

## Art of Cooperation – Small Project Fund panel discussion summary

The workshop was about to discover how Small Project Fund (SPF) has been and will be used in some Central and Eastern European Interreg programmes.

Slovakia has been using SPF in several Interreg programmes for 4 consecutive programming periods. Thus the management body – represented by **Peter Balun** – had a lot to share about their experiences with it. **Csilla Veres** as head of Joint Secretariat of the Hungary-Slovakia CBC Programme (Interreg SKHU) and **Julianna Orbán**, the director Via Carpatia European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), managing the SPF in the Eastern programming area of the Slovak-Hungarian border region, provided insights into the operation of SPF within the Interreg SKHU programme. **Marko Perić**, deputy head of the Managing Authority of the Interreg IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme between Croatia – Bosnia and Herzegovina – Montenegro (Interreg HR-BA-ME), contributed to the discussion with their initiative how to use SPF to support micro, Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SME).

In most programmes SPF is used to support people to people actions, where the Beneficiaries have limited financial sources. The HR-BA-ME IPA CBC Programme decided to use SPF so they involve SMEs and micro enterprises into the Programme. This is especially important in IPA countries, which do not have access to other funds designed for enterprises. In both cases it is crucial to operate SPF in a way that the administration of the implementation is easy, while the reimbursement is quick.

The SPFs operated in Slovakia as well as in the HR-BA-ME IPA CBC Programme are run through designated management organizations. In this programming period they have already been selected. One single Beneficiary (in case of Hungary-Slovakia CBC Programme 1-1 EGTC, in HR-BA-ME IPA CBC Programme a Croatian Agency for SMEs, Innovation and Investments established by the Government of the Republic of Croatia) will be responsible for the distribution of the allocated amounts. Peter Balun mentioned though, that he would prefer having the management structure as it was set up in the previous programming period. In 2014-2020 programming period it was set up by the Lead Partner principle, and at least two partners had to be in the partnership that was responsible for the operation of the SPF. This would represent a true Interreg programme, which always has at least two cooperating countries.

All mentioned programmes will use simplified cost options like unit costs, lump sums or flat rate financing as well as the draft budget method, which are set out in the regulation. This shall ensure that the planning of the project, the reporting and the reimbursement runs as smoothly and fast as possible. Via Carpatia and Rába-Duna-Vág EGTCs have just launched their first Call for Small Projects within the Hungary-Slovakia CBC Programme. They are looking forward to the experiences and feedbacks about the new methods. Marko Perić mentioned that if the SPF proves to be successful with the SMEs, it may open the opportunity for using this tool in other sectors too.

The panellists all agreed that there is a real need for cooperation and SPF is just the right tool for that. In case of SPF for people to people actions it can have a huge impact in the Programme areas, while generating an incredibly large visibility. SPF, if done right, is an exceptionally efficient tool in promoting and supporting cross-border cooperation.