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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ASPECTS IN CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION PROGRAMMES: THE CASE OF MACEDONIA AND ALBANIA

Introduction

*M*ain important strategy to achieve the goals of prosperity and peace in the Western Balkans¹ is through European integration. European policy makers trust that greater European involvement in the Western Balkans can have positive and long-lasting effects on the management of ethno-political conflict.² The stability is an important goal to be achieved and maintained not just by the Balkan countries but also that is from essential meaning for the European Union.

The European Union has invested great en-

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- 1 The Western Balkans refers to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro – countries which share a common perspective of European integration. South East Europe includes all of the Western Balkans, in addition to Bulgaria and Romania which joined the EU in January 2007.
 - 2 Belloni, R. University of Trento (2009) - European Integration and the Western Balkans: Lessons, Prospects, and Limits.

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ergy and finances in the stabilization of the Balkan countries. Through its aid programs the EU has provided more than 6.1 billion euros between 1991 and 2001 for the Balkan countries.³ The EU considered that more serious and long term approach was needed for the Balkan challenge, so the Stability Pact was established for that purpose. The crises in the beginning of the '90, and the crises in Kosovo were great experience for the European Union and a key moment for EU to understand the situation and to adapt to its needs so to perform its role better and more effective regarding the stabilization of the region.

For the last decade the countries of the Western Balkans region have been regarded as potential candidates for EU membership. These countries are subject to structural aid and assistance by a number of EU foreign policy instruments, with the fundamental purpose of tying these countries closer to the EU legislation, economy and values and successfully integrating them within the single market of the Union.⁴

The paper focuses on conducting research on sustainable development, territorial cohesion and CBC development aspects in the case of the IPA CBC Programme Macedonia-Albania 2007-13 and provides recommendations for improvement that can be taken in considerations for the next programme 2014-2020. Initial results after the first three calls for project proposals provide the first insights into the implementation of the 2007-13 Programme.

1. Cross-border Cooperation in Western Balkan

From 2007 effective, financial aid and technical assistance from the EU to the Enlargement policy countries (Western Balkans and Turkey) is disbursed through the framework of a uniform instrument – a pre-accession program, called Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). Main purpose of the IPA is to incorporate previous preaccession and stabilization assistance within a single framework, in order to enhance the efficiency and coherence of the aid provided, and thus – to better prepare the countries for actual membership within the EU. As of March 2014, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey are officially recognized as candidate countries, while Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, and Kosovo are identified as potential candidates.

3 Center for Research and Policy Making. *The Macedonian Experience with Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes*. Occasional Paper No.14. Skopje, Macedonia 2007.

4 Alexander Sirakov, Pavlin Delchev, Serdon. *EU Funding for the Western Balkans 2010 – 2012. A short survey on EU funding programs and instruments in the countries of the Western Balkans*. March 2011, Sofia, Bulgaria.

Within the five components of IPA⁵, the II component CBC applies to all IPA beneficiaries' countries and is intended to address activities and projects in promotion of good relations between regions and countries, as well as development of cross-border infrastructure, flood prevention, economic cooperation and environment problems, administrative cooperation, cultural and educational exchange, research, job creation, etc.

IPA funding for cross border activities is provided on both sides of the EU border, as well as Western Balkans internal borders on the basis of one set of rules, thus providing the opportunity for equal and balanced programming and decision making structures between Member States and Candidate and Potential Candidate Countries.

Analyzing CBC assistance provided by EU in the framework of IPA 2007-2013 as it presented in Table 1, Croatia has received the highest percentages of funds for CBC during 2007-2013 followed by Serbia, Albania and Turkey. If we analyze the trend of funds received 2007-2013 the total funds have increased yearly from 38.5 million euro to 66.5 million euro. In real terms Albania has registered a higher increase in funds compared to Macedonia during 2007-2013, but in terms of yearly percentage of the total funds, Albania has remained the same, while Macedonia has decreased.

Table No.1: EU funds provided in the framework of IPA 2007-2013

Country	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total per country	% of total
Albania	6.6	8.5	9.8	9.9	10.1	10.2	10.6	65.7	16.2
BiH	3.9	4.9	5.2	4.7	4.7	4.8	4.9	33.1	8.1
Croatia	9.7	14.7	15.9	15.6	15.8	16.1	16.7	104.5	25.8
Kosovo	-	-	-	2.8	2.8	2.9	2.9	11.4	2.8
Macedonia	4.1	4.0	4.3	5.0	5.1	5.2	5.2	32.9	8.1
Montenegro	3.9	4.5	4.6	4.2	4.3	4.3	4.4	30.2	7.5
Serbia	8.2	11.4	12.2	11.7	11.9	12.1	11.6	79.1	19.5
Turkey	2.1	2.8	3.4	9.5	9.7	9.9	10.1	47.5	11.7
Total	38.5	50.8	55.4	63.4	64.4	65.5	66.4	404.4	100

Source: Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, IPA Multi-Annual Indicative Financial Framework for 2011-2013, Com (2009) 543, October 10, 2009.

5 IPA aid is delivered through five fundamental components: I) Transition and Institution Building; II) Cross-border cooperation (I & II concern all beneficiary countries); III) Regional Development (providing support to transport, environment infrastructure and enhancing competitiveness and reducing regional disparities); IV) Human Resources Development; V) Rural Development.

In terms of distribution of the CBC funding in 2012 compared to number of population in 2012, it results that the funding are not provided in proportion to the size of population and size of the countries. The distribution rather depends on the previous assessed financial absorption capacity of each of the beneficiaries, as well as assessed necessity for the country's bordering regions development.⁶ The lowest percentage of receiving funds is represented by Bosnia and Herzegovina. The country is much time bigger as size compared to Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro, but it receives the same amount of money for CBC actions as Macedonia and Montenegro, and in the same time twice less than receives Albania. In terms of CBC funds per capita Montenegro is the highest ranked country with 7.17 euro per capita followed by Croatia (3.83) and Albania (3.29). In terms of CBC funds per sq.km Albania leads the list followed by Montenegro.

Table No.2: EU CBC fund in 2012 compared with population and surface area in 2012

Country	CBC funds	Population	CBC funds / population	Country surface area (sq. km)	CBC funds / country surface area (sq. km)
Albania	10.2	3.1	3.29	28,750	0.035%
BiH	4.8	3.8	1.26	51,210	0.009%
Croatia	16.1	4.2	3.83	56,590	0.028%
Kosovo	2.9	1.8	1.61	10,887	0.027%
Macedonia	5.2	2.1	2.48	25,710	0.020%
Montenegro	4.3	0.6	7.17	13,810	0.031%
Serbia	12.1	7.2	1.68	88,360	0.014%
Turkey	9.9	74.0	0.13	783,560	0.001%

Source: Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, IPA Multi-Annual Indicative Financial Framework for 2011-2013, Com (2009) 543, October 10, 2009.

Source: World Bank indicators on population and surface area, and author calculation.

⁶ Madzova, V. Davcev, L. Paceshkoski, V. (2013) - The Impact of Cross Border Cooperation on Sustainable Development of the Bordering Areas (Case Study of Republic of Macedonia). University "Goce Delcev" –Faculty of Economics.

2. Cross-border Programme Macedonia - Albania 2007-2013

2.1 Implementation of Cross-border Programme Macedonia - Albania 2007-2013

Borders are important for Macedonia and Albania's development, because of its specific geographical shape and lengths of borders. According to the IPA Cross-border Cooperation (CBC) Programme document⁷ the territory of the eligible area between the two countries covers 19,969 km², with a total population of 1,524,674 inhabitants. The overall borderline length is 191 km with four frontier posts operating permanently and one frontier post operating occasionally.

The objective of IPA CBC Programme Macedonia – Albania 2007-2013 was to promote good neighborly relations, foster stability, security and prosperity, and encourage their harmonious, balanced and sustainable development.

The program is managed by the Operating Structures (OSs) established in each of the two beneficiary countries, for the Republic of Macedonia is Ministry of Local Self-Government (MLSG) and for the Republic of Albania is the Ministry of European Integration (MoEI). During 2009 the OSs established a Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS)⁸ located in Struga to assist them and the Joint Monitoring Committee with their respective duties. Antenna in Elbasan was established 1st September 2008. The contracting authorities for each country are the respective European Union Delegation (EUD) office.

The management of the program actions/grants was supervised by the JTS/Antenna, MoEI/Technical Assistance and program managers at the EUD. During the implementation some improvement has been made to staff resources in the EUD⁹ which is important as the EUD are overall responsible for the contracting of all grant contracts. The main issue is to ensure the cooperation between the EUDs so that the procedures for each program are identical; and a unified process could be coordinated from Brussels. Reporting also has to be the same and one report instead of different reporting requirements on each side of the border.

7 IPA Cross-Border Programme 2007-2013 Macedonia – Albania.

8 The aim of JTS and Antenna structures were to facilitate the process of planning and preparation of the application packages and Call for Proposals, assist with evaluation procedures and related documentation, facilitate grant applications process, and then ongoing project evaluations and monitoring.

9 In the EUD in Albania, additional staff (acting as external expertise) has been made available with a very good system for covering each other.

The Program managed to launch three Calls for Proposals during 2007-2013¹⁰. It is important to underline that there was political will and interests from the eligible partners from both sides to start with the cross border programme, but with insufficient preparation and experience in dealing with such complex structure and procedures as IPA instrument requires. It resulted with the time gap of 18 months for the first call and more than two years for the second call for proposals, between the date of project applications submission and date of announcement of the final selection list of awarded project. In first case the awarded small scale projects have been implemented two years after the project application submission, while in the case of second call, over 2 million euro were not used. Those residuals were aimed for big grants over 100,000 EUR which actions might make possible development impact in cross border areas at both sides, and therefore the damage of such delay in selection process seems to be much bigger. Although the time for selecting projects for the third call was shortened, it still lasted longer than a year.

Table No.3: Analysis of time between the publishing of three calls and signing of contracts

Call	Date of call publishing	Deadline for application submission	Date of signed contracts
1st call	02.06.2009	04.08.2009	25.03.2011
2nd call	19.04.2010	19.07.2010	17-27.04.2012
3rd call	23.11.2011	23.02.2012	19.03.2013

The overall indicative amounts published under the three calls in the Albania-Macedonia CBC Programme 2007-2013 have changed during the years increasing the funds from 1 million euro in the first call to almost 5 million euro in the third call. It should be noted the division of indicative amounts has changed during the years by providing a more balance distribution between the two countries in the third call based also in the division of the eligible cross-border area for this programme¹¹.

10 Albanian Ministry of European Integration. External Evaluation Report, IPA Cross Border Programme Between Republic of Macedonia and Republic of Albania 2007-2013. Tirana 2013.

11 In the CBC programme the eligible cross-border areas are represented by Macedonia's territory with 52.5% and the Albanian territory with 47.5%, while the Macedonia's population is 50.3% (766,820 inhabitants) and Albania's population is 49.7% (757,854 inhabitants).

Table No.4: Analysis of overall indicative amounts published under the three calls

Call	Total amount of the CfP (both countries)	Macedonia (euro)	Albania (euro)	Macedonia in %	Albania in %
1st call	1,020,000	680,000	340,000	67%	33%
2nd call	3,525,000	2,200,000	1,325,000	62%	38%
3rd call	4,995,000	2,700,000	2,295,000	54%	46%

The size of grants awarded under the three measures has increased from the first call to the other calls from a minimum and maximum of 20,000 euro and 50,000 euro respectively to 30,000 euro and 100,000 euro respectively.

Table No.5: Analysis of published size of grants between the three calls

Measure	First Call		Second Call				Third Call	
	Min.	Max.	Small Grants		Big grants		Min.	Max.
			Min.	Max.	Min.	Max.		
Measure 1	20,000	50,000			50,000	200,000	50,000	200,000
Measure 2					50,000	200,000	50,000	200,000
Measure 3			20,000	50,000			30,000	100,000

Between June 2009 and February 2012 three calls for proposals were organized in three measures: Measure 1 Economic development; Measure 2 Sustainable environment development; Measure 3 Social cohesion. The number of applications has considerably increased by 105% from 60 applications in the first call to 123 to the third call. During the three calls the highest increase in number of applications between the measures has been registered by the measure 2 from 15 to 42 with more than 180% showing the increased interest on environmental related projects.

Table No.6: Number of applications during the three calls for proposals

Measure	First Call		Second Call		Third Call	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Measure 1	21	35%	44	53%	46	37%
Measure 2	15	25%	21	25%	42	34%
Measure 3	24	40%	18	22%	35	28%
Total	60	100%	83	100%	123	100%

The amounts of funds contracted for the projects during the three calls have followed almost a similar division between the countries taking in consideration the division of the eligible cross-border area for this programme, and the division is more proportional compared to indicative amounts published under the three calls (Table 4).

Table No.7: Amounts of funds contracted during the three calls for proposals

Call	Total amount of selected applications (both countries)	Macedonia (euro)	Albania (euro)	Macedonia in %	Albania in %
1st call	1,098,409	571,270	527,139	52%	48%
2nd call	1,252,024	662,447	589,577	53%	47%
3rd call	1,647,932	886,375	761,557	54%	46%

Under the first Call for Proposals 29 grants out of 60 applicants were awarded by EU Delegations from both sides of the border with a total budget for all three measures of 1.098 million euro (Albania and Macedonia together).

Table No.8: Number of awarded grants during the 1st call for proposals

Country	Total awarded grants	Projects implemented in both sides	Projects implemented only in one side
Macedonia	14	12	2
Albania	15	12	3
Total	29	24	5

Under the second Call for Proposals, 16 grants out of 83 applications from both sides of the border were awarded by EU Delegations with a total budget 1.25 million euro.

Table No.9: Number of awarded grants during the 2st call for proposals

Country	Total awarded grants	Projects implemented in both sides	Projects implemented only in one side
Macedonia	8	7	1
Albania	8	7	1
Total	16	14	2

Under the third Call for Proposals 19 grants out of 123 assessed were approved from both sides of the border, and were awarded by EU Delegations with a total budget 1.64 million euro.

Table No.10: Number of awarded grants during the 3rd call for proposals

Country	Total awarded grants	Projects implemented in both sides	Projects implemented only in one side
Macedonia	12	12	0
Albania	7	7	0
Total	19	19	0

Aside from these grants, funds were also allocated for strategic projects For Albania-Macedonia CBC Programme, funds for 2012 & 2013 (850,000 euro per year), were transferred to the strategic project for Lake Ohrid, “Towards strengthening the governance of trans boundary natural and cultural heritage of the region of Lake Ohrid”. Funding and management of this project went under IPA Component I.

2.2 Sustainability development aspects in the implementation of CBC Programme Macedonia - Albania 2007-2013

When looking at the objectives and priorities in the operational programmes for cross-border cooperation, in which the Albania and Macedonia participate, all of them are built on the idea of sustainability and integrated development. All of them include social, economic and environmental aspects. Participatory development approaches are inherent in the obligatory requirement that project proposals need to be developed by at least two cross-border partners.¹² The mentioned sectors in the programmes are often regarded to as the vertical elements of the programmes within which the objectives and priorities and measures are formulated.

In order to be considered for financing, proposed projects have also to comply with EU objectives and policies referring to social inclusion, gender equality, environmental aspects, accessibility, information and communication technology, which are most commonly integrated in the programmes as the horizontal policy axes.¹³ The programmes provide in that sense a top-down development framework for the respective border areas

¹² Cross-border Programmes in which participates Albania and Macedonia www.delmkd.ec.europa.eu and www.mie.gov.al.

¹³ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperate/cooperation/crossborder/index_en.cfm

with a clear indication of funding opportunities. The implementation of the programme is accomplished by projects developed by the targeted institutions (usually local and regional authorities, non-profit organisations) and funded through the respective operational programme grant schemes. In this way, bottom-up development is fostered and capacity building of the lowest levels of governance is enabled. According to the grant applicants' evaluation during the three calls, one can hardly say that any local authority in eligible areas did not thought of applying for EU grants.¹⁴

One can consider the implementation of the CBC program to be a very important one for both countries for the following reasons:

- Almost whole territory of both countries is covered by different IPA cross border programmes. These will enable total inclusion of all entities from all parts of the country while implementing it, to strengthen the human, organizational and institutional capacities to better adapt the EU practices.
- Some of the bordering regions are very poor with lack of capacities, thus, even small amount of funds might made evident improvements with project interventions.
- The partnerships established while implementing cross border projects can strengthen neighboring ties, or even improve political and ethnic relationship between the two countries.
- Being an area with great potentials in alternative tourism, the bordering regions get an opportunity to develop the cross border area, through implementing small-scale projects for cultural, historical, religious and other form of tourism, and therefore have positive impact on sustainable development.¹⁵

Overall, cross-border cooperation is found in the projects and there are clear cross-border effects and impacts by many projects. The grant projects analyzed fall well within the objectives of the programs, and impacts on a sectoral/priority level are therefore easier to identify and assess than cross-border impacts. Projects span from support to economic development of small infrastructure and tourism; entrepreneurship, activities focusing on eco-tourism in the cross-border region, as well as regional cooperation

14 Albanian Ministry of European Integration. External Evaluation Report, IPA Cross Border Programme Between Republic of Macedonia and Republic of Albania 2007-2013. Tirana 2013.

15 Madzova, V., Davcev, L., Paceshkoski, V., The Impact of Cross Border Cooperation on Sustainable Development of the Bordering Areas (Case Study of Republic of Macedonia). University "Goce Delcev" –Faculty of Economics – Stip (2013).

projects in tourism. The program beneficiaries were:

- Local and regional authorities;
- Country and regional agencies, (responsible at central, regional and municipal level);
- Regional employment agencies;
- Non-governmental or non-profit making organizations, associations and foundations (NGOs and NPOs), such as business support organizations, local enterprise agencies, development agencies, chambers of commerce, tourism agencies, ICT development agencies, educational, training and R&D institutions, producer associations, labour unions;
- Public enterprises;
- Small and Medium Enterprises.

Although many of the grant beneficiaries are experienced project implementers, a substantial part of them have never before implemented a CBC project and therefore are not aware of the specific implications. Many projects have requested a no-cost extension as the implementation period of less than 12 months for most projects seems to be too short, particularly taking into account that the grant beneficiaries, in general, have limited experience with European Union projects. As indicators are only used consistently in relatively few programmes and application forms, it is difficult to predict the sustainability of the implemented grant projects. There is little experience in the region with this concept, and further training is needed for grant beneficiaries in terms of assessing and ensuring sustainability of the projects.

In fact, overall understanding remains low, as most of the grant beneficiaries have conceptualized the sustainability only with regards to the financial needs. There is an expressed need to formalize the recommendations and project outcomes at institutional and policy levels and to involve the proper stakeholders right from the beginning. Some grant beneficiaries have considered this fact as the most important part of the sustainability and risk management plans, so the involved project beneficiaries could take over the project results and further continue the work.

When coming to the important question of the impact, although difficult to be clearly articulated, the cross-border involvement of numerous stakeholders show that project results have impacted the sectoral and thematic developments of the program. The prospect for medium or longer term impact is generally vague.

There is still evident low staff capacity for preparation and implemen-

tation of the projects among cross bordering municipalities. This is due to the fact that (a) municipalities do not have sufficient staff, (b) do not have a specific team or unit that will operate on funds from IPA and (c) have financial constraints, as they can't afford to engage consultants for writing and implementing projects. Thus the leading position for the project application is usually taken by experienced NGOs which are designing project activities based on their vision and capacities, which do not necessarily reflect the real needs of the people in bordering areas. All this prevent cross bordering human and organizational capacities to be strengthened and sustainable partnership to be built.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

Despite of several shortfalls, the CBC projects should be seen as a success story, especially when considering that for all Albanian organizations this was their very first experience in dealing with EU funded CBC projects.

- Although there were partnerships where organizations knew each other from previous activities, a general conclusion can be drawn that there was a clear willingness to work and cooperate across the borders. The CBC projects and their related promotion activities appear to have improved the overall neighborly relationships and understanding, communication as well as the awareness of the needs for further strengthening of this cooperation. Furthermore, they have raised mutual motivation for further cross border relations and future cooperation.
- All grant beneficiaries have had difficulties in complying with the financial management procedures of PRAG and VAT requirements. It can be stated that the projects represent very demanding administrative procedures. Training on and monitoring of project implementation, especially on PRAG regulations, should be offered to beneficiaries throughout project cycle. The "help-desk" support on project implementation should be strengthened. A solution should be found with Government authorities on the VAT issue in Albania, especially for NGOs.
- All cross-border cooperation programmes in EU candidate and potential candidate countries are supported by technical assistance projects, so preparatory meetings and trainings for potential applicants are frequently organized prior to calls for project proposals. However, due to lack of time or even expert knowledge, sustainable development and environmental protection issues could receive

more attention and could benefit from additional targeted training events. A way of strengthening sustainability could be of ensuring involvement and active participation of public local and regional institutions in all EU funded projects.

- The concept of CBC programmes is based on the partnership principle and a precondition or basic eligibility criteria for receiving a grant for project implementation. However, in reality very often the more experienced partner prepares the application and leads in the application procedures and later in the project implementation without a real improvement of the capacities of the other partners.
- Many of the projects suffer from weak design, while a majority of projects with clearly elaborated needs and objectives have set rather “overly ambitious” objectives and results, not possible to achieve in the given context, budget or time frame.
- Sustainability of results of these projects is questionable. It would be interesting to evaluate, through other research, if any of the projects had a second phase or a real follow up after its completion. However it is evident that the majority of projects generated some strong partnerships amongst organizations involved.
- An increase on allocations to fund CBC related initiatives would be strongly recommended. CBC initiatives are generally underfunded to produce a wide impact. CBC calls for proposals could be combined with similar regional development related initiatives already existing in the area under different donors funding (including EU).
- It can be recommended to limit the variety of actions that can be potentially funded under one Call for Proposal by narrowing the focus of interventions. This might increase the chances of deepening the level of interventions and impact of projects in a given area to be supported.
- Consolidated cross-border IT system with regards to Project Cycle Management and Monitoring & Evaluation: The number of grant beneficiaries, the diversity of the projects that have been implemented and parties involved, do create the grounds for consolidated and unified format of guidelines and regulations, dedicated to harmonized solutions in cases of joint activities and expected results.

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Abstract

The scope of the research is the evaluation and analysis of the Integrated Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) Cross-border Cooperation (CBC) Programme Macedonia-Albania 2007-2013 and its sustainable development aspects. The importance of the sustainable development aspect is recognized and is formally included into various national strategic documents, however implementation is often problematic and sustainability aspects need to be examined on a more concrete level.

The methodology was qualitative with research tools such as desk studies of relevant program documentation, strategic and planning documentation and other relevant published materials. The desk review considered well over 40 documents relevant to the program, most of which were shared by Ministry of European Integration (MoEI) and other actors.

Резиме

Во фокусот на истражувањето е евалуацијата и анализата на Инструментот за претпристапна помош (ИПА) за програмата за прекугранична соработка (ПС) во случајот на Македонија и Албанија во периодот од 2007 до 2013 година, и нејзините аспекти на одржлив развој. Одржливиот развој е признат и формално вклучен како важен аспект во разни национални стратегиски документи, но со оглед на неретко проблематичната имплементација, аспектите на одржливоста треба да се разгледаат на поконкретно ниво.

Беше применета квалитативна методологија со алатки за истражување како што се истражувањето на релевантна програмска документација, документација поврзана со стратегии и планирање, како и други релевантни објавени материјали. Беа проучени над 40 документи од значење за програмата, достапни во голема мера благодарение на Министерството за евроинтеграција (МзЕИ) и други чинители.

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- The cross-border Program between Republic of Macedonia and Albania, 2007-2013

- Reports of the monitoring missions performed by JTS/Antenna Elbasan in Albania on grant contracts awarded under the 1st Call for proposals IPA CBC Program Macedonia-Albania

- List of Beneficiaries under the 1st Call for Proposals - IPA CBC Program MK-AL

- List of Beneficiaries under the 2nd Call for Proposals - IPA CBC Program MK-AL

- List of Beneficiaries under the 3rd Call for Proposals - IPA CBC Program MK-AL

- Approved action plans, and websites of MoEI (www.mei.gov.al)
- www.delmkd.ec.europa.eu
- www.mls.gov.mk
- www.ipa-cbc-007.eu