross-border branding; development of new and innovative tourist products and services; development of local brand/s based on natural, historical and cultural heritage of the border region; establishment of networks/clusters/entities for management of joint tourist products; creating knowledge networks for tourism innovations in the border area, etc.).
- **Joint marketing and promotion of cross-border tourist destinations and products** (e.g. joint market perception analysis with the aim to assess the customer understanding of the border region as a consistent tourism destination identification; application of best practices in tourism promotion; preparation and dissemination of information and advertising materials; studies of the impact of the implemented marketing and advertising activities; organisation of tourism exhibitions and fairs; visualisation of local tourist products/ brand/s/ destinations, incl. 3D visualisation; mobile applications, social networks, tailor-made internet platforms, and other innovative tools; creating multi-lingual on-line tourist platforms, etc.).

Target groups:

- Touristic operators in the eligible border area
- Tourist associations
- SMEs operating in the field of tourism and hospitality sector
- Young entrepreneurs
- Cultural institutes (museum, library, art gallery, community centres, etc.)
- Residents of the cross-border area and the visitors (tourists)

Potential Beneficiaries:

- All levels of regional/local authorities
- Regional touristic associations
- NGOs
- Business support structures - chamber of commerce, business association, business cluster
- Education / Training Centres

- Regional and sector development agencies
- Central and regional offices and structures of relevant government institutions/administrations

The indicative actions to be supported under specific objective 1.3 are:

- **Support for public awareness activities and information services** (e.g. awareness raising campaigns on the values of cross-border cultural, historical and natural heritage, incl. joint events among youth; dissemination of relevant information to the touristic providers in the border region; organizing travel forums to promote effective two-way communication; participation and involvement of local touristic enterprises in recognizing and solve common problems; organisation of different events such as conferences, forums, seminars, platforms and networking meetings in order to improve the recognition and trust among existing partners and to assure the political commitment at all levels, etc.).
- **Capacity building activities addressed to local community and business** (e.g. training and consultancy support services for tourist enterprises/establishments to improve skills and performance; organising online forums for exchange of good practices in sustainable tourism management; support the cooperation of public and private institutions in fields of competence, etc.).
- **Organization of joint events to promote cross-border natural and cultural heritage** (e.g. promotion and cultivation of the common traditions of the borderland areas; support to activities in the fields of multiculturalism, cultural exchange and the establishment of connections on field of creative industry in order to increase cultural diversity; organisation of one-day festivals, exhibitions, performances, etc.).

Target groups:

- Residents of the cross-border area
- Tourist enterprises/establishments in the border region
- Touristic organisations and associations
- Youth organisations

Potential Beneficiaries:

- All levels of regional/local authorities
- Regional touristic associations
- Civil society structure (association/foundation/NGOs)
- Business support structures
- Education / Training Centres
- Cultural institutes (museum, library, art gallery, community centres, etc.)

2.1.5.2 Guiding principles for the selection of operations

Thematic Priority	TP(d): Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage
The selection of operations is to be made at level of 'specific objectives' , e.g. potential applicants should apply with project application focusing on only one specific objective (SO)	

under Priority Axis 1.

The following **guiding principles** will be observed when selecting project applications:

- **Strategic coherence:** coherence and contribution of each project application to the relevant Programme's specific objective, while addressing in a coherent way the achievement of the Programme's specific results envisaged. Furthermore, the cross-border added value of the operation, its territorial dimension and the relevance of the partnership will also be assessed in this context.
- **Operational quality:** design of the project application in relation to clarity and coherence of the operational objectives, activities and means, feasibility, efficiency, communication of the project and its specific results, potential for uptake and embedment into operative procedures of the partners involved.
- **Compliance to horizontal principles:** coherence and contribution of each project application to the Programme's horizontal principles and the demonstration of their integration and advancement within the project proposal intervention logic.

The detailed assessment criteria will be adopted by the **Joint Monitoring Committee** and will be made available to potential applicants in the Calls for proposals' documentation, which will be prepared and disseminated by the Programme's Managing Authority.

Under PA-1, **strategic projects** could also be identified outside Calls for proposals for the achievement of the programme objectives and priority specific objectives. Strategic projects should contribute to achievement of a bigger impact through real and strong cross-border impact and long-term results, in respect of the Programme's objectives. Strategic Projects must be effective and answer the territory's needs as envisaged by the Programme and result in a significant and long-lasting change or improvement on the whole or large parts of programme area. The basic principles for the eligibility of a strategic project should be the following:

- To address key specific objectives that can be achieved only through the involvement of large partnerships and /or of key stakeholders on the two sides of the border;
- To be based on a larger financial size than common project applications under open call for proposals.

The decision of selecting strategic projects under PA-1 lies down within the competence of the Joint Monitoring Committee of the Programme.

2.1.5.3 *Planned use of financial instruments (where appropriate)*

Thematic Priority	TP(d): Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage
Planned use of financial instruments	
No financial instruments will be used	

2.1.6 Common and programme specific indicators

2.1.6.1 Priority axis result indicators (programme specific)

Table 3: Programme specific result indicators

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
RI 1.1.1	Increased visitors to the cross-border region	Percentage	To be determined	2014	Increasing (<i>quantitative target</i>)	Survey National Statistics (BG&RS)	2019 2023
RI 1.2.1	Increased level of touristic valorisation of natural, cultural and historical heritage	Ordinal scale (e.g. 1-10)	To be determined	2014	Increasing (<i>qualitative target</i>)	Survey Annual Implementation Reports	2019 2023
RI 1.3.1	Increased cross-border networks operating in the field of sustainable tourism	Percentage	To be determined	2014	Increasing (<i>quantitative target</i>)	Survey Annual Implementation Reports	2019 2023

2.1.6.2 Priority axis output indicators (common or programme specific)

Table 4: Common and programme specific output indicators

ID	Indicator (name of indicator)	Measurement unit	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
OI 1.1.1	Total number of reconstructed/restored cultural and historical touristic objects in the eligible border area	Number	15	Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 1.1.2	Total length of reconstructed or upgraded access facilities (roads/cycling routes/ walking paths) to natural, cultural and historic tourism sites	Kilometres	5	Annual Implementation Reports	Annually

OI 1.1.3	Total number of small scale technical infrastructure, encouraging the visits to the tourist attractiveness	Number	15	Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 1.1.4	Total number of created/reconstructed facilities for disabled people in the supported touristic sites	Number	10	Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 1.1.5	Total number of information access facilities created/upgraded	Number	5	Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 1.2.1	Number of sustainable tourism strategies/action plans of common tourist destinations	Number	3	Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 1.2.2	Total number of newly established joint touristic products / services	Number	5	Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 1.2.3	Tools developed and/or implemented for marketing and promoting tourist products in the eligible border area	Number	8	Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 1.3.1	Public awareness initiatives promoting sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage and resources	Number	20	Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 1.3.2	Capacity building initiatives for capitalisation of the common touristic product/services	Number	35	Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 1.3.3	Total number of joint events aimed at promotion and cultivation of the common traditions of the borderland areas	Number	15	Annual Implementation Reports	Annually

2.1.7 Categories of intervention

Table 5: Categories of intervention - Dimension 1 Intervention field

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA1	092 - Protection, development and promotion of public tourism assets	5.563.785,50
PA1	094 - Protection, development and promotion of public cultural and heritage assets	2.320.653,00
PA1	079 - Access to public sector information (including open data e-Tourism)	808.231,00
PA1	075 - Development and promotion of tourism services in or for SMEs	1.971.107,50
PA1	095 - Development and promotion of public cultural and heritage services	930.988,60

Table 6: Categories of intervention - Dimension 2 Form of finance

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA1	01 - Non-repayable grant	11.594.765,60

Table 7: Categories of intervention - Dimension 3 Territory type

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA1	05 - Cooperation across national or regional programme areas in national context	11.594.765,60

Table 8: Categories of intervention - Dimension 6 Territorial delivery mechanisms

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA1	07 - Not applicable	

2.1.8 A summary of the planned use of technical assistance including, where necessary, actions to reinforce the administrative capacity of authorities involved in the management and control of the programmes and beneficiaries and, where necessary, actions for to enhance the administrative capacity of relevant partners to participate in the implementation of programmes (where appropriate)

Priority axis	1
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Capacity building initiatives:

- For project generation, assisting potential beneficiaries for the identification of needs among target groups, coordination of administrative procedures.

Promotion initiatives:

- To activate participation among potential beneficiaries groups;
- To inform target groups on outputs of the programme.

Surveys and evaluation activities:

- Surveys among target groups to evaluate the achievement of PA's results indicators.

2.2.1 Priority axis 2 - Youths

ID of the priority axis	2
Title of the priority axis	Youths

<input type="checkbox"/> The entire priority axis will be implemented solely through financial instruments	
<input type="checkbox"/> The entire priority axis will be implemented solely through financial instruments set up at Union level	
<input type="checkbox"/> The entire priority axis will be implemented through community-led local development	

2.2.2 Fund, calculation basis for Union support and justification of the calculation basis choice

Fund	Union funds (ERDF and IPA)
Calculation basis (total eligible expenditure or public eligible expenditure)	Total eligible expenditure
Justification of the calculation basis choice	

2.2.3 The specific objectives of the thematic priority and expected results

ID	2.1
Specific objective	SKILLS & ENTREPRENEURSHIP: Creating an attractive environment for development of young people in the border region.
The results that the partner States seek to achieve with	R 2.1.1 Improved environment for youth

<p>Union support</p>	<p>development</p> <p>The achievement of Programme's specific result 2.1 should lead to substantial improvement in some of the most demanding youth development challenges the cross-border region between Bulgaria and Serbia faces nowadays:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improvement of educational skills, extra-curricular activities, as well as activities aimed at creating opportunities for leisure and sport for young people. Extra-curricular activities are efficient site upon which contemporary educational goals can be realised, and a site upon which training strategies that facilitate learning are successfully implemented. Through introduction of variously themed activities, young people in the border area would have the opportunity to utilise various work strategies through auto-didacticism, active participation and independent (self-) development. Efforts should therefore be aimed at raising efficiency through: (1) upgrading the physical environment in schools and training centres, providing modern equipment and furnishings (all intended to create an attractive learning environment), and (2) enabling full-time schooling through improving the infrastructure, sports and recreational facilities, as well as providing rooms for extra-curricular activities. The provision of modern conditions in the educational infrastructure will improve the quality of education while reducing the school drop-out rate. On the other hand, creating an attractive school environment and providing opportunities for extracurricular activities will increase the motivation of young people to continue their education after secondary school and will thus contribute to increasing the share of college and university graduates. - Promoting an entrepreneurial culture among young people. Promoting an entrepreneurial culture is one of the most essential and neglected components of entrepreneurship development in the border region. Changing cultural practices and beliefs around entrepreneurship is a long-term process. It will be ambitious to say that IPA CBC Programme will overcome the above constrains; it will rather concentrate on facilitating the overall environment for youth development in the border region, while facilitating the process of
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	<p>entrepreneurial training through wider utilisation of cross-border networking opportunities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improving business counselling and development services. The more assistance a young person obtains during the start-up of the working carrier the better are the chances for finding a job and even creating a successful and sustainable business. However, young entrepreneurs in the cross-border area often lack the support services that are considered a key to transforming fragile one-person start-ups into successful small- and medium-sized businesses. Therefore, the Programme will concentrate on enhancing the provision of support services: i.e. business skills training, guidance and counselling services; one-stop shops; physical or electronic online portals to assist with registrations, financing applications etc.; on-the-job training and workshops; mentor support and business coaching.
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ID	2.2
Specific objective	<p>PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE NETWORKING:</p> <p>Promote sustainable, long-term and collaborative initiatives for and with young people, including enhancing mobility of young people</p>
The results that the partner States seek to achieve with Union support	<p>R 2.2.1 Enhanced networking between young people in the border region</p> <p>The searched change with reference to achieving Programme's specific result 2.2 is focused on encouraging youth to become more actively involved in making decisions. When young people have the opportunity to identify the problems that affect their lives and, most importantly, find and implement the solutions, it builds their self-confidence and encourages them to value the positive impact they can have on the lives of others. Through increasingly meaningful and active participation in decision-making they can develop their own identity, a sense of belonging and usefulness. This encourages them to respond to educational opportunities and enter more fully into life at school.</p> <p>To overcome the challenges outlined, the IPA CBC Programme will give ground for youth networking actions, as to help bring about the structural changes necessary to create an environment that makes young people feel welcomed and empowered to actively</p>

	<p>participate in decision-making processes, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advocacy. The Programme will support advocacy campaigns to review existing social policies and/or put in place appropriate policies to ensure the creation of structures and opportunities for children and young people's meaningful participation. - Good Governance. The Programme will promote good governance in public institutions and civil society organizations, and will therefore support systematic training in participatory skills for all professionals working with, and for, children and young people should be made available. - Education & Information. The Programme will mobilize the public to lobby for the establishment of child-friendly formal and non-formal education systems that enable the effective development and participation of young people. It will promote the principle of involving young people in the design and management of effective, safe and protective learning environments. - Opportunities for Volunteers. The Programme will stimulate all sectors of society, including governments and businesses, to create opportunities for voluntary service for young people to contribute, with their enthusiasm, idealism, experience and skills, to community development. - The Media. The Programme will also encourage and promote communication mechanisms among young people in the border region that will enable the sharing of experiences and ideas, as well as the creation of peer support and information networks.
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2.2.4 Elements of other thematic priorities added to the priority axis

ID	
Contribution to the specific objective of the priority axis	
The results that the partner States seek to achieve with Union support	

2.2.5 Actions to be supported under the thematic priority (by thematic priority)

2.2.5.1 *A description of the type and examples of actions to be supported and their expected contribution to the specific objectives, including, where appropriate, identification of the main target groups, specific territories targeted and types of beneficiaries*

Thematic Priority	TP(e): Investing in youth, education and skills
<p>The indicative actions⁶ to be supported under <u>specific objective 2.1</u> are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of youth-related small-scale infrastructure, and training and information facilities (e.g. construction/reconstruction/rehabilitation/refurbishment of youth, education-related and recreational infrastructure and facilities – for instance: lecture facilities, libraries, laboratories, sport facilities, campuses; investments to ensure physical accessibility to youth and education-related and recreational infrastructure and facilities; investments in ICT- facilities’ development and upgrade etc.). - Development of small-scale “entrepreneurship” infrastructure (e.g. business incubators, shared workspace, start-up factories and “start-up garage”, equipment provision/sharing, etc.). - Support to youth entrepreneurship schemes and initiatives (e.g. initiatives to encourage learning in support of young people's innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship; students’ mini-companies, school-entrepreneur/business activities and events; simulation games [often computer-based]; business skills training, guidance and counselling services [one-stop shops and youth enterprise centres, on-the-job training and workshops, mentor support and business coaching, YE online portals and web sites, etc.]; support to joint market initiatives and networking, incl. promotion and marketing campaigns for youth entrepreneurs, etc.). <p><u>Target groups:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pupils of primary and secondary schools - Young people (up to age of 29) - Youth organisations - Marginalised minority communities - Children and youth with special needs - Employment services <p>Potential Beneficiaries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All levels of regional/local authorities - Education institutions and training service providers - Vocational training institutions - Universities, knowledge / research institutes - Civil society structure (association/foundation)/ NGOs 	

⁶ List is not complete, further specific actions to be identified under each Call for Proposals

- Business support structures
- Cultural institutes, local community centres

The indicative actions to be supported under specific objective 2.2 are:

- **Support to youth networking initiatives** (e.g. promotion of young people's participation in representative democracy and civil society; cross-border initiatives aimed at combating youth poverty and social exclusion; community initiatives to support and recognize the value of youth volunteering; supporting youth capacity and opportunities to be creative and youth access to culture; cross-border initiatives for promotion of health and well-being of young people, etc.).

Target groups:

- Pupils of primary and secondary schools
- Young people (up to age of 29)
- Marginalised roma communities

Children and youth with special needs

Potential Beneficiaries:

- All levels of regional/local authorities
- Youth organisations / NGOs
- Local and national education institutions, and training service providers
- Universities, knowledge / research institutes
- Civil society structure (association/foundation)
- Business support structures
- Cultural institutes, local community centres

2.2.5.2 Guiding principles for the selection of operations

Thematic Priority	TP(e): Investing in youth, education and skills
<p>The selection of operations is to be made at level of 'specific objectives', e.g. potential applicants should apply with project application focusing on only one specific objective (SO) under Priority Axis 2.</p>	
<p>The following guiding principles will be observed when selecting project applications:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategic coherence: coherence and contribution of each project application to the relevant Programme's specific objective, while addressing in a coherent way the achievement of the Programme's specific results envisaged. Furthermore, the cross-border added value of the operation, its territorial dimension and the relevance of the partnership will also be assessed in this context. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Operational quality: design of the project application in relation to clarity and coherence of the operational objectives, activities and means, feasibility, efficiency, communication of the project and its specific results, potential for uptake and embedment into operative procedures of the partners involved. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compliance to horizontal principles: coherence and contribution of each project application to the Programme's horizontal principles and the demonstration of their 	

integration and advancement within the project proposal intervention logic.

The detailed assessment criteria will be adopted by the **Joint Monitoring Committee** and will be made available to potential applicants in the Calls for proposals' documentation, which will be prepared and disseminated by the Programme's Managing Authority.

2.2.5.3 *Planned use of financial instruments (where appropriate)*

Thematic Priority	TP(e): Investing in youth, education and skills
Planned use of financial instruments	
No financial instruments will be used	

2.2.6 Common and programme specific indicators

2.2.6.1 Priority axis result indicators (programme specific)

Table 9: Programme specific result indicators

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
RI 2.1.1	Increase of the share of modernized educational institutions in the border area	Percentage	To be determined	2014	Increasing (quantitative target)	Survey Annual Implementation Reports	2019 2023
RI 2.2.1	Percentage of youth participation in networks across the border (sports clubs, leisure time or youth clubs/associations and cultural organisations)	Percentage	To be determined	2014	Increasing (quantitative target)	Survey Annual Implementation Reports	2019 2023

2.2.6.2 Priority axis output indicators (common or programme specific)

Table 10: Common and programme specific output indicators

ID	Indicator (name of indicator)	Measurement unit	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
OI 2.1.1	Total number of supported youth-related small-scale infrastructure, and training and information facilities	Number	20	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 2.1.2	Total number of small-scale “entrepreneurship” infrastructure	Number	5	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 2.1.3	Total number of people involved in the supported youth entrepreneurship schemes and initiatives	Number	300	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually

OI 2.2.1	Total number of youth networking initiatives supported by the Programme	Number	15	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
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2.2.7 Categories of intervention

Table 11: Categories of intervention - Dimension 1 Intervention field

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA2	055 - Other social infrastructure contributing to regional and local development	2.669.348,50
PA2	117 - Enhancing equal access to lifelong learning for all age groups in formal, non-formal and informal settings, upgrading the knowledge, skills and competences of the workforce, and promoting flexible learning pathways including through career guidance and validation of acquired competences	1.913.135,80
PA2	109 - Active inclusion, including with a view to promoting equal opportunities and active participation, and improving employability	1.214.898,50

Table 12: Categories of intervention - Dimension 2 Form of finance

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA2	01 - Non-repayable grant	5.797.382,80

Table 13: Categories of intervention - Dimension 3 Territory type

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA2	05 - Cooperation across national or regional programme areas in national context	5.797.382,80

Table 14: Categories of intervention - Dimension 6 Territorial delivery mechanisms

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA2	07 - Not applicable	

2.2.8 A summary of the planned use of technical assistance including, where necessary, actions to reinforce the administrative capacity of authorities involved in the management and control of the programmes and beneficiaries and, where necessary, actions for to enhance the administrative capacity of relevant partners to participate in the implementation of programmes (where appropriate)

Priority axis	2
Capacity building initiatives:	

- For project generation, assisting potential beneficiaries for the identification of needs among target groups, coordination of administrative procedures.

Promotion initiatives:

- To activate participation among potential beneficiaries groups;
- To inform target groups on outputs of the programme.

Surveys and evaluation activities:

- Surveys among target groups to evaluate the achievement of PA's results indicators.

2.3.1 Priority axis 3 - Environment

ID of the priority axis	3
Title of the priority axis	Environment

<input type="checkbox"/> The entire priority axis will be implemented solely through financial instruments	
<input type="checkbox"/> The entire priority axis will be implemented solely through financial instruments set up at Union level	
<input type="checkbox"/> The entire priority axis will be implemented through community-led local development	

2.3.2 Fund, calculation basis for Union support and justification of the calculation basis choice

Fund	Union funds (ERDF and IPA)
Calculation basis (total eligible expenditure or public eligible expenditure)	Total eligible expenditure
Justification of the calculation basis choice	

2.3.3 The specific objectives of the thematic priority and expected results

ID	3.1
Specific objective	JOINT RISK MANAGEMENT: To prevent and mitigate the consequences of natural and man-made cross-border disasters
The results that the partner States seek to achieve with Union support	R 3.1.1 Improved preparedness of public authorities, civil organisations and targeted volunteers to better manage natural and man-made

natural and man-made hazards and disasters

Disaster prevention & management as well as adaptation to climate change is largely a local/regional topic as it is the local/regional authorities that are first confronted with the potential impacts of disasters and have to implement prevention measures. At the same time, cross-border and cross-sectoral impacts must also be kept in consideration, as forest fires, floods and other natural and man-made disasters do not recognize state borders and other artificial boundaries imposed by humans. In border areas discrepancy of interests and approaches, heterogeneous equipment and tactics, as well as diversities in legislative can decrease the ability to effectively deal with emergency situations.

In addition, natural disasters and impacts of climate change can significantly affect the socio-economic development and competitiveness of the Bulgaria-Serbia cross-border region. Investments in prevention and adaptation to climate change preserve existing assets and have a high economic return: the costs of action are lower than those of inaction.

The Programme's specific objective 3.1 is targeted at eliminating differences and barriers that reduce the effectiveness of joint cross-border activities, and the major change expected after its successful implementation is the enhanced capacity of local administrations and public bodies competent for early cross-border identification and assessment of emergency situation, and joint disaster management actions. These include, but are not limited to:

- Enhanced coordination mechanisms at both sides of the Bulgaria-Serbia border for risk prevention and disaster response management.
- Operating joint protocols and communication channels for an alert network of relevant institutions between bordering regions, which will reduce response time and to enhance and coordinate actions.
- Developed advanced monitoring and surveillance system for the whole cross-border area.
- Investments related to rehabilitation/upgrade of disaster resilience infrastructures and equipment.
- Improved capacity of local institutions to play active and efficient role in interventions for environmental emergencies, due to natural or

	man-made disasters.
ID	3.2
Specific objective	NATURE PROTECTION: Enhancing the capacity of regional and local stakeholders for improved environmental and natural resources management in the border region
The results that the partner States seek to achieve with Union support	<p>R 3.2.1 Improved capacity for nature protection and sustainable use of common natural resources in the border region</p> <p>The eligible Programme's area enjoys the benefits of having a vast, varied and mostly unspoilt natural environment. The region has a rich mixture of natural heritage in the form of flora and fauna, rivers, and forests the potential of which is not fully exploited yet. On the other side, sustainable development implies economic growth together with the protection of environmental quality, each reinforcing the other. The essence of this form of development is a stable relationship between human activities and the natural world.</p> <p>Hence, the protection of the environment is crucial to the sustainable and economic success of the eligible border area. There is a need to support activities aimed at ensuring that the management and development of the region's resources are carried out in an environmentally sustainable way.</p> <p>Environmental protection and the preservation of natural resources in cross-border context are clearly fields, which are to be dealt with in an integrated way. Joint and co-ordinated actions in the border region contribute to the creation of synergic effects in environmental protection and resource management.</p>

2.3.4 Elements of other thematic priorities added to the priority axis

ID	
Contribution to the specific objective of the priority axis	
The results that the partner States seek to achieve with Union support	

2.3.5 Actions to be supported under the thematic priority (by thematic priority)

2.3.5.1 *A description of the type and examples of actions to be supported and their expected contribution to the specific objectives, including, where appropriate, identification of the main target groups, specific territories targeted and types of beneficiaries*

Thematic Priority	TP(b): Protecting the environment and promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management
<p>The indicative actions to be supported under <u>specific objective 3.1</u> are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishing joint early warning and disaster management systems (e.g. surveys of actually applied procedures, policies and measures for disaster protection, prevention and provisions; establishing spatial data base for disaster risk assessment, containing terrestrial, meteorological and sociological features; preparing joint plans and procedures for emergency situation liquidation and disaster force accumulation responding to the incidents and emergency situations; developing joint protocols and communication channels for risk prevention and management of natural and man-made disasters, etc.). - Investments in equipment related to disaster resilience (e.g. up-to-date ICT solutions in pre-fire, fire and post-fire activities; supply of specialized fire-fighting equipment; supply of specialized equipment for floods, and for search and rescue interventions; supply of system for air surveillance of the surface and real time transmission of data, etc.); - Support of small-scale interventions/investments (e.g. sanitation and reforestation of river banks; building flood defence like dikes and canals; forestation of non-permanent vulnerable land; cuttings for emergency situations, etc.); - Capacity building related to disaster resilience (e.g. conducting joint theoretical-tactical exercises and field trainings for emergency situations management; trainings in the use of ICT technologies for risk management; exchange of experience and good practice (study visits, round-tables, conferences); joint trainings and raising awareness of public service actors and population (volunteers) for disaster resilience, etc.). <p><u>Target groups:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Affected population of the CBC region - All levels of regional/local authorities - Administrations of protected areas - Young people (up to age of 29) <p>Potential Beneficiaries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relevant local and regional structures dealing with emergency situations - Central and regional offices and structures of relevant government institutions/administrations - Regional and sector development agencies <p>The indicative actions to be supported under <u>specific objective 3.2</u> are:</p>	

- **Protection and enhancement of biodiversity, nature protection and green infrastructure** (e.g. joint initiatives targeting the effective management of environmental resources; joint initiatives towards the protection and restoration of ecosystems and endangered and protected flora and fauna species; preservation and improvement of the quality of natural resources (air, soil, water); introduction of Low Carbon practices shared for adaptation climate change and mitigation of their consequences, etc..)
- **Capacity building and promotion initiatives** (e.g. provision of training to local and regional authorities in the field of environment related matters, such as waste or protected areas management; establishment of help-desks with mobile expert groups helping regions and cities resolving environmental problems; creating networks for exchange of good practices; awareness raising on all levels (individual persons, organizations, businesses, public administration, schools) on issues related to environmental and nature protection, including marginalized communities and other vulnerable groups).

Target groups:

- Groups of population of the CBC region
- Civil society structure in the CBC region
- Economic operators in the CBC region

Potential Beneficiaries:

- Central and regional offices and structures of relevant government institutions/administrations in the sphere of their competence
- Regional and sector development agencies
- Administrations of protected areas
- All levels of regional/local authorities
- Research and academic institutes
- Environmental NGOs

2.3.5.2 Guiding principles for the selection of operations

Thematic Priority	TP(b): Protecting the environment and promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management
<p>The selection of operations is to be made at level of 'specific objectives', e.g. potential applicants should apply with project application focusing on only one specific objective (SO) under Priority Axis 3.</p> <p>The following guiding principles will be observed when selecting project applications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategic coherence: coherence and contribution of each project application to the relevant Programme's specific objective, while addressing in a coherent way the achievement of the Programme's specific results envisaged. Furthermore, the cross-border added value of the operation, its territorial dimension and the relevance of the partnership will also be assessed in this context. - Operational quality: design of the project application in relation to clarity and coherence of the operational objectives, activities and means, feasibility, efficiency, communication of the project and its specific results, potential for uptake and 	

embedment into operative procedures of the partners involved.

- **Compliance to horizontal principles:** coherence and contribution of each project application to the Programme's horizontal principles and the demonstration of their integration and advancement within the project proposal intervention logic.

The detailed assessment criteria will be adopted by the **Joint Monitoring Committee** and will be made available to potential applicants in the Calls for proposals' documentation, which will be prepared and disseminated by the Programme's Managing Authority.

Under PA-3, **strategic projects** could also be identified outside Calls for proposals for the achievement of the programme objectives and priority specific objectives, (namely 3.1). Strategic projects should contribute to achievement of a bigger impact through real and strong cross-border impact and long-term results, in respect of the Programme's objectives. Strategic Projects must be effective and answer the territory's needs as envisaged by the Programme and result in a significant and long-lasting change or improvement on the whole or large parts of programme area. The basic principles for the eligibility of a strategic project should be the following:

- To address key specific objectives that can be achieved only through the involvement of large partnerships and /or of key stakeholders on the two sides of the border;
- To be based on a larger financial size than common project applications under open call for proposals.

The decision of selecting strategic projects under PA-3 lies down within the competence of the Joint Monitoring Committee of the Programme.

2.3.5.3 *Planned use of financial instruments (where appropriate)*

Thematic Priority	TP(b): Protecting the environment and promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management
Planned use of financial instruments Planned use of financial instruments	
No financial instruments will be used	

2.3.6 Common and programme specific indicators

2.3.6.1 Priority axis result indicators (programme specific)

Table 15: Programme specific result indicators

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
RI 3.1.1	Status of preparedness to manage risks of transnational dimension (<i>composite indicator</i>)	Ordinal scale (e.g. 1-10)	To be determined	2014	Increasing (qualitative target)	Survey	2019 2023
RI 3.2.1	Joint initiatives related to nature protection and sustainable use of common natural resources	Percentage	To be determined	2014	Increasing (quantitative target)	Survey Annual Implementation Reports	2019 2023

2.3.6.2 Priority axis output indicators (common or programme specific)

Table 16: Common and programme specific output indicators

ID	Indicator (name of indicator)	Measurement unit	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
OI 3.1.1	Total number of joint activities aimed at establishing joint early warning and disaster management systems	Number	6	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 3.1.2	Purchased specialised equipment related to disaster management	Number	10	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 3.1.3	Total number of supported interventions / investments related to risk prevention	Number	5	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 3.1.4	Total number of people participated in risk prevention and management training activities	Number	600	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually

OI 3.2.1	Total number of interventions, addressing improved nature protected sites and endangered species	Number	12	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually
OI 3.2.2	Capacity building initiatives, trainings, exchange of experience and know-how in the field of sustainable use of natural resources	Number	15	Progress and Annual Implementation Reports	Annually

2.3.7 Categories of intervention

Table 17: Categories of intervention - Dimension 1 Intervention field

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA3	087 - Adaptation to climate change measures and prevention and management of climate related risks e.g. erosion, fires, flooding, storms and drought, including awareness raising, civil protection and disaster management systems and infrastructures	6.523.750,00
PA3	085 - Protection and enhancement of biodiversity, nature protection and green infrastructure	2.172.324,20

Table 18: Categories of intervention - Dimension 2 Form of finance

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA3	01 - Non-repayable grant	8.696.074,20

Table 19: Categories of intervention - Dimension 3 Territory type

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA3	05 - Cooperation across national or regional programme areas in national context	8.696.074,20

Table 20: Categories of intervention - Dimension 6 Territorial delivery mechanisms

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA3	07 - Not applicable	

2.3.8 A summary of the planned use of technical assistance including, where necessary, actions to reinforce the administrative capacity of authorities involved in the management and control of the programmes and beneficiaries and, where necessary, actions for to enhance the administrative capacity of relevant partners to participate in the implementation of programmes (where appropriate)

Priority axis	3
<p>Capacity building initiatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For project generation, assisting potential beneficiaries for the identification of needs among target groups, coordination of administrative procedures. <p>Promotion initiatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To activate participation among potential beneficiaries groups; 	

- To inform target groups on outputs of the programme.

Surveys and evaluation activities:

- Surveys among target groups to evaluate the achievement of PA's results indicators.

2.2 Description of the priority axes for technical assistance

2.2.1 Priority axis 4 – Technical Assistance

ID of the priority axis	4
Title of the priority axis	Technical Assistance

2.2.2 Fund, calculation basis for Union support

Fund	Union funds (ERDF and IPA)
Calculation basis (total eligible expenditure or public eligible expenditure)	Total eligible expenditure
Justification of the calculation basis choice (only if total eligible expenditure basis selected)	

2.2.3 The specific objectives of the thematic priority and expected results

ID	4.1
Specific objective	PROGRAMME'S ADMINISTRATION To maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of the management and implementation of the IPA CBC Programme Bulgaria-Serbia (2014-2020)
The results that the partner States seek to achieve with Union support⁷	Not applicable

2.2.4 Actions to be supported and their expected contribution to the programme implementation

Priority axis	Technical Assistance
The PA-4 will support on one hand actions that enhance the capacity of applicants and beneficiaries to apply for and to use the programme funds, and on the other hand, actions to support the Programme management and implementation.	

⁷ Required where the Union support to technical assistance in the cooperation programme exceeds EUR 15 million.

The technical assistance costs will mainly be composed of preparatory, management, monitoring, evaluation, and information and control activities.

In accordance with Article 35 of COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING REGULATION (EU) No 447/2014 of 2 May 2014, the limit for Technical Assistance is set at 10% of the total amount allocated to the cross-border cooperation programme.

Moreover, TA-funds will be used to support the programme management (implementation, monitoring, evaluation, communication, auditing, control, etc.) and to improve the administrative capacity of programme bodies and stakeholders. Therefore, Technical Assistance funds will finance the programme bodies: the MA, the NA, the JS, external assessors and the First Level Control system.

Indicative actions supported under this Priority Axis 4 are listed below:

Management and implementation

- Supporting the Programme bodies for the implementation of the Programme; supporting the Monitoring Committee activities; functioning of the JS, etc. (meetings organisation, travel expenditures, publicity and communication costs, remuneration costs, etc.)
- Elaboration of studies, reports and surveys on strategic matters concerning the programme implementation. These documents will contribute to the proper estimation of the Programme progress and sustainability.
- Performing quality assessments of applications for projects.
- Organisation of seminars, trainings and information events on national and cross border level (details will be set out in the communication strategy) to support projects' development and implementation.

Monitoring, control and audit

- Implementing proper procedures for the quality and risk assessment, monitoring and control of operations carried out under the Programme, as well as actions contributing to the reduction of administrative burden for beneficiaries.
- Ensuring proper functioning of the First level control system (remuneration of first level of controllers; travel and accommodation's costs for site visits, etc.)
- Developing and maintenance of the Monitoring system for programme management, monitoring, audit and control.
- Coordinating and organising of programme level audit activities, including the (external) audits on the programme management and control system and the operations and supporting the Group of Auditors.

Communication and information

- Development and maintenance of the programme website.
- Implementing widespread information activities about the programme and the projects, as well as supporting activities related to communication and publicity.
- Support for identifying and strengthening the co-ordination networks and contacts among representatives of other relevant EU co-funded programmes by MA, NA, and JS (EUSDR, neighbouring ETC programmes, national programmes, etc.)

Evaluation

- Evaluation of the programme implementation in achieving its objectives. For this

purpose, an evaluation plan may be drafted according to the provision of the regulations and making use of external experts may be necessary.

2.2.5 Programme specific indicators

2.2.5.1 Programme specific output indicators expected to contribute to results

Table 21: Programme specific output indicators

ID	Indicator (name of indicator)	Measurement unit	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting

2.2.6 Categories of intervention

Table 22: Categories of intervention - Dimension 1 Intervention field

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA4	121 - Preparation, implementation, monitoring and inspection	2.174.017,80
PA4	122 - Evaluation and studies	361.487,15
PA4	123 - Information and communication	363.186,45

Table 23: Categories of intervention - Dimension 2 Form of finance

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA4	01 - Non-repayable grant	2.898.691,40

Table 24: Categories of intervention - Dimension 3 Territory type

Priority axis	Code	Amount (EUR) EU (ERDF+IPA)
PA4	05 - Cooperation across national or regional programme areas in national context	2.898.691,40

2.3 Overview table of indicators per priority axis and thematic priority

Table 25: Table of common and programme specific output and result indicators

Priority axis	Thematic priority	Specific objective(s)	Selected results indicators	Selected output indicators
PA-1	TP(d)	SO 1.1 Tourist Attractiveness Supporting the development of competitive tourist attractions that contribute to the diversification of tourist product(s) in the cross-border region	RI 1.1.1 Increased visitors to the cross-border region	OI 1.1.1 Total number of reconstructed / restored cultural and historical touristic objects in the eligible border area
				OI 1.1.2 Total length of reconstructed or upgraded access facilities (roads/cycling routes/ walking paths) to natural, cultural and historic tourism sites
				OI 1.1.3 Total number of small scale technical infrastructure, encouraging the visits to the tourist attractiveness
				OI 1.1.4 Total number of created/reconstructed facilities for disabled people in the supported touristic sites
				OI 1.1.5 Total number of information access facilities created/upgraded
PA-1	TP(d)	SO 1.2 Cross-Border Touristic Product Valorising the favourable conditions for diversified tourism in the border area through creating common cross-border touristic destination(s).	RI 1.2.1 Increased level of touristic valorisation of natural, cultural and historical heritage	OI 1.2.1 Number of sustainable tourism strategies/action plans of common tourist destinations
				OI 1.2.2 Total number of newly established touristic products / services
				OI 1.2.3 Tools developed and/or implemented for marketing and promoting tourist products in the eligible border area

Priority axis	Thematic priority	Specific objective(s)	Selected results indicators	Selected output indicators
PA-1	TP(d)	SO 1.3 People-To-People Networking Capitalise the effect of cultural, historical and natural heritage tourism on border communities.	RI 1.3.1 Increased cross-border networks operating in the field of sustainable tourism	OI 1.3.1 Public awareness initiatives promoting sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage and resources
				OI 1.3.2 Capacity building initiatives for capitalisation of the common touristic product/services
				OI 1.3.3 Total number of joint events aimed at promotion and cultivation of the common traditions of the borderland areas
PA-2	TP(e)	SO 2.1 Skills & Entrepreneurship Creating an attractive environment for development of young people in the border region	RI 2.1.1 Increase of the share of modernized educational institutions in the border area	OI 2.1.1 Total number of supported youth-related small-scale infrastructure, and training and information facilities
				OI 2.1.2 Total number of small-scale “entrepreneurship” infrastructure
				OI 2.1.3 Total number of people involved in the supported youth entrepreneurship schemes and initiatives
PA-2	TP(e)	SO 2.2 People-To-People Networking Promote sustainable, long-term and collaborative initiatives for and with young people, including enhancing mobility of young people	RI 2.2.1 Percentage of youth participation in networks across the border (sports clubs, leisure time or youth clubs/associations and cultural organisations)	OI 2.2.1 Total number of youth networking initiatives supported by the Programme
				OI 2.2.2 Awareness campaigns carried out
PA-3	TP(b)	SO 3.1	RI 3.1.1 Status of preparedness to manage	OI 3.1.1 Total number of joint activities aimed at establishing joint early warning and disaster management systems

Priority axis	Thematic priority	Specific objective(s)	Selected results indicators	Selected output indicators
		<p>Joint Risk Management</p> <p>Preventing and mitigating the consequences of natural and man-made cross-border disasters.</p>	risks of transnational dimension	<p>OI 3.1.2 Purchased specialised equipment related to disaster management</p> <p>OI 3.1.3 Total number of supported interventions / investments related to risk prevention</p> <p>OI 3.1.4 Total number of people participated in risk prevention and management training activities</p>
PA-3	TP(b)	<p>SO 3.2</p> <p>Nature Protection</p> <p>Enhancing the capacity of regional and local stakeholders for improved environmental and natural resources management in the border region.</p>	<p>RI 3.2.1</p> <p>Joint initiatives related to nature protection and sustainable use of common natural resources</p>	<p>OI 3.2.1 Total number of interventions, addressing improved nature protected sites and endangered species</p> <p>OI 3.2.2 Capacity building initiatives, trainings, exchange of experience and know-how in the field of sustainable use of natural resources</p>

III. FINANCING PLAN

3.1 Financial appropriation from the IPA (in EUR)

Table 26: Financial appropriation

Fund	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	TOTAL
EU (ERDF+IPA)	1.447.186,17	2.095.179,94	3.002.371,79	5.443.145,32	5.551.144,76	5.659.144,21	5.788.741,80	28.986.914,00

3.1.1 Total financial appropriation from the IPA and national co-financing (in EUR)

Table 27: Financial Plan

Priority axis	Basis for calculation of Union support (Total eligible cost or public eligible cost)	Union support (a)	National counterpart (b) = (c) + (d)	Indicative breakdown of the national counterpart *		Total funding (e) = (a) + (b)	Co-financing rate (f) = (a)/(e) (2)	For information	
				National Public funding (c)	National private funding (d) (1)			Contributions from third countries	EIB contributions
PA1		11.594.765,60	2.046.135,11	1.023.067,56	1.023.067,56	13.640.900,71	85,00%	0,00	0,00
PA2		5.797.382,80	1.023.067,55	511.533,78	511.533,78	6.820.450,35	85,00%	0,00	0,00
PA3		8.696.074,20	1.534.601,33	767.300,67	767.300,66	10.230.675,53	85,00%	0,00	0,00
PA4		2.898.691,40	511.533,78	511.533,78	0,00	3.410.255,18	85,00%	0,00	0,00
TOTAL		28.986.914,00	5.115.337,77	2.813.435,78	2.301.902,00	34.102.251,77	85,00%	0,00	0,00

* The indicative breakdown of the national counterpart is indicatively split to equal contribution (50/50) by the participation countries. The real co-financing will be amounted on the base of the projects participation.

- For Republic of Bulgaria, the entire amount for all priority axes is covered by National Public funding.
- For Republic of Serbia, the amount for the PA4 is ensured by National Public funding. The amounts for the rest of the priority axes are covered by Serbian project partners through own contribution.

(1) To be completed only when priority axes are expressed in total costs.

(2) This rate may be rounded to the nearest whole number in the table. The precise rate used to reimburse payments is the ratio (f).

3.2 Breakdown by priority axis and thematic priority

Table 28: Breakdown by priority axis

Priority axis	Thematic priority	Union support	National counterpart	Total funding
PA1	TP-(d)	11.594.765,60	2.046.135,11	13.640.900,71
PA2	TP-(e)	5.797.382,80	1.023.067,55	6.820.450,35
PA3	TP-(b)	8.696.074,20	1.534.601,33	10.230.675,53
PA4		2.898.691,40	511.533,78	3.410.255,18
TOTAL		28.986.914,00	5.115.337,77	34.102.251,77

IV. INTEGRATED APPROACH TO TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT (WHERE APPROPRIATE)

4.1 Community-led local development (where appropriate)

Not Applicable

4.2 Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) (where appropriate)

Not Applicable

4.3 Contribution of planned interventions towards macro-regional and sea basin strategies, subject to the needs of the programme area as identified by the relevant partner States and taking into account, where applicable, strategically important projects identified in those strategies (where appropriate)

The priorities of the Bulgaria-Serbia IPA CBC Programme (2014-2020) has taken consideration of its contribution to implementing the **EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)**, within the areas delineated by the EUSDR Action Programme to make the region environmentally sustainable, prosperous, accessible and attractive, as well as safe and secure. The Danube Region Strategy addresses a wide range of issues; these are divided among 4 pillars and 11 priority areas.

The IPA CBC Programme demonstrates a **high relevance and coherence** to EUSDR strategic initiatives, namely:

PA-1 “Sustainable Tourism”

The priority is coordinated to the Danube region strategy that identifies actions for the sustainable development based on the natural and cultural resources among the main pillars of the regional strategy:

- **Pillar “A”: Connecting the Danube Region;** Priority Area 3: To promote culture and tourism, people to people contacts
- **Pillar “C”: Building Prosperity in the Danube Region;** Priority Area 08 *"To support the competitiveness of enterprises" [partially]*
- **Pillar “D”: Strengthening the Danube Region;** Priority Area 10 *"To step up institutional capacity and cooperation" [partially]*

The indicative activities to be supported by the Programme directly complement the actions envisaged in the EUSDR Action Plan, namely those aimed at building on cultural diversity as strength of the Danube Region, enhancing cooperation and contacts between people of

different origins, encouraging creativity, and provide a driving force for cultural innovation and economic development, based on heritage, traditions and tourism, developing the Danube region as a European brand, establishing the Danube Region as important European tourist destination, promoting short-stay weekend tourism and recreation, as well as longer stays, enhancing interconnection and cooperation in education and scientific and research activities for tourism, improving planning and infrastructure for tourism, supporting the improvement of the quality of tourism products, promote sustainable and wellness tourism, collecting existing data on cultural activities and establishing a comprehensive data base giving an overview of cultural activities in the Danube Region, etc.

The results to be achieved by the Programme are the creation of a recognizable identity for the entire area as a destination for sustainable tourism, the promotion of innovative type of tourism, the integration of the area in the touristic networks targeting the diverse environmental systems.

PA-2 “Youths”

By investing in young people and making best use of border’s area human capital, the IPA CBC Programme could substantiate its support to progress and grow in the Programme’s eligible territory. To arrive at a knowledge based and inclusive growth it requires empowering people through high levels of employment, investing in skills, fighting poverty and modernising labour markets, training and social protection systems. With reference to this, the Programme will have direct contribution to achieving the aims of:

- **Pillar “C”: Building Prosperity in the Danube Region;** Priority Area 9: "To invest in people and skills"
- **Pillar “C”: Building Prosperity in the Danube Region;** Priority Area 08 "To support the competitiveness of enterprises" [partially]
- **Pillar “C”: Building Prosperity in the Danube Region;** Priority Area 07 "To develop the Knowledge Society (research, education and ICT)" [partially]
- **Pillar “D”: Strengthening the Danube Region;** Priority Area 10 "To step up institutional capacity and cooperation" [partially]

The achievement of Programme’s specific objectives should lead to substantial improvement in some of the most demanding youth entrepreneurship challenges the cross-border region between Bulgaria and Serbia faces nowadays: promoting an entrepreneurial culture and skills among young people; and improving business assistance and development services.

The IPA CBC Programme will also give ground for youth networking actions, as to help bring about the structural changes necessary to create an environment that makes young people feel welcomed and empowered to actively participate in decision-making processes, namely: through advocacy, good governance, training & information, opportunities for voluntaries, as well as media involvement.

At the level of indicative activities the Programme complements EUSDR actions targeted at enhancing performance of education systems through closer cooperation of education institutions, systems and policies, fostering cooperation between key stakeholders of labour market, education and research policies in order to develop learning regions and environments, supporting creativity and entrepreneurship, promoting lifelong learning (LLL) policies and exchange best practices in implementation, etc.

PA-3 “Environment”

The Priority Axis is objective closely correlated to the EUDRS, namely:

- **Pillar B: Protecting the Environment in the Region;** Priority Area 5: "To manage environmental risks" and Priority Area 6: "To preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils"
- ***Pillar "D": Strengthening the Danube Region;*** Priority Area 10 "To step up institutional capacity and cooperation" [partially]

The CBC dimension is extremely relevant, for the integrated and interdependent environmental systems both for the border region as a whole, but also with reference to the Danube Basin as formulated in the EUDRS. Due to the financial capacity of the Programme, the coordination of projects implemented in the cooperation area with those implemented in the Danube Region is particularly relevant.

The cooperation will be sought in the areas covered by the EUSDR Action Plan such as extending the coverage of the European Floods Alert System (EFAS) and promoting joint responses to natural disasters and to flood events, including early warning systems, strengthening operational cooperation among the emergency response authorities in the Danube countries and improvement of the interoperability of the available assets. In the field of preserving biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils the Programme complements actions designed to achieve 2020 EU target for biodiversity, manage Natura 2000 sites and other protected areas effectively, protect and restore most valuable ecosystems and endangered animal species, raise awareness about soil protection, educate children and young people, build capacities of local authorities in the environment-related matters, etc.

Considering the fact that the whole Programme territory is covered by the EU Strategy for the Danube Region a link between the selected thematic objectives and the priority areas of the Programme, and the main pillars of the EUSDR is ensured. In the process of implementation of the programme specific mechanisms will be used to ensure the synergistic effect with the Strategy.



V. IMPLEMENTING PROVISIONS FOR THE COOPERATION PROGRAMME

5.1 Relevant authorities and bodies

Table 29: Programme authorities

Authority/body	Name of authority/body and department or unit	Head of authority/body (position or post)
Managing authority	DG “Territorial Cooperation Management” Ministry of Regional Development of the Republic of Bulgaria	Director General of DG “Territorial Cooperation Management” within the Ministry of Regional Development of the Republic of Bulgaria
Certifying authority, where applicable	National Fund Directorate at the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Bulgaria	Director of National Fund Directorate within the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Bulgaria
Audit authority	Audit of European Union Funds Executive Agency at the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Bulgaria	Executive Director of the Audit of the European Union Funds Executive Agency within the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Bulgaria

The body to which payments will be made by the Commission is:

<input type="checkbox"/> The Managing Authority	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The Certifying Authority	National Fund Directorate at the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Bulgaria

Table 30: Body or bodies carrying out control and audit tasks

Authority/body	Name of authority/body and department or unit	Head of authority/body (position or post)
Body or bodies designated to carry out control tasks	<u>For the Republic of Bulgaria:</u> Ministry of Regional Development of the Republic of Bulgaria	Minister of Regional Development of the Republic of Bulgaria
	<u>For Republic of Serbia:</u> Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Serbia, Department for Contracting and Financing of EU Funded Programmes – CFCU, Division for first level control of projects financed under IPA cross-border and transnational cooperation component	Assistant Minister for Contracting and Financing of EU Funded Programmes – CFCU Head of division for first level control of projects financed under IPA cross-border and transnational cooperation component
Body or bodies designated to be responsible for carrying out audit tasks	<u>For the Republic of Bulgaria:</u> Audit of European Union Funds Executive Agency at the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Bulgaria	Executive Director of the Audit of the European Union Funds Executive Agency within the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Bulgaria
	<u>For the Republic of Serbia:</u> Representing group of auditors - Government of the Republic of Serbia Audit Authority Office of EU Funds	Director of Audit Authority Office of EU Funds

5.2 Joint Monitoring Committee

In accordance with Article 38 of Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 447/214 of 2 May 2014 on the specific rules for implementing Regulation (EU) No 231 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II), the Member States shall set up a Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) within 3 months of the notification of the approval by the EU Commission of the Programme.

The JMC shall be composed of representatives of MA, NA, and the Commission and the NIPAC, as well as other relevant national authorities and stakeholders, including civil society and private sector organisations. The composition of the JMC will respect the principles of partnership and multi-level governance.

The Commission, Certifying Authority (CA) and the Audit Authority (AA) shall participate in the work of the JMC in an advisory capacity.

The JMC shall carry out its functions in accordance with the provisions of Article 38 of IPA II Regulation and Articles 49 and 110 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. The main competencies and responsibilities of the JMC are as follow:

- Review the overall effectiveness, quality and coherence of the implementation of all actions towards meeting the objectives set out in the cross-border programme, the financing agreements and the relevant strategy paper(s). It may make recommendations for corrective actions whenever needed.
- Monitoring by reference to indicators laid down in the cross-border cooperation programme, in accordance with Article 16 of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013.

The JMC shall examine and approve:

- a) any issues that affect the performance of the operational programme;
- b) the methodology and criteria used for selection of operations;
- c) the annual and final implementation reports;
- a) the evaluation plan for the operational programme and any amendment of the evaluation plan, including where either is part of a common evaluation plan pursuant to Article 114(1). The JMC will examine the progress made in implementation of the evaluation plan and the follow-up given to findings of evaluations;
- d) the communication strategy/plan for the operational programme and any amendment of the strategy/plan;
- e) any proposal by the MA for any amendment to the operational programme.

The JMC shall adopt its rules of procedures on the first JMC meeting. The rules of procedures shall encompass, as one of the other themes, a detail list of the JMC's tasks.

The JMC will be headed by a Chair and a co-Chair. The Chairmanship will be annually alternated between the MA and the NA. Decisions shall be taken by consensus.

The JMC shall meet at least once a year. Additional meetings may also be convened at the initiative of one of the participating countries or of the Commission, in particular on a thematic basis.

Table 31: Indicative list of Joint Monitoring Committee members

Name of authority/body and department or unit	Role in the programme	Contact details of the authority/body
EU Commission	Advisory	European Commission, Directorate Regional and Urban Policy
NIPAC	Decision	
Managing Authority	Decision	Ministry of Regional Development of the Republic of Bulgaria
National Authority	Decision	Government of the Republic of Serbia - Serbian European Integration Office
Macro-regional strategy representative (where the programme is overlapping a macro-region covered by an EU Strategy)	Consultative	<p><u>For Republic of Bulgaria:</u> Ministry of Regional Development</p> <p><u>For Republic of Serbia:</u> Government of the Republic of Serbia – Serbian European Integration Office</p> <p>Department for Cross-border and Transnational Cooperation Programs – Natalija Matunovic – Milosevic, coordinator for EU MRS related to ETC (nmatunovic@seio.gov.rs)</p> <p>Department for planning, programming, monitoring and reporting on EU funds and development assistance – Sanja Knezevic Mitrovic (sknezevic@seio.gov.rs)</p>
Regional authorities	Decision	
Local authorities	Decision	
Competent Public Central administration Authorities	Decision	
Social and economic partners	Decision	
Civil society organisations (environmental, equal opportunities, non-discrimination)	Decision	
Academic and scientific society	Decision	
EIB	Consultative	
Other (as agreed by the partner countries)		

5.3 Procedure for setting up the joint secretariat

In accordance with Article 23 (2) of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013, the Managing Authority in cooperation with National Authority shall set up a Joint Secretariat (JS). The JS main office will remain placed in Sofia, Republic of Bulgaria with a branch office located in Nis, Republic of Serbia.

The JS (including its branch as part of the same body) shall be composed of a balanced number of Bulgarian and Serbian experts contracted by the MA or NA.

The JS shall assist the MA, NA and the JMC in carrying out their respective functions. The JS shall also provide information to potential beneficiaries about funding opportunities under cooperation programmes and shall assist beneficiaries in the implementation of operations.

The JS shall be responsible for the following main tasks:

- participation in planning and organisation of programme information campaigns and other activities related to raising public awareness on the programme;
- establishing and managing a joint projects data base and project partners data base;
- supporting projects generation and development,
- supporting MA and NA for the preparation of all standardised forms for the implementation of Programme such as application package, evaluation, contracting, implementation, monitoring and reporting forms,
- preparing the full application package for CfPs and submitting it to MA and NA for approval,
- advising beneficiaries on the implementation of operations and financial administration;
- receiving and registering of applications submitted;
- performing a formal check of project applications in terms of administrative compliance and eligibility;
- presenting a work plan via the Managing Authority to the Joint Monitoring Committee once a year for approval;
- organising meetings and events, drafting the minutes from meetings, preparing, ensuring the administrative management of tasks and services;
- providing secretariat services for Evaluation Committees and submitting the results of the project technical evaluation sessions to the JMC;
- monitoring of project implementation, collecting of information from the lead beneficiaries and updating data in the Management Information System; Coordinating the work of the controllers;
- collecting, checking and approving project progress reports from the lead partners;
- preparing the reports on programme implementation;
- consulting the lead beneficiaries on any requests for contract modifications. Reviewing and approving requests for contract modifications, which do not affect the objectives, outputs and results of the projects;
- cooperation with the programme implementing authorities in Bulgaria and Serbia, and with other territorial cooperation programmes;
- collaboration with central, regional and local stakeholders involved in the CBC Programme.

The detailed list of the JS responsibilities will be laid down in the Programme Implementation Manual.

5.4 Summary description of the management and control arrangements

Institutional arrangements

Managing Authority

Directorate General “Territorial Cooperation Management” at Ministry of Regional Development of the Republic of Bulgaria is designated to perform the functions of single Managing Authority under Bulgaria-Serbia IPA Cross-border programme.

The Managing Authority is responsible for managing and implementing the IPA CBC Programme in accordance with the principles of sound financial management and the provisions of Article 125 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and in particular for:

- supporting the work of the Joint Monitoring Committee referred to in Article 47 of the CPR and provide it with the information it requires to carry out its tasks (data relating to the progress of the operational programme in achieving its objectives, financial data and data relating to indicators and milestones);
- drawing up and, after approval by the monitoring committee, submitting to the Commission annual and final implementation reports;
- providing to intermediate bodies and beneficiaries information that is relevant to the execution of their tasks and the implementation of operations respectively;
- establishing a system to record and store in computerised form data on each operation necessary for monitoring, evaluation, financial management, verification and audit, including data on individual participants in operations, where applicable;
- ensuring that the data referred to in above point is collected, entered and stored in the Management Information System (MIS).

As regards the selection of operations, the managing authority is:

- drawing up and, once approved, applying appropriate selection procedures and criteria that:
 - ensure the contribution of operations to the achievement of the specific objectives and results of the relevant priority axis;
 - are non-discriminatory and transparent;
- ensuring that operations are selected for funding in accordance with the criteria applicable to the cross-border programme and that they comply with applicable Community and national rules for the whole of their implementation period;
- ensuring that the beneficiary is provided with a document setting out the conditions for support for each operation including the specific requirements concerning the products or services to be delivered under the operation, the financing plan, and the time-limit for execution;
- satisfying itself that the beneficiary has the administrative, financial and operational capacity to fulfil the conditions referred to the above point before approval of the operation;

- satisfying itself that, where the operation has started before the submission of an application for funding to the managing authority, applicable law relevant for the operation has been complied with;
- ensuring that operations selected for support from the Funds do not include activities which were part of an operation which has been or should have been subject to a procedure of recovery in accordance with Article 71 following the relocation of a productive activity outside the programme area;
- determining the categories of intervention the measures to which the expenditure of an operation shall be attributed.

As regards the financial management and control of the operational programme, the managing authority is:

- verifying that the co-financed products and services have been delivered and that expenditure declared by the beneficiaries has been paid and that it complies with applicable law, the operational programme and the conditions for support of the operation;
- ensuring that beneficiaries involved in the implementation of operations reimbursed on the basis of eligible costs actually incurred maintain either a separate accounting system or an adequate accounting code for all transactions relating to an operation;
- putting in place effective and proportionate anti-fraud measures taking into account the risks identified;
- setting up procedures to ensure that all documents regarding expenditure and audits required to ensure an adequate audit trail are held in accordance with the requirements of point (g) of Article 72;
- drawing up the management declaration and annual summary referred to in points (a) and (b) of Article 59(5) of the Financial Regulation.

National Authority

The counterpart of the Managing Authority in charge of the coordination role in Serbia is the Government of the Republic of Serbia - Serbian European Integration Office, acting as National Authority.

The NA will cooperate in the joint programming, management and implementation of the programme and will take all necessary measures to provide assistance to the MA, CA and AA in their respective duties, mainly through:

- participating in joint programming and generation of operations in accordance with the programme objectives and priorities;
- ensuring national co-financing according to the approved allocation of funds;
- nominating Serbian representatives in the JMC;
- participating in preparation of job descriptions and in the selection process of the experts in the JS (main and branch offices);
- organizing a selection procedure and appointing assessors from Serbian side.
- establishing a First Level Control system for verification of expenditures on the Serbian territory, including development of guidelines for specific national control procedures;

- nominating representative(s) in the group of auditors;
- providing regular information and ensuring access to information of MA, CA and AA on the Programme progress on Serbian territory;
- supporting dissemination of information about the programme.

Certifying Authority

“National Fund” Directorate at the Ministry of Finance of Republic of Bulgaria has been designated as a Certifying Authority. The Certifying Authority shall receive the payments made by the Commission and shall make payments to the lead beneficiary in accordance with Article 132 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. In compliance with Article 126 of the same Regulation, the Certifying Authority is also responsible for:

- drawing up and submitting payment applications to the Commission, and certifying that they result from reliable accounting systems, are based on verifiable supporting documents and have been subject to verifications by the managing authority;
- drawing up the accounts referred to in point (a) of Article 59(5) of the Financial Regulation;
- certifying the completeness, accuracy and veracity of the accounts and that the expenditure entered in the accounts complies with applicable law and has been incurred in respect of operations selected for funding in accordance with the criteria applicable to the operational programme and complying with applicable law;
- ensuring that there is a system which records and stores, in computerised form, accounting records for each operation, and which supports all the data required for drawing up payment applications and accounts, including records of amounts recoverable, amounts recovered and amounts withdrawn following cancellation of all or part of the contribution for an operation or the Programme;
- ensuring, for the purposes of drawing up and submitting payment applications, that it has received adequate information from the managing authority on the procedures and verifications carried out in relation to expenditure;
- taking account when drawing up and submitting payment applications of the results of all audits carried out by, or under the responsibility of, the Audit Authority;
- maintaining, in a computerised form, accounting records of expenditure declared to the Commission and of the corresponding public contribution paid to beneficiaries;
- keeping an account of amounts recoverable and of amounts withdrawn following cancellation of all or part of the contribution for an operation. Amounts recovered shall be repaid to the budget of the Union prior to the closure of the Programme by deducting them from the subsequent statement of expenditure.

Audit Authority

Executive Agency “Audit of European Union Funds” to the Minister of Finance of the Republic of Bulgaria has been designated as an Audit Authority.

According to the Article 127 of the CPR, the AA shall ensure that audits are carried out on the proper functioning of the management and control system of the Programme and on an appropriate sample of operations on the basis of the declared expenditure. The declared expenditure shall be audited based on a representative sample and, as a general rule, on

statistical sampling methods.

The Audit Authority is also responsible for:

- ensuring that audit work takes account of internationally accepted audit standards;
- preparation of an audit strategy for performance of audits within eight months of adoption of the operational programme. The audit strategy shall set out the audit methodology, the sampling method for audits on operations and the planning of audits in relation to the current accounting year and the two subsequent accounting years. The audit strategy shall be updated annually from 2016 until and including 2024.

In addition, the Audit Authority shall draw up:

- an audit opinion in accordance with the second subparagraph of Article 59(5) of the Financial Regulation No 966/2012;
- draw up an annual control report setting out the main findings of the audits carried out in accordance with Article 127(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, including findings with regard to deficiencies found in the management and control systems, and the proposed and implemented corrective actions.

At the end of the implementation of the Programme, the Audit Authority shall prepare a final audit activity report and provide an audit opinion on the final statement of expenditure.

In compliance with Article 52 (d) of Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 447/2014 of 2 May 2014 the Audit Authority shall be assisted by a **Group of Auditors**, comprising representatives of Bulgaria and Serbia. The Group of Auditors will assist the AA in setting up and implementing the audit strategy. The audit strategy will also indicate which measures have been put in place by the AA and the Group of Auditors, in order to ensure that the same audit methodology, in accordance with internationally accepted audit standards, has been applied by all members of the Group of Auditors.

Programme management, implementation and control arrangements

Selection of operations

The Bulgaria-Serbia IPA CBC Programme shall support operations, which have direct cross-border impact, understood in terms of respecting at least two of the following conditions: joint development, joint staffing, joint implementation and joint financing.

The financing under the current Programme shall be made available to potential beneficiaries through a competitive process. The selection of the operations shall be made through open Call for proposals and/or decision of the JMC.

Geographical eligibility:

In accordance with Article 39 (2) of Commission Implementing regulation (EU) No 447/2014 of 2 May 2014, the selected operations shall involve beneficiaries from both partnering countries, at least one of which shall be from Bulgaria as a Member State. The beneficiaries and operations should be located in at least one of the NUTS level III regions (or equivalent regions in the non-MS) covered by the cross-border programme and specified above. An important exception to this rule is the eligibility of beneficiaries that are located outside the eligible administrative units but that are competent or relevant in their scope of action to all or parts of each national eligible area. Nevertheless, the Bulgaria-Serbia IPA CBC Programme

may also finance operations that are implemented outside the programme area, provided that the conditions of the Article 44(2) of Commission Implementing regulation (EU) No 447/214 of 2 May 2014 are satisfied. The total amount allocated under the programme to operations located outside the programme area shall not exceed 20 % of the support from the Union at programme level.

Beneficiaries:

In accordance with Article 40 (1) of Commission Implementing regulation (EU) No 447/214 of 2 May 2014, one of the potential beneficiaries shall be designated by all the beneficiaries as the lead beneficiary. The lead beneficiary shall carry out the tasks specified in Article 40, namely:

- a) lay down the arrangements with other beneficiaries in an agreement comprising provisions that, inter alia, guarantee the sound financial management of the funds allocated to the operation, including the arrangements for recovering amounts unduly paid;
- b) assume responsibility for ensuring implementation of the entire operation;
- c) ensure that expenditure presented by all beneficiaries has been incurred in implementing the operation and corresponds to the activities agreed between all the beneficiaries, and in accordance with the document provided by the MA;
- d) ensure that the expenditure presented by other beneficiaries has been verified by a controller(s).

The lead beneficiary and its partners have to be legally established organizations (legal persons) on the territory of Bulgaria or Serbia and must be non-profit making organization. Profit generating organizations and political parties are not eligible beneficiaries under Bulgaria-Serbia IPA CBC Programme.

Project generation/preparation:

Potential beneficiaries will be adequately informed on the programme objectives and priorities for support, the prerequisites for obtaining funds and the individual procedures. Support will be provided by JS for project generation and preparation, including a partner search facility.

Eligibility and selection criteria:

The operations will be assessed according to the criteria previously approved by JMC.

Eligibility criteria will be formulated in order to ensure the administrative and formal compliance of projects to be submitted. These will include: submission before a deadline, completeness of submitted documentation, cross-border character of the composition of the partnership, no double financing from EU financial source of the same operation, etc.

Selection criteria will be applied to those projects that have first fulfilled the eligibility criteria and will assess their compliance with the strategic and operational principles guiding the project selection.

Assessment:

The assessment of the operations (projects proposals) shall be carried out by the following three steps:

- Opening session - shall be carried out by the JS.
- Administrative compliance and eligibility check - shall be carried out by the JTS, and

- Technical/quality assessment - shall be carried out by independent assessors from both Bulgaria and Serbia appointed by the MA.

Standard rules and procedures for assignment and scope of the tasks of the external assessors shall be defined in rules of procedures/manual for external assessors and other relevant documents.

The criteria for appointment of the external assessors will be formulated in order to ensure the fair competition, equal opportunities and qualitative selection of the candidates. The selected external assessors shall possess the minimum required knowledge and experience on the issues covered by the Bulgaria - Serbia IPA Cross-border Programme.

For each call for proposals, the certain number of assessors will be assign for the technical evaluation of the received projects proposals. Equal number of assessors from the two countries will be appointed to carry out the technical evaluation for each call for proposals.

The assessment process will be organized and secretarially supported by JS and the relevant information will be recorded in the Management Information System. The results of all assessment steps will be summarized in a report and presented to the JMC for decision.

Projects selection and approval:

The JMC will decide on the approval of projects and the amount of programme's financial contribution to each operation. Detailed rules on decision making will be included in the rules of procedure of the Monitoring Committee.

Operations shall not be selected for IPA II assistance where they have been physically completed or fully implemented before the application for funding under the cross-border cooperation programme is submitted by the beneficiary to the MA, irrespective of whether all related payments have been made by the beneficiary.

Contracting:

Based on mandate given by the JMC, the MA shall proceed with conducting the procedure for concluding subsidy contracts with the lead beneficiaries. The MA shall carried out the pre-contracting visits on the investment sites proposed for financing and shall organize budget negotiations to all projects proposals approved for financing.

Contracts with the lead beneficiaries will be prepared in an approved standard subsidy contract template form and annexes. Implementation of the projects activities may start only after the contracts are signed by both - the MA and the lead beneficiary.

Management and control system

The management and control systems for the programme shall be set up in accordance with Articles 47 of Commission Implementing regulation (EU) No 447/214 of 2 May 2014 and respectively Articles 72, 73 and 74, 122(1) and (3), 128 and 148 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013.

MA shall ensure that the management and control system for the programme are set up in accordance with the IPA specific rules and that those systems function effectively.

First Level Control system

According to Article 23 (4) of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 and Article 125 (4) (a) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 each participating country designates the body or persons responsible for carrying out verification of expenditures of the operations in relation to

beneficiaries on its territory ('controller(s)').

The controller(s) shall provide control and verification of:

- delivery of the products and services;
- soundness of the expenditure declared for operations implemented by the respective beneficiary;
- compliance of such expenditure, related operations, as well as tendering procedures with Community rules and when relevant with its national rules; and
- compliance of such expenditure, related operations and part of operations to the eligible costs given in the application.

For Republic of Bulgaria

For Bulgaria, a decentralised FLC system will be established. The Minister of Regional Development or authorised person by him/her will assign the FLC tasks to the controller(s) in accordance with applicable public procurement legislation or under existing labour law.

Standard rules and procedures for carrying out the control activities are defined in FLC Manual and other relevant documents.

The cost for FLC verification shall be covered by the programme budget under PA "Technical assistance".

For Republic of Serbia

Serbia set up a centralised control system. Standard rules and procedures for carrying out the control activities are defined in national FLC Manual and other relevant documents.

The actual verification of expenditures is performed by the Division for First Level Control Activities of Projects Financed under IPA Component Cross-Border Cooperation, within the Department for Contracting and Financing of EU Funded Projects (CFCU), Ministry of Finance – Republic of Serbia. The above mentioned Division is involved in the verification of expenditures and takes responsibility for issuing declarations on validation of expenditures. The verification of expenditures is performed by the controllers employed with the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Serbia as civil servants or engaged on the Service Contract bases between Ministry of Finance, Serbian European Integration Office and expert 3. The requirement for formal separation of functions between the bodies having responsibilities in programme management, project selection and approval, project activities, the verification of project expenditure and delivery of the products and services, is fully respected (according to Article 47 of Regulation (EC) No447/2014 and Article 72 (b) of the Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. The salaries of the First Level Control officers for Serbian partners are financed from the national budget allocation of the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Serbia and additionally for maximum two controllers financed from NA TA Annual budget, while all travel costs for the on the spot checks or participation to the relevant Programme meetings or events or audit activities will be covered from NA TA Annual Budget of the Bulgaria – Serbia IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme.

Financial management

The MA shall be responsible for managing the operational programme in accordance with the principle of sound financial management.

The MA shall make payments to the Lead Beneficiaries and/or final beneficiaries (in the case of Priority axis "Technical assistance") of the IPA and the corresponding Bulgarian national

co-financing. The lead beneficiaries are responsible for transferring the corresponding funds to the project partners.

The MA shall set up procedures to ensure that all documents regarding expenditure and audits required to ensure an adequate audit trail are held in accordance with the requirements of point (g) of Article 72;

MA ensures the aggregation of information on expenditures and submits to the CA on a regular basis a report on certification and statement of expenditures.

Monitoring

The MA and the JMC will ensure the quality of the implementation of the programme in accordance with the principle of sound financial management. The JMC will observe the monitoring of the Programme implementation and ensure the achievement of the Programme objectives through a rational use of the allocated resources. Monitoring will be carried out by reference to the indicators herewith specified.

The tools used for the monitoring of the programme are the annual reports (and final report) on implementation, as set up in Article 14 of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013. The annual (final) report(s) will be drafted by the JS, verified by the MA and approved by the JMC before submitting them to the Commission. The reporting, information and communication tasks will be carried out in accordance with Article 42 of Regulation (EC) No447/2014.

The monitoring of the Programme will be done through the management information system that will provide project-specific technical and financial information. The reporting will be provided by the lead beneficiary on behalf of the entire partnership through periodical or final reporting and presented to the JS. The JS will check the compliance of the reports with the project application. The data of the reports will be stored in the management system that in turn will generate, based on it, the reports submitted to the European Commission.

Programme Evaluation

The Programme is subject to an ex-ante, interim and ex-post evaluation of independent evaluators with the aim to improve Programme quality and to optimise the allocation of the financial resources. Evaluations shall be carried out by internal or external experts that are functionally independent of the authorities responsible for programme implementation. All evaluations shall be made public. Provisions of Article 41 of Regulation (EC) No447/2014 are fully applied.

The participating countries jointly carried out an *ex-ante* evaluation in accordance with Article 55 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. The ex-ante has been carried out by external experts that are functionally independent of the authorities responsible for programme preparation. The recommendations of the ex-ante evaluation team are taken into account during the elaboration process of the Programme.

During the programming period, the MA shall ensure evaluation(s) for assessment of the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the programme implementation on the basis of the evaluation plan and consequently the follow-up actions. At least once during the programming period, an evaluation shall assess how support from the programme funds has contributed to the objectives for each priority axis. All evaluations shall be examined by the JMC and sent to the Commission.

5.5 Apportionment of liabilities among partner States in case of financial corrections imposed by the managing authority or the Commission

(Reference: point (a)(vi) of Article 8(4) of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013)

Each partnering country shall be responsible for investigating irregularities committed by the beneficiaries located on its territory. In the case of a systematic irregularity, the partnering country shall extend its investigation to cover all operations potentially affected. The partnering country shall make the financial corrections in connection with individual or systemic irregularities detected in operations or operational programme. Financial correction shall consist of cancelling all or part of the public contribution to an operation or to the operational programme. Financial corrections shall be recorded in the annual accounts by the managing authority for the accounting year in which the cancellation is decided.

The Managing Authority shall ensure that any amount paid as a result of an irregularity is recovered from the lead beneficiary. Beneficiaries shall repay the lead beneficiary any amounts unduly paid. Special provisions regarding the repayment of amounts subject to an irregularity shall be included both in the contract to be signed with the lead beneficiary and in the partnership agreement to be signed between the partners. The Programme shall provide the beneficiaries a template of the Partnership Agreement.

If the lead beneficiary does not succeed in securing repayment from other beneficiaries or if the managing authority does not succeed in securing repayment from the lead beneficiary, the partnering country on whose territory the beneficiary concerned is located shall reimburse the managing authority the amount unduly paid to that beneficiary. The Managing Authority shall be responsible for reimbursing the amounts concerned to the general budget of the Union, in accordance with the apportionment of liabilities among the participating countries as laid down in the cooperation programme.

In accordance with article 85 of Regulation no.1303/2013 (CPR) the Commission has the right of making financial corrections by cancelling all or part of the Union contribution to the programme and effecting recovery from the partnering country in order to exclude from Union financing expenditure which is in breach of applicable Union and national law, including in relation to deficiencies in the management and control systems which have been detected by the Commission or the European Court of Auditors.

In case of financial corrections by the Commission, due to systemic irregularities, the two partnering countries commit to dividing the amount between the partnering countries proportionally with the approved project budgets and performed activities by Bulgarian and Serbian beneficiaries, affected by the financial correction. In case of financial corrections by the Commission, due to random or anomalous irregularities, the two partnering countries commit to investigate on a case by case basis. The financial correction by the Commission shall not prejudice the partnering countries' obligation to pursue recoveries under the provisions of the applicable European Regulations.

5.6 Use of the Euro (where applicable)

In accordance with the ETC Regulation, Article 28, expenditure incurred by project partners located in countries, which are outside of the Euro zone, shall be converted into euro. The conversion is to be made by the beneficiaries using the accounting exchange rate of the EC applied during the month of the incurring of the expenditure.

5.7 Involvement of partners

Involvement of partners during programme preparation

The drafting of the Bulgaria-Serbia IPA CBC Programme 2014-2020 was organised in compliance with the partnership approach as referred to in Article 5 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. The Directorate General "Territorial cooperation management" at the Ministry of Regional Development of Republic of Bulgaria, as future Managing Authority, and Joint Secretariat of the Programme (MA/JS) coordinated the process. A Joint Working Group (JWG) as main decision making body and a programming Task Force (TF) for discussing particular topics and draft proposals were established in November 2013. The JWG and TF were composed of national and regional representatives from both countries participating in the Programme.

An important step in the programming process was to seek the views of stakeholders on the shape and content of the future programme. The wide public consultations undertaken were aimed to contribute the programming process with experience and know-how. Furthermore, these consultations were aimed to identify specific demands and expectations towards the new Programme among potential target groups:

- An online survey was the first step in this consultative process. It was aimed at collecting perceived needs, suggestions, and strategic addresses directly from a broad group of different relevant stakeholders. Stakeholders were invited to give their input to the development of the future Bulgaria-Serbia IPA CBC Programme 2014-2020 at an early stage of its elaboration. The online consultation was run between 25th January and 14th February 2014, and some 180 stakeholders gave their feedback on the issues raised.
- The 1st Regional Consultative Forum (RCF) brought together wide range of stakeholders who have expressed their opinion on the results of the situation and SWOT analysis in regards to the challenges and opportunities for cross-border cooperation between Bulgaria and Serbia and on the possible thematic prioritisation of the new bilateral Programme. The Forum was held between 5th and 14th of March 2014, covering all 13 NUTS-III regions in the programme area. The events were hosted by the respective Municipal/District administrations. The regional meetings were attended by 257 participants representing municipalities, regional and national administration/public institutions, regional NGOs, educational and other relevant institutions.
- In the frame of the 2nd Regional Consultative Form, public consultations with stakeholders have been held again in the programme area. The aim of these consultations was: (1) to present the Programme's 'thematic concentration' and proposed options for thematic priorities of the new IPA CBC programme; and (2) to present and discuss with stakeholders the Programme's 'intervention logic' - programme's specific objectives, respective results and future activities. The 2nd RCF was attended by 124 participants representing municipalities, regional and national administration / public institutions, regional NGOs, educational and other relevant institutions, covering all 13 NUTS-III regions in the programme area.

Based on a complete draft of the cooperation Programme, in June 2013 a public consultation was carried out via the WEB-page of the Programme. Individuals or organisations interested in the Programme were given the opportunity to express opinions towards the draft

Programme resulting in final amendments before the adoption of the final cooperation Programme in August 2014.

Involvement of partners during programme implementation

The involvement of national, regional and local authorities, economic, research and social partners, and non-governmental organisations including environmental organisations, in the implementation of the Programme will be of great importance.

A permanent on-line Forum (via Programme's WEB-page) will be organised thus collecting input from stakeholders and assessing further needs throughout the Programme. In addition, needs assessment and customer satisfaction as evaluating tools will be provided by the evaluators during the Programme's implementation. Learning from previous experience, a mix of methods will be applied, hence, providing effective stakeholders involvement.

The future Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) of the Bulgaria IPA CBC Programme (2014-2020) will comprise representatives from both national and regional level from the participating countries. In addition, an even broader involvement of the regional and local level, as well as economic, research and social partners and non-governmental organisations will be ensured through national sub-committees established in all participating countries; by doing so, adequate participation of the civil society in the implementation of the Programme is ensured.

VI. HORIZONTAL PRINCIPLES

6.1 Sustainable development

Sustainable development is one of the main pillars of IPA CBC Programme Bulgaria-Serbia (2014-2020). The Programme supports several Priority Axes and specific objectives that focus fully on sustainable development, notably: PA1 (SO1 and 2) and PA3 (SO2).

Under these PAs and respective specific objectives the Programme will support cross-border cooperation projects that have as their primary aim to improve the implementation of cross-border cooperation initiatives related to sustainable development issues. Projects will have to clearly demonstrate in their application that the activities they propose will make the implementation of those initiatives better, in order to eventually contribute to the sustainable development of the border area. Projects that fail to demonstrate this clear contribution to improving cross-border sustainable development policies will not be selected.

PA2 is targeted entirely on policy learning related to youth entrepreneurship and do not directly focus on sustainable development issues. However, it is quite likely that projects supported under this priority also address aspects of sustainable development in their work. This may for instance be the case for innovation related projects that focus on capacities and skills for eco-innovation, or projects that concentrate on the internationalisation of young people in green technology sectors. Project applicants under this PA will be invited to explain in their application how their project will comply with and possibly even strengthen sustainable development. At the end of the project the partners will be asked to report how their project activities and outputs actually contributed to this horizontal principle.

Based on the aggregated contributions reported by projects the IPA CBC Programme will be able to monitor and demonstrate how the Programme concretely contributed to sustainable development. However, no specific selection criteria are foreseen to favour the development of projects dealing with this issue. The activities may address relevant cross-border cooperation experiences and practices related to the principle of sustainable development.

The activities of IPA CBC Programme are likely to generate a lot of travel which leads to related CO2 emissions. While these travels are an essential aspect of cross-border cooperation activities, beneficiaries of the Programme will be encouraged to use modes of interaction that do not require travelling when possible.

6.2 Equal opportunities and non-discrimination

IPA CBC Programme Bulgaria-Serbia (2014-2020) does not intend to develop specific actions uniquely aimed at the promotion of equal opportunities and the prevention of discrimination. The reason that this horizontal principle is not pro-actively supported primarily lies in the thematic scope of the Programme's strategy adopted.

With its focus on sustainable touristic development, youth entrepreneurship, environment and resource efficiency as well as risk prevention, most of the specific objectives of the programme cover thematic areas that have no direct link to the horizontal principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination. Rather, the programme adopts social inclusion, which also implies equal opportunities and non-discrimination, as a crosscutting theme, to be applied in relevant cases within the scope of the Programme's action. This cross-cutting theme is most likely to emerge in projects under the PA2 (SO 2.1 and SO 2.2) dedicated to supporting

young people development and entrepreneurship. Even if the primary focus of this specific objective is not on addressing the equal opportunities/non-discrimination principle, it is anticipated that certain cross-border cooperation projects may emerge that focus on, or at least incorporate the equal opportunities principle. It may benefit the innovation climate to encourage diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity, religion and age etc. to provide a broadened framework for the projects. Diversity in this respect may also increase the possibilities of reaching new markets, improve market positions, broaden the recruitment base and increase creativity.

Under PA2 specifically, projects could for instance address the issue of promoting entrepreneurship among specific target groups at risk of discrimination (e.g. youth with disabilities, marginalised and/or ethnical groups of young people). The development of such projects, among the possible applications that may come forward in the corresponding Priority Axis, would be welcomed by the Programme bodies, as also indicated in the presentation of specific objectives in section 2 of the Programme document. Projects will have to demonstrate in their application that the activities they propose will guarantee, where applicable, the implementation of the equal opportunities and non-discrimination concept in the border area.

Project applicants will be invited to explain in their application how their project will comply with and possibly even strengthen equal opportunities and non-discrimination. However, no specific selection criteria are foreseen to favour the development of projects dealing with this issue. The activities may address relevant cross-border cooperation experiences and practices related to the principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination. At the end of the project the partners will be asked to report how their project activities and outputs actually contributed to this horizontal principle. Based on the aggregated contributions reported by projects the Programme will be able to monitor and demonstrate how the programme concretely contributed to equal opportunities and non-discrimination.

6.3 Equality between men and women

The horizontal principle of gender equality is not considered to be a primary focus of the Programme. As with the previous point, the reason for this lies in the nature of the thematic Programme's strategy. The specific objectives of the Programme cover thematic areas that have no direct link to the horizontal principle of gender equality.

In the case of the specific objectives (2.1 and 2.2) dedicated to supporting youth development and entrepreneurship, also the primary focus is not on addressing this horizontal principle. But in this case, it is not unlikely that cross-border cooperation projects may emerge that deal with related issues. There is evidence indicating a positive correlation between gender equality and factors promoting economic growth. Support schemes for innovative youth development initiatives might also have an impact on gender equality as men and women tend to be involved in different industry sectors. Similarly, under the same PA2, projects could for instance address the issue of promoting female youth entrepreneurship. The development of such projects as part of the wider thematic scope of PA2 specific objectives would be welcomed by the Programme bodies, as also indicated in the presentation of the respective specific objectives in section 2 of the Programme document. Projects will have to demonstrate in their application that the activities they propose will guarantee, where applicable, the implementation of the equality between men and women principle in the border area.

Project applicants will be invited to explain in their application how their project will comply with and possibly even strengthen gender equality. At the end of the project the partners will

be asked to report how their project activities and outputs actually contributed to this horizontal principle. Based on the aggregated contributions reported by projects the Programme will be able to monitor and demonstrate how the Programme concretely contributed to equality between men and women. However, no specific selection criteria are foreseen to favour the development of projects dealing with this issue.

The application of the horizontal principles at project and programme level will be monitored, assessed, and reported in the Annual Implementation Reports as well as in the evaluations done during the programming period, such as implementation evaluations, mid-term evaluation (if performed), evaluations capturing the effects of priorities and looking into their theory of change which will occur at a later stage. Reports will be adapted to the variety of different future readers and a feed-back from the evaluator to beneficiaries will be sought to enhance the quality and use of an evaluation process incl. for dissemination and sharing of best practices in the application of horizontal principles by project beneficiaries and the Programme as a whole.



VII.ANNEXES

- 7.1 Draft report of the ex-ante evaluation (including an executive summary of the report)**
- 7.2 Confirmation of agreement in writing to the contents of the cooperation programme (Reference: Article 8(9) of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013)**
- 7.3 A map of the area covered by the cooperation programme**
- 7.4 A "citizens summary" of the cooperation programme**
- 7.5 Strategic Environmental Assessment**