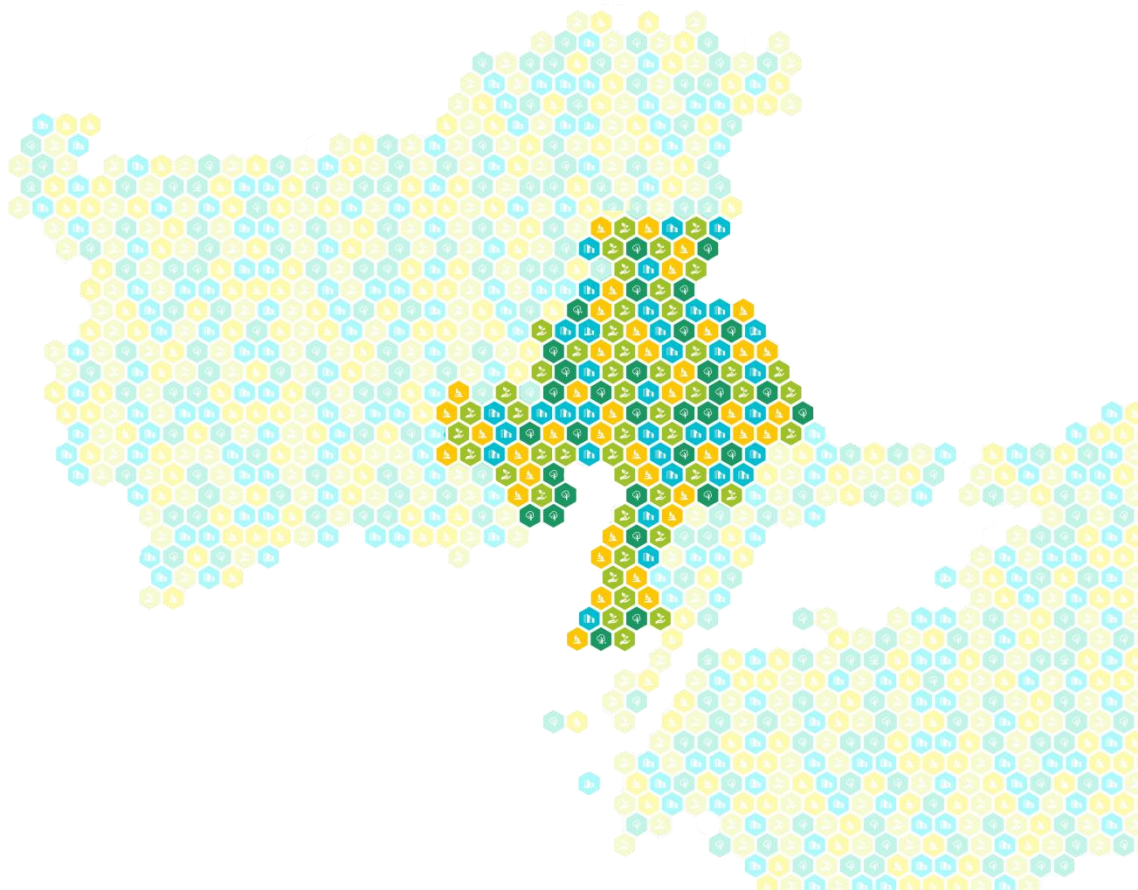


TERRITORIAL STRATEGY

to be financed under the

INTERREG VI-A IPA Bulgaria – Türkiye Programme 2021 -2027

STRATEGY



Version 2, September 2022

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this territorial strategy is to address the needs of the INTERREG VI-A IPA Bulgaria – Türkiye 2021—2027 Programme to contribute to the sustainable economic development of the region. The measures of the territorial strategy will be implemented within the framework of PO 5 ‘Europe closer to citizens’.

This document is developed in close coordination with local stakeholders in the CBC region. The Strategy contains a package of measures, including the identification of geographical/spatial scope and a methodology for governance, monitoring and evaluation. The document complies with the legal framework and takes into account the specificities of the programme area; it focuses on the cross-border dimension by identifying common challenges and development potentials.

Multi-level governance have been ensured by involving all competent levels (following a bottom-up regional approach, in close cooperation with the programme structures) in line with the principles of partnership, gender equality and non-discrimination.

The Territorial Strategy have been presented at various events and regional consultations.

According to the to the REGULATION (EU) 2021/1060 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 24 June 2021¹ (CPR) laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy, investments aimed strengthening the integrated territorial development approach should be supported within territorial and local development strategies. These territorial strategies should be developed and endorsed under the responsibility of local stakeholders and authorities who later become responsible for the selection of projects (or get involved in that selection) to be supported by the strategies.

2. METHODOLOGY FOR ELABORATION OF THE STRATEGY

The methodology of elaboration of the Territorial Strategy(TS) is grounded on the need to account for: compliance with EU and national territorial development and spatial planning practices, EU, national and regional development priorities, broad local participation and local ownership. The TS elaboration process followed the bottom-up approach whereby locals and stakeholders participated in every stage of the drafting process through three different territorial tools: Task force group (TFG), public consultations, public campaign for collecting project ideas. Members of TFG are nominated representatives of various

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R1060&from=EN>

sectors accounting for broad territorial representation. The work of the TFG has been supported by an external consultant whose tasks were to technically draft each essential element of the TS and study particular territorial needs (that complement the ones exhibited during the regional consultations). Then, the draft has been consulted by the TFG members and verified through public consultation with the local stakeholders.

The methodology can be presented in the following steps:

The first step is to establish a Task Force for the Strategy and is a continuation of the consultations for the development of the Programme. The identification of participants in the task force is based on the principle of partnership and the multi-level approach to governance, and ensures the involvement of civil society and the social partners.

The next step is to define the strategic context and methodology and to determine the geographical scope of the strategy. This activity is carried out through a desk analysis of the existing strategic documents at European, national, regional and local level in accordance with the requirements of the Strategy. The geographical scope of the Strategy is determined in accordance with the European requirements and guidelines applied in the local context.

All this provides the basis for the preparation of the analysis of the needs and development potentials as a third step of development of the TS. The thematic scope of the analysis includes the following main areas: economic development, tourism, social development, labour market, culture and cultural heritage, infrastructure, environment and others. The development objectives and priorities, as well as the measures for their achievement at a higher level, defined in the strategic context, serve as the basis for the criteria according to which the needs and development potentials are defined on the basis of the regional reality described with the help of the collected information.

The main emphasis in doing this has been placed on avoiding an overly descriptive approach to the region and its various characteristics while focusing on the common challenges on both sides of the border that are important for the preparation of the Strategy.

As a result of the identified needs and development potentials of the programme area, one functional area for interventions has been identified.

The integrated approach to addressing needs and utilising the existing potentials will be implemented through a multi-sectoral package of measures for attaining the objectives of the Strategy and ensuring the active involvement of partners (stakeholders) at all stages of its development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

The next step in the development of the TS is formulating the vision and goals of the strategy. The vision defines the desired role of the strategy as part of the organised measures for sustainable socioeconomic development of the territory.

The key (priority) needs of interventions identified provide the basis for defining the strategic objectives of the Strategy, which in turn provide basis for its specific objectives.

The strategic objectives are the basis for defining the package of measures in close connection with the specific needs and potentials and the priority measures of a higher level. The nature of the measures determines the need for keeping track, in the course of the process, of how adding or dropping any given measure would have an impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of the entire package.

A system of approaches (integrated, cross-border, ecosystem and place-based approach), principles and methods applied in the development of strategies for territorial development is used. The SMART approach — specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-based — is used in setting the objectives.

A methodology for implementation, monitoring and evaluation is prepared in close connection with the results achieved so far, the higher-level guidelines and the best practices.

The developed Action Plan for the implementation of the strategy includes the indicative terms for the implementation of the envisaged measures for achieving the objectives of the strategy.

The expected results from the implementation of the TS are related to:

- achieving concrete specific objectives and strategic objectives;
- building the stakeholders' confidence, understanding and willingness to participate in the process of integrated regional planning and in the implementation of measures;
- developing commitment of local communities to regional development, including through the established network of contacts and, specifically for the case, of cross-border contacts.

3. GEOGRAPHICAL AREA COVERED BY THE STRATEGY

The geographical scope of the strategy is defined in accordance with the requirements set out in Article 29 of the CPR.²

The TS looks into existing socio-economic and governance flows across the border region making up the entire programme territory a functional area. The programme area is considered functionally coherent due to the following particularities:

² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R1060&from=EN>

- *small size of the programme territory* – below the (Interreg VI-A) IPA programmes average. The smaller size questions the economic rationality for delineating functional areas for subsets of the territory;

- *identical demographic and socio-economic challenges depict the entire programme area* – please, see the Territorial Analysis of the TS. This analysis confirms the existence of similar economic, social and territorial challenges, needs and potentials which provides a reason to define the entire cross-border region as a functional area for which to develop a territorial development strategy.

- *uneven spread of common territorial assets and economic activities across the entire programme area, resulting in scattered functional interlinkages* - despite the fact that both sides of the border have access to the Black Sea, this strategic territorial asset cannot itself delineate a functional area. Unlike the Bulgarian part of the CBC area, who is exclusively oriented towards maritime tourism and reaps off fully from the excellent connectivity it has, the Turkish side does not enjoy identical peculiarities due to its territorial architecture (green areas prevail which predetermine the low population density and the limited infrastructure provision). Currently, there is only one border check point in the maritime sub-area of the CB region located 100 km away from the coastline. No sea transport connects both countries;

- *broad participation legitimizes the selected approach* - a Task Force Group (TFG) made of local stakeholders, who develops the TS, has already agreed on the assessed territorial characteristics and functionalities.

In addition to including common needs and potentials, the territory must create conditions for achieving the objectives defined in the strategy. The territorial nature of the strategy determines the serious impact on it of the priorities of the **Territorial Agenda 2030**³, which have also been included in the national and regional documents relevant to the strategy territory. They assign a significant role to a balanced polycentric network of cooperating cities in activating development potentials. Higher-level development centres, such as Edirne, Kırklareli, Burgas, Haskovo and Yambol, play a particularly important role in this network for the territories in both countries immediately along the border, and their inclusion in the territorial scope is of great importance.

The defined territory of the strategy provides an adequate territorial basis for the preparation of an integrated response to the needs and development potential of the territory, in compliance with the European strategic framework. The applied integrated and functional area approach to TS will help targeting the programme support to functional areas where sub-sectoral interlinkages provide opportunities for building regional value chains.

³ <https://territorialagenda.eu/home.html>

4. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The strategic context in which the current strategy is developed and implemented is composed of development documents related to the geographical scope of the strategy at different levels — European, national and regional. The main objectives and priorities of said documents are presented briefly.

The primary reason for the documents that make up the strategic context in this area is the common European policy. It is based on the objectives and values enshrined in the Treaty of Lisbon and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

The EU values are common to the Member States in a society in which inclusion, tolerance, justice, solidarity and non-discrimination prevail.

The objectives of the European Union considered in this document as long-term strategic objectives are as follows:

- promote peace, its values and the well-being of its citizens;
- offer freedom, security and justice without internal borders;
- sustainable development based on balanced economic growth and price stability, a highly competitive market economy with full employment and social progress, and environmental protection;
- combat social exclusion and discrimination;
- promote scientific and technological progress;
- enhance economic, social and territorial cohesion and solidarity among EU countries;
- respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity;
- establish an economic and monetary union whose currency is the euro.

4.1. EUROPEAN STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES

3.1.1. Policy objectives for the 2021—2027 programming period⁴

Specific objectives of INTERREG (ISO)⁶

3.1.2. Priorities of the European Commission (CP) for 2019—2024⁷

3.1.3. Territorial Agenda 2030 — A future for all places

Territorial priorities (TP) for Europe: <https://www.territorialagenda.eu/home.html>

⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R1060&from=EN>

⁶ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R1059&from=EN>

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024_en

3.1.4. International Cooperation in the Black Sea

A number of joint organisations and strategic documents of the Black Sea countries have laid the foundation for long-term cooperation in the Black Sea. It is worth noting the Commission on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organisation⁸, and in terms of the development strategies — the Common Maritime Agenda in the Black Sea⁵, the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda for the Black Sea (SRIA)⁶, Blue Growth⁷, and the EU Maritime Security Strategy⁸.

The developed strategy can contribute to the achievement of the objectives set by getting involved in the process of maritime spatial planning according to its capabilities. This process is regulated at EU level through the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive⁹.

3.1.5. Preparation for INTERREG Post 2020¹⁰

4.2. STRATEGIC GOALS AT NATIONAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL

4.2.1. Strategic documents of the Republic of Bulgaria

4.2.1.1. National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030¹¹

4.2.2. National Concept for Spatial Development for the 2013–2025 period. Update 2019¹²

4.2.2.1. Integrated territorial development strategy for the South Central Region¹³

4.2.2.2. Integrated territorial development strategy for the Southeastern Region¹⁴

4.2.3. Strategic documents of the Republic of Türkiye

4.2.3.1. Eleventh Development Plan 2019—2023¹⁵

4.2.3.2. Eleventh management plan of the region of Thrace 2014—2023¹⁶

⁸ <https://www.sme.government.bg/?p=2872>

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/press/common-maritime-agenda-black-sea-motion_en

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/info/news/launch-european-black-sea-strategic-research-and-innovation-agenda-2019-may-08_en

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/blue_growth_en

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/maritime-security_en

⁹ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=LEGISSUM:0201_2

¹⁰Preparation for Interreg Post 2020,

https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/communication/regional_offices/reg_offices_25-09-2019_interreg.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.minfin.bg/en/1394>

¹² <https://www.mrrb.bg/bg/aktualizaciya-na-nacionalnata-koncepciya-za-prostranstveno-razvitie-za-perioda-2013-2025-g/>

¹³ <https://www.mrrb.bg/bg/proekt-na-integrirani-teritorialni-strategii-za-razvitie-na-regionite-za-planirane-ot-nivo-2-za-perioda-2021-2027-g/>

¹⁴ <https://www.mrrb.bg/bg/proekt-na-integrirani-teritorialni-strategii-za-razvitie-na-regionite-za-planirane-ot-nivo-2-za-perioda-2021-2027-g/>

¹⁵ https://www.sbb.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Eleventh_Development_Plan_2019-2023.pdf

¹⁶ https://www.trakyaka.org.tr/upload/Node/33264/xfiles/trakya_bolge_plani_2014-2023.pdf,

https://www.trakyaka.org.tr/upload/Node/35323/xfiles/tr21_Thrace_Region_Region_Plan_2014-2023+1.pdf

4.3. Preparation for INTERREG Post 2020 — guidelines for cross-border cooperation

The **Border Orientation Papers** for INTERREG IPA CBC cooperation programmes between the Republic of Bulgaria and, respectively, the Republic of North Macedonia, the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Türkiye set out the key characteristics of cross-border territories and outline ideas, opportunities and orientations for the thematic focus of future programmes. These guidelines are useful for the developed strategy given its cross-border orientation.

The main principles of work include:

- Focusing on areas identified by common characteristics, needs and development potentials in order to achieve tangible results. The structuring of the interventions is not limited to the administrative boundaries of the programme, but is tailored to the actions necessary to achieve the desired effect.
- Principle of thematic concentration: focus on key thematic areas where joint actions can have the greatest impact, thus maximising the effectiveness of funding and results-orientation.

According to the paper, the main guidelines for the cross-border area between Bulgaria and Türkiye, which should be considered in the next programming period by both countries, are related to the challenges in view of the proposed objectives of cohesion policy.

5. ANALYSIS OF THE DEVELOPMENT NEEDS AND THE POTENTIAL OF THE AREA, INCLUDING ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL INTERLINKAGES

The CBC area traditionally enjoys good cross-border relations in the fields of economic cooperation, tourism (as a sub-function of the macro business function) and not until recently – in the field of academic research. The existent cross-border linkages enjoy good CB connectivity in the area, though it is limited to road and rail transport, while the four modes of transportation (road, rail, air, sea) co-exist only on the Bulgarian side of the programme area. Since 1991, the CB business cooperation and its strong tourism-oriented specialization, has been gradually expanding and adapting to changing technological and competitive factors, eventually delineating the business function. The functional linkages, that this domain exhibit, are unevenly spread between the five regional centres of Edirne, Kırklareli, Burgas, Haskovo and Yambol, where often intersect each other. This gave rise to the emergence of business network structures, which are still in a position of lock-in into low-value added segments of the global value chains (GVC). Lock-out is difficult, unless state and business actors have a shared interest in the economic and territorial development - a prospect that MA/NA will trigger promoting the integrated territorial development. Besides, the intercity relations of these 5 regional centres need to scale up and set up a sort of hierarchical

networks of nodes and hubs in order to further develop functional links between urban and rural areas, mostly around the metropolitan centres of Edirne and Burgas. Regretfully, there is no credible and reliable statistics at CB level to illustrate the precise degree of border interactions in the business and the tourism domain. Instead, a proxy for this assessment is programme historical data underpinned by corresponding national-level statistics (see below). Following deductive approach, provided nation-level data can be narrow down to regional level and infer strong arguments in support of the delineation of the business functional area across the programme territory (31% of the priority budget) prioritizing the tourism as a sub-function of the business development (26% of the priority budget). Both enjoy a total cumulative share of 57% of the priority budget. Türkiye is one of the top five trade partners of Bulgaria (7.3% of all exports, 6.5% of all imports). In the last five years, the total export of Bulgaria to Türkiye has been increased by 10%, while reverse data show a bigger growth rate of Türkiye's export to Bulgaria amounting to 36%. The border trading is also very active. Most of the bilateral visits are daily or weekend visits for shopping and sightseeing. Direction of visits are determined by the exchange rate between two countries. Recently, the appreciation of the BGN against the TRY has made products in Türkiye cheaper and border city Edirne a centre of attraction and favourite shopping spot for Bulgarian daily tourists. It is estimated that each Bulgaria tourists spend on average 100 euro per visit. Thus, 2.7 million Bulgarian tourists spent 270 million euros in 2019 during their shopping visits. The most recent programme data (2014-2020) confirms this positive trend from the perspective of tourism funding needs. Nearly 57% of all project proposals and 66% of all contracted applicants were within the tourism programme priority. Considering the fact that the tourism is the sector with the largest economic impact on the area, the added value of focusing roughly the same TS budgetary appropriations on CB business cooperation (totaling 7,260,000 Euro, which also includes business-driven solutions for service provision) and tourism (totaling 8,000, 500 Euro) increases the intra-regional functionalities and strengthens further the cohesion of the territory.

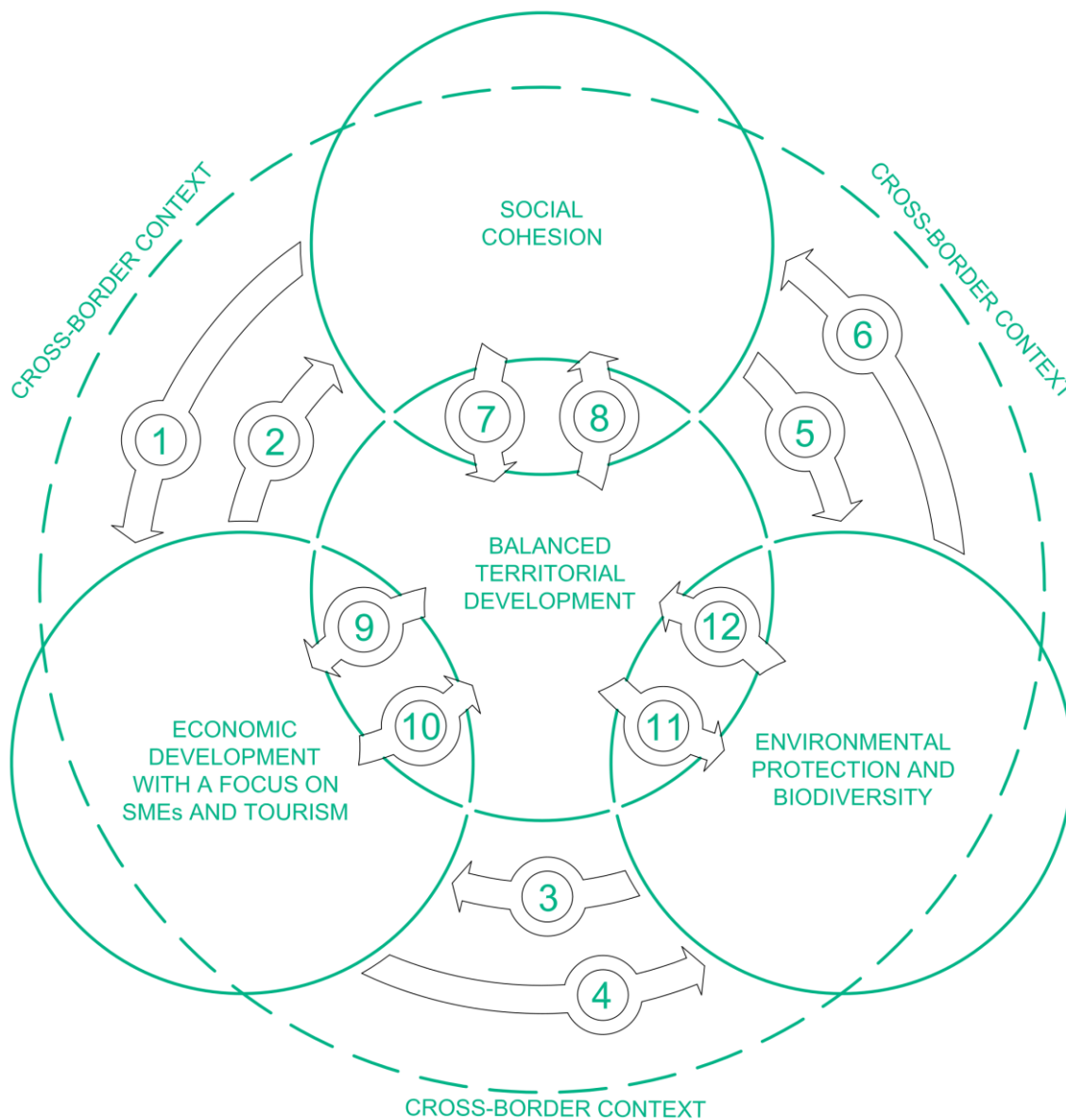
6. DESCRIPTION OF AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO ADDRESS THE IDENTIFIED DEVELOPMENT NEEDS AND THE POTENTIAL OF THE AREA

Interventions planned, coordinated and implemented centrally by the government are no longer enough to deal with the complex challenges of border territories. Different territories and communities require differentiated and tailor-made policy mixes. Here comes the integrated approach to support multi-sectoral interventions by enabling various communities and stakeholders to apply local skills and strengths, and have a sense of ownership over decisions that are made, is believed to be the right approach that brings participatory governance and long-lasting positive outcomes for the territory. The integrated approach to addressing needs and utilising the existing potentials will be implemented through a multi-sectoral package

of measures for attaining the objectives of the TS and ensuring the active involvement of partners (stakeholders) at all stages of its development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The support of the TS goes in integrated way across sectors under the form of interlinked actions. An example of such intelinked actions is the horizontal policy of the TS described below, under which each all supported interventions should include relevant actions that contribute to the protection of the environment and the biodiversity or provides green and digital solutions. Thus, the integrated approach is further extended to consider the ecological footprints of the supported actions making it mandatory for all projects to propose green and/or digital solutions based on the ecosystem approach. The locally-driven definition and implementation of the TS interventions is of highest relevance to the concept of integrated territorial development. Best approach to tackle the broad territorial opportunities and challenges is the place-based and the integrated approach who put the local perspective and work with local people and communities at a central level.

Figure 2 bellow illustrates the intervention logic of the TS built through an integrated approach.

Figure 1. Model of interaction between priority areas of intervention and related objectives and measures



The interaction and mutual influence between the objectives and measures of the different priority areas of intervention is explained by using findings of European institutions, strategic documents and studies that are fundamental to European development policies and relevant to the illustrated model of interaction:

1. “Making sure that EU citizens have the necessary skills to succeed in the labour market is key to improving economic growth and employment in the EU.”

European Council, Council of the European Union

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/education-economic-growth/>

2. An economy that works for people

“Individuals and businesses in the EU can only thrive if the economy works for them.

The EU’s unique social market economy allows economies to grow and to reduce poverty and inequality.

Small and medium-sized enterprises are the backbone of the EU’s economy. It is also essential to strengthen them.”

European Commission, Priorities 2019-2024

https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people_en

3. “Climate change and environmental degradation are an existential threat to Europe and the world.”

European Commission, Priorities 2019-2024

https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

“Biodiversity is the backbone of life. It is essential for humans as much for environmental as for climate protection reasons.

Biodiversity is vital in terms of protecting people's health and in sustaining our economy.”

European Council, Council of the European Union

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/biodiversity/>

4. “Climate change and environmental degradation are an existential threat to Europe and the world. To overcome these challenges, Europe needs a new growth strategy that will transform the Union into a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy.”

European Commission, Priorities 2019-2024

https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

5. The longer the respondents remained in education, the more likely they are to have heard of Natura 2000 (38% vs. 17%). The share of those who have heard of Natura 2000 varies between 18% for those who completed their education aged 20+ and up to 3% left by the age of 15.

Attitudes of Europeans towards Biodiversity, report

<https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2194>

6. “Climate change and environmental degradation are an existential threat to Europe and the world.”

European Commission, Priorities 2019-2024

https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

“Biodiversity is the backbone of life. It is essential for humans as much for environmental as for climate protection reasons.”

European Council, Council of the European Union

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/biodiversity/>

7. “The underlying objective of all public policies should be to increase citizens’ well-being and quality of life. These go beyond economic performance, living standards and purely material aspects to include access to quality public services, freedom of movement and healthy, resilient and high quality architecture and built environments. They also have a territorial dimension ranging from disparities between neighbourhoods such as social exclusion and urban poverty, to disparities between regions and countries.”

Territorial Agenda 2030

<https://www.territorialagenda.eu/home.html>

8. “In rural areas, prosperity will hinge on the capacity to mobilise people and local resources, whilst at the same time developing the locational factors that make living and economic conditions more attractive for people and businesses. The diseconomies and negative externalities of urban agglomeration run counter to the prospect of good quality of life for all.”

“In remote areas which are far from big cities, small and medium-sized towns play a key role in providing access to services, ensuring that these areas remain attractive places to live.”

European Economic and Social Committee

<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/towards-more-balanced-territorial-development>

9. “Economic prosperity in places depends on the competitiveness and creativity of their enterprises and start-ups as well as on local assets, characteristics and traditions, cultural, social and human capital and innovation capacities.”

Territorial Agenda 2030

<https://www.territorialagenda.eu/home.html>

10. “Industrial symbiosis processes in regional value chains are important. The transition of Europe’s economies towards a place-based circular and carbon/climate-neutral model has a territorial dimension and can strengthen functional regions.”

Territorial Agenda 2030

<https://www.territorialagenda.eu/home.html>

11. “Well-balanced territorial development means more even and sustainable use of natural resources, bringing economic gains from reduced congestion and lower costs.”

European Economic and Social Committee

<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/towards-more-balanced-territorial-development>

12. “Natural and cultural heritage are local and regional development assets that offer unique opportunities for development and highquality living environments. Sustainable and effective use of resources should benefit local communities and promote local business opportunities.”

Territorial Agenda 2030

<https://www.territorialagenda.eu/home.html>

7. VISION, STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES (SO), SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES (SpO), MEASURES (M)

7.1. Vision

The territory covered by INTERREG VI-A IPA Bulgaria—Türkiye: a place where cross-border cooperation is important and which contributes to the balanced territorial development of the region through a response to local needs and realisation of local potential

The vision defines the desired role of the strategy as part of the organised implementation of policies for sustainable socioeconomic development of the territory.

The vision will be achieved by using a balanced approach oriented to territorial needs, which is a key to achieving an overall integrated cumulative effect.

The key (priority) areas of intervention identified provide the basis for defining the strategic objectives, which in turn provide the basis for the specific objectives of the Strategy.

The specific objectives are the foundation for defining a multi-sectoral package of measures that are closely connected with the specific needs and potentials and the priority measures of a higher level. To this end, the implementation of the necessary minimum of territorially focused interventions in the various areas will be ensured.

The goal of meeting the identified needs by strengthening the polycentric model of development and thus reducing spatial imbalances lies at the heart of the territorial cohesion of the measures integrated in a multi-sectoral package. The priorities of the Territorial Agenda 2030, adapted to the context in the national and regional strategic documents, determine the crucial role of the polycentric networks of cities as drivers of economic and social development. The importance of small and medium-sized cities for ‘regional economic development, social well-being and adequate access to services’ at local level is emphasised.

The core of the polycentric network in the developed territory consists of five large urban centres (Burgas, Yambol, Haskovo, Edirne, Kırklareli) and the urban axes connecting them. A network of smaller centres with municipal and supra-municipal functions is developed around this core.

The territory within the geographical scope of the Strategy is characterised by common needs and development potentials and is essentially a functionally coherent territory. The measures envisaged and implemented in the entire area for which the Strategy is being developed increase not only their effectiveness, but also the effectiveness of the package of measures as a whole.

SMART approach to formulating specific objectives:

- **Specific:** they are related to needs and development potentials of the territory that are precisely defined in the analysis, and are achieved through specific interventions — cross-border.
- **Measurable:** it is possible to measure them by determining the ratio between the baseline value of the indicator(s), the value of the indicator(s) expected without intervention, and the achieved value of an adequate indicator or indicators.
- **Achievable:** the funding provided and the ongoing process of realisation of the specific objective by developing the current strategy are a necessary, but not sufficient condition for its achievability. The participation of the Task Force composed of stakeholders/partners in the whole process of elaboration, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy is a proof of their commitment to achieve the defined objectives. The MA of the INTERREG VI-A IPA Bulgaria – Türkiye 2021—2027 programme, has significant experience in organising the implementation of cross-border projects. All this in its entirety, together with the absence of unattainably high objectives, guarantees the achievement of good results.

- **Relevant:** they are related to needs and development potentials of the territory that are precisely defined in the analysis. The interdependence of the set objectives, illustrated by the links among the priority areas of intervention, is a guarantee for achieving the desired cumulative effect of the measures integrated in a comprehensive package. The objectives and measures for their achievement are related to specific objectives and priorities at European, national and regional level.
- **Time-based:** they are bound by the deadline for the implementation of the strategy, but the objective is to achieve a sustainable result that will persist even after the end of the interventions.

7.2. SO 1: Achieving sustainable and inclusive economic growth based on increased competitiveness of the local economy, digital and green transformation

Increasing the competitiveness of the economy in places through fair market competition is a fundamental EU principle of economic development. This requires a continuous process of creating and developing knowledge, skills and technologies, to which the threat of climate change has added a new focus — the development of a carbon-neutral economy. The measures related to the achievement of the strategic objective are in close coordination with the policies for environmental protection and biodiversity. On the other hand, the envisaged measures contribute to improving the quality of life of the population by providing an opportunity for good professional realisation in the local economy.

7.2.1. SpO 1.1: Increase the competitiveness of the local economy and improve the business environment

M 1.1 Promoting entrepreneurship, joint actions (initiatives, programmes and projects), development of industrial zones, technological renewal, participation in foreign markets, use of various financing opportunities, participation in European and national programmes, development of innovative ideas for products and services and products and services with high added value.

- **Relevant needs and development potential:**
 - Promoting the development of the entrepreneurial ecosystem of the region and the entrepreneurship in general, as well as increasing of the attractiveness of the CBC area for foreign direct investment through appropriate interventions, as imperative long-term policies.
 - Improving the culture of cooperation between SMEs, including for participation in programmes and solving common challenges and building a positive attitude towards various financing opportunities, instead of own funding as an important conditions for their successful development

- in a highly competitive environment;
- Encouraging the emergence and development of new ideas for products and services offered by SMEs as imperative of their development;
 - Continuous technological renewal of SMEs, related to new knowledge and skills, machines and software products, required by the market;
 - Continuation of the gradual and sustainable development of SMEs in the “Manufacturing” sector;
 - Activation of the potential for development of the local handicrafts, through its adaptation to the modern markets;
 - The significant contribution to the GDP of SMEs and the large number of employees in them determine the serious potential of the measures, related to the development of SMEs with their wide positive effect on the economy as a whole;
 - The development of SMEs in the field of ICT provides an opportunity to create products with high added value;
 - The significant number of SMEs and the variety of areas in which they operate, has the potential to increase the competitiveness of SMEs through their participation in joint initiatives, programmes and projects;
 - Identification of Bulgaria as a major foreign trade partner of the Province of Edirne creates potential for joint action in cross-border cooperation related to exports and imports, respectively;
 - Encouraging entrepreneurs in the SMEs to commit to improving the skills of their employees;
 - The well-developed educational infrastructure in the CBC area has the potential to link vocational training and business needs in the long term;
 - Support/increase of the competence for participation of SMEs in European and national financing programmes and improvement of the qualification, related to research, planning and export of SMEs;
 - Provision of up-to-date information on markets, technologies, raw materials, innovations and financing programs for the needs of SMEs.

7.2.2. SpO 1.2: Increase the level of digitalisation and climate neutrality of the local economy

M 1.2 Transformation of the local economy through measures for digital and energy transition, and implementation of the circular economy model

- **Relevant needs and development potential:**

- Specific targeted support for the implementation of digital technologies in SMEs;
- Support for implementing circular economy models by various economic operators, incl. municipal enterprises;
- Development of the potential for export of goods and services by maintaining their competitiveness on the international market by orienting part of the investments towards green transition.

7.2.3. SpO 1.3: Improving the qualification of local communities for successful integration and realisation in the labour market

M 1.3 Building and developing knowledge and skills adequate to the modern challenges in the local population

- **Relevant needs and development potential:**

- Improving qualifications by acquiring key skills - leadership, management, marketing, digital and other competencies, as a key condition for increasing the competitiveness of SMEs;
- Urgent policies and measures to address the shortage of qualified staff, especially in the areas with higher unemployment;

7.2.4. SpO 1.4: Tourism development

M 1.4 Overcoming the seasonality and increasing the occupation rate of the tourist infrastructure through integrated regional tourist products that combine different activities and locations and are based on sustainable development

- **Relevant needs and development potential:**

- Improvement and expansion of the existing network of bike lanes through field signalling, involvement of local communities in the initiative and promotion of the provided opportunities.
- Potential for overcoming the seasonality and increasing the usability of the tourist superstructure, through the possibility to combine different leisure activities in time and space;

- Creating a regional tourist product for the CBC area, based on natural resources, cultural heritage, mineral springs and relatively good tourist infrastructure, and implementation of regional marketing and advertising;
- The realization of the potential of the CBC area, which is directly dependent on the compliance of the implemented tourism policy with the policy priorities in a wider European context, including increasing of competitiveness of the sector and promoting the development of sustainable, responsible and high-quality tourism;
- Use of the untapped potential for development of SMEs from the region in the tourism sector;
- The development of cycling routes in the region has the potential to create conditions for rediscovering and developing unpopular destinations and supporting local communities.

7.2.5. SpO 1.5: Increasing the contribution of the natural heritage to the balanced sustainable socio-economic development of the region

M 1.5 Promoting joint actions for the development of ecosystem practices and services in the management of natural assets with tourism potential

Relevant needs and development potential:

- Development of the potential of the rich natural heritage of the region to contribute to balanced sustainable development through the implementation of nature protection policies, taking into account the ecological, scientific, cultural, economic, social and recreational requirements, as well as regional and local peculiarities;

Based on the described above Specific Objectives and Measures the following non-exhaustive list of actions are proposed under the Strategic Objective 1 “Achieving sustainable and inclusive economic growth based on increased competitiveness of the local economy, digital and green transformation”:

- Joint and cooperative actions for promoting entrepreneurship, digitalization (incl. ICT based management and production solutions, such as Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Customer Data Platform (CDP), Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP)), technological modernization, participation in regional value chains and internationalisation, applying new business and technology innovation models, upgrading production and outreach strategies, wider adoption and implementation of circularity principles, solutions and models; marketing and research. It will be clearly communicated to potential applicants that under this priority the MSMEs will not receive direct support for implementing circular economy models in order to

demarcate this support from the one under priority 1. Legal entities other than MSMEs can apply or participate as partners in integrated projects of circular economy significance..

- Upskilling and building new knowledge and skills of local employees and NEETs; joint development and implementation of new or improving existent settings for remote work; adoption of new human resource management practices to deal with younger generations;
- Joint development of new integrated regional tourist products where applicable with zero environmental footprint with the aim to overcome the seasonality in the sector, to increase the number of visitors and nights spent, to improve the access and quality of the tourism infrastructure by also strengthening the links between natural and cultural sites on both sides of the border, including through cross-border expansion of cycling path network; upgrading marketing and branding practices;
- Promoting joint actions for the development of ecosystem practices and services in the management of natural assets with tourism potential;

7.3. SO 2: Development of better access to services of general interest (SGI)

Technological development and the economic prosperity of the EU have increased the opportunities and requirements for the quality of life of the population in every corner of the Union. To take advantage of all this, citizens need to have fast and equal access to consumer-centered services, so as to close the gap between economically advantaged and disadvantaged persons and to raise social cohesion. The need for action in this direction is also recognized by the Territorial Agenda 2030, which prioritizes the reduction of territorial disparities, in all their aspects, through the uptake of digital solutions and technologies, as well as through green transformation. The measures related to the achievement of this strategic objective are in close coordination with the policies for digital and green transformation of the economy, helping to develop the necessary knowledge and skills of the local population.

7.3.1. SO 2.1: Creating digital and green solutions for better service to the population in a cross-border environment

M 2.1 Support for actions aimed at wide implementation in practice of consumer-oriented approaches in the provision of services of general interest

- **Relevant needs and development potential:**

- Observed disparities between the demand and the supply of health services across urban and rural areas and between different income groups; Türkiye is more advanced in e-health, while Bulgaria lags behind;
- Vulnerable and disadvantaged groups of people continue to have limited access to services of general interest, therefore integrated measures for service quality enhancement and active economic inclusion of vulnerable persons should be determined with priority and of ICT perspective allowing for more digital solutions;
- Growing level of ICT adoption on the Bulgarian part of the CBC area, while Turkish counterpart is less advanced. Yet, both countries operate in a less digitally transformed environment, which opens room for development of more digitalized solutions across various policy domains

7.3.2. SO 2.2: Reduce pollution and the negative effects of climate change and foreseeable natural disasters of a transboundary nature

M 2.2 Implementation of joint actions to reduce pollution and provide clean air, water and food and to mitigate and adapt to climate change

- **Relevant needs and development potential:**
 - Reduction of seasonal air pollution with PM₁₀ by encouraging the abandonment of solid fuels for heating, modernizing road transport and improving the condition of adjacent infrastructure.
 - Joint actions for reduction of transboundary pollution;
 - Implementation of climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, a prerequisite for sustainable development in the CBC area;

Based on the described above Specific Objectives and Measures the following non-exhaustive list of actions are proposed under the Strategic Objective 2 “Development of better access to services of general interest (SGI):

- Support for joint actions aimed at wide implementation of consumer-oriented approaches in the provision of services of general interest, as well as by incorporating digital and green solutions for servicing in a cross-border environment;
- Implementation of joint actions to reduce pollution and ecological footprint, and provide clean air, water and food, to mitigate and adapt to climate change and to prevent and mitigate the consequences of natural and man-made disasters.

Horisontal policy

Each supported intervention needs to include component that contribute to the protection of the environment and biodiversity or provides green and digital solutions. Thus, the green and digital policy becomes integral part of the integrated territorial development. This decision is seen as a strategy's instrument to promote the new cohesion policy.

8. DESCRIPTION OF THE INVOLVEMENT OF PARTNERS IN THE PREPARATION AND IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY

- **Multi-level governance and partnership**

The TS elaboration process was structured in a way to let broad range of stakeholders participate and contribute equally to the evolvement of a locally-driven Territorial Strategy. The involvement of partners/stakeholders in the drafting and implementation of the TS follows the provisions of art. 8 of the REGULATION (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council and the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014 on the European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF)¹⁷. Basic principles and good practices for conducting a timely, in-depth and transparent process of consultation with partners on the analysis of the challenges and needs to be addressed, definition of objectives and priorities for overcoming them, as well as with regard to the coordination structures and multi-level governance arrangements needed for effective strategy implementation, have been followed.

- **Roles and responsibilities of partners/stakeholders**

The TS elaboration process followed the bottom-up approach whereby locals and stakeholders participated in every stage of the drafting process through three different territorial tools: Taskforce group (TFG), public consultations, public campaign for collecting project ideas. The actual participation of stakeholders in the elaborations content of the TS is done through nominations of persons for members of the TFG. These persons acted as representatives of various interest groups who expressed their willingness to actively contribute to the programming during the first round of regional consultations, back in 2019. Thus, the TFG consisted of the following groups of stakeholders from the region (representative sample) – municipalities, districts, NGOs, professional organizations, businesses etc. The setting of the TFG is a tailor-made solution that takes into account the specificities of the CB area and the lack of existing EGTCs or other types of cross-border legal bodies for the elaboration and implementation of the TS as referred to under Article 20 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24

¹⁷ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A32014R0240>

June 2021 on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments (INTERREG regulation). Another tailor made instrument to support the development of the TS was the involvement of an external consultant to technically gather and analyze the existing strategic development documents of the territorial stakeholders, to study the particular territorial needs of the stakeholders in CBC context (that complement the ones exhibited during the regional consultations) and to technically draft the strategy. The external consultant was the Bulgarian National Center for Territorial Development, which provided analysis and inputs for the whole CBC area. In practical terms, the joint work goes as follows: each essential element of the TS is drafted by the consultant (step 1), then the TS draft is consulted by the TFG members (step 2) and afterwards it is verified through public consultation with the CBC stakeholders (step 3). These essential elements include: geographical area, analysis of the development needs and potentials of the territories, description of the integrated approach, defining the strategic context, methodology for implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the strategy and shaping a TS action plan.

Further to the three main steps in the elaboration of the TS described above, and in order to strengthen the “bottom-up” approach by involving a wide range of stakeholders in the strategic planning process, a broad campaign for collection of project ideas, that build the list of TS interventions, was launched in November-December 2021 on both sides of the border. The public campaign for collecting project ideas was carried out to sort out interventions with a potential to contribute to the definition of operations. The sorting out process was based on a set of three main criteria: distinct cross-border effect, explicit contribution to TS objectives, degree of maturity. The purpose of the campaign was twofold: (1) to verify once again that measures of the strategy are able to adequately respond to territorial needs and (2) to allow prioritization of areas for intervention under the TS’s Call for proposals.

Table 1. Members of the Task Force from the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of Türkiye

Institution	Subject of activity	Web page
Republic of Bulgaria		
Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (Directorate “Territorial cooperation management”)	<u>Chairperson of the Task Force</u> Performs the functions of the Managing Authority of the cross-border cooperation programmes under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance	https://www.mrrb.bg/
MRDPW (General Directorate "Strategic planning and regional development programs", MRDPW South - East Region)	Performs the functions of the Managing Authority of the Operational Program "Development of the Regions" 2021-2027 and all resulting obligations and	https://www.mrrb.bg/

Institution	Subject of activity	Web page
	responsibilities under the regulations of the EU and the Structural and Investment Funds	
National Association of Municipalities	Representation and protection of the municipalities in front of the central government bodies: research, analysis, evaluation and development of proposals for change and improvement of the policy regarding local self-government; lobbying	https://www.namrb.org/
District Administration Haskovo	Implements national government in place and ensures consistency between national and local interests in regional policy	https://www.hs.government.bg/
District Administration Burgas	Implements national government in place and ensures consistency between national and local interests in regional policy	https://www.bs.government.bg/
District Administration Yambol	Implements national government in place and ensures consistency between national and local interests in regional policy	https://yambol.government.bg/
Road Infrastructure Agency (Regional Division Haskovo)	State road administration	http://www.api.bg/index.php/bg/
Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce (BCC)	Non-governmental organisation. Leading partner of the state in determining economic policy. Representative organisation of employers at national level	https://www.bia-bg.com/
BCC, Industrial Business Association – Yambol	Non-profit association. Voluntary economic union of companies, economic and other organisations, regardless of their form of ownership. Employers' organisation, regional representative of the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce.	https://www.bia-bg.com/region/view/390/

Institution	Subject of activity	Web page
Industrial and Logistic Park Burgas	Construction, management and development of industrial zones	https://www.industrialpark-burgas.bg/bg
NGO "Club of European Initiatives - IDEA" – Yambol	Promoting direct citizen participation in the process of regional development. Creating and strengthening favorable conditions for economic and social progress, for regional development, for the development of ecology, tourism, culture, education, information technology, social and cultural activities and business relations, preservation and development of local traditions and others aimed at awareness and evaluation of local cultural identity and its diversity.	https://www.facebook.com/NGO.IDEA/about/?ref=page_internal
Viapontica Foundation – Burgas	Non-governmental organisation operating in the public interest and established to protect Bulgarian nature – conservation of natural resources, change of attitudes towards protected areas and awareness of the opportunities, benefits and responsibilities of the biodiversity in Bulgaria.	https://viapontica.org/bg/
Institute for regional strategies - Burgas	Non-profit legal entity with the idea of carrying out public benefit activities aimed at the development, promotion and implementation of projects in the field of economic and infrastructural integrated development of individual regions and districts.	http://www.irsburgas.com/
Republic of Türkiye		
Governorship of Edirne	State body responsible for both the national government and the state affairs in the province	http://www.edirne.gov.tr/

Institution	Subject of activity	Web page
Governorship of Kırklareli (EU and International Relations Office)	State body responsible for both the national government and the state affairs in the province	http://www.kirklareli.gov.tr/
Municipality of Edirne (EU&International Relations Office)	Internationally oriented office at the local administration level	https://www.edirne.bel.tr/
Back to Nature Association – Kırklareli	Youth organisation offering realistic perspective on the tackling environmental issues and the youth rights, which deals with both environmental, human rights and livelihoods to enable sustainable life for all living beings.	http://dogayadonusdernegi.org/
The Association of Promoting Tourism of Edirne	NGO that as an international platform aims to work towards the introduction of Edirne and protection of tourist sites. The goal is to get closer to the standards of accommodation in the tourism industry, services, food and beverage, training, seminars and workshops	http://ettder.org/about-us/
Kırklareli Chamber of Commerce and Industry	Main activities: protection of business interests and sharing of business experience and business interests, contact with governments, civil society, local media and the press and organizing trade fairs and events.	https://www.chamber-commerce.net/dir/4342/Kirklareli-Chamber-of-Commerce-and-Industry-in-Kirklareli
Edirne Chamber of Commerce and Industry (EU and International Relations Office)	Main activities: protection of business interests and sharing of business experience and business interests, contact with governments, civil society, local media and the press and organizing trade fairs and events.	https://etso.org.tr/

Institution	Subject of activity	Web page
Trakya University	State University, with institutions and schools located in the region of Thrace. The university manages research activities related to regional development and has international connections, especially within the Balkan network of universities.	https://www.trakya.edu.tr/
Kırklareli University	Kırklareli University is under the administration of the Rectorate of the University of Thrace. The university is based on extensive experience in the Faculty of Engineering.	https://www.klu.edu.tr/dil/en
Trakya Development Agency	In order to ensure regional development, the agency carries out planning, programming and coordination operations targeting the public, private sector, universities and civil society organisations. Results-oriented projects are implemented for social and economic development in Trakya.	https://www.trakyaka.org

After the development of the TS is finalized, the TFG will be transformed into Strategy Board (SB). The transition of TFG into SB is seen as a way to sustain the local ownership of the TS and at the same time to ensure broad public representation in its governance. Thus, SB reflects the partnership principle comprising relevant actors from both sides of the border. The Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) is the main body to regularly review any issues that affect the performance of the programme (Article 30(1)(b) of INTERREG regulation) and progress in administrative capacity building (Article 30(1)(g) of INTERREG regulation). The TS shall be endorsed both by the SB and the JMC, and checked by the MA/NA – all that by the end of 2022/beginning of 2023. The implementation of the TS will be organized in targeted calls for proposals. Rules of procedure, that guide the entire project selection process under the TS will be adopted by the SB and endorsed by the JMC.

- **Sustainability of partnerships**

The multi-level governance model involves the use of existing arrangements or the establishment of structures (such as secretariats, associations of municipalities, etc.) or coordination mechanisms (e.g.,

working groups, contracts or agreements, etc.). Capacity building in multi-annual multi-level strategic planning and implementation, especially at local level, increases the role of local authorities, other sub-national authorities, economic and social partners, and civil society organisations involved in the management and implementation of European structural and investment funds, and helps in the long term to strengthen capacity in the field of territorial development. Strengthening cooperation between the authorities, civil society, business organisations, universities and research institutions on the priority topics of the TS is essential for maintaining and building capacity.

The sustainability of the decisions taken in respect with the TS is directly related to multi-level governance as a principle and driver of innovation and good practices. This requires regular stakeholder forums on topics, whether live or in a virtual environment. This includes the development of formats that address and conceptualise topics through active communication, exchange of experience and practical alliances.

9. METHODOLOGY FOR IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE STRATEGY

The transformation of the measures and projects envisaged in the Strategy into real interventions will be carried out through the realisation of an Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy. The Plan establishes the sequence and indicative terms for implementation of the envisaged measures.

The implementation of the TS begins once it is endorsed by the SB, who will take over the TFG. Members of the SB will have certain thematic expert knowledge of a TS significance, but they may lack such of strategic governance and policy objectives' importance, as well as experience in project selection. These potential knowledge gaps may put the TS implementation at risk. Therefore, once the composition of the SB is completed, the MA/NA will perform skills gap analysis of the SB members to determine weak areas of competency and design corresponding training plans to address potential SB members' knowledge and skills needs. The needs assessment and the subsequent training will take place before the work of the SB starts in effect.

The endorsement of the TS by the JMC is expected to take place as early as possible by the end of 2022/beginning of 2023 and the implementation of the strategy will start immediately after that having all necessary procedural and application documents done in the meantime. The precise implementation arrangements of the TS are under elaboration, but main functions of the SB are already known, while their detailed description will be set out in a Description of functionality and responsibilities document/other agreement document, that will be signed between the SB chairmanship, the MA and the NA. The SB will:

- (1) select project proposals for funding based on jointly developed with MA and NA selection criteria and obtained user rights in the eMS where the actual selection process takes place. This will also facilitate the

work of the program authorities, who will then proceed with the projects compliance check in the eMS (please, see below); (2) agree on the content of the application package, and (3) govern the entire implementation of the strategy by informing MA and NA on the TS progress within a certain timeframe. The day-to-day technical support of the SB will be provided by a secretariat. With a view to maintain and make the best use of already existing administrative capacity within the programme/area, part of the Joint Secretariat (JS) and the JS Antenna staff will be involved as a secretariat of the SB. In that respect a clear separation of functions between the staff involved in the SB technical support and the staff responsible for project monitoring will be ensured (e.g. through separate units).

For consistency purposes, the monitoring and evaluation of the TS implementation will be linked with the Programme’s Performance Framework in compliance with the ‘*Commission staff working document on the performance, monitoring and evaluation of the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the Just Transition Fund in 2021-2027*’. The following indicators system will monitor the progress of the TS:

Output indicators¹⁸

A set of eight common output indicators (selected from Annex 1 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund (ERDF Regulation)) has been selected, ensuring a good coverage of the main outputs that supported projects will deliver - from establishment of cooperations through development of knowledge capacity to jointly developed solutions addressing territorial challenges.

Result indicators¹⁹

Result indicators measure the effects of the intervention. This type of indicators is related to the objectives of the intervention, which in turn are related to the specific objectives of the strategy. Four common result (listed below) indicators have been selected with the aim to adequately reflect and capture expected main results, as well as to promote the integrated territorial development as an instrument for solution to cross-border territorial challenges and developmental obstacles.

Output indicators	
<p>RCO84 Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects</p> <p>The scope of a jointly developed pilot action could be to test procedures, new instruments, solutions, experimentation or the transfer of practices. In order to be</p>	<p>Measurement unit: pilot actions</p> <p>Final target (2029): 18</p>

¹⁸ An 'Output indicator' means an indicator to measure the specific deliverables of the intervention (CPR, Article 2)
¹⁹ *Ibid.*

<p>counted by this indicator,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the pilot action needs not only to be developed, but also implemented within the project <p>and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the implementation of the pilot action should be finalised by the end of the project. <p>Jointly developed pilot action implies the involvement of organizations from each of the two partner countries.</p>	
<p>RCO 116 Jointly developed solutions</p> <p>The output indicator counts the number of jointly developed solutions from joint pilot actions implemented by supported projects. In order for a jointly developed solution to be counted, its documentary evidence, at minimum, should comprise of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a vision/strategy/plan to address at least one of the two decomposed objectives linked with identified common territorial challenges; - drafting and design process of the solution/s followed by their implementation (concrete actions); - indications of the actions needed for the solution/s to be taken up or to be upscaled; <p>Concrete solutions, resulting from cooperation and pilot activities within funded projects at the local and regional level, are needed to promote economic development, tourism, social development, labour market, culture and cultural heritage, infrastructure, environment,</p> <p>The solutions within funded projects, are needed to tackle the challenges of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Achieving sustainable and inclusive economic growth based on increasing the competitiveness of the local economy, digital and green transformation; - Development of better access to services of general interest. <p>A jointly developed solution implies the involvement of organizations from at least two participating countries in the drafting and design process of the solution. The solutions relevant for this indicator should not have the main topics linked to administrative or legal frameworks.</p>	<p>Measurement unit: solutions</p> <p>Final target (2029): 18</p>
<p>RCO58 Dedicated cycling infrastructure supported</p> <p>The programme contribution to expanding and promoting cycling solutions is significant, therefore the pair of indicators RCO58 and RCR64 (result indicator) are selected to measures progress and results in that direction. RCO58 measures the length (km) of dedicated cycling infrastructure newly built or significantly upgraded by projects supported. Dedicated cycling infrastructure includes cycling facilities separated from other roads or other parts of the same road by structural means, cycling streets, cycling tunnels etc. For cycling infrastructure with separated one-way lanes (ex: on each side of a road), the length is measured as lane length.</p>	<p>Measurement unit: km</p> <p>Final target (2029): 16 km</p>

<p>RCO77 Number of cultural and tourism sites supported</p> <p>Nearly 40% of the priority’s budget is earmarked for tourism. Based on previous experience, it is expected that most of the supported actions will envisage some interventions linked with CBC cultural and tourism sites. It is an indicator which will measure the number of outputs achieved at TS level. As the name of the indicator suggests, the indicator will count only physical investments, i.e. interventions that lead to creation of new, improved or rehabilitated existent infrastructure of tourism and cultural significance for the TS area.</p>	<p>Measurement unit: sites</p> <p>Final target (2029): 18</p>
<p>RCO28 Area covered by protection measures against wildfires</p> <p>The indicator counts surface area covered by protection measures against wildfires developed or significantly upgraded through supported projects. Significant upgrades refer, for example, to new functionalities for protection or upscaling of existing protection measure, encompassing different climate scenarios, implementation of new means for faster and smarter management of all interconnected fire management phases, i.e. prevention and preparedness, detection and response (including fire containment, extinction, potential evacuation and recovery) and post-fire restoration</p>	<p>Measurement unit: hectars (ha)</p> <p>Final target (2029): 588 200,00 ha</p>
<p>RCO74 Population covered by projects in the framework of strategies for integrated territorial development</p> <p>The output indicator counts number of persons covered by projects supported by the Programme in the framework of the Territorial strategy.</p> <p>Double counting of population covered by several projects for the same strategy in the same specific objective will be removed.</p>	<p>Measurement unit: persons</p> <p>Final target (2029): 850 000</p>
<p>RCO75 Strategies for integrated territorial development supported</p> <p>The output indicator counts number of contributions to strategy for integrated territorial development.</p>	<p>Measurement unit: contributions to strategies</p> <p>Final target (2029): 1</p>
<p>RCO76 Integrated projects for territorial development</p> <p>Counts the number of integrated projects under the strategy. A project is considered integrated in itself if it fulfils at least one of the following conditions: a) the project involves different sectors (such as social, economic and environmental sectors) the project integrates several types pf stakeholders (public authorities, private actors, NGOs), b) the project involves different administrative territories (ex: municipalities), and c) the project involves several types of stakeholders (public authorities, private actors, NGOs).</p>	<p>Measurement unit: project</p> <p>Final target (2029): 20</p>
<p>Result indicators</p>	
<p>RCR104 Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations</p>	<p>Measurement unit:</p>

<p>The indicator counts the number of solutions, other than legal or administrative solutions, that are developed by supported projects and are taken up or upscaled during the implementation of the project or within one year after project completion. At programme level, to be counted for this indicator, the solution should have been taken up or upscaled by a given organisation during the implementation of the project or at project closure. Also, the solution needs to be documented by the adopting organization/s in a proper format, for instance strategies, action plans. The concrete take up or upscale of developed solutions by relevant organisations is needed to have an impact on the territory. The content of the uptake / up-scaling should be based on the jointly developed solution/s.</p>	<p>solutions Final target (2029): 14</p>
<p>RCR64 Annual users of dedicated cycling infrastructure The baseline of the indicator is estimated as the annual number of users of the infrastructure for the year before the intervention starts, and it is zero for new infrastructure. The achieved values are estimated ex-post in terms of the number of users using the infrastructure for the year after the physical completion of the intervention.</p>	<p>Measurement unit: users Final target (2029): 1000</p>
<p>RCR77 Visitors of cultural and tourism sites supported The indicator builds strong linkages with RCO77. It is the most appropriate indicator to monitor the outcomes of the investments, measured through RCO77 as it is expected that improved cultural and tourism sites should attract more visitors. The time measurement will be one year after the completion of output in the supported project. The indicator does not cover natural sites for which an accurate estimation of number of visitors is not feasible</p>	<p>Measurement unit: visits Final target (2029): 48000 Baseline (2021): 45000</p>
<p>RCR36 Population benefiting from wildfire protection measures The indicator counts estimated number of persons living in areas where protection infrastructure is built, significantly upgraded or equipment investment is made due to support by measures under the Priority in order to reduce vulnerability to wildfires and related natural risks (droughts, heatwaves). The value reported is the number of persons that are living in an area where infrastructure has been built or significantly been upgraded during the reporting period, in addition to the number reported in the previous reporting round.</p>	<p>Measurement unit: persons Final target (2029): 290 000</p>

The baseline value (2021) of all indicators is 0 unless indicated otherwise.

The choice of indicators took into consideration the objectives, expected results and indicative types of actions plus available resources as input, to define targeted projects and strategy's outputs and results for each specific objective. It also seeks to reflect the mission of INTERREG to address cross-border

challenges and thus contribute to the EU territorial cohesion.

During application process, applicants will receive indicators fiches where more detailed information on data collection and reporting for project monitoring purposes will be provided.

For evaluation purposes, a mid-term assessment of the TS performance is envisaged to take place in 2025. The decision for initiating it will be at the discretion of the SB who will assess its need upon outcomes of the monitoring of supported projects, emerging territorial challenges or other factors that call for revision of the strategy.