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1. Joint programme strategy: main development challenges and policy responses

1.1. Programme area (not required for Interreg C programmes)

Reference: point (a) of Article 17(3), point (a) of Article 17(9)

Interreg VI-A Greece – Bulgaria Programme 2021-2027 is implemented at the NUTS III administrative area surrounding the 475 km border line that separates the two countries, plus the Regional Units of Thessaloniki, Kavala and Thasos. The border line stretches West to East from the tri-border point between Greece, Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia to the similar one between Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey. The region includes:

7 Greek Regional Units: Evros, Xanthi, Rodopi, Drama, Kavala of the Eastern Macedonia -Thrace Region, Serres and Thessaloniki of Central Macedonia Region

4 Bulgarian Regions: Blagoevgrad of South West Region, Haskovo, Smolyan, Kardzhali of South Central Region.

The cross-border area is mostly mountainous formed by the Rodopi, Belasica/ Kerkini and Slavyanka / Orvilos mountains and divided by valleys crossing the border line from North to South. The programme area also contains plain and coastal areas of the Macedonia – Thrace regions; the Thracian Pelagos and the northern part of the Thermaikos gulf as well as the two major islands of Thasos and Samothraki. Rough mountainous landscape and river streams act both as natural barriers between the Greek and Bulgarian territories and only few road passes (mostly opened during the last decades) are connecting the two countries. Mountains, valleys, coastal line and Islands are forming the diverse landscape of the CBC area. It includes variations from the Pirin Mountains to the forest of Rodopi, the lakes and the wetlands of the coastal areas and the Mediterranean landscape of Thasos and Samothraki islands.

Three almost parallel rivers cross the area from North to South forming estuaries at the coastline. From West to East, the most important rivers are Struma/Strymónas (length 415 km, river basin 17,330 km2), Mesta/Nestos (length 280 km, river basin 5,184 km2), Marica / Evros (length 480 km, river basin 53,000 km2). Maritsa is the longest river that runs solely in the interior of the Balkans. Its hydrological system also comprises its tributary Ardas (length 290 km). More than 70% of the total area is mountainous. The lowlands are limited almost exclusively to the coastal (Greek) zone, while even the two islands are mountainous and have peaks reaching up to the height of 1.600 meters (Samothraki).

1.2 Joint programme strategy: Summary of main joint challenges, taking into account economic, social and territorial disparities as well as inequalities, joint investment needs and complimentary and synergies with other funding programmes and instruments, lessons-learnt from past experience and macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies where the programme area as a whole or partially is covered by one or more strategies.

Reference: point (b) of Article 17(3), point (b) of Article 17(9)

1. JOINT CHALLENGES, DISPARITIES AND INVESTMENT NEEDS

Demographics

The CBC area covers an overall area of 40,111 km2 and a population estimated at 2,663,345 inh. in 2019. The overall population density is 66.4 inhabitants per km2, almost half of the EU27 average.

The most populated region is the Metropolitan Unit of Thessaloniki, and the most sparsely populated ones are the NUTS III areas of Drama and Smolyan. The demographic decline is a longstanding trend in the mountainous part of the region in both countries. Since 2010, because of the economic crisis in Greece, the phenomenon expanded to the coastal and lowland areas. Overall, (Eurostat 2020) between 2014-2019 the population of the CBC area decreased by 2.47% (or 67,476 inh). During this period, Smolyan lost almost 1/10 of its population and in the other nine out of the eleven NUTS III districts / Regional Units the population also declined and only Kardzhali District increased (+1.50%).

An equally unfavourable demographic condition is the old-age dependency ratio. In general, Greece and Bulgaria where the median age is 44.9 and 44.4 years respectively (2019) are ranking in 3rd and 4th place among the countries with the oldest population in EU. CBC area has even higher median. At Smolyan and Serres (the two NUTS III regions with the highest decline) the median age exceeds 50 years. Depopulation trends in remote and predominantly rural regions are affected by the negative natural change of the population and by the outmigration of mainly young and highly educated people to more dynamic regions with greater employment possibilities.

Between 2010-2016, net migration remained stable. From 2016 to 2019, Blagoevgrad, Haskovo and Smolyan have continuously experienced negative net migration rates from -0.3% to -1.2% yearly while Kardzhali shows increasingly positive rates up to 3.9% in 2019. In the same period, Greek territories showed a small increase.

Life expectancy has increased in the entire CBC territory during 2007-2018. In 2018, life expectancy at birth was 75.9 years (+2.1 from 2007) in the Southwest region and 75.5 (+2) in the South Central region. In Greece, life expectancy at birth was 81.4 years (+3.2) in Eastern Macedonia Thrace and 81.9 years (+2.7) in Central Macedonia.

Urban Network

According to EU/OECD standards, Thessaloniki is the only medium-sized city of the cross-border area (>300,000), while there are 9 other cities with a population of >50,000 inhabitants (<100,000). Urban population is estimated at 38% of the total. A significant part of the population (43% in BG, 25% in EL) is distributed into the smallest (25) towns with a population of between 10,000 to 50,000 inhabitants. The mountain areas are sparsely populated especially in the Greek side where 85% of the population lives in coastal and lowland areas.

Employment and Labour Market

The labour market differs significantly inside the cross-border region both in terms of employment, unemployment, sectors of activity and earnings. The activity rate in 2019 was 74.7% for Eastern Macedonia -Thrace, 65.3% for Central Macedonia (decreased from 74.2% in 2017) and 73.8% in Bulgaria. The unemployment rate in Bulgaria in 2019 was one of the lowest in Europe (6.7%). In

Blagoevgrad, the unemployment rate in 2019 was 4.1%, in Haskovo 0.4%, in Kardzhali 2.0% and only in Smolyan it was 8.8%. On the contrary, Central Macedonia and Eastern Macedonia-Thrace are considered among the regions with the highest unemployment rate in Europe i.e. 19.6% and 16.2% respectively.

The unemployment rate in both countries further increased in 2020 due to the impact of SARS- -CoV-2 on the economy. Tourism, recreation, and commerce are the most affected sectors. The latest national data comparing the current quarters to the same quarters of the previous year shows a decrease in the employment rate for both countries in the 2nd and 3rd quarter of 2020. In Greece, the employment rate diminished by 3% and 1.8% respectively and in Bulgaria by 3.3% and 2.6%. At the EU27 level, the change was -3.1% and -2.3% in the same quarters.

Data on labour market from the NSI (2019) shows that Blagoevgrad and Haskovo are the districts with the lowest annual average salary and wage nationally (4,405 euro and 5,283 respectively). In Greece, (no NUTSIII/II data available) average net earnings were estimated at €8,904 in 2020.

Labour Mobility

According to the Flash Eurobarometer (2016), only 7% of those surveyed in the Greek-Bulgarian border region stated that they have crossed the border to the neighbouring country for work or business purposes, with the levels being remarkably similar for residents in both countries. This rate is half the average of cross-border territories in the EU. Only 3% of the residents have crossed the border for work or business purposes "several times a year or more often".

Education, Knowledge Society, Digitalisation

Based on regional data from 2017, the picture of % persons aged 30-34 with high educational achievements is mixed. Both South West region (44.6% - including Sofia) and the Greek region of Central Macedonia (46.6%) rank higher than the EU average of 39.9%. Eastern Macedonia and Thrace (37%) is slightly below the EU average, with the South-Central region being the lowest at 22.7%.

The NUTS III level data available for Bulgaria show that CBC area Districts are significantly lagging in terms of tertiary education infrastructure, personnel, students and graduates. There are three higher education establishments in the area (all of them in Blagoevgrad). All Districts have less Higher Education graduates in the age groups 25-64 than the national average. The average share in Kardzhali is almost 10% below the national average and one of the lowest in the country. In Greece, besides the metropolitan role of Thessaloniki that has 4 universities with over 70,000 students, higher education institutions exist in every major city (Capitals of Regional Units)

According to Eurostat, the South-Central region (16.3%) has far higher rates of "early school leavers" than the EU average of 10.2%. The NSI 2018/19 statistics on school dropout rates (level I – VIII) report a rate of 3.2% (11,339) of which 477 in Blagoevgrad (3.6%), 166 in Kardzhali (1.24%), 584 in Haskovo (4.4%) and only 31 in Smolyan (0.23%). On the other hand, Eastern Macedonia and Thrace over the last two years managed to decrease the percentage of early leavers from 12.4%, in 2017, to 7.7%, in 2018. The high rate in EMC is mainly associated with the Roma population and the remote mountainous areas. In both South-West Bulgaria (5.6%) and Central Macedonia (2%) the rates of early leavers is way below the EU average.

In terms of physical accessibility of schools (the existence of a school within reasonable driving distance) Blagoevgrad, in Bulgaria has been designated as an inner periphery in terms of its poor access to primary schools by car, whilst Evros, in Greece, has been designated as an inner periphery with poor access to secondary schools.

Low participation in lifelong learning is a common characteristic across the CBC area. In 2020, (Eurostat) the participation rate of adults in education and training (last 4 weeks) was only 3.6% in Central Macedonia and Eastern Macedonia-Thrace Regions and 2.9% and 1.1% in South-West and South-Central Regions respectively.

Greece and Bulgaria have fallen behind the other EU Member States and are rated as "underperforming" on the DESI Index scoreboard. In comparison, Greece is in a relatively better position as regards

"Integration of digital technologies" and "use of internet services", while Bulgaria is relatively better in "Digital public services". In terms of eHealth services, the level is broadly similar in terms of ranking, as both countries are rated well below the EU average. In Northern Greece (NUTS I), according to ELSTAT 2020, 78.8% of the population has access to the internet. This percentage is slightly higher than the national average. In Bulgaria, 75.1% of households have access to the internet (2019, NSI). In Haskovo District households with Internet access are 68.1% and the individuals aged 16-74 regularly using the internet, are 58.4% (National 66.8%). In Kardzhali, the percentages are 67.5% and 57.3% respectively. Blagoevgrad percentages are closer to the national average (71.1% access, 65.2% use). In Smolyan, the percentages are 82.4% and 68.1% respectively.

Health

The Public Health care system in the area was under extreme pressure at the end of 2020 due to the second wave of the COVID19 pandemic. In terms of hospital beds per 10,000 inhabitants, both South-West (714.2) and South-Central (824.21) regions are far exceeding the EU average (537.34) and are close to around the national average (756.91). However, most of the hospital beds are located in the larger urban centres of the regions (Sofia, Plovdiv) outside the cross-border area. Regarding accessibility to hospitals, Border Orientation Paper (2019) classified Blagoevgrad and Smolyan as 'inner peripheries' with respect to access to hospitals by car.

In the Greek CBC area, the number of beds per 10,000 inhabitants is lagging the EU average. In Eastern Macedonia-Thrace, the number of beds is 403.53 while in Central Macedonia, 450.53 (mostly in Thessaloniki). In every Regional Unit there is a General Hospital while in Thessaloniki and in Alexandroupoli there is also a University Clinic too.

Ageing and increased elderly dependency rates will increase the needs in health and social care.

Social Conditions

Population At Risk of Poverty and Social Exclusion (Eurostat) in 2019 was high in all Regions of the CBC area. The % of population living in poverty and exclusion conditions is 35.4% EMC, 37.5% in South-Central region and 31.4% in Central Macedonia. In the South-West Region, the rate is 20.9% but it is mostly due to the presence of Sofia and does not reflect the situation in the District of Blagoevgrad in which, according to the NSI, the annual average wage in 2019 was equal to the 45.6% of the wage in Sofia. The percentage of people living in households with very low work intensity is higher in Greece (17.9 EMC, 14.1 CM) and lower in Bulgarian Regions where unemployment is low. Self-reported unmet needs for medical examination (due to reasons related to cost or accessibility) were relatively higher on the Greek side in 2019.

Economy

The Greece-Bulgaria CBC area is one of the poorest in the European Union. The GDP (pps) per capita is below 50 % of the EU average. The area is characterized by large internal disparities, as Bulgaria has long been a transition economy (BOP- Greece Bulgaria 2019, OECD 2021). The deviation from the European average GDP per capita has increased over the last decade. Following national trends, GDP in the regions of Greece decreased by up to 31% (in euro terms, 38.5% in PPS – Rodopi region), while in the Bulgarian regions it increased by up to 45.7% (in euro terms). Internal differences within the CBC area are equally large. GDP per capita at nominal euro prices in Kardzhali is about 1/5 of Thessaloniki or 1/3 of Xanthi. In 2019, Kardzhali and Haskovo ranked at the 1164th and 1165th position amongst 1170 EU NUTS III regions according to their per Capita GDP (pps), while Blagoevgrad ranked at the 1152nd position and Smolyan at the 1143rd position. In Greece, the Regional Unit of Xanthi ranked at the 1135th position while Thessaloniki at the 966th position. Employment data suggest that the internal CBC disparities do not cause productive and labour force mobility in the area.

The SARS-CoV-2. , so far, affected in a different way the CBC areas. In general, the Greek economy is more vulnerable to the crisis than the Bulgarian. In 2020, the loss of GDP in Greece was -9.2% while in

Bulgaria was less than -1%. (EU27, -4.5%).

Compared to the EU average, the economy remains considerably more agricultural, less industrial and more service-dependant. Thessaloniki Regional Unit (Eurostat 2018) produces more than half the GVA of the whole area (68.1% in Services, 1.9% in Agriculture and 30% in Industry and Construction). The share of Agriculture is relatively high in Serres (13.5%) and Rodopi (10.7%). Agriculture's share in GVA in Kardzhali was 11.2% (3X of the national average) and in Smolyan (7.4% X2 of the national average) in 2019 (NSI). Industry is more important in Smolyan and Kardzalli, (39.2% and 39% of GVA respectively), while the services share exceeds 65% of the GVA only in Blagoevgrad (65.7%) and Haskovo (65.2%). The overall GDP of the Bulgarian Districts economy represents less than 7% of the national. Thessaloniki Metropolitan Unit (Eurostat 2018) produces more than half the GVA of all the whole area (68.1% in Services, 1.9% in Agriculture and 30% in Industry and Construction). The share of Agriculture is relatively high in Serres (13.5%) and Rodopi (10.7%). In 2019, agriculture's share in GVA in Kardzhali was (NSI) 11.2% (3X national average) and in Smolyan (7.4% X2 of national average). Industry has relative importance in Smolyan and Kardzalli, (39.2% and 39% of GVA respectively), while services share exceeds 65% of GVA only in Blagoevgrad (65.7%) and Haskovo (65.2%). The overall GDP of the Bulgarian Districts economy represents less than the 7% of the national.

Business Structure

SMEs are an important generator of added value and employment in the CBC area. SMEs represent 63.5% of the total value added (EU average 56.4%) and have an employment share of 87.9% (EU average 66.6%). In 2014-2018, the overall share of SMEs in value added increased by 11.8%, with small firms showing the largest rise (25.7%) and micro firms showing a fall of 11.9% in Greece. In Bulgaria, in Blagoevgrad District, 93.4% of enterprises have less than 9 employees and only 0.1% more than 250., In Haskovo, the percentages are 93.7% and 0.1% respectively, in Kardzhali the percentage of small businesses is 91.7% and the percentage of large enterprises is 0.2% and in Smolyan 92.2% and 0.3%. In 2014-2018, SMEs in the "non-financial business economy" (includes the sectors of industry, construction, distributive trades and services) generated a substantial increase of 50.7% in value added. In contrast, the employment share of SMEs increased moderately by 8.6%. More recently, in 2017-2018, the share of SMEs in value added sustained a steady growth reaching 15%, whereas the employment share of SMEs grew by only 1.6%.

The Greek Business Registry shows that, with the exemption of Thessaloniki, in all other Regional Units, "agriculture, forestry and fishing" account for large shares of total enterprises and labour. The percentage of the Agricultural businesses ranges from 72% (44% of the employment) in Rodopi to 33% (7% of employment) in Thasos.

While agricultural activities in the CBC area are dominating in number and, in many cases their employment share in the overall economic figures is low due to low added value.

Smart Specialisation and Innovation

The Regions of the CBC area are classified according to the Regional Innovative Index and Scoreboard as "Moderate" or "Modest" Innovators.

Central Macedonia is classified as "**Moderate + Innovator**", and innovation performance has increased over time (21.3%). The Regional Innovation Index (RII) in 2019 was 0.386 (normalised score), 105.9 relative to Greece and 79.4 relative to the EU. The RII change between 2011 and 2019 was 21.3. As the most of the economic and almost all the academic and research capacity of Central Macedonia is in Thessaloniki, the figures are fully expressing the current situation in the CBC Area. Eastern Macedonia-Thrace is characterised by a gradual capacity-building in the fields of research, technology, and innovation by increasing the presence of academic institutions. The RII in 2019 was 0.209, classifying as a "**Moderate Innovator**", 73.4 relative to Greece and 45.1 relative to the EU. The RII change between 2011 and 2019 was 14.8.

The South-West region is classified as a "**Moderate – Innovator"** and the South-Central region as a

"**Modest – Innovator**", as innovation performance has increased over time by 1.5% and 2.5% respectively. Unlike Central Macedonia where innovation activities are grouped within the CBC area, the Bulgarian CBC NUTS III districts have only a minor contribution to performance of Regional Innovation. Blagoevgrad in 2019 participated with less than 1% in RD Staff and 0.5% of RD Expenditures in the South West Region. In Kardzhali and Smolyan, R&D expenditures were zero in 2019. Haskovo's share to the Central South Region R&D expenditures in 2019 was €900.000 which was almost equal to the 1/3 of the South-Central region's total expenditure. Regarding this relatively high participation, the R&D Personnel in Haskovo District was limited to only 60 employees (2% of Regional R&D Personnel). Respectively, 56 persons were employed in Kardzhali, and 218 persons were employed in Smolyan in R&D activities.

Tourism

Tourism shows significant variations in intensity and typology in the CBC area. The coastal Greek areas are more developed. City tourism is mainly developed mainly in Thessaloniki and secondarily in Kavala, Xanthi and Drama. Nights spent in Greek areas are more than double than the ones spent in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian CB area is divided in 3 different Tourist zones: a) Thrace has 35 municipalities (of which 6 in the CB area), b) Rila-Pirin Region has 23 municipalities (of which 14 in the CB area) and c) Rodopi Zone has 27 municipalities (of which 23 in the CB area). The main tourist product is related with winter and natural activities concentrated in the wider areas of the two major ski resorts of the area at Bansko (Blagoevgrad) and Pamporovo (Smolyan) and in traditional settlements. Nights spent by foreigners' amount to 56.8% in Greek and 47.9% in Bulgarian CBC areas. These rates fall significantly short of the respective national percentages, which were 84.6% for Greece and 79.8% for Bulgaria (2019).

The "B.O.P. Greece-Bulgaria" suggests that the area "has great tourism potential with certain limitations: lack of information points; lack of sustainable tourism development plans and strategies capitalizing on area-specific resources; lack of integrated tourism destinations both thematically and territorially; poor natural and cultural heritage protection capacity and weak international visibility of cultural and natural resources".

The SARS- CoV-2 pandemic crisis is expected to have a negative impact in the medium term and therefore, the main priority for the next five years is expected to be the reconstruction and recovery of the tourism destinations, rather than the territorial expansion and interconnection. Moreover, the possibility of integrated spatial tourism development at the CB level presupposes the interconnection of the internal zones of each destination (coastal with hinterland, winter tourism centres with cities and cultural monuments) which is in many cases absent.

Ecosystems and Biodiversity

The high importance of the CBC area in conservation of natural heritage is indicated by the existence of numerous protected sites.

Natura 2000 areas cover almost 40% of the CBC area on the Bulgarian side and about 20% on the Greek side. Amongst the 76 NATURA 2000 sites of the area, several spread across countries including clusters of mountain and forest ecosystems in the Mount Belles, Kerkini and Strymon, the Rhodope Mountain, the Nestos Valley, the Arda and Maritsa/Evros rivers. In total, the area includes (partly or fully) 7 Greek National Parks (out of 23) and 4 RAMSAR wetlands. The Pirin National Park and part of the Rila National Park of Bulgaria as well as 9 Nature Reserves areas. Attractions also include interesting geological and geomorphological settings, including the caves in Alistrati and the Rhodope mountains.

Urban Environment and Pollution.

According to European Cities ISGlobal Thessaloniki (64th in PM2.5, 71st in NO2) and Serres (30th in PM2.5) are highly vulnerable to air pollution according to WHO standards. In Urban Green Space vulnerability is high in Thessaloniki (46th Vegetation, 27th Green Area), Serres (62nd Vegetation, 3rd Green Area), Kavala (63rd Vegetation), Haskovo (116th Vegetation, 75th Green Area), Blagoevgrad

(163rd Green Area). The ranking shows that despite the relatively small urban size of the cities in the CBC area there are several needs to improve urban environment to upgrade living conditions.

Climate Change and Risks

CBC area is having relatively high levels of sensitivity, with several regions being assessed as having "high" sensitivity (Haskovo, Kardzhali, Smolyan and Blagoevgrad in Bulgaria, as well as Serres in Greece). It is assessed that drought conditions will have an extremely high impact on both public water supply and water quality. Moreover, forecasts indicate that the CBC area has a high chance of facing increased drought frequency in the future. Potentially significant "inland" flood risks have been identified in limited locations in the mountainous area. Flooding mostly concerns lowlands and coastal areas. Forest fires are another severe climate related risk caused by the temperature rise during the dry season. A greater number of natural disasters (i.e. storms, landslides, floods, droughts, etc.), pose important issues in the areas of spatial planning, development of infrastructure and joint risk management. These common challenges can be addressed at a wider (cross-border) regional level, also seeking linkages with other programmes (national and transnational).

Renewable Energy and River Systems

All river systems have River Basin Management Plans according to the WFD. In particular, the lowland and delta areas of the water bodies present an inappropriate or poor ecological and chemical status.Unfavourable conditions are mostly caused by the extensive use of chemicals and fertilizers in agriculture, disposal of untreated household and industrial wastes. The Struma/Strimon river system is mostly affected. The water quality of CB rivers of the Bulgarian territory are in good environmental status, they are still affected mostly by urban and industrial wastes.

Due to the rivers that run through it and the mountainous terrain, the wider region has a significant potential for hydropower production, which is greatly exploited in both countries. Dams exist in all the main rivers of the cross-border zone. Also, the valley of Evros/Maritsa is characterized by strong winds and has a high wind power potential. There are also particularly important geothermal fields of medium and high enthalpy in the area. Their geological exploration and exploitation are more developed on the Bulgarian side, while their exploitation on the Greek side remains low. Photovoltaic and wind farms have been developed in the whole area; both countries according to the National Climate and Energy Plans are exceeding EU averages in RES production.

Pollution and Waste Management

Air pollution problems are mostly detected in Thessaloniki. The information concerning the other urban centres is limited. In general, the monitoring of pollution in the area is mostly limited to rivers and there is little evidence in other types of environmental media. Lack of effective waste management infrastructure suggests possible environmental threats. Regarding the Urban Wastewater Directive, in the last two Programming Periods Greece has covered the distance towards the fulfilment of collection (Art. 3), secondary treatment (Art. 4) and third-degree treatment to 96%.(www.europa.eu/freshwater/countries/greece).

Bulgaria covered the distance towards the fulfilment of collection (Art. 3) to 94.6%, secondary treatment (Art. 4) to 82% and the distance to compliance on third-degree treatment is 20.5% (BG statistical data).

Both countries are underperforming in circular economy. There is lack of modern infrastructure for

effective and sustainable Waste Management in both sides of the CBC area, while there is limited reuse and recycle of materials. In the business sector, circular economy practices are generally absent in micro firms as markets for secondary or by-products for reuse or exploitation (e.g. energy recovery - biofuels) have limited growth. Modern Waste treatment and management infrastructures are mostly included in National Plans.

Mobility and Connectivity

The transport network of the area is generally characterized by the mountainous terrain and the absence of modern infrastructure (especially in Railway).

The TEN-T network corridor Orient /East Med crosses the area connecting Thessaloniki (city and port) with Sofia by motorway and rail. The axis has an imbalanced position to the CBC area, at the western side. The Orient/East-Med Corridor connects large parts of Central Europe with ports of the North, Baltic, Black and Mediterranean Seas. It focuses upon fostering the development of these ports as major multimodal logistics platforms and providing access to central Europe with modernised, multimodal connections. There are missing links in most of the multimodal connections between cross-border regions including Bulgaria and Greece. In the CBC area, there are three international Airports, in Thessaloniki, Kavala and Alexandroupolis, and three (major) maritime commercial ports (in the same cities) all of them located on the Greek side.

Passengers and commercial connections are established mainly by road with the port-cities of Thessaloniki, Kavala and secondly Alexandroupolis. Most of the commercial transportation between the two countries is passing through the cross-border area, but in terms of access to both rail and road connections, the cross-border region scores low compared to the EU average due to limited existence of modern infrastructure.

Motorways have developed only recently (from 2003 onward) in both sides of the borders and are still incomplete. Mountainous terrain restricts cross-border mobility, and road connections are limited in proportion to the length of the border line. Lack of effective crossing points was (and still is) a long-term weakness regarding cooperation potential as it restricts direct goods and functional labour mobility. As regards the perception of accessibility issues linked to geographical barriers or transport infrastructure (Eurobarometer 2016), there is a substantial difference in whether this constitutes a problem for cross-border cooperation. 42% of residents in the Greek border regions perceived that connectivity consists of a major barrier, whilst only 16% of residents on the Bulgarian side consider accessibility as a problem for cooperation.

The motorway network and overall connectivity relies in the completion of construction of Egnatia's motorway vertical axes and the construction of large parts of the A3 and A4 motorways in Bulgaria. Nevertheless, lower-level roads in the mountain area are in a bad condition and make interconnections difficult. The lack of modern secondary connections in the main motorway axis (Thessaloniki – Sofia) affects development in the inner area. The establishment of easy access between the two metropolitan centres combined with the inaccessibility to the inner lands can pose a threat to the development of CBC area.

There are currently only 6 operational border checkpoints along the GR/ BG border, servicing a population of about 2.8 million people.

The existing and operating crossing points are:

1. Ormenion - Kapitan Petko Voivoda: (1988), 2. BCCP Gotse Delchev – Drama point: (2005), 3.Thermes – Zlatograd: (2010), 4. Promahonas – Kulata (rebuilt at 2010), 5. Makaza – Nimphea (2013), 6. Ivaylovgrad- Kyprinos (2010).

The Dimario/Rudozem passage is currently under construction (Financed partly by Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020 programme. This axis along with the Makaza – Nimphaia crossing point were co-funded by Interreg Greece – Bulgaria in the 2007-2013.

Railway infrastructure is generally outdated and has limited importance in Crossborder Mobility as it is unattractive in its current form compared to road transportation for both passengers and cargo. The

national networks are generally developed in parallel with the border and there is only one CB connection in the axis “Sofia–Kulata–Promachon–Thessaloniki”. The route is currently characterized (JRC 2018) as “not fully exploited” as it still consists of a single lane in most of its length and lacks electromobility infrastructure. The current alignment is not effective and cannot bear the necessary modernization works (placement of second rail, electricity network and high-speed safety measures). Both National Transport Plans include the upgrade of the railway connection between Sofia and Thessaloniki as a priority project that will boost the economic development of the area. National Programmes will invest significant resources for the improvement of several parts of the network.

Smolyan District (with the higher depopulation rate) is the only district with no motorways and railway infrastructure. Ensuring cross-border mobility is of great importance also for tourism and yet there are still many challenges in ensuring public transport linking the areas along the border and allowing for solutions on how to get from the main regional transport hubs into tourist areas. Another challenge is to ensure more sustainable transport solutions in the tourist destinations and around nature park areas.

Cultural Heritage

The cross-border area includes three UNESCO world heritage sites. Two in Greece (Philippoi and Paleochristian / Byzantine Monuments of Thessaloniki) and one in Pirin National Park in Bulgaria. Several traditional customs and techniques that are used in the area are also part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Although orthodox tradition is a common element, the mountainous landscape always constituted a cultural barrier between the territories. On the Greek side, the promotion of cultural heritage focuses mainly on ancient Greek and Byzantine culture following the axis of the Egnatia Road.

Archaeological sites in Bulgaria at the cross-border region include the Heracleia Sintica, the prehistoric findings at Dolni Glavanak Cromlech, the ancient Thracian city of Perperikon, etc. A significant number of traditional and historic villages and cities can also be found in the CB area. These include Shiroka Laka, Gela, Kovachevitsa, Melnik, and Mandritsa. An interesting element are the currently abandoned border fortifications that were developed after the Balkan wars, witnessing the era of the great wars of the 20th century.

Territorial Governance and Institutional Cooperation

There are overall 83 municipalities in the Programme area (42 in Bulgaria and 41 in Greece), divided on 6 Regional Units in Greece and 4 Districts in Bulgaria. Cooperation was cultivated in the area even before the enlargement process in sectors such as the water and floods control management, energy. Institutional cooperation among Regions and Regional Units/ district has been developed manly in the sectors of culture and tourism and health.

2.LESSONS LEARNT FROM PAST EXPERIENCE

Cross Border Cooperation between Greece – Bulgaria has a significant history starting in the context of the Community Initiatives and, over time, it has evolved into a stable support mechanism in the area.

Throughout the different Programming Periods, the priorities and capabilities of the programme changed according to the respective provisions of the Regulations and the needs of each programming period (transition, accession, economic crisis). However, over the last three programming periods there has been a constant and committed targeting towards cooperation and objective achievement. This stability has gradually led to a specific definition of the options and the implementation instruments of the programme through the adoption of practices such as Strategic and Targeted Calls. Best practices and capacity building (through experience and trust) also led programme authorities to proceed to innovative activities (such as the inclusion of direct state aid) with confidence for the achievement of positive results.

Several highlighted points are:

·Strategic and Targeted Calls should continue, as they are highly efficient and effective, and seem to produce higher added value in terms of effects for beneficiaries, quality of services provided, and

population size affected.

·The successful application of direct support to enterprises in the 2014-2020 period is considered as a promising practice which can be further and more efficiently exploited using the innovative mechanism of Small Projects Fund.

·The exploitation of the current project development (calls and proposals preparation and submission practices) will use the technical skills and capacity that has already been built. This will enhance established partnership (fostering continuation, sustainability, and capitalization) and will also allow the Programme to start without delays.

·Capitalisation Plan drafted with the support provided by the Interact Programme (2014-2020) should be integrated to improve quality of results.

·The improvement of the beneficiaries' awareness has led to an increase in the competition for proposals. The submission of numerous proposals increases the managerial effort (delays on the selection and the approval of projects). It also places a significant administrative and financial burden on the potential beneficiaries for the preparation of the proposals' dossiers, most of which will be rejected due to budget constraints. One of the proposed practices in the selection process is to include a pre-selection stage at which concept notes will be evaluated. Thus, a more rational number of proposals will have to be evaluated in full and the less prominent proposals will be rejected without excessive effort from authorities or beneficiaries.

·There is limited experience in the use of simplified cost options during the 2014-2020 period. Based on the opportunities in the new legal framework, the use of simplified cost options will be further enhanced in the 2021-2027 period, focusing on the results of specific type of actions and aiming to reduce the administrative burden for beneficiaries and control bodies.

·Efforts should be made for a better sustainability of projects and the enhancement of their networking, thus providing results with permanent (long term) impact and greater integration.

·More effort is necessary for fostering the results of previous projects. Capitalisation activities should be considered.

The Programme will rely upon the current management capacity to set up a system ensuring that all exchanges between beneficiaries and the programme authorities are carried out by means of electronic data exchange.

3.COMPLEMENTARITIES AND SYNERGIES WITH OTHER FORMS OF SUPPORT

The programme will support the national development strategies through targeted interventions on issues where cross-border action creates added value, facilitates more effective implementation, and ensures better efficiency in the use of resources. In this direction, it will contribute directly or indirectly to the achievement of the objectives of the National Partnership Agreements 2021-2027 of both countries and their National / Regional Operational Programmes, the Resilience and Recovery Plans and the Just Transition Mechanism.

Priority areas to which CBC can contribute include:

·Supplementary activities to construction of TEN-T East-Med connections (both financed by PA and RRF in both countries) and especially for improved local and diffused access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility.

·Climate resilience and risk management measures and efficient resource management as to be implemented by national and regional plans regarding WFD and Flood risk Directive, also included in PA and RRF. As climate disasters do not have administrative barriers, the Programme should seek to invest in the coordination and interoperability needed.

·Cross-border activities regarding education, lifelong learning, inclusion, and job creation would be in line with the context of ESF+ national Programmes. The Programme will focus on territorial needs especially in the contexts of training and promotion of stronger vocational capabilities.

·Interventions on tourism will aim to common heritage and to increase cross-border tourist mobility and

will be supplementary to National and regional Tourism development plans.

·Synergies and complementarities with the Digital Europe Programme (DEP) and CEF2 Digital will be created in the field of services provision in topics of interest such as tourism and education.

All coordination activities in the field of water management provided for in the Programme, need to be limited to coordination in response to floods or other disasters as to avoid duplication with existing bilateral coordination mechanisms and arrangements, such as those under the Joint Declaration of Understanding and Cooperation in the Field of the Usage of Water resources in the respective territories of the Shared River Basins between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of Greece, signed on 27.07.2010 in Sofia.

In the field of financial support measures to enterprises (state aids), both countries have developed adequate national mechanisms through their National and Regional OP and RFF as well. The CBC Programme will provide limited financial support (in the form of Small Projects Fund) targeting structural challenges in issues of common interest and will be targeted to micro-enterprises that have limited access to mainstream financial sources.

At local and regional level, synergies will be adapted with Regional Operational Programmes and ITIs in themes of tourism, green infrastructures, local transport infrastructure and culture initiatives.

Regarding other forms of support, complementary and increased cooperation will be developed with Integrated Border Management Fund (IBMF) aimed at facilitating and ensuring uniformity between border and customs control and with the Asylum and Migration Fund (AMF), which is related to migration.

The complementarities include Interreg Europe, INTERACT, URBACT and ESPON and the applicable Interreg B Programmes Danube, Mediterranean, ADRION. Whereas the Programme focuses on solutions to solve the cross-border challenges, Interreg Europe allows for interregional capacity building to improve regional policies. Cooperation among all Interreg strands is further ensured by the INTERACT programme in the various programme management areas.

4. LINKS WITH MACROREGIONAL STRATEGIES

Each country is associated with a different macroregional strategy. The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (Bulgaria) which focused on comprising environmental threats, untapped shipping potential, insufficient energy connections, uneven socio-economic development, uncoordinated education and R&I systems, shortcomings in safety and security. The strategy and its action plan focus on 4 pillars – Connecting the region, Protecting the Environment, building prosperity and Strengthening the Region, each of them with several key themes. On the other hand, the EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region (Greece) aims to enhance the territorial cohesion and promote the common challenges and goals of the area, while contributing to the further integration of the Western Balkans. The strategy and its action plan focus on 4 pillars – Sustainable Tourism, Connecting the region, Environmental Protection and Blue growth.

Synergies are nevertheless expected to be developed indirectly in common ground with strategies such as environmental planning and connectivity, while capacity building and best practices of the implementation of the macro-regional strategies may add value to the priorities selected and the implementation of projects of the Greece-Bulgaria CBC Programme.

5. STRATEGIC ORIENTATION

Summarising main joint challenges, considering economic, social, and territorial disparities as well as inequalities joint investment needs and complimentary and synergies with other funding programmes and instruments, the strategic orientation is considering:

·The Greece – Bulgaria CBC area is a European territory that faces significant and complex challenges. It is one of the poorest regions (based on the GDP), with unfavourable demographic and social characteristics such as population ageing and abandonment.

·The productive structure of the area is mainly agricultural, consisting of low knowledge intensity and innovation micro enterprises with low competitiveness. The sectoral structure shows spatial diversity between countries and within regions/districts. Research and hi-tech activities within the Programme Area are mainly concentrated on the Greek side and especially in Thessaloniki. Despite the diverse specialisation, business structure shows similarities. Common needs are related to the organizational and management structure (micro-, family, traditional, low added value), the lack of technological modernization, digital competences and skill, lack of internationalization. Those dominating micro and/or family businesses have also limited access to finance.

·The natural environment along with culture (monuments, history, intangible assets) are two strong points of the CBC area, capable to boost sustainable growth and jobs. The CBC area is of high importance regarding the presence of endemic species and community interest habitats. A large part of the area is a site of the NATURA 2000 Network. The region has a high exposure to climate risks. Forest ecosystems are threatened by fires caused from the lengthening of the dry season while rising temperatures threaten living conditions in urban areas. The major rivers that cross the area also provide a significant resource as their water is exploited for energy purposes and to support agricultural production and maintain biodiversity in tanks and estuaries. Climate change associates those rivers with increased flood risks. The control and effective adaptation and treatment of climate risks requires crossborder cooperation and interconnection of communication, monitoring, early warning, management plans and inter-operability of prevention infrastructures.

·As regards resource efficiency, the region is characterized (like both countries) by extremely low performance in circular economy indicators. The main instruments for the transition to the circular economy are the National Plans and the financial instruments available to them. At the level of cross-border cooperation, the aim is to support specific categories of actors identified in the region, such as the adoption of circular economy models by individual or small/family businesses and cooperation at local level.

·Peripheral Geographical position, mountainous terrain and absence of modern infrastructure, significantly affect the level of development, competitiveness and living conditions in the CBC area. In such case, the transition to “sustainable mobility” presupposes an investment in both terms. In the term 'Mobility' by building limited and secondary routes that will connect remote areas with local centres and TEN-T Axes. In the term "sustainability", by altering the exclusive use of road transportation and car dependency. The fast connection between Sofia and Thessaloniki will offer significant advantages to the region but can also have negative impacts in local development by surpassing the intermediate areas. A mechanism is needed to diffuse the benefits that the advanced accessibility in the core network will offer to the most remote and disadvantaged territories of the CBC area. This can be achieved by investing in secondary connections that will provide safe, efficient, and greener connection.

·The CBC area, particularly in the countryside and the mountainous area, is characterised by (comparatively) low rates of population with higher education, participation in lifelong learning activities and digital skills. The liaison between education, training, competitiveness, and entrepreneurship is a common challenge for the area.

·The cross-border area has a rich and diverse tourist product that thematically can cover all tourism activities. The ski and seaside resorts are at distance of less than 3 hours away between them, while the rich historical, cultural, and natural reserve of the area offers the possibility of developing almost all tourist forms (cultural, historical, nature, M.I.C.E., gastronomic, city brake etc.). Some of the disadvantages are the low competitiveness of mainly small tourism enterprises, the lack of organization of tourist areas and networks, the poor accessibility and territorial integration, the unsustainable management of destinations, the lack of inclusiveness and the weak international visibility.

The strategic objective of the Interreg VI-A Programme Greece-Bulgaria 2021-2027 is to support the convergence of the area toward the growth and sustainability standards of the National and European Area, by responding to the complex challenges of the geographical regionalization and highlighting

through cooperation, understanding, and networking its specific characteristics as comparative advantages.

The Programme will exploit the potential of the new programming framework and will focus on addressing needs that are important for the CBC area but may not be at the heart of national development priorities and therefore not covered effectively for the area by National Programmes. In this context, it will also provide specific approaches and mechanisms that will help wider strategies applied in the area (for example TEN-T) to be more effective in favour of the local development.

More specifically, the Programme will focus on:

·Capitalization and spatial expansion / qualitative upgrade of systems and practices for adaptation and confrontation of climate risks and the protection of citizens, with emphasis on joint action, direct and effective coordination / cooperation, and infrastructure inter-operability (Special Objective 2. iv)

·Strengthen cooperation for the preservation of biodiversity and t enhance the identity of the settlements of the cross-border area through the upgrade of green and blue infrastructures in urban areas and settlements with the aim of jointly improving living conditions (S.O.2. vii)

·Focus on needs in sectors of common interest (in which there are capabilities such as Tourism and Culture or emerging needs such as Circular Economy), with a special focus on the integration of micro-enterprises that have limited access to mainstream national – regional financial instruments (S.O.2. vi, S.O.4vii).

·Reduce isolation and improve interconnection through a modern, greener, and safer transport system (3.ii) in a way that will bring benefits to the economic and social development of the whole region.

·Employment, entrepreneurship and upgrade of the capacities of enterprises (especially digital competencies) through the provision of support for education, coaching, training, and microfinance support through Small Project Funds (S.O.4. ii).

6.HORIZONTAL PRINCIPLES

The actions that will be funded by the programme will be in line with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the European Child Guarantee, gender equality, non-discrimination. Equality between men and women, gender mainstreaming and the integration of a gender perspective and prevention of any discrimination based on gender, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation will be ensured by a) specialisation of criteria on the Calls, b) documentation from the beneficiaries in the Projects Progress Reports, c) inclusion of specific task / questions in the monitoring and evaluation of the Programme.

The supported activities will include (in priority) investments that successfully combine the sustainability, aesthetics and inclusiveness - principles of the New European Bauhaus initiative - with a view to finding affordable, inclusive, sustainable and attractive solutions to climate challenges. The programme will not support the creation or restoration of any Social Infrastructure and will not include any actions that could lead to Institutionalisation.

The assessment of the compliance of the programme categories of actions with the DNSH principal will be monitored in cooperation with the relevant responsible bodies. Upon completion of the process and the development of the final compliance check sheets, the necessary reference confirming compliance with the DNSH Authority will be added per specific objective.

The Programme actions are directly associated to SDGs 4,8,9,11,12,13,14,15. The MA will promote the strategic use of public procurement to support strategic objectives (including efforts to address institutional capacity gaps). Beneficiaries should be encouraged to pay more attention to quality and projects life-cycle criteria. Where possible, environmental (e.g. green public procurement criteria) and social aspects and incentives for innovation would be included in public procurement procedures. More than 30% of the budget is earmarked in climate related actions.

In implementing the programme, the managing authority will promote the strategic use of public procurement to support strategic objectives (including effort to address institutional capacity gaps).

Beneficiaries should be encouraged to pay more attention to quality and life-cycle cost criteria. Where possible, environmental (e.g. green public procurement criteria) and social aspects and incentives for innovation should be included in public procurement procedures."

Access to open data will be ensured and the Open Data Directive (Directive (EU)2019/1024) Directive will be respected.

1.3. Justification for the selection of policy objectives and the Interreg-specific objectives, corresponding priorities, specific objectives and the forms of support, addressing, where appropriate, missing links in cross-border infrastructure

Reference: point (c) of Article 17(3)

Table 1

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
2. A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility	RSO2.4. Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience taking into account eco-system based approaches	1. PRIORITY 1 - A more Resilient and Greener Greece-Bulgaria Cross Border Territory	Greece – Bulgaria CBC area covers a variety of landscapes and morphology types, from mountains of the border line to the plain areas of the riverbeds and the coastal areas of the North Aegean. This diversity is associated to climatic threats, as it makes the area sensitive to a variety of natural disasters. The area has high vulnerability in floods, forest fires, landslides, droughts, erosion. Border Orientation Paper indicated two relevant needs: a) invest in joint climate change adaptation and mitigation, with a strong focus on sustainable and eco-friendly measures (such as flood plains and reforestation) and b) develop further cooperation on risk prevention and rapid response management, examine ways to establish joint emergency services (i.e. reduce the current obstacles). Territorial analysis also suggests the need for supporting the resilience of economic sectors affected by climate change of CBC interest such as tourism and agri-food. Bilateral cooperation for integrated prevention, control and confrontation of climatic threats will enhance effectiveness and efficiency that will be reflected in the ecology, economy, and social capital. Focus should be given on risk management and prevention based on the competences and responsibilities as stipulated in national strategic documents and interoperability of prevention and management of climatic risks measures. Prioritization

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			of projects and locations will be in line with the measures included in the Flood Risk Management Plans and the River Basin Management Plans Climate Change Adaptation actions had been implemented successfully during previous Programming Periods. The Programme will seek to further promote, extend, and capitalise successful practices that have been already tested. The thematic focus of the S.O. will be diversified from other forms of support (National Programmes, RFF) by addressing common threats and enhance bilateral cooperation of national systems. Due to the nature of the activities the programme will use grants and not financial instruments Main outcomes will be investments for climate change adaptation and risk prevention main result will be the enhancement of effectiveness in the confrontation of climatic treads from coordinated actions. Due to the nature of the activities the programme will use grants and not FIs.
2. A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility	RSO2.6. Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy	1. PRIORITY 1 - A more Resilient and Greener Greece-Bulgaria Cross Border Territory	Circular and resource efficient economy is underdeveloped in the CBC area. In all participating Regions there are several shortages in waste management infrastructure and practices. Reuse and recycle rates are way far below the EU targets for 2025 and 2030. As an opportunity, transmission to a more Circular Economy model, can support the economic reformation of the area by exploiting new sustainable economic activities. Border Orientation Paper Greece - Bulgaria suggests ‘the joint cross border actions to improve recycling rates and promoting transition to a circular economy, including capacity-building for stakeholders, awareness raising campaigns to promote sustainable consumption

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			practices and behaviour'. In both countries infrastructures for the transmission to a Circular Economy model will be supported mainly by national and regional waste management plans and will be financed by National Operational Programmes. The CBC Programme will diversify by focusing on supporting: a) local communities adopt efficient use of resources and circular economy models through cooperation. b) micro and small business (that have limited accessibility to mainstream financial instruments) to create competitive advantages and increase added value by introducing green and circular innovations. Main result of the actions will be the more sustainable use of resources and the reduction of waste production. Activities to enterprises could be provided with the use of SPF. Due to the nature of the activities the programme will use grants and not financial instruments.
2. A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility	RSO2.7. Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution	1. PRIORITY 1 - A more Resilient and Greener Greece-Bulgaria Cross Border Territory	The natural environment of the CB area is valued for its biodiversity, rareness, and size. Habitats and species protected under NATURA2000 sites occupy a large share of the total area. Many of the habitats and ecosystems along the borderline are continuous or inter-depended. Co-management and coordination actions are essential for shared habitat or endangered species. The Border Orientation Paper (BOP) proposes the 'Development of the capacity of environmental authorities and the non-governmental sector to exploit the common natural heritage of the region while respecting environmental standards and securing sustainability' and 'Support of actions to jointly protect nature and biodiversity. Ensure that actions are more strategic in their approach and that

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			awareness of the local population and visitors is raised on some of the specific challenges of the cross-border region when it comes to biodiversity.' In addition, several urban centres in the area face environmental problems regarding unavailable or poor green space and vegetation or/and poor air quality conditions. Investments in green and blue infrastructures will upgrade the ecosystem services that will improve urban quality and living conditions. The Programme should focus on: Investing in green infrastructures in urban and peri-urban areas, as well as in the monitoring of environmental conditions of cities aiming to create better and more resilient human habitats. The action will contribute to the overall upgrade of the quality of life in the area. Due to the nature of the activities the programme will use grants and not financial instruments.
3. A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility	RSO3.2. Developing and enhancing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility	2. PRIORITY 2 - A more accessible Greece-Bulgaria Cross Border Teritory	The selection of SO.3.ii is based on the accessibility problems facing mostly the mountainous part of the CB territory and the lack of modern and more green transport infrastructure. Due to the geographical position and the mountainous morphology of the border line, connectivity is one of the main barriers for communication and economic development. The Border Orientation Paper suggests: 'Focus on road connectivity in areas identified as inner peripheries – areas having relatively poor access to regional centres and in the inclusion of the Sofia– Thessaloniki rail connection 'as a strategic priority for the cross-border area, the programme could support preparatory activities of cooperation between relevant stakeholders. The strengthening of the East Med Ten-T corridor (supported by both National Programmes)

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			will provide improved connectivity between the hubs of Thessaloniki and Sofia. The Programme will undertake the task to expand the effects of mobility improvement to inner zones and disseminate development advantages in areas with relatively poor access to regional centres. To fulfill this role, the Programme will invest both in the promotion of 'mobility' and 'sustainability' complementarity with other support Programmes and Instruments In this respect the programme will focus on: a) The support of missing parts and improvement of travel safety in secondary road connections b) Enchanting Sustainable Mobility in the CB Area by promoting railway connectivity and digitisation of the CB transport system. c) Promote smart, safe and sustainable mobility in the CB area. The main result of the action will be the enhancement of sustainable and safe mobility in the area. The CBC added value is associated with the interoperability and the spatial continuation of the infrastructure. Due to the nature of the activities the programme will use grants and not financial instruments.
4. A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights	RSO4.2. Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	3. PRIORITY 3 - A more Inclusive Greece-Bulgaria Cross Border Territory	Investment in education and training will have multiple benefits for the area. It is a strategic measure to improve knowledge-based economy, increase income and provide new / sustainable job opportunities and therefore retain young population and provide resources for social development. The Border Orientation Paper suggests: "investment in joint education schemes" and "Support of more extensive and structured language-learning activities". The upgrade of educational infrastructure will be covered by National Programmes and

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			instruments. The Programme will focus on training and on the connection of training, upskilling of jobs and competitiveness to the special characteristics of the CBC Area. More specifically, it will support: a) The promotion of lifelong and vocational learning and the provision of support services such as coaching and mentoring for the promotion of entrepreneurship and the creation of better and more sustainable jobs. b) The support of small businesses for upskilling to adapt to new challenges, to innovate and create capabilities, to exploit further opportunities for smart and green transmission. The main result of the actions will be the improvement of competences and opportunities of participants. Due to the nature of the activities the programme will use grants and not financial instruments.
4. A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights	RSO4.6. Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation	3. PRIORITY 3 - A more Inclusive Greece-Bulgaria Cross Border Territory	The 'Greece – Bulgaria CBC' area shares common history, cultural heritage, which along with distinct nature values provide strong assets for sustainable tourism. Various and diverse destinations exist and operate mostly isolated from each other. Although tourism is a dominant economic sector in several areas on both sides, there is still room for a more sustainable growth. Analysis shows that there is low mobility of tourists within the area (due to poor connectivity and absent of cooperation between destinations). Exploitation of wellness, food and wine, hiking, biking, city, and culture tourist products create a significant (partly exploited) opportunity for transforming tourism into a more sustainable activity. Needs include the quality improvement of public and private tourism infrastructure and services and aim to increase competitiveness to exploit prominent types

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			of tourism market as silver and inclusive tourism. In the field of territorial development, the Border Orientation Paper suggests: ‘the investments in promoting destination marketing of the regions, linked with the offer of local products (gastro tourism and wine production) and investment in higher attractiveness of the hiking routes to develop accompanying offers as info-points, information/educative tables, maps, refreshment points, etc. The programme will focus on: • the transition of destinations (and their touristic enterprises) towards more inclusive, sustainable and resilience models. • Exploitation and valorisation of common heritage Main result of the actions will be the enhancement of sustainable touristic growth and the increase of economic effects. Activities to enterprises could be provided with the use of SPF. Due to the nature of the activities the programme will use grants and not financial instruments.

2. Priorities

Reference: points (d) and (e) of Article 17(3)

2.1. Priority: 1 - PRIORITY 1 - A more Resilient and Greener Greece-Bulgaria Cross Border Territory

Reference: point (d) of Article 17(3)

2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO2.4. Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience taking into account eco-system based approaches

Reference: point (e) of Article 17(3)

Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention and resilience, taking into account eco-system-based approaches

2.1.1.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

Cross border needs and opportunities:

The programme area is sensitive to climate related natural disasters. It is highly vulnerable to floods, landslides, forest fires and heatwaves. Socio-economic, health, and environmental impacts are significant and threaten the local communities. Climate Change Adaptation (SO2.iv) has territorial aspects that know no administrative borders. The aim of the specific objective is to improve resilience of ecosystems and communities to the effects of climate change and enhance cross-border risk prevention and response mechanisms. The focus is on river valleys that are susceptible to overflows of their flood bed in times of heavy rainfall, mountain areas facing landslides or threatened by forest fires during the hot and dry season and cities affected by urban heat and dust.

Strategy Response:

Interreg VI-A Greece-Bulgaria programme 2021-2027 will support cross border cooperation to enhance capacities for an effective climate resilience and adaptation. As climatic phenomena and effects do not know borders, the main aim of SO2.iv is to enhance through cooperation a territorial integrated approach. Cooperation fields can include both managerial (including information exchange and security plans) and infrastructure actions.

More specifically, the Programme will support actions on:

·Risk prevention, monitoring, planning and installation of early warning systems.

·Climate-proof landscape planning and eco-DRR (ecosystem-based Disaster Risk Reduction) measures.

·Cooperation plans, protocols, infrastructures, and equipment for effective risk treatment, including digital solutions.

The Special Objective will be implemented through a targeted call. The nature based approaches, will be taken into consideration during the drafting of the call and the evaluation procedure.

TARGETED CALL/S:

Capitalisation of the results and possible territorial expansion of the operation for the 2014-2020 projects:

FLOOD GUARD: Increasing the capacity to respond to disasters and emergencies in the cross-border region of Bulgaria and Greece

FLOOD PROTECTION: Installation of detection and early warning system for leaks in the embankments of rivers basin.

In the context of the 2021-2027 period, the Project/s should comply with the national and regional adaptation policies and the delegated competences thereby, in particularly with Regional Adaptation Strategy Plans the National Energy and Climate Plan, the National Risk Prevention Strategy and Plan and with the approved 2022-2027 Flood Risk Management Plans and River Basins Management plans. Supported actions should create territorial impact for the CBC area and not have only local effects.

Expected results:

Cooperation actions will increase the (technical and administrative) capacity for more efficient and timely response to different types of natural disasters. Early warning systems and infrastructures will make the area less vulnerable. Equipment will improve the effectiveness of immediate and targeted respond to disasters and emergencies (limiting the exposure of the population).

CBC Added Value / synergies with other forms of support:

Confrontation of Climatic risk is a common challenge The Cooperation activities and joint initiatives will support the interoperability of national systems and better coordination in prevention, control and improved response to natural disasters and therefore enhance the effectiveness. Cooperation will motivate organisational and policy learning processes and more improved efficiency.

Contribution to macro-regional strategies:

Achievements will contribute to Priority Area 5 (Environmental Risks) of Danube and Pillar 3 (Environmental Quality) of Adriatic – Ionian Macro-regional Strategies.

Horizontal principles

·Horizontal principles relating to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the elimination of inequalities, the promotion of gender equality, and the fight against discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be taken into account and applied in the design and implementation of the proposed actions.

·The types of actions will contribute to SDG's 11 and 13.

"The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature (early warning systems, monitoring measures, equipment).

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

2.1.1.2. Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
1	RSO2.4	RCO24	Investments in new or upgraded disaster monitoring, preparedness, warning and response systems against natural disasters	euro	250000	9250000
1	RSO2.4	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	2	8

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
1	RSO2.4	RCR35	Population benefiting from flood protection measures	persons	0.00	2021	300,000.00	MIS	
1	RSO2.4	RCR84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	organisations	0.00	2021	6.00	MIS	

2.1.1.3. Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

The target groups are Inhabitants, enterprises, visitors living and operating in low, medium, or high-risk areas.

Potential Beneficiaries could be National and Regional public authorities having legal competences as regards national and regional adaptation policies, in particular according to the National Risk Prevention Strategies and Plans and the approved 2022-2027 Flood Risk Management Plans and River Basin Management Plans as well as other related National Strategies.

2.1.1.4. Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3

N/A

2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

The actions of the Specific Objective will be implemented through grants. The use of financial instruments is not planned because the nature of the interventions concerned is related to the production of a public good and not a classic profitable activity.

2.1.1.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.4	ERDF	058. Adaptation to climate change measures and prevention and management of climate related risks: floods and landslides (including awareness raising, civil protection and disaster management systems, infrastructures and ecosystem based approaches)	9,897,767.00

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.4	ERDF	01. Grant	9,897,767.00

Table 6 - Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.4	ERDF	01. ITI - Urban neighbourhoods	9,897,767.00

2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO2.6. Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy

Reference: point (e) of Article 17(3)

Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy

2.1.1.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

Cross border needs and opportunities:

Circular economy and resource efficiency (CERE) is underdeveloped in both household and businesses sectors. National Programmes (by both ERDF and CF) will support the transition to circular economy and sustainable waste management by funding major infrastructure for the reduction, recycling and reuse of wastes. Cross border Cooperation can provide the opportunity to boost circular economy models by removing border barriers and expand the local secondary product markets.

Strategy Response:

The aim of this specific objective is to stimulate the potentials of the cross-border area in implementing customized, local solutions related to circular economy and resource efficiency.

The strategy seeks to promote information capacity building, skills improvement, and networking of different stakeholders (private-public partnerships, R&D, SMEs, public institutions, etc.) across the border to identify, develop and start joint circular economy solutions. Supported projects should aim to promote value chains based on resource efficiency and exploitation of local (bilateral) use, reuse and repair of secondary materials and outputs. Actions should also include awareness and capacity building measures along with good practices exchange tools.

More specifically the Programme will fund actions for:

·Implementation of Joint or coordinated action plans for the promotion and application of circular economy and resource efficiency

·Creation and support of cross-border and cross-sectoral networks and secondary / used material and product markets.

·Development and application of Circular transformation models solutions and products Awareness raising and know-how exchange

Indicative types of Action:

SO2.vi will be applied by one (1) Targeted Call and one (1) Open Call

A TARGETED PROJECT: Direct support to SME's capacities to transit to Green and Circular business models, implemented as Small Projects Fund.

The Project will aim to support mostly micro and small enterprises (having limited access to major financial tools) in order to invest in small scale infrastructure, renovation, equipment, upskilling and digital applications that will favour :

·Resource efficiency of their functions (including energy and water)

·Minimization of wastes produced through production function

·Smart monitoring of materials, energy, and wastes flows (that improves efficiency).

·Reuse of resources or byproducts within the enterprise or by third parties (secondary materials).

·Development of circular business models to favor the establishment of regional close-loop value chain by employing B2B, B2C and C2C models of cooperation

The support to SME's will be given in the forms of Grants through Small Project Funds instrument and with durability period shorted to three years (Art. 65 CPR).

B. OPEN CALL: Promotion of Circular Economy in CBC Greece -Bulgaria (Examples of actions, non-exhaustive list):

1. Creation and operation of CB secondary product marketplaces, including digital platforms
2. Initiatives that support infrastructure for the development of industrial symbiosis, reduction of waste, improved management of waste and promote resource efficiency (reform, reduce, recycle).
3. Integrated territorial monitoring of waste management and pollution sources.
4. Applied research and cooperation between research centres and SMEs for the promotion of eco-innovation, design of new, sustainable material and more friendly to the environment products based on local resources or traditional products.
5. Awareness raising initiatives and pilot actions for more responsible consuming.
6. Experience and good practices exchange.

Actions should seek synergies and be in line with the national and regional policies, the National Strategies for the Promotion of Circular Economy and the National and Regional Waste Management Plans. Water related activities in particular should additionally be in line with River Basin Management Plans.

Supported actions should seek for territorial impact for the CBC area and not have only local effects.

Expected results:

The CBC actions will improve regional and national capacity for sustainable waste management, providing solutions in circular economy and resource efficiency that might create new competitive advantages and added value for local businesses. The support of micro-enterprises will also act as an exhibition

project in local level for promoting the benefits of Circular Economy. Joint plans and awareness rising measures along with national initiatives will contribute to increase the reuse and recycling rates in the area.

The programme authorities acknowledge the availability of risks and uncertainties that could affect the capacity of the supported businesses to deliver results in the long term. The following main risks are identified: ongoing economic disturbances caused by the lasting COVID-19 pandemic, potential market fluctuations and downturns caused by conflicts close to the CBC region, insufficient experience working in a cross-border context. The administrative capacity of MSMEs is the issue where the Programme authorities could support enterprises to a great extent by providing tailor-made trainings and other dedicated events complemented by parallel mentoring and counsellingif their project performance and monitoring outcomes indicate potential issues.

CBC Added Value / synergies with other forms of support:

Cross border Cooperation can increase the market opportunities for developing Circular Economy businesses. Cooperation will provide enhanced learning opportunities and better understanding of needs in entrepreneurship and business modernisation.It will also encourage economies of scale and the achievement of critical mass to create common potential in the area. The actions can create synergies with other forms of support mostly in demonstration and public awareness measures.

Contribution to macro-regional strategies:

Achievements will contribute to Pillar 3 (Environmental Quality) of Adriatic – Ionian Macro regional Strategy. Supported actions will also contribute to the achievements to the targets of the EUSDR – EU Strategy for the Danube region, namely Priority Area 7 – 'To develop the Knowledge Society' and Priority Area 8 – 'To support the competitiveness of enterprises'

Horizontal principles

·Horizontal principles relating to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the elimination of inequalities, the promotion of gender equality, and the fight against discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be taken into account and applied in the design and implementation of the proposed actions. Application will include the special selection criteria, monitoring through Project Reports and evaluation objectives.

·The types of actions will contribute to SDG's 8 and 12.

·The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

·The types of actions will contribute to SDG's 8 and 12.

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

2.1.1.2. Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
1	RSO2.6	RCO02	Enterprises supported by grants	enterprises	5	58
1	RSO2.6	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	1	8
1	RSO2.6	RCO01	Enterprises supported (of which: micro, small, medium, large)	enterprises	5	58

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
1	RSO2.6	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	solutions	0.00	2021	8.00	MIS	
1	RSO2.6	GSR01	Enterprises adapting more sustainable processes	enterprises	0.00	2021	58.00	MIS	

2.1.1.3. Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

The target groups of the Programme are individuals/ organisations that live and/ or work, visiting the programme area.

Beneficiaries will include local, regional and national public authorities and sectoral agencies, especially in the field of environment, resource management and waste management, Enterprises including SME's, business and professional associations, Research and Higher education organisations, EGTC's and NGO's

Beneficiaries for Targeted Calls could be:

a Sole beneficiary under a Small Project Fund scheme, final recipients will be existing SMEs that are aiming to increase their capacity in Circular and Resource Efficient Economy

2.1.1.4. Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3

N/A

2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

In the context of SO2.6 and due to the specific nature of the actions, no financial instruments are planned. The activities concerned are not directly linked to the profitability of the enterprises.

2.1.1.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.6	ERDF	029. Research and innovation processes, technology transfer and cooperation between enterprises, research centres and universities, focusing on the low carbon economy, resilience and adaptation to climate change	1,600,000.00
1	RSO2.6	ERDF	067. Household waste management: prevention, minimisation, sorting, reuse, recycling measures	7,200,000.00
1	RSO2.6	ERDF	075. Support to environmentally□friendly production processes and resource efficiency in SMEs	1,600,000.00

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.6	ERDF	01. Grant	10,400,000.00

Table 6 - Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.6	ERDF	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	10,400,000.00

2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO2.7. Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution

Reference: point (e) of Article 17(3)

Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity, and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution.

2.1.1.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

Cross border needs and opportunities:

The reach and the size of natural habitats can characterise the CBC area as a biodiversity hot-spot that hosts multiple endemic habitats and species. Pollution from point or diffuse sources, irreversible and conflicting land use changes, invasion of alien species and climate change risks are the most emerging threats for the natural environment.

Insufficient green and blue areas in urban centres, low quality of green infrastructure, traffic congestion and brownfields are downgrading the quality of life in the small and medium cities of the area.

Strategy Response:

Under the SO2.vii, the Greece-Bulgaria Interreg Programme will support cooperation actions for the development and implementation of strategies / action plans, green and blue infrastructures, and monitoring systems regarding the protection of the natural environment and the upgrade of quality of life and living conditions in urban and peri-urban areas. The actions will also promote the sustainable, inclusive and resilience living dictated by the New European Bauhaus.

Indicative types of Action:

The SO2.vi will support the Upgrade of Natural and Urban Environment.

The action will be applied by one (1) Open Call focusing on the :

·Development of Green infrastructure, including developing and implementing new tools, transferring solutions between stakeholders and promotion of environmentally friendly practices

·Installation of monitoring systems regarding the prevention and control of air pollution at multiple territorial levels

OPEN CALL Monitoring, planning and development of green infrastructure that support functions of ecological corridors in the CBC areas and quality of life including the digitization of protection systems and promoting biodiversity and environmentally friendly practices. (Examples of projects, the list is not

exhaustive)**:**

1. Green and infrastructure in urban and peri-urban areas (in line with New European Bauhaus principal) that promotes the ecosystem services.
2. Capacity building and good practices sharing in areas/ species/ natural resources management, including joint training of personnel for the promotion of urban ecology.
3. Development and test of integrated environmental action plans on urban or regional level as a basis for pollution prevention and remediation measures.
4. Monitoring systems for the environmental conditions in urban areas and associated pollution prevention and control management plans.
5. Sustainable management practices towards greener approaches in various fields, bilaterally agreed.

Expected results:

The improvement of green spaces in urban and non-urban areas will increase ecosystem services provided to both inhabitants and wildlife. Improvement of living conditions will have direct impact on life quality and tourist development. Activities aiming to detect, monitor and improve air quality will contribute mostly to the upgrade of quality of life in urban centres and to the protection of their health from diseases associated with air pollution.

CBC Added Value / synergies with other forms of support:

Cross border Cooperation will support the overall upgrade of living conditions of the population in the area.The most significant added value will be formed by the cooperation of local authorities to exchange practices to upgrade the urban and peri-urban space with innovative solutions based in the promotion of ecosystem services.

Contribution to macro-regional strategies:

Achievements will contribute to Priority Areas 3 (Culture and Tourism) and 6 (Biodiversity, Landscapes and Air & Soil Quality) of Danube Strategy and to the Pillars 3 (Environmental Quality) and 4 (Sustainable Tourism) of Adriatic-Ionian Macro-regional Strategy.

Horizontal principles

-Horizontal principles relating to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the elimination of inequalities, the promotion of gender equality, and the fight against discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be taken into account and applied in the design and implementation of the proposed actions. Application will include the special selection criteria, monitoring through Project Reports and evaluation objectives.

-The types of actions will contribute to SDG's 11, 14, 15.

-The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

2.1.1.2. Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
1	RSO2.7	RCO39	Area covered by systems for monitoring air pollution installed	air quality zones	1	2
1	RSO2.7	RCO36	Green infrastructure supported for other purposes than adaptation to climate change	hectares	0.7	10.7

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
1	RSO2.7	RCR95	Population having access to new or improved green infrastructure	persons	0.00	2021	251,200.00	MIS	
1	RSO2.7	RCR50	Population benefiting from measures for air quality	persons	0.00	2021	430,000.00	MIS	

2.1.1.3. Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

The target groups of the Programme are individuals/ organisations that live, work and/or visit the programme area.

Beneficiaries could be local, regional, and national public authorities, including Management Bodies of NATURA2000 or other protected areas sites. EGTC's and NGO's, Research and Higher Education organizations specialized in conservation and biodiversity.

2.1.1.4. Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3

N/A

2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

The actions of the Specific Objective will be implemented through grants. The use of financial instruments It is not planned because the nature of the interventions concerned is related to the production of a public good and not a classic profitable activity

2.1.1.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.7	ERDF	079. Nature and biodiversity protection, natural heritage and resources, green and blue infrastructure	6,400,000.00
1	RSO2.7	ERDF	077. Air quality and noise reduction measures	1,600,000.00

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.7	ERDF	01. Grant	8,000,000.00

Table 6 - Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.7	ERDF	01. ITI - Urban neighbourhoods	8,000,000.00

2.1. Priority: 2 - PRIORITY 2 - A more accessible Greece-Bulgaria Cross Border Teritory

Reference: point (d) of Article 17(3)

2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO3.2. Developing and enhancing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility

Reference: point (e) of Article 17(3)

Developing and enhancing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility.

2.1.1.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

Cross border needs and opportunities:

The position of the region in relation to the centre of the European area, the mountainous terrain and the limited development of modern transport infrastructure limit the possibilities of social and economic development. The current state of a significant part of the road network is characterised by unsatisfactory conditions in terms of functionality and safety. The railway needs modernisation and is essentially non-operational. The improvement of the secondary connections was supported with significant resources from the CBC Programme Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020 (amongst other sources of support). Further enhancing regional connectivity will support local sustainable development, by improving accessibility in terms of time (and therefore fuel use) and safety. The modernisation of the railway connection will create conditions for greener commuting between the areas through which it passes.

Strategy response:

The programme will support the promotion of multimodal mobility and connection of the local networks to the (under upgrade) railway network. Improvement of smart and sustainable transport will help reduce the geographic isolation of mountainous communities and will contribute to enhance of the economic and social relations and partnership via direct cross border connection between neighbouring small cities (population from 10.000 to 100.000 inhabitants). Improved accessibility in secondary connections is essential for encouraging the commercial and business cooperation, the formation of integrated competitive tourism destinations and the cooperation in health and civil protection sectors.

National/ Regional ERDF and CF financial instruments are supporting cross border connectivity in the area both in TEN-T (upgrade of the railway line Thessaloniki – Sofia) and secondary connections (upgrade of the part Melivia – Dimario). During previous periods, the Greece-Bulgaria cooperation programmes supported the improvement of cross-border mobility by strengthening important parts of new links. In the 2021-2027 period, this strategic choice remains timely, shaped accordingly and in line with the progress of the TEN-T and redefined by incorporating the guidelines for greener, resilient, and

inclusive transport.

Main targets are:

·Improvement of mobility and travel safety in secondary network (non TEN-T) on the CB area

·Improvement of sustainability by supporting specified needs for the modernisation of the CBC railway network

Indicative types of actions:

SO3.ii will be applied by exclusively a Targeted Call for the following Action: Improvement of multimodal, smart and secure mobility in Greece - Bulgaria CBC Area

The action will include the following Strategic Projects:

A.Improvement of mobility and travel safety on the CB area: Functional upgrade/ modernization of CB Connections: A1. Completion of the Main Road Communication of the town of Smolyan, A2. Upgrade of remaining parts in the Road Axis Xanthi - Echinos (- Melivia –Echinos); Digitalization, inter-connection, infrastructure and equipment for Border control systems and security MIS. The action will finance pilot and local/ small scale interventions in specific sections that faces safety and accessibility issues and will be complementary to the projects that will be implemented through the support of the ESI Funds and the RFF in the two countries according to the National and Regional Strategic Transport Plans.

B.Enhancing Train Mobility in the CB Area: B1Technical design of the Modernization of the railway line Radomir – Kulata, B2 installation of an Intelligent dynamic system for detecting incidents and monitoring of the railway network in real time- A Resilient Plan for Interregional rail trips in the Cross-Border area and installation of an IT based communication system.

Expected results:

Improved cross-border connectivity and mobility will favour local development, assisting trade, tourism, and labour mobility. The support of railway modernisation will assist the transition to a greener transportation system.

CBC Added Value / synergies with other forms of support:

Added value will be produced by the enhancement of border connectivity and interoperability of national mobility networks.

Contribution to macro-regional strategies:

Achievements will contribute to PA 1b (Rail-Road-Air Mobility) of Danube Macro-regional Strategy and topic 2 of pillar 2 (Intermodal connections to the

hinterland) of Adriatic-Ionian Macro-regional Strategy.

Horizontal principles

-Horizontal principles relating to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the elimination of inequalities, the promotion of gender equality, and the fight against discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be taken into account and applied in the design and implementation of the proposed actions. Application will include the special selection criteria, monitoring through Project Reports and evaluation objectives.

-The types of actions will contribute to SDG's 9 and 10.

-The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, since they have been assessed as compatible under the RRF.

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

2.1.1.2. Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
2	RSO3.2	GSO001	Length of railways with updated technical design	km	2	60
2	RSO3.2	RCO50	Length of rail reconstructed or modernised - non-TENT	km	5	120
2	RSO3.2	RCO46	Length of roads reconstructed or modernised - non-TENT	km	0.5	5

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
2	RSO3.2	RCR56	Time savings due to improved road infrastructures	man-days/year	0.00	2021	9,695.00	Supported Projects	One year after completion of the supported project.
2	RSO3.2	RCR58	Annual users of newly, built, upgraded, reconstructed or modernised railways	passenger-km/year	0.00	2021	1,625,000.00	Supported projects	Common Result of projects / actions B

2.1.1.3. Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

Target groups of funded actions would be both individuals and organisations that will be involved or positively affected by the actions including local SME's. Target groups also include all population groups (inhabitants and visitors), which will benefit from improved, safer, sustainable, and inclusive transport network.

Project beneficiaries would be:

For Project A: RIA / Egnatia Odos SA,

For Project B: ERGOSE / National Railway Infrastructure Company, Ministries.

2.1.1.4. Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3

N/A

2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

The actions of the Specific Objective will be implemented through grants. The use of financial instruments It is not planned because the nature of the interventions concerned is related to the production of a public good and not a classic profitable activity.

2.1.1.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	RSO3.2	ERDF	099. Other newly built or upgraded railways – electric/zero emission	10,400,000.00
2	RSO3.2	ERDF	090. Newly built or upgraded other national, regional and local access roads	14,465,178.00

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	RSO3.2	ERDF	01. Grant	24,865,178.00

Table 6 - Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	RSO3.2	ERDF	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	24,865,178.00

2.1. Priority: 3 - PRIORITY 3 - A more Inclusive Greece-Bulgaria Cross Border Territory

Reference: point (d) of Article 17(3)

2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO4.2. Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training

Reference: point (e) of Article 17(3)

Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training, and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training

2.1.1.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

Cross border needs and opportunities:

The cross-border area is characterised by low training and lifelong learning rates, low professional skills and reduced digital competences. These characteristics affect the competitiveness of businesses (especially small and family businesses), their growth potential, entrepreneurship. Ultimately, they limit income and the likelihood of creating new sustainable jobs. On the other hand, the area has institutions that can provide necessary support upskilling and reskilling and to enhance knowledge base economy.

Strategy Response:

Under SO.4.ii, integrated interventions combining educational, employment and entrepreneurship are supported. Specially the programme will focus on the cultivation of knowledge and digital skills as an instrument to achieve more sustainable jobs, to expand businesses growth and to create a more resilient and inclusive economy in the area.

To separate actions from other financial support measures, supported actions should focus on thematic areas of bilateral interest where practices such as educational and business models can be exchanged, or further cooperation between professionals can be encouraged. Those thematic areas can be(indicative) agri-food endemic products, promotion of sustainable - territorial tourism, silver economy, cross border sustainable transportation, mountainous economy, and resource management. Measures supporting SMEs will also target Micro and family businesses that have limited access to mainstream financial support instrument for demarcation purposes.

More specifically the Programme will fund activities for:

·Training activities to workers, self-employed, unemployed, and would-be Entrepreneurs on priority topics, including staff exchange

·Information and technical exchange on educational and training practices.

·Training and support of special target groups (women, youths, disabled), focusing on cooperation and entrepreneurship.

·Growth of digital competences of enterprises and self-employed aiming to support cross-border value chains

·Corporate Infrastructure and equipment serving the above activities.

The implementation of the Specific Objective should ensure the compatibility of the instruments with the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights for inclusive education and active inclusion. The implementation of the Specific Objective should ensure the compatibility of the instruments with the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights for inclusive education and active inclusion. For this reason, in the process of projects proposal, it is necessary to be ensured that the supported actions will be accessible for people with disabilities and commit de-segregation in support for education and training.

Indicative types of Action:

SO4.ii will be applied by one (1) Open Call

OPEN CALL Actions providing support for the connection between business and education.

(Examples of actions, non-exhaustive list):

1.Direct support to micro / family enterprises, SME's and start-ups for upskilling, growth of digital competencies and organisational capacity (mentoring, coaching etc.) The support could be applied through Small Projects Fund instrument

2.Joint Training programmes, courses in topics of common interest

3.Development and pilot implementation of tools focusing on upskilling and reskilling of targeted groups; focusing on digitalisation and greening of economy.

4.Special educational/ training programmes, including for disabled

The Programme will cover explicitly equipment that is necessary for the implementation of the above type of actions (for example electronic devices for the partitipation of disabled).

Expected results:

The actions will support the creation or improvement of jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities through Knowledge and skills cultivation. The results will have long term positive effects on the economic and social development of the area.

CBC Added Value / synergies with other forms of support:

Cooperation will provide enhanced learning opportunities and better understanding of need in entrepreneurship and business modernisation. It will also

encourage economies of scale and the achievement of critical mass to create common potential in the area.

Contribution to macro-regional strategies:

Achievements will contribute to PA 9 (People & Skills) of Danube Macro-regional Strategy. Training and Skills is a cross-cutting issue of EUSAIR.

Horizontal principles

·Horizontal principles relating to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the elimination of inequalities, the promotion of gender equality, and the fight against discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be taken into account and applied in the design and implementation of the proposed actions. Application will include the special selection criteria, monitoring through Project Reports and evaluation objectives.

·The types of actions are going to contribute to SDG's 4, 8 and 9.

The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

2.1.1.2. Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
3	RSO4.2	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot actions	3	10
3	RSO4.2	RCO85	Participations in joint training schemes	participations	75	300

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
3	RSO4.2	RCR81	Completion of joint training schemes	participants	0.00	2021	270.00	MIS	

2.1.1.3. Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

Target groups of funded actions can be both individuals and organisations that will be involved or positively affected by the actions. As a result, they will be more inclusive growth. More concretely, target groups include both public and private actors covering a wide range of different sectors and levels of governance, such as policy makers, public administrations, urban and spatial planners, operators, internal security, infrastructure providers, resource management, international organisations, and associations as well as enterprises including SMEs. Target groups also include all population groups, which will benefit from improved local and regional governance processes.

Beneficiaries, i.e. project partners benefitting from programme funds, can be any entity having legal personality that contributes to the actions above. This includes e.g. local, regional and national public authorities, regional development agencies, EGTCs, development agencies, NGOs, education and training organizations as well as universities and research centers.

2.1.1.4. Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3

N/A

2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

The actions of the Specific Objective will be implemented through grants. The use of financial instruments is not planned because the nature of the interventions concerned is related to the production of a public good and not a classic profitable activity.

2.1.1.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO4.2	ERDF	145. Support for the development of digital skills	2,000,000.00
3	RSO4.2	ERDF	137. Support for self□employment and business start□ups	1,600,000.00

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO4.2	ERDF	01. Grant	3,600,000.00

Table 6 - Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO4.2	ERDF	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	3,600,000.00

2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO4.6. Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation

Reference: point (e) of Article 17(3)

Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion, and social innovation.

2.1.1.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

Cross border needs and opportunities:

The CBC area has rich natural, cultural heritage and history. Winter ski and sandy beaches resorts are 3 hours away and some of the most interesting mountainous and wetland ecosystems of the SE Europe along with some of the most emblematic historic and cultural sites lie among them. It offers a unique cultural context that includes historical sites, antiquities, folkloric and traditional heritage.

The territorial analysis shows that tourism is developed in (more or less) individual destinations mainly at the coastal area in Greece and at the winter sport resorts in Bulgaria. Despite the variety of resources, the touristic "consumption" is mainly based on mass tourism while cross border tourism mobility and exploration is limited. The tourism system is also vulnerable to Climate Change due to the limitation of snow period shortens the season of winter resorts and also floods, fires and heatwaves threaten insular and coastal destinations. Deficits in quality of accommodation and absence of special touristic facilities, poor promotion and lack of infrastructures that promote inclusiveness (for disabled and elders) limit the tourism development potential.

Strategy Response:

Exploitation and valorisation of the added value of sustainable tourist growth, in areas where the cbc cooperation has a significant comparative advantage, such as eco and adventure tourism, cultural tourism, gastro/ wine tourism. Also, it will support the adaptation of destinations to the standards of Silver and inclusive tourism, in order to upgrade competitiveness and reach new, promising markets. In accordance with National and Regional Tourism Development Strategies, it will support territorial integration and networking aiming to encourage tourists visiting the area. Special attention will be given to a) promotion of inclusive/silver tourism destinations, as prominent tourism development activities that will provide multiple benefits to local development, b) adaptation of destination and tourism facilities to Climatic Threats, and c) upgrade of skills and digital competences of local micro and social enterprises.

The following thematic fields be funded:

·Support of tourism destination and attractions networking across borders, including the creation of thematic networks and routes with the aim of seasonal and geographical expansions of sustainable tourism.

·Adaptation of tourism sector to cl. change and inclusiveness.

·Promotion of digitization of tourism resources and processes and adoption of digital and innovative tools in local tourism industry

·Upgrade of human resources and entrepreneur skills in tourism

·Link tourism with local supply chain in the context "farm to fork" EU strategy.

Supported actions should create territorial impact for the CBC area and not have only local effects. Priority should be given to supporting actions that

promotes broader access to culture and cultural heritage, mobilize new audiences through digital tools and services, with particular attention to facilitate inclusion of vulnerable people. Specifically in the field of valorization of the Cultural heritage, the Programme will follow the "EUROPEAN QUALITY PRINCIPLES for EU-funded Interventions with potential impact upon Cultural Heritage" (drafted by ICOMOS under the Commission mandate of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018) and also apply the integrated, sustainable and inclusive guiding principles of the New European Bauhaus, to which references in the text can enrich these considerations.

Indicative types of Action:

One (1) Targeted Call and one (1) Open Call

A. TARGETED CALL: Direct Support to MSMEs and Social Cooperative Enterprises of Solidarity Economy, in culture and tourism value chain.

With aim to support micro and small enterprises (having limited access to major financial tools) to invest in small scale infrastructure, renovation, equipment, upskilling and digital applications that will lead to:

·Upgrade of inclusiveness of provided services (specially for elderly and disabled)

·Creation/Provision of innovative touristic services

·Implementation activities of Climate Change Adaptation Business Plans

·Cbc networking of enterprises and data exchange

·Promotion of use of local products in the supply chain of tourism services and networking of local (CBC area) producers with touristic enterprises.

The support to SME's or Social Enterprises, given in the forms of Grants through Small Project Funds instrument and with durability period shorted to three years (Art. 65 CPR).

The programme authorities acknowledge the availability of risks and uncertainties that could affect the capacity of the supported businesses to deliver results in the long term. The following main risks are identified: ongoing economic disturbances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, potential market fluctuations and downturns caused by conflicts close to the CBC region, insufficient experience working in a cross-border context. The administrative capacity of MSMEs is the issue where the Programme authorities could support enterprises to a great extent by providing tailor-made trainings and other dedicated events complemented by parallel mentoring and counselling if their project performance and monitoring outcomes indicate potential issues.

B. OPEN CALL: Networking and promotions of cultural sites including the upgrade of attractions and sites and small-scale infrastructure interventions.

Examples of actions supported from open Calls (non-exhaustive list):

1.Implementation of Joint Strategic Sustainable Tourism Development plans for inclusive and silver tourism, including the upgrade of attractions and sites.

2.Technological and digital platforms and tools for cooperative tourist development and promotion, strengthening digital governance of tourist destinations cooperation for joint touristic utilization.

3.Networking and highlight of historical and cultural border Heritage (including fortifications, historic war sites, etc.).

4.Improvement of Climate Resilience of Tourist destinations / Infrastructure.

5.Promotion of thematic routes in areas such as geo-tourism etc.

Expected results:

The actions will improve the quality of the touristic product in the area and will enhance the opportunities for the exploitation of new markets (referring to silver and inclusive tourism as well). Networking and cooperation will provide added value through the connection of cross border destinations with diverse and/or complementary characteristics.

Through the selection process of projects special attention will be given to the promotion social inclusion and social innovation in tourism. In this respect the proposals should demonstrate the positive impact on the local communities and how could materialise the aim of strengthening the local economy.

CBC Added Value / synergies with other forms of support:

The actions will strengthen the overall tourist product of the CBC area. Cooperation will also address sustainable tourism from a policy perspective, fostering knowledge exchanges, identifying best practices, and building on the results of other projects.

Contribution to macro-regional strategies:

Achievements will contribute to PA 3 (Culture & Tourism) of Danube Macro-regional Strategy and to the Pilar 4 (sustainable tourism) of Adriatic-Ionian Strategy and the relative flagships.

Horizontal principles

-Horizontal principles relating to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the elimination of inequalities, the promotion of gender equality, and the fight against discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be taken into account and applied in the design and implementation of the proposed actions.Application will include the special selection criteria, monitoring through Project Reports and evaluation objectives.

-The types of actions are going to contribute to SDG's 10, 11 and 12.

-The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

2.1.1.2. Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
3	RSO4.6	RCO77	Number of cultural and tourism sites supported	cultural and tourism sites	2	12
3	RSO4.6	RCO02	Enterprises supported by grants	enterprises	5	45
3	RSO4.6	RCO01	Enterprises supported (of which: micro, small, medium, large)	enterprises	5	45

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
3	RSO4.6	RCR77	Visitors of cultural and tourism sites supported	visitors/year	0.00	2021	8,000.00	Supported Project	
3	RSO4.6	RCR03	Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) introducing product or process innovation	enterprises	0.00	2021	28.00	SPF beneficiary	

2.1.1.3. Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

Target groups of funded actions can be both individuals and organisations that will be involved or positively affected by the actions. As a result, they will be more inclusive growth. More concretely, target groups include both public and private actors covering a wide range of different sectors and levels of governance, such as policy makers, public administrations, urban and spatial planners, operators, internal security, infrastructure providers, resource management, international organisations, and associations as well as enterprises including SMEs. Target groups also include all population groups, which will benefit from improved local and regional governance processes.

Beneficiaries, i.e. project partners benefitting from programme funds, can be any entity having legal personality that contributes to the actions above. This includes e.g. local, regional and national public authorities (ministries of tourism), regional development agencies, EGTCs, Destination management Organisations or Agencies, intermediaries, enterprises including SMEs and social enterprises, associations, development agencies, NGOs, education and training organizations as well as universities and research.

Beneficiaries for Targeted Calls would be:

- a Sole beneficiary under a Small Project Fund scheme. Final recipients will be existing SMEs or relevant civil society organisations activated in tourism sector and providing tourism services

2.1.1.4. Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3

N/A

2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

In the context of SO4.6 and due to the specific nature of the actions, no financial instruments are planned. The activities concerned are not directly linked to the profitability of the enterprises.

2.1.1.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO4.6	ERDF	165. Protection, development and promotion of public tourism assets and tourism services	7,200,000.00
3	RSO4.6	ERDF	027. Innovation processes in SMEs (process, organisational, marketing, co□creation, user and demand driven innovation)	3,200,000.00

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO4.6	ERDF	01. Grant	10,400,000.00

Table 6 - Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO4.6	ERDF	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	10,400,000.00

3. Financing plan

Reference: point (f) of Article 17(3)

3.1. Financial appropriations by year

Table 7

Reference: point (g)(i) of Article 17(3), points (a) to (d) of Article 17(4)

Fund	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	Total
ERDF	0.00	11,473,458.00	11,657,757.00	11,845,740.00	12,037,484.00	9,974,507.00	10,173,999.00	67,162,945.00
Total	0.00	11,473,458.00	11,657,757.00	11,845,740.00	12,037,484.00	9,974,507.00	10,173,999.00	67,162,945.00

3.2.Total financial appropriations by fund and national co-financing

Reference: point (f)(ii) of Article 17(3), points (a) to (d) of Article 17(4)

Table 8

Policy objective	Priority	Fund	Basis for calculation EU support (total eligible cost or public contribution)	EU contribution (a)=(a1)+(a2)	Indicative breakdown of the EU contribution		National contribution (b)=(c)+(d)	Indicative breakdown of the national counterpart		Total (e)=(a)+(b)	Co-financing rate (f)=(a)/(e)	Contributions from the third countries
					without TA pursuant to Article 27(1) (a1)	for TA pursuant to Article 27(1) (a2)		National public (c)	National private (d)			
2	1	ERDF	Total	28,297,767.00	26,446,512.00	1,851,255.00	7,074,442.00	7,074,442.00	0.00	35,372,209.00	79.9999994346%	0.00
3	2	ERDF	Total	24,865,178.00	23,238,485.00	1,626,693.00	6,216,295.00	6,216,295.00	0.00	31,081,473.00	79.9999987131%	0.00
4	3	ERDF	Total	14,000,000.00	13,084,113.00	915,887.00	3,500,000.00	3,500,000.00	0.00	17,500,000.00	80.0000000000%	0.00
	Total	ERDF		67,162,945.00	62,769,110.00	4,393,835.00	16,790,737.00	16,790,737.00	0.00	83,953,682.00	79.9999992853%	0.00
	Grand total			67,162,945.00	62,769,110.00	4,393,835.00	16,790,737.00	16,790,737.00	0.00	83,953,682.00	79.9999992853%	0.00

4. Action taken to involve the relevant programme partners in the preperation of the Interreg programme and the role of those programme partners in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation

Reference: point (g) of Article 17(3)

In line with article 8 of CPR, the preparation of the Interreg programme should involve a partnership with competent regional and local authorities, economic and social partners, relevant bodies representing civil society.

Relevant bodies representing civil society, such as environmental partners, non-governmental organisations and bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, fundamental rights, rights of persons with disabilities, gender equality and non discrimination were actively involve in planning process. In particular National Confederation of People with Disabilities of Greece, Representative of the Bureau of the Research Committees of Universities. Employees organisations, the Bulgarian Commission for Protection against Discrimination, NGOs representatives from Bulgaria are participating in Programming Committee of the Programme, in which both the territorial review and the draft programme was consultated.

The preparation of the Programme started in April 2020 with the adoption of the "Concept paper for Greece-Bulgaria Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2021-2027" by the representatives of the two National Authorities.

Accordingly, in the last semester of 2020 the Programming Committee (PC) with delegates from both countries was formed. Members of the PC were divided in voting members and observers. Voting members include National Authorities (ministries), regional governance and local governance associations. Workers and Academic representatives are also included from the Bulgarian side. Observers (non-Voting members) include Ministries (social policy and education, health, culture and tourism, infrastructures, environment and climate change), business associations and chambers, higher education (Greece) and civil society associations (including associations for the support of disabled).

For the programming process, an external consultant was hired by the Managing Authority (MA). The programming was a process consisting of two phases:

Phase 1: Territorial and Socio-Economic Analysis (first drafted in December 2020) and

Phase 2: Defining the strategic orientation of the future programme and drafting the contents of the programme document (first drafted in July 2021)

Due to the COVID-19 restriction measures, PC meetings were hosted on-line or conducted by written procedures. The first meeting was held on the 28th of September 2020. During the session, the framework of the upcoming Programming Period was analysed by the Management Authority. The time plan for the preparation of the Programme and the methodology was also presented. According to planning in mid-November of 2020 the 1st public consultation regarding the thematic focus was held with on-line questionnaires. More than 210 individuals participated it this first consultation, representing more than 60 administrative, social, economic, or educational actors in the area. Regarding the significance of the Policy Objectives, P.O.2 (25%) ,1 (23%) and 5 (22%) were considered as more suitable for the area with almost equal distribution in both countries, while P.O3 (15,5%) was considerable higher on the Bulgarian side (24%). Amongst the types of actions that were considered most suitable for the territory "Protection, promotion and sustainable development of the natural environment and ecological resources of the territory" and "Strengthening business cooperation, promoting joint products/services and supporting their internationalization" were evaluated as most important from both sides. "Development of thematic networks for tourism/culture and promotion of joint products" was the most popular selection in Bulgaria and "Networking local markets in the cross-border region", "Better and safer transport links, reducing the isolation of border settlements through a network of roads in the cross-border region" were evaluated high. In Greece "labour mobility" and "SME support was evaluated high by participants.

Following that, an initial Strategy Orientation was adopted, and a second round of consultation was conducted in the 1st semester of 2021, during the finalisation of the 1st draft Programming Document. In

this round, the consultation focused on beneficiaries and included National and Regional Authorities, agencies, and key stakeholders (including civic society associations members of the PC Committee). The aim in this round was to determine the actual interest on the cooperation priorities of the key stakeholders and evaluate their readiness to support effective and efficient project proposals. Actions taken in this round included interviews, meetings and questionnaires. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, no public attendance event was organised and the MA promoted the activities through the Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020 site.

After this cycle of consultation in autumn 2021, the two National Authorities held three (3) online meetings and had constant close cooperation to finalise to evaluate the scope, feasibility, and maturity of the proposals and to agree on the programme's strategy.

Accompanying the drafting process, a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) has been conducted in order to provide information about the potential effects of the programme on the environment. The Sea process started in September 2021. According to national regulations, the SEA included a parallel consultation process regarding the environmental effects of the new programme.

The Monitoring Committee is going to be set up in line with the provisions of Art. 29 of the Interreg regulations. It shall consist of both representatives of the national level and the regions participating in the cooperation programme. Furthermore, representation of policy areas relevant for the programme and participating regions shall be ensured

5. Approach to communication and visibility for the Interreg programme (objectives, target audiences, communication channels, including social media outreach, where appropriate, planned budget and relevant indicators for monitoring and evaluation)

Reference: point (h) of Article 17(3)

In line with the Regulation, percentage at least of 0.5% the budget will be allocated for the communication purposes and visibility, after common agreement with the major stakeholders of the Programme.

Communication and Visibility Strategy will be built in two levels. A) Programme Level and B) (supported) Projects' level.

The Communication and Visibility will be specialised by an action plan elaborated by the MA. Important part would have the communication officer and the programme website. Lessons learned from the 2014-2020 period as well as the input from the external evaluator will be taken into consideration. The overall target is to highlight the Programme Greece – Bulgaria 2021-2027 and the EU support.

General communication targets are:

i. to inform potential project partners and beneficiaries regarding the financing opportunities

ii. to ensure transparency in the management of resources and utilization of projects.

iii. to inform citizens, enterprises and public of the outcomes, the results and the achievements of the Programme and the ESIT, to increase visibility of the EU contribution and to increase awareness regarding the needs and opportunities of the CB area.

Target groups are (not exhaustive list): General public; Local, regional, national, European, but also specialized mass-media, which contributes to the promotion of the Programme or projects funded by it; European Commission and the European Parliament; Local, regional and national authorities; Economic and social partners; Universities and research institutions, research community, educational organizations; Chambers, Federations and Associations; NGOs and Networks of citizens

Communication media and channels includes:

1. Advertising/ promotion in the media / communication (TV, radio, press, internet); 2. Advertising / promotion on social media / social media; 3. Printed and electronic / audiovisual productions (brochures, banners and material for events, guides and support leaflets for beneficiaries, videos / documentaries for works and actions, TV spots, audio productions, models of entries, etc.); 4. Promotional materials (calendars, bookmarks, USB sticks, bags, etc.); 5. Promotional activities (dissemination events and information events, road shows, participation in exhibitions, visits to projects, etc.); 6. Participation in European campaigns (Europe in my Region, Green trip Project, etc.); 7. Actions of a press office (press releases, press releases, press conferences, channelling of printed and electronic information material to journalists, etc.); 8. Information meetings, technical meetings with beneficiaries, potential beneficiaries, workshops, meetings of the Monitoring Committee, co-organization of informative events with stakeholders, etc.; 9. Official presence on the internet and social media (official MA/JTC website, e-newsletter, YouTube channel, Facebook account, etc.); 10.Awareness surveys (quantitative, telephone and web) and qualitative surveys (face-to-face interviews or questionnaires) on beneficiaries and beneficiaries of the Programme.

For the implementation of the information and communication actions of the Programme, a sequence of communication phases of a graduated nature is foreseen, according to the "life cycle" of the Programme (introduction, preparation, development, maturation, closure), as follows:

First Phase: General information on the Programme and its participation processes.

Second Phase: Creation of knowledge about the Programme and its projects in the various target audiences, easy access to the individual actions and opportunities it offers.

Third Phase: Dissemination of achievements and results, promotion of Good Practices.

To ensure visibility of projects activities and results in a uniform, effective and organized way a guidebook will be prepared.

Communication and Visibility task will be monitored and evaluated by a set of proper output, result and impact indicators, such as number of events organised, participants in events, statistical data from access to programme's website, etc. The detailed Intervention Logic will be specified by a Communication Action Plan.

For SPF, the beneficiary (intermediate body) will design and elaborate its own communication strategy that will implement through the funds allocated for the management of the SPF.

Operations of Strategic Importance (OSI) will also elaborate specific approaches in line with the practical toolbox for communicating OSI 2021-2027. This will be applied with special publicity, communication and visibility actions of the Strategic Projects.

6. Indication of support to small-scale projects, including small projects within small project funds

Reference: point (i) of Article 17(3), Article 24

Support to small projects could be applied under a Small Project Fund instrument as defined in the Article 2(9) of the CPR and Article 24 of the Interreg Regulation is planned by Interreg CBC Interreg Greece – Bulgaria Programme to be used targeting, as final recipient, Micro and Small enterprises and additionally new entrepreneurs, social enterprises, and civil society. Main scope is to use Small Project Funds in order to support entities that have mostly limited access to finance through mainstream financial tools provided by mainstream Programmes (and RRF).

Small Project Fund instrument will be used to cover the following Actions:

- Support of micro /small enterprises capacities to transit to Circular and Resource Efficient business models.
- Support of micro / family enterprises and start-ups for upskilling, growth of digital competencies and modernisation of their organisational capacity (mentoring, coaching etc.).
- Support of micro / family enterprises and civil association in culture and tourism value chain to promote sustainable and inclusive tourism.

The total budget allocation of resources in Small Project Funds is estimated at 8.000.000 (10% of the total available budget). The management of SPF will be assigned to a relevant to the subject of each action body (as a sole beneficiary).

The Small Project fund beneficiaries should ensure that the following conditions are applied:

(a) establishes a non-discriminatory and transparent selection procedure;

(b) applies objective criteria for the selection of small projects, which avoid conflicts of interest;

(c) assesses applications for support;

(d) selects projects and fixes the amount of support for each small project;

(e) is accountable for the implementation of the operation and keeps at its level all supporting documents required for the audit trail in accordance with Annex XIII to Regulation (EU) 2021/1060; and

(f) makes available to the public the list of the final recipients which benefit from the operation.

The SPF would cover the bellow categories of cost for the recipients:

- Professional Equipment and small infrastructure / construction works
- Training and educational activities
- Certifications
- Studies, business plans and technical reports
- Market research and promotion activities

7. Implementing provisions

7.1. Programme authorities

Reference: point (a) of Article 17(6)

Table 9

Programme authorities	Name of the institution	Contact name	Position	E-mail
Managing authority	Managing Authority European Territorial Cooperation Programmes (Hellenic Ministry of Development and Investments)	Angeliki Bouziani (Ms)	Head of the Managing Authority of INTERREG Programmes	interreg@mou.gr
Audit authority	Financial Control Committee (EDEL) / General Accounting Office of the State (Hellenic Ministry of Finance)	Athinais Tourkolia (Ms)	Head of Financial Audit Committee	gddde@mof-glk.gr
Group of auditors representatives	Greece: The Audit Authority is the Financial Control Committee (EDEL), Bulgaria: Audit of EU Funds Executive Agency, Ministry of Finance	Ms A. Tourkolia	Head of EDEL / Greece	gddde@mof-glk.gr
Body to which the payments are to be made by the Commission	Special Service "Certifying and Verifying Authority of co-financed Programmes" (Hellenic Ministry of Development and Investments)	Vassiliki Alesta (Ms)	Head of Certifying Authority	spa@mnec.gr

7.2. Procedure for setting up the joint secretariat

Reference: point (b) of Article 17(6)

In accordance with Article 46(2) of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, the Special Service Managing of the `European Territorial Cooperation` Objective Programmes is appointed as the Managing Authority (MA). After consultation with the participating countries, the MA shall set up the Joint Secretariat (JS), hosted at the Managing Authority, Greek Ministry of Development & Investments. The JS will support and assist the managing authority (MA) and the monitoring committee (MC) in carrying out their respective functions. The joint secretariat will also provide information to potential beneficiaries about funding opportunities under Interreg programmes and will assist beneficiaries and partners in the implementation of operations. Moreover, it may assist the Audit Authority in organizing the meetings of the group of auditors, provide information to potential beneficiaries about funding opportunities under the programme and shall assist beneficiaries in the implementation of operations.

Based on the successful implementation of the two previous programmes in the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 periods, the MA ensures a smooth transition and institutional stability by maintaining the basic organisational, structural and implementation arrangements already in place (including the location of the JS office in the CBC area) which will ensure that a highly experienced, professional and bilaterally composed JS team will support the Programme also in the future. Taking into account the good programme partnership approach, all JS members are selected in a transparent way by both Member States and are bilingual/trilingual, possessing representative linguistic competence and relevant programme area knowledge.

The Rules of Procedures of the existing Joint Technical Secretariat shall be updated by the Managing Authority in agreement with the Member States participating in the programme in order to ensure adjustment to the new EU legal framework. The body responsible to set up the Rules of Procedure determining the exact functions and the role of the Joint Secretariat is the Managing Authority. The Joint Secretariat will be composed of a balanced number of staff members from the participating Member States.

Info Point

An Information Office shall be set up in Bulgaria as part of NA.The main responsibilities of the Information Office shall be:

a) to provide support to beneficiaries from the Bulgarian side during the preparation of proposals and throughout the period of implementation of operations.

b) to implement information and publicity actions at national level, in cooperation with the Joint Secretariat of the OP.

The Information Office shall be financed by the Programme Technical Assistance budget.

7.3. Apportionment of liabilities among participating Member States and where applicable, the third or partner countries and OCTs, in the event of financial corrections imposed by the managing authority or the Commission

Reference: point (c) of Article 17(6)

Once the MS has reimbursed the managing authority any amounts unduly paid to a partner, it may continue or start a recovery procedure against that partner pursuant to its national law. In the event of successful recovery, MS may use those amounts for the national co-financing of the Interreg programme concerned. The MS will not have any reporting obligations towards the programme authorities, the monitoring committee or the Commission with regard to such national recoveries (Article 52 (4) of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1059).

If the MS does not reimburse the managing authority any amounts unduly paid to a partner, those amounts shall be subject to a recovery order issued by the Commission which shall be executed, where possible, by offsetting to the MS, respectively. Such recovery shall not constitute a financial correction and will not reduce the support from the ERDF or any external financing instrument of the Union to the respective Interreg programme. The amount recovered shall constitute assigned revenue in accordance with Article 21(3) of the Financial Regulation. With regard to amounts not reimbursed to the MA by a MS, the offsetting shall concern subsequent payments to the same Interreg programme. MA will offset about that MS in accordance with the apportionment of liabilities among the participating MSs set out in the Programme in the event of financial corrections imposed by the managing authority or the Commission.

The Partner State will bear liability in connection with the use of the programme ERDF funding as follows:

1. For project-related expenditure granted to project partners, liability will be born individually by each Partner State proportionately, on the basis of the approved project budgets per partner located on each Partner State territory respectively.

2. In case of a systemic irregularity or financial correction (the latter decided by the Commission), the EU Member State will bear the financial consequences in proportion to the relevant irregularity detected on the respective Member State territory. Where the systemic irregularity or financial correction cannot be linked to a specific EU Member State territory, the Member State shall be responsible proportionately to the population of project beneficiaries - per partner country - potentially affected, based on the projection of the specific error rate.

3. For technical assistance expenditure: a). Partner States shall bear joint liability for decisions of the monitoring committee in proportion to their respective share in the technical assistance budget; b) If technical assistance is used directly by a Partner State, this Partner State will bear full liability for this expenditure.

If the MA, or MS becomes aware of irregularities, it shall without any delay inform the liable ans ensure the transmission of information to the audit authority or group of auditors, where relevant.

MSs may decide not to recover an amount unduly paid if the amount to be recovered from the beneficiary, excluding interest, does not exceed EUR 250 in contribution from the Funds. Each Member State shall establish its own national rules regarding the procedure for the recovery of unduly paid funds to beneficiaries directly linked to financial corrections detected by the appropriate authorities within the operations funded under the cooperation Programme. MCs shall in the first instance be responsible for investigating irregularities and for making the financial corrections required and pursuing recoveries. In the case of a systemic irregularity, the MS shall extend its investigation to cover all operations potentially affected.

During the implementation of the Programme the Managing Authority will promote the strategic use of public procurement to support Policy Objectives (including professionalization efforts to address capacity

gaps).

Beneficiaries should be encouraged to use more quality-related and lifecycle cost criteria. When feasible, environmental (e.g. green public procurement criteria) and social considerations as well as innovation incentives should be incorporated into public procurement procedures.

Care will be given during the evaluation process of the proposed projects, through a specific criterion that will be mentioned in the documentation, on the part of the beneficiaries, of how to cover their long-term obligations. The documentation will be taken into account during the implementation of the projects using the risk assessment as a tool, in order to prevent situations and make appropriate corrective actions in this direction

8. Use of unit costs, lump sums, flat rates and financing not linked to costs

Reference: Articles 94 and 95 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR)

Table 10: Use of unit costs, lump sums, flat rates and financing not linked to costs

Intended use of Articles 94 and 95 CPR	Yes	No
From the adoption, the programme will make use of reimbursement of the Union contribution based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates under the priority according to Article 94 CPR	☐	☒
From the adoption, the programme will make use of reimbursement of the Union contribution based on financing not linked to costs according to Article 95 CPR	☐	☒

Appendix 1

A. Summary of the main elements

Priority	Fund	Specific objective	Estimated proportion of the total financial allocation within the priority to which the simplified cost option will be applied in %	Type(s) of operation covered		Indicator triggering reimbursement		Unit of measurement for the indicator triggering reimbursement	Type of simplified cost option (standard scale of unit costs, lump sums or flat rates	Amount (in EUR) or percentage (in case of flat rates) of the simplified cost option
				Code(1)	Description	Code(2)	Description			

(1) This refers to the code for the intervention field dimension in Table 1 of Annex 1 CPR

(2) This refers to the code of a common indicator, if applicable

Appendix 1

B. Details by type of operation

C. Calculation of the standard scale of unit costs, lump sums or flat rates

1. Source of data used to calculate the standard scale of unit costs, lump sums or flat rates (who produced, collected and recorded the data, where the data is stored, cut-off dates, validation, etc):

2. Please specify why the proposed method and calculation based on Article 94(2) is relevant to the type of operation:

3. Please specify how the calculations were made, in particular including any assumptions made in terms of quality or quantities. Where relevant, statistical evidence and benchmarks should be used and, if requested, provided in a format that is usable by the Commission:

4. Please explain how you have ensured that only eligible expenditure was included in the calculation of the standard scale of unit cost, lump sum or flat rate:

5. Assessment of the audit authority or authorities of the calculation methodology and amounts and the arrangements to ensure the verification, quality, collection and storage of data:

Appendix 2

A. Summary of the main elements

Priority	Fund	Specific objective	The amount covered by the financing not linked to costs	Type(s) of operation covered		Conditions to be fulfilled/results to be achieved triggering reimbusresment by the Commission	Indicator		Unit of measurement for the conditions to be fulfilled/results to be achieved triggering reimbursement by the Commission	Envisaged type of reimbursement method used to reimburse the beneficiary or beneficiaries
				Code(1)	Description		Code(2)	Description		

(1) This refers to the code for the intervention field dimension in Table 1 of Annex 1 to the CPR and Annex IV to the EMFAF Regulation.

(2) This refers to the code of a common indicator, if applicable.

B. Details by type of operation

Appendix 3: List of planned operations of strategic importance with a timetable - Article 22(3) CPR

In Priority 2 -SO3.ii: Two Strategic Projects will be included:

-**Improvement of mobility and travel safety on the CB area**. The project will include a. Completion of the Main Road Communication of the town of Smolyan, b. Upgrade of remaining parts in the Road Axis Xanthi - Echinos (Melivia – Echinos) and the digitalization, inter-connection, infrastructure and equipment for Border control systems and security IMS.

The Project will be implemented by a Target Call that will be launched by the 2nd semester of 2022. The approval of the Projects is expected by the first semester of 2023 and the duration of projects will last until the end of 2028 (72 months).

Enhancing Train Mobility in the CB Area (Modernization of the railway line Radomir – Kulata / Intelligent dynamic system for detecting incidents and monitoring the of railway network in real time. - Resilient Plan for Interregional rail trips in the Cross-Border area). The Project will be implemented by a Target Call that will be launched by the 2nd semester of 2022. The approval of the Projects is expected by the first semester of 2023 and the duration of projects will last until the end of 2028 (72 months).

DOCUMENTS

Document title	Document type	Document date	Local reference	Commission reference	Files	Sent date	Sent by
Map of the Programme GR-BG 2021-2027	Map of Programme Area	26-Jul-2022		Ares(2022)5415744	Map of the Programme GR-BG 2021-2027	27-Jul-2022	Κωστοπούλου, Μαρία
Programme snapshot 2021TC16RFCB021 1.1	Snapshot of data before send	27-Jul-2022		Ares(2022)5415744	Programme_snapshot_2021TC16RFCB021_1.1_en.pdf	27-Jul-2022	Κωστοπούλου, Μαρία