

## 2021-2027 - 2nd Interreg Europe Monitoring Committee meeting

### 13 and 14 December 2022

**Chaired by:** The Czech Republic (CZ)

**Participants :** See participants' List (Annex 01)

**Decision notes:** Interreg Europe JS

#### 01. Welcome, opening and approval of the agenda

The **Chair** welcomed the participants. Following the Chair's invitation, the new MC members Angeliki Bouziani (**EL**), Krista Tonisson (**EE**), Louis Oberhag (**LU**), Pasi Rantahalvari (FI) and Céline Manac'h (**BE**) introduced themselves.

**Decision:** The agenda was approved unanimously (Annex 02).

##### 1.1 Welcoming words from Slawomir Tokarski, Director of Directorate D – European Territorial Cooperation, Macro-Regions, Interreg and Programmes Implementation

Slawomir Tokarski congratulated Interreg Europe for being one of the first programmes approved by the EC. Interreg Europe is regarded as a powerful tool to disseminate the new policy objectives of the European Union and to help regions in facing the new challenges related to the impact of the pandemic, the energy crisis and the war in Ukraine. In this context, the EC also welcomed the possibility for Interreg Europe to enlarge its cooperation to 5 IPA countries, Ukraine and Moldova. Despite the challenges of such enlargement, the EC encouraged the Partner States to build on the current momentum and to consider this possibility of enlargement as a great opportunity for the programme.

##### 1.2 Participation of IPA and NDICI countries in Interreg Europe

**JS** provided an overview regarding the potential and implication of involving IPA and NDICI countries in Interreg Europe (Annex 03).

#### **Discussion:**

Thomas Wobben, Director for Legislative Works at European Committee of the Regions confirmed that a possible enlargement of the Interreg Europe programme was fully supported by the CoR, who could help the candidate countries in this process. Referring specifically to Ukraine, he highlighted a recent initiative of the CoR, the 'European alliance of cities and regions for the reconstruction of Ukraine'. In the same spirit, the Horizon programme has set a dedicated budget for Ukraine cities to organise peer to peer activities. Thomas Wobben also encouraged PS to take a positive decision regarding the involvement of IPA and NDICI countries in Interreg Europe.

Several PS expressed support for the proposal of further investigating this possibility and emphasized the good cooperation experience with IPA countries in the frame of other Interreg programmes. Several countries also highlighted that Interreg Europe was the right tool for helping partners from IPA and NDICI countries to improve their capacities and overcome the difficulties highlighted previously.

**IT** and **IE** enquired about the possibility of opening this process to also other countries (Southern Mediterranean countries, Kosovo and Georgia). **EC** and **JS** clarified that this possibility is not envisaged for the moment and the first step would be to align the cooperation area with the URBACT programme.

**PT** and **CY** pointed out that a mandate from the foreign affairs ministries is needed for taking such a decision, even more in case other countries will be considered in the proposal.

Some PS expressed their concern regarding:

- the IPA and NDCI countries' clear understanding of the programme's offer (no investments, soft cooperation measures aiming at improvement of policies); PL also asked whether the MA checked interest of the IPA and NDCI countries to join Interreg Europe (**PL**);
- the tight timing of the process which might be challenging (**FR**);
- the impact on the JS workload (**FR** and **EL**);
- the current experience related to the difficulties in involving partners from IPA countries in other programmes (**EL**);
- risks related to the decision process in an enlarged MC (**EL**).

**JS** agreed that Interreg Europe would need to be explained and promoted towards the IPA and NDCI countries and that the willingness of these countries to join Interreg Europe would need to be further investigated.

The **MA** highlighted that IPA and NDCI countries share common objectives with Interreg Europe. Welcoming them in the programme would send a strong and positive signal in the context of the war in Ukraine. Many technical aspects such as financial liabilities, co-financing rates, participation in the MC have still to be clarified but, based on the MC agreement, MA and JS will work step by step on investigating all these aspects, also in cooperation with other Interreg programmes involving IPA countries.

#### **Decision:**

The MC agreed that the MA/JS can investigate the possibility of involving a total of 7 candidate and potential candidate countries to align with URBACT.

## **02. Technical Assistance budget**

**JS** presented the activities of the new programme to be financed by the Technical Assistance (TA) budget for 2023 (Annex 04). The TA budget would be financed by the remaining 2014-2020 TA budget based on the decision taken by the 2014-2020 MC (see agenda item 7.2 of MC19)

**JS** also reminded the PS that the national contributions for TA are due by 31/01/2023 (See updated overview table - Annex 05).

Finally, **JS** informed the MC that the CA indicated that negative interest was no longer charged and positive interest will now be generated again on the CA accounts.

**Discussion:** No questions were raised on this point.

#### **Decision:**

The MC confirmed that all necessary activities related to the 2021-2027 period are covered by the TA budget for 2023.

The MC approved the financing under TA of programme related activities in Partner States (as previously agreed by the programming committee).

## 03 First Call quality Assessment

JS provided an overview of the assessment (Annex 06).

### Discussion:

Many PS expressed concerns regarding the check described in Article 22 of ETC regulation (EU/EC infringement). The PS asked JS and EC to provide clearer guidance on how such checks could be done.

**JS** agreed that more specific guidance is needed and that the issue should be dealt with in the same way in all Interreg programmes. JS proposed to discuss the issue with other Interreg via INTERACT and ask for guidance from INTERACT.

EC clarified that the infringement issues are often linked to the national governmental level or big companies. EC promised to check the applicability of the Article 22 to Interreg Europe (and other Interreg programmes). EC will provide feedback and if possible concrete guidance to the MC/ PS.

The **Chair** summarised that the check related to Article 22 would be kept on hold until the MC receives further information from the EC and/ or INTERACT on common approach for all Interreg programmes and clear guidance on how to proceed with such checks.

Following a request from IT about the automatic indication of national financing as private or public funding, the JS clarified that currently the Portal automatically allocates the funding to public or private based on the partner states. The automatic allocation is then modifiable by the partner. If a modification is necessary and not done before AF submission, they will be asked to do during the fulfilment of conditions phase.

**PT** welcomed the VAT information in the application form as it helped them aggregate the projects at the national level, but asked whether electronic validation of the VAT format could be introduced in the Portal. **JS** said that formats of VAT are known only for some PS, not all, so programming would be complicated. However, the JS will investigate ways of improving the collection of the VAT information.

In reply to a question from **DE**, **JS** clarified that if the legal status check is performed only in January (deadline 18 January 2023), additional conditions would be added in case a partner was found ineligible and might need to be replaced. Such situations would be treated case by case but the concerned projects could in principle still be approved after such change. .

## 04 Overview of first call results

**JS** presented the results of the first call (Annex 07)

### Discussion:

Replying to questions from **IT** and **NL** about the conditions process, **JS** clarified:

- that the few partners having selected actual costs for the travel and accommodation costs would have to provide a strong justification or select the flat rate. They are also reminded through the condition that the option chosen cannot be changed after the signature of the subsidy contract.
- the budget cuts were always considered very carefully, based on previous statistics, and also taking into account the specificities of the projects and inflation. For clear cases of overbudgeting, JS considered it important to present the cuts as a requirement so that it is clear for projects that they have to apply these budget cuts. JS also explains the rationale for the cuts during the conditions meetings and can reassure PS and projects that from experience this never negatively impacted project implementation as projects rather tend to overbudget and then underspend.

Further to a question from **RO**, **JS** clarified how the line was drawn between recommended and not recommended applications. Recommended applications meet the minimum quality standards of the programme. This means that the conditions for their approval will not lead to a fundamental change of the application form (in the most severe case, it can lead to removing a partner / policy instrument whose relevance is not demonstrated at all).

## 05 Approval of first call projects

**Chair** asked about the conflict of interest in the projects' approval of institutions represented in the room and asked such representatives to leave the room/ meeting in case individual projects were discussed. Associated project partners should also count for the conflict of interest. For the block decision on all projects, all PS representatives could stay.

### Discussion:

No discussion.

### Decision:

No objection to approval on the projects scoring 3 and above.

No objection to rejection of all projects scoring below 3.

72 projects recommended under conditions were approved (under conditions) by the MC.

## 06. Second call application pack approval -ToR – Programme manual version 2

**JS** presented the changes to the application pack of the 2<sup>nd</sup> call compared to the 1st call (Annex 08). The application pack includes:

- Version 2 of the programme manual (Annex 09),
- Second call terms of reference (Annex 10).

### Discussion:

Further to the Partner States comments, **JS** clarified the following points:

- A specific reference to the non-discrimination principle was added in version 2 of the manual. Responding to the mail message from the Commission, directly addressing the situation in Poland, PL confirmed – based on preliminary checks - that the Polish partners involved in approved projects comply with this principle. Further checks in line with national procedures will follow and if any issues arise, the MA will be informed.
- In the terms of reference, the encouragement to focus on energy issues or to involve partners from NUTS 2 regions not represented yet do not directly lead to an additional point in the quality assessment. It is just an element among other that could justify a higher score.
- Further to a proposal from **IT**, the definition of policy responsible authority was also updated and simplified.
- The list of IJG managing authorities available from the programme website may not always be exhaustive depending on the country. If the applicants indicate another body as managing authority, its relevance will anyway be checked directly with the responsible Partner State.

**Decision:**

The MC approved the application pack for the 2nd call.

**07. Evaluation plan**

**JS** presented the evaluation plan for the period 2021-2027 (Annex 11).

**Discussion:**

**EC** highlighted that, in the light of the discussion for the post 2027 regulations, the proposed timeline for the mid-term impact evaluation (January - June 2026) would be too late to feed in this discussion. **JS** proposed to advance the timeline of the mid-term impact evaluation and perform it at the same time as the mid-term operational evaluation (September 2025 – January 2026).

**SI** asked clarification regarding the budget foreseen for the optional update of the operational evaluation. **JS** clarified that the amount of 30 000 EUR refers to external support that may be needed for performing this update.

**FI** asked clarifications on the impact evaluation methodology and whether JS performs a critical evaluation of the results reported by projects. **JS** clarified that the impact evaluation follows the programme's intervention logic and is based on the results reported by projects. **JS** confirmed that the projects monitoring process implies a very careful and demanding assessment of the results reported (the significant part of the progress report template is dedicated to results monitoring, while this aspect is almost not present in the HIT template).

**Decision:**

The MC approved the evaluation plan (Annex 12) with the changes regarding the timeline of the mid-term impact evaluation.

**08. Communication plan 2023**

**JS** presented the Communication plan for 2023 (Annex 13).

**Discussion:**

**JS** confirmed to **IT** that regional correspondents can participate in the webinar on eligibility rules and finance reporting as webinars allow the participation of all relevant organisations.

**09. Policy Learning Platform – update Tender Procedure**

**JS** presented an update about the PLP tender procedure that will soon be launched (Annex 14). N.B. Since the MC, the procurement was launched on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January. Due to legal requirements the procedure is set up in two consecutive phases with distinctive deadlines for the candidatures and the tenders. The first phase for the submission of the candidature closes on the 3 February 2023. Following the analysis of the candidatures, the successful candidates will be invited to submit a tender by the end of March (tbc).

**Discussion:**

No questions were raised by the MC on this point.

## 10 Timeline

The timeline for upcoming programme events and meetings was presented by the JS (Annex 15).

### Discussion:

**MT** asked if there is a **MC** meeting planned back-to-back to the programme's annual event in March 2023 in Stockholm. **JS** clarified that it is not foreseen at the moment. However, should there be a need related to the IPA and NDICI proposal, this will be discussed with the chair, and it may be online. Partner states were asked whether they would prefer the next **MC** meeting to happen only in presence or in a hybrid format. Some Partner States indicated their preference to have a hybrid meeting (**RO, BE, DE, MT, IT, NL, HU, IE, CH**). Therefore, the next **MC** meeting in Gothenburg will be hybrid.

**SE** thanked **CZ** for chairing and for organising the meeting. **SE** also indicated that the platform for the Swedish presidency was just launched. Finally, **SE** mentioned looking forward to welcoming **MC** members in Gothenburg.

## 11 Any other business

No points were raised.

The Chair thanked the participants and closed the meeting.

NOTE: To ensure transparency of the Programming Committee meetings, the decision notes are published on the Interreg Europe's website. Annexes as mentioned in the notes can be requested by email: [info@interregeurope.eu](mailto:info@interregeurope.eu)