**EU-funded cross-border cooperation research papers for the projects implemented under IPA 2007-2013 and IPA 2014 -2020 Cross-Border Programme the North Macedonia – Republic of Albania**

**Rules of Contest**

**Ver.4**

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# Background

The communication from the European Commission captioned “Western Balkans: Enhancing the European perspective”[[1]](#footnote-1) emphasises the crucial role of cross-border cooperation (CBC) as an instrument to contribute towards reconciliation and restore good neighbourly relations in the Western Balkans at a grassroots level.

The CBC programmes under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA 2007-2013 and IPA 2014 -2020) have aimed to promote enhanced cooperation and progressive economic integration and coherence between the European Union and Candidate and Potential Candidate Countries.

Technical assistance has been provided at regional level since 2006 in order to sustain efficient programming and the management of CBC in the Western Balkans.

The IPA CBC programme North Macedonia and Albania was initiated in 2007 under IPA I, as first generation of the IPA CBC programmes (<http://ipacbc-mk-al.net/>)

This contest will support research concerned only about inplementation of projects funded by IPA Cross border cooperation programme Republic of North Macedonia – Albania (2007 – 2013) and (2014-2020)

The programme is implemented jointly by both countries. In the Republic of North Macedonia, the responsible institution is the Ministry of Local Self-Government, in charge of the overall coordination of the programme, whilst in Republic of Albania, the responsible institution is the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, responsible for the overall coordination of the programme. These two institutions represent the operating structures (OS) in these countries.

All contract and payment issues are the responsibility of Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of North Macedonia, the contracting authority (CA).

The implementation of the programme is overseen by a Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) composed of representatives of both participating countries' institutions and civil society. The JMC will examine and provide an advisory opinion on the list of operations selected through this call for proposals before the grant award decision.

The CA, the OSs and the JMC are assisted by the Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS) based in Struga(Republic of North Macedonia), and staffed with experts from the Republic of North Macedonia and Republic of Albania. The JTS is the administrative body responsible for the day-to-day management of the programme including support and advice to potential applicants as well as grant beneficiaries. The JTS has an antenna located in in Elbasan (Republic of Albania). The JTS will assist potential applicants in partner search and project development, organising information days and workshops; develop and maintain a network of stakeholders; advise grant beneficiaries in project implementation; and prepare, conduct and report on monitoring visits to cross-border cooperation operations.

The IPA cross-border programme between the North Macedonia and Republic of Albania period of 2007-2013 was implemented during the period 2010-2017. The IPA cross-border programme between the North Macedonia and Republic of Albania period of 2014-2020 started with implementation beginning of 2016 and it is still under implementation. Both strategic documents were based on a joint strategic planning effort between the two countries and are also the result of a large consultation process with the local stakeholders and potential beneficiaries. The objective of the cross-border programmes is to promote good neighbourly relations, foster stability, security and prosperity, which is in the mutual interest of both countries, and encourage their harmonious, balanced and sustainable development.

To some extent, the cross-border programme introduced some new and innovative actions at border where the frequency of people and goods is not very high. Due to the history of the countries and the mountainous feature of the border region, this particular programme is not building on an old tradition of partnerships and joint initiatives. Despite recent remarkable achievements, particularly in the environmental sector and in the southern part of the cross-border region, partnerships between local institutions and civil society, as well as business communities, were still at a preliminary stage. Motivating local institutions and people to use the opportunities offered by IPA component II and giving them the capacity to do it constituted the major challenges in both countries.

The goal of North Macedonia and Albania is to join the European Union. Both countries are now candidate countries. In March 2020, the EU decided to open accession negotiations with both Albania and North Macedonia. Shortly after the decision was followed by the presentation of draft negotiating framework laying out the guidelines and principles for their accession talks.

# Eligible Area

The territory of the eligible areas in the two countries is almost equivalent[[2]](#footnote-2).

The research papers should be conducted within the programme eligible which covers respectively three regions and their municipalities in each country. The municipalities covered by the programme are as follows:

* Bitola, DemirHisar, Dolneni, Krivogastani, Krusevo, Mogila, Novaci, Prilep, and Resen;
* Bogovinje, Brvenica, Gostivar, Jegunovce, Mavrovo and Rostusa, Tearce, Tetovo, Vrapciste and Zelino;
* CentarZupa, Debar, Debarca, Kicevo, MakedonskiBrod, Ohrid, Plasnica, Struga and Vevcani.
* Elbasan, Cerrik, Gramsh, Librazhd, Peqin, Belsh and Prrenjas,
* Korcë, Maliq, Pustec, Pogradec, Kolonjë and Devoll; and
* Dibër, Bulqizë, Mat and Klos.

# Objective

The operational structures of the cross-border program (OSs) are interested in knowing how the implementation of the IPA CBC program between Northern Macedonia and Albania contributes to improving the lives of inhabitants in the programmme area.

The Operating Structure is ready to open a call for proposals in order to:

1. Cover costs to legal and natural persons from the academic and research community for papers about these topics,
2. Invite the authors to present their research findings and enter into discussion with the participants.

These costs and invitations to the discussions are non-transferable and cannot be exchanged for cash.

***Eligibility***

In order to be eligible, the papers must fulfil the following characteristics:

1. Revolve around one of more of the following themes:

Fostering a cross-border economic, environmental and social development, i.e.:

* + Economic development with an emphasis on tourism related area;
	+ Sustainable environmental development with an emphasis on protection, promotion and management of natural resources and ecosystems.
1. Focus geographically on the eligible border areas of the relevant CBC programme MK-AL; and
2. Improve the knowledge about the impact of those CBC programmes on the life of citizens in the target areas.
3. Incent academia to start researching such themes.

For more information regarding the IPA CBC Programme North Macedonia – Albania , please visit the following web page: http://ipacbc-mk-al.net

***Types of papers***

As a way of illustrative example, the paper (Master thesis, Graduation thesis and research papers) could deal with one of the following subjects (non-exhaustive list):

* CBC initiatives in environmental protection as a means to preserve rich natural resources;
* Assessment of the tourism offer made available by the CBC programmes and/or the tourism demand for services and products in the CBC eligible areas (hotels, tourists, tourist adventures etc);
* Cross-border networks for economic development;
* Cross-border networks for social inclusion;
* Analysis of the gap between the labour supply and demand in terms of qualifications and skills;
* Citizens’ experience with the implementation of CBC programmes in cultural, economic, social, tourism, environmental and any other relevant aspect;
* The contribution of CBC in improving the trust and peaceful neighbourly relations between borders communities;
* The contribution of CBC to reverse negative social, economic and/or environmental tendencies;
* The contribution of CBC in preparedness against and/or palliation of the effects of natural and man-made disasters;
* Cross-border inter-municipal and/or inter-sectoral cooperation - a tool for increasing socio-economic development;
* The contribution of the CBC programmes to the implementation of local and regional development strategies;
* Differences in the impact achieved by diverse types of applicants (e.g. public institutions, municipal administrations, NGOs, etc.);
* Sinergy established between the CBC programmes and other EU funded regional initiatives (e.g. RESPA, ECRAN, ADRIATIC initiative etc.);
* Any other relevant theme for the students and academiain relation to their curricula.

Duration of the preparation of the papers must not be longer than 12 months.

The papers must not have been published anywhere else prior to the contest submission deadline. They shall not be either an output prepared under any type of EU-funded contract.

# Award criteria

The entries under the call of the “EU-funded cross-border cooperation research papers” will be selected according to the following criteria that will be assessed by an independent evaluation committee established by the OS and a representative of the Delegation of the European Union as observer of the process:

1. Originality and replicability;
2. Technical excellence;
3. Significance and exploitation of lessons learnt.

# Evaluation process

On the basis of a review of the written entries[[3]](#footnote-3) of the contestants, the evaluation committee will appraise their quality and recommend to the OSs the final contestant to be awarded a contracts.

At the evaluation phase, the members of the evaluation committee will individually assess each submitted application against the award criteria and will then mark as a group each of them up to a maximum number of 60 points.

For planning purposes of the evaluation process, all potential contesters are kindly requested to express their interest in the contest up to one month before the deadline for submission of entries. Please note that this is not a requisite, will neither bind the potential contester to submit an application nor will disqualify a contester who has not sent his or her expression of interest. This expression should be emailed at jts\_mkal@yahoo.com.

The independent expert evaluation committee will evaluate each application against the three award criteria and score them as follows:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Criterion** | **Threshold[[4]](#footnote-4)** | **Max points** |
| 1. **Originality and replicability** - The extent to which the idea is innovative, original and a first-of-a-kind in the domain of application. The description should be clear, logically presented and well-illustrated.
 | 10 | 20 |
| 1. **Technical excellence** - The extent to which the conclusions of the application are demonstrably state-of-the-art and based on the use of an excellent social science method.
 | 10 | 20 |
| 1. **Significance and exploitation of lessons learnt** - The extent to which the application demonstrates understanding and awareness of the relevant scientific implications, including needs of programme managerial authorities and opportunities for quality improvement of the CBC programmes.
 | 10 | 20 |
| **Total** | 30 | 60 |

Demonstrated cooperation between a student and mentor or cooperation between both sides of the cross border will receive additional points.

Upon completion of their work, the members of the evaluation committee shall sign a record of all the entries examined, containing an assessment of their quality and identifying those to which the contract may be awarded.

Only contestants with the minimum 30 points will be further considered for award.

All contestants will be informed about the outcome of the evaluation latest **15th of July 2021.** The selected candidates will have to provide proof of eligibility, which will be presented to the evaluation committee for evaluation.

Entries dealing with an irrelevant subject or containing vulgar, defamatory, violent, racist, sexist or discriminatory content, or any other content deemed by the evaluation committee to be inappropriate for the tone of the competition, will be excluded.

Participation in the contest, including selection to award a contract, in no manner constitutes an endorsement or support by the OSs, of the views presented by the contestants in the entries submitted to the competition.

# Submission of papers and timetable

To take part in the contest, candidates must complete the application form that can be downloaded from the following webpages: <http://ipacbc-mk-al.net>; [www.mls.gov.mk](http://www.mls.gov.mk); <http://punetejashtme.gov.al>;

Contestants can submit a maximum of 2 entries or applications but they shall be aware that they can be awarded only one contract in this contest. Formally speaking, the entries are submitted only by one legal entity or natural person, which could do this on behalf of a group of researchers or legal entities. When the contester is a legal entity, the names of all the authors who participated in drafting the research paper have to be declared in the application. Written consent – authorization by all entries must be supplied together with the application.

Entries will need to be submitted by email, to: **jts\_mkal@yahoo.com**. **The deadline for submission of entries is by midnight Central European time on 1st of May 2021 as evidenced by the date of dispatch in the email.** Any application submitted after the deadline will be rejected.

Contestants are kindly requested to carefully read and abide by the instructions contained in the application form. Entries must be readable, accessible and printable. Incomplete entries may be considered inadmissible if essential elements are missing. Contestants must display their signature wherever required (e.g. declaration).

By entering the contest, each contestant is deemed to accept these rules. Contestants agree to abide by and be bound by the competition rules and the decisions of the evaluation committee, which are final in all matters related to the contest.

The following timetable displays important dates in the calendar of this contest:

|  | **Date** | **Time** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **1. Deadline for requesting any clarifications from the OS project team** | **10.04.2021** | N/A |
| 1. **Info sessions on both sides of the border**
 |  |  |
| **2. Last date on which clarifications are issued by the OSs project team** | **20.04.2021** | N/A |
| **3. Deadline for submission of entries (application forms)** | **01.05.2021** | N/A |
| **4. Notification of award contracts, along with information to contestants on opening, administrative check and research paper evaluation** | **15.07.2021** | N/A |
| **5. Payment of the awarded contracts (provided the contestant has submitted proof of eligibility – valid supporting documents)** | **15.09.2021** | N/A |
| 1. **Publication of the list of awarded contracts**
 | **15.09.2021** | N/A |
| 1. **Publication of the research papers in national scientific journals**
 |  **August 2022** | N/A |

During the submission period, the contestants may replace the entries that they submitted previously but cannot change their title for easy reference and replacement purposes. The evaluation committee will consider for evaluation only the latest version of the entries.

# 6. Amount of the awarded contract

Provided there will be applications with a total score above 30 points, this contest will award contracts as follow: First awarded contract amount of 2000 EUR, the second awarded contract amount of 1.500 EUR, third awarded contract amount of 1000EUR, forth awarded contract amount of 800EUR and fifth awarded contract amount of 700 EUR to the contestants from the list of ranking whose entries will have received the highest scores. These type of awarded contracts will be provided for the contestants in each of the beneficiaries countries.

# Conditions for cancellation of the contest

The OSs, has the right to terminate the contest before its closing date without any obligation to indemnify contestants due to reasons of force majeure[[5]](#footnote-5).

The OS has the right to decide not to award any contract if no entries are received or if the contest evaluation committee did not award any contract (e.g. when no contestant obtained at least 30 points in total) or the best contestant is not eligible or must be excluded.

# Conditions for participation

The contestant’s application must not have previously received any other funded contract that is the subject of the current competition. For that purpose the contestant must sign a statement declaring that has not received previously any other funding for the application. All information given by the contestant in the application must be correct and complete.

## 8.1. Eligibility criteria

Contestants for the ‘EU-funded award contract for cross-border cooperation research papers’ shall comply with the following eligibility criteria to participate:

1. The contestant must be a legal or a natural person (the natural persons belonging to an University, student, professor / mentors, etc).
2. The contestant must be established or be a student or university professor at one of the beneficiary country.
3. When the contestant is a legal person, it must be one of the following types of legal persons:
* Private or public higher education institution;
* Research institutes or research organizations connected with the academic community.

Demonstrated cooperation between a student and mentor or cooperation between both sides of the cross border will receive additional points in the evaluation.

## 8.2. Exclusion criteria

Entries submitted either by natural persons or drafted by authors under a legal entity who work in operating structures or joint technical secretariats involved in the management of the IPA and IPA II CBC programmes are ineligible in order to safeguard the impartiality of the evaluation and prevent the access to confidential information by potential contesters prior to the launch of the contest.

## 8.3. Liability of contestants

Neither the European Commission nor the consortium members of the Operating Structures may be held responsible for any claim relating to the activities carried out in the framework of the contest by the contestant.

Neither the European Commission nor the consortium members of the OSs shall be held liable for any damage caused or sustained by any of the contestants, including any damage caused to third parties as a consequence of or during the implementation of the activities related to the contest.

## 8.4. Checks and audits

The contestants accept that, if they are awarded, the European Commission, OLAF and the Court of Auditors may carry out checks and audits in relation to the contest and the awarded contract.

## 8.5. Publicity

The contestants accept, if they are awarded, to promote their research paper, by providing targeted information to multiple audiences (including the media and the public) in a strategic and effective manner.

Unless the European Commission requests or agrees otherwise or unless it is impossible, any communication activity related to the research paper (including in electronic form, via social media, etc.) must:

1. Display the EU flag and emblem of the Ministry of Local Self Government of Republic of North Macedonia and the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs.
2. include the following text: *‘This paper has been awarded the EU-funded contract for cross-border cooperation research papers, managed by the Operating Structures’*

When displayed together with another logo, the EU emblem must have appropriate prominence. For the purposes of his or her obligations, the awarded contracts may use the EU flag with first obtaining approval from the Delegation of the European Commission in Skopje. This does not, however, give the right to exclusive use. Moreover, the awarded contracts may not appropriate the EU flag or any similar trademark or logo, either by registration or by any other means.

**By the European Commission and the OSs**

The European Commission and the OSs may use, for its communication and publicizing activities, information relating to the research paper (notably summaries) for non-profit publications and public deliverables as well as any other material, such as pictures or audiovisual material that it receives from the winner (including in electronic form).

The OSs will publish the name of the winner, its locality, the amount of the support and its nature and purpose. The contestant may request the OSs or the European Commission to waive such publication if disclosure risks threatening its security and safety or harm its commercial interest.

Before publishing the paper in any other magazine or publicity, the winner must previously inform the OS or the European Commission. However the publication must be done in accordance with the EU visibility rules.

## 8.6. Applicable law

The contest is governed by the applicable law of the two countries respected the applicant residence. The General Court or, on appeal, the Court of Justice of the European Union, shall have sole jurisdiction to hear any dispute between the Union and any participant concerning the interpretation, application or validity of the rules of this contest, if such dispute cannot be settled amicably.

# Personal data

Registration and submission of entries shall be made by electronic means (as specified in the rules of the contest), provided that it is non-discriminatory in nature and ensure integrity, confidentiality and protection of personal data. All personal data contained in the application form shall be processed in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council (OJ L8 of 12.01.2001, p1) on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by the Community institutions and bodies and on the free movement of such data. Such data shall be processed by the Controller solely in connection with the implementation and follow-up of the application of the winner, without prejudice to a possible transmission to the bodies in charge of a monitoring or inspection task in accordance with European Community and European Union legislation.

Contestants may, on written request, gain access to their personal data and correct any information that is inaccurate or incomplete. They should address any questions regarding the processing of their personal data to the Controller, via the contact person announced in the rules of the contest.

Contestants may, at any time, lodge a complaint against the processing of their personal data with the European Data Protection Supervisor.

The European Commission and the OSs shall be authorized to publish, in whatever form and on or by whatever medium, the following information:

* The name of awarded contracts(s);
* The locality of awarded contracts (s);
* The general purpose of the activities of the awarded contracts (s) in relation to the contracts, in the form of a summary provided by the awarded contracts(s);
* The amount of the support awarded.

# Language of the procedure and application

All communication related to this contest will be held in English language. Furthermore, only entries drafted in English language will be eligible for awarding contracts. Supporting documents to prove the eligibility of the contestant will be acceptable in any of the official languages of both beneficiaries countries.

# Ethics

The activities must be carried out in compliance with:

1. ethical principles (including the highest standards of research integrity — as set out, for instance, in the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity[[6]](#footnote-6) — and including, in particular, avoiding fabrication, falsification, plagiarism or other research misconduct) and
2. applicable international, EU and national law.

# Contact

If the contestants have any questions regarding the contest, the information processed in the context of the contest, or their rights, they are welcome to contact the OSs at the following email address: jts\_mkal@yahoo.com.

When for the purpose of drafting the research paper, the contester deems that he or she will need data from CBC grant contracts (either implemented or under course), he or she should address the contracting authority who signed those contracts for the specific CBC programme. The name and contact of this contracting authority can be requested at the following email address: jts\_mkal@yahoo.com.

1. COM(2008) 127 “Western Balkans: Enhancing the European Perspective” dated 5 March 2008 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://07-13.ipacbc-mk-al.net/eligible-area/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Please mind that this is the technical term used in contests for an application. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Minimum score for further evaluation of the application. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The term force majeure, as used herein covers any unforeseeable events, not within the control of either party to this contest and which by the exercise of due diligence neither party is able to overcome such as acts of God, strikes, lock-outs or other industrial disturbances, acts of the public enemy, wars whether declared or not, blockades, insurrection, riots, epidemics, landslides, earthquakes, storms, lightning, floods, washouts, civil disturbances, explosion. A decision of the European Union to suspend the cooperation with the partner countries is considered to be a case of force majeure when it implies suspending funding under this OS operation. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity of ALLEA (All European Academies) and ESF (European Science Foundation) of March 2001: <http://www.esf.org/fileadmin/Public_documents/Publications/Code_Conduct_ResearchIntegrity.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)