

Cross-Border Cooperation among South East European countries: case Kosovo

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Abstract

Cross-border cooperation (CBC), as part of the European Union regional development policy aiming to increase territorial cohesion, is implemented based on operational programmes and projects prepared jointly in participatory and strategic manner. In particular, IPA Assistance is provided on the basis of the European Partnerships of the potential candidates and the Accession Partnerships of the candidate countries, which means South East European countries (Western Balkans) and Turkey. This paper analyses CBC Kosovo projects implemented so far, its effects in re-establishing social and economic links between inhabitants of the border regions involving Kosovo, Albania, and North Macedonia. Key questions addressed in this paper are: is CBC helping Kosovo's economic growth, sustainable development, and regional cooperation? To what extent can CBC be seen as a good opportunity for capacity building in countries aspiring to join the EU? What could be changed or improved in future CBC projects in Kosovo?

Keywords: European integration, cross border cooperation, regional development, Kosovo, territorial cohesion

Introduction

This paper presents a critical review of developmental and institutional effects of cross-border cooperation (CBC) in Kosovo as part of EU's support for Kosovo in the period before and after its declaration of independence. During this period border regions of Kosovo neighbouring with Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Albania experienced for the first time the creation and implementation of EU funded CBC projects. At the same time, institutional structures were built on the national level, in Kosovo within the Ministry of European Integration, to plan, organize, and implement these projects. EU funding and support for Kosovo has changed before and after the declaration of independence in 2008. Since Kosovo gained its independence it has received 358 mil euro as part of IPA 1 programme as well as

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150 mil euro direct funding (2009-2011), IPA 1 (2007-2013) 704 mil euro supporting two components: aid for transition and building of institutions and cross-border cooperation. Kosovo has benefited from IPA 2 programme (2014-2020) (Regulation (EU) No 231/2014 of the European Parliament) for CBC only the amount 25 mil euro in all five components, cross-border cooperation, good neighbourly relations with all countries of the region, a sustainable economic development, reforms in administration and financial sector in order to be prepared to be more aligned with EU standards (Indicative Strategy Paper for Kosovo 2014-2020, adopted 20.08.2014).

As cross-border cooperation programmes are implemented through projects on the regional level, this level is the main focus of the evaluation of CBC policy as well as the impact it has had on the economy of Kosovo. The impact on territorial cohesion among bordering countries, as part of EU's policy behind cross-border strategy, needs to be viewed from a wider perspective. In this regard, the cross-border cooperation experience of Kosovo with its neighbouring countries (all non-EU members) offers an important insight into how such EU strategies can be implemented on EU's frontiers. All countries in this region have declared they will share 'the common European values' and have engaged in implementing (more or less actively) the reforms required by the EU. The "Europeanization" discourse is shared by all, and the Commission progress reports and European partnerships serve as roadmaps for further reforms to 'consolidate stability and raise prosperity' in Western Balkans (SEE) (CEC, 2006). When it comes to territorial cohesion, in the regional and spatial development context, this meaning is still not fully explained and is still evolving as experiences differ with different modes of policy implementation. In the Community strategic guidelines on Cohesion, the Council of European Union stressed the importance of the territorial dimension of cohesion policy and the possibility for all areas to contribute to economic growth. Furthermore, it is stated that investment needs of urban and rural areas must be taken into account in order to promote sustainable development and social inclusion. The importance of the European territorial cooperation objective is also emphasized as well as its role in ensuring balanced and sustainable development of the territory of Community. Transfer of this objective into national, regional and local frameworks is crucial and shall enable the transfer of these ideas to mainstream national and regional cohesion programs (CEU 2006, art. 12 and 13). 14 years after the adoption of this document, Kosovo has been the beneficiary, but not at a desirable level due to its political position and relations with the EU and the fact that regional programs started to be implemented at a later stage. There have been significant advances at the institutional level. In particular, this is reflected in the ability of local and regional actors to understand the importance of strategic planning as one of the main conditions for project financing from EU sources, which has contributed to the existence of numerous comprehensive or integrated strategic development documents. These trends need to be viewed differentiated across localities and

regions as the level of understanding the importance and existence of strategic documents is not explicit. Evolution in institutional cultures takes time and cannot be externally imposed through legal acts or funding conditions. In 2008, the European Commission introduced its position on Territorial cohesion in its Green Paper (CEC, 2008). It is stated that Territorial cohesion is about ensuring the harmonious development of all these places (emphasizing the rich territorial diversity of the EU) and about making sure that their citizens are able to make the most of inherent features of these territories. As such, it is a means of transforming diversity into an asset that contributes to sustainable development of the entire EU. Also, it is stated that the concept of territorial cohesion builds bridges between economic effectiveness, social cohesion and ecological balance, putting sustainable development at the heart of policy design. Here it needs to be stressed once more, that sustainable development as a concept does not refer only to ecological development, but to an overall, integrated and balanced development of all aspects (economic, social and environmental, including spatial and ecological dimensions).

With regard to actions within the territorial cohesion policy, in the Green paper concentration (overcoming differences in density), connection (overcoming distance) and cooperation (overcoming division) are emphasized, in particular with regard to geographical regions that pose particular challenges to territorial cohesion (incl. border, rural, islands, and mountainous areas). With regard to “cooperation” within territorial cohesion, cross-border cooperation assumes its appropriate significance within the framework of territorial cohesion. Here cooperation is necessary on various territorial and administrative levels as well as among various sectors. Faludi (2009) discussed in the paper possibilities for the future of territorial cohesion within Cohesion policy and proposed that the Commission could put territorial cohesion forward as a new rationale for sustaining cohesion policy and as a platform for improving, by means of integrated territorial strategies, upon its famous programmatic approach. Indeed, squaring the complex, multi-dimensional and sometimes conflicting objectives of the EU and national sector policies with each other, would represent a great leap forward. In addition, he emphasized that all reactions to the Green Paper (on Territorial Cohesion) stress the point that coordination of EU policies is a first requirement, maybe the most important one.

1. Data and methodology

This research uses official data obtained from the Ministry of Integration of the Government of the Republic of Kosovo, the CBC division, as well as other EU CBC available data and other relevant documents and information pertaining to CBC projects in South East Europe. The aim of this study is to present and compare Kosovo’s CBC experience with other neighbouring countries as well as attempt to assess the level of preparedness of local actors and administration in handling CBC projects, and ultimately asses to which extent have CBC projects affected Kosovo’s

economy and relations with neighbouring countries. As the next call for projects IPA III is scheduled for fall 2020, this paper presents previous projects highlighting the aims and goals of the projects, as well as the costs, and EU participation. The IPA Instrument of Pre-Accession Assistance in Kosovo is directly managed by the European Union Office in Kosovo (EUOK). Kosovo does not have a decentralized management system, despite the fact that there have been some attempts to do so by the Ministry of Finances. Up to date, Kosovo is the only country in the region which has made no attempts for setting up a decentralized system for IPA. The data about CBC projects involving Kosovo, catalogued, available, are very scarce.

The Ministry of Local Government of the Republic of Kosovo, which is in charge of CBC projects, has published very few documents regarding CBC Kosovo involvement. The majority of data for this study has been collected through interviews with government officials, heads of departments and information officers that are tasked with CBC operations. Currently, the Kosovo Government, through its Ministry of Local Governance and the EU Office in Prishtina, is carrying out trainings for future bidders as well as reassessing future management and implementation oversight of the programmes. (Berisha, 2020). European Commission has its own impact assessment reports on CBC projects which are not available for the public¹. For the purpose of this study interviewed were Kosovo Government officials in charge of CBC projects, lead project implementing parties, and EU Commission on site officers in charge of projects.

2. Cross-border cooperation in South East Europe (Western Balkans)

Since 2007, financial aid and technical assistance from the EU to the Enlargement policy countries (Western Balkans and Turkey) has been disbursed through the framework of a uniform instrument - a pre-accession program, called the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). The main purpose of the IPA is to incorporate pre-accession and stabilization assistance within a single framework, in order to enhance the efficiency and coherence of the aid provided, and thus to better prepare the countries for eventual membership within EU. As of March 2014, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey are officially recognized as candidate countries, while Bosnia Herzegovina, Albania, and Kosovo are identified as potential candidates. The second of five components of IPA, CBC, applies to all IPA beneficiary countries and is intended to address activities and projects of good relations between regions and countries, as well as development of cross-border infrastructure, flood prevention, economic cooperation and environment problems, administrative cooperation, cultural and educational exchange, research, job creation, etc. A cross-border region acts consistently and long-term fields of actions and projects are

¹ Sadriu, D. (2020), Interview with Dardan Sadriu, EU Office in Kosovo. Former Task Manager of Kosovo Cross Border Cooperation Projects, September 2020.

developed (Gabbe, 2005). While the Council of Europe prefers the term ‘Transfrontier Co-Operation’ (Council of Europe 2006) the EU uses the notion ‘Cross-border Cooperation’ since the term stresses more proximity (Bataillou, 2002, p. 6). The idea of the European integration is based on dismantling the borders and, in practice, it means the borders between member states. Therefore, Western Balkan countries ought to ideally use the opportunity of CBC as a long term vision of making borders irrelevant in the future. But often actors, governments, municipalities, NGO’s, etc., carry ‘a different perspective on the issue’ (Reich, 2006, p. 21) Such an example was the Balkan’s Peace Park, an initiative to promote ecotourism in the programme area between Montenegro and Kosovo, which has run into many obstacles because the idea was not perceived in the same way by all actors at all levels. The Park was meant to be a protected area hence concerns were raised by local owners that they could not apply forestry and chopping fire wood. (Young, 2008, p. 10). It took a lot of work to explain to residents that the park could actually be a source of income for residents, not only an idea of a ‘protected area’ (Milsom and Dworski, 2010, p. 11)

IPA funding for CBC activities is provided on both sides of the EU border, as well as SEE internal borders, on the basis of a set rules, thus providing the opportunity for equal and balanced programming and decision-making structures between Member States and Candidate and Potential Candidate Countries. Analyzing CBC assistance provided by the EU in the framework of IPA 2007-2013 as it is presented in the Table 1, Croatia has received the highest percentage of funds for CBC during 2007-2013, followed by Serbia, Albania and Turkey. If one analyses the trends, in 2007-2013 the total of funds have increased yearly from 38.5 million EUR to 66.5 million EUR. During this period Kosovo has received the lowest percentage of funds, mainly because of political uncertainty regarding Kosovo’s final status.

Table 1. EU funds provided in the framework of IPA 2007-2013

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

Source: European Commission (2009)

In terms of distribution of the CBC funding in 2012 compared to the number of population in 2012, it results that the funding is not provided in proportion to the size of population or of the countries. The distribution rather depends on the previous assessed financial absorption capacity of each of beneficiaries, as well as the assessed necessity for the country's bordering regions development. (Madzova, Davcev, and Paceshkoski, 2013) The lowest percentage of funds is represented by Bosnia Herzegovina. This country is much bigger in size than Kosovo, Albania, North Macedonia or Montenegro, respectively, but it received the same amount for CBC operations as Macedonia and Montenegro, and at the same time twice less than what Albania received. In terms of CBC per capita Montenegro is the highest ranked country with 7.17 EUR per capita followed by Croatia (3.83) and Albania (3.29). In terms of CBC funds per sq.km Albania tops the list, followed by Montenegro (Table 2 and Table 3).

Table 2. EU CBC funds in 2012 per population and surface area in 2012

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

Sources: European Commission (2009)

Table 3. Overview of IPA II allocations for WB countries, 2014-2020

Country	IPA 2014 – 2020 allocation (EUR)
Serbia	1.5 billion
Republic of Macedonia	664.2 million
Albania	649.4 million
Kosovo	645.5 million
Montenegro	270.5 million
Bosnia and Herzegovina	167.1 million

Source: European Commission (2014a)

3. Kosovo-Albania cross-border cooperation program 2014-2020

The cross-border program area for the IPA Cross-Border Program between Albania and Kosovo covers a territory of 8.335 km² with a population totaling around 936,761 inhabitants. The length of the border is 114 km. In Albania the eligible areas cover 48% of the program area, involving two regions composed of eight municipalities with a total of 362 settlements. The two regions from Albania include the Region of Kukës and the Region of Lezha (Figure 1). In Kosovo, the eligible area covers 52% of the program area and includes the South Economic Region composed of six municipalities, and the West Economic Region composed of six municipalities (Table 4).

Figure 1. Map of the program area



Source: Ministry of Local Governance of the Republic of Kosovo

Table 4. Geography of the program area

	Area (km ²)	% of the total territory
Albania	28,748	100%
Cross-border area	3,994	48%
Region of Kukës (Districts of Kukës, Has and Tropojë)	2,374	28.48%
Region of Lezha (districts of Lezha, Mirdita and Kurbin)	1,620	19.44%
Kosovo	10,908	100%
Cross-border area	4,341	52%

South Economic Region	2,016	24%
West Economic Region	2,325	28%
TOTAL Programme Area	8,335	AL: 48%, KOS: 52%

Source: European Commission (2014a)

In the whole program area, the population is predominantly rural. In the regions of Kosovo, 65.9% of the population is rural, whereas in Albania rural population amounts to 53.8% (Table 5).

Table 5. Population and density in the programme area

	Population*	% / Programming Area	Population Density
Total Programme Area	936,761	100%	
Eligible Area Kosovo ⁷⁰	717,442	76.6%	
South Economic Region	396,691	42.4%	197 p/km ²
West Economic Region	320,751	34.2%	138 p/km ²
Total population Kosovo	1,815,606		177.471 average
Eligible Area Albania ⁷²	219,319	23.4%	
Kukës	85,292	9.1%	36 p/km ²
Lezhe	134,027	14.3%	83 p/km ²
Total population Albania	2,800,138		97 Average

Source: European Commission (2014a)

Regional differences in terms of economic and social development are evident not only across the program area, but also within regions. The program area has a predominately industrial agrarian economy, with industry more developed on the Kosovo side, while the Albanian regions are dominated by agriculture and services. Both sides have, more or less, the same economic structure relying on agriculture, services, wholesale and retail markets, while traditional industry is more present in the Kosovo regions. Agriculture and tourism are commonly important for both sides but both rather underutilized and underdeveloped. Trade between both sides is suffering from administrative barriers. Some important factors representing constraints for the economic development of the region are, inter alia, the lack of technological know-how and labour skills necessary to respond to the market demand for high-quality services and products.

Competitiveness, productivity and know-how are quite low throughout the program area. Further investment in increasing the level of productivity and technology is a precondition to becoming more competitive both domestically and internationally. Light industry and food processing industries are also considered as a potential for accelerated economic growth of the program area. SMEs of less than 4 employees dominate the businesses map, while business networks existing in the border areas are underutilized. The level of business cooperation across the border

is minimal. Synergies between business communities need to be developed within the program area and to be supported by CBC initiatives. The programming area is the biggest energy generator in both IPA II beneficiaries. Both hydro potential and lignite reserves are important resources in the program area for energy generation and overall economic development of the IPA II beneficiaries.

Regional disparities on both sides of the border are evident. Poverty has become an urban concern, indicating a sluggish performance of the economy over the past years, while the revival of the already exhausted urban potential to lead economic growth has become imperative. Unemployment remains at a disturbing rate for the population of the program area, especially on the Kosovo side where there is much higher unemployment especially amongst youth, the rural population and women. Social services are poorly and unevenly developed. Especially, health services need major improvements both in coverage and quality. Improving the educational system at all levels is a major priority for the programme area, particularly in rural areas. Further joint action could be undertaken to establish networks of vocational training centres as well as higher education institutions and research agencies and organizations. Advantages coming from the common language (Albanian) should be further utilized in developing educational curricula.

Conclusively, the PESTLE (political, economic, socio-cultural, technological, legal and environmental) and SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analyses reveal that in the programming area underexploited potentialities for economic development in different sectors, such as economy, environment, tourism, cultural and natural resources, youth and education, can be identified. The program area has a contrasted geographic profile. It is rich with mountain ranges, plains, valleys, rivers and lakes. It is rich in wood, wild animals and pastures (forests and grassland pastures cover over 50% of the total surface). The terrain is also quite difficult with unspoilt sites making it an attraction for tourism for both sides of the border. It has contrasts of terrains, mountainous and field, water sources, lakes, fishery, rivers, flowing from both sides of the border and exiting to the sea through Lezha, in Albania. The new constructed highway through Durrës to Kukës and then through the border to Prishtina has considerably contributed to the increase in the movement of people and goods for various purposes - such as trade, tourism, education and exchanges - since 2009.

IPA II CBC programme for Albania-Kosovo benefited from a financial allocation of 8.4 million euros in the framework of the multiannual program 2014-2020 (Table 6 and Table 7).

Table 6. Indicative financial allocations per year for the 2014-2020 cross-border cooperation program

Year	IPA II CBC PROGRAMME ALBANIA – KOSOVO							Total (EUR)
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2014-20
CBC Operations (all thematic priorities)	840 000	1 200 000	1 200 000	840 000	1 200 000	1 200 000	1 080 000	7 560 000
Technical Assistance	360 000	0	0	360 000	0	0	120 000	840 000
Total (EUR)	1 200 000	1 200 000	1 200 000	1 200 000	1 200 000	1 200 000	1 200 000	8 400 000

Source: European Commission (2014a)

Table 7. Indicative financial allocations per priority over the period 2014-2020 and rate of Union

PRIORITIES	IPA II CBC PROGRAMME ALBANIA – KOSOVO 2014-2020			
	Union contribution	Beneficiary /ies Co-financing	Total funding	Rate of Union contribution
	(a)	(b)	(c) = (a)+(b)	(d) = (a)/(c)
1 - Thematic Priority	2 520 000	444 706	2 964 706	85%
2 - Thematic Priority	2 520 000	444 706	2 964 706	85%
3 - Thematic Priority	2 520 000	444 706	2 964 706	85%
4 -Technical Assistance	840 000	0	840 000	100 %
GRAND TOTAL (EUR)	8 400 000	1 334 118	9 734 118	

Source: European Commission (2014a)

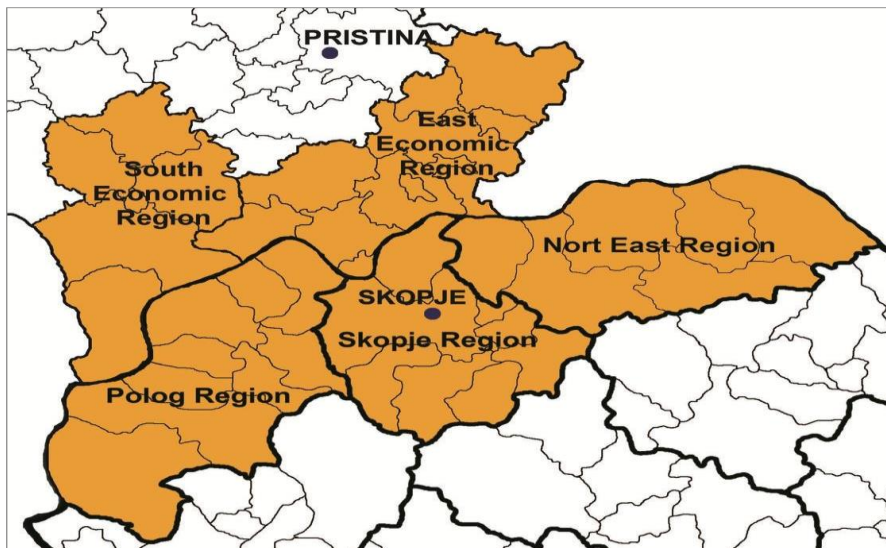
The overall objective of the program was to: strengthen good neighbourly relations and foster environmentally friendly and socially inclusive economic development of the bordering regions, through the promotion of their touristic potential and respect of its common cultural and natural heritage. The program *thematic priorities* were protecting the environment, promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management encouraging tourism and promoting cultural and natural heritage, investing in youth, education and skills; Technical Assistance. Program *specific objectives* were the protection and preservation of environmental resources, tourism promotion and cultural and natural

heritage valorisation as a way to foster economic development, socio-economic integration of youth, an effective, efficient, transparent and timely implementation of the program and awareness raising.

4. Kosovo-North Macedonia cross-border cooperation program 2014-2020

The program eligible area includes five regions: the East and South Economic Regions in Kosovo, and Skopje, Polog and the Northeast Region in the North Macedonia (including altogether 1 430 settlements) covering an area of 10 852 km², where a population of 1 800 000 inhabitants lives. The Kosovo part of the program area includes two economic regions and 17 municipalities with a total of 529 settlements (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Map of the program area



Source: Ministry of Local Governance Republic of Kosovo

The cross-border area is quite homogeneous in terms of geographical features, as well as social and economic development characteristics. The population growth tendency is declining. The entire program area has a total surface of 10,852 km², of which 60.25% represents the area of North Macedonia, and 39.75% the area of Kosovo. The total population of the program area is 1,851,965 inhabitants, representing 47.76 % of the total population of both, Kosovo and the North Macedonia. 40.4% of the program area population lives in Kosovo and 59.6% lives in North Macedonia (Table 8).

Table 8. Main data on territory and population

	Area (km ²)	% of the total territory	Population	% of the total population
North Macedonia	25,713	100%	2,062,294	100%
Cross-border area	6,538	25%	1,103,825	54%
Polog Region	2,416	9%	317,490	15%
Northeastern Region	2,310	9%	175,560	9%
Skopje Region	1,812	7%	610,775	30%
Kosovo	10,908	100%	1,815,606	100%
Cross-border area	4,314	39%	748,140	41%
East Economic Region	2,298	21%	351,449	19%
South Economic Region	2,016	18%	396,691	22%
TOTAL Cross-border area	10,852		1,851,965	

Source: European Commission (2014b)

The young population makes up a large group of the population ranging from 25-30%. Migration has been one of the most concerning issues of the last decade, which has impacted the labour force. The cross-border area is rich in various natural resources that represent an important asset for economic and tourism development. The area is becoming more and more attractive for foreign investors, whose direct investments are playing an important role on the economic development of the border area. Trade relations between both IPA II beneficiaries have shown an increasing trend over the years. The SMEs are dominating the economic activities in almost all sectors, while large enterprises constitute a small number of economic entities. The business sector is developing but suffering from various problems, such as low labour productivity, lack of labour market skills to cope with new technologies and innovation capacities. Although there is a wide range of higher education institutions in the area, the level of research and development (R&D) activity is very limited. Knowledge transfer should take place both locally and across the border, as well as between different sectors. The program area is rich in natural resources, but deforestation, land and air pollution, and waste management problems are causing environmental problems and impacting the health of the population. Sustainable development, through efficient and effective use of resources, is one of the big challenges for the program area. The program strategy strives to foster the co-operation among institutions and organizations in the cross-border region to support sustainable economic growth and strengthen social cohesion. The program will better exploit the opportunities offered by the joint development of the border area.

The proposed strategy is centred on these main priority directions: enhancing competitiveness, business and SME development, trade and investment, encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage, protecting the environment,

promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management. In addition, there is another priority (technical assistance) by which the administrative capacity of the authorities and beneficiary institutions/organizations implementing the program can be enhanced. The possibilities for short term development of tourism in the program area are real, but remain moderate. The area has a great potential for tourism development with hundreds of kilometres of skiing areas, and mountains with potential for hiking and hunting. The East Economic Region has Brezovica, the biggest ski resort in Kosovo. Spa centres exist in all regions, such as the thermo-mineral spa in Klllokot/Klokot (Kosovo) and the Katlanovo and Proevska Spa in the North Macedonia. There are opportunities to develop rural tourism, eco-tourism, mountain tourism, cultural tourism, etc. Agriculture is an important sector of the economy of both IPA II beneficiaries. Its contribution to the GDP counts for 14% in Kosovo and 8% in North Macedonia. The five regions in the program area have many common characteristics (geography, demographic trends, agricultural production system, etc.). Such common characteristics should be seen as an opportunity for building or strengthening synergies between them. These synergies are particularly important for the development of tourism in the mountain areas, agriculture and trade exchange, and in overall economic development and improving citizens' life. The presence of important private and public universities and business research centres in the program area is an asset for the CBC program. Joint actions should be undertaken to establish a network of higher education institutions and well-known research agencies and organizations. This could be considered as an important asset, which could be exploited to more active cooperation and coordinated actions, both in the area of higher education and research.

The programme *thematic priorities* were: enhancing competitiveness, business and SME development, trade and investment; encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage; protecting the environment, promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management; technical assistance.

IPA II CBC programme for Kosovo - the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia benefited also from a financial allocation of 8.4 million euros in the framework of the multiannual program 2014-2020 (Table 9 and Table 10).

The program general objective "to foster co-operation among institutions and organizations in the cross-border region in order to support sustainable economic growth and strengthen social cohesion" was implemented through three specific objectives (to improve labor market skills and access to the international market; to enhance tourism potentials and to further promote regional values; to enhance joint efforts to address environmental pollution issues in the area) and one technical assistance objective, to ensure an effective, efficient, transparent and timely implementation of the program and awareness raising.

Table 9. Indicative financial allocations per year for the 2014-2020 cross-border cooperation program

Year	IPA II CBC programme Kosovo-the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia							Total (EUR)
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2014-2020
CBC operations (all thematic Priorities)	840 000	1 200 000	1 200 000	840 000	1 200 000	1 200 000	1 080 000	7 560 000
Technical Assistance	360 000	0		360 000	0	0	120 000	840 000
Total (EUR)	1 200 000	1 200 000	1 200 000	1 200 000	1 200 000	1 200 000	1 200 000	8 400 000

Source: European Commission (2014b)

Table 10. Indicative financial allocations per priority over 2014-2020 period and rate of Union contribution

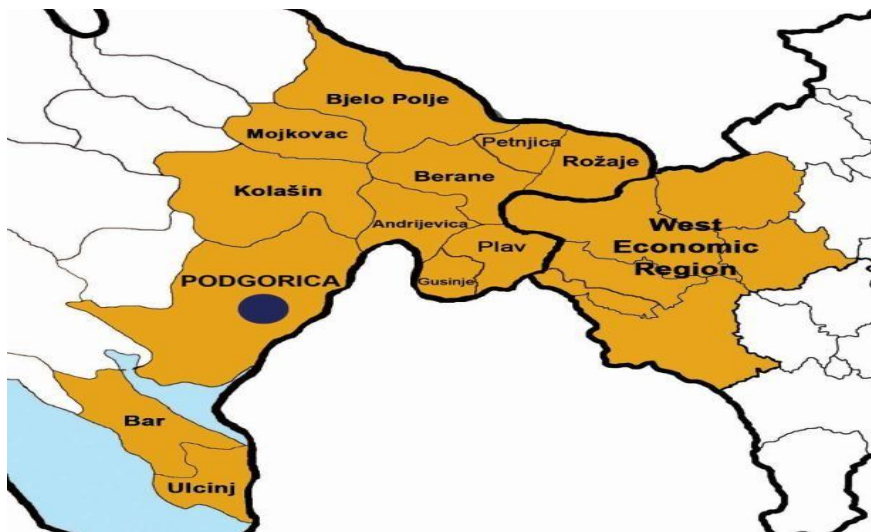
PRIORITIES	IPA II CBC programme–Kosovo - the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia				
	Union contribution	Beneficiary/ies co-financing	Total funding	Rate of Union contribution	
	(a)	(b)	(c) = (a)+(b)	(d) = (a)/(c)	
TP.1 Enhancing competitiveness, business and SME development, trade and investment	2 352 000	415 059	2 767 059	85%	
TP.2 Encouraging tourism, culture and natural Heritage	2 856 000	504 000	3 360 000	85%	
TP.3 Protecting the environment, promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management	2 352 000	415 059	2 767 059	85%	
P.4 Technical Assistance	840 000	0	840 000	100%	
GRAND TOTAL	8 400 000	1 334 118	9 734 118		

Source: European Commission (2014b)

5. Kosovo-Montenegro cross-border cooperation program 2014-2020

The program area for the IPA Cross-border Program between Kosovo and Montenegro covers a territory of 8,725 km² with a total population of about 706,823 inhabitants. The total borderline length is 75.6 km. There are two border crossing points; in Kulla (on the road Rozhaje–Peja), which is also a customs point; and in Qakor (on the road linking Plava and Peja municipalities) that has been closed to traffic for the last fourteen years. In Montenegro the eligible area cover 6,400 km² and consists of twelve municipalities or a total of 624 settlements, including the capital city and eleven main towns (Figure 3). In Kosovo the eligible area covers 2,325 km² and includes the West Economic Region which covers six municipalities.

Figure 3. Map of the program area



Source: Ministry of Local Governance Republic of Kosovo

The eligible area of Montenegro covers the north-eastern part of the country, a mountainous area bordering with Kosovo, Serbia and the capital city of Podgorica. Mountain peaks reach up to 2,500 meters and the territory is crossed by rivers, like Lim, Moraca and Tara, forming canyons and valleys.

The region is dominated in the east by Bjeshket e Nemuna and Hajla mountains adjacent to Albania and Kosovo. Another mountain range, Bjelasica forms the centre of the northern part of the eligible area. Podgorica is located in the central part of Montenegro, where the population and economic activities of the country are mainly concentrated. The southern part of Podgorica is among the rare territories in the country where intensive agriculture is possible and is reported to

have the largest all-in-one piece vineyard in Europe. The municipality stretches to the northern shore of Shkoder Lake, the largest lake in the Balkans. The eligible area also covers the two coastal municipalities of Bar and Ulqin/Ulcinj. The municipality of Bar, with its port infrastructure, is an important entry and exit point for large amounts of goods, not only for Montenegro but also for its neighbouring countries. Consequently, it relies less on tourism than the other coastal municipalities. Even though the North-eastern region of Montenegro is directly located along the border with Kosovo, the coastal area has paradoxically a better access to Kosovo via the new highway in North-West Albania (Table 11).

Table 11. The program area

	Area (km²)	% of the total territory
Montenegro	13,812	100%
Program area	6,400	46%
Municipalities of Andrijevica, Bar, Berane, Bijelo Polje, Gusinje, Kolašin, Mojkovac, Petnjica, Plav, Podgorica, Rožaje and Ulqin	6,400	46%
Kosovo	10,9081	100%
Programme area	2,325	21%
West Economic Region (municipalities of Pejë, Istog, Klinë, Junik, Deçan and Gjakovë)	2,325	21%
TOTAL program area	8,725	MNE: 73% KOS: 27%

Source: MNE KOS Cross Border Programme 2014-2020

In Montenegro, in order to reduce disparities in economic and social development across the regions, the Northern region is a priority for all national development strategies. Regional economic development plans are based on the protection and preservation of the natural and environmental resources of the region and on a high priority given to sustainable agriculture and food processing, tourism, sustainable forestry and the creation of all types of “green jobs” in environmentally friendly sectors. In Kosovo the same priorities are defined for the eligible economic region, to improve efficiency in agriculture and forestry and to develop additional sources of income from preserving natural assets and tourism. Mining is another economic potential in an area that is known for having the richest mineral resources in Kosovo (lignite and bauxite minerals in Istog and Klina municipalities).

Regional differences in terms of economic and social development, not only between Montenegro and Kosovo but even within their regions, constitute a characteristic of the program area. In terms of private sector development there are clear synergies to be developed within the program area and to be supported by the CBC program. The entrepreneurial tradition identified in the programming area, with a long history of cross-border trade, was an area to be utilized. The challenge was how to overcome the culture of a short investment horizon, favouring short-term trade opportunities over long-term capital investments. Unemployment is still a major economic and social problem across the program area. Creating new jobs and improving the unemployment characteristics (especially reducing gender inequalities, stimulating employment of youth and the disabled) are among the key sustainable development challenges. One of the main challenges in this regard remains to be the continuing migration from rural to urban areas, which may impede the development of the rural economy in the program area. Both at central and local levels, the development plans for agriculture are often linked with tourism. Their main development priorities could be easily supported by cross-border initiatives.

The importance of tourism in the economies of Montenegro and Kosovo varies a lot - the share of tourism in GDP could be over 30% in Montenegro while it is still negligible in Kosovo. Nevertheless, tourism is a sector of potential growth for the cross-border area, thanks to rich natural resources, unspoiled nature and mountainous landscapes, traditional folklore and the presence of valuable cultural and historic sites. Improving the educational system and school infrastructure is a major priority for the program area. The CBC program had a limited role in addressing this issue but supported exchanges between schools and vocational training centres in the border areas. The presence of higher education institutions and research centres on both sides of the program area is an asset not only for establishing academic cooperation, but also for initiating cross-border research program in sectors such as agriculture or tourism. Health prevention campaigns and health education are potential activities to be covered within the framework of the CBC program.

IPA II CBC programme for Montenegro - Kosovo benefited also from a financial allocation of 8.4 million euros in the framework of the multiannual program 2014-2020 (Table 12 and Table 13).

Additional information related to the three implemented projects, leaders and amounts are exposed in Annex 1.

Table 12. Indicative financial allocations per year for the 2014-2020 cross-border cooperation programme

Year	IPA II CBC PROGRAMME MONTENEGRO – KOSOVO								Total (EUR)
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2014-2020	
CBC									
Operations (all thematic priorities)	840 000	1 200 000	1 200 000	840 000	1 200 000	1 200 000	1 080 000	7 560 000	
Technical Assistance	360 000	0.00	0.00	360 000	0.00	0.00	120 000	840 000	
Total (EUR)	1 200 000	1 200 000	1 200 000	1 200 000	1 200 000	1 200 000	1 200 000	8 400 000	

Source: European Commission (2014c)

Table 13. Indicative financial allocations per priority over the 2014-2020 period and rate of Union contribution

PRIORITIES	IPA II CBC PROGRAMME MONTENEGRO – KOSOVO			
	Union contribution	Beneficiaries co-financing	Total funding	Rate of Union contribution
	(a)	(b)	(c) = (a)+(b)	(d) = (a)/(c)
1. Thematic Priority 1 - Promoting employment, labor mobility and social and cultural inclusion across the border	2 100 000.00	370 588.24	2 470 588.24	85%
2. Thematic Priority 2 - Protecting the environment, promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management	2 520 000.00	444 705.88	2 964 705.88	85%
3. Thematic Priority 3 - Encouraging tourism and cultural and natural heritage	2 940 000.00	518 823.53	3 458 823.53	85%
4. Technical Assistance	840 000.00	0	840 000.00	100 %
GRAND TOTAL (EUR)	8 400 000.00	1 334 117.65	9 734 117.65	

Source: European Commission (2014c)

Overall program objective “Improve the standard and quality of living of the people in the program area through the environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive economic development of the region, with respect for its common cultural and natural heritage” was organized on three thematic priorities: promoting employment, labour mobility and social and cultural inclusion;;protecting the environment, promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation, risk prevention and management; encouraging tourism, culture and natural heritage.. In addition to the above thematic priorities, this CBC program also includes a fourth, technical assistance priority aiming amongst others at reinforcing the administrative capacity of the authorities implementing the CBC program and of the beneficiaries, similar to the others programmes.

Conclusions

The border areas of Kosovo with Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia - especially those covered by CBC programs – differ, some being large and depopulated areas and some with large to small urban areas. Areas in North Macedonia and Montenegro close to cities of Podgorica and Skopje are attractive economic areas, with low unemployment rates, whereas Kosovo’s southern part and Albania’s north-eastern part are characterized with successive losses of population and high unemployment rates. As a consequence, CBC projects provide a case study for examining how far territorial cooperation has contributed to a more cohesive border territory and the outcome of the projects in the area of economic development, institutional cooperation between the countries, and institutional cooperation between Kosovo and the EU presence in Kosovo itself. European Commission financial and institutional support for Kosovo, especially in the past decade, has been oriented in the programmes supporting rule of law and tackling corruption while programmes like CBC have not been the main priority. It was EU’s intention to get the parties (countries) to work together on an institutional level with economics being not a priority².

Despite some positive effects of the investments provided under the auspices of the CBC programme in the territorial development of the border area, as witnessed by some jobs created and maintained by the programme, they have not been sufficient to achieve the goal of a more cohesive territory. The goal of territorial cohesion in CBC areas bordering North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Albania during the next decade might be achieved by stimulating a more polycentric and financially stronger presence through establishing and reinforcing the cross-border physical links in order to improve not only accessibility in the border programme areas but launching other bold economic projects. Spatial integration in border areas

² Sadriu, D. (2020), Interview with Dardan Sadriu, EU Office in Kosovo. Former Task Manager of Kosovo Cross Border Cooperation Projects, September 2020.

could be improved by exploring territorial diversity in terms of regional specialization through a development strategy that promotes regional complementarities, focusing not only on economic competition but also on other functions, such as education, culture, and social infrastructure. The role of territorial cooperation is paramount for achieving a more balanced and cohesive territory in border areas, and depends on the various actors concerned in the process having the political will to tackle the major barriers to cross-border cooperation. Increased territorial integration in Kosovo's border areas requires continued implementation of a long-term and genuine cross-border strategy, which can be held up at the European level as a good example of an efficient and effective CBC programme.

Additional funding to complement the territorial cooperation objective of the European cohesion policy is needed to achieve the goal of territorial cohesion in border regions. The ongoing EU Cohesion Policy cycle (2014–2020) was presented as a new opportunity to focus on the need to achieve 'concentration' and 'results' (see EC, 2014 July). This suggests that the EC has given increasing importance to 'Policy Evaluation Procedures'. Here, the Territorial Impact Assessment Procedure seems to be the most complete and adequate existing programme/policy evaluation tool, as it takes into account all the dimensions of territorial development and/or territorial cohesion. Hence, given the fact that CBC programmes cover a large portion of the EU territory, and the corollary that they touch many crucial components of territorial development, there is a strong case to make use of TIA procedures in evaluating the impact of such programmes. Evaluating the impact of CBC programmes pertaining to Kosovo was not easy since the data provided by the actors were lacking in facts, some funding procedures, and procedural regulations. Neither Kosovo's institutions nor the EU Office in Kosovo offer concise evidence or information on the particular impact on the economy of the CBC areas of operation. Through different projects, tourism was stimulated and awareness was evidently raised in giving exact information on the benefits of getting residents involved in other sectors apart from forestry and agriculture. Kosovo remains one of the few countries (alongside Bosnia Herzegovina) that does not have an indirect managing system. Because of this, the EU Office in Kosovo plays the biggest role on all phases of IPA II implementation. On programming, there is insufficient involvement at the political level with regard to considering and deciding on eventual IPA interventions, as well as insufficient legal and procedural mechanisms in place. Participation of Civil Society Organizations in this process is low or non-existent at all³. With regard to public information there is lack of accessible data on the programming of IPA II funds. At the institutional level, Kosovo needs to improve the managing structure of CBC programmes by creating a more capable sub-unit,

³ Murati, A. (2020), Interview with Artan Murati, Legal Advisor to Kosovo Speaker of the Assembly and Head of NGO 'Kosovo Democratic Institute' member of Transparency International, July 2020.

with relative independence, within the structure Government of Kosovo. The operational structure is led by the Ministry of Local Governance, whereas the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) that conducts the monitoring of the implementation of the projects only meets annually and this discrepancy hampers the implementation phase of the programmes. The initial stage of the IPA III is underway now (at the time of finalizing this paper, in September 2020), the Kosovo Government through the Ministry of Local Government and the EU Office in Prishtina have been conducting trainings for potential bidders for future programs and this offers an opportunity to improve and overcome the faults made in previous times. (Berisha, 2020). Also, in terms of documentation and analysis, a more robust approach is required in evaluating territorial impacts of CBC programmes by listing all components that were aimed as objectives although they might be subjected to border region specificities. A need to conduct further research on this very specific thematic of relating TIA procedures with CBC programmes, in order to contribute to a higher efficiency and effectiveness of the EU financed projects, programmes and policies, is strongly advocated. Finally, Kosovo's institutions involved with the CBC need to work even closer with the EU in future programmes since these actions further Kosovo's ambition to joining the EU.

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ANNEX 1. Country by country implemented projects, leaders and amounts

Countries	Lead Applicant	Total value, grant amount, and the percentage of the EU grant	Short description of the operation
Kosovo-Albania	European Center for Minority Issues (ECMI) Kosovo	Total value: 575.984 EUR Grant amount: 489.586,264 EUR Percentage: 85 %	Fostering youth development and employment through a cross-border digital entrepreneurship academy (Y.D.E.A) in Lezha and Prizren Overall objective: Enable youth networking and capacity building in the field of digital entrepreneurship and encourage the exchange of best practice between vocational and educational institutions
Kosovo-Albania	Albanian Local Capacity Development Foundation (ALCDF)	Total value: 549,526 EUR Grant amount: 467,097EUR Percentage: 85%	Improving tourism offer in highlands of Albania and Kosovo Overall objective: To enhance the capacities and competitiveness of the tourism sector in the cross-border region by the economic valorization of its cultural and natural heritage
Kosovo-Albania	Axhensioni I Përkrahjes Punësimit Kosovë (APPK)	Total value:322.353 EUR Grant amount:274.000 EUR Percentage: 84,98%	Skilled workforce for economic integration (SWEI) Overall objective: Fostering cooperation, best practice exchange, improve efficiency and quality of Employment Services and Vocational Training Services, for sustainable employment of jobseekers, training of youth to support socio-economic integration in the cross-border region.
Kosovo-Albania	Community Development Fund – CDF	Total value: 470.588 EUR Grant amount: 400.000 EUR Percentage: 85%	Extension of VIP Dinarica in the CBC Region Albania-Kosovo Overall objective: to enhance cross-border economic activities through unique sustainable tourism models based on natural, traditional, and cultural values while bringing forth common characteristics of the region
Kosovo-Albania	Open Data Kosovo (ODK)	Total value: 294.210 EUR Grant amount: 250 078.50EUR Percentage: 85%	Open ICT Education for Youth Employability Overall objective: to foster youth employability by providing an open access to critical knowledge and skills, and by strengthening cross-border cooperation between specialized learning centers (high schools, vocational schools and universities)
Kosovo-Macedonia	Center for Sustainable Development ALKA Skopje	Total value: 229,888 EUR Grant amount: 195,400 Percentage: 85%	Backing Regional Tourism Potential Overall objective Enhance tourism potential and promote regional values of CB region.
Kosovo-Macedonia	Kreacija Association of Business and consultants – ZBK Kreacija Skopje	Total value: 226,663 EUR Grant amount: 192,641 EUR Percentage: 85%	Building competitiveness through cooperation and innovation: Accessing export markets for handicraft products Overall objective: Contribute to economic development and social inclusion in the cross-border area of the East Region in Kosovo as well as the Northeast and Skopje Region in Macedonia through income generation of start-ups and micro enterprises
Kosovo-Macedonia	Kosovo Foundation for Cultural Heritage Without Borders	Total value: 234,113 EUR Grant amount: 199,013 EUR Percentage: 85%	Cultural cross-border exchange initiative – MAKS FORUM Overall objective: To contribute to the establishment of favorable conditions for social cohesion, cooperation and cultural exchange between institutional and CSO representatives from Kosovo and North Macedonia

	CHWB Kosovo		
Kosovo-Macedonia	Kosovo Foundation for Cultural Heritage without Borders, CHwB	Total value: 348,285 EUR Grant amount: 248,078 EUR Percentage: 70%	Cultural Route "On the Trail of Mother Teresa" Overall objective: Contribute to strengthening the cooperation between the institutions, the CSOs and the community in Kosovo and North Macedonia through recognition of shared values towards joint economic growth
Kosovo-Macedonia	DTTU Radika Rezor Doeel	Total value: 386,054 EUR Grant amount: 200,000 Percentage: 52%	Developed Tourism Potentials in cross-border region in rural area Overall objective: Enhancing rural tourism in cross-border region through engagement of two businesses in development of attraction points and improving the quality of products and services
Kosovo-Macedonia	CeProSard – Center for promotion of sustainable agricultural practices and rural development – Skopje	Total value: 200,924 EUR Grant amount: 149,005 Percentage: 74%	Fostering rural and environmental tourism through SMART touristic information centers FRET-STIC Overall objective: Development, promotion and presentation of local and regional tourism through innovative approaches and systems for improved rural and environmental experiences
Kosovo-Macedonia	Union-National Council for Gender Equality – Lead Partner	Total value: 228,945 EUR Grant amount: 179,264 EUR Percentage: 78%	Networking for success Overall objective: Fostering gender balance and youth society level by encouraging the involvement of women and youth in the introduction of the cultural, traditional and national values of Kosovo and Macedonia
Kosovo-Macedonia	Municipality of Gjilan	Total value: 324,766 EUR Grant value: 196,905 EUR Percentage: 60%	Sustainable market for farmers fresh produce in cross-border area in Gjilan and Kumanovo Municipality Overall objective: Maximizing sales and profit of farmers local fresh produce in the Municipality of Gjilan and the Municipality of Kumanovo through organizing advanced green market
Kosovo-Macedonia	Municipality of Viti	Total value: 312,917 EUR Grant value: 195,510 EUR Percentage: 62%	Tourism without borders Overall objective: Encouraging tourism, culture and natural heritage
Kosovo-Macedonia	P.E. Hidromorava, Gjilan	Total value: 553,319 EUR	Substantial environmental and health benefits in cross-border area Overall Objective: Enhancement of capacities to intervene against environment pollution in cross-border area
Kosovo-Montenegro	Center for protection and research of birds	Total value: 443,791 EUR Grant value: 377,222 EUR Percentage: 85%	Eco and Outdoor Tourism Actions of the Balkan Alps Overall objective: The offer of active tourism services improved, made visible to international and domestic visitors.
Kosovo-Montenegro	Regional Development Agency for Bjelasica, Komovi, and Prokletije	Total value: 424,724 EUR Grant value: 360,994 EUR Percentage: 85%	Accursed Mountains-Exquisite Outdoor Destination Overall Objective: Improved outdoor tourism infrastructure. Standardized cross-border information made available for tourists and tourism agencies. Promotional activities to increase visibility of targeted zone as one outdoor destination

Kosovo-Montenegro	FORS Montenegro	Total value: 293,171 EUR Grant value: 249, 107 EUR Percentage: 85%	CARES-Cross-border actions in the reproductive health sector Overall objective: Improve capacity of health centers and the quality of reproductive health services Improve cross-border cooperation in the improvement of reproductive health.
Kosovo-Montenegro	LLC Utility Company Plav Montenegro	Total value: 315, 724 EUR Grant value: 266,012 EUR Percentage: 84%	Cross-border joint initiatives for better waste management Overall objective: Contribution to the protection of the environment and economic development of the border area through more efficient waste valorization Establishing a system of selective collection and treatment of communal waste in urban areas of Gjakova and Plav municipalities.
Kosovo-Montenegro	Municipality of Andrijevisa Montenegro	Total value: 262,445 EUR Grant value: 223.062 EUR Percentage: 85%	Green jobs for better future of cross-border region of Montenegro and Kosovo Overall objective: Resources for employment in agriculture identified and promoted. Technical capacities of the farmers upgraded. Agricultural products from the cross-border region promoted to the public and businesses.
Kosovo-Montenegro	Municipality of Gjakova, Kosovo	Total value: 350,950 EUR Grant value: 298, 307 EUR Percentage: 85%	United against pollution-UAP Overall objective: Infrastructure improvements at waste transfer stations; improved training and safety precautions for employees, including the sharing of best practices; illegal waste removed.
Kosovo-Montenegro	Association for Democracy and Prosperity-Zid Montenegro	Total value: 288,572 EUR Grant value: 245,286 EUR Percentage: 85%	Self-employed and social entrepreneurship for youth Overall objective Young people in cross-border area are informed and encouraged to use social innovations and technology as their perspective of employment; Trainings and personal assistance provided for increasing competences and skills as a support for to develop their own business solutions. Young people are supported to exchange ideas and start business cooperation with the other young people from the CBC region.

Source: Ministry of Local Governance of the Republic of Kosovo, September 2020