

Introduction

The Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) between Kosovo and the European Union was signed in October 2015 and entered into force on the 1st of April 2016. By signing this Agreement Kosovo, for the first time, entered into a contractual agreement with EU, where it is now committed to fulfil the obligations deriving from the SAA (alignment of legislation, trade issues etc.)

With a view to support implementation of the reforms, in complementary to other EU financial support, a Framework Agreement (FWA) between Kosovo and the European Commission on general principles for participation in EU Programmes was signed on the 25th November 2016. The FWA includes a list of the 17 EU Programmes in which Kosovo is eligible to participate.

EU Programmes are multi-annual (7 year) programmes dedicated to promote and support EU policies and strengthen cooperation between EU Member States (and other members) in certain areas such as research & innovation, education, culture, health, environmental protection, custom and taxation, justice etc.

In order to better fulfil the responsibilities arising from the participation in the SAA, the Government of Kosovo decided to use the opportunity of participating in EU Programmes to continue the development of technical and administrative capacities in line with EU standards. Private sector organisations and businesses, and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), could benefit from the use of EU Programmes in preparing the ground for the accession standards, along with public administrations and agencies from EU Programmes.

What are EU Programmes?

Initially the EU Programmes (ex-Community Programmes) were only available for EU Member State Countries. In 2003 during the European Council meeting in Thessaloniki, the decision was made to open the European Union Programmes to countries outside the EU and EEA, who were in the Stabilisation and Association Process.

The objective of participation of candidate countries and potential candidates on EU Programmes is to support their accession to the EU, to make them acquainted with the methods and policies of the EU, and to strengthen cooperation between countries in different areas: research & innovation, education, culture, health, environmental protection, custom and taxation, justice etc...

Each Programme is managed by EC services or executive agencies in Brussels with dedicated structures normally established at national level.

To participate in EU programmes the following steps need to be taken:

Legal steps:

- Framework Agreement between candidate or potential candidate countries and EC needs to be signed
- Express interest for each EU Programme by the Government
- International Agreement between EC and beneficiary institution needs to be signed

Kosovo and EC signed the FWA on general principles for participation in EU Programmes on the 25th November 2016.

Financial steps:

- Fee “entry ticket” to EU budget for each EU Programme where International Agreement is signed
- The fees are different for the various Programmes and various countries, as each programme has its own rules for participation.
- The fees can be reimbursed partially through IPA National Programmes (but may be for limited number of years)

The 17 EU Programmes are:

Programme Name	Focus	Budget (2014-2020)
COSME	Competitiveness of SMEs	2.3b
Erasmus+	Education, training, youth and sport	14.4b
Creative Europe	Culture and Media	1.46b
Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI)	Employment, social affairs and inclusion	919m
Europe for Citizens	EU History, shared culture, civic and democratic participation	185m
Hercule III	Combatting fraud, corruption and other illegal activities	105m
Justice	Judicial cooperation, Judicial training, Access to justice	373m
Fiscalis 2020	National Tax Administrations exchange of information and expertise, trans-European systems	235m
Customs 2020	National Customs Administrations harmonized approaches, trans-European systems, facilitating trade, reducing red tape	548m
Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme	Equality and access to rights	439m
Civil Protection Mechanism	Protection and prevention of disasters, improving ability to respond, rapid response	224m
Interoperability solutions for European public administrations, businesses and citizens (ISA2)	Development of digital solutions for interoperable cross border and cross sector public services	131m
Horizon 2020	Focus on world-class science, removing barriers to innovation and makes it easier for the public and private sectors to work together in delivering innovation	80b
Health for Growth Programme	Promote health, healthy lifestyles, prevent diseases	449m

Consumer Programme	Protect the health, safety and economic interests of consumers	189m
LIFE	Environment and climate action	3.1b
Copernicus	Earth observation information in the fields of marine, atmosphere, land, climate change, emergency and security	4.3b

Study for Kosovo access to EU programmes

Experts from the Project Preparation Facility project undertook a Preliminary Assessment for participation of Kosovo in EU Programmes 2014-2020 starting in November 2016. A main component of this assessment was a mapping of all 17 programmes. This mapping exercise provided findings/recommendations on Kosovo's participation in EU programmes against the mapped criteria. This preliminary exercise was used as the basis of the consultation process.

EU Programmes	Objectives of EU Programmes	Eligibility	Link with Strategic documents (ERA, NPISAA, Progress Report 2016, ERP, ISP etc)	Region experience	Finding/recommendation
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By taking into consideration their interest expressed for participating in the EU Programmes during the consultation process and referring to national short term priorities and immediately needs (deriving from European Reform Agenda and SAA), a short-list of EU Programmes where IPA II support would be considered was developed.

The Indicative Strategy Paper for Kosovo defines priorities for EU financial assistance to support country in meeting accession criteria for the period 2014-2020.

The choice of EU Programmes should focus on the short-term priorities of the Government and be in line with the Indicative Strategy Paper respective sectors, i.e. Competitiveness, Education, Employment and Social Policies etc.

Furthermore, the action will need to be a complementary tool to support implementation short-term priorities of European Reform Agenda (ERA).

The NPISAA 2016-2020 also acknowledges the importance of Kosovo's participation in EU Programmes, such as COSME and Erasmus+

The EC Progress Report 2016 recommended to Government of Kosovo to focus on the implementation of SAA obligations and ERA priorities.

The EU Programmes supported need to be in line with the Enlargement Strategy in a way that proposed EU Programmes will contribute to the achievement of membership criteria.

Potential obstacles to smooth implementation might be lack of ministerial staff, lack of political support or inadequate technical capacities to support the end beneficiaries in information sharing, and project application etc. In this context, training of the final stakeholders is a key element for the effective absorption of EU Programmes.

The experience from the region shows that successful participation in EU Programmes requires a high degree of ownership and initiative by the beneficiary.

Based on assessments and evaluations conducted for participation and absorption the EU programmes for the period 2007-2013 it was found that countries in the region did not sufficiently use the financial instruments. In many cases, there was low applicant success rate and a low number of submitted proposals.

Other findings from the region showed that the countries lack coordination, the capacities of national contact points were weak and the budget for co-financing of EU Programmes was not planned properly. These are lessons that Kosovo will need to take into account if it is to successfully benefit from the selected EU Programmes.

Consultation process

The Ministry of European Integration (MEI) started in December 2016 to undertake a consultation process with different governmental institutions and stakeholders aimed to raise awareness on the EU Programmes. Following a first round of consultations, a draft study of participation was developed and circulated. The study explored to what extent line ministries/ potential beneficiaries had sufficient knowledge on EU Programmes and to what extent they had the capacity to apply and benefit from the various programmes.

Further consultation workshops were held during February 2017. These workshops, specifically targeted at the potential applicant groups from the CSO/NGO sector (February 20th 2017); Local Public Administration and Public Bodies (21st February 2017); the Private Sector (23rd February 2017); and Education and Research (23rd February 2017) discussed in further detail the specific programmes from which they could benefit as applicants and/or partners. Approximately 75 different institutions/bodies participated in these workshops.

Recommendations

COSME

National Co-ordinator:	Ministry of Trade and Industry
Potential Applicants/Partners:	Small and medium-sized enterprises, local and regional authorities, corporations, government agencies/offices, public agencies, chambers of commerce and industry.
Types of actions supported:	the competitiveness, growth and sustainability of EU's enterprises, in particular SMEs, and promoting entrepreneurship SME's access to finance by providing loan guarantees and risk capital Access to new markets inside and outside the EU and reducing the administrative burden on SMEs.
Rationale:	The objectives of the programme are in line with ERA and PR 2016 short-term priorities and Art 100 SAA, chapter 20 NPISAA. Support to SMEs and the competitiveness of the Private Sector is a priority of the Government of Kosovo.

EURASMUS +

National Coordinator:	Ministry of Education, Technology and Sciences
Potential Applicants/Partners:	Individuals and organizations, / students, trainers, teachers etc.
Types of Actions Supported:	<p>To support young people gain more and better skills by studying & training abroad.</p> <p>To enhance teaching quality in the EU and beyond.</p> <p>To support Member States and partner countries in modernizing their education and Vocational training systems.</p> <p>To promote youth participation in society.</p> <p>To support teaching and research on European integration.</p> <p>To support European grass roots sport.</p>
Rationale:	<p>The objectives of the programme are in line with short-term priorities of ERA for improving the quality of education in Kosovo and in line with PR 2016 recommendations for quality of education and access to education, and Art 107 SAA. Kosovo has experience with the TEMPUS programme and aspects of EURASMUS+. Education, improvement of curriculum and mobility of students are key priorities of the Government of Kosovo</p>

Creative Europe

National Coordinator:	Ministry of Culture
Potential Applicants/Partners:	Cultural and creative organizations, audio-visual professionals, association of artist, public institutions dealing with culture, media etc.
Types of Actions Supported:	<p>To support the capacity of the European cultural and creative sectors to operate transnational;</p> <p>To promote the transnational circulation of cultural and creative works and operators and reach new audiences in Europe and beyond;</p> <p>To strengthen the financial capacity of the cultural and creative sectors, and in particular small and medium-sized enterprises and organizations;</p> <p>To support transnational policy cooperation in order to foster policy development, innovation, audience building and new business models.</p>
Rationale:	<p>The objectives of Culture sub programmes are in line with the priorities of the Ministry of Culture for promotion and supporting of Culture and art 108 SAA.</p> <p>The objectives of sub programme Media are in line with art 109 SAA</p>

Good regional experience, a strong creative sector in Kosovo and a priority area for support.

Europe for Citizens

National Coordinator:	MEI; Prime Minister's Office / Technical secretariat for CSO council
Potential Applicants/Partners:	local authorities, policy research organisations (think tanks), citizens' groups and other civil organisations, educational institutions, which promote active European citizenship
Types of Actions Supported:	<p>To contribute to citizens' understanding of the EU, its history and diversity</p> <p>To foster European citizenship and to improve conditions for civic and democratic participation at EU level</p> <p>To raise awareness of remembrance, common history and values</p> <p>To encourage democratic participation of citizens at EU level, by developing citizens' understanding of the EU policy making-process and, by promoting opportunities for societal and intercultural engagement and volunteering at EU level</p>
Rationale:	In line with Indicative Country Strategy Paper for Kosovo chapter "Democracy and Governance" and Ministry of Culture policies. Provides an opportunity to develop Civil Society and community engagement, which are priorities for the Government of Kosovo.