

Minutes of 4th Interim Meeting

May 28th, 2019

“Hotel Garden”, Ohrid, Republic of North Macedonia

The Interim meeting was organized as part of the Working Package 1 in the framework of the project “SMEInnoBoost” financed under the Interreg - Balkan-Mediterranean 2014 - 2020 Transnational Program.

The meeting was hosted by the State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia (PP3), Albania and took place in the conference hall of “Hotel Garden” in Ohrid on May 28th, 2019.

Representatives of all project partners, except for PP5, and members of the Steering Committee were present in the meeting.

Ms. Eleonora Negulova (Project Manager, Lead Partner) welcomed the participants wishing for a successful implementation of the present and upcoming activities and a fruitful cooperation among all partners in this common project, marking the importance of the good decisions making regarding achieving the project goals as well as exchange of experience.

According to the Agenda, the meeting continued with presentation of the current status of implementation of the project WP’s, presented by each project partner separately.

The **PP2** (National Statistical Institute of the Republic of Bulgaria, Bulgaria) representatives informed the partnership about the activities they have realised from the start of the project until now. They informed the participants about the survey that was conducted on the field, based on a sample. A draft tabulation template for the output data resulted from the statistical survey on innovation activity of SMEs was done in March 2019. Also they informed about the current and next activities: Data checking, validation, weighting, processing, aggregating and tabulating the results from the survey - (currently ongoing activity); Dissemination of the final tabulation template to PP3 and PP4 (11 tables with around 4000 cells) - (May 2019). About procurement, they had 4 procurements for:

1/ Organization of the workshop in Slivek - (January 2018)

2/ Provision of methodological support for development of the national survey Questionnaire - (February 2018)

3/ Development of special software for the Questionnaire and for data matching with records from Innovation Capacity Self-Assessment - (September 2018)

4/ Delivery of 50 tablets for data collection by the interviewers - (December 2018)

Representatives from **PP3** (State Statistical Office) continued with presentation of the progress between the two interim meetings. They noted that they have purchased 30 laptops and 10 PCs necessary for conducting the real survey. Also, they informed about the conducting of the survey, which was done with the help of enumerators. They were selected by means of a public announcement and they used the laptops for data entry. In total, 1058 companies were included in the survey and the response rate is 70%. PP3 also informed the other partners that PP5 is planning to withdraw from the project due to financial problems. No official information has been received by them, yet, however the possibility to withdraw is very realistic. LP informed PP3 that in this case, the only feasible solution is for PP3 to take over the remaining activities and obligations of PP5, together with their budget. PP3 informed the LP that they will make consultations with the Director General and only upon his approval can they accept this proposal. It was noted that in case PP3 do not take over the activities of PP5, then the whole project will be jeopardised and negative mark will be given to the project.

Next, representatives from **PP4** (Institute of Statistics Republic of Albania) informed about the activities that were realised from the beginning of the project until now. They purchased 40 tablets to be used by the enumerators for conducting the survey on SMEs, contracted the Company in charge of data collection, data processing; data control, data clean and data tabulation. Also, they had external expertise to assist the project manager for the preparation of the progress reports. At the moment, they have ongoing procurement for organisation of the Innovation Summit in Tirana. In relation to problems, they informed the partnership that there is not budget foreseen for translation of the SAT questionnaires.

PP3 also informed about the same problem – neither they nor PP5 have budget for this translation.

PP5 was not present at the interim meeting.

PP6 (Foundation Regional Development Agency (S.M.E.) of Korce, Albania) informed the partners that in the period between the two interim meetings no specific activities have been realised. They had regular communication with the other project partners and they were regularly updating the project's website with information obtained from the partners.

PP8 (Foundation for Research & Technology Hellas, Science & Technology Park of Crete) presented the idea of the benchmarking for SAT. The idea is the following: the aggregated data obtained from the statistical survey will be imported in SAT and they will also be used for the

benchmarking. Additionally, the data from the SAT will be used for the benchmarking, but also additional data from the participating SMEs will contribute to the benchmarking procedure. Benchmarking will be done on national level, regional level, on the level of area of specialisation and benchmark in general. During the presentation, a discussion developed about the SAT and the benchmarking reports. In order to obtain relevant information from SAT, a minimum of 50 companies per country need to be registered in the SAT. At the beginning, only ICT companies should be registered in the SAT, in order to be able to make relevant comparisons, because the statistical survey included only companies from the ICT sector. The benchmarking report will be only about the ICT sector. PP8 got a recommendation to develop a mobile version of the SAT. Also, PP8 informed the partnership that they will send them a draft benchmarking report for commenting.

After presentation of the individual progress presentations, the Lead partner presented the SAT. It needs to be translated into the languages of all the project partners. Ms. Negulova mentioned that the user guide needs to be shortened, because it is big and users will not be keen on consulting it.

Further on, the LP has made an overall progress presentation in order to see the progress.

The technical progress of the project is visible (the main deliverables are approximately on time) – SAT and clustering system have already Beta versions. Benchmark reports have to be prepared as per common structure – LP to summaries all of them. Each partner's meeting is also used for project management issues, especially for reporting and how to use the budget, according to the time-plan, application form and type of the costs envisaged. Reporting is provided relatively on time. The forthcoming report 01.01.2019-30.06.2019 should be send to the LP latest 20th of June, 2019. All PP should be more efficient in spending the funds, because about 70 % of the project life passed and only 25% of the project budget is reimbursed. The costs are not consumed, according to the planned budget for each partner and available resources. Many partners have accrued expenses, that are not paid and as such not claimed yet. This is linked to delayed funding of verified expenditures. The process of verification of the costs by FLC is more time consuming than expected.

After this presentation followed discussion and decision taking. The following points were raised:

1. According to the information provided by PP3 – PP5 is going to leave the project and in this respect there are two options:

Option 1 – The core activities of PP5 /together with the relevant budget/ is reallocated to PP3 who is taking the responsibility of the main results for NMacedonia: Pilot phase /10 SMEs/ + Benchmark report for NM + Workshop

Option 2 – PP5 is staying in the project and is achieving the results pro-bono with the support of all PPs.

PP3 opted for option 1 i.e. should PP5 withdraw from the project they will take over their activities and the respective budget. However, PP5 should send official information whether they will leave or stay

2. PP6 to prepare the criteria for selection of pilot SMEs and the methodology of assessment during the pilot phase as well as the structure of the Innovation Action Plan to be customized and provided to pilot SMEs in BG, NM, AL

3. PP8 to support PP6 to prepare ToR for Benchmark reports in BG, NM, AL

4. Innovation summit in AL to be organized after the selection criteria for pilot SMEs is ready in order the workshop in Korcha /PP8/ to be held together with the event in Tirana /PP6/

5. Innovation summit in Athens has to invite representatives of the Cypriot observing partner – Software Engineering and Internet Technologies Lab - University of Cyprus - PP9. PP8 to contact them and to ask for feedback on the ongoing WP4 & WP5

6. What should be the SMEINNOBOOST booklet - Booklet of the successful Innovator

7. Animated film for SAT for promotion and marketing of the tool – suggestions

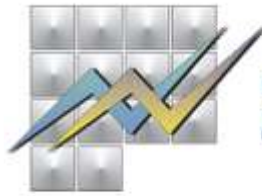
8. PR4 to be provided to LP till 5th of July, 2019. Financial plan per month till the project end, incl. FLC – to be provided to LP latest 31th of May, 2019

9. Requests for modification – latest 7th of June, 2019

10. All PP should send breakdown of costs till the end of the project, in total, by the end of May 2019

11. Results from the innovation survey will be received in 11 Excel tables by the end of July 2019.

12. The final meeting will take place between 10-20 January 2020.



Prepared by:

PP3 – State Statistical Office