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**“Market Changer”**

**“MarCh”**

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**“Assessment Report on Pilot Application of**  
**BuSSes”**



*Agency for Transnational Training  
and Development*

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# ASSESSMENT REPORT ON PILOT APPLICATION OF BUSSES

## Preface

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The project MarCh - Market Changer- aims at strengthening the local Collective Business Bodies in the areas of its implementation, so as for them to become able to effectively respond to their institutional role, in supporting the businesses – members of theirs- to coping with the current challenges and strengthening their competitiveness.

MarCh, taking into account the inability of local businesses in its area of implementation to compete with the multinational chains and the increase of the international competition, as derived from the globalization of the economy and the internationalization of the trade, draws up development strategies for its areas of intervention. Furthermore MarCh creates “Business Supporting Structures” which, under the guidance of the local Collective Business Bodies, carry out pilot actions to improving the competitiveness of businesses in the project area.

MarCh is implemented as a project of the INTERREG VA Cooperation Program Greece – Bulgaria 2014 – 2020 and is co-financed by European Union (ERDF) resources, at 85% of its budget, and at a rate of 15% from resources of the member states of the EU participating in the Programme.

MarCh project is implemented in Greece in the Regional Units of Thrace (Regional Units of Xanthi, Rhodope and Evros) and in the Administrative District of Kardzhali in Bulgaria.

The following organizations participate as partners (Project Beneficiaries – PBs) in the MarCh project:

- Agency for Transnational Training and Development - TRANSCOOP, as Coordinator
- Center for the Development of Commerce and Entrepreneurship - KAELE
- Federation of Commerce and Entrepreneurship of Thrace – OEE,
  - in Greece and
- Regional Industrial Association of Kardzhali – RIA Kardzhali,
  - in Bulgaria.

The budget of MarCh amounts to € 678,708.77.

## Description of the BuSSes

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The MarCh project envisaged the establishment and operation of Business Supporting Structures (BuSSes), to systematically provide assistance and guidance to businesses in the project areas, in order to utilize their comparative advantages and strengthen their competitiveness.

The aim of BuSSes was to be the mechanisms for providing support services to businesses – members of the Collective Entrepreneurship Bodies of the project in order to meet their needs in relation to their competitiveness.

The Business Supporting Structures – BuSSes) were foreseen as an action within the framework of Work Package (WP) 4 of the project MarCh, - Devising Business Supporting Structures' (BuSSes) Infrastructure - , while their mode of intervention and operation was specified in WP 3 (Development of Strategies), WP 4 and WP 5 (Pilot Implementation).

### **WP 3 Developing Strategies**

Action 3.1 Mapping Areas

Action 3.2 Elaborating Vision and Strategies with Local Stakeholders

Action 3.3 Communicating Vision and Strategies to Local Communities

Action 3.4 Semi Structured Research to Agri Food Businesses

Action 3.5 Synthesis of Results and Definition on Intervention Axes

### **WP 4 Devising Business Support Structures' (BuSS) Infrastructure**

Action 4.1 Action Plans for BuSSes

Action 4.2 Operating BuSSes (Purchasing equipment +operational costs)

Action 4.3 Digital Data Base for Branch Professionals

Action 4.4 Labor market digital platform

Action 4.5 Digital market place with business' assessment tool

### **WP 5 Pilot Application**

Action 5.1 Strengths' Weaknesses' Diagnoses for 2X50 enterprises

Action 5.2 Designing and Coaching Business Plans for 2X20 businesses

Action 5.3 Counseling to 60 entrepreneurs each country

Action 5.4 Horizontal Support – Seminars on: innovation, e commerce, branding, and extroversion

The services that the BuSSes were expected to provide, in principle as part of their pilot operation in the context of the project, and then as structures of the Collective Business Bodies of the project partners, related to the following types of interventions:

- Studies, in principle in the logic of recording the areas' existing situation and preparing development strategies for the region and its businesses
- Conducting field surveys to record business needs
- Elaboration of diagnostic reports for businesses in order to identify their strong and weak points
- Preparing Business Plans (Business Plans) for companies
- Providing consulting support to businesses
- Human resources training
- Operation of the three digital platforms developed in the framework of MarCh:
  - Job market platform
  - Platform to find external partners for companies
  - Platform for the promotion and promotion of businesses in the project areas
- Business networking
- Hosting events for local businesses.

The operation of BuSSes should have to cover the requirements for the successful implementation of the above interventions as follows:

- To ensure the necessary infrastructure in places for the implementation of each category of interventions carried out by BuSSes
- The necessary equipment should be available
- The necessary human resources should be available.

## Application of BuSSes

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### Infrastructure and Equipment

The infrastructure and equipment requirements were fulfilled in both project areas (i.e. Greece and Bulgaria) and can be summarized as follows:

- Meeting room
- A room with the possibility of holding individual and/or parallel interpersonal meetings
- Seminar hall with the appropriate equipment
- Office room
- PCs, projectors and internet connection

The above requirements concerned the structure of BuSSes in Kardzhali, the central structure of BuSSes in Alexandroupolis, while for the rest of the structures in Xanthi and Komotini, these requirements were applied occasionally depending on the interventions implemented each time.

The Federation of Commerce and Entrepreneurship of Thrace proceeded with the purchase of:

(12) Computers

(1) Server

(2) Multifunctional Printers

(2) Video Screens - Projectors and

(1) Flipchart – whiteboard

Office equipment (chairs, desks, boards etc)

The Regional Industrial Association Kardzhali proceeded with the purchase of:

(12) Computers

(1) Multimedia projector

(1) Printer

(1) Video display (monitor)

(2) Router WiFi (1 for the project staff network and 1 for the trainees/guests)

Installation and networking

Office equipment (Videoscreen, Flipchart – whiteboard, Seminar chairs with integrated tables)

### **The premises in Alexandroupolis**

Chamber of Evros

307 Dimokratias Avenue

4th floor

Alexandroupolis

### **The premises in Kardzhali**

Paradise centre, 1-st floor

Address: 9 "Pirin" str., 6600 Kardzhali, BG

## **Human Resources**

For the implementation of the actions of BuSSes within the framework of the "Market Changer" project, there was a responsible in the area of Kardzhali as well as in the 3 areas of Thrace, (Alexandroupolis, Xanthi and Komotini), for the supervision and management of the activities at the local level.

The largest part of actions of BuSSes has been carried out by the other project partners (TRANSCOOP and KAELE) and their collaborators, as well as by external partners of the Federation of Commerce and Entrepreneurship of Thrace and the Regional Industrial Association of Kardzhali. However, there was an active involvement of the scientific staff of both the Federation of Thrace and the Association of Kardzhali in the interventions of the other partners, in order to achieve osmosis and consolidation of the generated knowledge and experience.

## **Activities of BuSSes**

### **Mapping Areas**

Two studies (desk analysis) have been carried out, one for the area of Thrace in Greece and one for the district of Kardzhali in Bulgaria.

The studies aimed to identify the advantages and disadvantages, opportunities and threats of the project area, both as a geographic area and in terms of local entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship in general and the agri-food sector in particular were examined. The studies were based on statistical data and on bibliographic sources with an extensive analysis of the issues of the region as a place for business development.

The studies resulted in the following strengths and weaknesses of entrepreneurship in each of the two areas.

## In Thrace

### Strengths of Entrepreneurship in Thrace

- The supply of local raw materials by the companies as well as the adoption of modern methods in raw material production (e.g. contract farming),
- The significant degree of processing of agricultural products
- Recent Development Initiatives of research bodies in collaboration with local collective business bodies can effectively support the entrepreneurship in Thrace
- Thrace's environment creates the conditions for special local products in the agri-food sector, for products with "green" practices
- The environment of Thrace creates the conditions for Sustainable Tourism

### Weaknesses of Entrepreneurship in Thrace

- The limited volume of business exports
- The lack of recognition of local products and services
- The limited online services of businesses
- The lack of innovation of the businesses
- The lack of cooperation between companies and research institutions
- The difficulties in finding appropriate human resources is a very important problem for the development of the entrepreneurship in the area
- The inability of the Local Collective Bodies to implement actions to support the local businesses and contribute to improving their competitiveness

## In Kardzhali

### Strengths of Entrepreneurship in Kardzhali

- Presence of a well-developed economic sector including automotive industry, garment industry, food industry and mining industry
- Suitable infrastructure for the development of small, medium and large businesses in the municipal centers
- The presence of direct transport connectivity between the district's municipal centers, ensuring the development of local supply chains across all economic sectors
- Location of the area, through which passes the European transport corridor /EETC/ No 9 Helsinki - Alexandroupolis
- Increase in technologically upgraded enterprises
- Favorable climatic conditions for crop and livestock production
- Availability of large areas for the production of environmental friendly plant and animal products (organic farming)

### Weaknesses of Entrepreneurship in Kardzhali

- Low levels of productivity and resource efficiency in most SMEs, due to a low share of high-tech enterprises
- Strong technological obsolescence and low degree of competitiveness of enterprises in Kardzhali district



- Obsolete equipment, characterized by high running costs for some enterprises
- There has been a continuing subsequent negative impact of the COVID-19 crisis leading to business closures in Kardzhali district.
- Shortage of skilled labour
- Weak level of entrepreneurial initiative - the sources of income are mainly formed by wages, with its relative share being the largest
- Shortage of skilled personnel with appropriate education and experience to work in a range of sectors in the real economy
- Sustained migration of young and skilled professionals to other more developed regions and EU countries.

### Semi Structured Research to Agri Food Businesses

Two researches have been carried out, one for the area of Thrace in Greece and one for the district of Kardzhali in Bulgaria.

The researches aimed to record the strong and weak points of the businesses in the agri-food sector in the project area, so that the interventions to be carried out within the project be targeted and respond to the needs identified by the businesses themselves. The sample of the companies used referred to processing companies in the agri-food sector of each area.

### **In Thrace**

#### **Strong Points**

- The supply of local raw materials is a strong point of the area's businesses, on the one hand because it contributes to the local economy, and on the other hand because it creates the prospect of producing products distinct from those of other areas - products with local characteristics and with the potential for differentiation in the market.
- The application of new modern methods of raw material procurement (e.g. contract farming) is a strong point for the businesses of the area, since on the one hand it ensures a steady flow of raw materials for the business and ensures the quality it demands, on the other hand because it contributes to the support of farmers and therefore also to the support of local communities.
- The increase in turnover during the last three years of many of the companies of the sample is a strong point for the companies of the region, highlighting the importance and prospects of the agro-food sector of Thrace and especially of the sector of animal products.
- The promotion of local products in the European market of certain business sectors is a strong point for the businesses of the area, highlighting their potential in the promotion of their products in demanding foreign markets.

- The significant interest of local businesses in improving production processes and in the development of new products/services is a strong point for businesses in the region that can push them to develop innovative solutions to enhance their competitiveness.
- It is certainly a strong point for Thracian businesses to produce excellent quality products, however, because this is the subjective opinion of the producers and not of the consumers, certification actions for the products produced (e.g. produced with raw materials from PGI or PDO products, etc.) would objectively ensure this point of view.

#### **Weak Points of Businesses in Thrace**

- The problem of limited exports of businesses in the area is a weak point for them, showing their low degree of extroversion
- The very limited development of e-commerce is a weak point for businesses in the area, thus limiting their growth, especially considering the remoteness of their region
- The business sector "Production of vegetable", "Plant and animal production and related activities" and "Distillery" should look for the causes of the downward turnover that their businesses present in the last three years, through the search for consultancy support
- The lack of innovation is a weak point of the area's businesses, thus limiting their competitiveness. Small businesses in particular, without adopting innovative processes or products will find difficulties to grow in today's market
- The local Collective Entities supporting entrepreneurship could contribute significantly to the promotion of innovation and competitiveness in local businesses, e.g. with the organization of scientific workshops (workshops) per branch of activity, the provision of consulting services, the training of personnel, the organization of business missions, etc. and in this way to strengthen the competitiveness of their member companies
- The fact that finding staff or partners is achieved mainly through acquaintances and friends is a weak point for the entrepreneurship of the area. Here too, the contribution of the local Collective Bodies supporting entrepreneurship could be catalytic, e.g. by creating a relevant labor supply and demand platform, etc
- The difficulty of finding suitable human resources is a very important problem for the development of entrepreneurship in the region. This is a complex problem to which the actions of the local collective support bodies for entrepreneurship can contribute, as previously mentioned, for example with the creation of a digital platform for labor supply and demand, however, sectoral surveys are also required to identify the needs in specialties and to promote subsequent actions to create and find the relevant specialties

- It is a weak point of the companies, that half of them have not organized a training seminar in the last 2 years for their staff (or their staff has not participated in a seminar organized in the area by other agencies). The continuous and very rapid development of technology requires continuous training of the staff. And this is where the local Collective Bodies can contribute substantially
- Difficulties in promoting export activity and marketing are also a weak point for businesses, fields that could also be covered by the actions of local collective bodies

### In Kardzhali

#### Strengths of Businesses in Kardzhali

- Almost half of the companies have been in business for more than 10 years, indicating good stability and experience of the business
- Good relations with customers and "fast processing of orders"
- The supply of the main local raw materials from the Kardzhali area or from other areas of Bulgaria
- In terms of innovation, priority is given to methods of promoting and selling products, as well as improving the organization of business processes and, last but not least, securing financing for the activity.

#### Weaknesses of Businesses in Kardzhali

- Lack of attitude/culture of business cooperation and partnerships on the side of the entrepreneurs in Kardzhali district
- More than 60% of companies do not foresee hiring new employees in 2023, which may be determined by the uncertain global situation marked by pandemics, wars and natural disasters, and those that do claim new jobs limit them to a maximum of 5.
- Low export potential and insufficient opportunity to enter other markets, including lack of relative knowledge and skills
- Low presence on the Internet
- Low participation of employees in training programs
- Difficulties in products' marketing, as the main problem, in conjunction with the common problem of finding appropriate staff
- The channels for the search of employees are through recommendations from known persons and advertisements on the Internet and social media.
- Continuous migration of young and skilled professionals to other more developed regions and EU countries
- Insufficient support from local collective entrepreneurship bodies

**The common challenges related to the businesses in the agro-industry and the food sector in both areas (Thrace in GR and in Kardzhali district in BG), are mainly related to the needs on:**

- Reaching other than the local, the regional and the national markets
- Increasing online positioning
- Incorporating of innovative methods to reorganize business processes and increase sales
- Stronger use of modern marketing tools to achieve business goals
- Increasing the knowledge, skills and culture of entrepreneurs and employees
- Creating a structure for finding suitable human resources is a very important problem for the development of entrepreneurship
- The Collective Bodies of Entrepreneurship must respond to their responsibilities with respect to their institutional role and towards their members and take initiatives to strengthening the competitiveness of their businesses

#### **Elaborating Vision and Strategies with Local Stakeholders**

Based on the data of the above researches and studies, the SWOT analyses of the Area, the SWOT analyses of the Local Entrepreneurship, a strategic development plan has been prepared for the project and mainly for the entrepreneurship development for each area.

The Central Objective - Vision and the Operational Objectives as well as the Actions for each Operational Objective in each project area of the project have been specified.

#### **In Thrace**

The vision for the area of Thrace is shaped around the natural environment of the region, the area's comparative advantage, which, if properly deployed by the local businesses, can provide them with dynamism and strengthen their competitiveness. This element is enforced taking into account in particular the impact of the new EU policies on the economic environment, with regard to the climate, the sustainability and the development of the European rural areas (Green Deal, Farm to Fork (F2F), National Strategic Plan for the new CAP, etc.).

**Thus, the vision for the area of Thrace is formulated as an area with a rich and unspoiled natural environment, with a rich cultural tradition and with businesses that utilize these advantages in the production of high quality products and services which integrate and highlight the comparative advantage of the area.**

On the basis of the above, five Operational Objectives for the local businesses are formulated:

- The first one focuses on creating a common consciousness at the local community and the local actors on the advantage of their area and the realization of the vision

- The second Operational Objective regards the adaptation of products and services to the market demand and the consumer requirements
- The third Objective enhances the cooperation between businesses to creating economies of scale
- The fourth refers to the promotion of the area's brand in the market
- The fifth Operational Objective concerns the empowerment of the collective business organizations, as a guiding force for the competitiveness of the local enterprises

### **In Kardzhali**

**The vision for the development of Kardzhali district over the next period is the "Preservation and diversification of the existing businesses, the attraction of new investors and the improvement of the technical infrastructure so as to make Kardzhali district a fast developing area in Bulgaria".**

#### **The Strategic Objectives:**

- Strategic Objective 1: Improving the Economic Climate and the Business Attractiveness of the Region through Investment in Human Capital and Business related Infrastructure
- Strategic Objective 2: Balanced Development of the Human Environment and Reduction of Regional Disparities in Quality of Life. The regional and local infrastructure elements are a major factor stimulating business development and economic balancing of the territory. The development of regional infrastructure is also a potential source for attracting investment, creating new jobs and improving quality of life
- Strategic Objective 3: Developing Administrative Capacity and Increasing Opportunities for Attracting Investment in the Region

### **The Digital Tools Developed**

In accordance with the results of the studies and surveys on the needs of the businesses, carried out in the project area, three digital platforms have been developed for each of the two Cross Border project areas.

Aim of the three platforms was to facilitate the operation of the local businesses, meeting distinct difficulties raised by the businesses themselves as stated in the interviews carried out in the context of the field surveys.

The three digital platforms developed were the following:

- a) an e-market place aiming at the extroversion of the local enterprises and their promotion,

Objectives of the digital market (e-marketplace) are:

- to help especially local small businesses to promote their products
  - small businesses will have their own storefront, online
  - the envisaged integrated evaluation tool will allow customers to express their opinion, thus leading to the improvement of the services and products offered by the companies and to the improvement of their quality
- b) an e-platform for hiring professionals and experts so as to facilitate the access to know how and expertise,
- c) an e-labor market platform to facilitating the recruitment of staff, one of the major problems raised by the entrepreneurs in the surveys.

Objectives of the above platforms are:

- the facilitation of local businesses in meeting needs in specialized professionals, experts, human resources and, conversely, to help professionals to get in touch with businesses.

### **Strengths' Weaknesses' Diagnoses for 2X50 enterprises**

#### **In Greece**

Diagnostic reports were prepared for 50 manufacturing companies in the agro-food sector of Thrace (in the 3 Regional Units: Xanthi, Rhodopi and Evros) with the aim of highlighting their strong and weak points. The diagnostic report, by this way, could be a support for the entrepreneurs on improving competitiveness of their businesses.

For the preparation of the diagnostic reports, 3 meetings were held between consultants and representatives of each company.

In the 1st meeting the representatives of the businesses in each Regional Unit were informed about the project and the questionnaire that the consultants would use was presented to them.

In the 2nd meeting, the consultants visited the companies at their headquarters where the questionnaire was completed in the form of interview.

In the 3rd meeting, the consultants visited again the companies at their headquarters and discussed with them the conclusions of the diagnostic report as well as the proposals for the improvement of the competitiveness of each company.

The elements that were examined and mentioned in the relevant reports prepared for each company, indicatively, were:

- The object of the business,

- Quality data of its product/s,
- The market to which the company was addressed,
- The sales / distribution network,
- The raw materials and their origin,
- Evaluation of the financial data of the operation of the business
- The company's staff: people, specialties, competence in relation to the company's strategy,
- The mechanical equipment of the enterprise,
- Business innovation elements,
- Business strategy and potential exploitation of the region's advantages,
- The weak points of the business,
- Their improvement potential

Every diagnostic report (of each company) was individualized however some common elements have been emerged:

#### **Strengths**

- Several businesses have a strong local profile and competitive advantages that allow them to stand out
- The special characteristics of the area and the high quality of the products are two key strengths for some companies, giving them a competitive advantage in the market
- Some businesses have succeeded in maintaining a steady clientele that appreciates their products
- Some businesses have a high level of know-how and expertise that makes them stand out

#### **Weaknesses**

- Many enterprises referred to the increasing production costs due to increasing precision in raw materials, increasing energy costs, which affect the production costs and the sales prices of companies' products making them uncompetitive
- Many enterprises referred to the lack of trained and specialized personnel that prevents them from operating effectively

- Many enterprises mentioned the changes in climate, the natural disasters and the changes in the environment that have immediate effects on raw materials and therefore to the product quality.
- Many businesses cited a lack of the marketing activities, which is a sector that needs more attention and investment in order for the business to improve their market presence, their expansion into new markets
- Some businesses pointed out that distance of their business from the centers increases the cost of transportation and distribution
- Some companies referred to the short life span of the product as a weak point as it may limit long-term competitiveness
- Some businesses mentioned as weakness their limited production capacity, as they produce limited quantities of products, or their delay in creating new products to meet new needs of consumers
- Several companies cited that the entrepreneurship support measures that have been provided so far (such as grants, loans, etc.) have not met the needs and expectations of the businesses.

### **In Bulgaria**

Diagnostic reports were prepared for 50 manufacturing companies in the agro-food sector of Kardzhali with the aim of highlighting their strong and weak points.

The diagnostic analysis was carried out for each entrepreneur, and reflects his particularities.

It can be summarized that the factors that positively (**Strengths**) influence the development of businesses in the agriculture and food sector are mainly determined by a limited market and these are in particular, the:

- Creating and establishing a name and brand
- Better trade placement
- Maintaining of the quality of products/services, including the:
  - Maintaining the quality (recipe) of traditional products
  - Guarantee of use of quality raw materials and materials
  - Provision of qualified personnel
  - Availability of good infrastructure
  - Use of modern equipment and technologies
  - Enrichment of the range of products and services offered.
- Availability of owned land, buildings and transport
- Keeping fixed costs low



- Family business - use of family workers
- Establishing partnerships and long-term relationships with suppliers and customers

At the same time, a negative influence (**Weaknesses**) is indicated by:

- the absence or the inadequacy of the above factors, and
- the recently increased influence of permanently negative trends such as:

**at global (worldwide) level:**

- Wars
- Pandemics and health measures
- Economic crises

**at regional level:**

- Labor market
- Real Estate Prices
- Energy resources prices
- High general inflation of consumer prices
- Unfair competition
- Unregulated imports
- Frequent changes in the regulatory framework
- Too much administrative burden and control, etc.

### Designing and Coaching Business Plans for 2X20 businesses

#### **In Greece**

20 business plans were prepared for an equal number of businesses and/or future entrepreneurs in the processing of the agro-food sector with an emphasis on start-ups and new businesses in the Thrace region.

4 meetings were held between consultants and representatives of each company.

In the 1st meeting with the representatives of businesses in each Regional Unit, the representatives were informed about the business plans.

During the next 3 meetings, the consultants visited the companies at their headquarters as well as the start ups in the Incubator of Alexandroupolis, where they acted “educationally” towards the companies, preparing the business plan in collaboration with each company and

their executives, so that they could understand the critical parameters that are associated with the successful implementation of the business idea.

The role of consultants in this context included:

**Current Situation Assessment:** Consultants discussed with the businesses and analyzed the current situation of each business, including its structure, financial condition, products or services it offers and its competitive environment.

**Data collection:** The consultants worked with each business to gather important data and information about the business and its market.

**Analysis and evaluation of options:** Based on the data collected, the consultants analyzed and evaluated various options and strategies for the future development of the business.

Preparation of the Business plan: The consultants prepared the business plans.

**Business plan presentation:** The consultants presented the business plans to the businesses. The presentation included an explanation of the plan, objectives, strategies and proposed actions. Questions, discussions and exchange of views were asked, thus helping the businesses for the future.

The 20 Business Plans prepared concerned the following:

1. Business Plan for the creation and operation of a Grocery Retail business
2. Business Plan for the creation and operation of a Retail Business of Organic and Health Food Products
3. Business Plan for the creation and operation of a Food Retail business
4. Microbrewery Business Plan
5. Business Plan of a craft production of traditional tomato sauce with the creation of new products
6. Winery Business Plan with new equipment supply
7. Another Winery Business Plan with new equipment supply
8. Sesame Tahini (made from toasted ground hulled sesame) Business Plan for New Tahini Products
9. Business Plan for Herbal Drinks Business to increase production activity
10. Business Plan for a Geothermal Utilization Company with supply of new equipment to increase the production activity
11. Business Plan for a Dough Production Company with supply of new equipment to increase production activity
12. Business Plan for Mushroom Processing Business with supply of new equipment to increase production activity
13. Business Plan for a Cheese Factory with supply of new equipment to increase production activity

14. Business Plan for Organic Honey Products Company with new equipment supply to increase production activity
15. Business Plan for Honey Products Company with new equipment supply to increase production activity
16. Business Plan for Organic Aromatic Plants Company with supply of new equipment to increase production activity
17. Business Plan for an enterprise of Soft drinks, fruit drinks, etc. with new products
18. Business Plan for an enterprise of Organic Production of Dairy Products
19. Business Plan for an enterprise of Hippophaes (sea-buckthorn) Products with supply of new equipment to increase production activity
20. Business Plan for an enterprise of Products of Lavender with supply of new equipment to increase production activity

Each business plan included the following:

- Business idea - object of activity - the product/service
- Target Market – Competition
- Success criteria of the business idea
- Production process
- Sales – the distribution network
- Financial analysis

### **In Bulgaria**

20 business plans were prepared for an equal number of businesses in the Kardzhali region.

The 20 Business Plans prepared concerned the following:

- (1) Business Plan for increasing capacity of a restaurant
- (1) Business Plan for the modernization of a confectionery company specializing in the production of a variety of durable and short-lived confectionery products
- (1) Business Plan for launching the production of a new product in a company in the milk and dairy products processing sector
- (1) Business Plan for increasing the competitiveness of a company engaged in the processing of raw cow's milk, by purchasing new equipment
- 2) Business Plans for the modernization of 2 milk processing enterprises
- (1) Business Plan in new equipment investing at a restaurant for expanding the capacity of the restaurant's kitchen

(1) Business Plan for increasing the production capacity of a company operating in the bakery and confectionery sector, through investments in technological equipment

(1) Business Plan for the modernization of a start-up that is been operating for 1 year, managing a fast food restaurant

(1) Business Plan for expanding a farm by creating new 17,500 decares of sweet corn

2) Business Plans for the construction of 2 sheep farms

(2) Business Plans for the expansion of 2 farms by creating new decares of cherries and new decares of plums

(1) Business Plan for the creation of 6 decares of perennial stonecrops in a biological way

(1) Business Plan for the modernization of a cow farm, through the purchase of equipment

(1) Business Plan for the modernization of the kitchen and increase of production capacity in a restaurant

(1) Business Plan for increasing the competitiveness of a company engaged in the processing of meat and meat products from pork and beef.

(1) Business Plan for expanding the capacity of a restaurant's kitchen

(1) Business Plan for creating better working conditions and achieving compliance with good practices in a company of food production

### Counseling to 60 entrepreneurs each country

#### **In Greece**

The objective of this action was the advisory support of 60 entrepreneurs in the agri-food sector, with a priority on start-up businesses, in the area of Thrace.

The total number of participating businesses was 49 in Orestiada, 34 in Alexandroupolis, 8 in Xanthi and 10 in Komotini. In each meeting the business representatives were divided into groups of 4 or 5 people.

3 consultation sessions were held with representatives of each company.

During the Consultation, the companies received advice on the following topics:

- 1. The Idea - Identifying a Business Opportunity,**
- 2. Innovation,**
- 3. Market Evaluation and Prospects of a Business Idea,**
- 4. Establishment of a Company and Definition of the Business Culture,**
- 5. Development of a Sales Network,**
- 6. Elaboration of a Product Promotion Plan,**
- 7. Find Financing.**

### **1. The Idea - Identifying a Business Opportunity**

At the meetings, the topics discussed concerned: the criteria for an idea to be viable, how to distinguish a real opportunity from a simple "good idea", methods or tools to identify business opportunities, market trend analysis - consumer behavior, risks associated with undertaking a new business initiative and ways of management, structure of a credible business plan, positioning the "idea" in the market, development of a strong value proposition.

### **2. Innovation**

Innovation was identified as a critical factor in the success of a new business. Practices for the integration of innovative processes, products and services and how innovation can be an important differentiating factor of competition were discussed. Strategies for encouraging creativity as well as implementing innovation in products, services and processes to achieve competitive advantage were examined.

### **3. Market Evaluation and Prospects of a Business Idea**

This section covered market assessment methods such as SWOT analysis and estimation of market size and growth. It was also discussed how to determine the prospects of a business idea based on current and forecasted demand.

### **4. Establishment of a Company and Definition of the Business Culture**

This topic covered basic steps in setting up a business, such as legal, tax and accounting aspects. It also analyzed the importance of creating a strong business culture that promotes values such as innovation, transparency and social responsibility. The consultants also focused on the importance of the company having a clear direction and a certain set of values that are supported by both management and employees. It was emphasized that a company's culture can influence talent recruitment, personal development, workplace well-being and ultimately business success.

### **5. Development of a Sales Network**

Developing an effective sales network is critical to the success of a business. Strategies for creating, managing and expanding sales networks as well as sales techniques, customer management and the use of CRM technology were discussed.

The topic contained additional discussions around market trends and the need for adaptability to changing conditions. It looked at how digital technologies and social media platforms can enhance the experience offered and also customer engagement. Finally, the discussion covered the importance of flexibility and scaling sales according to the stage of business growth.

### **6. Elaboration of a Product Promotion Plan**

At this topic, the consultants emphasized the need for a strategy that starts with understanding the market and the needs of the consumer. Tactics for creating messages

that raise awareness and attract consumer attention were extensively presented, while distribution channels that can increase product reach were analyzed.

The importance of the creativity in advertising campaigns and the use of modern digital tools to reach a wider audience were also discussed. In addition, examples of successful campaigns were given, with an analysis of the measurable results achieved. Also tips and advises for evaluating and improving promotional plans were discussed.

The discussion also covered the topic of leveraging customer feedback for the continuous adaptation and improvement of products and offers.

## **7. Find Financing**

In the "Finding Funding" themed section the consultants covered a wide range of topics related to finding and securing capital for a business. They developed methods and strategies for attracting investors, preparing and presenting investment proposals, they presented the process for accessing various forms of financing such as bank loans, venture capital, business angels, crowd funding, etc.

Also tips on managing a business's financial requirements, tips on understanding the terms and obligations associated with financing, and techniques for improving a business's credit rating were included.

The overall approach aimed to make businesses more attractive to investors and provide them with the tools to secure the necessary financing for their growth or expansion.

### **In Bulgaria**

The objective of this action was the advisory support of 60 entrepreneurs, in the area of Kardzhali .

The total number of participating businesses was 60 enterprises of the agri-food sector. The consultations took place during the time period from 02.2023 until 11.2023 with a break from 17.06 to 24.09.2023, because of the workload in the agro-food businesses.

During the Consultation, the companies received advice on the following topics:

1. Marketing,
2. Finance,
3. Administration,
4. Quality Management,
5. Insurance and
6. Transport and Logistics.

Over 80% of the above 60 businesses were individual business. A percentage of 32% of the entrepreneurs were registered as producers of agricultural products and work in the field of agriculture and livestock.

It can be concluded that the interest of the businessmen in the Kardzhali area is primarily oriented at:

- entering the regional markets and the EU market,
- developing e-commerce and online marketing,
- investing by meeting respective quality standards
- in better transport and logistics management planning as key factors in making deliveries to customers

### **Seminars on: innovation, e commerce, branding, and extroversion**

Training Seminars were organized in the project area in Greece and Bulgaria:

- In Xanthi from 08/09/2024 to 10/10/2023 with 15 participants
- In Alexandroupolis from 08/09/2023 to 11/10/2023 with 12 participants
- In Kardzhali, with 50 participants:

from 11/10/2023 to 18/10/2023

from 19/10/2023 to 26/10/2023

from 27/10/2023 to 03/11/2023

from 13/11/2023 to 20/11/2023

The topics for the seminars were **Innovation, E-Commerce, Branding, and Extroversion**.

The total duration of each "INNOVATION-E-COMMERCE-BRANDING-EXTROVERSION" training program was 144 hours, of which 36 hours were related to "Innovation", 36 hours to "E-Commerce", 36 hours to "Branding" and the 36 hours "Extroversion".

The participants could be entrepreneurs, mainly in the agri-food sector or unemployed or working people - prospective entrepreneurs who wished to develop entrepreneurship in the agri-food sector, or in a related sector.

**The teaching material of each topic in summary:**

#### **Innovation**

- 1. What is innovation?**
- 2. Technological innovation of products and processes**
- 3. Non-technological product and process innovation**
- 4. Examples of technological innovations**

- Industry-Production  
New methods in the manufacture of final and other products / services with new raw materials
- Trade - Wholesale Trade Introduction of eco-friendly products into the range of goods
- Other cases of innovation

## **5. Legal framework for innovation in the EU**

Achievements

- A. Association of Innovation
  - B. Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe programs
  - C. Cohesion policy
  - D. Funding
  - E. The European Institute of Innovation and Technology
  - F. Council for Innovation
  - G. European agenda for innovation
- The role of the European Parliament

## **6. Technological innovation in the agri-food sector**

- What is Agri-Food Technology?
- Examples of agritech
- Examples of foodtech
- Problems for which agri-food technology offers solutions

## **E-Commerce**

- 1. Concept and Definition of Electronic Commerce**
  - 2. Principles of Electronic Commerce**
  - 3. Advantages and Limitations of Electronic Commerce**
  - 4. E-Commerce support tools**
  - 5. Functional Requirements of Electronic Commerce**
  - 6. National legislation on e-commerce**
  - 7. E-Commerce categories based on participants**
- Business-to-Consumer (B2C)
  - Business-to-Business (B2B)



- Business-to-Employee (B2E)
  - Consumer-to-Consumer (C2C)
  - Consumer-to- Business (C2B)
  - Peer-to-Peer (P2P)
- 8. E-Government**
  - 9. Other types of E-Commerce**
  - 10. M-Commerce - Mobile E-Commerce**
  - 11. Business Models in E-Business**
  - 12. E-Commerce, Marketing and Strategies**
    - Direct and Indirect Marketing
    - Total and Partial Marketing
    - The Online Store and the Online Shopping Center
    - Electronic Catalogues
    - Services to the consumer
    - Electronic auctions
  - 13. Online retail**
  - 14. Online service provision**
  - 15. Market Research**
    - Consumer Behavior
    - Carrying out Market Research
  - 16. Electronic online advertising**

## Branding

- 1. What is Branding and why is it important for every business?**
- 2. “Want a bigger brand? Make bigger promises. And keep them.”**
- 3. Why is branding important?**
  - Branding defines the customer's point of view
  - Branding determines the value of the brand
  - Customer trust through branding
  - Branding and new customers
- 4. Branding doesn't end here**
- 5. What is Branding for ecommerce?**

6. **(20) Tips to find the best brand name | Think Plus**
7. **Win audiences and partners with effective branding strategies**
8. **Benefits of Building a Strong "Name"**
9. **Branding for e-Commerce: Process and Guidelines**
10. **Branding Tips and management for development**
11. **(10) Steps to build your brand**

### **Extroversion**

1. **How to Use Social Media - Best Practices and Top Strategies**
2. **Key elements to preparing a comprehensive digital marketing strategy**
3. **Face book**
4. **Instagram**
5. **Twitter**
6. **Google My Business**
7. **What is the right social media for promoting your business**
8. **Useful information about social media**
9. **YouTube**
10. **Concept of advertising**
11. **Advantages of advertising**
12. **Disadvantages of advertising**
13. **Conditions of efficient advertising**
14. **Reasons for collective advertising of agricultural products**
15. **Alternative methods of advertising**

### **Networking actions**

During the project, the following networking actions were carried out:

1. 1st networking event for Greek and Bulgarian Businessmen (September 27, 2023) at the conference hall of the Rodopi Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in Komotini, GR.
2. 2nd networking event for Greek and Bulgarian Businessmen (Thursday, October 26-th, 2023) at the conference room, Paradise centre, Kardzhali, BG

3. 3<sup>rd</sup> networking event for Greek and Bulgarian Businessmen (November 8, 2023) at the conference hall of the Evros Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in Alexandroupolis, GR
4. 4<sup>th</sup> networking event for Greek and Bulgarian Businessmen (Wednesday, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2023) at the conference room, Paradise centre, Kardzhali, BG

During the B2B discussions the entrepreneurs from Greece and Bulgaria noted that both Greece and Bulgaria have unique business environments, opportunities, and challenges that entrepreneurs should consider when venturing into B2B entrepreneurship in these countries.

**From the Greek's point of view** they analyzed the situation such as:

1. Market Overview: Thrace has a diverse economy with opportunities in various sectors like tourism, agriculture, and technology.
2. Product of Service Offerings
  - Discussing the specific products of services offered by each business.
  - Exploring how these offerings can meet the needs of the other business.
3. Challenges: Greece has faced economic challenges in recent years, which have impacted the business environment. Bureaucracy, tax regulations, and access to financing can be challenging.
4. Requirements and Specifications
  - Detailing the requirements and specifications of products or services needed.
  - Ensuring that both parties have a clear understanding of expectations.
5. Opportunities: B2B opportunities can be found in sectors such as logistics, agriculture, renewable energy, and tourism-related services. Thrace's strategic location makes it a potential hub for trade.
6. Networking: Building relationships and networking are crucial in Greek business culture. Establishing trust and connections can be beneficial for B2B entrepreneurs

**From the Bulgarians point of view** the data are:

1. Market Overview: Bulgaria is known for its relatively low business costs, a skilled workforce, and a strategic location in Europe.
2. Challenges: While Bulgaria offers a favorable business environment, corruption and bureaucratic challenges can be encountered. Access to capital for startups may also be limited.
3. Customization and Tailoring
  - Discussing the possibility of customizing products or services to meet specific business needs

- Addressing any unique requirements or preferences
4. Pricing and Terms
    - Negotiating pricing structures and payment terms
    - Clarifying any discounts, bulk pricing, or special arrangements
  5. Opportunities: B2B opportunities can be found in IT and software development, outsourcing services, logistics, manufacturing, agriculture, and renewable energy and tourism-related services. Bulgaria is known for its outsourcing industry.
  6. Tech Ecosystem: Bulgaria, in particular, has a burgeoning startup ecosystem, with numerous tech and IT companies offering B2B services.
  7. EU Membership: Bulgaria is a member of the European Union, which can provide businesses with access to a larger market.

Continuously they agreed that in both Greece and Bulgaria, understanding local business practices, regulations, and cultural nuances is essential for success.

Networking, building relationships, and seeking local advice are valuable strategies.

Additionally, a thorough market analysis and business plan tailored to the specific B2B sector planning to enter are crucial steps in entrepreneurship.

They also noted that economic conditions, regulations, and business environments can change, so it's advisable to consult with local business experts, chambers of commerce, and government agencies for the most up-to-date information when considering B2B entrepreneurship in Greece or Bulgaria.

Following each participant (representing a company) from both countries presented himself and his company and analyzed the entrepreneurship situation in both countries trying to cover a wide range of topics depending on the nature of the businesses involved and their respective needs.

At the end of the networking action it was built a successful relation between entrepreneurs and there was significant interest from both sides for a development of certain co operations.

## Positive Results of BuSSes

Taking into consideration the challenges related to the businesses in the agro-industry and the food sector in both areas (Thrace in GR and in Kardzhali district in BG), as already described at the present document, it can be said that BuSSes managed to contribute significantly on many of them, as follows:

### ➤ Challenge 1: Reaching other than the local, the regional and the national markets

**Within the Activity of BuSSes “Elaborating Vision and Strategies with Local Stakeholders”,** interventions for the Promotion of Local Resources – Products are included and in particular the Elaboration of a Marketing Plan for specific products, the Conducting of Special market surveys for selected products in specific countries, Actions to disseminate the results of the Marketing Plan, Organization of meetings with the involved bodies and companies for the results of market research on specific products.

Within the same Activity “Elaborating Vision and Strategies with Local Stakeholders”, Interventions Strengthening of Local Entrepreneurship Collective Bodies are included and particularly for the business support for Extroversion.

**Within the Activity, “Counseling to 60 entrepreneurs each country”** proposals have been discussed for the improvement of the competitiveness of each company including the development of a Sales Network, the Elaboration of a Product Promotion Plan.

**Within the Activity, “Seminars”,** a separate section was included for the Extroversion of the enterprise.

**Within the Activity, Strengths' Weaknesses' Diagnoses** for 2X50 enterprises proposals for the improvement of the competitiveness of each company were discussed, including proposals on entering new markets.

**Within the Activity, Designing and Coaching Business Plans** for 2X20 businesses, the Target Market – Competition and the Sales – the Distribution Network are examined and proposals were prepared.

**Within the Activity “The Digital Tools Developed”** an e-market place has been created aiming at the extroversion of the local enterprises and their promotion.

**Within the Activity, “Networking actions”,** it was built a successful relation between entrepreneurs of the two countries (Greece and Bulgaria) and there was significant interest from both sides for the development of certain co operations.

### ➤ Challenge 2: Increasing online positioning

**Within the Activity “Elaborating Vision and Strategies with Local Stakeholders”,** Interventions for the Adaptation of Local Resources - Products to Market Requirements & Strengthening Competitiveness are included and in particular the creating of a list of skills

and competencies needed for the digital transformation of enterprises, so as to prepare the appropriate seminars.

**Within the Activity, “Seminars”**, a separate section was included for the e-commerce as well as the Use of Social Media on extroversion actions of the enterprises. Also, in the separate section of the “Branding”, the Branding for e-Commerce - Process and Guidelines is included.

**Within the Activity “The Digital Tools Developed”** an e-market place has been created to help small businesses to have their own storefront, online.

➤ **Challenge 3: Incorporating of innovative methods to reorganize business processes and increase sales**

**Within the Activity “Elaborating Vision and Strategies with Local Stakeholders”**, Interventions for the Adaptation of Local Resources - Products to Market Requirements & Strengthening Competitiveness are included and particularly the Organization of workshops between research bodies and businesses in the agri-food sector for innovations, new technologies, regarding the utilization of local products and increasing their added value. Dissemination of the results of the workshops, Dissemination of good practices of innovative enterprises

**Within the Activity, “Counseling to 60 entrepreneurs each country”**, Strategies for encouraging creativity as well as implementing innovation in products, services and processes to achieve competitive advantage were examined.

**Within the Activity, “Seminars”**, a separate section was included for the “Innovation” in businesses.

**Within the Activity, “Designing and Coaching Business Plans for 2X20 businesses”**, innovative methods related to the business idea were proposed.

➤ **Challenge 4: Stronger use of modern marketing tools to achieve business goals**

As already mentioned, **within the Activity “The Digital Tools Developed”** an e-market place has been created to help small businesses to have their own storefront, online.

**Within the Activity, “Seminars”**, modern ways on Businesses Extroversion are included.

➤ **Challenge 5: Increasing the knowledge, skills and culture of entrepreneurs and employees**

**The activities: “Strengths' Weaknesses' Diagnoses for 2X50 enterprises”, “Counseling to 60 entrepreneurs each country”, “Designing and Coaching Business Plans for 2X20 businesses” as well as the Activity, “Seminars”**, contributed to increase the knowledge, skills and culture of entrepreneurs.

These actions offered the entrepreneurs the necessary tools and consulting that help them to develop and improve their businesses. The entrepreneurs appreciated that the consultants provided high quality advice and guidance for their businesses. According to the entrepreneurs, the consultancy has brought significant benefits to their businesses, for the improving of their competitiveness.

➤ **Challenge 6: Creating a structure for finding suitable human resources is very important for the development of entrepreneurship**

Within the Activity “The Digital Tools Developed” the following platforms have been prepared:

- d) an e-platform for hiring professionals and experts so as to facilitate the access to know how and expertise,
- e) an e-labor market platform to facilitating the recruitment of staff, one of the major problems raised by the entrepreneurs in the surveys.

Objectives of the above platforms were:

- ◆ the facilitation of local businesses in meeting needs in specialized professionals, experts, human resources and, conversely, to help professionals to get in touch with businesses.

➤ **Challenge 7: The Collective Bodies of Entrepreneurship must respond to their responsibilities with respect to their institutional role and towards their members and take initiatives to strengthening the competitiveness of businesses**

All activities of BuSSes described at this document have to be the activities to be offered by the Collective Bodies of Entrepreneurship in order to strengthen the competitiveness of their businesses – members.

By March project, the Collective Bodies of Entrepreneurship had the opportunity to create an infrastructure, to implement important actions and to participate in the implementation of actions to support their members.

Their goal should be their Empowerment with:

**The Creation of Infrastructure**

Staffing of local collective bodies

Development of digital infrastructure

**The Business Empowerment**

Recording of needs - problems 5

Update - Support

Human Resources Training

**The Extroversion**

Networking

Organization of business missions



## Problems on the Operation of BuSSes

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The main problems observed during the operation of the Busses were:

- The difficulty **in persuading businesses so as to participate in the surveys as well as in the support activities of BuSSes**. It took many attempts with emails, with many phone calls, with reminders, to finally get them to participate.
- The difficulty of persuading businesses to participate in BuSSes events for their networking.

The above difficulties show that businesses, to a large extent, do not expect any particular results in their favor from the researches or from the support actions, whether they come from Universities or from collective business support bodies. It should of course be emphasized that after their participation, e.g. at the BuSSes counseling activities or at the networking events, they expressed satisfaction with these actions.

However, this issue of the difficulty in the response of businesses should be taken seriously into account by the collective business support bodies so that with effective actions, with the development of trusting relationships and with consistency, they can convince businesses of their important role.

Another problem that arose during the operation of the BuSSes was:

- The **requirement to implement the training actions only in certified training structures**, which limited the choice of the place of their implementation, with the result that they could not be carried out in the existing facilities of the BuSSes. However, they were implemented in certified training structures.

Finally, **a problem that is expected to arise in the future** and is very important, concerns the **understaffing of the collective business support bodies**. Through the financing of the March project, there was of course no such problem, but after the project, this issue should seriously concern the collective bodies and they should take care of the staffing of their bodies with at least one person - scientific staff. In this way they will ensure their role and also the continuation of the business support actions and their effective cooperation with them.

## Recommendations on the Operation of BuSSes

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Businesses in the area face many challenges and have several needs. Factors contributing to these needs include difficulties in attracting new customers, new markets, competitive pressure in the market, the need for better marketing etc.

In addition, the rapid development of technological developments and the need to be adapted to the digital age, the demands of climate change for "green" development, make the necessity for support and guidance even more urgent.

It is considered that the continuation of the support activities by the Business Supporting Structures (BuSSes) is absolutely necessary for the strengthening and success of entrepreneurs in the area.

This continuity is essential to sustaining the support of entrepreneurs.

Support activities offer entrepreneurs the necessary knowledge, tools and advice to help them develop and improve their businesses.

In addition, the continuation of these activities can help maintain and increase the competitiveness of businesses in the area and provide support for the creation of new business opportunities.

Somme recommendations on the operation of BuSSes in the future include:

- Staffing of the structures with at least one person - scientific staff. Support structures should find a way to finance such a job as it is imperative for their effective operation.
- The support structures should make businesses aware of their active participation in the structures' actions. They should approach businesses in a systematic way. One way would be the organization of thematic events in thematic objects that are of interest to businesses and the continuation of their support in the same thematic object by presenting relevant practices, sending a relevant newsletter.
- The support structures should intensify their collaboration with Universities, research institutions and together with them to implement research and contribute to the transfer of know-how and the dissemination of good practices in businesses.
- Support structures can also create a register of consultants specialized by subject e.g. "green" investment, marketing, digital tools etc, to which businesses can refer
- Cooperation between support structures and planning bodies (Regions, Municipalities, and Ministries) should be "instituted" for the best planning of actions for which businesses are interested.
- Natural disasters are one of the main risks that can affect the production and quality of the harvest. Changes in climate, natural disasters and changes in the environment can have immediate effects on productivity and product quality. The support structures should cooperate with the Planning Authorities in such matters, e.g. disaster prevention, for the benefit of businesses.

- The increase in energy costs, environmental policies should also be subjects of cooperation between the support structures and the Planning Authorities on introducing relative funding projects.
- The digital platforms created (Digital Data Base for Branch Professionals, Labor market digital platform, Digital market place) should be subsequently developed by the support structures. Their monitoring and updating as well as the publicity of these tools will contribute to their increasing use by businesses.
- The strong relationship achieved between Greek and Bulgarian support structures should be further developed. It is the key to successful business networking between the 2 countries. Organizing meetings and investing time in getting to know, in finding ways to mutually benefit from the collaboration shall lead to fruitful businesses co operations. Also, participation in exhibitions in both countries can contribute positively to the improvement of the companies' position. Contact with the consumer through exhibitions, as well as support and guidance from the chambers, can strengthen the presence and competitiveness of the business in the market.

**Business awareness, continuous communication, consistency, publicity of actions and good practices, cooperation with businesses, research bodies and planning authorities**

should be the motto of the Operation of BuSSes in the next period.