

ANNUAL IMPLEMENTATION REPORT 2015



Bulgaria – Serbia
IPA Cross-border Programme

CCI No. 2007CB16IPO006

April 2016



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GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

AIR	Annual Implementation Report
AA	Audit Authority
AEUFEA	Audit of European Union Funds Executive Agency
CA	Certifying Authority
CBC	Cross-border Cooperation
EU	European Union
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
IPA II	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance 2014-2020
JMC	Joint Monitoring Committee
JTS	Joint Technical Secretariat
JWG	Joint Working Group for preparation of IPA II CBC Programme Bulgaria – Serbia
MA	Managing Authority
MIS	Management Information System
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NA	National Authority
PA	Priority Axis
RI	Result Indicator
TA	Technical Assistance





I. IDENTIFICATION

The Annual Implementation Report is drawn up in accordance with the provisions of Article 112 of Commission Regulation № 718/2007 of 12 June 2007 implementing Council Regulation (EC) No 1085/2006 establishing an Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance.

The current report is the sixth in a row for the Bulgaria – Serbia IPA Cross-border Programme and it covers the period from 1 January to 31 December 2015.

The Managing Authority of the Programme is the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works of the Republic of Bulgaria having as counterpart the European Integration Office of the Republic of Serbia designated as the National Authority.

Objective concerned:	IPA Cross-border Cooperation	
Programming period:	2007 – 2013	
Programme:	Bulgaria – Serbia IPA Cross-border Programme	CCI No. 2007CB16IPO006
Eligible area concerned:	On the Bulgarian side (NUTS III regions): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Vidin District (11 municipalities) ✓ Montana District (11 municipalities) ✓ Sofia District (22 municipalities) ✓ Pernik District (6 municipalities) ✓ Kyustendil District (9 municipalities) ✓ Sofia City District (1 municipality) – as an adjacent region 	On the Serbian side (NUTS III regions): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Bor District (4 municipalities) ✓ Zaječar District (4 municipalities) ✓ Nišava District (11 municipalities) ✓ Pirot District (4 municipalities) ✓ Jablanica District (6 municipalities) ✓ Pčinja District (7 municipalities)
Reporting year:	2015	

Date of endorsement by Head of MA:	5 April 2016
Date of approval by the JMC:	21 April 2016



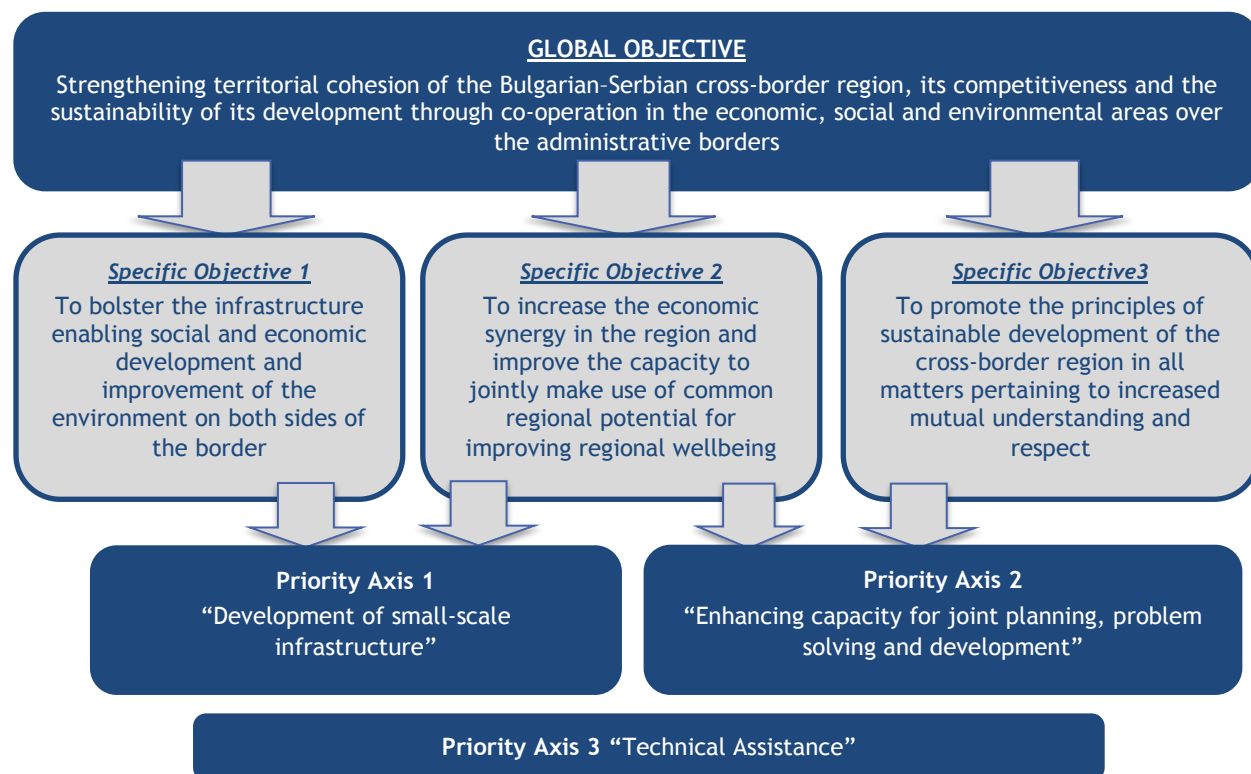


II. OVERVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME

The Programme was approved by the European Commission on 25 March 2008 with Decision No. 1058. Following the positive opinion on description of management and control systems, the implementation started in 2011.

Two open calls for proposals have been organised under the Programme and 154 projects were financed. The available budget was entirely covered by the calls. Additionally, the accumulated savings from projects already completed were used for financing the qualitative worthwhile projects from the reserve list. The Programme has attracted more than 370 applicants which is a positive sign for the intensity of co-operation between organisations of the border region. At the same time, it shows the dynamics and increased interest in launching common cross-border initiatives to contribute for the sustainable economic, social and territorial development of the cross-border region.

IPA CBC projects are often relatively small-scaled but they create valuable cross-border partnership, influence territorial cohesion, and contribute for sharing the European values and facilitating the integration. The projects supported by the Programme contribute to the achievement of IPA objectives and they correlate with the pillars of EU Strategy for the Danube Region by targeting on one hand the development of infrastructure that facilitates connection between the two countries and, and on the other, creation of linkages between business, education and research entities that can foster socio-economic activity and development. The objectives and priority axes of the Programme are presented in the figure below:





2.1. ACHIEVEMENT AND ANALYSIS OF THE PROGRESS

2.1.1. Information on the physical progress of the Programme

▪ Status of the projects

The number of subsidy contracts signed till the end of 2015 is 154, involving 383 project partners¹, respectively, 196 Bulgarian partners and 187 Serbian partners. As of 31 December 2015, there were 148 projects completed and 6 projects under implementation.

Based on the final visits conducted by the JTS, it could be estimated that all planned project activities were successfully implemented in accordance with the provisions of the subsidy contracts. For each of the projects, a special summary presenting the project's basic information (project partner names, total budget amounts, project duration) and results achieved as well as the best available photos illustrating the project results was developed. All the project summaries were uploaded to the Programme website: <http://www.ipacbc-bgrs.eu>

Summary of the main parameters of the Calls for proposals under the Programme

1 st Call for Proposals	No. 2007CB16IPO006-2009-1
Launched on 31 August 2009	Budget ² : EUR 12 230 771
110 project proposals received within the deadline	
Assessment and contracting	July 2010 – December 2011
53 project financed	Total amount: EUR 11 778 977
All projects completed as of 31 December 2013	
2 nd Call for Proposals	No. 2007CB16IPO007-2011-2
Launched on 22 November 2011	Budget ¹ : EUR 20 397 606.05
257 project proposals received within the deadline	
Assessment	October 2011 – February 2012
Contracting	January 2013 – June 2015
101 project financed	Total amount: EUR 23 803 085
95 projects completed and 6 projects under implementation as of 31 December 2015	

¹ Counted as unique partner names (each organisation is counted only once)

² In accordance with JMC decision for re-allocation of budget commitments.





▪ Modifications to the subsidy contracts

During the project life-cycle and due to the certain reasons, the following types of modifications to the subsidy contracts have proved to be necessary for the smooth projects implementation: partnership amendments, project contents changes, budget amendment, extension of implementation period and administrative changes. Depending on the type of the changes and their effect on the project outcomes and results, all contracts' modifications have been proceeded with notification and / or written approval or addendum on the part of the relevant administrative structure as JTS, MA or JMC.

Substantial modifications of the subsidy contracts such as partnership amendments, changes in the projects' outputs and results (and relevant indicators), and extension of the projects' implementation period have been exceptions rather than a common practice and in any case need prior approval on the part of JMC and signing addenda.

Since the first Call for Proposals brought a significant number of requests for contracts' modifications, the respective procedures were improved in line with the principles of the sound management to ensure administrative burden reduction. Currently the modification procedures are the day's routine and they do not affect to the proper programme's implementation.

2.1.2. Indicators

The Programme indicators are vital to the efficient and effective implementation of the Programme, and they serve to monitor and evaluate the extent to which the Programme has achieved its objectives.

The table below presents data for all results indicators under the Programme *in a cumulative manner and based on the finalised projects*. The achievements were measured in compliance with the elaborated Methodology of Programme output and result indicators assessment in order to ensure their reliable and plausible interpretation. In addition, a *forecast on the expected indicators values* for 2016 is provided. The data for the achievement in 2016 is *based on the projects approved but not finalised yet* under the second Calls for Proposals.

Programme Result Indicators		2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Improved small-scale infrastructure	Achievement	0	0	0	0	0	29	2	21	18	3	73
	Target 2016	2.5%										
	Baseline	31										
Increase of public transport coverage (% of population)	Achievement	0	0	0	0	0	1,000	2,081	3,300	0	0	6,381
	Target 2016	2% (3,550 km)										
	Baseline	3,480 km										
Decreased pollution in the region	Achievement	0	0	0	0	0	0	2*	0	1	0	3
	Target 2016	2%										
	Baseline	3										
Increased attractiveness of the region based	Achievement	0	0	0	0	0	1	0*	4	13	0	18
	Target 2016	2%										
	Baseline	8										



on preservation of natural resources													
Projects actually applied	Achievement	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	4	0	0	7	
	Target 2016	3%											
	Baseline*	10											
Number of joint information services established	Achievement	0	0	0	0	0	30	0	33	17	0	80	
	Target 2016	3											
	Baseline	32											
Improved environment for development of relationships across the border	Achievement	0	0	0	0	0	33	0	95	105	1	234	
	Target 2016	3%											
	Baseline	43											
Increased cross-border movement of people and exchange of goods and services in the region	Achievement	0	0	0	0	0	11	0	14	0	30	55	
	Target 2016	1,5%											
	Baseline	34											
Increased public awareness regarding sustainable use of regional resources	Achievement	0	0	0	0	0	8	4	83,5	0	10	105,5	
	Target 2016	2%											
	Baseline	42											
Number of new partnerships created	Achievement	0	0	0	0	0	163	187	65	56	4	475	
	Target 2016	7											
	Baseline	49											

* Source of data: Final Project Reports of the successfully finalised projects till the end of 2015.

2.1.3. Financial information

The total value of the Programme after the procedure for automatic de-commitment of funding for year 2012 is EUR 34 089 013 of which EUR 28 975 661 is the EC funding and EUR 5 113 352 is the amount of the national co-financing from state budgets by the partnering countries.

Breakdown of priority axes by source of funding:

	Community Funding (EUR)	National Public funding (EUR)	Total funding (EUR)	Co-financing rate (%)
	(a)	(b)	c=a+b	a/c*100:b/c*100
Priority Axis 1 "Economic development and social cohesion"	15 936 614	2 812 344	18 748 958	85:15
Priority Axis 2 "Improvement of the quality of life"	10 141 481	1 789 673	11 931 154	85:15
Priority Axis 3 "Technical Assistance"	2 897 566	511 335	3 408 901	85:15
Total	28 975 661	5 113 352	34 089 013	85:15





▪ Achievement of the Programme payment targets

The financial target for the year 2015 is EUR 5 002 738 (IPA financing). All measures taken by the MA for continuing the good track of the verification process under the Programme resulted in high level of absorption of funds and overachievement of the targets.

The total amount of IPA funds certified to 31 December 2015 is EUR 7 787 055.

Programme Payment targets					EC advance payments 2007-2009	EC reimbursements 2007-2013*	Total advance payments and reimbursements	Amounts to be included in application for payment in order to avoid "n+3" risk
2011	2012	2013	2014	2015				2016
1 061 448	4 714 194	4 808 474	4 904 646	5 002 738	5 775 642	21 747 827	27 523 469	5 102 794

** Accumulated amounts 2007-2015, for the years 2009 and 2010 the value is 0.

▪ Data from quality checks performed by the Certifying Authority

In the year 2015, the MA succeeded to submit three certification reports amounting to EUR 7 852 264 (IPA financing). The regular on-the-spot checks before certification were conducted by the "National Fund" Directorate at the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Bulgaria, acting as a CA under the Programme. Based on their examinations, expenditures on the total amount of EUR 65 209 were excluded from the proposal for certification to the EC.

2.1.4. Information on the breakdown of use of the funds

The table below presents the actual financial data for the year 2015. As it is evident from the information provided, the project beneficiaries have submitted to the MA interim and final requests for payments amounting to EUR 9 010 760.

Priority axes by source of funding (EUR)

	Expenditures paid out by the beneficiaries included in payment claims sent to the MA	Corresponding Community and Public contribution (IPA and national co-financing)	Private expenditures	Expenditures paid by the body responsible for making payments to the beneficiaries (IPA and national co-financing)	Total amount certified by CA
Priority Axis 1	7 294 614	7 230 539	64 075	5 773 297	6 872 857
Priority Axis 2	1 716 146	1 716 146	0	1 742 070	2 066 875



Priority Axis 3	763 829	763 829	0	651 023	237 339
Grand total	9 774 589	9 710 514	64 075	8 166 390	9 177 071

**National co-financing including state budget co-financing for Bulgaria and obligatory beneficiaries' own co-financing for Serbia.*

The breakdown of use of the funds accumulated by Calls for proposals as of 31 December 2015 is presented in the table below:

Call s for proposals	Contracts	Total contracts amount (IPA and national co-financing*)	Advance payments (IPA and national co-financing)	Interim and final payments (IPA and national co-financing*)	Total payments (IPA and national co-financing*)	Comparison of total payments to total contracts amount
1st Call for Proposals	53	11 778 977	2 217 763	7 540 182	9 757 945	82.84%
2nd Call for Proposals	101	23 803 085	4 445 444	14 662 579	19 108 023	80.27%
Total	154	35 582 062	6 663 207	22 202 761	28 865 968	81.12%

**National co-financing including state budget co-financing for Bulgaria and obligatory beneficiaries' own co-financing for Serbia.*

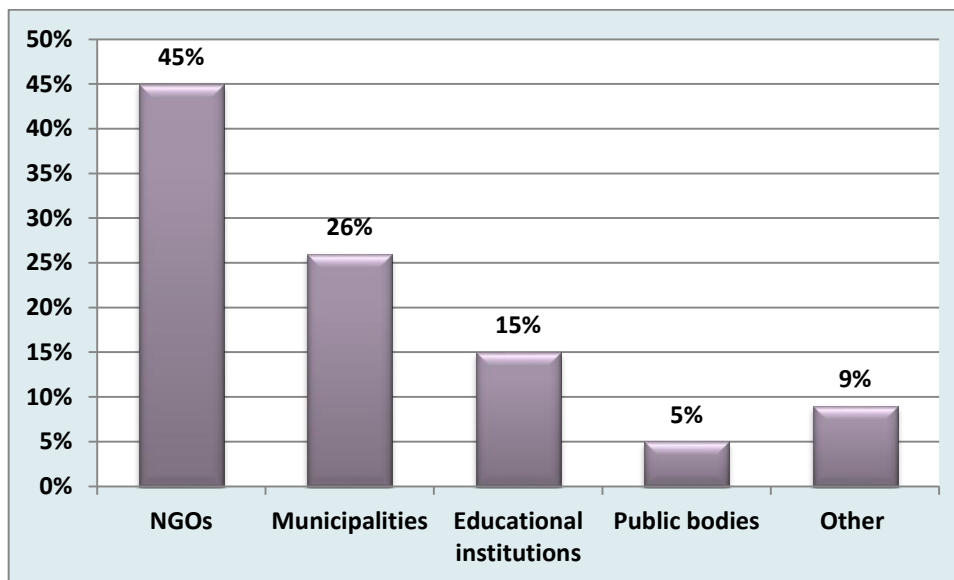
The data above provide evidence for the good financial rates of the payments under the Programme. The first Call for Proposals was closed in 2014 and the payments were accomplished at the total rate of 82.84% in comparison to the contracting level. The payments under the second Call for Proposals are going in good track with the total rate of more than 80% at the end of the year 2015. Over-contracting was carried out under the Programme so that the available budget amounts are utilised efficiently.

2.1.5. Assistance by target groups

Wide range of target groups are involved in implementation of subsidy contracts funded within the Programme. Varieties of regional entities (municipalities, district administrations, NGO's, cultural and educational institutions, etc.), being project partners benefited from Programme implementation. Indirectly, the residents in the cross-border area profited from the results of the operations financed by the Programme through awareness raising initiatives and another public events.



The distribution (in %) of different types of beneficiaries implementing projects under the Programme (final state of play) is shown in the following chart:



2.1.6. Assistance repaid or re-used

n.a.

2.1.7. Qualitative analysis

In 2015 the Programme has entered in its final stage of implementation when the efforts of the Programme bodies were concentrated mainly on ensuring successful completion of all on-going projects. In total 154 cooperation projects between the institutions and organizations of the two countries were contracted under the two Calls for proposals on the amount of EUR 35 582 062 which could be estimated at approximately 115% of the available Programme budget under PA1 and PA2.

During the reporting period no significant problems have been encountered for programme implementation and no risks to programme performance have been identified. The total certified amount to subsidy contracts of the IPA funds exceeded the Programme's payment targets, thus till the end of 2015, the overall amount certified was EUR 23 125 723 or approximately 80% of Programme budget (Community Funding). The increased rate of certified expenditures contributed to smooth programme implementation including timely payments. No funds were de-committed in accordance with the "n+3" rule.

System audit findings show the management and control system has been operating properly in both countries.



The indicators of the Programme display a good degree of achievement of the target values and the main results achieved until the end of December 2015 include numerous successful projects that contributed to:

- Improved physical and information infrastructure addressing the social and economic development in the region through infrastructural projects of information, social infrastructure and upgrade of existing business, and innovation facilities.
- Increased joint actions for tackling common challenges and opportunities of the periphery border region in order to overcome its regional disparity through establishment of partnerships across the border and through implementation of joint cooperation projects.
- Enhanced environment for sustainable economic development of the border area through establishment of links and networking on the institutional, business and educational levels, and through exchange of experience and know-how for research and development and in the field of the entrepreneurship.
- Strengthened potential for tourism development through sustainable utilisation of regional resources (natural and cultural assets) of the border region and exchange and transfer of know-how in tourism sector.
- Enhancing capacity for joint planning, problem solving and natural preservation through enriched partnerships and small-scale investments for risk prevention of natural and man-made disasters and awareness raise of environmental protection.

The achieved results clearly show that the dynamics of the bilateral collaboration lead to intensity of cooperation among the local stakeholders and to increased interest in implementing common cross-border initiatives for sustainable development of the regions.

The cross-cutting issues were addressed through the implementation of specific actions in the financed projects. The environment-related priority is horizontally integrated within PA1 projects through investments for environmental protection and tourism development and in PA2 for awareness rise in regards to EU environmental policies and sustainable development. The projects also comply with the gender equality and non-discrimination principles although they are not directly targeting through the Programme priorities.

The Programme had an added value for the residents in the cross-border region through the direct Programme investments in sectors such as business, local economic development, culture, tourism, environment and education, etc. and thus contributing to the objectives of the EUSDR. In addition, the Programme (through IPA) supported Serbia in capacity building for adopting and implementing institutional, administrative, social and economic policies and practices in order to comply with the European Union values in view of its forthcoming EU membership.

2.2. INFORMATION ABOUT COMPLIANCE WITH COMMUNITY LAW

The amendments brought to the legislation in 2015 did not influence the Programme implementation.





2.3. SIGNIFICANT PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED AND MEASURES TAKEN TO OVERCOME THEM

No significant problems for Programme implementation have been encountered in 2015.

2.4. CHANGES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION

n.a.

2.5. COMPLEMENTARITY WITH OTHER INSTRUMENTS

A clear demarcation and complementarity of Bulgaria – Serbia IPA Cross-border Programme 2007-2013 with national and EU co-financed programmes as well as other European territorial co-operation programmes in which both partnering countries participate in is ensured through mechanisms foreseen in the programming document and the co-ordination done through the national structures participating in the JMC.

The entire territory of the Programme is part of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. Both priority axes of the Programme correlated directly with the all pillars of Danube strategy, by targeting, on the one hand, the development of infrastructure that facilitates connection between the two countries and, on the other hand, creating linkages between business, education and research entities that can foster socio-economic activity and development.

Investments in physical and information infrastructure in Measure 1.1 facilitate the improvement of mobility and multimodality connections as laid down under the first pillar of the Danube Strategy. The promotion of cultural and tourism heritage and encouraging the people to people networks are supported by the objectives of Programme measures 2.2 “Sustainable development through efficient utilisation of regional resources” and 2.3 “People to people actions”.

The projects financed under programme measure 1.2 “Infrastructure concerning environmental issues” addressed the fields of actions within the second pillar of the Danube Strategy for management of environmental risks, preservation of biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air, soils and water.

The joint initiatives supported by programme measure 2.1 “Links and networking on the institutional, business and education levels” aimed to developing the knowledge society through research, education and information technologies and investments in people and skills reflect to the third pillar of the Danube Strategy.

The fourth pillar of the Danube Strategy, related to improvement of institutional capacity and co-operation and to tackling organised and serious crime, is reflected in the Programme through Measure 2.1 “Links and networking on the institutional, business and education levels” and 2.3 “People to people actions”.

2.6. MONITORING ARRANGEMENTS

Monitoring of the Programme is focused on ensuring quality of implementation and compliance with applicable rules and procedures.





■ Implementation manuals and Management Information System

In 2015 the Programme implementation procedures were performed in compliance with the provisions set in Programme implementation manual for the three IPA CBC Programmes managed by Bulgaria (Bulgaria – Serbia, Bulgaria – the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria – Turkey). During the reporting period an annual review was carried out in January 2015 and the financial procedures were modified in accordance with the instructions provided by the Certifying Authority.

The Project Implementation Manual remains unchanged. The MIS is fully operational and it collects Programme related data (priority structure, budget, indicators, etc.); projects data on the application and assessment phase, contracting and implementation (subsidy contract and modifications concerns, progress implementation reports and FLC request, etc.); and financial data for ensuring sound management of Community funds. The system is regularly upgraded and accessible via the Internet at mis-bgrs.mrrb.government.bg. The entries are controlled through users' permissions.

■ Monitoring measures and risk assessment procedure

➤ Programme level

In 2015 the Managing Authority and the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) carried out monitoring at programme level and reviewed the overall performance in terms of effectiveness, quality and coherence of the implementation of all actions towards meeting the objectives set out in the programmes.

An attendance JMC meeting was carried out on the 9th of June 2015 in Borsko jezero, Bor, Serbia. The main focus of the meeting was the presentation and approval of the Annual Implementation Report for 2014 and the overall progress in programme implementation.

Additionally, several JMC written procedures have been conducted for consideration and approval of negotiation reports, subsidy contract modifications for budgets relocations, extension of project implementation periods, etc.; TA budget for year 2016.

A number of technical meetings between MA, NA and JTS have been carried out in 2015 for discussing issues related to smooth programme implementation and the prospects of the new programming period.

➤ Project level

The overall monitoring at projects level was carried out by the JTS verifying the proper implementation of the projects in conformity with the provisions of the subsidy contract. In 2015 74 final monitoring visits to beneficiaries of finalised projects under the Second Call for Proposals were carried out and it could be estimated that all planned project activities were successfully implemented in accordance with the provisions of the subsidy contracts. Any delays and problems encountered during implementation were overcome through the active measures evoked by JTS and the respective project teams.

During project lifecycle risk assessment has regularly been performed by the JTS in order to predict the risk events jeopardising successful project implementation. In compliance with the Risk Assessment

Analysis and the Risk Response Plan, the JTS has carried out *ad-hoc* monitoring visits for projects in risk and on the basis of the mitigation measures all risk events have been avoided.

▪ First-level control system

Bulgarian authorities have set up a decentralised control system in which the first level control is carried out by external independent controllers selected by the “Territorial Cooperation Management” DG within the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works in accordance with respective national rules. The controllers perform verifications on six months periods during the whole life-cycle of the projects. An option for request of verification on three months basis is allowed depending on the amounts spent by the partners. The MA carries out administrative control of all FLC reports and quarterly quality check (on the sample basis) over the work performed by the controllers.

Serbia has adopted a centralised FLC system. The controllers are full-time employees of the CFCU, Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Serbia and they are responsible for performing verifications during the whole life-cycle of the projects. In 2015, NA initiated engagement of two additional controllers due to the large number of verification requests. They have been paid from TA NA budget of the Programme. Control over the work by the controllers is carried out regularly.

▪ Audits under the Programme

➤ System audit

In 2015, the AA has started performing the fifth system audit under the Programme. Its main objective was to obtain reasonable assurance on the effective functioning of the management and control system under the Programme in accordance with the requirements of Regulation (EC) 718/2007 and Regulation (EC) 1828/2006. The audit is carried out by Audit of European Union Funds Executive Agency (AEUFEA), a second-level spending centre to the Minister of Finance of the Republic of Bulgaria and Audit Authority Office of EU Funds to the Government of Republic of Serbia. The audit mission is still ongoing and the final conclusions will be available in 2016.

➤ Operations Audit

In 2015 the AEUFEA conducted operations audit for assurance that the certified expenditures were correct and the underlying transactions were legal and regular. During the audit mission expenditures certified in the period of 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2014 were checked. The AA has underlined two findings with financial impact of EUR 5 189.84 for which the relevant corrective measures have already been evoked by MA.

▪ Evaluations under the Programme

Multi-annual Evaluation Plan for the Programme was elaborated and approved by JMC on 13 May 2011. The Programme has subject to three evaluations aiming at improving the quality, effectiveness and consistency of the assistance and its strategy and implementation.



The evaluation of the communication plan was performed in 2011 and aimed at examining the level of achievement of the objectives set out for the period of 2007 – 2010. Detailed information about the findings and recommendation from the internal analysis was presented in the Annual Implementation Report 2012.

An internal examination of the Programme output and results indicators was performed after the first Call for Proposals. Detailed information on the findings and recommendation from the internal analysis has been presented in the Annual Implementation Report 2012.

The on-going evaluation of the Programme was carried out by external consultants in year 2013 with aim to assess the Programme' performance (interim results) and the level of achievements of the output and results indicators; to measure the effectiveness of the FLC system and to provide independent conclusions and recommendations for management and control system's improvements in way to ensure successful completion of the Programme and to ensure bases for the programming of the new interventions for the programming period 2014 – 2020. The main findings and recommendations were presented in the Annual implementation report 2013.

The executive summaries and the final reports on the on-going evaluation of Bulgaria – Serbia IPA Cross-border Programme was uploaded to the programme website and to the web-portal of the Interact Programme in the appropriate "Good Expertise Gained" Section.

III. IMPLEMENTATION BY PRIORITY

3.1. PRIORITY AXIS 1 "DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL-SCALE INFRASTRUCTURE"

Objective

Improvement of the cross-border infrastructure towards spatial integration, better quality of the environment and accessibility, favourable business environment for new business activities and attractiveness for inhabitants and investors.

The specific objectives of Priority Axis 1 are:

- ✓ to bolster the infrastructure enabling social and economic development and improvement of the environment on both sides of the border;
- ✓ to increase economic synergy in the region and improve the capacity to jointly make use of common regional potential for improving regional well-being.

Measure 1.1 "Physical and information infrastructure"

Measure 1.2 "Infrastructure concerning environmental issues"

Measure 1.3 "Assistance for project preparation"



3.1.1. Achievement of targets and analysis of the progress

Information on the physical and financial progress of the priority

Following the financial plan for the period 2007-2013 the funds available for the PA1 amounted to EUR 18 748 958.00 (incl. EUR 15 936 614.00 Community funding and EUR 2 812 344.00 national funding).

The projects under PA1 were selected through open Calls for proposals, to which public bodies and non-profit organisations from the border region had applied. An over-contracting procedure was carried out under that PA1 covering the accumulated savings.

In total 39 projects were financed, out of which 15 projects under the first Call and 24 projects under the second Call. Until 31 December 2015, 36 PA1 projects were finalised (all projects under the first call and 21 projects under the second call). Only 3 projects are still on-going.

The analyses of the data shows that the majority of implemented projects cover measures 1.1 "Physical and information infrastructure", while under measure 1.2 "Infrastructure concerning environmental issues" and 1.3 there are quite a few contracted projects "Assistance for project preparation".

Financial progress of projects under PA1, as of 31 December 2015 (EUR)

Call for Proposals	Contracts	Total amount	Advance payments	Interim and final payments	Total payments
		(IPA + national co-financing*)	(IPA + national co-financing)	(IPA + national co-financing*)	(IPA + national co-financing*)
1st Call for Proposals	15	6 968 579	1 308 361	4 737 577	6 045 938
2nd Call for Proposals	24	14 410 934	2 699 700	9 125 208	11 824 908
TOTAL	39	21 379 513	4 008 061	13 862 785	17 870 846

**National co-financing including state budget co-financing for Bulgaria and obligatory beneficiaries' own co-financing for Serbia.*

Indicators which are used to measure the progress of measures 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 are shown in the tables below:

Measure 1.1 "Physical and information infrastructure"

Programme Output Indicators		2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Number of small-scale projects addressing physical infrastructure improvement	Achievement	0	0	0	0	2	17	4	16	8	3	50
	Target 2016	5										
	Baseline	6										
Number of small-scale projects addressing information infrastructure improvement	Achievement	0	0	0	0	2	4	0	0	3	0	9
	Target 2016	3										
	Baseline	0										
Number of small-scale	Achievement	0	0	0	0	7	1	1	0	2	3	14



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projects addressing social infrastructure improvement	Target 2016	3											
	Baseline	3											
Number of small-scale projects addressing business and innovation facilities	Achievement	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	2	0	7	
	Target 2016	7											
	Baseline	9											
Number of existing facilities upgraded	Achievement	0	0	0	0	2	26	1	1	7	3	40	
	Target 2016	7											
	Baseline	6											
Number of institutions/bodies reached by Programme activities	Achievement	0	0	0	0	6	106	17	44	30	5	208	
	Target 2016	45											
	Baseline	24											
Training places created	Achievement	0	0	0	0	0	5	6	4	5	0	20	
	Target 2016	3											
	Baseline	0											

Measure 1.2 Infrastructure concerning environmental issue

Programme Output Indicators		2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Number of joint friendly environmental projects	Achievement	0	0	0	0	1	6	1	5	1	0	14
	Target 2016	5										
	Baseline*	2										
Number of small-scale infrastructural projects concerning environmental protection	Achievement	0	0	0	0	2	6	0	5	2	0	15
	Target 2016	3										
	Baseline	0										
Number of projects for pollution prevention and flood reduction	Achievement	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	0	4
	Target 2016	3										
	Baseline	3										
Partnerships for cases of natural disasters established	Achievement	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	0	0	4
	Target 2016	2										
	Baseline	0										
Number of joint eco-itineraries created/developed	Achievement	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	5
	Target 2016	5										
	Baseline	3										
Number of institutions/bodies reached by Programme activities	Achievement	0	0	0	0	3	19	9	14	1	0	46
	Target 2016	10										
	Baseline	8										



Measure. 1.3. Assistance for project preparation

Programme Output Indicators		2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Feasibility studies	Achievement	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	5	0	0	8
	Target 2016	10										
	Baseline*	4										
Preliminary and detailed design works	Achievement	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	3	0	0	10
	Target 2016	7										
	Baseline	8										
Project environmental assessments	Achievement	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	4
	Target 2016	2										
	Baseline	1										

▪ **Qualitative analysis**

The measures under PA1 support the investment activities in the field of physical and information infrastructure and in environmental protection. 39 projects have been financed at the total amount of EUR 21 379 513.

The output indicators show a good degree of achievements with variations for those related to innovation facilities, pollution prevention and flood reduction activities and feasibility studies.

Majority of projects implemented under PA1 are based on balanced and adequate partnerships and demonstrated clear link between activities and results. Irrespective of their delayed start, which led to multiple project changes (project staff, budget or duration), majority of the projects under the first Call for Proposals were successfully implemented and the planned outputs were delivered. Activities were realised with the involvement of the target groups.

In regards to the type of beneficiaries in approved projects under this priority, 83% are public bodies and 17%, non-governmental organisations.

The objective for bolstering the infrastructure enabling social and economic development and improvement of the environment on both sides of the border was directly addressed by 36 projects, while few projects targeted the assistance for project preparation. Detailed information on the results achieved under priority will be given by the ex-post evaluation of the Programme.

All details related to the successfully achieved projects could be found on the Programme web-site www.ipacbc-bgrs.eu.

3.1.2. Significant problems encountered and measures taken to overcome them

No significant problems could be encountered in implementing the priority.



3.2. PRIORITY AXIS 2 “ENHANCING CAPACITY FOR JOINT PLANNING, PROBLEM SOLVING AND DEVELOPMENT”

Objective

To improve the capacity of the region in regards to identification of problems and tracks for solutions, establishment of models for cooperation based on best practices and common needs, strengthening of institutional and business structures to respond to market requirements.

The specific objectives of Priority Axis 2 are:

- ✓ to increase economic synergy in the region and improve the capacity to jointly make use of common regional potential for improving regional well-being;
- ✓ to promote the principles of sustainable development of the cross-border region.

Measure 2.1 “Links and networking on institutional, business and educational levels”

Measure 2.2 “Sustainable development through efficient utilization of regional resources”

Measure 2.3 “People to people actions”

3.2.1. Achievement of targets and analysis of the progress

▪ Information on the physical and financial progress of the priority

Following the financial plan for the period 2007-2013 the funds available for the PA2 amounted to EUR 11 931 154.00 (incl. EUR 10 141 481.00 Community funding and EUR 1 789 673.00 National funding).

The projects under the PA2 are also selected by open Calls for proposals, to which public bodies and non-profit organisations from the border region can apply. An over-contracting procedure was carried out under that PA2 covering the accumulated savings.

In total 115 projects were financed, out of which 38 projects under the first Call and 77 projects under the second Call. Until 31 December 2015, 112 PA2 projects were finalised (all projects under the first call and 74 projects under the second call). Only 3 projects are still on-going.

The analysis of the data shows a balanced distribution of the projects to the measures without tangibly unattractive spheres of interventions.



Financial progress of projects under Priority Axis 2 as of 31 December 2015(EUR)

Call for Proposals	Contracts	Total amount (IPA + national co-financing*)	Advance payments (IPA + national co-financing)	Interim and final payments (IPA + national co-financing*)	Total payments (IPA + national co-financing*)
1st Call for Proposals	38	4 810 398	909 402	2 802 605	3 712 007
2nd Call for Proposals	77	9 392 151	1 745 745	5 750 544	7 496 289
TOTAL	115	14 202 549	2 655 147	8 553 149	11 208 296

*National co-financing including state budget co-financing for Bulgaria and obligatory beneficiaries' own co-financing for Serbia.

Indicators which are used to measure the progress of priority measures are shown in the tables below:

Measure 2.1 "Links and networking on institutional, business and educational levels"

Programme Output Indicators		2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Number of linkages between different institutions created	Achievement	0	0	0	0	70	0	138	184	56	3	451
	Target 2016	7										
	Baseline*	22										
Number of joint databases created	Achievement	0	0	0	0	7	2	18	20	5	0	52
	Target 2016	3										
	Baseline	32										
Number of management plans/strategies /researches developed	Achievement	0	0	0	0	15	77	91	69	17	1	270
	Target 2016	3										
	Baseline	63										
Number of education / business partnerships	Achievement	0	0	0	0	101	0	196	148	36	3	484
	Target 2016	5										
	Baseline	90										
Number of common marketing initiatives	Achievement	0	0	0	0	3	9	20	29*	0	1	62
	Target 2016	2										
	Baseline	7										
Number of institutions participating in knowledge economy activities	Achievement	0	0	0	0	47	28	275	372	10	6	738
	Target 2016	5										
	Baseline	81										
SMEs involved / addressed in CBC projects	Achievement	0	0	0	0	169	764 (18478)	1851 (13010)	235	31	69	3119 (31488)
	Target 2016	7										
	Baseline	380										
Number of people	Achievement	0	0	0	0	821	2277 (35000)	5293 (1208)	345	173	27	8936 (36208)



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involved in projects' activities	Target 2016	400											
	Baseline	4 858											
Management and job-related training courses	Achievement	0	0	0	0	12	47	10	30	8	7	114	
	Target 2016	15											
	Baseline	14											
Number of people trained	Achievement	0	0	0	0	230	736	1125 (935)	75	71	149	2386 (935)	
	Target 2016	250											
	Baseline	1203											

*The figures in brackets represent data from the final projects progress reports. On the bases of the final monitoring visit the data is adjusted according to the real achievement.

Measure 2.2 "Sustainable development through efficient utilisation of regional resources"

Programme Output Indicators		2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Number of common cross-border tourist products and services	Achievement	0	0	0	0	1	32	8	43	1	0	85
	Target 2016	7										
	Baseline*	18										
Tourist destinations created/ developed	Achievement	0	0	0	0	15	5	9	52	1	0	82
	Target 2016	2										
	Baseline	0										
Number of projects concerning common cultural heritage	Achievement	0	0	0	0	0	13	3	9	2	2	29
	Target 2016	10										
	Baseline	6										
Number of cultural events carried out	Achievement	0	0	0	0	0	18	4	30	7	2	61
	Target 2016	15										
	Baseline	20										
Number of projects concerning common products and services	Achievement	0	0	0	0	0	23	5	38	0	0	66
	Target 2016	10										
	Baseline	7										
New jobs created	Achievement	0	0	0	0	3	68	51	15	80	0	217
	Target 2016	50										
	Baseline	2										
Number of projects concerning exchange and transfer of know-how	Achievement	0	0	0	0	2	18	3	53	76	2	154
	Target 2016	7										
	Baseline	8										



Number of cross-border business events, seminars, workshops carried out	Achievement	0	0	0	0	11	43	43	153	5	2	257
	Target 2016	15										
	Baseline	83										
Awareness campaigns carried out	Achievement	0	0	0	0	20	66	20	37	0	10	154
	Target 2016	30										
	Baseline	46										

Measure 2.3 "People-to-people actions"

Programme Output Indicators		2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Number of people to people collaboration projects	Achievement	0	0	0	0	148	150	490	26	6	0	820
	Target 2016	50										
	Baseline*	32										
Number of institutions / bodies involved	Achievement	0	0	0	0	59	120	132	272	82	0	665
	Target 2016	100										
	Baseline	93										
Number of people involved	Achievement	0	0	0	0	777	1664 (8240)	5074 (7538)	1936 (3622)	90	10	9551 (19400)
	Target 2016	300										
	Baseline	1 624										

■ Qualitative analysis

The measures under PA2 support the cooperation activities encouraging the networking on institutional, business and educational levels, joint actions for efficient utilisation of regional resources and people to people actions. 115 projects have been financed at the total amount of EUR 14 202 549. The actually contracting amount has exceeded the Programme amount for the priority axis due to procedure for over-contracting.

The output indicators shows a good degree of achievements, however there are numerous cases of substantial overachievement of the target values, attributable on one side to the different approach in measuring and related possible misunderstanding of some of the applicants about the essence of the indicators, and on the other hand to the lower target values laid down in the programme.

Majority of projects implemented under PA2 are with balanced and adequate partnerships and demonstrated clear link between activities and results. Irrespective of their delayed start, which led to multiple project changes (project staff, budget or duration), majority of the projects under the first Call for proposals were successfully implemented and the planned outputs were delivered. Activities were realized with the involvement of all target groups.



In regards to the type of beneficiaries with approved projects under this priority, 43% are public bodies and 57% non-governmental organisations. All details related to the successfully achieved projects could be found on the Programme web-site www.ipacbc-bgrs.eu.

3.2.2. Significant problems encountered and measures taken to overcome them

n.a.

IV. MAJOR PROJECTS

n.a.

V. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (PRIORITY AXIS 3)

For the period 2007-2013 the amount of EUR 2 897 566 (Community funding) is available for activities under that priority axis.

The indicative budget breakdown for year 2015 was developed on the basis of the Annual “Technical Assistance” Plan and approved by JMC on 13 January 2015. Total budget forecast was amounted to EUR 999 269 from which EUR 740 595 allocated for MA and EUR 258 674 for NA.

The main activities carried out under PA3 within 2015 were as follows:

✓ *Training sessions for the Programme staff:*

During 2015, MA, NA and JTS staff attended various thematic seminars and training events organized by INTERACT in order to acquire practical knowledge and information, to share their experience with colleagues from other European territorial cooperation programmes in the field of management techniques, financial issues, European regulations, communication, strategic orientation, policy development, etc.

✓ *Organisation of events:*

- ▶ Technical meeting of the Joint Technical Secretariat took place on the 22nd of April. The meeting was attended by 8 people;
- ▶ Meeting with new beneficiaries aimed at preventing implementation delays at the end of the programming period, took place on the 14th of May. The meeting was attended by 11 people;
- ▶ Workshop for beneficiaries under the Second Call took place on the 27th of May in Nis, Serbia. The workshop was attended by 19 people;
- ▶ External event: “One direction—many possibilities” programme fair was co-organized with other EU funded programmes, and coordinated by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria. The fair took place on the 28th of May in Sofia, Bulgaria and was visited by hundreds of people;
- ▶ Technical meeting for MA/NA/JTS took place on the 8th of June in Bor, Serbia. The meeting was



- attended by 12 people;
- ▶ Joint Monitoring Committee meeting, took place on the 9th of June in Bor, Serbia. The meeting was attended by 33 people;
- ▶ External event: Meeting of the Regional Council for development of North-West Bulgaria took place on the 12th June in Varshets, Bulgaria. JTS communication officer took part in the event as a speaker, presenting the basic facts and project funding opportunities in the new programming period;
- ▶ External event: South-East Europe Economic Forum took place on the 19th of June in Sofia. Head of JTS took part in the event as a speaker, presenting the basic facts and project funding opportunities in the new programming period;
- ▶ Joint Monitoring Committee meeting, took place on the 30th of July in Sofia. The meeting was attended by 57 people.
- ▶ European Cooperation Day 2015 celebration took place on the 13th of September in Kyustendil, Bulgaria;
- ▶ Conference “European Territorial Cooperation in the Republic of Bulgaria – Achievements Bringing New Perspectives”, took place on the 13th of October in Sofia. The conference was attended by 250 people;

✓ *Regarding expenditures for external expertise*

Part of the technical assistance budget was used for remuneration of controllers appointed to perform checks of expenditures made by the beneficiaries from Bulgaria. Additional external expertise was used for information and publicity activities under the Programme and for organisation of public events, in particular.

In year 2015, tender procedure for supply of IT equipment needed for JTS main office and MA was carried out. Contract was signed with the successful tenderer, and the respective equipment was delivered and put into operation.

VI. INFORMATION AND PUBLICITY

The focus of the information and publicity strategy is centred on increasing the awareness and promoting the positive work of the Programme. For the purposes of implementation of the information and publicity strategy, a detailed Communication Plan is elaborated and approved simultaneously with Programme approval. The aim of the Communication Plan is to ensure broad dissemination of the information about the Programme, to guarantee the transparency of the Programme's implementation and to increase the awareness of the local stakeholders about the Programme's possibilities. The implementation of the Communication plan is responsibility of the MA, NA and JTS.

During 2015 various tools for information and publicity were used to reach the wide audience:

- ✓ *Programme website;*



- ✓ *Promotional materials;*
- ✓ *Information seminars;*
- ✓ *Mass media campaign;*
- ✓ *Social media campaign;*
- ✓ *Active training.*

Programme Website

The official website of the Programme ipacbc-bgrs.eu has been one of the main publicity tools used to promote the Programme and disseminate relevant information. The whole range of information concerning the Programme (e.g. general information, priority axes, documents, questions and answers etc.) was presented in a structured and user-friendly manner, allowing the users to find the necessary information more easily.

The website was redesigned in 2015, featuring modern interactive and simplified user-friendly interface, and the new visual identity. The redesigned website was launched on the 22 October and most of the new content on it was related to the new programming period. However, the main menu features a dedicated and clearly visible link to the 2007 – 2013 version of the website which was preserved in its entirety, but under a different domain 07-13.ipacbc-bgrs.eu. Thus, the well-known website of the Bulgaria – Serbia Programme 2007-2013 has remained in use for the convenience of the beneficiaries and the Programme management bodies, as well as for the general public.

The best features of the old website were reintegrated into the new one, such as: a dedicated “Tenders” section, an interactive map of the cross-border region and a specialised Joint Monitoring Committee section. The JMC section, used for implementing and keeping track of all written procedures, proved very useful in 2015, facilitating the total of 7 JMC written procedures.



Old Programme website home page (left) and the new Programme website homepage (right)

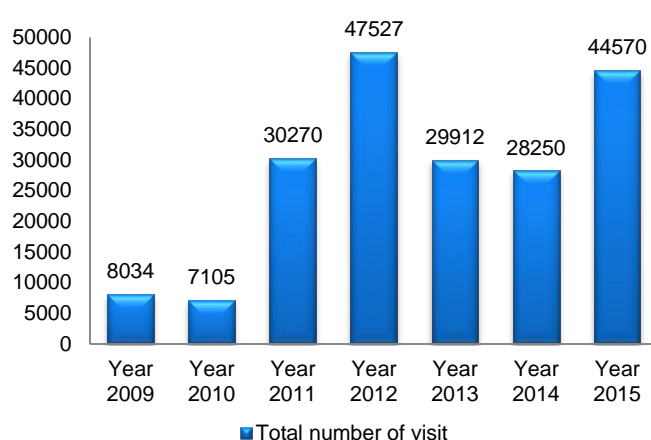
The website was regularly updated with relevant Programme information, in relation to both programming periods. The “News” section was particularly useful to both general public and the potential beneficiaries since it was continuously updated with information on all relevant events, training sessions, info-days, and news in general. **The “News” section was updated 112 times during 2015.** The main body responsible

for maintenance and updating of the Programme website is the Joint Technical Secretariat and the Communication Officer in particular.

In order to ensure broad publicity, information on the Programme was also disseminated through regional and national websites as well as on the websites at the European level:

- www.mrrb.government.bg – Bulgarian Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works
- www.eufunds.bg – EU Structural Funds website in the Republic of Bulgaria
- www.seio.gov.rs – Serbian European Integration Office.

The above described efforts for regular update of the Programme website, along with the intensive promotional campaign related to the launching of the First Call for proposals under the new Programming period led to a significant increase in the **number of website visits – 44 570 visits**, or approximately **57% increase** compared to the previous year. The daily peak of the number of visits was registered, as expected, on the 17th of August – the day of the launch of the First Call for project proposals. The website was visited 1055 times on that day alone, indicating great public interest in the Call and the effectiveness of the publicity campaign, including in the national newspapers and the Social media pages.



Year	Visitors	Unique	Impressions
2009	8 034	6 386	50 186
2010	7 105	6 404	28 628
2011	30 270	24 616	130 170
2012	47 527	40 214	166 896
2013	29 912	25 497	92 551
2014	28 250	24 667	95 858
2015	44570	21936	170 106

A comparative chart with overall visits and a table including the unique visits, and impressions per year

Starting with the launch of the new website, the Programme implementation bodies adopted a new tool for analysis of the Programme website statistics – Google Analytics, instead of the previously used Tyxo.bg platform. The new tool provides much more detailed information regarding the website statistics such as the “bounce rate”, the average user statistics including time spent on the website, language preferences of the users, etc. The new tool will allow the developers to adjust the website design and content, based on the detailed website statistics.



Screenshot of the Google Analytics summary statistics regarding the Programme website in 2015

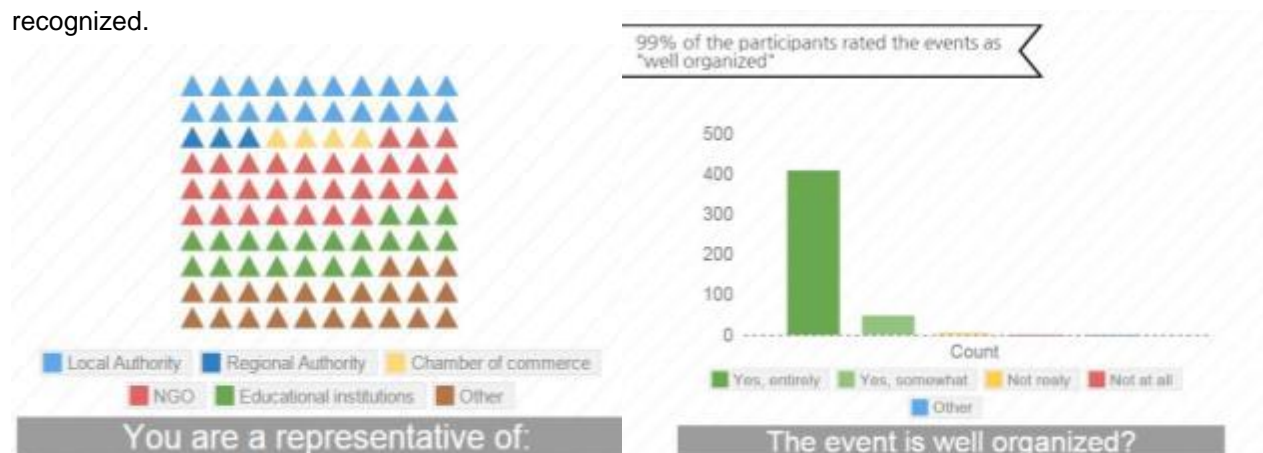
Promotional materials

During 2015 there were no new tender procedures for procurement of Programme promotional materials. Instead, the JTS used materials leftover from the previous years, along with some minor quantities of materials procured under the procedure for organisation of Programme events (European Cooperation Day 2015, and the European Territorial Cooperation conference – ETC conference).

All the promotional materials were properly branded with the Programme visibility elements, incorporated into the overall design, depending on the available branding space. The available materials and props were used for promotion the Programme on various events including Programme information seminars, external events such as “One direction – many possibilities” Programme fair and the European Cooperation day celebration.

Information seminars

Most of the information seminars organized during 2015 were focused on promotion of the new Programming period and the First Call for Proposals. However, the best Programme and project results from the 2007 – 2013 programming period were promoted at each and every event, especially at the ETC conference, where the overall Programme results were presented and the best project practices were recognized.



In order to introduce the Programme to the local population in the two newly added districts to the cross-border area, Vratsa and Toplica, 2 information seminars were organised in the cities of Vratsa and Prokuplje. Additionally, upon launching the First Call for proposals, 11 information seminars were organized in Bulgaria and Serbia along with one Partner Search Forum which was organized in Nis, Serbia.

Mass media campaign

The Programme publicity campaign in 2015 was adjusted to complement the most important Programme goals and activities planned for the year. Thus, the mass media campaign was centred on the following activities:

- Regular updating of the Programme website, redesigning of the website for the new period;
- Continuous support by the JTS Communication Officer to the beneficiaries under the Second Call for Proposals;
- Organisation of the regular Programme events;
- Organisation of the EC Day and active participation in the external publicity events and initiatives.

In terms of active promoting through the Mass media channels, most results are visible on the online media, originating from the Programme website and distributed through the established contacts of the JTS with the regional media representatives. Furthermore, the most effective mass media promotion efforts were tied to the public Programme events. Participation of the high-level Programme representatives at the key Programme events contributed to the Communication Officer's efforts to attract the media attention to the events and the Programme as a whole. The Programme representatives participated in several media interviews, while the biggest Programme press conference took place at the Info day in Nis, on the 18 September, attracting more than 50 journalists from regional and national media in Serbia. Programme advertisements in the national newspapers and regional radio stations were used in relation European Cooperation Day and to the First Call for Proposals 2014 – 2020.



Journalists at the Info day in Nis (left), and the press conference at the initial info day in Vratsa (right), and the interview with the Communication Officer at the “One direction – many possibilities” programme fair

Proper visibility was secured for each of the events through distribution of available promotional materials (brochures, pens, folders, binders, promotional gifts) and setting of visibility props such as banners and flags. In addition, each public event was preceded and followed by publication of a press release on the Programme website. Photos illustrating the best project practices were used extensively in all Programme presentations, promo materials and press releases. A good example is the photo exhibition organized within the “European Territorial Cooperation in Bulgaria – Achievements Bringing New Perspective” conference, in which the Programme participated. Project logo was featured as part of the conference logo, and many of the Programme photos were included in the exhibition.

European Cooperation Day celebration took place on 12 September 2015, and was co-organized with the IPA Cross-border Programme 2007CB16IPO007, between Bulgaria and former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The celebration took place in front of the Drama Theatre in Kyustendil. The joint celebration included an artistic programme, with performances of traditional folk dances, as well as a workshop for young painters from Bulgaria, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and the Republic of Serbia. The second part of the celebration was a live fashion show presenting clothes designed under the project “Development of Research and Creative Centre for Support of Business and Educational Initiatives”, implemented under the Second Call for proposals of the Bulgaria-Serbia IPA Cross-border Programme. Winners of the Bulgaria-Serbia Programme photo competition received their rewards from the deputy-minister Nikolova at the celebration finale. The event attracted the attention of the local media, who interviewed the VIP guests.

The Programme also took part in the “25 Years of Interreg” conference, which took place on the 15 September in Luxembourg. The high-level international event included an exhibition of large posters, illustrating the stories of the European Territorial Cooperation programmes. JTS communication officer designed a special poster for the occasion, which was printed in A0 format and delivered to the event organizers for the exhibition. Additionally, one of projects implemented under the Bulgaria – Serbia Programme was featured at the event as one of the best project practices on EU level, and was featured as such in the sub-subsequent press releases.

“European Territorial Cooperation in Bulgaria” conference exhibition featured many Programme photos





The Programme poster featured at the conference and the project featured in a conference press-release

Social Media Campaign

In order to reach wider audience and ensure transparency on the Programme level, JTS Communication Officer created two official social media pages for the Programme: on Facebook and Twitter. The two pages were created on 5 January, and have been continuously maintained and promoted throughout the year. The use of social media for promotion of the Programme has proven to be a very efficient and cost-efficient. The Programme Facebook page attracted as many as **1793 Likes in 2015**. Some of the **individual Programme Facebook posts have reached as many as 40 668 people**.

Each time there is a new post on the Programme Facebook page, it is automatically posted on the Twitter as well, as programmed by the JTS Communication Officer. The Programme Twitter page attracted the total of 19 followers and the **total number of tweets (posts) in 2015 is 151**.

It is also worth noting that the Programme made use of the option for paid advertisements on Facebook in 2015, for promotion of the major Programme events and for promotion of the Programme page and website. **The total amount spent on Facebook promotion in 2015 is EUR 250**.



Twitter profile: **@ipacbcgrs**
Active training



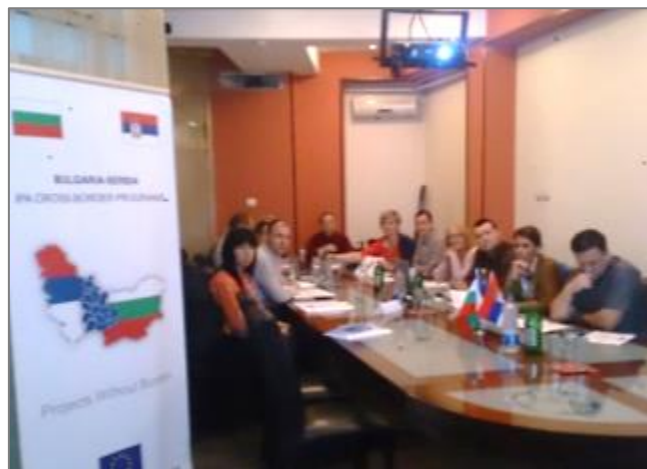
Facebook page: **www.facebook.com/bgrsipacbceu**



The JTS, in cooperation with the MA and the NA, had organized two training sessions for beneficiaries under the Second Call for Proposals during 2015:

- A training session in the Bulgarian language on 14 May at the premises of the JTS office in Sofia. The training was attended by the representatives of the Bulgarian project partners, involved in the newly contracted projects, from the reserve list.
- A training seminar in Serbian language on 27 May at “Regent” hotel in Nis, Serbia. The training was directed to the members of the management teams of the Serbian partners under the newly awarded subsidy contracts.

The aim of the training sessions was to familiarise the participants with the essential moments in the project management, following the main themes, covered in the Project Implementation Manual of the Programme. The most common mistakes and useful tips for solving problems and issues were explained by the Programme representatives. In addition, the participants had the opportunity to ask questions regarding the implementation of projects, and were provided with advice and consultancy by the Programme representatives. The Programme representatives emphasized the fact that delays in project implementation should be completely avoided in order to minimize the risk of de-commitment.



Meeting with beneficiaries in Sofia (left) and the training session in Nis (right)



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Indicators for communication and publicity measures

	Activity	Indicator	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Programme website	Website functionality	Number of web-site visits	0	0	8 034	7 105	30 270	47 527	29 912	28 250	44 570		
		Target 2016	2 000 per year										
		Baseline	0										
		Increase in the number of web site visits (on a yearly basis)			n/a	-12%	326%	57%	-37%	-5,55	57%		
		Target 2016	2% per year										
		Baseline	0										
	Partners' search facility	Number of new potential PPs in the database	0	0	92	2	193	193	4	3	140		
		Target 2016	20 per Call										
		Baseline	0										
Promotional materials	Leaflets	1) Number of leaflets produced	0	0	1 000	0	3 000	6 000	0	0	0		
		Target 2016	500 per call										
		Baseline	0										
		2) Number of leaflets distributed			100		95	5600	400	0	0		
		Target 2016	80% of leaflets produced										
		Baseline	0										
	Brochures	1) Number of brochures produced	0	0	750	0	1 000	1 300	0	2 000	0		
		Target 2016	500 per year										
		Baseline	0										
		2) Number of brochures distributed			100		95	1 250	50	300	0		
		Target 2016	80% of brochures produced										
		Baseline	0										
	Other promotional materials (gadgets)	1) Number of materials prepared for promotion of the Programme	0	0	3 002	0	5 890	3 950	0	4 850	0		
		Target 2016	200 per call										
		Baseline	0										
		2) Number of materials distributed					4 123	3 000	950	2 037	0		
		Target 2016	80% of materials produced										
		Baseline	0										
Information seminars	Info-days	Number of organisations / bodies attending	0	0	300	0	120	0	0	0	822 (74 per event)		
		Target 2016	40 per event										
		Baseline	0										
	Thematic seminars/ workshops	Number of organisations / bodies attending	0	0	650	80	97	60	78	28	364 (91 per event)		





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Mass media campaign	Print media campaign	Target 2016	20 per event									
		Baseline	0									
	Press conferences	Number of newspapers publishing issue(s) concerning the Programme	0	0	4	0	4	8	17	4	5	
		Target 2016	4 per year									
	Press releases	Baseline	0									
		Number of press conferences held				n/a*	2	3	2	0	2	
	Press Advertisements	Target 2016	2 for the duration of the Programme									
		Baseline	0									
	Internet media advertisement	Number of press releases published				n/a*	6	3	5	0	3	
		Target 2016	1 per call									
	eNewsletter	Baseline	0									
		Number of press advertisements published	0	0	5	0	2	0	0	0	3	
	Participation in regional initiatives and forums	Target 2016	2 per call									
		Baseline	0									
	TV and Radio campaign	Number of advertisements / eBanners				n/a*	2	2	2	2	2	
		Target 2016	2									
	Strengthening the capacity	Baseline	0									
		Number of eNewsletters				n/a*	1	17	113	158	118	
	Active training	Target 2016	2									
		Baseline	0									
	Increasing the competence of the potential beneficiaries	Number of events				n/a*	1	1	2	1	2	
		Target 2016	1									
	Strengthening the capacity	Baseline	0									
		1) Number of TV advertisements aired					0	0	0	0	0	
	Active training	Target 2016	1 for the duration of the Programme									
		Baseline	0									
	Strengthening the capacity	2) Number of radio advertisements aired					2	1	1	1	2	
		Target 2016	1 per country for each call									
	Active training	Baseline	0									





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	of the MA / NA / JTS through attending trainings / seminars	Target 2016	min 50% of the total staff									
		Baseline	0									
	Increasing the availability and quality of the information disseminated to the public	1) Increase in the number of project proposals submitted for the last Call for Proposals in comparison to the number of projects submitted for the preceding Call for Proposals				n/a*	132	132	0	0	0	
		Target 2016	2%									
		Baseline	0									
		2) Percentage of submitted projects whose final assessment score that pass the minimum threshold of 65 points				n/a*	74	61	0	0	0	
		Target 2016	min 50% out of the total number of projects submitted for the relevant call									
		Baseline	0									
	Beneficiaries' trainings	1) Number of participants					630	243	703	61	30	
		Target 2016	min 20									
		Baseline	0									
		2) Number of trainings					5	4	9	2	2	
		Target 2016	min 1									
		Baseline	0									
	Controllers performing FLC trainings	1) Number of participants					75	94	27	57	6	
		Target 2016	min 30									
		Baseline	0									
		2) Number of trainings					3	2	1	4	1	
		Target 2016	min 1									
		Baseline	0									
	External assessors trainings	1) Number of participants					14	20	0	0	0	
		Target 2016	min 10									
		Baseline	0									
		2) Number of trainings					1	1	0	0	0	
		Target 2016	min 1									
		Baseline	0									

Based on the figures above it could be concluded that the Programme proved to be a par excellence example of one more than good reception on the part of the stakeholders and the general public. Majority of publicity indicators have achieved their targets or they are to be reached at the final implementation year.

The cross-border programme is apparently a very successful EU integration tool and the experience gathered, not only in terms of project implementation but also in the field of information, publicity and visualisation which will be applied in programming period 2014-2020. The communications officer will continue to coordinate the information and publicity measures in the new programme and to ensure popularisation of the programme opportunities within the border area.





Attachments:

ANNEX I to the Annual Report 2015

The annex encompasses a comprehensive list on communication and information activities during 2015.

Promotional materials

Programme web site

Programme training sessions

Technical meetings and JMC meeting





Comprehensive list of Communication and information activities

Activity 1: Programme Website

The official Programme website was effectively released on the 21st of August 2009. The address of the website is: www.ipacbc-bgrs.eu

The website includes comprehensive information on the Programme and its Priority axes, accompanied by all documents concerning Programme implementation. The website was regularly updated with relevant information on the Programme (events, news, documentation etc.). The website also includes a tool for partners search with project partner database, thereby facilitating the integration among actors and promoting joint activities and ideas.

During 2015 the website was one of the main publicity tools used to promote the Programme and disseminate the relevant information. The whole range of information concerning the Programme (e.g. general information, priority axes, documents, questions and answers etc.) was presented in a structured and user-friendly manner, allowing the users to find the necessary information more easily. The website was **completely redesigned in 2015**, featuring modern interactive design, simplified user-friendly interface, and the new visual identity.



Old Programme website home page (left) and the new Programme website home page (right)





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The redesigned website was **launched on the 22nd of October 2015** and most of the new content on it was related to the new programming period. However, the main menu features a dedicated and clearly visible link to the 2007-2013 version of the website, which was preserved in its entirety, but under a different domain: <http://07-13.ipacbc-bgrs.eu> This way, the well-known website address of the Bulgaria-Serbia Programme remains in use for the convenience of the general public but the old website features and all the related documents are preserved in one place for convenience of the beneficiaries and the Programme implementing institutions.

The most important features of the old website were reintegrated in the new one, and were actively used during 2015. Here is the summary of the key Programme website features and how they were used 2015:

1. The **“News”** section has been continuously updated with information on all relevant events, training sessions, info-days, and news in general. The “News” section was **updated 112 times in 2015**, with 41 press releases in Bulgarian language, 34 press releases in Serbian language, and 37 press releases in English language. Some particular types of press releases are not published in all three languages, depending on the news relevance and the target audience.
2. The **“Partner Search Database”** was particularly useful during 2015, due to the new Call for proposals. JTS Communication Officer personally added **144 new entries to the database in 2015**, collected at the “Partner Search Forum” in Nis. Additionally, the users have the option to register at the database by filing in a simple form, stating their basic contact information and specifying which Programme priorities interest them. The “Find partner” option allows the user to filter potential partners according to the region and priorities.
3. The **“Calendar of events”** section features the most important public Programme events and was **updated 12 times in 2015**. Other events such as workshops with existing beneficiaries, technical and JMC meetings are not featured in this section, since they are aimed at a very specific target group, and/or are not open to the public.





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4. The **“Public Tenders”** section aims to help the beneficiaries and the Programme institutions to ensure widest possible participation in competitive tendering and the requisite transparency according to the Practical Guide to contract procedures for EU external actions (PRAG). The “Public Tenders” section was **updated 15 times in 2015**.
5. The **“Joint Monitoring Committee”** section The JMC section is used for implementing and keeping track of all the written procedures. The section was **updated 7 times in 2015**.
6. The **“Subscribe”** section allows to visitor to register for regular e-mail updates whenever there is new content on the website. In order to subscribe, the visitor needs only to submit and confirm his/her e-mail address. **In 2015 exactly 118 people have subscribed** to the section. At the time of preparation of this report the total number of **active subscribers is 234**.

In addition to the regular sections and attributes, the new website features a whole **new range of improvements were introduced in 2015**:

1. **Responsive design:** The new website incorporates the modern practice of having the content adaptable to the type of device on which it is viewed. In other words, the way the news and the menus are displayed changes depending on the size of the screen/window on which the content is viewed. This way, the user opening the website on their smartphones and tablets are able to see the content in a format which is adapted to their devices. Photos on the bottom right show how the new website looks on devices with relatively small screens.
2. **The “Featured News” and redesigned photo gallery:**

The website features a new section for the most important Programme news. The section auto-rotates the news while the user can also manually switch between the featured news. The section is placed next to the interactive photo slideshow, which now has a new format and displays photos from Programme events and the best project practices.



The “Featured News” and the photo gallery section (left), “Responsive design” illustrated on a tablet and a smartphone (centre and right).





3. Redesigned interactive map of the cross-border region:

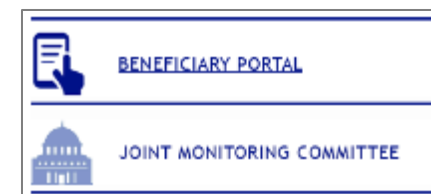
The two new regions, Vratsa and Toplica, are incorporated into the map. Users are able to select the regions on the maps, and see the regional capital city, population, and the list of all municipalities in the region. Municipality name and coat of arms act as a hyperlink, leading the user to the municipality website.

The map is featured on the home page in order to help the first-time visitors to gain a clearer idea of the geographical range of the Programme activities. Once there are new subsidy contracts, the map content will be enriched with the featured information about the projects funded in each region.



4. Introduction of the “Beneficiary portal” section – under development:

The new “Beneficiary portal” button is already integrated in the website design, and the future beneficiaries will use the section for submitting project documents in electronic format such as the project progress reports. The portal, like the JMC section, will be password-protected and will facilitate the communication with the Programme implementation bodies and limit the use of paper for reporting purposes.



5. The featured Programme publication section – The Success story:

In order to ease the transition between the two programming periods, as well as highlight the cumulative Programme results, the new website features an online publication titled “The Success Story 2007-2013”. The publication is posted in PDF format and can be read directly on the website, in an animated book format. Future Programme publications will replace the existing brochure in the “Featured” section, while all such publications will be featured in the “Media” section.



6. The Social media integration:

Since the Programme is formally represented and promoted through two major social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter, direct access links have been featured on the new website as well. Additionally, every news piece has the “Share” option integrated at the bottom of the text, so that the user can directly share the news on one of the listed 275 social media websites.





Website statistics in 2015

The above described efforts for regular update of the Programme website, along with the intensive promotional campaign related to the launching of the First Call for proposals under the new Programming period led to a significant increase in the **number of website visits – 44 570 visits**, or approximately **57% increase** compared to the previous year. The daily peak of the number of visits was registered, as expected, on the 17th of August – the day of the launch of the First Call for project proposals. The website was visited 1055 times on that day alone, indicating great public interest in the Call and the effectiveness of the publicity campaign, including in the national newspapers and the Social media pages.

Starting with the launch of the new website, the Programme implementation bodies adopted a new tool for analysis of the Programme website statistics – Google Analytics, instead of the previously used Tyxo.bg platform. The new tool provides much more detailed information regarding the website statistics such as the “bounce rate”, the average user statistics including time spent on the website, language preferences of the users, etc. The new tool will allow the developers to adjust the website design and content, based on the detailed website statistics.

The bounce rate is around average bounce rate is actually the percentage of single interaction visits to a website. High percentage of bounce rate means that there are a lot of people who immediately leave the website one they reach it - meaning that they either got there by mistake or immediately lost interest in the website content upon reaching it. The average bounce rate is around 45%, and the Programme website had a bounce rate of 45.63% in 2015.

Year/Month	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
January	0	588	683	9835	2929	2,378	1899
February	0	547	867	7818	2831	2,884	2135
March	0	483	942	3429	2807	3,126	2102
April	0	555	844	3015	3109	2,732	2854
May	0	442	1470	3150	2715	2,152	2657
June	0	452	1486	2783	2379	2,319	2423
July	0	480	1741	3226	2209	2,060	2737
August	278	534	2819	2911	2071	1,976	9162
September	1839	521	2460	4292	2134	2,126	7113
October	2613	810	2269	3036	2491	2,542	6904
November	2729	980	7281	2476	2538	2,093	2570
December	575	713	7408	1556	1690	1,862	2014
TOTAL	8034	7105	30270	47527	29903	28250	44570



Activity 2: Promotional materials

During 2015 there were no new tender procedures for procurement of Programme promotional materials. Instead, the JTS used materials leftover from the previous years, along with some minor quantities of materials procured under the procedure for organization of Programme events (European Cooperation Day 2015, and the European Territorial Cooperation conference – ETC conference).

All the promotional materials were properly branded with the Programme visibility elements, incorporated into the overall design, depending on the available branding space. The available materials and props were used for promotion the Programme on various events including Programme information seminars, external events such as “One direction – many possibilities” Programme fair and the European Cooperation day celebration.



EC Day 2015 (top left and right); the EU Programmes fair (top middle), ETC conference (bottom left), and an Information seminar (bottom middle)

Activity 3: Information seminars

The information seminars organized during 2015 were focused on promotion of the new Programming period and the First Call for project proposals. However, the best Programme and project results from the 2007-2013 programming period were promoted at each and every event, especially at the ETC conference, where the overall Programme results were presented and the best project practices were recognized.

In order to introduce the Programme to the local population in the two newly added districts to the cross-border area, Vratsa and Toplica, 2 information seminars were organized in the cities of Vratsa and Prokuplje. Additionally, upon launching the First Call for proposals, 11 information seminars were organized in Bulgaria and Serbia along with one Partner Search Forum which was organized in Nis, Serbia.



From left to right, starting from the top: seminars in Prokuplje (RS), Vratsa (BG), Aleksinac (RS), Pirot (RS), Predejane (RS), and Pernik (BG).



Activity 4: Publicity campaign

The Programme publicity campaign during 2015 can be best described through the following major categories:

1. Events:

- 1.1 Public Programme events – open to the general public;
- 1.2 Internal Programme events – restricted to Programme institutional members and the beneficiaries;
- 1.3 External events in which the Programme took part.

2. Media promotion:

- 2.1 Press conferences and media interviews;
- 2.2 Online Promotion:
 - Project websites;
 - External websites;
 - Social media promotion.
- 2.3 Television;
- 2.4 Radio;
- 2.5 Newspaper.

3. Other publicity initiatives:

- a. Programme photo competition 2015.

1. Events

1.1 Public Programme events:

Other than the Information seminars, described in Activity 3, the Programme organizes other public events as well. In 2015 one of the most visible public Programme events was the celebration of the European Cooperation Day 2015. The aim of the initiative is to highlight the achievements of the cooperation between the regions and countries of Europe.

In 2015 Bulgaria-Serbia IPA Cross-border Programme and IPA Cross-border Programme 2007CB16IPO007, between Bulgaria and former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, organized a joint celebration on the 12th of September 2015, in Kyustendil, Bulgaria

The first part of the event included performances of traditional folk dances, as well as a workshop for young painters from Bulgaria, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and the Republic of Serbia. The second part of the event included a live fashion show presenting clothes



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designed under the project “Development of Research and Creative Centre for Support of Business and Educational Initiatives”, implemented under the Second Call for proposals of the Bulgaria-Serbia IPA Cross-border Programme.

The official guests at the event were: Denitsa Nikolova, Deputy Minister of Regional Development and Public Works; Radoslava Chekanska, Deputy District Governor of the Regional Administration Kyustendil; Petar Paunov, Mayor of Kyustendil; H.E. Blagoj Handziski, Ambassador of the Republic of Macedonia in Republic of Bulgaria; and H.E. Vladimir Curgus, Ambassador of the Republic of Serbia in Bulgaria. Winners of the Bulgaria-Serbia Programme photo competition, Kosyo Nikolov and Kalina Valkova, received their rewards from Deputy Minister Nikolova at the celebration finale.



From left to right (starting from the top): group painting, audience, traditional folk dancers, fashion show, group photo, and the Info point.

“European Territorial Cooperation in Bulgaria – achievements lead to new prospects” was opened by Bulgarian Minister of Regional Development and Public Works, Lilyana Pavlova, on the conference on the 13th of October at the “Sofia Hotel Balkan” in Sofia. In the frames of the conference, Deputy Minister of Regional Development and Public Works Denitsa Nikolova presented a report on the results achieved under European Territorial Cooperation programmes in 2007-2013 and also information about the programmes which Bulgaria will participate in until 2020.

A discussion was also held and good practices related to the implementation of programmes were shared by the national partner institutions under the cross-border cooperation programmes. The best projects implemented under European Territorial Cooperation programmes in the past period have been awarded, including three projects from the Bulgaria-Serbia Programme. At the end of the conference, Deputy Minister Denitsa Nikolova inaugurated an exhibition themed “History in photos of the territorial cooperation programmes in Bulgaria”.

1.2 Internal Programme events:

Other than the training seminars described in Activity 6, the Programme organized several other internal events. The major internal events such as the Joint Monitoring Committee meetings were not open to the public participation, but were still part of the Programme publicity campaign and promoted on the Programme website due to their importance. The events were organized as follows:

- The first technical meeting took place on the 22nd of April, at the premises of the JTS office in Sofia, Bulgaria;
- The second technical meeting took place on the 8th of June, at the hotel “Jezero” in Bor, Serbia;
- The first JMC meeting took place on the 9th of June, at hotel “Jezero” in Bor, Serbia;
- The second JMC meeting took place on the 30th of July at hotel “Best Western Plus City” in Sofia, Bulgaria.



“European Territorial cooperation in Bulgaria” conference (left and centre), Joint Monitoring Committee meeting in Bor (right)

1.3 External public events:

The Programme was promoted in 4 external events during 2015.

“One direction–many possibilities” Programme fair was co-organized with other EU funded programmes, and coordinated by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria. The fair took place on the 28th of May in Sofia, Bulgaria, and was visited by hundreds of people. JTS Communication Officer represented the Programme and the section devoted to the cross-border Programmes, answered the questions from the public and the attending journalists, and distributed Programme promotional materials such as brochures, pens, post-it sets, notebooks and other;

Meeting of the Regional Council for development of North-West Bulgaria took place on the 12th of June in Varshets, Bulgaria. JTS communication officer took part in the event as a speaker, presenting the basic facts and project funding opportunities in the new period;

South-East Europe Economic Forum took place on the 19th of June in Sofia. Head of JTS took part in the event as a speaker, presenting the basic facts and project funding opportunities in the new programming period;

Interreg 25 year anniversary celebrations in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg: Over the course of the year 2015, the EU's programmes for territorial cooperation were celebrating the 25th anniversary of Interreg, headlined at a number of events to discover the current achievements and find inspiration for future work. The celebration initiative was headed by an international conference organised within the Luxembourg presidency on 15-16 September 2015 with the support of the European Commission and INTERACT. The conference was held under the patronage of Ms Corina Crețu, the European Commissioner for Regional and Urban Policy and Mr. François Bausch, Minister for Sustainable Development and Infrastructure of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.



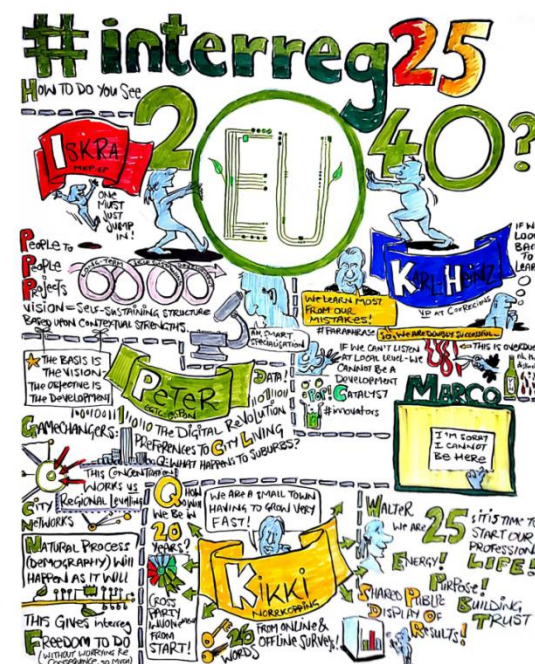
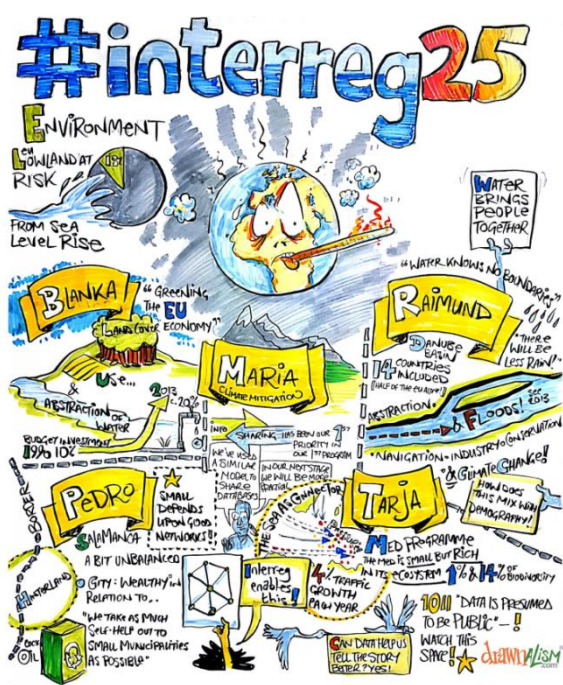
“One direction–many possibilities” fair (left), “25 Years of Interreg” conference (centre), and the South-East Europe Economic Forum (right)

The event offered an opportunity to look back on the history of Interreg, explore some of the themes where Interreg made a difference, take a global view on territorial cooperation, and discuss visions for European regions as well as the role of Interreg itself.

The Role of Interreg in Environment - panel discussion

The Head of the Managing Authority joined the discussions as a speaker within the Panel Session “The Role of Interreg – Environment”, providing the audience with an overview about the role which IPA CBC Programmes managed by Bulgaria has played in the field of environment protection and reducing climate change risks in the cross-border areas.

The main outcomes of this session together with the other one concerning Labour market and demographic changes have been taken into account in shaping the discussions during the final session “Building on 25 years” contributing to the development of common vision and common ground for European territories beyond 2020.



“Building on 25 years” – panel discussion

Ms. Iskra Mihaylova, Bulgarian member of the European Parliament and Head of Regi Committee, took part within the final session and put a special emphasis on the role of the IPA cross-border programmes in the context of the EU vision for the regions in the perspective and the challenges beyond 2040.

A clear message was outlined to the crucial role of Interreg as an EU integration tool and platform for information and solutions exchange. It was concluded that the territorial cooperation programmes should keep their focus on strengthening partnerships in the cross-border regions thus encouraging EU cohesion policy. Harmonisation of the programme rules and procedures was considered as an essential instrument for better cooperation within the interreg framework.

The Programme, together with the other two IPA CBC Programmes managed by Bulgaria, participated in an exhibition of posters with its own designed one. A Programme presentation was included in the European Project Slam initiative along with 13 applications from all over the Interreg world.

During the conference, the celebration of the European Cooperation Day 2015 was officially launched through awarding ceremony of the slogan contest for Interreg. The winner was selected among a huge number of contestants – a representative of a Bulgarian non-governmental organisation with a long standing experience in cross-border projects development and implementation.

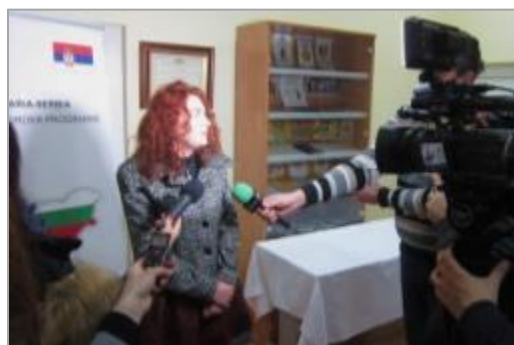


From left to right: Exhibition posters from the BG-FYROM, BG-RS, and BG-TR Programmes, and the graffiti of the winning slogan

2. Media promotion

2.1 Press conferences and media interviews:

Programme representatives used the major Programme events to attract the attention of the regional and national media representatives and disseminate Programme information. In 2015 there have been 3 organized press conferences and 2 spontaneous media interviews. The press conferences took place during the initial information seminars in Vratsa and Prokuplje, and after the biggest Programme media event of the year – the Information campaign kick-off in Nis. The two interviews took place at the “One direction–many possibilities” programme fair in Sofia and at the EC Day celebration in Kyustendil. JTS communication officer made effort to timely notify the media about each major Programme event and initiative in advance, to prepare concise and clear press releases in English and local languages and to assist the MA and NA representatives during the press conferences.



From left to right (starting from the top), Press conferences/interviews in: Vratsa, Nis, Prokuplje, Sofia, Nis, and Kyustendil.

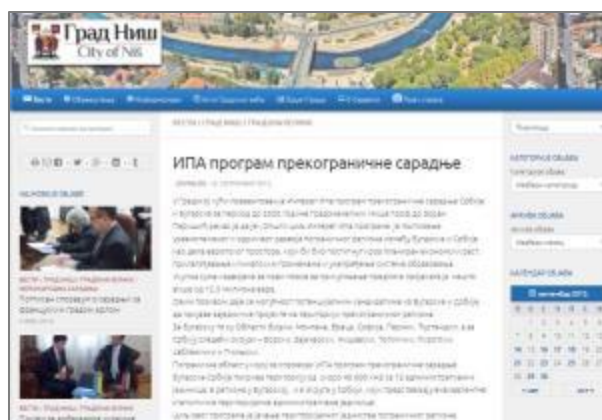


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2.2 Online Promotion:

Project websites: Many of the projects implemented under the First and Second Call for proposals have focused on online project promotion and created unique project websites. The JTS keeps a record of the project websites, making sure that they correspond to the Programme Information and Publicity standards. There are currently 46 active project websites, disseminating project and Programme information in English and local languages.

External websites: In addition to the promotion through the Programme website and the websites of the official institutions directly related to the Programme, both the Programme and the projects funded received a good deal of online media attention. In order to reach even broader audience, JTS Communication officer regularly prepares and sends out specific Programme press-releases in all the three languages to the representatives of local and regional media as well as to the “EU Funds” website (administered by the Bulgarian Council of Ministers). Furthermore, the JTS encourages the Programme beneficiaries to promote the Programme and the respective projects by using the websites and social media pages of the project partners. **During 2015, more than 100 separate website have featured information about the Programme** and the projects implemented under the Programme, other than on the Programme official and institutional websites. The number of online publications increased in comparison to the 90 publications in 2014. The increase in the online visibility is most probably the result of encouragement by the JTS representatives to the beneficiaries to utilize the online media for promotion of the projects, as well as the increased awareness of the local media for the Programme issues and results. The online media have featured primarily positive information about the Programme, mostly focusing on the new funding opportunities under the First Call and the major project events. A list of links, PDF files and screenshot records of these websites and the articles published are available in annex to this report.



Project website (left), City of Nis website (centre), and Capital.bg website (right).



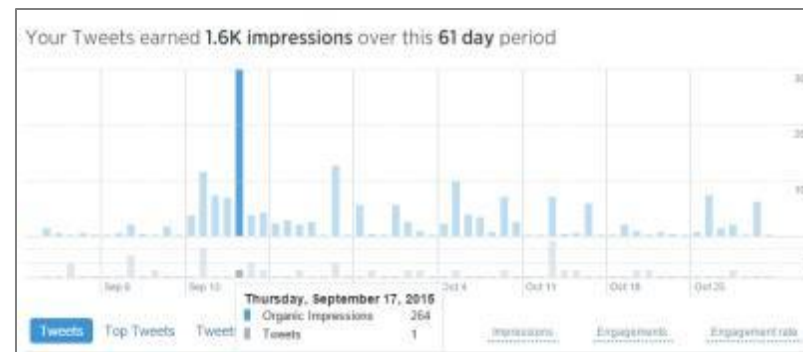
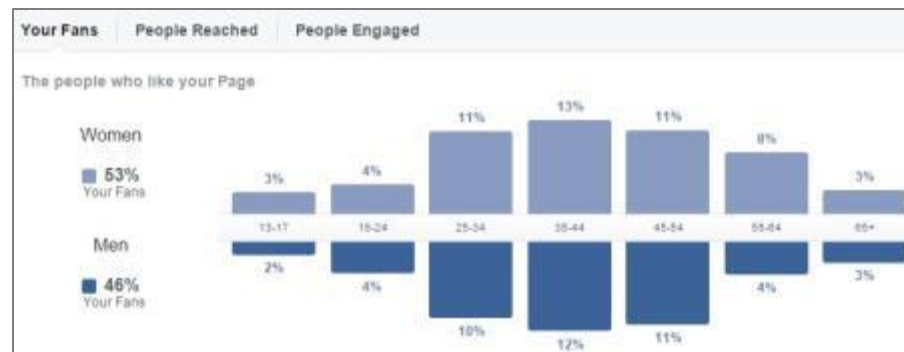


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Social media: In order to reach wider audience and ensure transparency on the Programme level, JTS Communication Officer created two official social media pages for the Programme: on Facebook and Twitter. The two pages were created on the 5th of January, and have been continuously maintained and promoted throughout the year. The use of social media for promotion of the Programme has proven to be a very efficient and cost-efficient. The Programme Facebook page attracted as many as **1793 Likes in 2015**. The people who “Liked” the page are referred to as the “followers”, since they follow all the updates to the page they liked. This means that each time a new content is posted on the Programme Facebook page it will automatically show up on the personal pages of all the fans. Additionally, all the friend of the fans will also see the post if the fan has marked it as Liked. Thus, some of the **individual Programme Facebook posts have reached as many as 40 668 people**.

Each time there is a new post on the Programme Facebook page, it is automatically posted on the Twitter as well, as programmed by the JTS Communication Officer. The Programme Twitter page attracted the total of 19 followers and the **total number of tweets (posts) in 2015 is 151**. Twitter is not nearly as popular in the cross-border region as Facebook, but is very useful for maintaining contacts with other Programmes and European Institutions. Both Facebook and Twitter offer a number of options for monitoring the success of the page/account (illustrated below).

It is also worth noting that the Programme made use of the option for paid advertisements on Facebook in 2015, for promotion of the major Programme events and for promotion of the Programme page and website. **The total amount spent on Facebook promotion in 2015 is 250 Euro**. For the mere 250 Euro the Programme page attracted more than a 1000 new Likes, and thousands of additional views for strategically selected page posts. The paid promotional campaign was executed in relation to the organization of the European Cooperation Day celebration and the ETC conference in Sofia, during the second half of September and the first half of November. In addition to attracting significant permanent audience at the time, the Programme Facebook page continued to attract additional Likes in the following months and has managed to maintain the interest of its audience, which is evident from the individual subsequent post “likes”, “views” and “shares”.



A report on the Programme Facebook page audience demographics (left) and a two-month report on the Programme Twitter page (right)



2.3 Television promotion

Journalists from the local and national TV stations, together with the other media representatives, are regularly invited to the Programme public events. In case of the beneficiaries, many have promoted their respective projects on the local television stations in the region, such as the **“Radio Television Nis”**, **“Belle Amie TV”**, **“K1” TV**, **“TV Zona Plus”**, **“Moderna TV”**, and **“Vidin Television”**. Promotion on the national television stations is in most cases too expensive for promotion of the individual projects. Therefore, many of the projects use the social networks and platforms, such as YouTube, in order to distribute the project video materials. Nevertheless, some of the projects managed to attract attention of national television networks, such as the Municipality of Surdulica, whose project was promoted on during the primetime morning program of the **Radio Television of Serbia - RTS**. The Serbian national television network, RTS, along with the regional television stations **KTV** and **Kopernikus TV**, also promoted the First Call for project proposals.



Programme TV coverage in 2015 (from left to right): KCN TV – Kopernikus TV; KTV; and RTS (morning show and “This is Serbia” show)

2.4 Radio promotion

As a part of the media campaign promoting the celebration of the “European Cooperation Day 2015” in Kyustendil, JTS organized production and 10 prime-time airings of an advertisement on the “Darik Radio – Kyustendil” during the week prior to the event. “Darik Radio - Kyustendil” station in Kyustendil is a regional radio station of the “Darik National Radio” and has an excellent coverage of the region in which the event was organized. Since the advertisement was aired on a regional radio station, the cost for production and airing of the advertisement were comparatively low. The journalists from Darik Radio also attended the EC Day celebration and wrote a cover story about it (published on the media website).

Many of the projects have also relied on the local radio stations in the region for promotion of the project events and results. Most of the local and regional radio stations in the cross-border region provide an inexpensive but sufficiently effective advertising opportunity for the beneficiaries. In



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addition to airing advertisements, news and interviews aired in relation to the projects, many of the radio stations also have websites where they publish some of the content from the radio broadcasts. The radio websites often contain open archives which allow for searching and reading the relevant news reports from preceding months, allowing for easier monitoring of the Programme relevant news.

Some of the most popular local radio stations in the cross-border region, used for promotion of the projects in 2015, are: regional stations of “Darik Radio”, “Radio Vidin”, as part of the “Bulgarian National Radio” network, “Belle Amie Radio”, “F-Radio”, “Radio Krakra”, regional stations of “Radio Focus” and many others.



Programme Radio coverage in 2015 (from left to right): Darik – Kyustendil, BNR Vidin, Belle Amie Radio, and Radio Focus

2.5 Newspaper promotion

As part of the promotional campaign for the First Call for project proposal the Programme published advertisements in 3 national daily newspapers: “**Trud**” and “**24 Chasa**” in Bulgaria, and “**Politika**” in Serbia. Additionally, “**Interact**” magazine has published a full two-page interview with the Maria Duzova, Director General of “Territorial Cooperation Management” DG at the MRDPW, in which she mentions the Bulgaria-Serbia Programme and reflects on the successes and lessons learned during the 2007-2013 programming period. Another international magazine, “**Panorama**”, published by the European Commission and available across Europe in 22 languages, featured an article about the exemplary project from the Bulgaria-Serbia Programme: “Strengthening of forensic capacities in the domain of the organized cross border crime prevention in the field of narcotics trafficking”. The Programme media campaign resulted in a number of positive press releases on the websites of national print media but there is no information on how many of such press releases were published in the printed format. As for the coverage related to individual projects, most of the press releases were published in the local newspapers in the cross-border region. Publishing a paid article in the national newspapers is usually too expensive for the project budgets and such publications are ultimately unnecessary from the project perspective because their target audience is not the entire population of a country but the local population in specific regions.





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Newspaper coverage in 2015, from left to right: "Stroitel" newspaper, "Panorama" magazine, "Blic" newspaper and "Trud" newspaper

3. Other publicity initiatives– Programme photo competition 2015

Photo competition under the Bulgaria-Serbia IPA cross-border Programme was open from 10th until the 31st of August. The competition themes were: **Tourism** in the cross-border region; **Youth** in the cross-border region; **Environment** of the cross-bored region. The best entries were uploaded to the Programme Facebook page and the winners were selected through the process of public voting. The voting was done during the period between the 1st and 7th of September through the Programme Facebook page: www.facebook.com/bgrsipacbceu. The finalist photos which received the highest number of "Likes" in this period have been declared the winners and were invited to the EC day celebration in Kyustendil to receive their rewards. The winners who did not manage to attend were sent their rewards by mail. The collected photos will be used for production of Programme promotional materials, such as calendars and brochures.



Photo competition 2015, from left to right: competition logo, 1st place in "Tourism", 1st place in "Youth"; and 1st place in "Tourism" category



Activity 5: Active training

The JTS, in cooperation with the MA and the NA, had organized two training sessions for beneficiaries under the Second Call for proposals during 2015:

- A training session in Bulgarian language on the 14th of May at the premises of the JTS office in Sofia. The training was attended by the representatives of the Bulgarian project partners, involved in the newly contracted projects, from the reserve list.
- A training seminar in Serbian language on the 27th of May at hotel “Regent” in Nis, Serbia. The training was directed to the members of the management teams of the Serbian partners under the newly awarded subsidy contracts.

The aim of the training sessions was to familiarize the participants with the essential moments in the project management, following the main themes, covered in the Project Implementation Manual of the Programme. The most common mistakes and useful tips for solving problems and issues were explained by the Programme representatives. In addition, the participants had the opportunity to ask questions regarding the implementation of projects, and were provided with advice and consultancy by the Programme representatives. The Programme representatives emphasized the fact that delays in project implementation should be completely avoided in order to minimize the risk of de-commitment.

