



9th Interreg Europe Monitoring Committee Meeting 18 – 19 December 2018

AC Hotel Innsbruck
Salurnerstrasse 15, 6020 Innsbruck, Austria

Chaired by: Manfred Bruckmoser (AT)

Decision notes: Interreg Europe JS

1. Welcome, opening and approval of the agenda

The **Chair** welcomed the participants and indicated that the quorum is fulfilled even if CH, LT and BG were absent.

The **Chair** then presented the agenda and proposed to move the discussion on the update on post 2020 to the 1st day (see annex 02). This was approved by the participants.

2. Presentation of the new MC members

The new participants of the Monitoring Committee from AT (MC and NPC members), HR (MC substitute), CY (NPC member), EL (MC member), IE (MC substitute), MT (MC member), NL (MC member) introduced themselves. The new EC desk officer for Interreg Europe (and Interact) also introduced himself.

3. Update on general programme developments

The **JS** presented an overview on programme developments and HR situation (see annex 03). Given the high expected number of approved projects after the 4th call and the duration of these projects and also taking into account the results of the mid-term evaluation, the **JS** proposed the reinforcement of the JS staff by 2 positions (1 Policy Officer and 1 Finance Officer), without any increase of the Technical Assistance budget. The MC agreed to have a written procedure regarding this proposal launched shortly after the MC meeting.

The **JS** presented the JS participation to external meetings (including cooperation with CoR and S3 platforms) and informed the MC about the latest iOLF and iDB developments (see annex 04). The



JS invited PS to have a look at the newly available statistics tables and let the JS know if anything was missing or could be useful to add in iDB. The JS also informed that a webinar was planned to be organised for the National Points of Contact at the beginning of 2019 to explain in more detail the statistics.

The **JS** presented the 2018 survey on result indicators (annex 05) and proposed that these indicators also integrate the achievements collected through the projects progress reports. This would allow to go beyond the survey - and to better reflect the real achievements of the programme.

The **JS** then gave an update on the cooperation with Interact and explained the proposal to test joint thematic events with Interact on TO 1, 3 and 6.

Decision:

- The MC agreed that the JS integrates the achievements of the projects into the programme results indicators under the conditions that the source of information can be identified and that the same results are not counted twice.
- The MC agreed that one test joint event with Interact is organised.

4. Policy Learning Platform update

The **JS** presented an update of the PLP progress regarding the contract and the changes in the expert team (annex 06).

The **PLP Thematic Manager** Thorsten Kohlisch (PLP TM) then presented the activities performed in 2018 (annex 07).

The **JS** continued presenting elements on the future of the PLP and on the next annual contract that will be proposed to the MC members for approval through a written procedure.

5. Projects monitoring

Request for changes in ongoing projects

The **JS** provided an overview of the changes that took place for running projects since the last MC meeting in March 2018 (see annex 08). The **JS** also presented the request for change of the project PERFECT. The advisory lead partner of this project, the Town and Country Planning Association from the UK, requested to become a lead partner as during the project implementation this organisation identified a policy instrument that could influence. Being this a change in a core feature of the project, the **Chair** asked the approval of the MC.



Decision

The MC decided to allow the advisory lead partner of the project PERFECT, Town and Country Planning Association, to become lead partner.

Feedback from the mid-term review meetings, action plans and pilot actions

The **JS** presented the outcomes from the mid-term review meetings carried out with 12 first call and 12 second call projects (see annex 08).

The **JS** also indicated that 19 projects ended phase 1 in March 2018 and provided an updated on the spending situation of these projects as well as on the quality of their action plans (see annex 08). Indeed, the quality of the action plans is not always adequate. For the time being, the main clarifications on the action plan concerned its format, its content (i.e. definition of the actions included in the action plan) and its endorsement by the policy responsible organisation.

The **JS** gave an update of the pilot action requests (see annex 08). A total of 42 pilot actions were received from 17 projects. Out of these pilot action requests 13 were already approved by the MC. 15 were not recommended for approval by the JS. 8 are currently under discussion with the projects and 6 are recommended for approval. The **JS** highlighted that although a specific folder on pilot actions is available on the programme database, it is planned to develop an excel file to give an overview of all pilot action requests per project and Partner State. The **JS** will provide MC members with a monthly update of this file.

The **JS** presented the 6 pilot actions recommended for approval and asked the MC to approve them.

Decision

The MC approved the 6 pilot actions recommended.

Update of the programme manual

The **JS** presented the update of the programme manual (see annex 08) and asked the MC to approve the revised version of the programme manual (see annex 09). **PL** indicated that for the action plan template, the word 'provisional' should be added when indicating the source of funding to finance the actions included in the action plan.

Decision

The MC approved the updated version of the programme manual on the condition that the proposal from PL on the action plan template was included.



6. Fourth call (1): lump sum / eligibility results

Lump sum

The **JS** provided an update on the lump sum proposal and the analysis carried out by the external audit firm Ernst & Young (EY) (see annex 10). The **JS** will send EY's analysis for information and the updated proposal for the lump sum for final validation to the MC through written procedure.

Eligibility results

The **JS** presented an overview of the eligibility results

7. Fourth call (2): overview assessment / forecasted ERDF commitment

Overview fourth call assessment

The **JS** presented the results of the strategic assessment and the assessment process

During the presentation, the **JS** informed the MC about new information received by the JS of Central Europe on a project application (BEECH for EUROPE) originally scored 3 and thus recommended for operational assessment. A very similar project (BEECH POWER) was submitted in the last call of Central Europe project and it will most likely be approved by the MC of Central Europe in January.

The **JS** proposed:

- In case Central Europe rejects the application: to approve the strategic assessment as initially proposed (i.e. BEECH FOR EUROPE approved at strategic level).
- In case Central Europe approves the application: to approve a revised version of the strategic assessment, with a lower score in criterion 2, whose text was shared with the MC during the meeting (i.e. BEECH FOR EUROPE failed at strategic level).

The **Chair** proposed not to take a decision on this project during the meeting but wait for the decision by Central Europe MC. The JS proposal will be subject to decision by the MC through a written procedure after the decision by the MC of Central Europe.

8. Fourth call (3): approval of strategic assessment

The **JS** presented the forecasted ERDF / Norwegian funding commitment (see annex 14) and explained the following main points for discussion in order to prepare the next MC meeting in March:



- Concerning the funding distribution among priorities, shall the CP be amended? Since the ERDF allocation is very close to the initial plans, the **JS** considered that there was no urgency in this regard and recommended to wait for the end of the programming period to do it only if really necessary then.
- Shall the programme proceed with over commitment and, if yes, by how much? The Interreg IVC experience with over commitment was rather positive but the **JS** recommended not to go above 5% taking into consideration the pilot action requests that the programme will receive.
- In case over commitment is decided, the **JS** mentioned 4 possible options to allocate the additional ERDF available: 1/ to organise a restrictive call for all rejected projects of last call since they would not have the opportunity to come back but then the timing and legal issues related to this call should be further analysed. 2/ to promote further pilot actions 3/ to finance new ideas and experimentation maybe also in the context of the future programming period. MC members were encouraged to propose ideas for such experimentation 4/ The Chair proposed to approve more applications than those recommended by the JS.
- In order to keep all four options open for the next MC meeting, the MC would need however to require the full assessment of those applications with a 2.67 score. If the MC would strictly approve the strategic assessment as proposed, then in March the discussion could only focus on the 64 projects that passed the strategic assessment.

Decision

- The MC approved the strategic assessment of all applications scored 3.00 and above (with the exception of the project "Beech for Europe", for which a decision will be taken in written procedure after the decision by the MC of Central Europe; see point 7 above) .
- The MC also approved to further assess all applications scored 2.67 after strategic assessment.

9. Presentation of project (Austrian partner)

Agnes Kurzweil from the Environmental Agency of Austria and Martin Traxll, representative of the Regional Government of East Tyrol presented their experience in the LAST MILE project (see annex 15).

10. Mid-term evaluation – context

The **JS** reminded the committee of the context of the mid-term evaluation (see annex 16) and invited the experts to present the results of the evaluations.



11. Mid-term evaluation lot 1 – Final report

The **expert (Amparo Montan)** in charge of the lot 1 of the mid-term evaluation, the operational evaluation, presented the nature of the evaluation, focusing on the procedural side of the programme (see annex 17).

Overall the results of the evaluation were very positive. The procedures work and the project partners as well as MC members have very positive perception of how the programme operates.

Three main recommendations were drawn:

- More strategic debates at MC meetings
- Focusing on good practices and project/ Platform achievements and target new groups
- Involving more national points of contact in the communication

In addition, there is a need to follow-up on the PLP development.

Decision

The MC approved the Lot 1 report including the slight amendments as discussed during the MC meeting (see annex 18).

12. Mid-term evaluation lot 2 – Final report

The **expert (Thomas Stumm)**, presented the main findings of the results evaluation available in the final version of the interim report for lot 2.

The report focused on the effectiveness of the interregional cooperation projects and the policy learning platform as well as the impact of projects on policy changes and how these changes are contributing to the EU-wide or country level development goals. (see annex 19).

The **expert** pointed the limit of the programme indicator “staff with increased capacity” which does not allow grasping the organisational learning that contributes to the policy change.

Decision

The MC approved the Lot 2 report (see annex 20).



13. Communication

The **JS** gave an overview on the communication activities implemented from 22 March till mid-November. The communication plan for 2019 was also presented (see annex 21).

Overall, **JS** received positive feedback on the activities foreseen.

It was considered to move the location to Brussels instead of Bucharest. This choice could be more strategic because of the negotiation for the future of the programme and the RO presidency in Brussels would be much more visible. The event will take place in mid-April (9-11 April) but the **JS** clarified that the official date will be communicated once the venue is confirmed and booked.

The **JS** will take on board the suggestions provided by the Partner States.

14. Finance

The **JS** together with the CA provided an update on the national contributions (see annex 22). Compared to the information provided in the supporting documents submitted to the MC, five additional national contributions were received by the programme from the following Partner States: FR, IE, 2 from DE, HU. Currently only one national contribution is missing for 2018, while for 2019 the deadline is 31 of January.

The **JS** provided an update on the de-commitment situation (see annex 23). The **JS** also indicated that it was informed by Interact that the EC was planning to reduce the annual pre-financing from 3% to 1% which would increase the de-commitment targets and have a negative impact on the programme's cash flow. The **JS** informed that the MA is planning to send an official letter to the EC to explain the constraints programmes may face if this change was applied in the ETC context, where cash flow problems already today risk to arise (if not compensated by a very frequent submission of interim payment claims).

Due to timing and delays in the agenda, the presentation on the performance framework was skipped, but the JS briefly indicated that the programme expects to reach the performance targets in 2019 (see annex 24)

The **JS** provided a brief overview on the audit activities in 2018 (see annex 25).

The point and **JS** presentation on the recovery procedure and in particular the rule concerning irregularities below 250€ was also skipped. The JS explained that an updated EC guidance was published a few days before the Monitoring Committee meeting in the meantime. The JS will analyse



this guidance which included some last minute amendments regarding the EUR 250-rule, and will check whether the note has to be further updated and inform the MC accordingly in the next meeting.

The **JS** presented the results of the Arachne checks carried out in 2018 and the lessons learnt to be taken into consideration in order to potentially change the programme's use of Arachne and make the checks done with this tool proportionate to the actual risks (see annex 26).

The **JS** also presented an update of the whistleblowing cases received by the programme in 2017 and 2018, which are closed by now. .

The **JS** concluded that the resources dedicated within the finance team in the JS to audit, anti-fraud (Arachne) and programme financial matters are significant. This also partly explains the proposal presented by the **JS** at the beginning of the MC meeting, namely to increase the finance team by one permanent officer (see annex 03).

15. Update on post 2020 discussion

Post 2020 discussion

The **JS** reminded that the JS and the MA do not have the mandate to promote the future of Interreg Europe, which lies on the members of the MC. The **JS** mentioned the actions it has carried out so far, i.e. the production of a position paper in collaboration with the Région Hauts-de-France which was presented at the Committee of the Regions and at the European Parliament.

The **Chair** presented the proposal of **AT Presidency of the Council of the European Union**, i.e. that component 5 should be moved from the ETC to the ERDF regulation, and that Urbact should continue. The **Chair** highlighted that for ETC as a whole, the majority of MS was in favour of the continuation of ETC, and that as a result, the three strands of ETC should continue for the next period.

The **RO** agreed with the timeframe and suggested Brussels as the meeting location.

Decision:

The meeting suggested by **RO** was approved.

Technical comments regarding post2020 regulation

The **JS** briefly presented the technical paper co-written with the two other Interreg programmes and the Urban innovative actions initiative hosted by the Région Haut-de-France (see annex 27). The paper gathers technical comments on the future regulations based on the practitioners' experience (see annex 28). The presentation put emphasis on the comments regarding the joint audit approach,



the organisation of first level control, cash flow matters, staff cost calculation methods and the use of the Euro. These issues seem to be very technical and specific, but have an important impact on the running capacity of programmes in practice. That's why the secretariats and the MA felt it important to draw the Monitoring Committee representatives' attention to these points so that they could if appropriate also inform the representatives in the Structural measures working party about these issues and proposals.

16. AOB

Following up on RO's meeting suggestion, the **JS** proposed that it would take place in Brussels on 23 January 2019, and encouraged Member States contributions, papers, and new ideas.

The **JS** concluded with the presentation of the timeline for the next months (see annex 29).

End of Meeting

NOTE: To ensure transparency of the Monitoring 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