

3rd Session: European Territorial Cooperation Programmes (Interreg) design in the Balkans and S.E. Europe in the Programming Period 2021-2027 & Capitalization of good practices

Cooperation programmes in the Balkans have been a key factor in building social capital and trust between people and institutions in this area. Interreg programmes, whether bilateral, transnational, with participation of EU member and non-member states, bring countries and regions in the Balkans together, sharing knowledge and experiences and creating opportunities for development in the most important fields of EU policies.

The new programming period of EU Cohesion Policy 2021–27 offers the possibility to promote a smarter Europe in Balkan area through governance and institutional capacity-building.

The EU new policies are focused on green and digital transformation of Europe. It is obvious that these policies are better implemented on a transnational level and the best tools for this are Interreg Programmes. The budget for these Programmes should be increased in the new programming period.

The services of the Ministry for Interior (Macedonia-Thrace) have set up a Master Plan for the period 2019-2025. Its main objectives are:

- to strengthen transnational co-operation for sustainable co-development in the Balkans and South East Europe,
- to exploit our regions' and countries' comparative advantages, and
- to transform them into competitive advantages, aiming at a Balkan, Mediterranean and South East Europe of fair, democratic and equitable cooperation through the synergies between the transnational (BalkanMed, ADRION, MED, MED ENI, Black Sea) and the cross-border Interreg Programmes among the 12 Balkan countries with close cooperation with Mediterranean countries.

Balkan Med Transnational Programme was established through a bottom-up approach, at the initiative of the participating countries. This Programme has sought to identify potential functional areas for regional cooperation and act as a substantial “convening power” to bring together the relevant actors to develop and begin implementation of a coherent strategy in the Balkan Peninsula in the thematic areas of entrepreneurship, innovation and environment. It is of great importance for all regions and countries in the wider area to continue its efforts in the new Programming Period.

The BalkanMed area has a joint historical past that spans through centuries. Most importantly, the broader BalkanMed region forms a unified and functional geographical area with uninterrupted, dense and two-way flows of people, goods and services in the fields of economy, tourism and culture.

Dis- continuation of the Balkan-Med Programme in 2021-2027 programming period will be a significant loss for the developmental potential of the area.

The development perspective of the Balkan region cannot be imagined without the institutional and targeted presence of the European policies, especially designed for this region and implemented in cooperation with a leading role for the countries of the region.

This area has enormous political & geographical importance for the whole Europe. Cooperation programmes play an important role, which is very well reflected in number of Interreg programmes, and numbers of beneficiaries successfully implementing projects and participating in calls for proposals. Collaboration among partners should be maintained in the next programming period, with simplification of procedures and reduction of costs for control and administrative burden. Also, visibility of Interreg programmes and projects should be increased.