

CROSS-BORDER ORIENTATION PAPER

for IPA CBC cooperation programmes with the participation of regions of Bulgaria, North Macedonia and Turkey



Executive Summary

This Orientation Paper is a document of the European Commission (EC) aimed at launching a discussion on the **2021-2027 Interreg IPA¹ CBC cooperation programmes:**

- **Bulgaria - Republic of North Macedonia**
- **Bulgaria - Serbia**
- **Bulgaria - Turkey**

It is the result of collective work led by REGIO D.1 with the support of the other REGIO services as well as other line DGs (in particular DG NEAR), the EEAS and the EU delegations in the region. It does not represent the negotiating position of the EC, but is destined to provide ideas, options and orientations on the thematic focus of the future programmes.

The guiding principles for drawing this Orientation Paper are the following:

- The **Functional Area** principle: The definition of a functional area is a key element for cooperation in larger regions. Cooperation should concentrate on areas defined by joint characteristics, challenges and development opportunities, and the need and potential to address them jointly with the aim of delivering tangible results. Structural interventions should therefore not be strictly limited to the administrative borders of the programme. Depending on the topic, the geography can vary. For some topics, the solution can be found if partners outside the programme area are involved, while for some other topics the solution can be very local. What matters is that the projects can benefit to the cross-border area. This new approach proposed in the post-2020 regulations has the benefit of enabling more efficient interventions based on the experiences of a wider range of partners.
- The **Thematic Concentration** principle: In view of the limited budgetary resources and the requirement to focus support in areas where European Union (EU) funds can achieve the highest benefit, the programmes should concentrate on thematic key areas where joint actions can have the biggest impact. In doing so, EU funds would focus on a limited set of objectives and policy areas, thus achieving the highest possible impact, in terms of efficiency of funding and result orientation (article 15 of the Regulation COM (2018) 374²).
- Coherence with **Macro-Regional Strategies**: Macro-regional strategies have become an integral part of EU regional policy. The future IPA CBC cooperation programmes with the participation of cross-border regions in Bulgaria, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey are destined to closely link to the 'European Strategy for the Danube Region' (EUSDR) and the 'European Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region'

¹ IPA – Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance

² Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments - COM(2018) 374.

(EUSAIR). Macro-Regional Strategies such as the EUSDR and the EUSAIR mean an integrated framework endorsed by the European Council, which may be supported by the Cohesion Policy funds among others, to address common challenges faced by a defined geographical area relating to Member States and third countries located in the same geographical area, which thereby benefit from strengthened cooperation contributing to achievement of economic, social and territorial cohesion. The 2021-2027 Interreg programmes should be ready – where relevant – to support actions arising from the macro-regional strategies, provided that these actions also contribute to the specific objectives of the programme area. The coordination between programmes and macro-regional strategies can ensure bigger territorial impact and better visibility. This, however requires good and proactive coordination. Projects serving both the macro-regional strategies and the cross-border cooperation can be funded either as “group of projects”, complementing each other and creating synergies, as well as “single projects”. In order to promote macro-regional strategies the programme may consider one of these mechanisms: specific selection criteria (ex. bonus points if the project contributes to a macro-regional strategy); earmarking of a budget or specific calls.

- This IPA Orientation Paper was also designed to support the new strategic orientations (in particular as regards the implementation of the six Flagship Initiatives) presented in the Communication of February 2018 ‘Western Balkan Strategy’ where the European Commission reaffirmed the firm, merit-based prospect of EU membership for the Western Balkans (A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans- COM(2018) 65 final³)

Considering the external pressures on the EU budget and the EC’s desire to increase effectiveness and efficiency, this Orientation Paper for new IPA-Interreg programme(s) will aim at:

- a) Consolidating genuine cooperation at the level of programme governance (programme bodies) and locally;
- b) Re-inforcing the strategic dimension of the future programmes by linking them more strongly with existing strategic frameworks and political initiatives such as the macro-regional strategies and applying a top-down approach for part of their envelopes (through strategic/thematic/flagship projects);
- c) Fostering cooperation among European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programmes in the Danube region and the Adriatic and Ionian basin (Bulgaria/Greece and Bulgaria/Romania) to facilitate the achievement of the objectives of the EUSDR and the EUSAIR;
- d) Refocusing on functional areas and avoiding duplication, fragmentation and overlapping with existing transnational programmes (Adriatic-Ionian programme, Danube programme and the Balkan-Mediterranean programme), other IPA-IPA CBC programmes (Serbia-Republic of North Macedonia) and ENI CBC programmes (Black

³ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf

Sea Basin Programme) etc- this is how the effectiveness of the programme will be increased;

- e) Supporting institutional cooperation through two new horizontal Interreg specific objectives 'a better Interreg governance' and 'a safer and more secure European Union' and encouraging more extensive and structured ways to develop a common vision for the cross-border region, possibly using public participation tools and practices (citizens' consultations, town hall meetings, competitions, etc);
- f) Exploring the use of simple financial instruments with a grant component to make them sufficiently attractive and manageable while taking into account the local constraints and providing related procurement assistance;
- g) Exploring the possibility of establishing joint territorial instruments adapted to the characteristics of the border region, especially with a view to tackling specific situations such as depopulation;
- h) Putting in place mechanisms to finance small projects or people-to-people projects that make a strong contribution to the social and civil cohesion of the cross-border region.

These objectives comply with EU priorities.

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A. Introduction

1. The objective of this paper is to support the programming process for the 2021-2027 period for the three borders:
 - Bulgaria- Republic of North Macedonia
 - Bulgaria-Serbia
 - Bulgaria-Turkey.
2. The EC considers that the concerned territories have gained considerable experience in cooperating with different stakeholders, including municipalities, universities, vocational schools, civil society, regional tourists organisations, business support structures etc. Consequently, the EC proposes to give continuity to the current 2014-2020 cooperation programmes and focus on increasing the impact of these new programmes on the socio-economic development and improved connectivity of these cross-border areas.
3. This document sets out key characteristics of the above-mentioned cross-border regions and outlines options and orientations for the programming of the 2021-2027 period. It can serve as a basis for discussion between partner states, programme authorities and the EC. It also can provide a point of reference for the Task Forces that are planning the forthcoming cooperation programmes.
4. This paper is based on the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis of the current programmes⁴, the impact evaluation report from the 2007-2013 period ('lessons learned')⁵ and the implementation evaluation report for the 2014-2010 period⁶. The paper also draws on the recommendations from the 'Border needs Study'⁷, the European Semester report for Bulgaria

⁴ The Final Report of the 2019 Implementation Evaluation of Interreg IPA CBC Programmes confirms that despite recent progress, the cross-border areas are still lagging other parts of the countries. The report concludes that the core challenges described in the SWOT analysis remain the same

⁵ Performance of Impact Evaluation of the IPA Cross-border Programmes 2007-2013 managed by the Republic of Bulgaria, November 2016 + handbook of best practices: <http://www.ipacbc-bgrs.eu/news/impact-evaluation-ipa-cross-border-programmes-2007-2013>

⁶ http://www.ipacbc-bgrs.eu/sites/ipacbc-bgrs-105.gateway.bg/files/uploads/annual_reports/revised_bg_serbia_executive_summary.pdf
http://www.ipacbc-bgtr.eu/sites/ipacbc-bgtr-105.gateway.bg/files/uploads/2nd_call/revised_bg_tr_executive_summary.pdf
http://www.ipa-cbc-007.eu/sites/ipacbc-bgmk-105.gateway.bg/files/revised_bg_fyrom_executive_summary.pdf

⁷ 'Border Needs Study' (collecting solid evidence to assess the needs to be addressed by Interreg Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes') conducted in 2016

including its Annex D⁸ and other available data (OECD, JRC, Eurostat and other specific DG studies⁹). However, it should be emphasised that the amount of data available at NUTS 3 (statistical equivalent for candidate countries) level is much more limited for the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey than it is for EU Member States. In that context, the data provided by the socio-economic analysis and public consultations to be carried out by the national authorities will be extremely important to complete the analysis of the border areas and their main challenges.

5. The cooperation area of the Bulgaria-Serbia programme falls partly within the 'EU Strategy for the Danube Region' (EUSDR). The cooperation area of the Bulgaria-Republic of North Macedonia programme will fall partly within the relevant 'EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region' (EUSAIR). Therefore, the objectives and priorities of Macro-Regional Strategies should be considered for these programmes. In addition, cooperation with its governing bodies should be sought. The impact of the cooperation programmes should be seen as well in the light of the contribution they might give to reaching the objectives of the Macro-Regional Strategies concerned by seeking coordination with other existing Interreg programmes (Bulgaria/Romania and Bulgaria/Greece), IPA – IPA programmes (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance) and mainstream (ERDF and IPA) programmes in the region.

The EUSAIR focuses on the following policy areas (Pillars):

Blue Growth: Blue technologies; Fisheries and aquaculture; Maritime and marine governance and services

Connecting the region: Maritime transport; Intermodal connections to the hinterland; Energy networks

Environmental quality: The marine environment; transnational terrestrial habitats and biodiversity

Sustainable tourism: Diversified tourism offer (products and services); sustainable and responsible tourism management (innovation)

The EUSDR focuses on the following policy areas (Pillars and Priority Areas):

Connecting the region: Waterways mobility; Rail-Road-Air mobility, Sustainable Energy, Culture & Tourism

Protecting the environment: Water quality, Environmental Risks, Biodiversity & Landscapes

Building prosperity: Develop the Knowledge Society, Support the competitiveness of enterprises, Invest in people and skills

https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/studies/2016/collecting-solid-evidence-to-assess-the-needs-to-be-addressed-by-interreg-cross-border-cooperation-programmes

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2019-european-semester-country-report-bulgaria_en.pdf

⁹ See full list under section 'Existing sources of information'

6. This paper also considers the strategic framework for EU relations with IPA countries. This concerns the conclusions of the Western Balkans Summit in Poznan (July 2019), the 2019 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy, the measures in support of a Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans and the Sofia declaration of May 2018. The paper also considers the activities carried out in the framework of the Regional Cooperation Council to which the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey and Bulgaria participate. Therefore, the design of the new Interreg IPA CBC programmes should refer to these activities.
7. The paper proposes orientations for all five Policy Objectives (POs) that will drive investment in the 2021-2027 programming period. Nevertheless, there is a need to find the right balance between the (potential) wide range of actions envisaged and the need for thematic concentration to increase the impact of available funds. Future programmes should consider the lessons learned from previous periods and focus assistance on actions that bring clear cross-border added value and capitalize on previously achieved results.
8. Cross-border cooperation is much broader than Interreg programmes alone. The instruments available are not only the EU funds (Interreg and other Cohesion Policy programmes or Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) which may invest in cooperation), but also European and national legal instruments (European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation – EGTC – ,regional agreements, bi-lateral agreements, etc) as well as several policies. The future Interreg IPA CBC programmes should therefore not only aim to fund projects, but should also seek to reduce cross-border obstacles. To do so, the EC legislative proposal on Interreg¹⁰ includes a specific objective dedicated to cross-border governance (including capacity building and contribution to the Macro-Regional/ Sea-basin Strategies). That is why this paper goes beyond the traditional activities of Interreg programmes (i.e funding projects) and covers governance issues (i.e reducing cross-border obstacles) as well.
9. When it comes to cross-border cooperation activities financed by the EU via the IPA-Interreg programmes, cooperation is also in its infancy compared to other parts of the EU. The level of interaction and population flows cannot be compared with that in more integrated border regions in Western Europe – a combination of limited physical access and historical isolation means that cooperation levels start from a relatively low base.

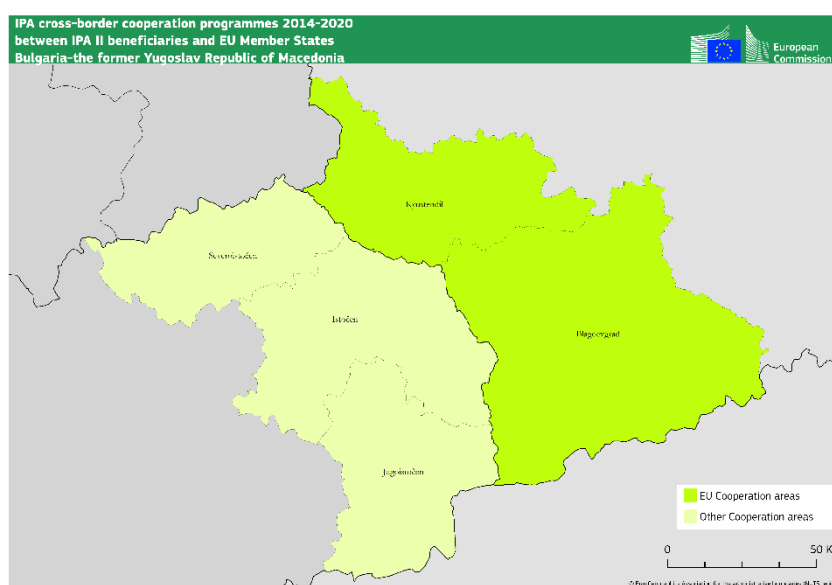
¹⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/regional-development-and-cohesion_en

10. This orientation Paper was consulted with other relevant EC services and the EEAS.

B. Territorial dimension (as proposed in the previous period)

11. The proposed geography for the three Interreg IPA CBC programmes is identical to the set-up of the two previous generations of programmes (2007-2013 and 2014-2020). The only difference is that two new districts (Vratsa and Toplica) have been added to the programme area of the Bulgaria – Serbia programme in the 2014-2020 period. However, no further enlargements are proposed for the 2021-2027 period.
12. The main characteristics of the three cross-border regions (as described in the SWOT analysis¹¹ of the programmes for 2014-2020) are the following:

Bulgaria - Republic of North Macedonia

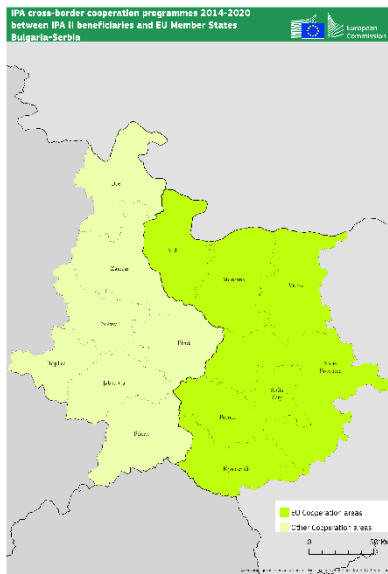


13. The programme area (Bulgaria- Republic of North Macedonia programme) is in the South-Central part of the Balkan Peninsula. It covers a territory of 18 087 km² and has a population of about 980,000 inhabitants. The length of the border between Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia is 165 km.
14. More than half of the programme area is mountainous with forests occupying over 40% of the land. There is a concentration of population, economic and social activities in several regional centres, in particular Blagoevgrad and Kyustendil (on the Bulgarian side) as well as in Kumanovo, Shtip and Strumica (on the side of

¹¹ http://www.ipa-cbc-007.eu/sites/ipacbc-bgmk-105.gateway.bg/files/annex_com_decision_c2017_5820_cbc_programme_bg-fyrom_18082017.pdf

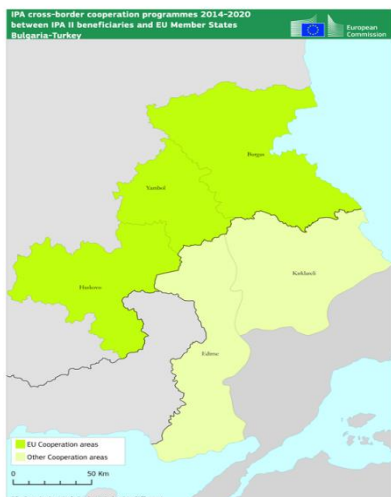
North Macedonia). There are also sparsely populated rural and peripheral areas in the mountains closer to the border.

Bulgaria - Serbia



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15. The programme area (Bulgaria- Serbia programme) borders Romania (to the north) and the Republic of North Macedonia (to the south). It covers a territory of 43 933 km² and has a population of about 2 million inhabitants. The length of the border between Bulgaria and Serbia is 341 km.
 16. The programme area is characterized by sparse population, small size of the settlements and a limited number of bigger cities such as Pirot, Niš and Dimitrovgrad (Serbian side) and Vidin, Montana and Vratsa (Bulgarian side). It has a diverse landscape (hills and mountains but also wide plains).

Bulgaria – Turkey (as proposed in the current programming period 2014-2020)



17. The programme area (Bulgaria- Turkey programme) is located in South East Europe in the Balkan peninsula. It covers a territory of about 29 000 km² and has a population of about 1. 5 million. The length of the border between Bulgaria and Turkey is 288 km.
18. The main cities are Burgas (about 211 000 inhabitants), Yambol (about 72 000) and Haskovo (about 92 000) (in Bulgaria) and Edirne (about 148 000) and Kırklareli (about 62 000) (in Turkey). The Eastern Rhodope mountains on the Bulgarian side of the territory represent the highest altitude of the border area. It borders the Aegean Sea (Turkey) and the Black Sea (Bulgaria/Turkey).

Analysis of the border areas and main challenges

19. The three programme areas share many challenges such as a low GDP, negative demographic trends ('depopulation'), a relatively high level of unemployment, a weak infrastructure endowment and a high vulnerability to natural hazards (more details on the main challenges are included under part D). All these factors represent major impediments to cross-border cooperation.
20. Yet, the programmes also share an important natural and cultural heritage, which can create new opportunities linked to the exploitation of complementary assets over the borders (Impact Evaluation Report 2007-2013¹²).

Economy:

21. Even though Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey have experienced positive growth in recent years, the economic performance of these countries remains lower than the EU average. According to the latest available data from Eurostat¹³, the GDP per capita as % of the EU average reaches 16 % (Republic of North Macedonia), 19 % (Serbia), 31 % (Turkey) and 50 % (Bulgaria). The unemployment rate in Turkey (11%) is lower than that of the Western Balkans.
22. The economies of the border areas are even weaker than the national average. This is particularly the case for the Bulgaria – Serbia programme area that is located in one of the poorest regions of Europe. By contrast, the socio-economic situation on the Turkish side of the border (Bulgaria – Turkey programme) is more favourable.

Demographic trends:

23. Demographic trends in the region over recent years show a continuous decline mostly due to ageing and net migration. Eurostat data on 'population change' (including natural population change and the crude rate of net migration) gives the following data at national level: Bulgaria (- 7, 1%), Turkey (+ 14, 7%), North Macedonia (0, 9%) and Serbia (- 5, 4%).
24. Data at NUTS 3 level shows that the most affected areas are in Bulgaria: Vidin (Bulgaria/Serbia border) and Kyustendil (Bulgaria/Serbia and Bulgaria/North Macedonia borders).

¹² Performance of Impact Evaluation of the IPA Cross-border Programmes 2007-2013, managed by the Republic of Bulgaria – Impact Evaluation Report, November 2016

¹³ Eurostat, key figures on enlargement countries – 2019 edition:

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/9799207/KS-GO-19-001-EN-N.pdf/e8fbd16c-c342-41f7-aaed-6ca38e6f709e>

Natural resources:

25. The Western Balkan countries and Turkey are vulnerable to various natural hazards including floods, storms, landslides, forest fires, drought and earthquakes. There is also in the region an important potential to advance in energy efficiency, improve recycling rates and protect biodiversity.

Connectivity:

26. There are still important gaps in the road and rail transport networks, particularly at the borders between Bulgaria-North Macedonia and Bulgaria- Serbia. ICT connectivity is improving but there are also important challenges ahead in order to overcome the urban/rural divide and provide broadband connexions to all users (schools, public institutions and businesses etc).

Cooperation:

27. Cooperation in the region is still in its infancy compared to other parts of the EU and the level of interaction of population flows cannot be compared with that of more integrated border regions of Western Europe. Cooperation between EU Member States and IPA countries also present additional complexities because of differences between the legal frameworks.
28. Yet cooperation is growing. The Nišava Euroregion between the districts of Pirot (Serbia) and Sofia (Bulgaria) was launched in 2005. There is also a long history of cooperation in the field of nature protection and sustainable use of common natural resources in the framework of the EU Green Belt Initiative (Balkan Green Belt). Cross-border tourism between Bulgaria and Turkey is important and increasing.

Potential relevance of the Policy Objectives for 2021-2027:

29. In the 2014-2020 period, the three programmes concentrated the EU support on a limited number of priority axes i.e Environment and Tourism as well as Youth (Bulgaria - Serbia, Bulgaria - Turkey) and Competitiveness (Bulgaria - North Macedonia).
30. For the preparation of the post 2020 IPA Border Orientation Papers, interviews were carried out with the staff of the Joint Secretariats. Their outcome evidenced a high interest for the PO1, PO2 and PO4. Concerning PO5, its apparent low relevance is explained by the difficulties of the implementing bodies to understand the rationale of PO5 and its potential.

<i>Classification grid¹⁴</i>	PO1 smarter Europe	PO2 greener low-carbon Europe	PO3 a more connected Europe	PO4 a more social Europe	PO5 a Europe closer to citizens
Bulgaria – Republic of North Macedonia	+++	+++	+	+++	+
Bulgaria – Serbia	++	+++	+	+++	+
Bulgaria – Turkey a	++	+++	+	+++	+

31. The interviews also demonstrated that the two INTERREG specific objectives ‘a better Interreg governance’ and ‘a safer and more secure Europe’ were highly relevant. This is particularly relevant for the Bulgaria-Turkey programme (migrant crisis¹⁵).

	<i>‘a better Interreg governance’</i>	<i>‘a safer and more secure Europe’</i>	<i>‘building up mutual trust’</i>
Bulgaria – Republic of North Macedonia	++	+++	++
Bulgaria – Serbia	+++	+++	++
Bulgaria – Turkey	++	+++	+++

¹⁴ Based on the expert’s report, these two programmes have been characterised against the five INTERREG policy objectives and the two INTERREG specific objectives. The classification was provided as follows; the “+” means generic relevance with limited support potential, “++” means strong relevance but limited support potential due to insufficient financial possibilities and missing relevant Priority Axis/Specific Objective in the 2014.

¹⁵ The refugee crisis between 2015 and 2017 represented a great challenge in the cross-border areas. The total number of arrivals from Turkey to the EU in 2019 is over 22 800 people.

C. Orientations linked to challenges

32. Orientations are structured in view of the proposed objectives for Cohesion Policy (PO 1 to 5, cf. Art. 4 (1) of the proposed CPR:

- a. *PO1: A smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation*
- b. *PO2: A greener, low-carbon Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate adaptation and risk prevention and management*
- c. *PO3: A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility and regional ICT connectivity*
- d. *PO4: A more social Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social rights*
- e. *PO5: A Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of urban, rural and coastal areas and local initiatives*

33. In addition, there are two Interreg-specific objectives (ISO) proposed, cf. Art. 14 (4) and (5) ETCR:

- f. *ISO1: A better Interreg governance*
- g. *ISO2: A safer and more secure Europe*

C.1. PO1: A smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation

34. Research, technological development and innovation seem to be a thematic field difficult to implement programmes for cooperation as stakeholders' capacity is limited (Performance of Impact Evaluation of the IPA CBC programmes 2007-2013 mentioned above)). According to the latest SME Policy Index for the Western Balkan countries and Turkey¹⁶, **SMEs** make up 99, 7 % of all enterprises in the region. Moreover, over 90 % of these SMEs are micro-enterprises. The service sector is the dominant sector contributing on average to about 50 % of the GDP in terms of value added and generating most employment (over 50 % on average).

35. In terms of **Research and Development (R&D) density**, Eurostat¹⁷ data show that despite significant improvement of the situation in the last ten years, all four countries are far from the EU average (2, 07 %): Bulgaria (0,96%), Republic of North Macedonia (0, 36 %), Serbia (0, 87 %) and Turkey (0, 96 %). According to the

¹⁶ SME Policy Index – Western Balkans and Turkey 2019 – Assessing the implementation of the small business act for Europe

¹⁷ Eurostat, key figures on enlargement countries – 2019 edition:

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/9799207/KS-GO-19-001-EN-N.pdf/e8fbd16c-c342-41f7-aaed-6ca38e6f709e>

OECD¹⁸, the competitiveness of the Western Balkans is still hampered by the following factors: (i) Regional skills gaps (low level of enrolment in early childhood education and a persistent digital divide), (ii) slow transition to a knowledge-based society (chronic underfunding of science, technology and innovation, weak linkages between business community and academia), (iii) Demography (high level of 'brain drain') and (iv) the quality of institutions and access to public services (in particular education and health).

36. Consequently, public investment in research, development and innovation should be focused on a few carefully chosen priority domains, where the impact can be the greatest. In the framework of the Innovation Agenda for the Western Balkans¹⁹, work on developing **smart specialisation** at national level has started in Serbia (2016) and North Macedonia (2018). The smart specialisation strategy envisaged for Bulgaria (at national level) indicate that there is a potential in sectors such as ICT and life sciences. In Turkey, the smart specialisation strategy for the border region with Bulgaria is not yet developed.
37. The SWOT analysis of the 2014-2020 programmes (see part B) are useful to get a picture of the challenges in the three cross-border areas. The Final Report of the 2019 Implementation Evaluation of Interreg IPA CBC Programme²⁰ confirms that despite recent progress in the development in all three programme areas, the border regions are still lagging behind other parts of the countries. The report concludes that the core challenges described in the SWOT analysis remain the same.
38. For the programme Bulgaria – Republic of North Macedonia, the SWOT analysis of the 2014-2020 programme points to a diverse economic structure and sectoral disparities. The lagging regions are the North East Region (North Macedonia) and Kyustendil district (Bulgaria). The share of the agricultural sector is higher in the Republic of North Macedonia. The dominance of the manufacturing sector is higher on the Bulgarian side. The service sector (including tourism) is growing fast in both countries.
39. For the programme Bulgaria – Serbia, the SWOT analysis of the 2014-2020 programme points to very low trends of economic development. Agriculture holds a substantial share of GDP on both sides of the border. The industry on both sides of the border is represented mainly by mining. Industrial production has decreased

¹⁸ Competitiveness and Private Sector Development – Competitiveness in South East Europe – A policy outlook 2018

¹⁹ Supporting an Innovation Agenda for the Western Balkans, tools and methodologies, Joint Research Centre 2018

²⁰ Implementation evaluation of Interreg IP CBC programmes 2014-2020, managed by the Republic of Bulgaria – Revised Final Report, May 2019

significantly. The region's geographical location and rich natural resources contribute to the development of the service sector.

40. For the programme Bulgaria – Turkey, the SWOT analysis of the current programme points to challenges such as a declining economy, rising unemployment and out migration.

ORIENTATIONS:

The current framework conditions for innovation and competitiveness of SMEs in the programme areas are challenging and the impact of earlier actions funded by the IPA Cooperation programmes on socio-economic development has been limited (see Impact Evaluation Report 2007-2013 mentioned above). However, there is potential to help the development of Balkan value chains through cross-border partnerships between territories with similar specialisations.

Such projects would complement:

- Projects financed under the respective national/regional programmes supporting innovation and competitiveness in Bulgaria, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey. Full complementarity between those programmes and the cross-border cooperation programmes need to be ensured.

- Activities organised by the JRC in the framework of macro-regional strategies through targeted scientific support to the Danube Strategy

Possible areas of investments include:

*- The provision of **support to local SMEs** taking into account also the activities under the Enterprise Europe Network to face challenges related to their size, limited resources (such as skills and finance) or industry and market conditions. This could take the form of voucher schemes to purchase cross-border business advice. The use of financial instruments may be considered to facilitate the access of SMEs to finance, with generic support in the form of grants only used if justified and avoiding competition with the repayable forms of support / ensuring that it does not crowd out FI support.*

*-The **enhancement of links, networks and clusters** taking into account also the activities funded under the European Cluster Collaboration Platform and the Danube Strategy between businesses active in similar fields.*

*-The promotion of **entrepreneurship education** taking into account also the activities under the European Institute of Innovation and Technology to build the competencies needed for successful start-up and growth of enterprises.*

C.2. PO2: A greener, low-carbon Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate adaption and risk prevention and management

Energy transition:

41. The consumption of energy from renewable sources is still limited in the programme areas. According to the latest data (2017) from Eurostat²¹, the share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption is close to 13 % in Turkey, 19 % in Bulgaria, 20 % in the Republic of North Macedonia and 21 % in Serbia. By contrast, the EU 2020 target is 20 %.
42. The potential to invest in renewables energy and energy efficiency in the region is important. For example, the SWOT analysis of the current programme for Bulgaria - Republic of North Macedonia found that the cross-border region has a strong potential for power generation from renewable sources such as hydropower, solar, biomass, geothermal waters and wind.

Climate change and risk prevention:

43. According to the Food and Veterinary Organisation, the programmes areas are vulnerable to various natural hazards including floods, storms, landslides, forest fires and drought and earthquakes²².
44. The Republic of North Macedonia is among the most arid countries in Europe. The SWOT analysis of the 2014-2020 programme Republic of North Macedonia - Bulgaria expects both countries to be most severely impacted by climate change in Europe.
45. The SWOT analysis of the 2014-2020 programme Bulgaria - Serbia also refers to fires as a specific risk for the natural heritage of the region. In the case of Serbia, the FAO estimates that the economic impact of droughts on agriculture is much higher than for floods.
46. The SWOT analysis of the 2014-2020 programme Bulgaria - Turkey refers to the risks of floods posed by Maritsa river (the longest river in the Balkan peninsula) and Tundzha/Tunca River Basins.
47. Finally, the seismic risk is important in the region. The map produced by EU researchers in the framework of an EU funded project (Share project)²³ shows that

²¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/9799207/KS-GO-19-001-EN-N.pdf/e8fbd16c-c342-41f7-aaed-6ca38e6f709e>

²² Food and Veterinary Organisation (FAO) – guidelines on ‘drought risk management’:
<http://www.fao.org/3/i9148en/i9148EN.pdf>

²³ Seismic hazard harmonization in Europe: <http://www.share-eu.org/>

the Western Balkans, Bulgaria and Turkey are among the most exposed regions of the continent to earthquakes risks.

Circular economy:

48. According to Eurostat²⁴, recycling rates of municipal waste in the region are very low ranging from 0, 3 % (Serbia), 9, 2 % (Turkey) and 34, 6 % (Bulgaria) compared to the EU 2020 target of 50 %. Data for the Republic of North Macedonia is not available.

Biodiversity- natural heritage:

49. Economic development is putting additional strains on biodiversity in the programme areas. As mentioned above, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey share a long history of cooperation in the field of nature protection and sustainable use of common natural resources in the framework of the EU Green Belt Initiative (Balkan green belt) and the current programmes.

50. The area covered by the Bulgaria – Republic of North Macedonia programme is rich in forests with diverse flora and fauna, comparatively clean soil, fertile land, thermal waters and numerous mountains. Two of the three national parks of Bulgaria are located in the region (National parks Rila and Pirin). The latter is also included in the UNESCO convention on protection of cultural and natural heritage.

51. The area covered by the Bulgaria - Serbia programme is also rich in natural parks, protected areas and natural reserves, many of which are already included (or in the process of being included) in the Natura 2000 network. The Dragoman Marsh in Bulgaria (close to the border with Serbia) is a valuable habitat for rare and endangered plant and animal species and an important resting place for migrating birds.

52. The area covered by the Bulgaria - Turkey programme hosts a number of nature parks and protected areas: the Strandja Nature Park (Bulgaria), the Gala Lake National Park (Edirne province in Turkey), the Kasatura Korfezi Nature Reserve (Kırklareli, Turkey) and the Saka Lake Nature Reserve (Kırklareli province in Turkey). The Sakar hills (Bulgaria) are one of the last remaining and most important places of refuge for the Imperial Eagle in Europe. The programme territory is also rich in water and mineral resources. It borders the Aegean Sea (Turkey) and the Black Sea (Bulgaria/Turkey).

²⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/t2020_rt120/default/table?lang=en

Air pollution:

53. A major cause for air pollution problems in the region are heating systems, traffic, the energy sector (power plants) and industry. Air pollution remains high in major cities of the programme areas: Burgas (Bulgaria), Niš (Serbia), Kumanovo (Republic of North Macedonia) and Edirne (Turkey).

ORIENTATIONS:

The areas of investments proposed below take into account the joint statement on 'clean energy transition in the Western Balkans'²⁵ and support the region's efforts to develop a Green Agenda for the Western Balkans²⁶. Previous programmes have put an important emphasis on environment. Any further assistance should build on previous results with the objective to valorise and multiply them (see Impact Evaluation Report for 2007-2013).

Energy transition: Possible areas of investment may include:

- Consider investing in **cross border small-scale energy generation from renewable sources and smart energy systems** if investment and distribution conditions are favourable. This could for instance take the shape of simple FIs with a grant component to make them sufficiently attractive and manageable. In that case, complementarity with other sources of funding (national funding, ERDF funding for Bulgarian national/regional operational programmes, IPA national programmes, Regional Efficiency Programme for the Western Balkans etc) should be ensured. For further details on the orientations in relation to the use of financial instruments please refer to section E – governance)
- Where possible, exchange of best practices across borders for developing **energy efficiency** including in SMEs or public buildings

Climate change and risk prevention: Possible areas of investments may include:

- **Joint climate change measures** with a strong focus on sustainable and eco-friendly measures (such as green infrastructure (e.g flood plains and reforestation).
- Consolidate existing cooperation through the development of joint policies, protocols, procedures and approaches **on risk prevention and rapid response management** to many potential emergencies (such as wildfires, flooding, natural disasters, severe weather evacuations, health emergencies).

Circular economy:

²⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2014-2019/hahn/announcements/speech-commissioner-johannes-hahn-ministerial-meeting-clean-energy-transition-western-balkans_en

²⁶ https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-19-3669_en.htm

Ensure that resources are used in a more sustainable and efficient way, possible areas of investments may include:

- Joint actions and campaigns to raise awareness and support sustainable consumption practices and behaviour (reuse and recycling of waste) in border regions*
- Sharing of best practices to build the capacity of stakeholders involved in the transition to circular economy*
- Joint measures to increase resource efficiency and to promote the circular economy in SMEs (if this is their primary objective, otherwise support should be focused under PO 1) such as advisory services, training on business-to-business circular procurement or 'circular' hubs.*

Bio-diversity and pollution:

*- Support actions to **jointly protect nature and biodiversity**. Ensure that actions are more strategic in their approach and that 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, ecological connectivity, ecological quality of water bodies, invasive plants, ground and lake water pollution. Maximise the positive contributions that can be made to protecting and developing natural resources (large number of Natura 2000 and Ramsar sites, large mammal habitats, landscape connectivity, green infrastructure networks). In this context, invest also in:*

-The protection of wetlands (for example the Dragoman Marsh at the border between Bulgaria and Serbia) so that they also function as a natural filter, to remove pollution from the watershed, to reduce flooding and improve the habitat quality for birds and other wildlife (for example in the Sakar hills at the border between Bulgaria and Turkey)

*-Develop 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. Joint capacity-building measures for environmental authorities should be considered.*

Air pollution:

-Measures to improve air quality such as green infrastructure, joint awareness campaigns as well as monitoring

-Decontamination and rehabilitation of industrial sites and contaminated land on both sides of the border (for example in the case of mining waste)

C.3. PO 3 A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility and regional ICT connectivity

Mobility:

54. The lack of comprehensive network connections from Bulgaria to Serbia and the Republic of North Macedonia creates important obstacles to trade and to the economic development as well as social and territorial cohesion of border regions.
55. The Republic of North Macedonia and Bulgaria are committed to improving the infrastructure on Corridor VIII (Sofia - Skopje) which crosses the southern Balkans into Bulgaria. By contrast, the road transport connections between Bulgaria and Turkey are more developed. The traffic flow is also more important on this border. Road safety and the quality of transport infrastructure is also a major issue in all four countries with road fatality rates much higher than the EU average and intelligent transport systems (including cross-border data) still to be developed.
56. Cross-border rail services are still underdeveloped particularly between Bulgaria - Republic of North Macedonia and Bulgaria - Serbia. The rail infrastructure between Bulgaria - Turkey is in the process of modernisation (with support from the ERDF on the Bulgarian side and IPA on the Turkish side). Investments are planned on both sides of the border Bulgaria – Serbia for both road and rail along corridor 10 (linking Sofia and Belgrade).

Digital connectivity:

57. Digital connectivity is equally important in today's globalised world. Despite recent progress, digital society is still lagging behind in the programme areas compared to the EU average. Eurostat data (2018)²⁷ show that the 'percentage of households with internet access at home': Bulgaria (72 %), Turkey (84 %), North Macedonia (79%) and Serbia (73%) compared to the EU average of 89 %. Moreover, the IT network is often weaker in the rural cross border areas.

ORIENTATIONS

IPA CBC programmes can play an important role for coordinated actions aimed at improving cross-border mobility and connectivity, in line with the Connectivity Agenda for the Western Balkan countries and in complement to other funding (ERDF, national IPA, Western Balkans Investment Framework etc). Depending on the funding available and on the basis of a commonly agreed strategic framework, possible investments could include:

²⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/9799207/KS-GO-19-001-EN-N.pdf/e8fbd16c-c342-41f7-aaed-6ca38e6f709e>

Mobility:

- Targeted support for projects that tackle complex issues and aim at improving cross-border mobility in the programme area. Depending on the financial allocation available this could include: new/improved border crossing points, coach lines, public bicycle and car sharing schemes etc.

- Strategic projects (list of priority connections and planned operations) can be a submitted already at the adoption phase of the programme.

- Open calls for proposals can be used to select operations that would complement the above pre-identified operations.

Digital connectivity:

- supporting ICT infrastructure (WIFI spots on municipal buildings) mainly in rural areas (white spots / no interest of private providers), complementary to national programmes funding and EU initiatives (WIFI 4 EU).

- improving general conditions for joint e-solutions for instance in education (digital literacy), health care, business support and cultural cooperation.

C.4. PO4: A more social Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social rights

Demographic trends:

58. As already described under part C, the demographic trends in Bulgaria and the Western Balkan countries show a continuous decline over recent years mostly due to ageing and net migration. The values for Eurostat²⁸ indicators (2016) on 'population change' (including natural population change and the crude rate of net migration) gives the following data at national level: Bulgaria (- 7, 1%), Republic of North Macedonia (0,9%) and Serbia (- 5,4%). Data at NUTS 3 level show that the most affected regions are Vidin in Bulgaria (Bulgaria – Serbia border) and Kyustendil (at the borders Bulgaria - Serbia and Bulgaria – Republic of North Macedonia). The situation in Turkey is better (+ 14, 7%).

59. At NUTS 3 level, the data for the three programmes areas are as follows:

Bulgaria – Republic of North Macedonia:

Bulgaria: Kyustendil (- 20,7%), Blagoevgrad (- 8,1%)

Republic of North Macedonia: North East region (0, 3%), East region (- 3,5%), South-East region (0%)

²⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/RCI/#?vis=nuts3.population&lang=en>

Bulgaria – Serbia:

Bulgaria: Vidin (- 26,3%), Vratsa (- 19,3%), Sofia region (- 12,3%), Pernik (- 13,5 %), Kyustendil (- 20,7%), Montana (- 18,5 %)

Serbia: no data available

Bulgaria – Turkey:

Bulgaria: Burgas: (-2,9%), Yambol:- (- 12,6%), Haskovo (-12,6%)

Turkey: Edirne (- 2,1%), Kirklareli (+ 13, 5%)

60. According to the latest data from Eurostat²⁹, the proportion of the population below the age of 15 in Bulgaria, Serbia and North Macedonia is in close to the EU average (15; 6%). By contrast, Turkey has one of the highest % of young population below age 15 among OECD countries (23, 6%).

Education:

61. Despite significant progress in the last five years, Eurostat reports that tertiary educational attainment (2017)³⁰ remains lower than the EU 2020 target of 40 % (27, 8 % in Bulgaria, 30, 6% in North Macedonia, 31, 4 % in Serbia and 27, 3 % in Turkey). The percentage of NEETs (young people not in employment, education or training) is also significantly higher than the EU average (10, 9 %) in all four countries. In the case of Turkey there is also a gender gap as the rate for young men is 14, 6 % and for young women 34, 4 %. For Bulgaria, Eurostat statistics at NUTs 2 level show that tertiary educational attainment is higher than the EU average in the south-west region of Bulgaria (at the border with Serbia and the Republic of North Macedonia).

Employment:

62. The employment performance is considerably lower than the EU average. Eurostat³¹ data on the share (%) of the population employed in 2017 (employment rate) show values of 71, 3% (Bulgaria), 54, 8 % (North Macedonia), 61, 5% (Serbia) and 55, 3 % (Turkey) compared to the EU average of 72, 2 %. The youth and long-term unemployment rate are also higher than the EU average (16, 8%) in Turkey (20, 5 %), Serbia (31, 9 %) and North Macedonia (46, 7%). The youth unemployment rate in Bulgaria is lower (12, 9%). Matching skills with the labour

²⁹ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/9799207/KS-GO-19-001-EN-N.pdf/e8fbd16c-c342-41f7-aaed-6ca38e6f709e>

³⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/9799207/KS-GO-19-001-EN-N.pdf/e8fbd16c-c342-41f7-aaed-6ca38e6f709e>

³¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/9799207/KS-GO-19-001-EN-N.pdf/e8fbd16c-c342-41f7-aaed-6ca38e6f709e>

market requirements is still a challenge and the share of informal employment is high. Labour productivity is increasing in all four countries but remains lower than the EU average. At NUTS 2 level, the highest productivity rate is found in the Southwest region of Bulgaria (higher than 50 % of the EU average).

Cooperation:

63. Cross-border labour mobility in the programme areas is still limited partly due to the differences in the legal frameworks between IPA countries and EU Member States. .

ORIENTATIONS:

Under PO 4 the programmes should establish a more pro-active interaction and convergence with employment programmes operating in their cooperation areas (Impact Evaluation Report 2007-2013).

Other possible areas of investments include:

*-Support more extensive and structured **learning activities** as a vector for building an employment-boosting factor.*

-Mechanisms for active inclusion and improving the employability of vulnerable groups

C.5. PO5: A Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of urban, rural and coastal areas and local initiatives

64. The main urbanisation trends of the three cross-border areas are presented under part B and C of the paper. The cross - border areas are rich in natural and cultural resources, which can create new opportunities (for example in tourism), linked to the exploitation of complementary assets over the borders (Impact Evaluation Report 2007-2013)³².
65. Tourism makes a relatively small share of the economies of Serbia and the Republic of North Macedonia. The OECD³³ points to the following challenges: the lack of an appropriate skilled workforce, the high seasonality of the tourism demand, the lack of less competitive prices (compared to neighbouring countries such as Bulgaria, Croatia or Montenegro), the gaps in transport infrastructure and the limited targeting of markets. By contrast, Turkey is the sixth most popular tourist destination in the world. It has a well-educated workforce and a strong brand. The tourist industry in Bulgaria is one of the most dynamic sectors of the economy.

³² Performance of Impact Evaluation of the IPA Cross-border Programmes 2007-2013, managed by the Republic of Bulgaria – Impact Evaluation Report, November 2016

³³ Fostering Tourism Competitiveness in South East Europe, OECD, February 2016

66. The programme area covering Bulgaria – Turkey includes the ancient city of Edirne (Turkey) dating back to the Neolithic age, the town of Nessebar on the black sea coast (Bulgaria) which is included in the Unesco list of world cultural heritage. Tourism is a very important economic sector on both sides of the border.
67. The cultural/historical heritage of the cross-border region Bulgaria – Republic of North Macedonia is very rich with archaeological sites going back to the Thracians, Romans and Byzantines including a high density of churches. The most famous sites are the Rila monastery (Bulgaria) and the St Joakim Osogovski monastery (Republic of North Macedonia). All forms of tourism can be found: ski, spa, cultural tours, golf, wine festivals etc.
68. The programme area Bulgaria – Serbia is also rich in archaeological sites, monasteries, museums but also festivals etc. Professional cultural institutes are well developed in Bulgaria and Serbia but tourism is still underdeveloped.

ORIENTATIONS:

*Under PO5 interventions shall be based on an **integrated, place-based strategy**, i.e. strategies targeting a specific geographical area, identify common challenges and objectives based on the local needs, developed with appropriate citizen involvement, and endorsed by the relevant urban, local or other territorial authorities or bodies.*

Possible areas of investments can also refer to policy objectives (1-4) and could concern:
*-Investments in **common historical, natural and cultural heritage products and services**.*

Shared resources can also create new opportunities linked to the exploitation of complementary assets across the borders with a positive impact on employment:

-Improvement of the attractiveness of the region as a destination for green tourism and cultural heritage

-The promotion of local products and quality labels through the establishment of a network of local partners

-The preparation of plans and strategies to develop sustainable tourism

-Targeted support for environmentally friendly agricultural and forestry practices on both sides of the border

-Integrated actions targeting the economic, social, cultural and environmental local development needs of the area

-Promote training in vocational and entrepreneurial skills tackling the regional qualified and skilled labour

-Enhance interaction and networking between different actors to stimulate economic activities (development strategies)

Explore the possibility of establishing joint territorial instruments³⁴ adapted to the characteristics of the border regions, especially with a view to tackling specific situations such as rural areas facing similar challenges on both sides of the border.

Town twinnings, urban-rural linkages, and cooperation within cross-border functional urban areas could provide an opportunity for facilitating local authorities' involvement in the EU acquis alignment process while learning from good practices in EU Member States. On the other hand, town twinning can set a framework for creating people-to-people exchanges and thereby involve citizens, universities and civil society.

- It will be important to identify projects of a strategic nature, which will enhance the impact of the programmes on the cross-border regions. In this context, some inspiration could be drawn from the EUSDR and EUSAIR Strategies in cooperation with all neighbouring CBC programmes and with national and regional programmes.

C.6. ISO 2: A safer and more secure Europe

69. Given the continuous arrival of migrants trying to reach the European Union through Turkey (about 22 000 persons between January-July 2019), the programmes should consider the selection of the 'a safer and more secure Europe' specific objective and setting- up respective priorities and measures.
70. The proposed actions of the draft regulation: "...actions in the fields of border crossing management and mobility and migration management, including the protection of migrants..." could all be relevant for the programmes.

ORIENTATIONS:

- Address capability gaps relating to EU external borders identified by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and by EU customs.

• ISO 2 to support EU policies on integrated border management so as to strengthen security of EU external borders and to protect supply chains. In close coordination with IPA special national envelopes, cooperation programmes can support the upscaling and replication of border crossing point's infrastructures that can help the setting-up the Integrated Border Management (IBM) on EU's external borders.

Integrate people with a migrant background / foster cohesive and inclusive societies regardless of ethnicity, nationality, legal status, gender, sexual orientation, religion and disability.

³⁴ While the establishment of an ITI for an IPA-CBC programme could be challenging due to the complexity of the legal/administrative framework in the IPA countries, there is experience of Local Action Groups (LAG)-like partnerships in IPA countries. The IPA-CBC programme could use such experience during the possible application of Community Led Local Development in the 2021-2027 period

- *ISO 2 to support small-scale reception, health, education and housing infrastructure in cross-border areas while long-term integration measures to be primarily financed by the cohesion mainstream programmes.*

Manage disaster risk better, by improving assessment, prevention, preparedness and response.

- *For the Cohesion policies, these needs are essentially covered by PO2 at the exception of pandemics and emerging infectious diseases. ISO2 to support EU policies on cross-border health threats.*

Improve protection of all public spaces from terrorist attacks and make cities secure and resilient.

- *For the Cohesion policies, these needs are essentially covered by mainstream programmes.*

Protect critical infrastructures, the Digital Single Market and the digital life of citizens against malicious cyber activities.

- *For the Cohesion policies, the needs are essentially covered by mainstream programmes at the exception of ensuring disaster-proofing of infrastructure to support resilience of basic societal functions located in cross-border areas..*

D. GOVERNANCE

D.1. Cross Border Governance in a wider context (and use of the new "Interreg Governance" specific objective)

71. Cross border cooperation is not limited to Interreg programmes. It also builds on policies (e.g. cross border mobility), on legal instruments (e.g. bi-lateral agreements, treaties, European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation) and on funding (including but not limited to Interreg).
72. Actions and orientations set out in this section may be supported by using the programmes budgets for improving governance issues, as proposed in the ETC (Interreg) Regulation.

D.1.1. Working on border obstacles and potentials

73. As illustrated in the Commission Communication "Boosting Growth and Cohesion in EU Border Regions"³⁵, there are many different types of obstacles to cross border cooperation, which have different effects on border regions. There is also

³⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/communications/2017/boosting-growth-and-cohesion-in-eu-border-regions

scope for greater sharing of services and resources in cross border regions. Among the obstacles, legal, administrative and institutional differences are a major source of bottlenecks. Other issues include the use of different languages or lack of public transport for instance. When it comes to unused potential, the shared use of health care or educational facilities could contribute greatly to improving the quality of life in border regions. As the Interreg programmes are instrumental to effective cross border cooperation, they should seek to address these particular obstacles and tap the common potential to facilitate cooperation in this wider context.

ORIENTATIONS:

In order to facilitate cooperation and reduce cross-border obstacles in the cross-border, the programmes could:

- *Identify key obstacles and unused potential and facilitate the process of finding ways to reduce these obstacles or exploit the potential (e.g. by **funding meetings, experts, pilot projects**, etc.).*
- *Reinforce the participation of civil society as much as possible, inviting selected representatives at MC meetings.*
- *Continue organising joint information seminars for potential beneficiaries,*
- *Establish cooperation at the level of projects*
- *Take into consideration the Strategy for the Western Balkans and its goals.*

D.1.2. The use of territorial instruments

74. Where the cross-border area features territorial specificities, such as mountains or scarcely populated areas, territorial instruments can be set-up within each cooperation programme; drawing on resources from several priority axes to allow for the implementation of integrated actions based on place based joint strategies. Its implementation could be delegated to a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC) or a cross border legal body established under the laws of one of the participating countries, provided that the latter is set up by public authorities from at least two participating countries (See Orientations under PO5 of this paper).
75. The only INTERREG Programme which applied an ITI in the 2014-2020 period is the Italy-Slovenia Programme. More concretely the Task Force of the Italy-Slovenia Cooperation Programme decided to introduce in the Cooperation Programme the ITI - Integrated Territorial Investment for the implementation of two pilot actions presented by the GECT GO/EZTS GO: the projects "Building a cross-border

healthcare network” and "Isonzo-Soča cross-border nature park", with a financial allocation of EUR 10.000.000.

76. Meanwhile many border regions between Member States have set up cross-border entities established under national law (e.g. private law associations or public law bodies), under EU law (e.g. European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation – EGTC) or international law (e.g. under bilateral agreements based on the Council of Europe’s “European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities”, also called the Madrid Convention). One example are the Euroregions under national law, which cover many internal EU borders. Many of these entities have a legitimacy (established by public authorities), experience (many exist for years) and expertise (through their past work and staff) that should be put to good use. Evidently, Euregio-type bodies on external borders have typically been set up more recently. Where border regions consider setting up an Euregio-type body, but do not want to go for an EGTC yet, its recommended that they set up a single joint cross-border body. This will make it easier to manage a Small Project Fund in a genuinely cross-border way than by two unilateral bodies on each side of the border.
77. For border regions between Member States and IPA countries, the setting-up of EGTCs is quite challenging as the EGTC Regulation does not apply to third countries and there has not been an obligation to adopt national rules implementing the EGTC Regulation in third countries. EGTC approval authorities in Member States have two options to assess the membership of members from third countries to an EGTC: each third country has approved the prospective members' participation in accordance with either: (a) equivalent conditions and procedures to those laid down in this Regulation; or (b) an agreement concluded between at least one Member State under whose law a prospective member is established and that third country. Option (a) would require the adoption of national legislation to implement EGTC’s [for IPA countries with negotiations opened, add: which the Commission has suggested under Chapter 22 negotiations anyway]. Option (a) would also be fulfilled should the third country have ratified the Madrid Convention and its additional protocols in a way that regional/local authorities are allowed to become member of a grouping established under the law of a neighbouring Member State, as this would also include the national rules implementing the EGTC Regulation in the Member State.
78. Further to this, the experience gained through the implementation of the LAGs(-like) and the stakeholder engaged to the LAGs could be utilized by the IPA CBC Programmes during the possible application of Community Led Local Development in the 2021-2027 period.

79. Finally, the Impact Evaluation Report for 2007-2013 emphasizes that the sustainability of cooperation is likely to be determined by the level of trust and confidence between partners. The report shows that the programmes have contributed to ‘confidence and trust building’ (ranked first in the list of benefits of cooperation) and to the ‘creation or consolidation of a regional identity’.

ORIENTATIONS:

Under the specific objective ‘Interreg Governance’, programmes could consider setting-up territorial instruments such as EGTC and taking into account the specific challenges on the border with third countries.

D.1.3. The use of financial instruments (FIs)

80. FIs in the form of loans, guarantees and equity have gained a lot of importance over the last years. FIs have been used for delivering investments for structural funds since the 1994-1999 programming period. Their relative importance increased during the programming period 2007-2013 when they represented around 5 % of total European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) resources. It has continued to further increase in the 2014-2020 period.
81. Given the leverage effect of FIs, the impact of their support can be greater than grants to the same policy areas. FIs are suitable to all projects, which are financially viable.
82. FIs, especially those targeting SMEs, are most effective when professional financial institutions are employed as they have better competence in assessing viability of applications. To make the support attractive for them, critical mass is needed and conditions of support could not be too complex.
83. FIs consisting solely of loans or guarantees may be implemented directly by MAs themselves, but in practice this approach is rarely used.
84. The framework contains rules on combination of FIs with other forms of support, in particular with grants, as this further stimulates the design of well-tailored assistance schemes that meet the specific needs of Member States or regions.

ORIENTATIONS:

The future programmes are encouraged to explore the possibility of using FIs.

*Given the limited budget of the concerned programmes and the local constraints, consider **simple FIs with a possible grant component** to make them sufficiently attractive and manageable, e.g. providing a “capital rebate” (forgiving a part of the loan) of X% (or more – e.g. linking the amount with income) of the project costs. Such a combination would be greatly simplified in post-2020 period.*

Investments in energy efficiency and support to SMEs appear to have a high potential for using FIs: the eligible costs are easy to define, the instrument could be relatively simple and implementation could be fast.

D.1.4. Links with macro-regional strategies

85. The EUSDR is relevant for the Bulgaria-Serbia programme. The EUSAIR will be relevant for the Bulgaria-North Macedonia programme.
86. The alignment of cross border programmes to macro-regional strategies is a 'win-win' approach. Clearly, macro-regional strategies will benefit from the experience, the partners and the funds of cross border programmes. But cross border programmes will also benefit from such an alignment:
 - a. their impact will be bigger, when they participate in a structured development policy as set by a macro-regional strategy framework across a wider territory which they are part of,
 - b. the project pipeline will be improved as project ideas will have political support,
 - c. they will increase visibility by political leaders, decision-makers and citizens, as well as the various Commission services and other EU institutions
 - d. they will improve the social and economic development in the macro-region they are located in and the actions of the relevant strategy will also have a positive impact on the cross border area. In particular, the contribution to macro-regional strategies does not mean a reduction of the budget available for the programme as it is clear that every project should also benefit to the cross border functional area.

ORIENTATIONS:

Where relevant, the programmes are expected to contribute to the objectives of the relevant Macro-Regional Strategies.

*This requires a good and pro-active **coordination with the governance structures of the Macro-Regional Strategies** (i.e. following the developments of the Macro-Regional Strategies, being in contact with the National Contact Points, etc.).*

*This requires a good and pro-active **coordination with the macro-regional strategies and relevant stakeholders** (i.e. following the developments of the macro-regional strategies, being in contact with the National Contact Points, etc.).*

Different types of projects could be funded, for example (i) "coordinated projects", which are part of a set of coordinated action(s) and/or project(s) located in several

countries participating in a macro-regional strategy (two or more countries), and are part of a joint macro-regional action creating a cumulative effect; several programmes can contribute to the funding of these projects; or (ii) single projects, where one programme is funding one project, the impact of which is relevant on the entire macro-region and therefore creates synergies.

One of following mechanisms could be considered: specific selection criteria (e.g. bonus points if the project contributes to a macro-regional strategy); earmarking of a budget; specific calls; or labelling (e.g. ex-post identification of projects that could be replicated).

*With a view to achieve efficiency and coherence of investments coordination of all ETC programmes in the region is crucial and might be achieved by establishing a **regional network of ETC cooperation programmes and MRS governing structures** (Governing Board (GB) and Thematic Steering Groups (TSG) members), organizing joint information seminars for potential beneficiaries, highlighting differences, complementarities and possibilities of cooperation between programmes*

D.1.5. Links with other existing strategies

87. Cross-border cooperation cannot be done in isolation. It has to be framed in existing strategies (e.g. Western Balkans, national, regional or sectoral). Ideally, there should be a dedicated cross-border strategy based on reliable cross-border data, politically supported and in line with stakeholders' views. It is a useful exchange forum and a necessary step for sustainable and structural cooperation (i.e. a Monitoring Committee is not sufficient as its focus is on funding and not on designing a development strategy with strong political support). Whilst some borders have such strategies, it is not always the case. And even when there are such strategies, they are often only partly implemented with the Interreg programmes.

ORIENTATIONS:

Support more extensive and structured ways to develop a common vision for the cross-border region, possibly using public participation tools and practices (citizens' consultations, townhall meetings, competitions, etc).

When such cross-border strategies exist, consider to better embed the Interreg programmes in these strategies with clear actions and results (e.g. through an appropriate intervention logic and indicators).

When such strategies do not exist yet, consider establishing them.

Finally, programmes should be better coordinated with existing macro-regional, national, regional or sectoral strategies (e.g. with an analysis on how to translate these in a cross-border context). Therefore set out a coherent overview of all existing strategies (i.e. have a mapping of the strategies affecting the border area).

D.1.6. Role of existing cross-border organisations

88. Many regions have cross-border entities established under EU law (e.g. European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation – EGTC), national law (e.g. private law associations or public law bodies) or international law (e.g. under bilateral agreements). One example of this are the Euroregions under national law, which cover many of the borders in the EU. Many of these entities have a legitimacy (established by public authorities), an experience (many exist for years) and expertise (through their past work and staff) that should be put to good use.

ORIENTATIONS:

Cooperation with Cross-border bodies could be enhanced. They can play a key role in deepening cooperation both through Interreg (e.g. by managing a Small Projects Fund) and beyond any funding mechanism.

Where appropriate, the cooperation programmes could provide financial and/or technical support to the Inter-Governmental Commissions and their respective working groups and build on the legitimacy, experience, and expertise of International, Inter-regional and Transnational Initiatives as any other programme.

D.1.7. Links with other Cohesion and External Relations policy programmes

89. The proposed Common Provisions Regulation stipulates: “each programme shall set out, for each specific objective the interregional and transnational actions with beneficiaries located in at least one other Member State”. Whilst a similar provision was already present in the past, it is now compulsory for the mainstream programmes to describe the possibilities for cooperation for each specific objective. This new obligation may have many benefits for cross-border areas: more ambitious projects (e.g. joint infrastructures), involvement of new players (e.g. the national authorities such as Ministries) and overall more ambitious policies (e.g. spatial planning with associated funds).
90. The three programmes have partial/complete territorial and thematic overlaps with:
- *Three Transnational programmes: Adriatic Ionian programme (with IPA CBC Bulgaria – Serbia), Danube programme (with IPA CBC Bulgaria – Serbia and Bulgaria – Republic of North Macedonia) and Balkan-Mediterranean programme (with IPA CBC Bulgaria – Republic of North Macedonia)*

- *IPA/IPA cooperation programme* Serbia – Republic of North Macedonia (with IPA CBC Bulgaria – Serbia and Bulgaria – North Macedonia)

- *ENI CBC cooperation programme: Black Sea Basin Programme* (with IPA CBC Bulgaria – Turkey)

91. Taking into account the territorial overlaps and thematic similarities (especially concerning competitiveness, environment, natural and cultural heritage) there is a need for closer coordination and more intensified interaction with the above-mentioned programmes.

ORIENTATIONS:

Establish (or participate to) a strong coordination mechanism with the authorities managing mainstream programmes in the concerned countries, in particular the national and IPA programmes dealing with transport, environment, regional development, ICT and labour issues. Any future regional programme located along the borders should also be closely associated to the CBC programmes. This coordination implies exchange of information and cooperation and should happen at all stages: planning (e.g. designing complementarities), implementation (e.g. building on synergies) and communication (showing the benefits for the citizens and the region).

Synergies with the Transnational programmes (Adriatic and Ionian, Danube and Balkan Mediterranean for 2021-2027) and the ENI CBC Black Sea Basin programme should be sought, avoiding overlapping to the maximum possible extent. These programmes cover a wider area and are therefore are more strategic by nature.

D.1.8. Cross-border data

92. Good public policies (e.g. spatial planning, transport, health care) should be based on evidence (i.e. data, studies, mapping). Whilst this is generally available at national level for Member States, it is not always the case for IPA countries, especially at regional/ local level and even less at cross-border local level. Some of this evidence is particularly important: economic flows, transport flows and trends, labour mobility and mapping of skills, health of citizens, mapping of important infrastructures and services (such as energy, waste treatment, hospitals, emergency services, universities), mapping of risk areas (to floods, fires, etc.), mapping of natural areas (e.g. Natura 2000 sites under the Ramsar convention of wetlands, etc.) and mapping of the main inclusion difficulties (poverty, marginalised communities, etc).

ORIENTATIONS:

Identify the sectors where important cross-border data is missing and support projects that would fill the gap at the latest by 2027 (e.g. in cooperation with national statistical offices, by supporting regional data portals etc.).

Ensure that socio-economic analysis for each side of the border are completed as soon as possible

D.2. Governance of the Interreg programmes

D.2.1. Operational performance

93. The Interreg IPA CBC programmes in these border regions generally experienced long designation procedures and slow take off in project contracting and implementation during the programming period 2014-2020. This should be an incentive to better identify underlying bottlenecks and structural problems. The responsible authorities would be therefore strongly encouraged to undertake a systematic analysis of the key factors having an impact on the slow take-off of the programme(s) and the targeted mitigating measures to accelerate the programme implementation for the new programming period. In coordination with Interact and CBIC+, technical assistance can be used for developing a roadmap for administrative capacity building with defined activities.

D.2.2. Partnership principle

94. The principle of partnership is a key feature of the whole programme cycle (including preparation, implementation and participation in monitoring committees), building on the multi-level governance approach and ensuring the involvement of public, economic, civil society and environmental partners. Examples of good practice include involving representatives of different interests in the programming process; involving them in programme evaluation or other strategic tasks for instance by setting up temporary working groups; consulting all members on key documents also between meetings. An active involvement of economic, social and environmental partners should be ensured by their participation in key steps. Technical Assistance can be made available to facilitate their full involvement in the process.

D.2.3. Role of the monitoring committee

95. The **monitoring committee (MC)** is the strategic decision-making body of the programme. In 2021-2027 the MC will be given a more prominent role in supervising programme performance. Therefore, MCs currently concentrating on project selection should be invited to widen their scope of action and take on a more strategic role. Good practices include having strategic discussions as a standing agenda point, inviting contact points of macro-regional strategies or institutions playing a key role in the border area, organising project visits. Some

examples of strategic discussion themes: border obstacles, cross-border data needs, inclusion of SMEs, NGOs and other under-represented beneficiaries or target groups of the programme. Where relevant, the contribution of the programme to the development of a macro-regional strategy should also be a regular point of discussion.

96. The **composition of the MC** must be representative for the respective cross-border areas. It must also include partners relevant to programme objectives (i.e. priority axes), e.g. institutions or organisations representing environment, SMEs, civil society or education. When the programme is relevant for the development of a macro-regional strategy, macro-regional key stakeholders should also be regular members of the MC of the programme.
97. **Project selection** shall take place in the MC or in steering committee(s) established under the MC in full respect of the partnership principle. It is crucial that all are involved in the process. Selection criteria and their application must be non-discriminatory and transparent. They should also be clear and they must enable the assessment of whether projects correspond to the objectives and the strategy of the programme. They are to be consulted with the Commission and communicated to applicants in a clear and systematic way. The cross-border dimension is compulsory in every selected project. The programme might consider the use of independent expert panels for preparation of project selection. Clear distinction between expert evaluators and MC roles in project selection needs to be defined and described in the rules of procedure.
98. **Large Infrastructure Projects (LIPs), flagship projects or Projects of strategic importance** (i.e. designed and implemented by public authorities without a call) may be pre-defined in the programme document or selected via a transparent and agreed procedure. It is up to each programme partnership to decide on the optimal balance between different types of projects to reach the overall programme objectives (flagship projects, regular projects, bottom-up or top-down project selection, small projects etc).
99. **Decision-making** must also be non-discriminatory and transparent. The procedure should also be inclusive. Each monitoring (or steering) committee member shall have a vote. Voting by delegation should not be encouraged unless it is transparent and puts weaker partners at equal footing with "institutional" partners.

D.2.4. Role of the managing authority (MA)

100. The **MA** shall ensure effective implementation of the programme(s) under their responsibility. The MA is also at the service of the programme and its MC. It acts as the programme authority representing all countries participating in an programme. Therefore, it is recommended that the Member State hosting the programme

authorities is represented in the MC separately from the MA (i.e. a different person). The MA shall ensure the effectiveness and transparency of the project selection, reporting and monitoring systems. The use of Interact's Harmonised Implementation Tools and electronic monitoring system (eMs) is recommended where possible.

D.2.5. Role of the Joint Secretariat (JS)

101. The **JS** should ideally be the **cross-border executive body of the programme**, implementing the decisions made by the MA and the MC. It should consist of professional and independent staff from the participating countries, with linguistic competences and relevant border area knowledge. Its procedures should be efficient and transparent, avoiding unnecessary bureaucracy (such as excessive documentation requirements). Communication with beneficiaries, potential applicants and the general public should be ensured in a speedy and transparent manner mainly by the JS. **Regional contact points/antennas** operating directly under the JS' responsibility may be useful in border areas characterised by large distances and/or difficult accessibility.

D.2.6. Functional areas

102. According to different sectors, an Interreg programme may cover several overlapping functional areas (e.g. for access to health facilities, it may be larger or smaller than for access to secondary education). For some topics, the solution can only be found if partners outside the programme area are involved (e.g. for reducing the risks of floodings, you may need to reintroduce wetlands or dams upstream of a river but outside the relevant programme area). For some other topics, the solution may be very local (e.g. to have a cross-border tram line in an urban area which expands on both sides of a border, or to promote daily commuting for work).
103. The proposal to address the issues through a functional area offers some flexibility in planning and implementation and linkages with other projects can be easier established. The MC shall have the competence to decide on projects outside the eligible area, but with clear benefit for the cross-border region, and the macro-region, if relevant.

ORIENTATIONS:

Design the actions based on functional areas - which will depend on the issue at stake - rather than on the administrative scale defining the programme area. Authorities are encouraged to use the different available tools to support functional areas such as the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation - EGTC -, Euroregions, Integrated Territorial Investments, Community Led Local Development,

metropolitan areas, natural parks, and to cooperate with the relevant macro-regional key stakeholders, where appropriate.

D.2.7. Trust-building measures

104. Effective cross-border cooperation requires a good level of trust between partners. Trust needs to be built and maintained. This is a long-term investment which aims at fostering cooperation-minded future generations. Impact Evaluation Report for the 2007-2013 period emphasises that the sustainability of learning and cooperation is likely to be determined by the level of trust and confidence between partners. The report shows that the programmes have contributed to 'confidence and trust building' (ranked first in the list of benefits of cooperation) and to the 'creation or consolidation of a regional identity'.
105. The IPA-Interreg and IPA-IPA programmes can make a substantial contribution by providing financial support for trust-building activities such as linking up schools, sports clubs, cultural organisations, etc. The beneficiaries of such activities are often not equipped to manage full-blown Interreg projects.

ORIENTATIONS:

*Put in place mechanisms to finance small projects or people-to-people projects that make a strong contribution to the social and civil cohesion of the cross-border region. Programmes could focus on measures that will increase citizen's knowledge of each other and **build trust**. This can be done using the new tool proposed by the Commission (the Small Projects Fund) or via specific calls managed by the Managing Authority itself, focused on **people-to-people** activities.*

D.2.8. Conflict of interest

106. Conflict of interest between decision-making bodies and applicants and beneficiaries must be avoided at any moment in the programme cycle, including project generation, project preparation, project selection and project implementation. One way to avoid this is to ensure a proper segregation of duties between institutions and persons.

D.2.9. Communication and visibility

107. The programme makes use of the Interact-developed eMS. This is very positive as it also provides a direct interface with the KEEP database of projects, which is an invaluable resource for all actors of territorial cooperation. The programme should ensure it continues to contribute to the completeness and correctness of KEEP.
108. The programme runs a clear and well-structured website that contains good and up-to-date information including for instance on progress towards achieving the

programme's targets. This level of transparency is much welcome and should continue.

ORIENTATIONS:

Make use of the opportunities offered by the Interreg Volunteers Youth Initiative (IVY) and host young volunteers in the programme management bodies or within individual projects.

Make use of communication tools to inform the wide public both at local, regional and national level.

Maintain transparent process by publicising progress of projects but also the minutes of discussion of MCs.

E. CONCLUSIONS

109. The main raison d'être of these programmes is threefold: 1) trust building, reconciliation, developing good neighbourly relations and lasting cross-border partnerships in a region with a very difficult recent history (wars in the 1990'); 2) capacity building of the programmes authorities and of the stakeholders' community, preparing the (potential) candidate countries for accession and management of EU funds; 3) supporting financially border regions, usually underfunded and lagging behind, to enable them to jointly address local needs on both sides of the border.
110. The success of the IPA-Interreg programmes can be proved not only by the results already delivered by projects but also by a constant, very high interest among the stakeholders – for these programmes the amounts already applied for are five to ten times higher than the total budgets of the programmes.
111. The paper proposes orientations for all five Policy Objectives (POs) that will drive investment in the 2021-2027 programming period for the Interreg IPA cooperation programmes. Nevertheless, there is a need to find the right balance between the (potential) wide range of actions envisaged and the need for thematic concentration to increase the impact of available funds. Future programmes should reflect EU priorities such as the ambitious climate agenda of the new Commission and Europe's global challenges.
112. Supporting European integration of IPA beneficiaries by promoting good neighbourhood relations and building capacities of local, regional and national institutions to implement EU programmes under EU territorial cooperation goal is also particularly important.

Existing sources of information

- Performance of Impact Evaluation of the IPA Cross-border Programmes 2007-2013 managed by the Republic of Bulgaria, November 2016 + handbook of best practices:

<http://www.ipacbc-bgrs.eu/news/impact-evaluation-ipa-cross-border-programmes-2007-2013>

- Implementation evaluation of Interreg IPA CBC Programmes 2014-2020 managed by the Republic of Bulgaria, Sofia 9 May 2019

http://www.ipacbc-bgrs.eu/sites/ipacbc-bgrs-105.gateway.bg/files/uploads/annual_reports/revised_bg_serbia_executive_summary.pdf

http://www.ipacbc-bgtr.eu/sites/ipacbc-bgtr-105.gateway.bg/files/uploads/2nd_call/revised_bg_tr_executive_summary.pdf

http://www.ipa-cbc-007.eu/sites/ipacbc-bgmk-105.gateway.bg/files/revised_bg_fyrom_executive_summary.pdf

- EUROSTAT, key figures on enlargement countries – 2019 Edition
<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-statistical-books/-/KS-GO-19-001?inheritRedirect=true>
- Competitiveness in South East Europe, a policy outlook 2018 (OECD):
https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/competitiveness-in-south-east-europe_9789264298576-en#page1
- SME Policy Index – Western Balkans and Turkey 2019 – Assessing the implementation of the small business act for Europe (OECD, European Commission, ETF, EBRD): https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/sme-policy-index-western-balkans-and-turkey-2019_g2g9fa9a-en
- Annual Report of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) 2018-2019:
<https://www.rcc.int/docs/466/annual-report-on-of-the-secretary-general-of-the-regional-cooperation-council-rcc-2018-2019>
- Supporting an innovation agenda for the Western Balkans, tools and methodologies (Joint Research Centre, 2018):
http://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC111430/2018-04-24_western-balkans-report_online.pdf
- Air quality in Europe – 2018 Report (European Environment Agency):
<https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/air-quality-in-europe-2018>
- Commission Staff Working Document- Measures in support of a Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans- SWD (2018) 360 final:
<https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood->

[enlargement/sites/near/files/swd_measures_in_support_of_a_digital_agenda_for_the_western_balkans.pdf](#)

- Policy handbook, Fostering Tourism Competitiveness in South East Europe, 2016 (OECD): <https://europa.ba/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Fostering-Tourism-Competitiveness-in-South-East-Europe.pdf>
- Serbia – Romania- Bulgaria Cross-border Tourism Initiative (ROSEB initiative) <http://www.raris.org/eng/download/ROSEB%20Initiative%20ENG%20November%202016.pdf>
- Border needs study (Commission, 2016) – [Collecting solid evidence to assess the needs to be addressed by Interreg cross-border cooperation programmes - Regional Policy - European Commission](#)
- EC ex-post evaluation of ETC 2007-2013 http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/evaluations/ec/2007-2013/#11
- European Territorial Cooperation - best practices and innovative measures, European Parliament, 2016 [REPORT on European Territorial Cooperation - best practices and innovative measures - A8-0202/2016](#)
- Quantification of the effects of legal and administrative border obstacles in land border regions (Commission, 2016) – [quantification of the effects of legal and administrative obstacles in land border regions - Bing](#)
- Easing legal and administrative obstacles (Commission, 2017) – [Easing legal and administrative obstacles in EU border regions - Regional Policy - European Commission](#)
- Check out the 10 pilot projects selected under b-solutions – [b-solutions: the 10 successful cases announced | FUTURIUM | European Commission](#)
- Comprehensive analysis of the existing cross-border transport connections and missing links on the internal EU borders (Commission, 2017-2018) – https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/cb_rail_connections_en.pdf
- DG SANTE's study on cross-border health care [Building Cooperation in Cross-border Healthcare: new study published! | FUTURIUM | European Commission](#)
- ESPON's Targeted Analysis on Cross-Border Public Services [CPS - Cross-border Public Services | ESPON](#)
- Policy papers from REGIO (on the 5 Policy Objectives as well as on cooperation and administrative capacity)

- Strategy of the 2014-2020 programme (ex-ante evaluation, SWOT, priorities, evaluations)
- Background analysis for the IPA CBC Programmes to support the Commission in drafting the post 2020 input paper for IPA CBC Programmes on EU borders with enlargement countries, Final Report, May 2019
- EUSAIR, EUSDR information