



# **Macedonia - Greece**

## **Cooperation through the Confidence Building Measures, view from civil-society's point**





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## Table of contents

Abbreviations .....	4
Introduction.....	5
CHAPTER 1: Cross border cooperation between	
Macedonia and Greece as a confidence building measure .....	7
Methodology.....	7
Cross-border cooperation between Macedonia and Greece	
within the IPA programmes.....	7
Background information on the four projects chosen for the research .....	9
Facilitators of Cooperation .....	10
Detected Challenges.....	12
The impact of the name Issue on the cross border cooperation	
between Macedonia and Greece .....	13
Involvement of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) .....	14
Impact of cross-border cooperation on	
confidence building between the two countries.....	14
CHAPTER 2: Cooperation in education and science between	
the Republic of Macedonia and Greece .....	16
Why is there a lack of cooperation in education and culture? .....	16
The confidence building measures .....	20
What do internal sources in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Macedonia	
say regarding the issue of cooperation between the two countries? .....	21
What the cooperation is like in the education sector from the point	
of view of the ones directly involved	
- interview with Professor Snezana Mojsovska Salamovska from	
Bitola University on the cooperation in science and education .....	22
Conclusion .....	24
Sources .....	27

## **Abbreviations**

CBC – Cross border cooperation

CBM – Confidence building measures

CSO – civil society organisation

EU – European Union

IPA – Instrument of Pre-Accession

IA – Interim Accord

MfA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

## Introduction

The name dispute between Macedonia and Greece has had an effect not only on both countries high-level cooperation but also it has deeply affected almost all segments of academic/scientific cooperation as well as cooperation between civil society organisations. As a result, the civil societies of the two countries have not managed to date to build strong channels of unofficial communication and collaboration that would be instrumental in helping the official diplomatic channels between the two countries. The relations between the two countries have never been particularly good or warm, apart from the tourism exchanges. Even the lukewarm cooperation almost stopped after the veto in Bucharest 2008 with which Macedonia was excluded from becoming a NATO member state. Subsequently to that followed the “antiquization” of Macedonia orchestrated by the then ruling party VMRO-DPMNE which re-vamped the capital Skopje with monuments of controversial figures such as Alexander the Great, his father Phillip II, naming airports, stadia etc with their names etc. This in return was not accepted well in Greece and in the following years there was almost no developing in the negotiations, Macedonia’s path towards EU and NATO nor between the relationship of the two neighbours. The dire situation was also cemented by in that time harsh financial crisis in Greece and the whole EU and the political crisis and deterioration of the democratic ruling in Macedonia under the previous government of VMRO-DPMNE.

All in all the past nine years had many reasons why Athens-Skopje had almost no communication. This started changing slowly however when the ministries of foreign affairs from both sides started slowly trying to normalize the relations and to think of some ways to establish informal but structured ways of talking and building trust. For this matter as of recent the Ministries of foreign affairs initiated a process of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) with the hope that cooperation in ‘low politics’ and among civil society actors will strengthen the otherwise weak and problematic bilateral relations. However, it is important to notice that during this whole time both of the countries did cooperate through EU funded programmes such as Cross Border Cooperation and other IPA projects.

In that context, the main purpose of this research is to contribute to enhancing relations between Athens and Skopje by investigating and assessing areas of existing cooperation, providing ‘lessons learned’ from it as well as proposing ways through which civil society collaboration could be strengthened in the future.

More specifically, the objectives of the paper are to:

1. Assess key areas of unofficial collaboration between the two countries and provide ‘lessons learned’ for future similar activity as well as to propose ideas for facilitation of new collaborations. Through the task of assessing the merits of existing cooperation the proposed research will likely also contribute to the undermining of deeply embedded stereotypes that exist about interaction and cooperation between the two countries.
2. Propose solutions to the academic and civil society sectors regarding how to establish more frequent structured cooperation regardless of the status of the high-level communication between the two countries.

3. Support the Confidence Building Measures' (CBMs) process initiated by Athens and Skopje by providing knowledge and expertise in relevant areas, such as more effective cooperation in European programmes (CBM action 2) and education and culture (CBM actions 4 and 5).



# CHAPTER 1: Cross border cooperation between Macedonia and Greece as a confidence building measure

## Methodology

This analysis is informed by desktop and field research, including analysis of relevant documentation and interviews with stakeholders involved in implementation of projects funded under the Macedonia - Greece IPA Cross-Border Programme 2007 – 2013. The project team selected four case studies, taking into consideration project variety including geographic dispersion, budgets, project partners and project theme. Face to face interviews were conducted in Bitola, Resen, Kavadarci and Novaci as main project beneficiaries of the selected projects.

### 1. Cross-border cooperation between Macedonia and Greece within the IPA programmes

The Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) is important financial instrument enabling implementing local development projects and fostering cooperation between Macedonia as a candidate country and Greece as an EU member state. The Macedonia - Greece IPA Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) Programme 2007 – 2013 was approved by the European Commission in 2008<sup>1</sup> with an overall objective “to enhance convergence in the programme area by promoting sustainable local development. The Global Objective is addressing sustainability in its economical, social, cultural and environmental components, thus taking into account the need to specify and focus, on the one hand, on the socio-economic dimension and, on the other, on the undividable whole of nature and culture and their interactions in this programme area.”<sup>2</sup> As such, the Programme had a total budget of 31.549.722, 00€ and three priority axis<sup>3</sup>:

- Priority Axis 1: Enhancement of cross-border economic development
  - Measure 1: Promotion of entrepreneurship
  - Measure 2: Enhancement of human resources
  - Measure 3: Development of sustainable tourism
  - Measure 4: Protection of public health through cross-border activities
- Priority axis 2: Enhancement of the environmental resources and cultural heritage of the programme area
  - Measure 1: Promotion and protection of environmental resources
  - Measure 2: Promotion and protection of the natural and cultural heritage of the area
- Technical Assistance
  - Caring out specific actions to ensure successful implementation of the Programme

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<sup>1</sup> Approved on 5/09/08 by the European Commission Decision C (2008) 4717.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, Inforegio, Greece-Macedonia IPA Cross Border Cooperation Programme, 2007-2013, [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/atlas/programmes/2007-2013/crossborder/greece-the-former-yugoslav-republic-of-macedonia-ipa-cross-border-co-operation-programme-2007-2013](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/atlas/programmes/2007-2013/crossborder/greece-the-former-yugoslav-republic-of-macedonia-ipa-cross-border-co-operation-programme-2007-2013)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Taking into consideration the priority axis, this programme enables variety of projects that could directly address concrete local needs. The variety of opportunities is an important incentive for the local municipalities to get involved in such projects and use EU funding to resolve local problems. A total number of 49 projects were implemented, resulting in improved infrastructure, cultural exchange, capacity building activities etc.<sup>4</sup>

Four Macedonian and five Greek regional entities are the beneficiaries of this programme: Regions of Pelagonia, Vardar, Southeast and Southwest Macedonia as well as Florina, Pella, Kilkis, Serres and Thessaloniki.



Map 1: Regions involved in Macedonia - Greece IPA Cross-Border Programme

On 6 August 2015, the European Commission approved the IPA Macedonia-Greece CBC Programme 2014 – 2020 (CCI: 2014TC16I5CB009).<sup>5</sup> The programme is worth more than EUR 45 million, with a contribution from the European Union of nearly EUR 39 million from the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) which is an increase when compared to the previous 2007-2013 Programme. The remaining funds are supposed to be covered by the National Counterpart. This is a positive signal that cross-border cooperation is important pillar of European integration, but also builds on the successful implementation of the previous cycle. Main aim of the programme is enhancing cohesion by improving living standards and employment opportunities holding respect to the environment and by using the natural resources for upgrading of the tourism product. This new programme has three priority areas: development and support of local economy, protection of environment – transportation and technical support. The first call for project proposal was published on 7 December, with submission period between 07.12.2015 – 22.04.2016. Therefore, projects selected upon this call are still in their signing/implementation phase and they could have not been analyzed for the purpose of this paper.

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<sup>4</sup> The full list of projects is available at: <http://www.ipa-cbc-programme.eu/old/index.php/projects?limitstart=0>

<sup>5</sup> By decision C (2015) 5655

## 1.2. Background information on the four projects chosen for the research

### 1.2.1. *Kaimaktsalan Gastronomy Routes KAIMAK*<sup>6</sup>

KAIMAK Project was implemented under the priority axis 1: Enhancement of cross-border economic development and more concretely the measure 1.3 Promote Sustainable Tourism. The project involved two partners: Municipality of Kavadarci and Municipality of Edessa. The main objective of the project is to enhance convergence in the cross-border area, by promoting sustainable local development and by assisting co-operation on addressing common challenges in food and tourism sectors.

Main activities:

1. The creation of the House of Taste in Edessa and Kavadarci, with the aim to promote the cross-border gastronomy culture and support the food and tourism sectors;
2. The creation of a Gastronomy Information Centre in Edessa;
3. The implementation of ecology and health interactive applications;
4. The organization of two eco-gastronomy expositions; the Blossom and Cherry Festival in Edessa and the Wine Festival in Kavadarci; of God Dionysus Bacchus, a trilingual website, bilateral events and publications.
5. The implementation of dissemination activities, such as the gastronomy guide of God Dionysus Bacchus, a trilingual website, bilateral events and publications.

### 1.2.2. *LHI-LNA / Living history, Living Nature*<sup>7</sup>

LHI-LNA was implemented under the priority axis 2: Enhancement of the environmental resources and cultural heritage of the programme area and more concretely the measure 2.2: Promote and protect the natural and cultural heritage of the area. Two project partners were involved: Municipality of Novaci and Municipality of Almopia. The main objective of this project is the realization of common interventions by both municipalities, in order to jointly promote the historical and natural resources of the cross border area and present them in a way that can reinforce local-driven sustainable development.

Main activities of the project were related to documentation and exploration of the connection between the historical monuments and the natural sites of each area and creation of three paths namely "Roads of Living Nature", "Roads of History", "Cross-roads of History and Nature" in every country. This also includes outreach activities.

### 1.2.3. PEEBPE - Promotion of Energy Efficiency in Buildings and Protection of the Environment<sup>8</sup>

PEEBPE was implemented under the Priority axis 2: Enhancement of the environmental

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<sup>6</sup> KAIMAK, official project facts available at: <http://www.ipa-cbc-programme.eu/old/index.php/projects?view=item&id=13>

<sup>7</sup> LHI-LNA, official project facts available at:  
<http://www.ipa-cbc-programme.eu/old/index.php/projects?view=item&id=38>

<sup>8</sup> PEEBPE, official project facts available at:  
<http://www.ipa-cbc-programme.eu/old/index.php/projects?view=item&id=33>

resources and cultural heritage of the programme area and more concretely measure 2.1: Promote and protect the environmental resources of the area. Project partners included: Technological Educational Institute of Western Macedonia, Municipality of Resen, Municipality of Prespa and the Association for Sustainable Architecture and Urban Development Atmosphere, Bitola. The main objective of this project is to stimulate local societies and authorities on the great potential that public and corporation buildings have to decrease energy consumption.

The main project activities included energy audits with in-situ measurements of twenty-five public buildings in each country, delivery of technical studies with the exact CO<sub>2</sub> footprint and energy consumption for each building and issuance of Energy Efficiency Certificate; and study and implementation of energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies in three buildings (the elementary school and the kindergarten in Municipality of Prespa, as well as one high school in Resen).

#### 1.2.4. DECIDE - Decision Support System for Disaster Emergency Management<sup>9</sup>

DECIDE was implemented under the priority axis: 2. Enhancement of the environmental resources and cultural heritage of the programme area, measure 2.1: Promote and protect the environmental resources of the area. Project partners included: Municipality of Amyntaion, Centre for development of the Vardar Planning Region, Veles, and Centre for Research and Technology Hellas - Hellenic Institute of Transport, Thessaloniki and the Centre for Sustainability and Advanced Education, Bitola.

Project activities envisaged: assessment of user needs and requirements, design, development, testing and operational installation of the Intelligent Decision Support System (iDSS) and educational and training activities.

Unfortunately, the project was implemented only in Greece while the Macedonian partners never signed the contract. There is no official information confirming the reason for this failure. The partners from Macedonia were only involved in some of the capacity building activities which took place in Greece.

## 2. Facilitators of cooperation

All interviewed parties expressed high level of readiness and commitment to cooperation. Main driver for cooperation is **the common interest to use EU funds for the benefits of the municipalities in the eligible regions**. Given that the IPA Cross-Border Programme prioritizes areas such as economic development, environmental and heritage protection, there is wide range of opportunities to use these funds to improve local infrastructure, support local businesses, reconstruct heritage sites or protect the environment. This is especially important for smaller municipalities with limited budgets that cannot implement this type of activities without external support. While co-financing from the project beneficiaries is also requested, project partners should contribute only with 15% of the overall budget and the rest is secured by the European Union. Usually, Macedonian municipalities receive support from the Ministry of Local Self-Development to cover their contribution.

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<sup>9</sup> DECIDE, Official project facts available at:

<http://www.ipa-cbc-programme.eu/old/index.php/projects?view=item&id=45>

Moreover, **geographic proximity** of the regions was used as an argument that the need for cooperation is self-evident. However, while this was a facilitator for the municipalities of Bitola, Novaci and Kavadarci, the situation is different in Resen. Even though the region of Prespa (including Resen) is located on the border with Greece, the border crossing point (Markova Noga) is closed, so they need to travel 150+ km in order to meet their partners.<sup>10</sup> On the other side, having **an operational border-crossing point in the region** would significantly strengthen the fluctuation of people, goods and services between the two regions. There have been several initiatives for opening of this border-crossing point from the Macedonian side. In 2009, the Macedonian Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time Antonijo Miloshoski sent an official letter to his Greek colleague Dora Bakojani initiating such development;<sup>11</sup> however, it was left without positive response from the Greek side. At the time of negotiating the confidence-building measures, the Macedonian media speculated that this measure might be included in the package<sup>12</sup>; nevertheless, it did not find itself included in the final list of proposed and accepted measures.

All projects that were studied within this paper were part of a larger cross-border cooperation scheme between the affected municipalities. Namely, all of them applied for more than one project with the same partner municipality before. Successful project implementation and good cooperation transfers into developing **good inter-personal relationships and establishing personal contacts**. During the interviews, there was information about lot of informal meetings and friendships built between the people involved in the project implementation and between the mayors of the involved municipalities. This results in willingness for continued cooperation and developing new projects together. Moreover, it contributes towards building trust between both communities and having positive perceptions for all involved. That being said, confidence-building is possible only by experience, and using the platforms for cooperation instead of awareness raising activities and positive narratives without having the people-to-people contact.

Conversely, the effect on building positive perceptions towards the Greek citizens might be **limited to the cross-border regions and not the whole country**. Namely, most of the interviewees considered their partners as sharing similar socio-cultural background and even speaking the same language with some of them, which facilitates the communication and trust-building. It should be noted that such communication happens informally, while official working language of the programme is English.

Another facilitator of cooperation within the IPA Cross-Border Programme is having local **staff that is competent and willing** to apply and implement the project's activities. This capacity is built by experience, i.e. involving the same people in different projects under the same cross-border cooperation schemes. This is how they develop skills for

<sup>10</sup> Interview with representative from the Municipality of Resen, conducted on 18.09.2017

<sup>11</sup> Vecer daily, "Macedonia requests a new border-crossing point with Greece", 10 April 2009, available at: <http://vecer.mk/makedonija/makedonija-bara-nov-granichen-premin-so-grcija>

<sup>12</sup> MKD, "Macedonia and Greece are considering confidence building measures, the first one might be opening a border-crossing point in Prespa", 29 March 2015, available at: <https://www.mkd.mk/makedonija/politika/makedonija-i-grcija-razgleduvaat-merki-za-gradenje-doverba-mozhna-prva-merka-e>

project writing, all aspects of project implementation and project reporting. Moreover, local staff is familiar with project rules, problems of the municipalities that could be resolved with EU support and feasibility of the proposed projects. This means **bottom-up approach**, where projects are initiated by practitioners. At the same time, having support from the top management is of utmost importance. In most of the cases, employees within the municipality administration enjoy high level of support from the mayor. Even in cases of changes in the political establishment i.e. election of new mayor from another political party, the staff working on IPA funded projects usually remains the same. This is a very positive finding, given the many criticisms towards the high level of politicization and partisanship of institutions in the Republic of Macedonia.

However, there have been cases where the top management is not fully aware of the benefits of such programmes and the additional workload assigned to the local staff. Therefore, it very much depends on **personal motivation and interest** of the individuals within the institution to work on particular topics. If such support is missing, this would negatively influence the pro-activity and motivation of staff to participate and lead such projects. Even though the local staff is usually the one driving the process, there have been cases such as the Municipality of Novaci where the mayor himself is the one initiating the cooperation and being closely involved in all projects implemented under the IPA Cross-Border Programme. All in all in-house motivation and able staff are some of the main drivers for successful cross-border cooperation.

### 3. Detected Challenges

Main challenges related to implementation of projects within the IPA Cross-Border Cooperation Programme between Macedonia and Greece are mainly related to operational issues, programme rules, and insufficient capacities for proper implementation as envisaged.

First of all, the personnel working in the municipality administration is oftentimes **lacking the capacities for project planning, proposal writing and narrative and financial reporting**. The usual approach is “learning by doing”, so people working on the projects are becoming better trained over time. That is why staff turnout should be minimized. In some cases, institutions engage consultancy agencies to help them with project application and project administration. This is not a bad solution per se, especially in the first phases when there is limited experience with such projects. However, local staff should work together with the consultants in order to enable **knowledge transfer and human resource development**. On the positive note, all interviewees agreed that communication and information exchange between project teams from both countries is very satisfactory, which is especially relevant for smooth and timely reporting and also for mutual knowledge exchange.

In addition to this, **public procurement proved to be one of the main challenges** for successful project implementation. One difficulty is following EU rules on public procurement which can differ from national legislation. Therefore, such trainings are very much appreciated by the project teams. Another aspect is the obligation to buy only products from the EU, which is not always possible and feasible. There have been experiences in the past when some of the costs were not accepted when reported, which



resulted in damage for the municipality's budget. Such examples could discourage further engagements within the IPA Cross-Border Programme, given the limited budgets that these border regions have. Therefore, special attention should be put on capacity building for public procurement and budget execution in order to avoid misunderstandings and poor implementation.

As it has been noted, local staff is investing significant resources in terms of commitment for professional development and capacity building, time, and distraction from other tasks according to their employment specifications. However, there are **no financial incentives for employees within local municipalities** to get involved in such projects. Indeed, there are certain funds available for the project team. Nevertheless, there is also an incompatibility of being a civil servant and receiving additional honoraria from EU funds. This means that local municipalities can hire a project manager and/or project assistant externally but not pay its own employees additional funds for the extra work they do. The practice also shows that the main workload is still carried by the local administration employees and there have been negative experiences when external staff was not up to the task and only interfered in the proper implementation of the activities. This can be resolved by a more careful selection of the project team, but also by better support and division of responsibilities between the local staff.

Furthermore, one of the main challenges which is very important from the aspect of the contribution of the programme to the neighbourly confidence building is the fact that oftentimes municipalities are **working in parallel instead of working together**. While all projects start with a coordinative meeting, the frequency and quality of joint activities differ between different projects. Given that these projects are addressing a specific local need, they usually consist of **mirroring similar activities in both countries**. For instance, one of the activities within the KAIMAK Project was creation of a House of Taste in Kavadarci and a House of Taste in Edessa.

Moreover, there used to be a common practice to have different starting dates of the projects resulting in completely **different timelines for project implementation**. Within the IPA Cross-Border Programme 2007-2013, both countries had different contracting authorities, so all contracts were signed independently. More precisely, The Delegation of the European Union in Skopje was designated as the Contracting Authority for the Macedonian beneficiaries, while the Greek partners were signing the contracts with the Managing Authority in Greece i.e. the Ministry for Development, Competitiveness and Trade which also acted as a Contracting Authority. The most unsuccessful example from this kind of operations is the project DECIDE which was never implemented in Macedonia. Namely, due to certain issues, the contract with the Macedonian partners was never signed, while the Greek side of project benefited from its successful implementation. Fortunately, this problem is overcome in the new 2014-2020 Programme and now there is only one **contracting authority** for both Macedonia and Greece which should provide better coordination and avoiding such blunders in the future.

#### 4. The impact of the name Issue on the cross border cooperation between Macedonia and Greece

All interviewees agreed that the name issue certainly affects cooperation between both countries. **However, it was not seen as a main obstacle for successful project imple-**

**mentation and cross-border cooperation within the IPA CBC Programme.** More concretely, the name issue does not affect operational work and regular communication between the project partners. There is an understanding between all involved parties about the complexity and sensitivity of the issue, so there is a general consensus that local municipalities should rather focus on constructive activities where they can work together for the benefit of both communities.

Given that this Programme is a European Instrument, it does not recognize the constitutional name of the country and the reference Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia should be used as it is the case with all communication with EU institutions. Macedonian project partners are usually using creative branding solutions when publishing any material within the projects, where focus is put on content and not formal names and declarations. Main objective of this approach is minimizing the risk of creating negative perceptions within the communities in both countries towards the IPA CBC Programme and putting and emphasis instead on the projects' results.

There has been one case when the name issue directly prevented a concrete activity though. Namely, the KAIMAK Project envisaged creating an online platform for selling gastronomy products distinctive for the concrete region involved in the project. However, branding of Macedonian products was not acceptable for the Greek side so this activity was never implemented. Therefore, such bad experiences can be avoided by careful selection of project activities and better project planning taking into consideration all risks and possible complications.

#### 5. Involvement of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

Main beneficiaries of the IPA CBC Programme are local municipalities i.e. the municipality administration. The involvement of CSOs is only sporadic in these projects. From the case studies, it is evident that there was only one Macedonian CSO and that is the Centre for Sustainability and Advanced Education in Bitola.

Main reason for the lack of involvement of CSOs is the lack of capacities of the local civil society sector to undertake projects on such a large scale. Lack of human resources and lack of financial sustainability are considered to be especially problematic for CSOs operating in smaller towns in the border regions. Some of the interviewees from the municipalities stated that they avoid involving CSOs since they believe that it will decrease their chances of getting the proposal approved, given that the capacities of each project partner are being also assessed by the selection committee. Therefore, they prefer working with "stronger" partners such as institutions or companies. However, such approach undermines the potential of CSOs to further improve their capacities and ensure their sustainability and should be reconsidered in future projects.

#### 6. Impact of cross-border cooperation on confidence building between the two countries

The IPA CBC contributes towards lasting improvement on inter-municipal cooperation between both countries. Experiences in project implementation are very positive and all studied parties are committed to further engagement within this type of activities.



Depending on project areas, the effect spreads in different areas and there have been positive experiences in bringing together various stakeholders from the both countries. In this sense, this programme has facilitated establishing contacts also between businesses, schools and other target groups.

In terms of visibility, the results are diverse. The website of the Municipality of Kavadarci unfortunately does not contain any information about the KAIMAK Project. The official project website is also not available anymore as the project has ended. However, the most visible project output is the “House of taste” in Kavadarci as a museum containing more than 500 exponents and art pieces related to gastronomy in the Tikves region.<sup>13</sup> Analytica’s team visited the building which became one of the tourist attractions in this town. The museum is visibly promoted as being created within support of the IPA CBC Programme. In addition, the project involved a Wine festival and several workshops; which created the opportunity to reach wider audience.

The website of the PEEBRE project<sup>14</sup> is still active and contains information about the project in Macedonian, Greek and English. Also, on the homepage of the website of Municipality of Resen, there is a banner of the project. The website was regularly updated with information about the project activities and some of those activities have been promoted in the media.

The Lhi-Lna Project website is also active<sup>15</sup> and contains extensive information about the project. There is another website created by Novaci Municipality focusing on promoting multimedia products of the project in Macedonia.<sup>16</sup> Taking into consideration that the project includes documentation of historical and natural sides, the website focuses on promotion of those sites through maps, pictures and videos.

As it has been noted, the DECIDE Project was never signed from the Macedonian side. However, the project’s website<sup>17</sup> is functional and contains main information about the project in the three languages, even though there were no activities in Macedonia.

The perception of the IPA programme within the local community was assessed as very positive. This is linked to the type of activities that project partners are undertaking and whose activities can range from resolving concrete issues (such as reconstruction of certain buildings), capacity building activities for the locals (such as workshops, trainings, classes etc.) to cultural programmes (such as festivals and concerts). As long as there is a concrete benefit for the local community, visible project results create positive perceptions between the border communities of Macedonia and Greece.

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<sup>13</sup> Nova Makedonija daily “Kavadarci got a “House of Taste”, 18 May 2013

<sup>14</sup> PEEBPE, project website: <http://peebpe.eu/>

<sup>15</sup> Lhilna project <http://www.lhilna.eu/>

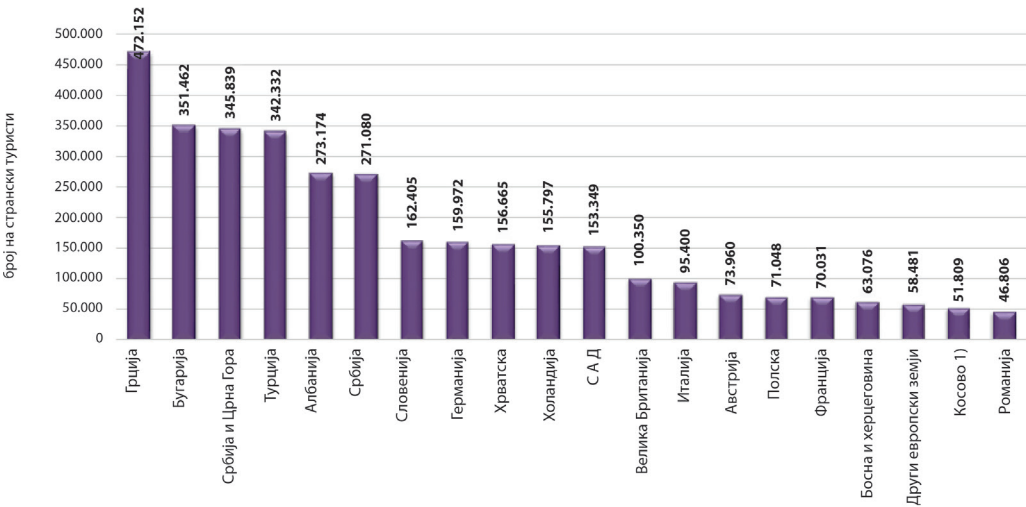
<sup>16</sup> Municipality of Novaci, <http://www.novaci.mk/index.php/mk/>

<sup>17</sup> DECIDE Project, <http://decide-project.eu/>

**CHAPTER 2: Cooperation in education and science between the Republic of Macedonia and Greece**

1. Why is there a lack of cooperation in education and culture?

As mentioned in the introduction, the reason why the cooperation between the both countries in education, science, culture is on low level is due to the bigger issue of the name problem which in turn affects the collaboration in all areas including the ones which is important for building liaisons and trust between the societies of the two countries. Since the break-up of Yugoslavia, tourism is still the only area of consistent cooperation between the two countries. Table 1 shows the numbers of Greek tourists per year in Macedonia (the infographic is for 2014).



Source: Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning <sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately in education and science there is no data gathered as to how much and which institutions collaborate, the number of joint projects and the amount of funds invested in this. The information available online usually paints a picture that the focus of the projects is more on environmentally related issues rather than education for instance. Research shows the University from Bitola has long term established cooperation with Greek educational institutions. This should be analyzed in depth and these relationships should be harvest further as well as duplicated and/or increased in other areas such as culture, transport, energy etc. Tables 2 and 3 show some of the types of projects high-education institutions from both neighbours work on:

<sup>18</sup> Tourist turnover in the Republic of Macedonia, Ministry of environment and physical planning, [http://www.moepp.gov.mk/?page\\_id=3971](http://www.moepp.gov.mk/?page_id=3971)

**Table 2**

Number of the project	IPA/2010/DN 023658/CN362856
Type of project	Cross-border cooperation project Greece – Macedonia
Country/Region	Republic of Greece, Republic of Macedonia
Title	Soil degradation assessment and rehabilitation strategies for sustainable land use planning
Acronym	TERRA_MED
Goals	Sustainable development in the area of studies/ research, as well as creating tools which will be implemented in other similar research and studies
Area	Fostering development and protection of the natural resources
Timeframe	15 months (16.10.2015 – 15.01.2017)
Grant	766.000 €
Estimated budget for Bitola University	169.875,00 €
EU Grant	144.393,75 €
Co-financing	25.481,25 €
Coordinator of the project	Region of central Macedonia in Greece
Partners	1.Arisoteli University – Chemistry Department, Thessaloniki, Greece 2. University St. Kliment Ohridski – Bitola, Macedonia

**Table 3**

Number of the project	IPA/2010/DN 023657/CN361064
Type of project	Cross-border cooperation project Greece – Macedonia
Country/Region	Republic of Greece, Republic of Macedonia
Title	Water protection: Theme park Action
Acronym	WATER_NET
Goals	Supporting the cross border cooperation with Greece, through promoting activities for the importance of the water and its protection as well as activities for protection of the environment in both countries as well as mobilizing natural resources
Area	Fostering development and protection of the natural resources
Timeframe	15 months (22.06.2015 – 22.09.2016)
Grant	530.000 €
Estimated budget for Bitola University	60.000,00 €
EU Grant	51.000,00 €
Co-financing	9.000,00 €
Coordinator of the project	Municipality of Edessa, Greece
Partners	Aleksandar Technological Institute for education in Thessaloniki, Greece  Municipality of Ohrid, Macedonia  University St. Kliment Ohridski – Bitola, Macedonia

Source: University of Bitola<sup>19</sup>

Currently as the example shows, the biggest cooperation of the both countries outside of tourism is done within different EU funding schemes, as one of the most popular measures is the Cross Border One which was previously discussed. The collaboration does somewhat begin more structurally with the first IPA 2007-2013 and the introducing of this measure. Important to notice is that it is almost impossible to find available information on the cooperation before this period which in online and/or publicly available.

Coming back to the cross-border cooperation (CBC), it aims at overcoming the administrative, legal and physical obstacles by fostering good relations between regions and countries, familiarising future Member States with rules and procedures governing

<sup>19</sup> University St. Kliment Ohridski, Bitola Macedonia – Project cooperation (УКЛО – Проектна соработка)

the European Territorial Cooperation under EU Structural Funds, and by promoting sustainable local development... Under IPA I, CBC has received around EUR 30 million. Based on the high interest, experience gained and existing joint programme structures, the IPA CBC with Member States (Greece and Bulgaria) has been continued under IPA II... The CBC programme with Greece aims at promoting employment, labour mobility and social and cultural inclusion; promoting sustainable transport and improving public infrastructures; protecting the environment and promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management. The Balkan – Mediterranean Cooperation Programme will foster the programme area's entrepreneurship potential by encouraging SMEs' cooperation and networking, clusters and clusters policies, new business models' applications and in particular the ones promoting innovation, opens up new markets and support internationalisation. It will also provide support for natural and cultural heritage and resources' efficiency.<sup>20</sup>

Concerning the amount of money spent and the number of projects conducted since the introduction of the Instrument of Pre-Accession in 2007 until the first program ended in 2014 the stats are as follows: the activities of the cross-border cooperation program between Macedonia and Greece are infrastructural zones in the cross-border zone, protection of the common natural and cultural heritage, favourable health and educational services, better business conditions. The utilization of the funds from the IPA Cross-border Program for the period 2007-2013 is 82 percent which in turn is a good signal that there is not only a need but also desire from both sides to cooperate and utilize these funds. For Macedonia, 11.5 million Euros were available for financing projects in the Southwest, Pelagonia, Vardar and Southeast regions. A total of 57 projects have been implemented, for which more than 10 million Euros have been allocated for the Macedonian partners said the then Minister of Local Self Government of Macedonia Shiret Elezi... Specific projects based on strong partnerships are essential for achieving the goals of regional and local development, increasing the attractiveness and competitiveness of the area and improving the quality of life of the people. I believe in our cooperation and we have many positive expectations from our project partners in the next period, - said Alexandros Samaras, representative of the IPA program from Greece. Cross-border co-operation is at the core of the integration process and represents team work that goes beyond the borders of countries and guarantees political stability and prosperity of the entire region, said the head of the European Union delegation in Skopje. "Cross-border cooperation also enriches the neighbourly relations. This partnership continues with the IPA 2 program for the period 2014-2020. The challenges people face are not limited by borders and cross-border programs, "said Samuel Zbogar, head of the EU Delegation.<sup>21</sup>

Regarding the funds foreseen for the new IPA 2014-2020, the amount is 40 million Euros, which is increased since the last programme and shows the dedication of the European Commission and the EU itself to invest in the improvement of the relations between the two countries through joint projects. However the first call from the new CBC from IPA II (2014-2020) is with Bulgaria, and this goes in line with the renewed cooperation

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<sup>20</sup> Indicative Strategy Paper for Macedonia, Regional cooperation and territorial cooperation, revised version (2014-2020), DRAFT

<sup>21</sup> Macedonian Radio Television, News, 23.01.2017, accessed on 15.09.2017.

between Macedonia and Bulgaria as well as the increased influence Bulgaria has in the region as the promoter of the EU accession<sup>22</sup>. Due to the open questions Greece has it is regrettably a role it was not able to perform.

There is an urgent need for action plan and or strategy on high level educational and research collaboration for the duration of IPA II (2014-2020). Assessment of needs, obstacles, common issues, proposed measures etc are more than needed in the renewed atmosphere that there is a possible solution for the name dispute in the very near future. Even the Strategic plans of the Ministry of Education and Science of Macedonia do not mention the joint cooperation with neighbourly Greece in the area of education and science. In the latest plan 2017-2019 the only time Greece was mentioned was in the plans for free education for foreign students studying in Macedonian and the countries eligible for this measure (Greek students studying in Macedonian in Macedonia are eligible for this measure – author's remark).<sup>23</sup> This is quite astonishing having in mind the volume of interest in areas such as tourism and EU projects. Not having any state-level strategies for developing cooperation when there is a clear interest goes in line with the later findings that the name dispute does have quite the big impact on all areas of institutional cooperation.

The presented above is also a clear indicator that it took foreign assistance to nudge the countries to work together on different issues including education and science. Nevertheless, the conclusion is that cooperation is very sporadic, not structuralized, with no strategic approach from either side on developing joint cooperation in this area etc. Mostly universities and research institutions collaborate exclusively and only on EU projects (meaning it is a network of many institutions from different European countries and both of countries are there as well). This is in no way an indicator of enhanced collaboration although it can serve as a trigger for specific collaboration in the area of education and research.

## 2. The confidence building measures

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced the 11 measures of mutual trust, which were agreed by the heads of foreign affairs of Macedonia and Greece at that time, Mr. Nikola Poposki and Mr. Nikos Kodzias. With these measures the trust between the two countries should be built in parallel with finding an appropriate solution for the name dispute. "Ministers Poposki and Kodzias agreed on a joint and active approach to build a climate of enhanced trust between the two countries through intensification of the overall bilateral co-operation and active dialogue on open issues, with the ultimate goal of joint contribution to overcoming differences in the spirit of European values and common interests. This approach is also contained in the provisions of the Interim Accord of 1995, whose potential should be actively used."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Bulgaria pushes for clearer EU membership path for Western Balkans, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-10-16/poorest-eu-state-to-push-for-further-expansion-as-it-takes-helm>. accessed on 31.10.2017

<sup>23</sup> Strategic Plan, Ministry of Education and Science, RM, 2017-2019, p. 13 [http://www.mon.gov.mk/images/Strateski\\_plan\\_MON\\_-\\_2017-2019-za\\_na\\_website.pdf](http://www.mon.gov.mk/images/Strateski_plan_MON_-_2017-2019-za_na_website.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> What kind of confidence building measures agreed Poposki and Kodzias in Skopje, <http://emagazin.mk/vesti/10313?title=kakvi-merki-za-doverba-dogovorija-poposki-i-kodzias-vo-skopje/>, accessed on 1.10.2017

The CBM are total 11 in number, divided into several different categories:

A. Political and EU Affairs:

1. Political consultations between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs in international, multilateral, regional, horizontal, security and consular matters, as well as for regional cooperation initiatives/Annual Consultation Plan.
2. Bilateral dialogue on EU matters and strengthening the bilateral cooperation within IPA II programmes, taking into account the priority areas, as set out in the strategic document and annual programs. Collaboration in Cross-border Cooperation, Twinning and TAIEX.
3. Cooperation between the National Center for Public Administration in Athens and the Agency for Administration in Skopje.

B. Education and culture:

4. Cooperation between universities, research centers and institutes.
5. Exchange of university scholarships.
6. Encouraging measures for cultural cooperation and exchange.

C. Trade and economic cooperation:

7. Strengthening economic and trade relations - Business Forums.

D. Connectivity:

8. Improve the energy grids/gas pipe-lines connectivity.
9. Improvement of the railway link Bitola-Florina.

D. Justice and Home Affairs:

10. Consultations between representatives of the competent ministries of interior, border police and customs administration in order to exchange information and strengthen the fight against organized crime, corruption, terrorism, illegal migration and drug trafficking.

E. Other:

11. Cooperation in health issues, etc.<sup>25</sup>

As seen, the education and science cooperation is part of these measures; however it is not clear yet if there will be a more strategic approach towards developing this area of collaboration between Macedonia and Greece.

3. What do internal sources in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Macedonia say regarding the issue of cooperation between the two countries?

Significant problem is that there is no developed bilateral legal framework to foster cooperation between the in-line institutions from both sides. Namely, due to the specificity of the name issue, the 1995 Interim Accord (IA) remains the cornerstone of bilateral relations, along with bilateral agreements signed between Greece and Macedonia specifically mentioned in the IA to remain in place between the two sides. What is in place are mainly ad-hock forms of cooperation between different sectors. As of lately, the two MFA's opened channels for communication through the implementations of

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.,

the Confidence building measures. So far, for example, in the field of education, a MoU between Apostol Pavle University of Ohrid in Macedonia and the University of Pieria in Greece was signed which is a good sign for fostering further cooperation. Some more are in the pipeline. However, the cooperation is yet to be increased as sometimes institutions are hesitant to engage without having so called “blessings” from the MFA’s.

According to the Ministry for any cooperation to take place and develop first there must be a political will on both sides. The aim of the CBMs – is to bring together the ministries from both sides in their areas of expertise and to establish not only cooperation but trust in the mutual interests as well. Macedonia and Greece due to the name dispute are starting from zero in the cooperation in all fields including education and science. Furthermore, it is considered that further development of joint projects to utilize available IPA funds are extremely beneficial to facilitate bilateral cooperation. Regarding the work dynamic of the implementation of the CBMs, there are no strict dead-lines when these measures should be implemented. The plan of both neighbouring countries is to improve the cooperation as well as foster trust to create favourable climate towards overcoming the name issue. The central conclusion is that cooperation is possible and should take place.

4. What the cooperation is like in the education sector from the point of view of the ones directly involved - interview with Professor Snezana Mojsosvska Salamovska from Bitola University on the cooperation in science and education.<sup>26</sup>

According to the professor joint cooperation with Greece needs to overcome the issue with the name. There is always a will from both sides to work together, nevertheless when the time comes to sign the contracts due to the name dispute many of the projects fail to be implemented. She has been involved in cooperation with Greece since 2001, where from Greek side Large Scale Socio-Economic projects were proposed which had five components and were supposed to be financed by the EU. However the main coordinating person from Greece who initiated these projects died and the project outputs were minimised, and no large scale impact was achieved.

Furthermore, more recently there was an initiative from the East West Institute of Vienna for a joint degree between Bitola University from Macedonia’s side, Florina Department of Balkan studies (Aristotelis University from Thessaloniki from the Greek side) and the Korca University from Albania’s side. Here as well was present the lingering issue of the name dispute as to what name to put on these joint diplomas. Peculiar fact is that Bitola University has a double degree with University Sophia Antipolis from Nice, France but due to the name dispute it cannot have the same with a Greek partner which is on a distance of only 30 km away.

There is an ongoing joint project through the Balkan Med called Eco Entrepreneurship where Bitola University is a partner and once more when it came to signing up contracts or naming the language there have been many issues. In all project initiatives with Greece the situation is the similar.

This situation, according to the professor has a devastating impact on the local com-

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<sup>26</sup> The interview was conducted on 31 October 2017.



munities in the border region as due to this problem they suffer greatly from loss of important funds for their local development. Enormous amount of donor money has been lost for these impoverished communities since there is no official diplomatic relationship between the two states and the name dispute impacts everything, up to the smallest detail. The people working on these joint initiatives get discouraged as they will work hard to get both sides into joint projects and find funding and at the end in the final stage the projects will not start as there is no established custom on how to write the name of the Republic of Macedonia on the contracts so they can be legally binding in both countries. Hence, there is no hostility or lack of interest for mutual cooperation, it is simply impossible under the current situation when there is no solution on the name dispute between the two countries.

## Conclusion

**The first chapter** showed that cross-border cooperation within EU-funded programmes is one of the more successful measures that foster cooperation between Macedonia and Greece and positively contributes towards the trust-building between the two countries.

There is high level of readiness and commitment among Macedonian stakeholders for cooperation with their Greek colleagues. This is mainly driven by the common interest and opportunity to use EU funds for the benefits of the eligible regions and solve problems affecting the local municipalities. Successful project implementation usually happens under a larger cooperation scheme based on positive experiences with known and reliable partners. This means that trust is built on positive experiences and getting to know each other, which is possible only when having the opportunity to work together. Having personnel that are competent and willing to be involved in such projects is one of the key factors enabling successful project implementation. Moreover, some of the examined projects facilitated establishing contacts between businesses, schools and associations related to the project theme.

On the other side, detected challenges mainly relate to operational issues and they are not different than challenges that might be expected when working on joint projects with partners from two different countries. Still, those issues did not have the capacity to undermine the overall successful cooperation.

At the same time, these findings and positive perceptions towards the Greek nationals might be limited only to the region of Northern Greece. Namely, some of the interviewees pointed out that trust building in some has been facilitated by the feelings of socio-cultural proximity and speaking the same language in some cases.

Unfortunately, one of the negative features of such programmes is the insufficient involvement of CSOs in the projects. There is a need for raising awareness among the main project beneficiaries (the local municipality administration) regarding the benefits that local CSOs can bring and the assistance they can provide in the more efficient use of the IPA funding.

Regarding the name issue, it can be concluded that this problem is not a major obstacle for cooperation. The main reason for this is having already established rules and procedures on branding, given that cooperation happens under existing EU schemes. This finding, combined with the fact that external support is one of the main incentives for cooperation, shows that the EU can be identified as the crucial enabler of the cross-border cooperation between Macedonia and Greece.

**Regarding the second chapter** the conclusion is that Macedonia does not gather information how many joint projects in different EU programmes it has with Greece in science and education. The only available info is the one from the EU as they administer the Cross Border Cooperation Programme under IPA. However there are other EU

programmes that do not specifically fall under IPA and the Ministry of Education and Science should do an inventory and check about all neighbouring countries so it can identify potentials for cooperation, gaps, where there is lack of initiatives, where there is capacity for increased cooperation etc.

The name dispute unlike in the CBC does have a heavy impact on the institutional cooperation, hence the one is almost non-existent and thus the data available on it is also very hard to find or create. After 25 years of independence of Macedonia, the cooperation with Greece apart from tourism and CBC is on a very low almost basic level. There is no institutionalized practice how to cooperate, there are even none unofficial practices in cooperation between the institutions, consequently it all boils down to having a very ad hoc and sporadic collaboration almost entirely dependent on EU assistance through its projects.

There is a need and potential for cooperating in joint projects in education and science from both sides and there is money as well – but the name dispute will continue to put obstacles to this cooperation until both sides find an innovative way, such as local authorities did in the CBC Programme, to have meaningful cooperation regardless of whether the name dispute has been resolved or not.

All in all until the name dispute is at it is without any resolution in sight, the joint cooperation in education and science will be under the danger of low productivity and connection as well as sharing of the know-how.



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