SECTION 7
Reduction of the Administrative burden for beneficiaries

(Reference: point (b) of Article 8(5) of Regulation (EU) No 1299/201317)

A summary of the assessment of the administrative burden for beneficiaries and, where necessary, the actions planned accompanied by an indicative timeframe to reduce administrative burden

7.1. Assessment of the administrative burden

The main sources of administrative burden in the 2007-2013 period were the huge volume of data received from beneficiaries and the time needed to assess reports and authorise the payments.

Regarding **the huge volume of data received by the beneficiaries**, a distinction can be made between the application stage and the implementation period.

The procedure to be respected in order to submit the final application included, in some of the calls, up to 9 different documents, all of them to be sent in both hard and electronic copies. Some flexibility rules regarding the eligibility criteria were approved during the programming period, but they were not enough to reduce the administrative burden. Rules were not easily understood by beneficiaries and many formal mistakes motivated the ineligibility of numerous projects.

As for the implementation period, Lead Partners had to submit every six months a progress report, a payment claim and certificates of the controllers in both hard and electronic copies. A list of deliverables only had to be submitted electronically.

However, the main difficulty for Lead Partners during the implementation period was the coordination of a complex set of different national eligibility rules within a same project. Every national First Level Control system had its own procedures, templates and delays.

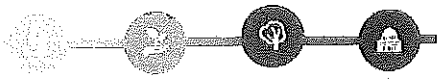
As a consequence, at both Programme and project level, enormous human resources were employed to accumulate and verify documents rather than focus on controlling the delivery of outputs and achievements of objectives, thus **the time needed to assess reports and authorise the payments** was very long.

The main conclusion is that the time and cost required for the assessment, management and control of MED projects in the 2007-2013 period was disproportionate and, therefore, certain flexibility and simplification are needed.

7.2. Main actions planned to achieve a reduction in administrative burden

The main actions planned to achieve a reduction in the administrative burden are the following:

- The approval of general rules on eligibility of expenditure
- The use of simplified cost options in some budget categories (in accordance with Articles 67 and 68 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and with Article 19 of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013)



- The use of simplified implementation tools (harmonised, whenever possible with the other ETC Programmes)
- The electronic exchange of information between beneficiaries and programme bodies
  - The dematerialization process
  - The electronic signature (when possible)

The approval of general rules on eligibility of expenditure

The ETC Regulation provides in its Article 18(1) that the Commission shall set up specific rules on eligibility of expenditure for cooperation programmes by means of a delegated act.

The delegated act on eligibility of expenditure (Commission Regulation (EU) No 481/2014) contains general provisions and five sections related to staff costs, office and administrative expenditure, travel and accommodation costs, external expertise and services costs, and finally equipment expenditure.

These five budget lines applicable to all ETC programmes are the ones within which all expenditure incurred during the implementation of a project shall be declared.

A guidance on individual costs eligible under each of the budget lines is provided in a set of fact sheets issued by the INTERACT programme. In this way, all beneficiaries can work with a set of harmonised core rules and focus on programme specific conditions only, when they work across different programmes.

Article 18(2) of the ETC Regulation provides that the States participating in the Monitoring Committee shall establish additional rules on eligibility of expenditure for the cooperation programme as a whole.

The use of simplified costs options, in accordance with Articles 67 and 68 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 and with Article 19 of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013, may be proposed under the relevant budget lines.

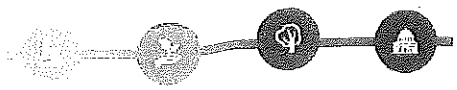
At the same time, new implementation tools set up by the programme are uploaded in the Programme information system.

These tools take into account, whenever possible, the harmonisation work that is coordinated by the INTERACT programme together with the other ETC programmes. Harmonised implementation tools are one of the main simplification measures that aim at reducing the administrative burden for both ETC programme bodies and beneficiaries, shifting the focus of programme implementation towards results and quality.

Taking into account the experience of the 2007-2013 period, sound financial management requires that all the national First Level Control systems use the common implementation templates and the simplified elements in the calculation of costs.

Controllers must adapt their working methods and practices. However, the change of the system will give them time and resources to focus more on areas that address the greatest risk (as the public procurement procedures, for instance).

The bodies responsible for the First Level Control in the different Member States hold regular coordination meetings regarding the implementation of the common eligibility rules, the simplified cost options and the harmonised tools. These meetings are held to improve the quality of the checks and to reduce the possible discrepancies in the application of the shared rules.



The electronic exchange of information between beneficiaries and programme bodies

A system for the electronic exchange of information between beneficiaries and programme authorities must be in place no later than on December, 31st 2015, as set up in Article 122(3) of the CPR and in the Implementing Act on the rules concerning electronic information exchange with beneficiaries ("e-Cohesion").

Regarding the communication with beneficiaries, this exchange covers the whole life span of the projects, from the application and the signature of the Subsidy Contract until the submission of all documents related to project implementation as well as the progress report and the certification of expenditures.

Furthermore, a process of dematerialization of documents is put in place through the programme's on line monitoring tool. This process includes the production of documents using information already entered in the tool for the whole project life in compliance with the "only once" principle, as well as the storage of relevant documents for the management and implementation of the project. This process will reduce significantly the amount of paper and the transfer of documents, and will allow gathering all documents in the same place making them available to everybody at any time: programme bodies, beneficiaries and controllers.

Finally, a secure electronic signature system in the same platform, in compliance with the Directive 1999/93/EC, should be available in order to guarantee the autonomy of the electronic audit trail and to reduce considerably the existing administrative burden.

November 2014

EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region

Towards a streamlined governance and management architecture for the EUSAIR

Working Paper devised by the EUSAIR National Coordinators in partnership with the Commission

1. PURPOSE

Council Conclusions on the European Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), adopted by the General Affairs Council on 29 September 2014, call upon the Member States, in partnership with the Commission and the non-EU countries, to set up, by the end of 2014, an effective multi-level governance system. This includes effective procedures for the implementation of the Strategy. fully respecting the institutional architecture of the participating countries and the specificities and competences of their administrative structures, in order to ensure a timely start of the Strategy. The Commission Report on governance of macro-regional strategies[1] and the related Council Conclusions, adopted on 21 October, furthermore refer to three interrelated levels of governance, namely (i) political leadership and ownership, (ii) coordination and (iii) implementation.

The present Working Paper addresses these requirements by outlining a framework within which governance and management of the EUSAIR can take place. It is to be endorsed at the launch event for the EUSAIR on 18 November 2014 by the eight Ministers of Foreign Affairs involved, in the presence of the Commission. This endorsement will convey status and authority to the functions to be performed through the proposed governance architecture and to its members, thereby paving the way for a swift implementation of the Strategy.

The present paper builds on this, while underlining that there can be no 'one-size-fit-all' governance and management model. Specific contextual conditions need to be taken into account. Accordingly, the paper does not aim at providing a detailed, exhaustive description of the functions and tasks to be performed within the proposed architecture. It emphasises the key functions to be performed and the key objectives to be pursued at the different levels, leaving it to the participating countries, in partnership with the Commission, to decide how this can best be achieved. It aims to provide sufficient clarity and certainty for implementation of the Strategy without unnecessary hurdles.

2. PURPOSE OF EUSAIR GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT ARCHITECTURE

In addition to the political level, this architecture involves two main levels: the coordinating level represented by a Governing Board and the implementation level represented by thematic Steering Groups.

2.1. EUSAIR Governing Board (GB)

[1] COM (2014) 284 of 20 May 2014

ADRION PROJECT OFFICER

LIV. BE

The Governing Board (GB) coordinates the work of the Thematic Steering Groups in charge of implementation through strategic guidance with respect to management and implementation of the EUSAIR and its Action Plan. To this end, representatives from the participating countries should be duly empowered by their respective Governments.

GB's functions should include:

- Acting as interface between the operational/managerial level (Thematic Steering Groups) and the political/ministerial level
- Convening and preparing meetings at ministerial level, as appropriate
- Proposing possible revisions of the Strategy and/or the Action Plan
- Issuing strategic guidelines to the Thematic Steering Groups (TSGs) and ensuring linkages between them
- Issuing guidelines on information and publicity about the Strategy
- Reporting to the EU-28 High Level Group on macro-regional strategies
- Elaborating further, and reviewing as appropriate, on the six broad criteria, included in the Action Plan (AP), for selecting actions/projects as potential candidates for inclusion in the AP
- Providing a general template for Rules of Procedures governing the thematic Steering Groups
- Providing orientations and guidelines for the annual EUSAIR Forum (e.g. setting the Agenda)
- Ensuring coordination with existing regional cooperation organisations, as appropriate
- Developing a monitoring and evaluation framework

The GB should adopt its Rules of Procedures.

Participants:

- National representatives: each participating country is represented by two delegates, one from the Ministers of Foreign Affairs[2], the other from the national authorities responsible for the coordination EU funds (in non-EU countries: National IPA Coordinators)
- Pillar Coordinators
- Commission services (DG REGIO, DG MARE and DG NEAR). Other DGs will be invited as appropriate, especially those relating to the pillars.
- The permanent Secretariat of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative
- A representative of the Committee of the Region's Adriatic-Ionian Interregional Group
- A representative of the European Economic and Social Committee

[2] Some countries may use an equivalent ministry

- The Managing Authority of the ADRION programme and the authority responsible for the EUSAIR Facility Point under that programme

The GB can consider inviting other participants, as appropriate.

The GB will be co-chaired by the country chairing pro tempore the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative and by the Commission (DG REGIO).

2.2. Thematic Steering Groups (TSGs)

The EUSAIR Communication identifies four interdependent pillars of strategic importance: Blue Growth - Pillar 1; Connecting the Region (transport and energy networks) Pillar 2; Environmental quality - Pillar 3; Sustainable tourism - Pillar 4. It is proposed to set up one thematic Steering Group per pillar. However, special arrangements will be set under Pillar 2 (transport and energy).

The TSGs will be chaired for an initial period of 3 years by a tandem of countries, on a rotating basis, starting with those that acted as coordinators for the pillar of their choice during the consultation process, namely: Greece and Montenegro for Pillar 1, Italy and Serbia for Pillar 2, Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina for Pillar 3, and Croatia and Albania for Pillar 4. These arrangements may be reconsidered in due course by the Governing Board, as appropriate.

TSGs' functions should include:

- Developing specific criteria for selecting actions/projects within each pillar on the basis of the six broad criteria included in the Action Plan (AP) as further developed/complemented by the Governing Board, as appropriate.
- Identifying actions/projects to be included in the AP, ensuring that they comply with the pillars' objectives, including with regard to cross-cutting and horizontal aspects
- Identifying relevant funding sources for the actions/projects selected and facilitating and following up implementation of actions/projects, including monitoring and evaluation
- Ensuring linkages with the other thematic Steering Groups
- Liaising with Managing Authorities/NIPACs[3] of EU programmes in EU and non-EU countries
- Liaising with: the relevant EU programmes managed directly by the Commission; the IFIs; the regional cooperation organisations, etc.
- Convening and preparing meetings of relevant line ministers
- Submitting to the GB policy proposals and recommendations re. revisions of the AP
- Reporting to the GB

Each TSG is to adopt its Rules of Procedures on the basis of the template provided by the GB.

[3] National IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance) Coordinators

Each country is to ensure that the necessary internal consultations are completed prior to TSG meetings so that the position adopted by its representatives in the TSG reflects a compromise acceptable to all key actors, within the country, that are concerned by the issues discussed.

Participants:

- Chairs. Each TSG will be chaired by two Pillar Coordinators following the scheme presented above. These Coordinators will be designated by the respective countries from their most competent national/regional administrations. Coordinators shall *i.a.* ensure the necessary interaction with the other TSGs.

- Members. In each TSG: Representatives from the relevant administrations within the participating countries. Sub-national (regional) representatives should participate, as appropriate, according to each country's institutional structure.

- The Commission, including relevant line DGs

- Regional cooperation organisations, as appropriate

- Representatives of International Financial Institutions, as appropriate

The Pillar Coordinators can consider inviting other participants

3. ROLE OF THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN (ADRION) TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME

Operational and administrative support is of utmost importance for an effective and efficient performance of the functions attributed to the GB and the TSGs. Accordingly, the ADRION programme shall support governance and implementation of the EUSAIR. To this end, the ADRION programme shall include a Priority Axis "Supporting the governance of the EUSAIR" which envisions a specific Action "Operational support to the key EUSAIR governance actors and stakeholders in their respective role". This Action – which will be implemented through a "EUSAIR Facility Point" to be established in the Slovenian administration – may include activities, such as:

- Providing day-to-day operational and logistic support to the GB and TSGs

- Assisting the TSGs in 'match making' activities, bringing together project promoters and financiers

- Providing assistance in developing project concepts (seed money, pilot actions, preparatory actions, etc.)

- Supporting preparation of macro-regional actions/projects, in coordination with the TSGs

- Supporting the TSGs in monitoring, reporting and evaluation

- Facilitating the development and functioning of a stakeholders platform

- Facilitating visibility through promotion of an Adriatic Ionian profile, as well as awareness-raising, including management of a EUSAIR website and the staging of events (incl. the annual EUSAIR Forum)

- Assisting the GB in the preparation of the annual EUSAIR Forum
- Supporting the building of the knowledge base, including collection of reliable and comparable data for establishing sound baselines and developing relevant, evidence-based result indicators and plausible targets
- Facilitating dialogue with bodies in charge of the implementation of programmes/financial instruments regarding how best to mobilise funding for actions under the different pillars

1. Legal framework

The Communication Strategy has been drafted according to:

- Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 – art. 115, 116 and 117 and Annex XII - , which defines the provisions of information and communication, structure of the communication strategy, role of communication officers and networks; and
- Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 - art. 14 – Implementation reports –.

Additional requirements can be found in the Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 821/2014 which provides technical characteristics on information and communication measures for operations, instructions for creating the Union emblem, and definition of the standard colours.

In addition to what above, the Communication Strategy makes also reference to the strengthening of the institutional capacity of the relevant partners and to the supporting of the key stakeholders of the programme in accordance with art. 17 of the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014.

The Communication Strategy must be submitted to the Monitoring Committee for approval no later than six months after the adoption of the cooperation programme by the European Commission, which took place on 20 October 2015.

2. What a communication strategy is

A communication strategy is – according to the Google Web Definition - *"the selection of appropriate communication objectives and the identification of the specific brand awareness and brand attitude strategy. This general strategy has to be linked to the roots of the organization and must be treated seriously. All of the employees and people involved in the organization must commit to the strategy 100%. There is no way that an organization can function well with the outside world if it does not have a sound plan for how to inform the public of what they do. A communication strategy can take on many different looks, ranging from a one-on-one interaction to a worldwide campaign"*[1].

In general, communication is strategic when it is completely consistent with a mission, a vision, a goal, and is able to enhance the strategic positioning of the affected institution.

More importantly, communication should be considered from the audience's perspective, i.e.: communication activities should answer the following: "as a result of this communication, my audience will...".

Transferring the general concepts above to the conceiving of a communication strategy for a transnational European Territorial Cooperation programme means identifying those elements to be communicated which are able, on one side, to promote the overall programme goals and, on the other, to inform the relevant stakeholders, including the citizens, on the outcomes achieved using public funds in an efficient and effective way.

The Communication Strategy must, finally, not be a mere theoretical exercise *per se*, but take into account the financial size of the programme, the geographical area where it will be implemented and its main characteristics; these elements shall be analysed in the following paragraphs.

[1] https://www.wpi.edu/Pubs/E-project/Available/E-project-042507-084241/unrestricted/GuidelinesForTheDevelopmentOfACommunicationStrategy.pdf

3. Drafting a communication strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian area/programme

3.1 The strategy of the Interreg V B Adriatic-Ionian programme (ADRION)

The ADRION programme affects a wide European area of 31 regions from four different ERDF Partner States and four IPA Partner States populated by more than 70 million inhabitants.

The programme addresses all the three dimensions of sustainability – social, economic and environmental elements/aspects – characterized by an uneven state of advancement in the area.

Strong disequilibrium in regional development – with regard to ageing of population, shrinking regional phenomena, high levels of unemployment, structural economic and productive gaps (especially with regard to some of the high technological sectors, patents, financial services, SMEs competitiveness performance and consequent effects on the logistic chains and transport), weak and slow economic upturn after the recent world economic crisis - highlights the need of strong efforts in territorial cohesion activities.

The Adriatic Ionian area is – on the other hand –distinguished by high potentials deriving from its natural and cultural heritage. The environmental safeguard of a fragile area also from the non-sustainable exploitation can become a key source of economic growth. Additionally, marine and maritime opportunities linked to the blue growth can offer potential of progress also to its landlocked country and regions.

The programme multifaceted political geography emphasizes its need of cohesion and, consequently, of capacity building. Notwithstanding the fact that the ADRION programme mainly builds on the previous experience of the transnational programme South East Europe and on a long cooperation tradition (IPA CBC programmes, MED programme, etc.), the cohesion process is far from being considered as completed.

Having regard to what above, the programme has defined its goal as:

...to act as a policy driver and governance innovator fostering European integration among Partner States, taking advantage from the rich natural, cultural and human resources surrounding the Adriatic and Ionian seas and enhancing economic, social and territorial cohesion in the Programme area.

The goal is in line with recital No 10 of the Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 according to which the defined transnational cooperation areas are defined *"having regard to actions needed to promote integrated territorial development. In defining those areas, the Commission should take into account the experience obtained in previous programmes and, where appropriate, macro-regional and sea-basin strategies"*.

3.2 The relation between the overall programme goal and the communication strategy

In addition to what briefly reported in the previous paragraph, further elements specific of the ADRION Cooperation Programme must be taken into account while conceiving the Communication Strategy.

The overall total funding of ADRION amounts to EUR 117.918.198, out of which EUR 8.919.082 for Priority Axis 5 (Technical Assistance). According to the categories of intervention (reference: point (b) (viii) of Art. 8.2 of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013), EUR 650.806 are devoted to information and communication activities.

Moreover, as the IPA II funds must be spent in the IPA countries or for their benefit, careful allocation of resources shall be considered.

Finally, as the Technical Assistance programme budget includes core funds for activities to be carried out at programme level and funds for initiatives to be realized at national level, further budget constraints have to be considered.

These concerns mirrors art. 116 1 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 *"(...) the communication strategy shall take into account the size of the operational programme (...) in accordance with the principle of proportionality"*.

3.3 ADRION communication strategy and the EUSAIR macro regional strategy

The geographical area covered by the ADRION Programme coincides with the one encompassed by the EU macro regional strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region (EUSAIR), which offers a framework for policy coordination reflected in a joint action plan shared between several countries or regions.

A macro region is an area including the territory of several countries or regions which shares common features or challenges.

The EUSAIR was jointly developed by the countries and stakeholders of the Adriatic-Ionian Region with the support of the European Commission. The EUSAIR was finally endorsed by the European Council in October 2014, in order to identify and address common challenges together.

Through the development and implementation of the EUSAIR, the Partner States actually aim at fostering coordination of interventions across all territories and policy areas in the Adriatic-Ionian Region and at adding value to those actions which significantly contribute to address joint challenges and opportunities.

The Strategy is structured into 4 pillars; its action plan identifies topics for joint actions, defines the related targets and will be periodically revised to take into account achievements and changes in the Region.

ADRION supports the implementation of the macro regional strategy through its Priority Axis No 4 *"Facilitate the coordination and implementation of the EUSAIR by enhancing the institutional capacity of public administrations and key stakeholders and by assisting the progress of implementation of joint priorities"*.

The expected result is the building up of the capacity of the governance actors and stakeholders to effectively implement the macro regional strategy EUSAIR.

The support to the EUSAIR shall operationally take place through the implementation of a strategic project which involves partners from all the Programme Partner States until 31 December 2022.

Due to its specificities, the strategic project shall compulsory foresee, among its outputs, also the elaboration of a communication strategy for the macro region, which shall set up synergies and complementarities with the present communication strategy on several elements, like:

- Types of used tools;
- Shared calendar of initiatives (joint initiatives);
- Location of activities;
- Complementarities among activities.

The present Communication Strategy, therefore, mainly focuses – content-wise - on the Priority Axes 1-3, whereas the strategy related to the EUSAIR shall be defined by the strategic project more in details. The latter shall take into account the content and approach of the present programme strategy.

3.4 Communication Strategy objectives

The description of Priority Axis 5 - Technical Assistance - in the Cooperation Programme foresees two Specific Objectives:

Specific Objective 1	To increase in efficiency and effectiveness the management and implementation of the cooperation programme
Specific Objective 2	To improve the support to applicants and beneficiaries and to strengthen the involvement of relevant partners in the programme implementation

The Communication Strategy primarily addresses to the Specific Objective 2, as Specific Objective 1 refers to programme management activities and prepares the basis for the implementation of Specific Objective 2.

The following communication objectives supporting Specific Objective 2 have been identified:

1. AWARENESS/INTEREST RAISING ABOUT THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN AREA

Raising awareness about the Adriatic-Ionian area means primarily unveiling its potentials and opportunities and contributing in spreading wide political concepts. In the initial programme implementation steps it will also address to the promotion of the EUSAIR, until the *ad hoc* strategic project becomes fully operational.

This objective addresses to a multifaceted audience, stretching from institutional to private bodies.

The National Contact Points can play a relevant role in identifying the key audience at national level and in creating a valuable database of contacts.

Communication activities shall take profit from all the identified media tools as thoroughly described in paragraph 6.

Indicative outline of activities

Activities to be set in place for reaching the expected result could include:

- Realization of the programme web portal;
- Collection of links to relevant documentation related to the ADRION priority axes with regard to their state of the art;
- Digital activities including direct mailings, social media, etc.;
- Targeted events.

2. MAKE THE ADRION PROGRAMME KNOWN

Being a new programme, ADRION shall create its own audience within the Interreg community and beyond; it shall also recall the communication experiences of the programmes which operated in the area to take profit from previous outcomes and challenges.

Support to potential beneficiaries and beneficiaries

The programme shall promote its overall goals, priority axes, available funds as well as technical information, in particular how to apply to get programme resources.

Communication will have twofold goals:

- supporting applicants in getting the relevant information to submit project proposals;
- supporting ADRION in receiving good quality applications which will contribute to reach its goals and outputs.

In accordance with the simplification approach introduced by the European Commission, the programme shall also emphasize the introduced simplified elements in administrative and financial procedures without forgetting highlighting the respect of financial and managerial rules.

During the projects implementation phase, communication activities shall constantly inform beneficiaries on the rules to be implemented, the relevance of good quality deliverables and the role a good and effective communication implemented by the project themselves can have.

As half of the Partner States are non EU countries, it is assumed that these activities shall contribute to capacity building and supporting the future enlargement process.

The National Contact Points shall also play a relevant role in spreading information and supporting beneficiaries.

Several media tools as described in paragraph 6 can be used.

Indicative outline of activities

Activities to be set in place for reaching the expected result could include:

- Events and training sessions;
- Participation to events organized by other institutions and programmes;
- Digital activities including targeted emails, use of social media, web;
- Manuals and guidance;
- Press releases.

3. PROMOTE ADRION OUTCOMES AND CONSTITUTE AN ADRION COMMUNITY

ADRION shall widely promote the funded operations with a focus on their outputs both in the programme area and beyond.

The promotion shall also be supported by the funded project beneficiaries themselves through their *ad hoc* communication activities.

The promotion of projects outcomes and partnerships takes generally place when the projects are in a good advancement phase. In this respect it should be noted that as the programme envisages the launch of two calls for proposals only, the programme appeal could face the risk of being considerably reduced once allocated all the funds, thus minimizing the interest on the achieved outcomes, which will presumably be available to a great extent at a later time.

Being aware of the challenges the communication activities have to face, the programme shall try to continuous mobilize the potential stakeholders, acting as a multiplier engaged in preparing the ground for future activities likely to be supported and implemented in the framework of the macro regional strategy. Networking activities among beneficiaries and stakeholders shall be encouraged to solidify virtuous examples of cooperation and put the first milestones for future cooperation activities, thus to encourage the constitution of an ADRION community of stakeholders and implementers.

In this respect special attention shall be addressed to those institutions and relevant stakeholders operating both in the area and at EU level, which will benefit from special reports on overall outputs achieved and on the programme contribution to change the status of the area (e.g.: increase of capacity of key innovation actors to be effectively involved in transnational actions for the development of a regional innovation system increase of the level of capacity for the stakeholders in the fields of natural and cultural heritage protection and tourism to sustainably valorise natural and cultural heritage as a growth asset) as highlighted in each Priority Axis of the Cooperation Programme.

Communication activities shall be addressed to a wide audience using all media tools described in paragraph 6.

Indicative outline of activities

Activities to be set in place for reaching the expected results could include:

- Events and training sessions;
- Participation to events organized by other institutions and programmes;
- Digital activities including targeted emails, use of social media;
- Press releases;
- Web portal.
- Electronic brochures;
- Studies.

3.5 Communication Strategy and programme cycle management

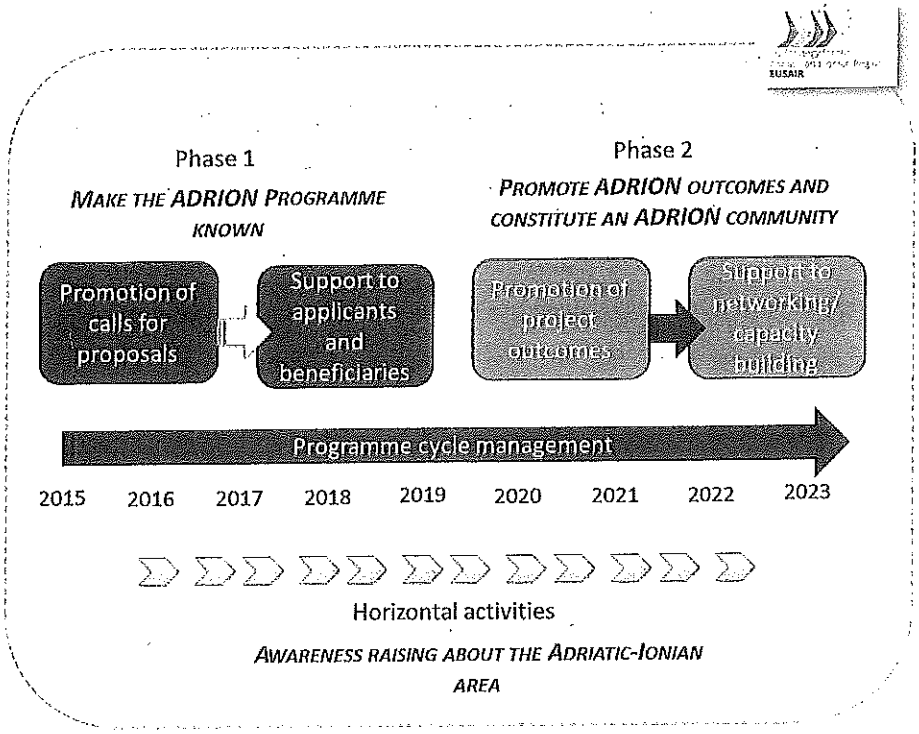
Communication activities will mirror and be indissolubly linked to the programme cycle management the programme cycle management.

Indicatively, the identified communication objectives No 2 and 3 define the key milestones of programme implementation, whereas the communication objective No 1 can be considered as horizontal.

Communication objective No 2 corresponds to the need of promoting ADRION and its financial resources to support operations, whereas communication objective No 3 corresponds to the maturity of programme implementation. In this respect the implementation of EUSAIR will provide a revamped attention to the area and to the programme.

Activities under communication objective No 3 can nevertheless take place during the implementation of the communication objective No 2.

Audiences could differ according to the phases, the foreseen types of the activities and chosen approaches.



4. The proposed approach

The proposed approach surrounding the Communication Strategy is characterized by the following key elements:

1. Web and social media shall be widely used in order to reach the widest possible audience and minimize costs;
2. Tools implemented by INTERACT shall be adopted (e.g.: joint branding);
3. Synergies shall be encouraged with EUSAIR; cooperation opportunities with other ETC Programmes operating in the area (in particular the MED transnational programme) shall be proposed;
4. Support by the National Contact Points in the identification and mobilization of the target groups at national level shall be of high importance.

The proposed approach shall ease on one side the wide spreading of information involving manifold stakeholders and institutions, and encouraging the development of a communication culture with a focus on "going local", on the other.

5. Target audience

The Cooperation Programme addresses to wide type of audience, composed by *beneficiaries*, *target groups* or *end users*, and *key actors*[2]:

Beneficiary are bodies and organizations which will be directly involved in the projects funded by the programme and will be the ones to conceive, discuss and develop the deliverables; they are responsible for

[2] See Cooperation Programme - Glossary.

initiating, implementing – or both – operations in accordance with art 2.10 of the Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013;

Target groups or end users are bodies, groups and individuals who will use the outputs of the projects or directly positively affected by the activities and results of the funded operations. Not necessarily the target groups shall receive a financial grant or has to be directly involved in the funded operation; still it may exploit project outcomes for their own benefits;

Key actors are the institutions or individuals which play an important role in the field of action of the project and are likely to contribute in a significant way to its realization. They have both political and administrative competences and technical capacities to implement the actions required for the project.

More in general, the programme addresses to stakeholders, i.e. *"people, groups or entities that have a role and interest in the objectives and implementation of a policy or programme. They include the community whose situation the policy or programme seeks to change; staff who implement activities; policy and programme managers who oversee implementation; decision-makers who decide the course of action related to the policy or programme; and supporters, critics and other persons who influence the policy or programme environment"*[3].

ADRION describes, per each Priority Axis, target groups and indicative types of beneficiaries.

However, the overall definition of target groups and indicative beneficiaries is not enough to ensure a targeted and efficient communication.

The National Contact Points play a key role in this respect through their in-depth knowledge of their country: they can identify the relevant key players at national level and contribute to increase awareness on the programme topics thanks to the use of national language, national institutional tools etc.

The process of their identification can be considered as on-going.

The definition of the target audience is one of the key milestones of the Communication Strategy, as programme information should be targeted according to their interest and needs. The strengthening of the institutional capacity of partners is, in fact, one relevant element of the European Code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the ESI Funds[4].

5.1 How to reach the target audience

ADRION will set in place several tools to reach its multiple target audience; tools shall be described having regard to the communication intervention logic described in paragraph 3.5.and in paragraph 4 – Proposed approach.

Visual identity and joint branding

During the previous programming period all Interreg programmes developed their visual identity and branding. The result of this approach was programmes' limited visibility due to the fragmentation of the approach and difficult in communicating the relevant outcomes to the relevant stakeholders, including national institutions and the European Commission. Limited visibility was also strengthened by the projects' projects' realization of their own logos and web sites, often not containing the relevant information to potential interested public. This approach determined high costs but weak effectiveness.

[3] Adapted from Handbook on monitoring and evaluating for results, Evaluation Office, UNDP, NY, 2002.
[4] Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014.

ADRION intends to join the INTERACT joint branding initiative to raise its visibility within the Interreg community and beyond. With branding harmonisation, simplification in respecting EU publicity rules, more effective communication, better results and spending should be ensured.

Additionally, the joint branding shall allow positioning ADRION in the political debate and contribute to the discussion post 2020 which has already started.

Effective brand strategy provides a central idea around which all behaviours, actions and communication topics are unified. Joint branding means:

- increase visibility and facilitate recognition;
- Reassurance (optimum quality) – the brand communicates the quality of products services and reassures customers that they have made the right choice.
- Engagement (to identify with) – the brand encourages "customers" and the community to identify with them.

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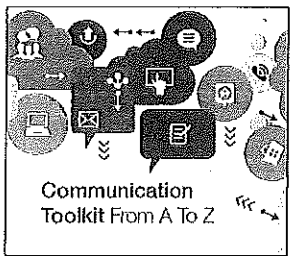
Envisaged benefits are two-folded: from the programme perspective, its visibility shall be increased as being part of a wider initiative (characterized by a joint branding); programmes shall be more easily recognizable; costs for developing the design and to the increased visibility shall be significantly reduced; from the project perspective, the identification of the project with the programme shall be stronger.

To increase the visibility of the programme and to reduce costs, the Interreg ADRION programme will positively contribute also to other initiatives started by INTERACT (such as European Cooperation Days and European Maritime Days) and by other Interreg programmes that share the same geographical area or other relevant cross-fertilization events.



ADRION shall also take profit from the Communication Toolkit drafted by INTERACT aimed at:

- Combine lessons from Programmes' experience and draw guidelines under one toolkit;
- Boost quality of communication works in synergy with other Programmes;
- Contribute in understanding of harmonised tools and Interreg branding.

6. Communication activities and tools

This paragraph provides an overview of the activities and tools ADRION will use to implement its Communication Strategy.

6.1 ADRION website portal

Linked to the communication objectives	AWARENESS RAISING ABOUT THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN AREA
	MAKE THE ADRION PROGRAMME KNOWN
	PROMOTE ADRION OUTCOMES AND CONSTITUTE AN ADRION COMMUNITY

The ADRION website portal will be the primarily source of information on the programme and its area. It will be regularly updated providing information on activities performed at programme level.

It will contain links with the relevant institutional web sites, e.g.: European Commission (relevant thematic Directions General and Regional and Urban Policy), international organisations operating in the area and other ETC programmes (e.g.: Italy-Croatia, Italy-Albania-Montenegro, MED programme and Interreg EUROPE[5]). A link with EUSAIR web site shall be ensured as well.

According with Annex XII of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 the Managing Authority shall ensure that the ADRION strategy and objectives as well as funding opportunities offered are disseminated widely to potential beneficiaries and all interested parties, with details of the financial support from the Funds concerned.

In particular, the wide dissemination of the following information shall be ensured:

a) Funding opportunities under ADRION and the launching of application calls;

b) Relevant information for potential beneficiaries namely:

- application package (e.g.: templates, forms, guidance, manual in electronic forms etc.) and relevant information to the execution of their tasks and the implementation of operations respectively (art. 125.1.c) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013);
- eligibility of expenditure conditions to be met in order to qualify for support under an operational programme;
- legal framework;
- conditions to be met in order to qualify for support under an operational programme;
- a description of the procedures for examining applications for funding and of the time periods involved and the criteria for selecting the operations to be supported;
- the contacts at national, regional or local level that are able to provide information on the operational programmes, including the National Contact Points;
- the responsibility of potential beneficiaries to inform the public about the aim of the operation and the support from the Funds to the operation;
- FAQs;
- templates, guidelines, manuals, etc.

c) A list of operations in a spreadsheet format, which allows data to be sorted, searched, extracted and compared, including a summary of the projects goals and/or activities; the list of operations

[5] The Interreg EUROPE programme shall set in place policy learning platforms to provide policy intelligence in support of ongoing EU wide regional policy learning in the field of research and innovation, SMEs competitiveness, low-carbon economy, environmental and resource efficiency. The platforms shall enable policy learning and in the identified fields by Interreg EUROPE. These activities and services will increase knowledge and awareness of existing practices and experiences in this field and build up skills and capacities of actors (staff and organisations) involved in the development and implementation of specific knowledge in ETC communities in the identified fields.

shall be regularly updated every six months and provide per each operation the following information:

— beneficiary name (only of legal entities; no natural persons shall be named);
— operation name;
— operation summary;
— operation start date;
— operation end date (expected date for physical completion or full implementation of the operation);
— total eligible expenditure allocated to the operation;
— Union co-financing rate, as per priority axis;
— operation postcode; or other appropriate location indicator;
— country;
— name of category of intervention for the operation in accordance with point (b) (vi) of the first subparagraph of Article 96(2);
— date of the last update of the list of operations.

In accordance with art. 13 of the Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, the web site shall also ensure the dissemination of the guidance prepared by the Commission on how to effectively access and use the ESI Funds, and on how to exploit complementarities with other instruments of relevant Union policies.

Subscribers to the email service shall receive information on the most recent published news and programme initiatives.

The ADRION web site portal shall devote targeted sections to all the funded operations for uploading the relevant information on their achievements. In that way ADRION intends - through a unique web location – to ensure quality of delivered information and avoid future loss of data. It will also assist project coordinators to generate an effective flow of information and publicity about the objectives and results of their work, the contribution to cohesion policy, the value of collaboration on a transnational scale, and the benefits to EU citizens in general.

Infographics shall be used when possible to make the message more immediate and understandable.

Format accessible for people with disabilities: the ADRION web site portal shall ease its visualization to partially-sighted people.

6.1.1 Use of eMS data and links with other relevant web portals and databases

Linked to the communication objectives	MAKE THE ADRION PROGRAMME KNOWN

	PROMOTE ADRION OUTCOMES AND CONSTITUTE AN ADRION COMMUNITY

The ADRION web site portal shall also use data elaborated by the eMS (the tool used for the submission of applications and the monitoring of the funded ones) on the state of the art of approved operations, data, deliverables, achievements etc.

eMS will also allow the automatic transmission of all the relevant data to the KEEP data base[6] as well as the development of online tools for project ideas, partner searches and a function for displaying cooperation projects and outputs on geographic maps.

With reference to the previous paragraph 6.1, links with the Interreg Europe policy learning platforms shall be ensured to the possible maximum extent.

Format accessible for people with disabilities: the ADRION web site portal shall ease its visualization to partially-sighted people.

6.2 Use of social media

Linked to the communication objectives	AWARENESS RAISING ABOUT THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN AREA
	MAKE THE ADRION PROGRAMME KNOWN
	PROMOTE ADRION OUTCOMES AND CONSTITUTE AN ADRION COMMUNITY

Social media represent an effective and free of charge way to communicate directly with wider target audiences in a more interactive and dynamic way.

ADRION will monitor the relevance of the social media platforms (e.g.: LinkedIn, Twitter, Pinterest, Facebook) and consider their potentials in accordance with the programme needs. Most suitable social media shall be selected in accordance with the programme goals, the type of news to be spread, the services to be offered, the synergies with the users. Social media will be used by the Joint Secretariat to reinforce links with applicants, stakeholders and the wide public using an easy-to-understand language.

Format accessible for people with disabilities: partly, depending on disabilities.

6.3 Programme communication manual

Linked to the communication objectives	MAKE THE ADRION PROGRAMME KNOWN
	PROMOTE ADRION OUTCOMES AND CONSTITUTE AN ADRION COMMUNITY

[6] KEEP is the source of information on the projects and partners of Territorial Cooperation managed by INTERACT. This includes the INTERREG programmes as well as the IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession) and the ENPI (European Neighbouring and Partnership Instrument) cross-border cooperation programmes. www.keep.eu.