

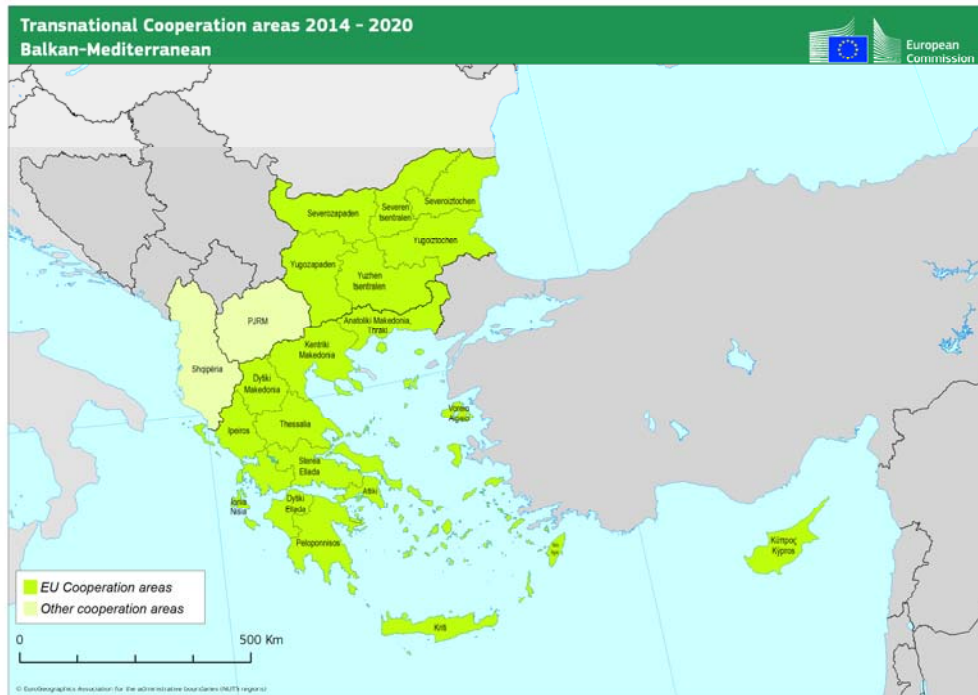
Citizens' Summary of the TNCP Balkan – Mediterranean 2014 – 2020

Cooperation area of the Balkan – Mediterranean Cooperation Programme

The “Balkan-Mediterranean 2014-2020” is a new cooperation programme, deriving from both, the split of the “South East 2007 – 2013” (<http://www.southeast-europe.net>) and the strong will of the “Balkan-Mediterranean” participating countries to promote cooperation in the area. The programme brings together five (5) countries, three (3) EU member states (Bulgaria, Cyprus and Greece) and two (2) candidate countries, Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

It is the first time ever that the European cooperation addresses the Balkan Peninsula and the Eastern Mediterranean Sea together, in a joint effort across maritime and terrestrial borders, to contribute to the “EU 2020” strategy, for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm).

After a long period of various cooperation forms, the “Balkan-Mediterranean 2014-2020” transnational cooperation programme has been identified as a structured tool to strengthen cooperation in the area, capitalising on experiences and results achieved so far. Accordingly, the programme supports the know-how and experiences’ sharing, improvement of the public policies and networking, between national, regional and local authorities and other territorial actors of the whole Balkan-Mediterranean cooperation area. It is a new cooperation opportunity that enriches the “European territorial cooperation goal” of the new programming period ahead, 2014 – 2020.



The Balkan – Mediterranean Cooperation Programme is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) with 28.330.108,00 Euros. The total support from the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) fund accounts for 5.126.138,00 Euros. Therefore, the total budget of the Programme, including national contribution, is 39.727.652,11 Euros.

For the overall cooperation area, a co-financing rate of 85% is applied (excl. Technical Assistance).

The official language of the Programme is English.

Priorities of the Balkan – Mediterranean Cooperation Programme

Taking into consideration the territorial analysis, as well as the public consultation process' results, the main needs and challenges shared by the programme actors can be grouped to the following headings: socioeconomic development and demography, environment and climate change, natural and cultural heritage. However, limited funding compelled for tougher choices.

In response to all regulatory requirements, a strong thematic focus has been promoted to address two key challenges: territorial competitiveness and environment. Accordingly, the programme is built upon the following two priority axes:

- ↳ Priority Axis 1: “Entrepreneurship & Innovation”
- ↳ Priority Axis 2: “Environment”

Priority Axis 1: “Entrepreneurship & Innovation”

Entrepreneurship and innovation are powerful drivers of economic growth. As the programme area suffers from markets' fragmentation, high unemployment and limited labour force skills, “Priority Axis 1” is dedicated to actions that foster the area's entrepreneurship potential by encouraging SMEs' cooperation and networking, clusters and clusters policies, new business models' applications and in particular the ones promoting innovation, opens up new markets and support internationalisation. Two “Specific Objectives” are established to better focus the above mentioned topics. The first “Specific Objective” (SO 1.1) promotes entrepreneurship on the basis of new ideas and new types of business models, while the second “Specific Objective” (SO 1.2) goes one step forward by facilitating the SMEs' adjustment to the changing socioeconomic and policy/regulatory circumstances.

Bearing also in mind that the Balkan-Mediterranean area also suffers by labour skills shortcomings it is important to foresee knowledge transfer and skills' development, linking the overall business' support to vocational training. The aim is to reach a maximum territorial impact on competitiveness, through internal spill over and leverage effects on knowledge and technology transfer, as education and training will enable entrepreneurs to acquire the necessary skills/tools and enhance the SMEs' capacity, boost their

competitiveness, grow towards other markets and introduce innovation in all phases of their business cycle.

By linking education and businesses, the “Balkan-Mediterranean 2014-2020” cooperation programme also embeds the **“Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan”** of the EU, stating that *“investing in entrepreneurship education is one of the highest return investments Europe can make”*. Furthermore, against the current economic crisis’ background, the training support for entrepreneurs was identified as crucial in order to maximise the impact and effectiveness of the investment put forward by the prior two “Specific Objectives”. A sole thematic focus on SMEs support with no investment in their respective human capital will jeopardize expected results, as monitoring and management are performed by the entrepreneurs. Therefore a third “Specific Objective” (SO 1.3) is established for transnational training schemes that can provide a powerful platform to address entrepreneurship skills. SO 1.3 along with the SMEs’ thematic support planned by “SO 1.1” and “SO 1.2” ensures an integrate, structured and inclusive approach to effectively address territorial competitiveness and skills’ gaps, to overcome markets’ fragmentation and foster business environment that could further unleash untapped cooperation potential. An extensive menu of transnational cooperation opportunities (type of activities) has been set up (check each “SO” description) and offered to the following actors:

- ❖ Umbrella organisations of SMEs
- ❖ Development and planning agencies
- ❖ Local, regional and national authorities involved in business’ management
- ❖ Technology transfer centres and universities
- ❖ Innovation support networks
- ❖ Non-governmental and Civil Society organisations

Priority Axis 2: “Environment”

During the public consultation process environment related issues emerged as the main challenge to address over the new programming period ahead. More than 70% consider the deterioration of the environment in the programme area as a major common threat, while over 60% perceive the natural resources’ inefficient use as one of the main problems to tackle.

Accordingly, the “Priority Axis 2” of the “Balkan-Mediterranean 2014-2020” transnational cooperation programme is built upon natural/cultural heritage and resources’ efficiency. By doing so the programme is also aligned with the “EU Environment Action Programme to 2020” which under “Priority objective 1” aims to protect, conserve and enhance natural capital.

The Balkan-Mediterranean area includes landscape and natural capital of high biodiversity potential, yet under constant human pressure. Ecosystems’ restoration and green infrastructure development have important socio-economic benefits including for public health. Furthermore, management & monitoring of designated areas can generate sustainable growth and sustainable employment, while studying, mapping, zoning and

restoring degraded areas enhance both, scientific knowledge and the targeted ecosystems' quality. At the same time it helps to resolve conflicts over land use and set the basis for ownership on shared sustainable growth goals. In this respect an "ecosystem based" management approach is promoted as it can deliver improved growth patterns. According to Eurostat, the employment in environmental sectors in the EU is steadily growing around 3% annually over recent years.

An integrated approach for sustainable growth can also mitigate the land–sea environmental pressures suffered throughout coastlines of the programme areas. Marine and maritime planning coupled with coastal zones' management can provide a promising testing bed for transnational cooperation potential in order to alleviate joint pressure from overall marine and maritime activities both, in land and sea. The programme area holds significant potential for sustainable use of natural resources in the fields of resource management efficiency in the waste sector, the water sector, the soil and air pollution as well as in the energy efficiency sector.

The "Priority Axis 2" is further streamlined in two thematic "Specific Objectives" focusing on the one hand in natural ecosystems' management (SO 2.1) and on the other hand in efficient resources' management of the waste sector, the soil and the water sector (SO 2.2). The programme allows different stakeholders to build up partnerships and deal with the protection of natural and cultural heritage. The development and implementation of common strategies and approaches will foster for the protection and sustainable use of natural/cultural heritage and resources' efficiency. The development of common brands is also foreseen as it creates a favourable environment for sustainable tourism practices. A wide range of activities is proposed to the following actors:

- ❖ Local, regional and national authorities
- ❖ Environmental and development agencies
- ❖ Protected/designated areas' management organisations and bodies
- ❖ Non-governmental and Civil Society organisations
- ❖ SMEs umbrella organisations

Yet, to learn how to monitor environmental targets and develop common management techniques and approaches, it requires specific skills' development. Furthermore, to implement EU standards requires expertise aligned with the latest scientific knowledge on environmental policies' implementation procedures. To address joint challenges on environmental management to successively tackle green and blue growth, the skills shall be supported accordingly. Developing training programmes geared to green jobs is clearly recommended in the EU Environment Action Programme to 2020 (PE-CONS 64/1/13, p. 38). In this respect, support training schemes to learn how to deal, monitor and manage environmental targets is important in order to reinforce peer review and best practice sharing in all Balkan – Mediterranean participating countries and IPA countries in particular. Therefore the "Priority Axis 2" foresees to bridge the skills' gap by implementing the missing training facilities, for public authorities and stakeholders in particular, in order to improve delivery on environmental legislation monitoring and governance. Consequently, the two

thematic “Specific Objectives” (SO 2.1 and SO 2.2) are combined with a third one the “SO 2.3” aiming to “develop skills for better environmental management and increase governance capacities”. It is a holistic and integrated approach aiming to improve both, the ecosystems’ sustainable use and delivery on legislation and governance.

Policy tree of the Balkan – Mediterranean Cooperation Programme

The table below summarises the Balkan-Mediterranean 2014-2020 policy “tree”:

