

**Cooperation Programme**  
**Interreg V-A Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020**

**“Market Changer”**

**“MarCh”**

**MIS Code: 5070788**

*Project Website: <http://marchproject.eu>*

**Deliverable 1.1.4**  
**“OnGoing Evaluation”**



*Agency for Transnational Training  
and Development*

The Project is co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and by national funds of the countries participating in the Interreg V-A “Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020” Cooperation Programme



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## 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.

## First Ongoing Project Evaluation Report

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**Version:** 01  
**Date:** April 2022  
**Name of Author:** A. Karamoschos, Project Coordinator

### Methodology

The objective of the ongoing evaluation was to develop and maintain a system of internal/self-evaluation for the project partners (Project Beneficiaries/PBs) to locate weak / strong points in the project content and structure, aiming at the facilitation and the learning during the process which might lead to improvements in the project implementation.

For the first ongoing project evaluation cycle, a questionnaire was prepared and completed by all project beneficiaries.

The questionnaire was designed so that, on the one hand, it was easy and short to complete, and on the other hand, it included essential questions so that important conclusions - observations could be drawn for the proper implementation of the project (a sample of the questionnaire is annexed in the Appendix).

The questionnaire consisted of two Parts

#### Part A: General Issues

With questions such as: Mentioning up to 5 strong points of the project implementation until today, Mentioning up to 5 weak points of the project implementation until today, Mentioning one success - experience and one failure - experience in the project life time so far, etc

#### Part B: Suggestions – Recommendations

With questions asking for the partners' opinion on different matters, e.g. on drastic interventions needed, amendments that should the project initiate/comply.

The first ongoing project evaluation was carried out on April 2022.

All four project beneficiaries completed the questionnaire.

## Editing of the Answers to the Questionnaire

### Part A: General Issues

#### 1. How appropriate do you consider the following:

- Scope and objectives of the project
- Content of activities
- Internal operational structure (management, partnership)
- External operational structure (administration, funding, controlling)

(from A (very appropriate) to D (not appropriate))

The answers to the question 1 showed that:

#### the majority of the partners

- consider the scope and objectives of the project as well as the external operational structure (administration, funding, controlling) as very appropriate

#### half of them

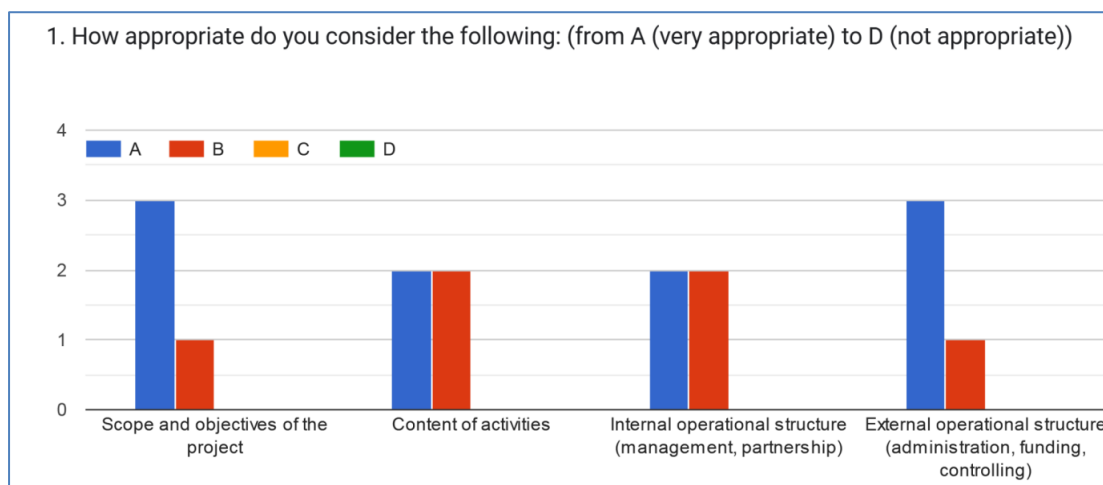
- consider the content of activities as well as the internal operational structure (management, partnership) as very appropriate

#### half of them

- consider the content of activities as well as the internal operational structure (management, partnership) as appropriate

How appropriate do you consider the following:	A	B	C	D
Scope and objectives of the project	3	1	0	0
Content of activities	2	2	0	0
Internal operational structure (management, partnership)	2	2	0	0
External operational structure (administration, funding, controlling)	3	1	0	0

**Diagram 1 – Part A**



**2. Mention up to 5 strong points (SP), in priority order (1st SP, 2nd SP, 3rd SP, 4th SP, 5th SP):**

1. Project idea
2. Project Activities
3. Strategy of Implementation
4. Partnership Setting
5. Administrative Requirements
6. Cooperation among partners
7. Available funds
8. Relevance of your previous experience
9. Other

The answers to the question 2 showed that:

**the majority of the partners**

- consider the project idea as 1st strong point of the project

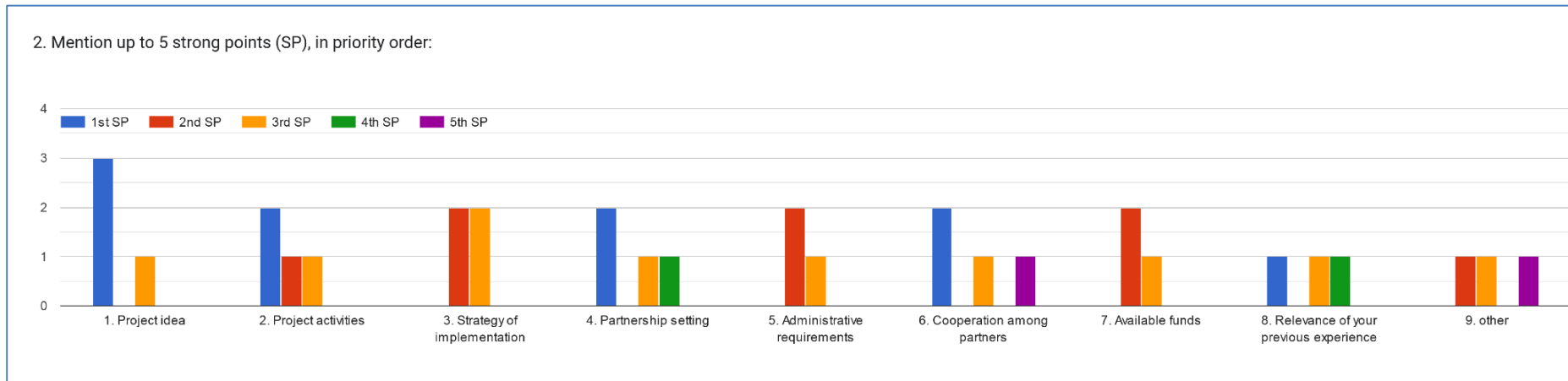
**half of them**

- consider the project activities, the partnership setting as well as the cooperation among partners as 1st strong points of the project

Mention up to 5 strong points (SP), in priority order	1st SP	2nd SP	3rd SP	4th SP	5th SP
1. Project idea	3	0	1	0	0
2. Project activities	2	1	1	0	0

Mention up to 5 strong points (SP), in priority order	1st SP	2nd SP	3rd SP	4th SP	5th SP
3. Strategy of implementation	0	2	2	0	0
4. Partnership setting	2	0	1	1	0
5. Administrative requirements	0	2	1	0	0
6. Cooperation among partners	2	0	1	0	1
7. Available funds	0	2	1	0	0
8. Relevance of your previous experience	1	0	1	1	0
9. other	0	1	1	0	1

Diagram 2 – Part A





**3. Mention up to 5 weak points (WP), in priority order (1st WP, 2nd WP, 3rd WP, 4th WP, 5th WP):**

1. Project idea
2. Project Activities
3. Strategy of Implementation
4. Partnership Setting
5. Administrative Requirements
6. Cooperation among partners
7. Available funds
8. Relevance of your previous experience
9. Other

The answers to the question 2 showed that:

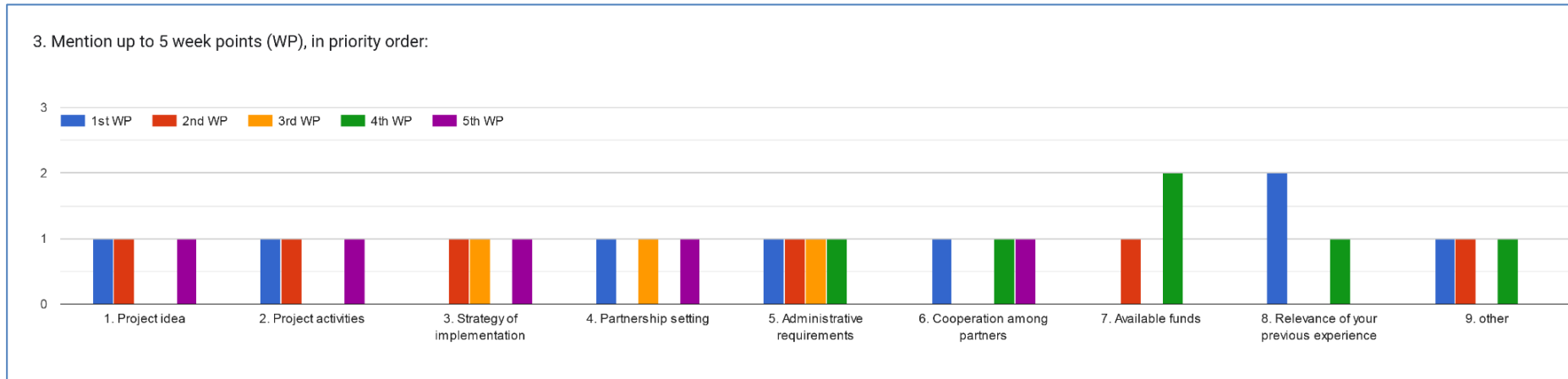
Administrative requirements were noted by all partners as **weak points (WP)**, however with **different priority order by each partner**

Available funds and partnership setting were noted by 3 partners

Relevance of previous experience was also noted by 3 partners, from the two of them as a **weak point of 1st order**.

Mention up to 5 weak points (WP), in priority order	1st WP	2nd WP	3rd WP	4th WP	5th WP
1. Project idea	1	1	0	0	1
2. Project activities	1	1	0	0	1
3. Strategy of implementation	0	1	1	0	1
4. Partnership setting	1	0	1	0	1
5. Administrative requirements	1	1	1	1	0
6. Cooperation among partners	1	0	0	1	1
7. Available funds	0	1	0	2	0
8. Relevance of your previous experience	2	0	0	1	0
9. other	1	1	0	1	0

Diagram 3 – Part A



**4. Mention one success - experience in the project life time so far.**

The answers to the 4th question were different between the project beneficiaries:

- Co-operation among partners
- The creation of the two platforms
- The preparation of the mapping areas analysis report provided a lot of up-to-date information and trends that were missing in the existing strategic documents at the regional level for Kardzhali district.
- The response of PBs to administrative needs

**5. Mention one failure - experience in the project life time so far.**

The answers to the 5th question were different between the project beneficiaries:

- -
- The training
- Most activities requiring the involvement of target group participants, which were to take place during the summer months, did not take place due to holidays and travel
- The resignation of PB3

**6. Make any further comments.**

There were 2 answers to the 6th question:

- The accumulation of many activities at the end of the project, puts an enormous strain on the team and the participants, and for this purpose, the possibilities of extending the period of implementation of the activities must be evaluated for its optimal implementation!
- The effective cooperation with the JS.

## **Part B: Suggestions – Recommendations**

**1. Do you think the project demands drastic interventions, so as for it to comply with: (All ticks possible)**

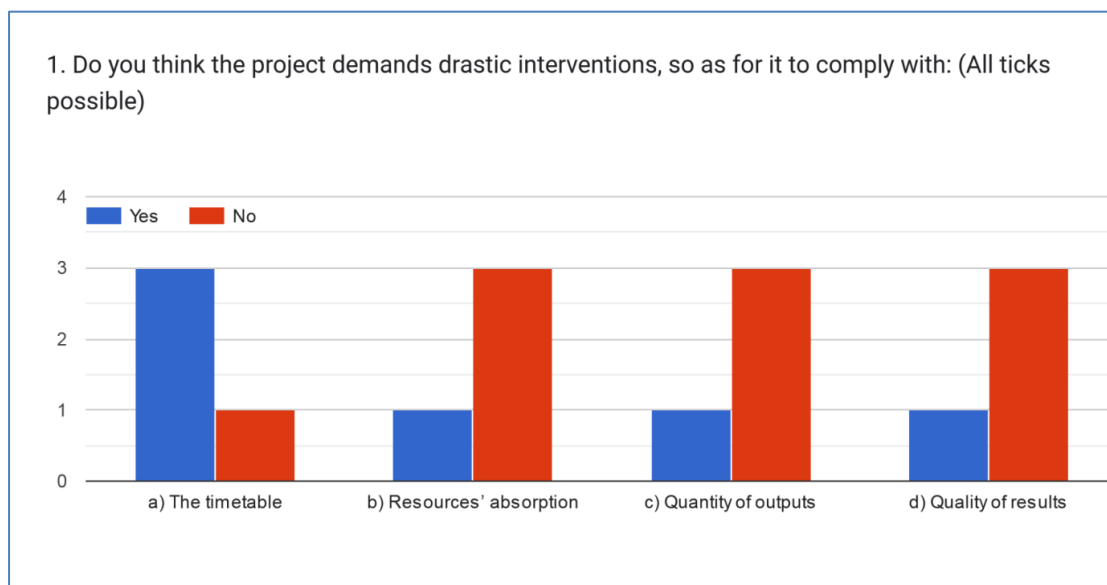
- a) The timetable
- b) Resources' absorption

- c) Quantity of outputs
- d) Quality of results

The timetable was chosen by the majority of the partners as the one needing drastic intervention:

Do you think the project demands drastic interventions, so as for it to comply with	Yes	No
a) The timetable	3	1
b) Resources' absorption	1	3
c) Quantity of outputs	1	3
d) Quality of results	1	3

**Diagram 1 - Part B**



**2. Choose up to 3 (in priority order) interventions that should the project make/comply.**

- a) Reduce administrative effort
- b) Hold more transnational meetings
- c) Provide more support to partners
- d) Strengthen coordination between partners
- e) Care for sufficient flow of resources

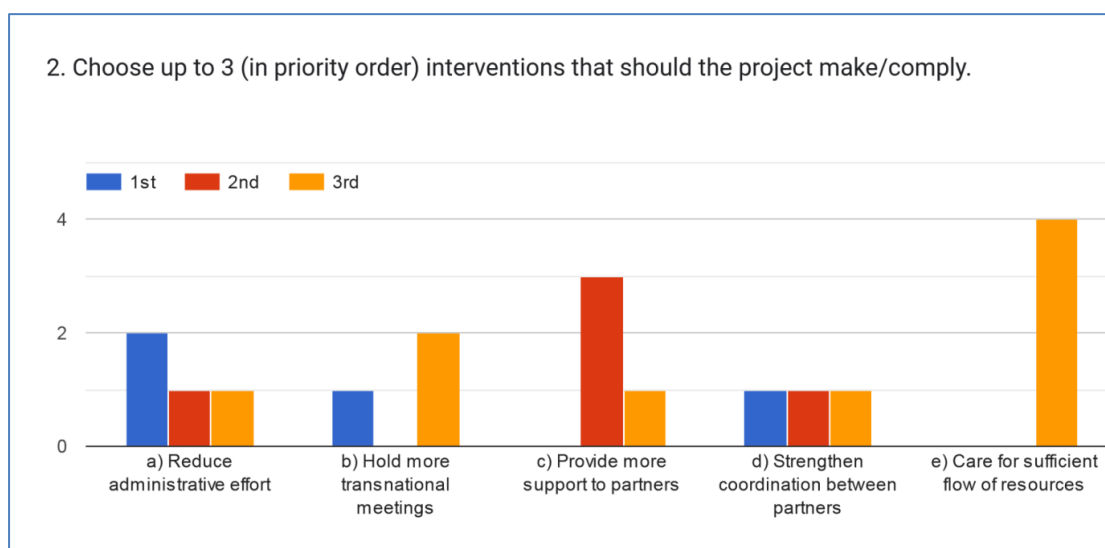
All partners chose the reduction of administrative effort as an intervention that should the project make/comply. Half of them consider this intervention as 1st priority.

All partners chose also the need for providing more support to partners as an intervention that should the project make/comply. However this intervention is considered as 2<sup>nd</sup> priority by the most of them.

The caring for sufficient flow of resources was also chosen by all partners, but as a 3<sup>rd</sup> priority by all of them.

Choose up to 3 (in priority order) interventions that should the project make/comply	1st	2nd	3rd
a) Reduce administrative effort	2	1	1
b) Hold more transnational meetings	1	0	2
c) Provide more support to partners	0	3	1
d) Strengthen coordination between partners	1	1	1
e) Care for sufficient flow of resources	0	0	4

Diagram 2 - Part B



### 3. Write down any comment you may have.

There was only one comment:

- It should be assessed any possibilities for accelerating the refund process
- The possibilities of extending the period of implementation of the activities must be evaluated for its optimal implementation!

## Conclusions

The majority of the partners have considered the project idea as 1st strong point of the project and half of them consider the project activities, the partnership setting as well as the cooperation among partners as 1st strong points of the project. The above findings show that the partners believe in the project, in the importance of its implementation as well as in the partnership of which it consists.

Despite the effective cooperation with the JS (as mentioned in the questionnaire), the administrative requirements were noted as weak points by all partners. In addition, all partners chose the need for reducing administrative effort as an intervention that should the project make. Half of them consider this intervention as 1st priority. But unfortunately this is a problem that cannot be resolved, even by the JS as it concerns the whole Programme.

The relevance of previous experience was noted by 3 partners as a weak point, from the two of them as a weak point of 1st order. Combining this note with the finding that “all partners chose also the provision of more support to partners as an intervention that should the project make (as 2<sup>nd</sup> priority by the most of them)”, leads to the necessity of their further support from the Coordinating Partner, e.g. by preparing detailed specifications for the implementation of the partners' activities, more communication with them, etc.

The caring for the sufficient flow of the resources, was also chosen by all partners, (as a 3<sup>rd</sup> priority) by all of them, which at the same time means the need for speeding up the procedures for certifying expenses by all partners, so that payment requests can then be made.

The timetable was chosen by the majority of the partners as the drastic intervention needing, the necessary actions should be carried out by the coordinator.

## Annex 1

The questionnaire

## Second Ongoing Project Evaluation Report

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<b>Version:</b>	01
<b>Date:</b>	January 2023
<b>Name of Author:</b>	A. Kamoschos, Project Coordinator

### General

The present report has been conducted under Deliverable 1.1.4 Ongoing Evaluation of the Project Market Changer – MarCh, implemented in the context of the INTERREG VA Greece – Bulgaria 2014 – 2020 Cooperation Programme.

This document is the 2<sup>nd</sup> report of the specific Deliverable.

Del. 1.1.4 consists of 3 partial reports as follows:

- The 1<sup>st</sup> report was dedicated to general aspects of the project and the project partnership and was addressed to the project beneficiaries (PBs) (project partners), examining general features of the project, as the project appropriateness in terms of scope and objectives, the adequacy of the partnership, the degree of satisfaction from the cooperation, the self-confidence of PBs to carry out the project activities etc.
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> (present) report (interim report) assesses the progress of the project works and makes its focus on issues as amendments, timetable, absorption of resources and progress of activities.
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> report is planned for the end of the project lifetime and will examine the overall results and the project achievements.

### The Methodology of the evaluation

The evaluation report was compiled on the basis of the submitted and approved semester progress reports by the end of 2022 and the experiences gained by the LB from its involvement in the project implementation.

The period covered by the present report is from the beginning of the project (April 2021) until the end of the year 2022, hence it covers a period of 20 months.

The report is divided in two Parts. Part A displays the general project data, Part B presents the progress of the works achieved.

## PART A: GENERAL DATA

### The MarCh Project - Its Main Features

MarCh was submitted under **Investment Priority 3a**: Promoting entrepreneurship, in particular by facilitating the economic exploitation of new ideas and fostering the creation of new firms, including through business incubators, **Thematic Objective 03** - Enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises, the agricultural sector (for the EAFRD) and the fisheries and aquaculture sector (for the EMFF), **Specific Objective SO 1**: -To Improve entrepreneurship SME support systems of the Greece – Bulgaria 2014 – 2020 Interreg VA Cooperation Programme.

**The project's main objective** is to help local business collective bodies in its intervention area (Thrace region in Greece and Kardzhali district in Bulgaria) to support businesses towards strengthening their competitiveness.

The project views great challenges at local businesses especially in peripheral and less favored EU areas, as local markets are penetrated by multinational retail chains and local businesses, consisting of very small and small enterprises, are not in the position to design and apply strategies for their competitiveness. MarCh identifies in this context an opportunity and institutional duty for the collective bodies of entrepreneurship in its intervention areas to design territorial competitiveness strategies and provide support to their businesses - members. Though all project partners are involved in carrying out activities and implementing deliverables for the project, the envisaged intervention is built around the "Business Supporting Structures", established within the project context and expected to coordinate the actions towards the local enterprises at local level.

### The Project – Partnership

The partnership of MarCh comprises 5 bodies out of which:

- 1 consulting agency, private entity, non-profit organization, as Lead Beneficiary
- 2 business collective organizations at national level, 1 in each participating country of the Programme
- 2 business collective organizations at regional level, 1 on each side of the Cross Border (CB) area

### The Project Structure

The project action is structured in 6 distinct Work Packages (WPs) as follows:

- WP 1: Project Management and Coordination  
Dealing with the management of the project activities and the coordination of PBs
- WP 2: Communication and Dissemination  
Communication of project's scope and objectives and dissemination of results and achievements
- WP 3: Developing Strategies



Refers to data collection through desk analyses and surveys, elaboration and communication of territorial strategies in the intervention areas

- WP 4: Devising Business Support Structures  
Preparation of tangible and digital infra structure of the operation of the BuSSes
- WP 5: Pilot Application  
Provision of support in the CB area in terms of counselling, training programmes and business networking at CB level
- WP 6: Valorizing Results – Securing Sustainability  
Redesigning the project intervention upon the gained experience.

### Project Duration and Budget

- The project duration is 24 months, from 13 April 2021 to 12 April 2023
- The project budget amounts to 628.708,77 €

A more detailed analysis of the budget allocation to budget lines, participating cross border areas and work packages is presented in the following tables.

The budget allocation to individual Budget Lines and CB areas is the following:

### Budget allocation to individual Budget Lines

No	Subject	Staff Costs	Office and Admin	Travel Costs	External Services	Equipment	TOTAL
1	Amount (€)	199.130,58	31.461,39	23.051,80	340.365,00	34.700,00	628.708,77
2	% of Budget	31,67	5,00	3,67	54,14	5,52	100,00

### Budget allocation to CB areas

No	Country	Amount (€)	% of Total
1	Greece	437.561,87	69,60
2	Bulgaria	191.146,90	30,40
3	Total	628.708,77	100,00

**Allocation of budget to the individual WPs**

No	WP	Amount	%
1	WP 1	80.058,90	12,73
2	WP 2	48.377,35	7,69
3	WP 3	93.117,28	14,81
4	WP 4	151.733,10	24,13
5	WP 5	216.490,10	34,43
6	WP 6	38.932,04	6,19
7	<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>628.708,77</b>	<b>100,00</b>

## PART B THE PROJECT PROGRESS

### General Comments

- The project was challenged in its beginning by the late withdrawal of a major PB. Communication difficulties with the specific PB due to health problems of the respective project manager(s), resignation from the project due to incompliance of the organization with the State Aid regulations of the Programme and the subsequent need for a project modification, so as to transferring activities and budget to the other PB on the Bulgarian side of the project area, generated delays and affected the first phase of the project.
- Nonetheless the demanding procedures of both project and procurement management, definitely require more resources for the effective and timely execution of the related activities.
- Having settled the procedures resulting from the withdrawal of the project partner the project does not seem to face serious challenges and the individual activities are being carried out. However a longer implementation period will be required.

### Progress of Works

In the specific period and with regard to project content, following actions have been carried out:

- **WP 1**
  - Project Management structures at PBs and project level set up
  - Communication channels between PBs established
  - Staff for project management at PBs recruited
  - 1 PB (BICA, PB3) has resigned

- Project has been modified (approved modification request)
  - Activities and budget of PB3 transferred to PB5
- 4 Project Semester Reports submitted
- 1 official and several unofficial coordination meetings held
- PBs decide to proceed for a prolongation request of the project life time by 6 months.
- **WP 2**
  - Communication Guide prepared
  - Project logo designed and website launched
  - 1 Flyer prepared
  - Kick Off meeting held
- **WP 3**
  - Specs for stocktaking prepared and communicated
  - Del. 3.1.1 completed and preparation of 3.5.1 studies launched
  - Del. 3.1.2 Vision and Strategy on the Greek area prepared
- **WP 4**
  - Infra structure for operation of BuSSes in Thrace secured
  - The development of the two digital platforms assigned
  - Specs for the development of the 3<sup>rd</sup> digital platform (Labor Market) prepared
- **WP 5**
  - Calls for trainers and trainees prepared and planned to be published
- **WP 6**
  - No action taken

#### Progress in the absorption of financial resources

The main figures reflecting the progress in the use of project financial resources are presented in the following tables.

- Expenditures declared per Semester Report

No	By reporting date	Cumulative Amount paid out (€)	% of Budget Total
1	30/06/2021	8.993,00	1,4
2	31/12/2021	28.589,98	4,5
3	30/06/2022	75.955,71	12,1
4	31/12/2022	122.112,52	19,4

### Progress by WP

- **WP 1**

Particular effort has been made at management level. Beside the management routine work, project had to tackle difficulties occurring from various unexpected circumstances, as the need for clarifications on the application of the State Aid regulation and communication difficulties deriving from health problems of the management staff of some PBs.

A project modification, resulting in the reallocation of activities among the PBs and in the restructuring of the budget due to a.o. the resignation of one of the partners rendered unexpected irregularities and led to spent of time.

The shifting of the activities and budget from the resigned PB3 to PB5 will lead to more administrative effort for PB5 as further tendering procedures will be necessary.

Nonetheless, as PB3 was expected to play a “guiding” role in BG due to its experience and know how, this role is now shifted to PB5, sole project partner in BG, which has to fill the gap.

Moreover it is likely that the additional administrative and substantial work added to PB5 may affect their response capacities.

Latter should be considered also in the context of the PB’s cash flow, as it results from the different to GR system of reimbursing funds.

Absorption of resources is affected by the above irregularities, while the demanding procedure of presenting expenditures on the digital programme monitoring system challenges PBs to verifying the expenditures made.

The project will need more time for implementing its activities and therefore a request for prolongation will be submitted to the JS/MA.

- **WP 2**

Foreseen communication activities are being carried out. Communication work in terms of meetings with the local communities has to be accelerated.

- **WP 3**

Basic studies in terms of desk analyses and strategies have been carried out or being prepared.

- **WP 4**

Availability of infra structure for the implementation of the project activities has been secured, with the purchase of the planned equipment.

The development of the planned digital platforms has been assigned resp. specs have been designed.

- **WP 5**

The 3 out of the 5 activities planned within the specific WP are part of one single open procurement, for which the responsible PB consider a prerequisite the availability of respective availability of resources. The subject is to be examined with the JS, so as for the PB to launch the action.

Problems derive for the implementation of the training programmes in GR, as the related legislation regarding the use of training facilities has been recently changed. Moreover the great offer of training actions funded with public resources in the current period is likely to negatively affect the interest of potential apprentices.

The call for trainers and trainees has been prepared and will be soon published.

- **WP 6**

No progress has been recorded in the specific WP as it depends on the completion of the previous WPs

## Results

- By the end of 2022 the project shows a delay in both progress of activities and absorption of resources.

The specific delay is attributed to the resign of PB3 (BICA - Bulgarian Industrial Capital Association) in the first project phase, major project partner, as guidance was expected to be provided to the other CB partner (PB5), and the resulting modification of the allocation of the budget and the activities.

- The absorption of resources mainly concerns staff costs related with management and desk analyses, as well as procurements through direct assignments (WPs 1, 3, 4, 2)
- A large amount of the budget (54,14 % of the total) is allocated to procurement of external services, whereas a large part out of them is linked to demanding and time consuming assignment procedures.
- WPs 4 and 5 (some 58% of the overall project budget), where major procurements are foreseen show a low absorption rate.
- Shortages in the cash flow of PBs discourage project partners to proceed to tendering procedures, without having prior received the respective funds.
- Difficulties in the communication among PBs due to health problems of PBs' management staff affect the efficiency of cooperation.
- Delays in the reimbursement of project resources affect the proper implementation of the project and especially the tendering procedures, as the availability of funds is considered by PBs a prerequisite to publishing major tenders.

## Conclusions – Recommendations

As already mentioned the project shows a delay in its implementation and spending of resources.

The specific delay is justified by the late withdrawal of a major project partner and the linked to it administrative procedures.

Difficulties due to additional administrative load might occur at PB5, the partner which undertook the activities and budget of the resigned PB.

The project management structures however have been set up at the individual PBs, a number of deliverables have been implemented and others are under way. A number of procurement procedures based on direct assignment of contracts have been made and works are being carried out. Hence, the project presents a progress in its works.

Difficulties arise in the procurement procedure by the LB within WP5, as it concerns a larger amount of resources and captures a large part of WP5. As the specific PB justifies the delay with cash flow shortages the subject has to be settled in cooperation with the JS.

A project prolongation is necessary for the project to carry out its activities.

## Third Ongoing Project Evaluation Report

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<b>Version:</b>	01
<b>Date:</b>	November 2023
<b>Name of Author:</b>	A. Kamoschos, Project Coordinator

### General

The present report has been conducted under Deliverable 1.1.4 Ongoing Evaluation of the Project Market Changer – MarCh, implemented in the context of the INTERREG VA Greece – Bulgaria 2014 – 2020 Cooperation Programme.

This document is the 3rd report of the specific Deliverable.

Del. 1.1.4 consists of 3 partial reports as follows:

- The 1<sup>st</sup> report was dedicated to general aspects of the project and the project partnership and was addressed to the project beneficiaries (PBs) (project partners), examining general features of the project, as the project appropriateness in terms of scope and objectives, the adequacy of the partnership, the degree of satisfaction from the cooperation, the self-confidence of PBs to carry out the project activities etc.
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> report (interim report) assessed the progress of works and made its focus on issues as amendments, timetable, absorption of resources and progress of activities.
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> (present) report is compiled at the end of the project and examines its overall results and achievements.

### The Methodology of the evaluation

This evaluation report was compiled on the basis of the submitted and approved semester progress reports by the end of the project (November 2023) and the experience gained by the LB from its involvement in the project implementation.

The period covered by the present report is from the beginning of the project (April 2021) until the end of it (November 2023), hence it covers a period of approx. 31 months.

## PROJECT GENERAL DATA

### The MarCh Project - Its Main Features

MarCh was submitted under **Investment Priority 3a**: Promoting entrepreneurship, in particular by facilitating the economic exploitation of new ideas and fostering the creation of new firms, including through business incubators, **Thematic Objective 03** - Enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises, the agricultural sector (for the EAFRD) and the fisheries and aquaculture sector (for the EMFF), **Specific Objective SO 1**: -To Improve entrepreneurship SME support systems of the Greece – Bulgaria 2014 – 2020 Interreg VA Cooperation Programme.

**The project's main objective** is to help local business collective bodies in its intervention area (Thrace region in Greece and Kardzhali district in Bulgaria) to support businesses towards strengthening their competitiveness.

The project views great challenges at local businesses especially in peripheral and less favored EU areas, as local markets are penetrated by multinational retail chains and local enterprises, consisting of very small and small businesses, are not in the position to design and apply strategies for their competitiveness. MarCh identifies in this context an opportunity and institutional duty for the collective bodies of entrepreneurship in its intervention areas to design territorial competitiveness strategies and provide support to their businesses - members. Though all project partners are involved in carrying out activities and implementing deliverables for the project, the envisaged intervention is built around the "Business Supporting Structures", established within the project context and expected to coordinate the actions towards the local enterprises at local level.

The project, as indicated in the previous report, is divided in 6 distinct Work Packages (WPs). The subject of each WP is as follows:

- WP 1 is dedicated to project management
- WP 2 deals with the communication work of the project and the dissemination of its achievements
- WP 3 refers to the stock taking in the two project areas
- WP 4 regards actions for preparing the tangible and digital infra structure of the Business Support Structures to be operated during the project
- WP 5 covers counseling support to businesses and the organization of training seminars
- WP 6 assesses the results of the project and plans future interventions upon the gained experience.

The project proposal was submitted by a partnership of 5 beneficiaries, 3 of them based in Greece and 2 of them in Bulgaria. In the first phase of the project Beneficiary 3, Bulgarian Industrial Capital Association, resigned from the project and Beneficiary 5 (Regional Industrial Association of Kardzhali) undertook its activities and budget.

The initial project duration was 24 months extended to 31 months and its overall budget amounts to € 628.708,77.



### **Brief Description of the Project Implementation**

MarCh project was challenged in its start-up phase by the withdrawal of Project Beneficiary (PB) 3, in a longer lasting procedure. The specific withdrawal affected the project implementation triggering a modification procedure and causing delays in the implementation of the overall project. A project prolongation request was submitted and the project lifetime was extended by 6 months. After approval of the project modification PBs accelerated their action and almost the total of the foreseen activities were carried out. The outbreak of the wildfires in Thrace in summer 2023 affected the cooperation between the project and the businesses in the Greek CB area and therefore an additional prolongation of approx. 1,5 month was approved. The new date for completion of activities is the 30<sup>th</sup> of November 2023.

### **The Activities carried out by WP**

The works and achievements obtained in the context of each individual WP are described below as per WP.

#### **WP1**

- Local and Central Management Structures were established and operated throughout the entire project implementation period
- A request for project modification was submitted and approved after the withdrawal of PB3
- 2 requests for the prolongation of the project duration by 6 and 1,5 months resp. were submitted and approved shifting the date of completion of the project action to November 30, 2023
- 5 Progress Reports were submitted and 1 will be submitted after project completion in January 24. The final project report will be submitted in a period of two months after closure of reimbursement of funds.
- Project coordination was achieved over continuous communication between PBs at bi- and multilateral level, 2 Steering Committee meetings in physical form, 1 in Kardzhali and 1 Thessaloniki,
- 2+1 (present) evaluation reports were compiled
- Absorption of resources drastically increased after the project modification and verifications of incurred expenditures are in progress.

#### **WP 2**

With regard to the dissemination work

- 2X2 flyers (2 in each CB area) and 1 digital brochure with info on project objectives and results were prepared
- A Kick Off meeting and a Closing Conference were organized resp. in Alexandroupolis and Kardzhali

- Project logo and website were developed and maintained
- 3 Local Awareness Seminars were held in Thrace and Kardzhali.

### **WP 3**

- Desk analyses on the CB areas' economic development potential were carried out
- Visions and strategies for the development of Thrace and Kardzhali areas were formulated and discussed with local stakeholders at 3 meetings in Thrace and resp. 2 meetings in Kardzhali
- 2 surveys to local businesses on their needs and priorities were carried out in the 2 CB project areas
- The results of the above interventions on the 2 CB areas were summed up in 2 Synthesis Reports

### **WP 4**

- Space and equipment for the operation of the BuSSes in the CB areas were secured
- 2 Action Plans for the BuSSes in Thrace and Kardzhali were designed and BuSSes were operated in the two areas
- 3X2 Digital Platforms for the search of Branch Professionals, the operation of the Labor Market and the extroversion of the local enterprises were developed and maintained in in Thrace and Kardzhali

### **WP 5**

- Counselling support was provided to local enterprises of the agro-food manufacturing sector in the two CB areas
- 2X50 Strengths' – Weaknesses' Diagnoses were carried out in Kardzhali and Thrace
- 2X20 Business Plans were designed
- 2X60 Counselling interventions were made in the two project areas
- Training seminars were implemented in Xanthi and Alexandroupolis (Thrace) and in Kardzhali as below:
  - 15 + 12 attendees trained in Thrace
  - 50 attendees trained in Kardzhali.
- 4 networking meetings for entrepreneurs from the CB area were organized, in Komotini, Alexandroupolis and Kardzhali.

### **WP 6**

- Two assessment reports with the results of the project pilot action were prepared
- 1 Cross Border Lab was organized in Thessaloniki in the premises of the local Chamber of Handicrafts
- 2 Business Plans on the further operation of the BuSSes in the two areas were designed

- A Memorandum of Cooperation of PBs in the coming years was designed and approved by the PBs.

#### Progress in the absorption of financial resources

No	By reporting date	Cumulative Amount paid out (€)	% of Budget Total
1	30/06/2021	8.993,00	1,4
2	31/12/2021	28.589,98	4,5
3	30/06/2022	75.955,71	12,1
4	31/12/2022	122.112,52	19,4
5	30/06/2023	241.495,36	38,4

## Results

- After settling the problems occurred from the withdrawal of PB3 and the extension of the project's duration by 6 months the project was in the position to accelerate its action and to carry out almost the total of its activities.
- The outbreak of the wildfires in Thrace area in summer 2023 created difficulties in the communication with the local businesses. A further prolongation of the project duration by approx. 1,5 months helped overcome the problem.
- Absorption of financial resources was drastically increased after removal of the administrative burdens and it is expected that the project will reach a high level of spending by its completion, as almost all planned activities have been carried out.
- Cooperation with the businesses in the Greek part of the CB area proved a complicated issue. Intensive communication efforts enabled removing the difficulties to a certain extent. This problem did not emerge in Kardzhali district.
- Besides, the implementation of the project activities and the cooperation of the project with both local businesses and stakeholders highlighted the validity of the project strategy and underlined the need for further action in the specific field.
- However a systematic and intensive communication campaign is necessary in order to establish permanent and trustful bonds between the local business communities and the collective bodies of entrepreneurship.
- The digital tools developed by MarCh respond to the needs of the local enterprises. A wide and effective advertising campaign to the target groups should help businesses to benefit more the specific digital infrastructure and contribute to its successful valorization.

- The needs of the businesses for staff and, even more, trained staff is identified as the main problem of the businesses
- The very low scaled extroversion of the local entrepreneurship reveals the needs for export oriented strategies at both businesses and area level. Building capacities on this issue should be a priority area of intervention.
- The will of both businesses and the local university in Thrace for strengthening the mutual cooperation on innovation and restructuring of production processes made apparent the need to take concrete initiatives on the ground towards this direction
- Networking action of businesses either at local or CB level can prove very promising for the involved businesses. Detailed identification of needs and systematic preparation of interventions is necessary for the success of the specific action.

## Conclusions – Recommendations

- The implementation of the project activities confirmed the project's assumption, namely the need for the local collective bodies to take initiatives for fostering the competitiveness of their businesses – members.
- A basic condition to this end is for the local collective bodies of entrepreneurship to earn the trust of the local enterprises and establish strong communication and cooperation bonds.
- An efficient and continuous communication campaign supported by the provision of good practice examples and achievements of the collective professional organizations might prove helpful.
- The promotion of cooperation schemes of the businesses with the local Universities – Research Institutions might boost the adoption of innovative practices.
- Nonetheless, and with regard to the sector in which the pilot intervention of the project was carried out, the agro-food sector, businesses will need support and guidance considering the priorities and the challenges by the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).
- The digital tools developed by MarCh can cover concrete needs of the local enterprises. They need to be broadly advertised so as for the business community to benefit the most from them.
- Training action and availability of trained staff is very highly prioritized by the enterprises. Local collective business bodies can do both, provide training programmes to employees in accordance to identified needs and intermediate to training or resources provider so as for them to cover the businesses' training needs.
- Capacity building to support the extroversion of the local enterprises is very important as the resp. performance of the businesses in the project areas is very low.
- The collective bodies of entrepreneurship can support business networking both at local and CB level by systematically preparing and executing B2B actions and missions.