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The Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance II role on Promoting Regional Cooperation within Western Balkan Countries

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Abstract: Regional and territorial cooperation is an important component of funds dedicated to the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance II (IPA II). The participation of the state, private entities, community and third sector make cross border cooperation a strong tool for joint initiatives in various economic, social, environmental and political fields. Within IPA II, the Western Balkans CBC has been provided an added value in terms of funding local development in isolated, peripheral areas that have historically received little policy attention and investments from national governments. The focus of the research will be on CBC funds results regarding regional cooperation within WBC. The paper will analyze the cross-border cooperation differences between different municipalities based in financial assistance from EU, IPA II funds (2014-2020) as a region at the external border of EU identification of different degrees of involvement of border municipalities/settlements in cross-border cooperation in the Balkan region and its impact in promoting good neighbour's relationship.

Keywords: Cross border cooperation; Western Balkan Countries; IPA II; European Union

1. Introduction

Based on Article 8 on Treaty on European Union (TEU) the “Union is to develop a special relationship with neighbouring countries, aiming to establish an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness, founded on the values of the Union and characterized by close and peaceful relations based on cooperation³.”

Borders are defined not only by territory but also by geo-political, cultural, and economic aspects. They are also as a space where agents and structure are mutually influential and interrelated in terms of interests and human aspects of communities, sharing common past and future of living so close. Borders play an important role also in the representation of European nation-states and the EU itself, as well as in the representation of the EU's relations to its neighbours (Scott, 2015, p. 35). For a long time, cross border cooperation between states has been the subject of interdisciplinary and comparative studies. Many of the research regarding cross-border cooperation has been focused on European borders and in this regard is needed more attention on its outside borders to analyze the efficiency of this instrument.

Born out of post-Cold War transformations, cross-borders cooperation has increasingly assumed a paradigmatic status as an instrument for rapprochement/reconciliation and development between states.

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³<https://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2014:077:0027:0043:EN:PDF> Official Journal of the European Union L 77/27 / 15.03.2014.

For small countries such as those in the Western Balkans, with historical concerns along the way, the relationship with European Union is crucial in every dimension, especially when it comes to democracy, rule of law, development, sustainable growth, reconciliation and regional cooperation. Under this vision, previously divided border regions can be brought together through various policies that aim to create a more cohesive European space (Deiana *et al.* 2019, p.531). The reason of such instruments like Cross Border Cooperation is to reduce the negative effects of borders as administrative, legal and physical barriers, tackle common problems and exploit untapped potential. The Regional Policies include the European Territorial Cooperation objective in the Cohesion Funds where are developed the Cross Border Cooperation programmes. European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), better known as Interreg, is one of the two goals of Cohesion Policy and provides a framework for the implementation of joint actions and policy exchanges between national, regional and local actors from different Member States. Within EU the Member States CBCs are supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The overarching objective of European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) is to promote a harmonious economic, social and territorial development of the Union as a whole. Interreg is built around three strands of cooperation: cross-border (Interreg A), transnational (Interreg B) and interregional (Interreg C). The three strands A, B and C kept their roles, but two new instruments were put in place to assist regional development alongside the external borders: IPA CBC (a pre-accession instrument) and ENPI CBC (a neighbourhood policy instrument). These two financial instruments followed the same philosophy as the cross-border cooperation INTERREG programmes. The idea was to transfer the successful principles of INTERREG from the internal borders to the external borders and even further beyond, i.e. to borders with future candidate States or potential candidate States (Reitel, *et al.*, 2018. p. 13). As it is mentioned as an example by James Scott; a central logic of INTERREG and other support programmes of CBC is the creation of new communities of interest and geographically flexible networks and to break down territorial and administrative constraints to the exchange of ideas. It is perhaps not an exaggeration to state that the EU has envisaged a project of European construction through the transcendence of local particularizes and boundaries (Scott 2015, p. 28). According to Elisabetta Nadalutti "... borders are linked to the nature of their physical, social processes that frame and contain individual actions. On the other hand, borders are 'humanized' and identified with the individuals who as dynamic actors through their intentions, motivations, beliefs and values shape social life and their human environment (Nadalutti, 2015, p.485-6). That is why the tool for cooperation between countries is by intensifying the CBC. The complexity of issues deals with CBCs includes a wide range of sensitive questions. Such as management of natural resources, cross-border trades, work opportunity, links between urban and rural areas, infrastructure and transport are the major intentions of CBC. The principal strategy pursued by the EU in supporting CBC has been to couple the development of local and regional cooperation structures with more general regional development policies. For the Western Balkan countries the CBCs are supported under the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA). Till now the territory cooperation programs within the IPA funds have recognized two financial perspectives: IPA I (2007-2013) and IPA II (2014-2020).

IPA supports cross border cooperation between candidate countries, potential candidate countries and EU Member States¹. Consequently the article will analyse cross border cooperation through a complex point of view that will be elaborated through achievements and challenges faced by countries in implementation of cross border cooperation activities in Western Balkan. The implementation of different initiatives in Balkan have improved somehow the relations between countries. But still the

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/ipa/cross-border/.

results are far away especially when it comes to funds absorptions and sharing expertise and experiences. Even if when it is in common interest between countries in applying successful projects and getting financed there is a lack of cooperation. The question is; what kind of culture cooperation exists in Western Balkan and which is the role of cross border cooperation programs in promoting it? What is the impact of cross border cooperation between EU member states and Western Balkan Countries? Is there any evidence, results and improves related with IPA program implementation regarding regional cooperation in Western Balkan? These are some of the question that will be addressed in this paper.

2. The Regional Cooperation approach in Western Balkan Countries

Regional cooperation in Western Balkan Countries has undergone a fundamental shift over the past decades. If in the late 1990s, when the process took off in earnest, it was mostly about strengthening security in the wake of violent conflict, nowadays the principal goal is the economic growth and development of the region. The territory of Western Balkan region is totally surrounded by Member States of the European Union. Mostly, the European Integration is recognised as a project of reconciliation or as a unique prospect and engagement with his neighbours. The region is a relevant area in terms of political, economic and cultural significance and also a bridge between East and West, covering approximately 800,000 km² with 60 million inhabitants (Grozeva, 2017, p. 86). Long time ago the Western Europe was described by U.S. president George H. W. Bush (January 1989) as an “economic magnet” and the results of this prediction are evident now that the EU has 27 members. From these early stages the commitment of the EU toward his neighbours has been more profound shaping new policies on this regard. “Wider Europe – Neighbourhood” launched in 2004 sets as a framework to govern the EU’s relations with countries of the EU’s Eastern and Southern Neighbours in order to achieve the closest possible political association and the greatest possible degree of economic integration¹.

Local communities and authorities located alongside international borders often face problems and issues directly related to the presence of the border. European strategies towards the neighbourhood are not only multi-scale, multi-level and multi-actor, but they also can be said to materialize different geo-strategies or multiple neighbourhood policies (Celata & Coletti, 2013, p. 113). As in other areas, the EU is indispensable for getting local countries to work jointly. The European Union has been the main provider of expertise and funds. Effective handling of such problems requires the development of joint cross-border strategies. Cross-border cooperation (CBC) is a concerted process of building neighbourly relationships between local stakeholders and authorities on either side of a border, with a view to overcoming such problems and fostering harmonious development of neighbouring communities. (COE, CBC Toolkit, 2012, p. 4). An alternative cooperation narrative suggests that to enhance territorial 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 it is assumed that with time, CBC will both break down barriers to deeper political and social integration as well as create new development opportunities through communication, ideas and synergies (Scott, 2015, p. 28).

Regional cooperation is crucial in terms of political stability, security and economic development of the region. European integration and regional cooperation are closely intertwined. One of the key aims of the Stabilization and Association Process is to encourage countries of the region to cooperate among themselves across a wide range of areas, including the prosecution of war crimes, border issues, refugees

¹ https://eeas.europa.eu/diplomatic-network/european-neighbourhood-policy-enp/330/european-neighbourhood-policy-enp_en

and the fight against organized crime. One of the specific components of the IPA is dedicated to regional cooperation and cross-border programs (Xhemaili 2016, p. 62). As the European Commissioner for Enlargement Olli Rehn states “Many of the challenges facing the western Balkan countries are not only common to them but also have a cross-border dimension, which involves their regional neighbours”¹.

Regional cooperation has been one of the greatest achievements of the Western Balkans. In the declaration of Western Balkans Investment Summit in 2018 was emphasized the fact that the two main pillars of stability in the Western Balkans are, Euro-Atlantic institutions and regional cooperation (Levitin & Sanfey, 2018, p. 2). Also the regional cooperation is a requirement for the candidate countries to be involved in order to fulfill their membership aspirations. This is an important and effective mechanism by imposing collaboration in order to bring long stability by common European prospective.

All the countries of Balkan Region share the same aim of integrating into the European Union, and also they face similar challenges in their political and economic development. This is why mutual coordination among countries could bring more benefits in their integration prospective. Good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation form an essential part of the country’s process of moving towards the EU. They contribute to stability, reconciliation and a climate conducive to addressing open bilateral issues and the legacies of the past (EC, 2020, pp. 59-60). Cross-border cooperation (CBC) is a concerted process of building neighbourly relationships between local stakeholders and authorities on both sides of national land and sea borders; its aim is to foster the harmonious development of border communities (Bianco & Jackson, 2012, p. 11).

It is the most common form of Territorial Cooperation and aims (particularly in the case of the Western Balkans) to promote good neighbourly relations, foster EU integration and promote socio-economic development in border areas between countries through joint local and regional initiatives combining both external aid and economic and social cohesion objectives.

3. Common Challenges and Problems Faced Today by Western Balkan Countries.

Before and after the 90’ the Western Balkan region has been and still is one of the most undeveloped areas of the Europe continent. The entire region has been part of unexpected and dramatic events happened with the disintegration of Yugoslavia. As is described by Akova and Ünal in their work “...the peoples of the Balkans, a living museum comprising a number of different ethnic groups and religious beliefs, have reached the point where the culture of coexistence has been internalised and dynamics have moved from the conflict of identities to cultural integration” acknowledging that the perspective of the region’s integration has played an important role in the recognition and coexistence between them, this coexistence still remains fragile when the complexity of developments in the region is associated with stagnation in achieving economic development, the progress of democracy and the threshold towards membership in the EU.

Based on the Balkan Barometer 2022 data survey the biggest concerns of western Balkan Citizens are considered as below: Unemployment; Economic situation; Corruption; Brain drain/emigration and crime. The report reveal that: “*Economic development and unemployment remain the two most pressing obstacles in the region. The current economic situation is considered the biggest challenge by 47% of respondents in the Western Balkans. On the other hand, unemployment is most detrimental to the economy, according to 39% of respondents. Corruption is again ranked third with 27%, while the share*

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/nf5703249enc_web_en.pdf.

of those seeing emigration as a negative trend is increasing (18%, from 13% in 2020)” (Balkan Barometer 2022, p. 11). Looking to the unemployment data from 2015 till 2021 (Table 1) from the 6 WBC the situation has improved slightly, for Albania where the unemployment data in 2015 has been 17.3% while in 2021 were 11.6%, also for Serbia the unemployment data in 2015 has been 17.7% and in 2021 were 11.1%. For countries like BiH and Kosovo the situation has changed compared to the previous years but still there is a considerable difference by having a high number of unemployment compared to other countries of the region. This situation reveals that regional disparities persist. The entire region has marked differences in unemployment figures, showing a problem and a bad situation compared to the Eurozone countries where the unemployment in 2021 was 7%.

Table 1. Unemployment Data

WBC:	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Albania	17.3	14.2	13.8	12.3	11.6	11.7	11.6
Bosnia and Herzegovina	27.7	25.4	38.4	36.0	33.1	33.8	32.4
Kosovo	-	-	30.5	29.5	25.7	26.0	20.8
Montenegro	17.2	21.3	16.1	15.2	15.1	17.9	16.7
North Macedonia	26.1	23.7	22.4	20.7	17.3	16.4	15.7
Serbia	17.7	15.3	13.5	12.7	10.4	9.0	11.1
Eurozone	10.9	10	8.7	7.9	7.5	8.2	7.0

Source: <https://www.focus-economics.com/country-indicator>

Regarding the economic development, the outlook for the Western Balkans remains subdued and uncertainty remains high. After the negative effects of the pandemic Covid 19, the economic performance of the WBC has been challenged by the external environment stemming from the fallout of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, higher energy and food prices, tightening financial conditions, and significant uncertainty. Based on the World Bank report for 2023 “*The economic performance of the region reflects synchronization with the European Union (EU), the effect of rising energy and food prices on consumption and investment, and the weather-induced impact on agriculture and energy production, due to a particularly dry year. Despite having avoided a recession in the last quarter, the EU27 is estimated to have grown at a pace of 3.7 percent in 2022, leading to a pause in the Western Balkans convergence*” (WB, 2023, p. 2). Data reveals that the last three years has been a test of resilience and that the six economies have now surpassed their pre-pandemic levels in terms of GDP, although at different speeds (Table 2).

Table 2. Real GDP Growth (Percent)

Countries	2020	2021	2022
Albania	-3.3	8.9	4.8
Bosnia and Herzegovina	-3.0	7.4	4.0
Kosovo	-5.3	10.7	3.5
North Macedonia	-4.7	3.9	2.1
Montenegro	-15.3	13.0	6.1
Serbia	-0.9	7.5	2.3
WB6	-3.0	7.8	3.2

Source: World Bank, *Western Balkans Regular Economic Report. No.23, 2023 p.6*

The integration process and especially the financial support of the EU toward the region are indispensable. The EU is one of the world’s top providers of budget support, which involves direct financial transfers to public bodies and private companies of partner countries that are required to conduct sustainable development reforms. Data reveal that the total (consumed) EU budget support to its neighbouring countries, as measured only at the EU level and not taking into account the

contributions of individual member states, amounted to €4.1 billion in 2020. Of this, 45 percent went to the Western Balkans and Turkey (WIIW, 2023, p. 8).

Regarding the EU integration process it is in different stages and the six countries are facing common challenges and problems. The challenges are in many areas, such as rule of law, fighting corruption, improving infrastructure, diversifying stable energy supplies, strengthening competitiveness, increasing exports, reducing the high levels of unemployment, developing administrative capacity, addressing environmental problems, fighting corruption and organised crime, and improving the business environment – are not only common for individual Western Balkans countries but, importantly, can be most efficiently addressed by joint and coordinated effort at the regional level.

As is stated on the Balkan Barometer 2022 report, “The vast majority of citizens in the Western Balkans (76%) saw a positive correlation between regional cooperation and better political, security and economic situation (Balkan Barometer 2022, p. 11). In this regard the role of regional cooperation is estimated and acknowledged as a key factor for addressing common challenges and finding common solution also by the citizens of the region.

4. Implementation of IPA 2014-2020 in Western Balkan Countries

Based on the work of Tamás Szemplér (2008) the EU financial support for the countries of the Western-Balkans can be divided into three periods. The first period, is between 1991 and 1999 named by him as “No Strategy, No System”, were the EC/EU has provided support (of € 4.4 bn) to these countries in the framework of various assistance programmes. He stated that “many of the actions have been of ad hoc nature (in most of the period, reacting to urgent needs of the countries in/after war), no structured approach could be seen; synergy effects could thus be very limited” (Szemplér, 2008, p. 9). The second period or as Szemplér named “Part of a Structured Relationship”, is between 2000 and 2006, were the main instrument of EU financial support was CARDS (Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation) as part of the Stabilisation and Association Process (totalling € 4.6 bn). CARDS was characterised by a much more structured approach than the one used before. It included bilateral co-operation tailored to the specific needs of the Western-Balkan countries, as well as regional cooperation among them (Szemplér, 2008, p. 9). The third period named by him the IPA instrument as “Single Framework, Different Clubs” is from 2007 and on.

IPA (the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance) was established in 2007th by Council Regulation no. 1085/2006 and covered the period of 2007-2013, and it has replaced all previously existing pre-accession instruments, including CARDS. IPA provides a single framework and a unified instrument for pre-accession financial assistance (Jano, 2017, p.120). It is the main instrument of EU for pre-accession assistance to candidate countries and potential candidates. In general, IPA I was managed in a centralized manner by the EU, while for IPA II the approach was to increase the decentralized management of funds. The IPA funds build up the capacities of the countries throughout the accession process, resulting in progressive, positive developments in the region. For the period 2007-2013 IPA had a budget of some € 11.5 billion.

The principal users of IPA resources are, above all, the ministries and administration authorities making laws and regulations and enforcing them, local governments, public institutions, as well as NGOs and associations. The end beneficiaries of the available resources are the people of the beneficiary countries, since the concrete results of the implemented projects in the end affect the quality of life of the population the most – whether they are improving the quality of performance of the institutions,

attainment of European standards or infrastructure in different areas (Djurovic, 2020, p. 86). As it is stated on document Commission Implementing Decision of 28.7.2020 “The lessons learned from IPA-I demonstrated that progress towards meeting EU membership criteria is best achieved by a mix of measures planned both at regional and IPA II beneficiary level...Other conclusions concern economies of scale in horizontal programmes versus efficiency risks, due to sometimes complex set-ups for their implementation under IPA-I assistance (EC, 28.7.2020 C (2020) 5209 final p. 4)”. It is also evident that one of the challenges encountered during the implementation of IPA-I was related to the low absorptive capacity of the Western Balkan countries mainly by the weak administrative capacities and lack of experience (Table 4.).

Table 3. IPA I 2007-2013 (only WBC)

	Allocations	Disbursements	Disbursements in %
Albania	537,017,522	288,139,323	53.66%
BiH	571,773,967	370,377,054	64.78%
Kosovo	685,782,927	486,699,110	70.97%
North Macedonia	542,844,358	273,049,040	50.30%
Montenegro	211,489,565	143,423,580	67.82%
Serbia	1,367,009,190	906,220,245	66.29%

Source: EC (2014) Annual Report on Financial Assistance for Enlargement, p. 23

Since 2014, the financial support to EU candidate and potential candidate countries is offered through the new financial instrument, IPA II, which has been implemented during 2014-2020¹. The IPA II instrument, unlike the IPA 2007-2013, will not consist of five components, but of sectoral fields. The new instrument proposes some novelties to address previously stated shortcomings. The most important one concerns strategic approach. Namely, there are Country Strategy Papers are developed for a seven-year-long period for each of the countries allowing for more focus on specific countries taking into account their different needs. Thus, EU wanted to achieve more tangible, adequate and lasting results in different priority areas (Brnovic, 2017, p. 17). The beneficiary countries are: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey. This means there is no differentiation of available funds between candidate and potential candidate countries. Each of the beneficiary countries will benefit from all sectoral areas, regardless of status (candidate or potential candidate). It will be programmed based on the sectoral approach and not specific projects.

During IPA II programming period, EU has introduced three mutually reinforcing priorities to guide all EU - funded programmes: smart growth, sustainable growth and inclusive growth. There are some crucial EU principles on financial assistance that have to be followed and respected by countries of the regions.

The main driving force of IPA II is the so-called sector approach targeting 5 priority areas. In this context, the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance II (IPA II) is dedicated to supporting beneficiaries from eligible areas for:

- Political reforms,
- Economic, social and territorial development,
- Smart, sustainable and inclusive growth,
- Research, technological development and innovation capacity, and

¹ Regulation (EU) No 231/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 establishing an Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II).

- Regional integration and territorial cooperation.

All countries have established legal and institutional framework for using IPA. In the table below is given an overview of IPA II allocation for WB countries. The country that benefits most from all the countries of the region is Serbia; followed by North Macedonia and Albania.

Table 4. Overview of IPA II Allocation for WB Countries

Country	IPA 2014-2020 allocation in Euro
Serbia	1.5 billion
North Macedonia	664.2 million
Albania	649.4 million
Kosovo	645.5 million
Montenegro	270.5 million
BiH	167.1 million

Source: EMIM (2018) “Instrument for pre-accession assistance and the countries of the Western Balkans”, p. 5

Regarding Multi-Country IPA assistance, there are four channels: horizontal support (technical assistance, information and training), regional structures and networks (regional cooperation and networking), regional investment support (targeting project with regional dimension) and territorial cooperation (cross-border programmes) (Brnovic, 2017, p. 18). IPA II supports cross-border cooperation with a view to promoting good neighbourly relations, fostering union integration and promoting socio-economic development. All the Western Balkan Countries participates in cross-border cooperation programs with neighboring Western Balkan countries and Member States, as well as in transnational cooperation programs under the European Regional Development Fund and some of them participate also to IPA Adriatic cross-border. Many scholars define the Cross Border Cooperation as a trademark of “Europeanization” (Deiana *et al.* 2019, pp. 530-531). The implementation of financial support under IPA II is particularly demanding both for state administration and the civil society. The assessment of WBCs IPA II absorption capacities has demonstrated that, although these countries has been using pre-accession instruments for almost two decades now, there is a need to continue to strengthen the absorption capacity, especially vis-à-vis implementation of IPA II Programmes under indirect management.

IPA II programming and development assistance requires valuable human resources capable of coping with the ever-increasing amount of work and obligations in the framework of achieving the objectives and demands of the program.

We are going to analyse the support of IPA II regarding CBC programs. More important is to analyze the impact of CBC between an EU member state with a country of a Balkan region in terms of cooperation and sharing expertise by cooperation with an EU country. The majority of IPA assistance in the form of horizontal and regional programmes and managed directly by the Commission since one of the key features is the need for close coordination and cooperation with multiple beneficiaries. Cross-border cooperation with EU Member States and transnational cooperation programmes has been implemented under shared management with the relevant EU Member States (EC, 2014, p. 9).

Through the investigation of funds received in CBC instrument we realize and understand capability of these countries in absorbing and benefits gained in Western Balkans countries. Data reveal that from all the countries of the region Serbia has profited the largest amount of funds in this regards with a total of 4 CBC programs with a total of 203,310,350 €, followed by Albania with 2 CBC programs but with the highs amount of financed contribution comparing to North Macedonia which have also 2 CBC programs. (Table 5). The progress report of 2020 for Serbia reveals that “...the implementation

capacities of the indirect management structures need to be improved in order to ensure timely and efficient contracting and implementation of IPA programmes” (EC, Serbia 2020 Report, p. 100). The issue of “improvement of management structures” is a demand and challenge even for the other countries of the region.

Table 5. CBC between EU-Member States and WBC

Cooperation between:	No of CBC	Total EU contribution on CBC
EU-Member States with Serbia	4	203,310,350.00€
EU-Member States with Albania	2	124,766,644.00 €
EU-Member States with The Republic of North Macedonia	2	55,191,986.00€
EU-Member States with BiH:	1	57,155,316.00 €
Total for the region	9	440,424,296.00 €

In the section of “Good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation” in every progress reports of year 2020 for each of the Western Balkan Country is declared that: “Good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation form an essential part of “WBC’s¹” European integration process and contribute to stability, reconciliation and a climate conducive to addressing open bilateral issues and the legacies of the past” (EC, Albania 2020 Report, p. 59; BiH 2020 Report, p.56; EC, Serbia 2020 Report, p. 64 etc). More specific for each country of the region projects are combinations of different priorities and are interests for both countries regarding the cross border cooperation. The following tables give more concretely the contribution of the CBC program between an EU country and a country in the region. In the Table 5.1 is given the IPA assistance support to Serbia regarding the cross-border cooperation with Member States (Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary and Romania).

¹ Note: This is a statement in each report of each country. WBC word has substituted the name of each country for example “Albanian’s European Integration”

Table 5.1 SERBIA - IPA CBC 2014-2020

Tab.1	Bulgaria-Serbia	Croatia - Serbia	Hungary - Serbia	Romania - Serbia
Priority Axis 1	Sustainable Tourism	Health and social care services	Cross-border water management	Employment promotion et.,
Priority Axis 2	Youth	Environment et.,	Cross-border transport network	Environmental protection et.,
Priority Axis 3	Environment	Tourism and cultural and natural heritage	Tourism and cultural heritage	Sustainable mobility and accessibility
Priority Axis 4		Business environment development	SMEs' economic development	Sustainable tourism
		Total EU contribution: 28,986,914.00 €	Total EU contribution: 34,293,188.00 €	Total EU contribution: 65,124,000.00 €
				Total EU contribution: 74,906,248.00 €
Total EU contribution on CBC EU-Member States with Serbia: 203,310,350.00€				

Albania participates in two cross-border cooperation programmes with EU Member States (Greece, Italy) (Table 5.2), implemented in shared management with the participating of an EU country. The Albanian partners participate in joint projects on equal footing with the partners from the Member States (same obligations and responsibilities). This participation allows strengthening capacities of regional/local bodies in the management of EU funds.

Table 5.2. Albania- IPA CBC 2014-2020

Tab.2	Greece - Albania	Italy – Albania - Montenegro
Priority Axis 1	Promotion of the environment, sustainable transport and public infrastructure	Competitiveness of SMEs
Priority Axis 2	Boosting the local economy - Tourism	Sustainable tourism
Priority Axis 3		Public infrastructures
Priority Axis 4		Environmental protection
		Total EU contribution: 45,965,222.00 €
		Total EU contribution: 78,801,422.00 € €
Total EU contribution on CBC EU-Member States with Albania: 124,766,644.00 €		

Table 5.3. IPA CBC 2014-2020

Tab.3	Bulgaria – The Republic of North Macedonia	Greece-The Republic of North Macedonia
Priority Axis 1	Environment	Development and Support of Local Economy
Priority Axis 2	Tourism	Protection of Environment - Transportation
Priority Axis 3	Competitiveness	
		Total EU contribution: 16,542,434.00 €
		Total EU contribution: 38,649,552.00 €
Total EU contribution on CBC EU-Member States with The Republic of North Macedonia: 55,191,986.00€		

All 6 WB countries have made use of IPA funds and are investing significant efforts to achieve progress towards becoming EU members, with various levels of success. The role of cross-border cooperation with Member States is very important in terms of sharing experience and strengthening human capacity for the countries of the region.

Conclusions

The European Union is the most significant contributor to the Western Balkans institutionally, politically, and economically. The culture of cooperation in the region of the Western Balkans has grown thanks to the comprehensive contribution given by the European Union. Regional development is a very complicated and multi-level policy, so its success will depend not only on increasing the partnership between state and non-state partners, but also on the clear division of responsibilities for each one. The EU integration is a dynamic process that involves the reallocation of economic and political power between the member states and the Union, the coordination of the EU policies is challenging issue. One of the major challenges recognized in all 6 WB countries regarding IPA absorption, relates to the lack of administrative capacities. Regarding the benefits from CBC programs it is related with the cooperation is such programs with EU member state which is efficient regarding the process of strengthen human capacities by the countries of the region and development of common interest and strategies for participatory countries in such programs.

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