

The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA): Greece and its Balkan Neighbours - Strengthening economic dimensions in cross-border collaborations, 29/06/2015, Thessaloniki

The European Commission's Directorate-General responsible for enlargement, the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) and the Greek International Business Association (SEVE) organised the event 'The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA): Greece and its Balkan Neighbours- Strengthening economic dimensions in cross-border collaborations' which was held in Thessaloniki at the Electra Palace Hotel on the 29th of June 2015.

Representatives of the Greek ministries, the embassies of Balkan countries, think tanks, NGOs, consulting companies, Greek partners of the cross-border programmes as well as postgraduate students participated in this event.

Mr. Alexandru Leonard Ionita, Regional Development expert of the Directorate General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations of the European Commission discussed the programs financed by the Instrument for Pre-Accession Cooperation (IPA) during the period 2007-2013. He underlined the objectives and the regulatory framework governing the period 2014-2020 (IPA II), during which approximately €11,7 billion will be allocated. He noted that the programming and implementation of IPA II will focus particularly on the measurement, monitoring and evaluation of performance and results. He noted that the administrative capacity, strategic planning and comprehensive stakeholder consultation remain the main challenges for the new programming period.

Mr. George Papadopoulos, Coordinator of the IPA cross-border programme "Greece- Albania" of the Managing Authority of European Territorial Cooperation in Greece, underlined the principles and the benefits of territorial cooperation. He presented the results of and the experience gained by the implementation of the above mentioned programme during the period 2007-2013. He mentioned that this programme contributed to the improvement of living standards of the populations involved, the enhancement of tourism and environmental protection, the promotion of cultural heritage and economic and social development. Regarding the period 2014-2020, he highlighted that great attention will be given to the long-term project sustainability.

Ms. Katerina Samakovli, Coordinator of the IPA cross-border programme "Greece- FYROM" of the Managing Authority of European Territorial Cooperation in Greece, focused on the results achieved during the period 2007-2013, which include, *inter alia*, the improvement of infrastructure, business cooperation, the promotion of sustainable agriculture, the enhancement of tourism, the sharing of knowledge and joint cooperation in the health and environmental sectors. He emphasized that during the period 2014-2020, priority will also be given to monitoring and evaluation of expected results.

Mr. Kyriakos Loufakis, President of the Greek International Business Association, referred to the traditionally good trade and economic relations between Greece and the Western Balkans, stressing the mutual benefits of close cooperation. He underlined the considerable impact of the economic crisis and he referred to the prospects for strengthening cross-border cooperation through business networking particularly in the shipping, transport and education sectors. He underlined the role and the activities of the Greek International Business Association in strengthening regional cooperation.

Professor Dimitrios Kyrkilis, Head of the Department of Balkan, Slavic and Oriental Studies of the University of Macedonia, engaged the speakers and the audience in an interactive dialogue. The discussion and the questions of the audience focused on achieved results and lessons learnt as well as the priorities and the challenges of the programming period 2014-2020.