

CeSPI

Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale



Regional Social Policy Reform in Shkoder: State of the Art and Future Perspective

by Manuela MURTHI (SRC&IT, Albania)
Assignment done under the CeSPI guidance

**Fifth Report- Final Report
June 2013**

(30th June – First draft)

SeeNet Programme

A trans-local network for the cooperation between Italy and South East Europe



Piazza Margana 39 – 00186 Roma (Italia) – Tel. +3906 6990630 – Fax +3906 6784104 – e-mail: cespi@cespi.it –
web: www.cespi.it

TABLE OF CONTENT

Executive Summary

1. Three years of Regional Social Policy Reform in Shkoder: successes and failures	5
1.1 Social Policy Reform in its latest development in Shkoder	5
1.2 The role and the dynamic of actors and authorities operating in the Social Policy Reform	6
1.3 Local Government and its challenges in the National Policy Framework.....	7
2. The role of cooperation to improve the Regional Social Policy Reform in Shkoder: past experiences and future opportunities	7
2.1 International, bilateral and/or decentralized cooperation	8
2.2 The main role for decentralized/territorial cooperation in the future	10
3. Future perspectives	12
3.1 Regional Social Policy Reform in Shkoder in future IPA perspective.....	12
3.2 IPA new programming according to the perspective of the local/territorial development	15
3.3 Policies and Perspectives in the Adriatic Ionian Macro region Framework.....	17
Conclusion	20
ANNEX 1: List of stakeholders interviewed	22
ANNEX 2: EU PRESS RELEASE.....	24
ANEX 3: Draft Calendar of Events	23
Document Sources:	27

ACRONOYMS

AAC	Albanian Association of Communes
AAM	Albanian Association of Municipalities
ADA	Austrian Development Agency
CBC	Cross Border Cooperation

DSDC	Department of Strategy and Donor Coordination
DLDP	Decentralization and Local Development Programme
DPS	Departamento per lo Svilupo e la Coesione Economica
EC/EU	European Commission/European Union
EUSAIR	European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region
EUSBSR	EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
EUSDR	EU Strategy for the Danube Region
ESI	European Structural and Investment Funds
FTI	Fast Track Initiative
GoA	Government of Albania
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
IPS	Integrated Planning System
LGDS	Local Government and Decentralisation Strategy
LGU	Local Government Unit
MADA	Mountain Area Development Agency
MIPD	Multi-Annual Indicative Planning Document 2011-2013
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MoLSAE	Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare
NCP	National Contact Point
NFP	National Focus Point
NSDI	National Strategy for Development and Integration
RDP	Regional Development Programme
RCDS	Regional Development Cross Cutting Strategy
SCO-A	Swiss Cooperation Office in Albania
SDC	Swiss Development Cooperation
SAA	Stabilization and Association Agreement
SEE	South East Europe
SWG	Sectorial Working Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Executive summary

In the framework of the main objective of the Seenet Program and in particular of the research activity, this final report focuses on an analysis of the changes that the implementation of this Program has brought in the field of the Social Policy in Shkoder Region. The report tries to highlight the achievements of the Seenet programme and to put them in the framework of Albanian integration process, the new IPA and macro regional perspectives and the decentralization process.

After the three year implementation of the program this final report highlights the progress on the topic under research – social policy reform in the Region of Shkodra. While in the first report of this research activity¹ the analysis showed that most programs in the region were lead from central level Sectoral Working Group or donor meeting, today Shkoder Local Government successfully has start to be an active beneficiary not only for the domestic resources but also for the external financial support. Last years Shkodra Region was considered among the leader government unit in the decentralization process, project implementations and EU different programs fund receiver. In this process the Seenet Programme is clearly recognized from the LGUs in Shkodra as an important key player in the process of local government strenghtning and capacity building.

With clear evidence, Shkodra region has demonstrated today its capacity, skills and ability gained through the programme to be a beneficiary for the EU programmes. Facing the decentralization challenge and exchanging experience from region to region seems an effective way to develop the sucesfull implementations of Social Policies in Shkoder Region.

This report tries to illustrate the dynamic of the main national and local policies aiming at the achievement of social planning reforms objectives. The analysis brings, in continuation with previous reports, the context and the regional development strategy over which the central and the local level respectively are working to address the actual challenges in social policy field. All the counted progress are going along with the national attempt to accomplish the obligations of the EU membership which includes criteras for Social Protection, Human Rights and Social Services issues. These criterias are set in the framework of EU perspective which shapes the actual challenges, requiring a dynamic process of the social protection strategy for the central and local level.

While looking at the progress done, the report tries to highlight also the importance of the new challenges ahead, in particular in the way towards EU membership. In the way to get the Candidate Status Albania has clear tasks and objective to achieve. These tasks and objectives guide the local and international actors in their efforts to improve the quality of service and the standards of the institutions offering social care in the region.

Following the stages of Seenet project implementation the research in itself and this report, in coherence with the General Objective, has contributed to the adoption of democratic and effective models of Shkodra Local Development and governance in the multi actorness, long term and multi level perspective in framework of the decentralization and EU enlargement process for Albania. The programm itself was throughout project life in coherence with the main objective of IPA support to the Social Policy sector in preparing Albania for the implementation and management of the European Social Fund and bringing Albania closer to EU policies.

Beside the evidence based of the work done in the framework of the Seenet Program Objectives, the report brings attention on future perspectives and the way foreward for the Shkodra Region in Social Policies. The EU Programs in the field of Social Policies are an important challenge for regional level as the role of EU funding represents undoubtedly the main window of opportunity.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the Programs and funds allocated through regional cooperation are central element of EU's efforts to bring forward the reform process in the WB and help region to achieve economic prosperity. The report highlights in particular the perspectives for the Adriatic - Ionian Macroregion. Albania is currently having for the second time since the yar 2000 the Chairmanship of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative. This role is taking place in a crucial period of cooperation among the AII Member States, during which the process of the approval of the EU strategy for the Macroregion will be hopefully finalized. The inter-governmental work of the AII will converge toward the common goal of arriving by the end of 2014 to give the final endorsement of EU Strategy for the EUSAIR and turn it into an operational platform.

1. Three years of Regional Social Policy Reform in Shkoder: successes and failures

¹ "Local Democratic Governance in Shkodra Region", by Manuela Murthi, available at <http://www.cespi.it/SEENET/Shkodra.pdf>

1.1 Social Policy Reform in its latest development in Shkoder

The Social Policy Reform for Shkodra Region lies in coherence with the national “Sectorial Strategy of Social Protection 2008 – 2013”, based on which Shkodra Regional Council has developed the “Strategical Concept of Shkoder Regional Development 2010 – 2016” for making more tangible action by tailoring the national objectives to the regional one. The five pillars of this document are: education, training and capacity building; infrastructure and services; tourism and agrobusiness; interregional and other partner cooperation; and flood protection, giving also the comprehensive attempt road for coordinating efforts in developing the region.

The City of Shkodra and the adjoining area is definitely one of the most attractive regions in Albania. *Referring the trend of Social Policy Reform during the Seenet Project Implementation we brought through this research work the increasing dynamic of this reform and implementation.* We clearly put in evidence since the beginning of the research work that the 2009 – 2010 period showed that like in other regions, absorption capacity for IPA funds was lacking in Shkoder and the implementation of reform and strategies on place were difficult to put in place, understand and build them. Lack of coordination and responsibilities between local and central actors were quite evident. In the start of the Seenet project life, these issues were standing as some of the main challenges for Shkodra LGUs.

While it was important to develop the technical management capacities in the field of Social Policies and on how to plan, implement and evaluate concrete projects, the need was even more in the developing the responsible institutions and procedures, with a view to make project funded investments sustainable, use them properly and maintain infrastructure and improve services in coherence with national strategic framework.

In the meanwhile the Department for Strategy and Donor Coordination (DSDC) noticed that External assistance had a relatively low level of support for social development and there was the need to increase this support in future programming². And it was evident that external assistance in Shkodra was focused more in local economic development as compared with those in education and health, the latest one led more strongly from USAID and SWISS cooperation projects as well as UNDP with the program of achieving MDG.

The EU progress Report for the period of 2010-2011 also noticed that: *It is still important to develop capacity building programs in regional level in a way to enable the staff to plan and set development priorities. It is also important to build capacities for planning, implementing and evaluating projects, to maintain EU funded infrastructure and sustain their use. Regional policy must concentrate on least prosperous regions as well as on contributing to a more attractive place to live and work more knowledge and innovation for growth, more and better jobs.*

As such, in the context of Stabilization Association Agreement (SAA) and EU Pre-Accession Programm, a particular importance has been given to LGU capacity strengthening. Towards this end and in line with the NSDI, the RDPs advocated for appropriate improvements of the legal framework as well as to contribute to further development of capacities of Qarks and other relevant institutions to fully meet the EU standards in their regional development activities.

In this framework the Shkoder Regional Development strategy puts a strong emphasis on the aim of strengthening the cooperation process, both in terms of cross-border cooperation and international cooperation as well as the LGUs inter-municipality cooperation. In line with national and local strategies on place, Shkodra LGU significantly has turn its work toward the increase of quality service, their standards and inclusiveness in implementation of Social Service projects. As a different picture from the past, today Shkodra Local Governmens is part of the elektronik platform of “*Digital Map of Social Service*” tool, provided from the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (MoLSAE) with the support of National and Local Social Services, UNICEF, World Vision and National Center for Social Studies³ which identify clearly the local picture of the development stage of this service and making it an important tool for the users – mean target group.

After all assistance put in for the Local Government’s capacity building from national and international actors - in which Italian Cooperation through the Seenet is an important active actor to

² Republic of Albania; External Assistance Orientation Document, April 2008

³ <http://www.sherbimeshoqerore.gov.al/Default.aspx>

be count – today Shkoder Region successfully has start to be an active beneficiary not only for the domestic resources but also for the external financial support funds. The highlighted positive aspects of “Financing regional and local development” for Shkodra Region are counted to be⁴:

- LGUs benefiting from own incomes derived from local taxes and tariffs, with gradually increased self-sustainability
- Effective equalization of local incomes via unconditional transfers from central budget
- Increasing overall volumes of investment expenditures at sub-national level

In emphasizing the above, in regard to the cooperations project implementations and EU different programs fund receiver, we can count here the CBC project named “*Development of local strategies for social services in the cross-border Shkoder-Ulcinj region*”. This project is a project in the framework of Cross-Border Programme funded by the European Union IPA 2007 – 2013, Component II, with the overall objective to contribute to social development and promotion of social cohesion in the respective communities in the mutual interest of citizens of two countries through the use of their social and economical pursuing regional development and facilitating cross border cooperation⁵.

Shkodra region is also increasing the ability to participate actively for the Government Competitive grants introduced to finance small capital investments at local level, with regard to roads, water supplies, education and health. These funds are given from the state Budget through National Development Funds and in particular for the year 2013 we note an increase of 13% of the budget allocated in 2011. As a result, currently the Shkoder Municipality has financed various “Social Service” projects such as “Open Door” project aiming to support the vulnerable children 0-6 years old with low economic condition at home, assisting them with health, education and integration services. For similar services but different vulnerable segments of population Shkoder Municipality has supported the projects “Open School for you”, “My Homme” and “Raibow”. Shkoder Municipality aims to support more the social aspect of Shkodra community using and coordinating various donor support to contribute in the increase standard of service offered as required from EU and international requirement.

1.2 The role and the dynamic of actors and authorities operating in the Social Policy Reform

The “Donor Architecture” of Albania is led by regular Quarterly Donor-Government Roundtables chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister. Initially, bilateral and multilateral donors used to discuss the problem of donor fragmentation, duplication of efforts and lack of absorption of donor assistance. As a consequence, the donors agreed to support key challenges over the period 2007-2013, that were :

- a single policy framework for the socio-economic development of counties leading to ‘*National Programme for the Development of Counties*’;
- a single socio-economic development programming document for the county leading to ‘*County Development Strategy*’;
- a single local agency to coordinate its implementation
- a government plan for the development of the Disadvantaged Areas and the allocation of a special budget line in order to operate special support schemes for disadvantaged areas

The Albanian Ministry of Interior plays a key role in supporting the implementation of the programmes, providing political and institutional support as well as technical and practical expertise through its consultants. The Ministry also contributes to the sustainability of the programmes, ensuring the dissemination of the results and future use of the project tools. Qarks of Shkodra and its Council undertake today their responsibilities to coordinate and harmonise regional policies, carrying out functions assigned by the central government as well as functions transferred to them by local governments.

The European Commission, USAID, UNDP, SDC, and CoE were given stewardship of the coordination process by the donor community in-country, supported by efforts of a number of

⁴ EU and UNDP Albania, Integrated Support for Decentralization Project “ Working for Regional Development”, 2012

⁵ http://www.shkodra.euic.al/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=270%3ARound-table-development-of-local-strategies-for-social-services-in-the-cross-border-shkoder--ulcinj-region&catid=54%3Akrye&Itemid=1&lang=en

bilateral donors and international organisations. For the purpose of the coordination among projects and donors the Sectorial Working Groups (SWG) were composed. Within this working group several donors coordinate sub - thematic issues. There are three SWG active in the Social/ Human Resource Development Sector. The first one addresses "Social Protection and Inclusion" led from the UN; the second one concerns "employment and VET" with the lead donor the Switzerland and other EU donors and the third one covers "education" led from the WB.

The above mentioned process was going along with the national attempt to accomplish the obligations of the EU membership which includes criteria for Social Protection, Human Rights and Social Services issues. These criteria are set in the framework of EU perspective which shapes the actual challenges requiring a dynamic process of the social protection strategy for the central and local level.

Local governments are organized also in three national Associations: the Albanian Association of Municipalities, the Albanian Association of Communes, and the Albanian Association of Regions. Strengthened day to day, the associations seem to play a growing role in bringing the views of municipalities/communes into the political debate and are increasingly successful in influencing political decisions on decentralization issues at central level. However, still these associations see spaces to raise concerns about lacking capacities and the limited interest of local governments in joining forces for political lobbying.

The Decentralisation and Local Development Programme (2010 – 2013) has required the active involvement of the Albanian Association of Municipalities (AAM) and the Albanian Association of Communes (AAC) and foresees also a wide range of activities requiring continuous communication and the assistance of the two Associations. The Associations provide in particular technical and practical expertise to the programme and facilitate the implementation and organisation of activities at the municipal and commune level and in particular in the pilot LGUs.

Prefecture of Shkodra which represents the central government at the Qark level is responsible for oversight of the legal compliance of local government operations as well as for coordinating the work of de-concentrated central government agencies. The project design of the Strategic Concept of Shkoder Regional Development 2010 – 2016 is followed from a consultation process which includes various workshops with interested stakeholders including civil society and business community. Exchange of knowledge among different actors is made in this process and the sectorial expertise as well as voice of community individual is heard in the same platform.

1.3 Local Government and its challenges in the national policy framework

In the current dynamic the coordination of the roles and responsibilities of local and central level remain key for the success of the reform. Even though it's a hard run, Shkodra Region in the framework of national policies which imply different strategies and policy papers, took and is taking steps to be the main actor in the Policy Design in regard with implementation of Social Policy Reform in Shkoder and increase the existing standard of Social Protection and Social Delivery Service. Being aware of the challenges of this task the Action Plan of Shkodra Region Strategic Concept gives special focus in human resource capacity building and inter-regional and other partner cooperation. Shkodra Development strategy and its action plan brings out a new approach for social service provisions giving a context acknowledging that social services does not have to be provided only by the local government, but can be offered by a mix of governmental and non-governmental providers and they must be licensed, experienced, evaluated and regulated by a national standardised system through independent bodies.

As the Social Policy Reform is a cross cutting reform and imply different level of actors, the LGUs today are aware that this process can not be successful if does not stand closely in coherence and close coordination with central level. While we have put in evidence at the beginning of Seenet project life that local and central level were lacking the evidence based and/or a clear picture of ongoing running projects, modalities and types of them as well as financial evidences in a way to articulate the social protection service planning, currently we notice that progress in this process has been made both central and local levels, strengthening and coordinating more the priorities and financial allocation according to the priorities set.

However, there is still an evidence of the lack of horizontal partnering, especially among municipalities and communes. In a situation of extreme LGUs fragmentation, undefined regional scope of functions, and generally limited financial resources for development, Inter-Municipal Cooperation (IMC) should be the first and natural way to overcome these barriers. Currently there is evidence based of the success of IMC for some LGUs in Albania (including some LGUs of Shkoder). This good experience should be scaled up and applied in social services using the lesson learned of what actually is implemented, interventions which up to now have been focused on economic aspects.

Seenet Programme devoted specific attention to the implementation of the Inter Municipal Cooperation Project, aimed at reinforcing local and regional government structures. Seenet program had thus a crucial role in this successful IMC program contributing to increase the effectiveness of social policies, promoting the definition and implementation of an integrated system of social services and interventions (territorial social plan) based on the public private partnership and person-centred, able to identify the needs and the possible answers coming from the territory. Inter-municipal cooperation is quite a new experience for the Region of Shkodra, indeed for almost the whole of Albania. The role of Seenet in working closely with LGUs in the de-institutionalization of the services is considered as an important intervention and experience in the the field of social services. There is today an active electronic platform friendly used making accessible the social service details either from the groups in need or for the supplier and other interested actors as well . In regard with financial resources, eventhough still limited we can notice that in the process of achieving its vision, the budget of unconditional transfers for Shkodra Region results increasing in the trends of last year. So while in 2010 there was a negative percentage of change in the unconditional budget allocated for Shkodra LGU, the 2013 show an increase of 12% as compared with the 2011 budget.

Shkoder Region develops familiarity with different donor programs and expertise with various external assistance instruments in social policies development with a view to optimizing the match of the regional priorities and multi/bilateral donor programs/aid instruments.

2. The role of cooperation to improve the Regional Social Policy Reform in Shkoder: past experiences and future opportunities

2.1 International, bilateral and/or decentralized cooperation

The representatives of Shkodra Municipality and other LGU unit's consistently recognize and appreciate the assistance of donors in their region – selecting clearly the Seenet Programm, highlighting their patient in dealing with existing concerns and/or barriers in administrative works while dealing with public financial resources, such as: following the LGUs administrative time-line which sometime is not compatible with project time line implementation; following administrative regulations and procedures which also sometimes create delays in achieving particular project's objective set, etc. In the way of decentralization and Social Policy Reform implementation, while the position of municipalities and communes is to be both participants in the planning process as well as the real project promoters that identify needs, generate project ideas, develop them, apply for funding and then implement projects, qarks were lagging behind without clear functions and in a vacuum of resources. The functions of other actors in the chain of decentralization were also unclear for each actor, i.e: *The National Partnership Council for Regional Development; The Regional Partnership Councils; The Department for Integrated Regional Development; The Regional Development Agency*⁶, etc.

One important issue dicussed early on time from international community cooperation about the Social Policy Reform in Shkodra Region was the overlapping of projects/activities/and implementations, an evident discussion at the inception/initial phase of Seenet project and it seems

⁶ “Local Democratic Governance in Shkodra Region”, by Manuela Murthi, second report, available at <http://www.cespi.it/SEENET/Shkodra.pdf>

to be a very critical aspect for almost all stakeholders which used to articulate it very clearly. Under the international assistance, today the issue of overlapping activities is having a specific focus and attention from LGUs. The local actors are driven from the central cooperation framework (DSDC, MoI, SWG) but the need is to have a better monitoring and reviewing system of the interventions plans, so to be in compliance with updated development and community needs as well as coordinated in optimizing the investment values and making actors accountable for their actions. With an increasing trend of their technical capacities and best use of these human resources for international community, the regional staffs from year to year for these last three years is more focused to the coordination and effective administration of local level as well as the best use of the financial resources deriving from Government budget, their own source or donor.

The Shkoder Region has an intensive and dynamic financing from international donors that covers various regional development aspects. It was evident that the external assistance in Shkodra was more focused in local economic development as compared with those in education and health. The latest one was mainly led from USAID and SWISS cooperation projects as well as UNDP with the program of achieving MDGs. Later on the Strategic Concept of Shkoder Regional Development 2010 – 2016 has detailed comprehensively the regional development on five fields of action with their respective vision, objectives, priorities, and indicators. Keeping in focus the participatory approach in the policy design, Shkodra Region has been trying to involve all these actors of society in this regional development policy design being followed from a consultation process which involved various workshops with interested stakeholders including civil society and business community. The aim is that different stakeholders contribute to ensure equity and inclusiveness.

The donor cooperation assistance was seen as an important factor in boosting the management skills, the use of the existing capacities at regional level and in the management of grant schemes. The grant funds now-on has a strong component embedded for the capacity development of the LGUs both in project cycle management and thematic trainings on relevant areas of service provision. Trainings were provided to Qark experts to increase their capacities. Transparency of the decision making of every grant scheme was an important theme and considered of crucial importance in capacity building. The objectives of intervention are to give to Shkodra Local Government ownership of all the processes of the Social Policy Reform implementation in Shkoder Region.

Apart from international assistance for an optimization of investments done through local government capacity building, a number of other important projects/programms has followed for establishing and strengthening the social policy reform in the region. Some of them to be counted here are the EC-UNDP funded project “Integrated Support for Decentralization” ended December 2012, the SDC funded project “Decentralization and Local Development Program in Shkodra and Lezha Region” (DLDP II) for a duration of March 2010 - 2013, the USAID’s “Local Government Program in Albania” ongoing as the second phase after 2012.

The advancement of the Information Society nowadays (i.e “Digital Map of Social Services”) calls for involvement of diverse stakeholders including international organizations, public institutions, private sector, academia and civil society representatives. This should be addressed from both the policy and technical perspectives as the use of ICT can help improve transparency, accountability and effectiveness in public institutions as well as increase quality of service for the community. The objective of this strategy is the review and the coordination of the commitments related to the creation of an information based economy and therefore to ensure a coordinated society wide execution of the responsibilities from the relevant actors. This objective stands embedded on the vision of the progress of Albania towards knowledge based society through a sustainable development that would lead to a society where all citizens benefit from the communications and information technologies with the aim of increasing the level of knowledge, effectiveness and transparency in the public administration. This challenge will help the local government unit to provide its community with adequate and accountable information, exchange information and capitalize experience.

2.2 The main role for decentralised/territorial cooperation in the future

In the current dynamic the coordination of the roles and responsibilities of local and central level remain key for the success of the reform. Even though it's a hard run, Shkodra Region is taking steps to be the main actor in the Policy Design in regard with Social Protection and Social Service Delivery. Today the current objectives of Social Policy Reform might be threatened from the:

- Global economic crisis which may reduce investments by the Government in the social, health and protection sector and thus increasing the vulnerability of socially excluded groups
- Changes in political power of central or local government, bringing a delay in implementation and sustainability due to governmental staff engagement in running the elections or staff turnover (i.e. Parliamentary elections of June 2013).

As such in response, it will be worth working to:

- Push for ongoing advocacy and implementation of social reforms by networking with local and central stakeholders, interested actors and NGOs to increase impact to targeted groups through joint interventions.
- Ensure the ownership of governmental structures at the very start of program implementation and build their institutional capacities on relevant program issues so the interventions became sustainable.
- Increase the ability to benefit from the EU programmes as the role of EU funding represents undoubtedly the main window of opportunity for the cooperation in the area at all level.

Furthermore, scaling up some of the investments from very local interventions to supra-local levels, from inter-municipal to regional, and from regional to inter-regional levels should be considered. This on the one hand can counterbalance the fragmented and inefficient territorial administration and on the other create stronger horizontal and vertical linkages among development actors. Through inter-connected shared responsibilities, this translates into shared interest in more growth and jobs.

In pursuing these priorities there is a need of a wider participation, in particular for partnershiping and coordinating with local experienced NGOs making sure to optimize and make the investment sustained through vertical and horizontal interaction. Otherwise it would constitute in an important missed opportunity. There are also open issues in the involvement of the business community actors in the process of regional development through common interests. More should be done to increase the private sector participation as a development actor and make it more included in the initiatives presented in the region. The local government is looking for more innovative ideas in the upcoming future to improve the business community participation in the regional development process, in particular for the deinstitutionalization of services, forcing them to hear the community voice and needs through collaboration and partner's cooperation.

Cross - border cooperation and development cooperation have been identified by Shkodra Region as important instruments for Shkoder Region Development. In the context of Stabilization Association Agreement (SAA) and EU Pre-Accession Programm, the main focus of cooperation initiatives has been LGU capacity strengthening.

International donor community (Development and Integration Partners – DIP) is involved in a “coordination mechanism”, whose aim is to promote aid harmonization. The coordination with the projects and donors is made at the central level through the Sector Working Group on Decentralization that is co-chaired by the deputy Minister of Interior and the Deputy Country Director of SDC in Albania. There is a parallel coordination process within the European Union, the so-called “Fast Track-Division of Labour” (FTI-DoL), where the Italian Cooperation has taken the peculiar role of “facilitator”⁷. FTI-DoL is seen as added value to the existing coordination mechanisms established by the Government of Albania, as such it is embedded in the national Harmonisation Action Plan.

In this context, the Decentralisation & Regional Development as well as the Employment sector are lead from Switzerland - Swiss Cooperation Office. Germany is the FTI-DoL facilitator globally while Italy is assigned the role of FTI-DoL facilitator in Albania. The facilitator is expected to:

⁷ Memorandum of Understanding 2010; “The Launch of Fast Trucking Initiative on Division of Labour in Albania”

- Support the GoA by way of development assistance as well as development of tools for DoL (such as mapping donor aid flows; assessing relative advantages of donors, etc).
- Support the development of a country strategy/roadmap/plan on DoL as agreed by the GoA and donors.
- Provision of capacity development to the Albanian Public Administration's staff to lead the aid effectiveness agenda.
- Develop tools and guidance notes and train staff of interested donors to create an enabling environment.

In this framework, the Italian Cooperation promoted the creation of an working group, which saw the participation of the Delegation of the European Union, Austria, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland and, subsequently, the Albanian government. Department of Strategy and Donor Coordination (DSDC) documents and evidences the Italian Biletaral Cooperation funds showing its investment and disbursement onvarious sector where its easy to highlight the continues investment through years in field of regional decentralization and social sectors in health and education.

Actually the Italian Cooperation is implementing a number of projects in Shkodra Region consistin in field of Health in value of 3.46 Mil €, Education in value of 2.93 Mil €, Government and Civil Society in value of 2.57 Mil €, Social Services invalue of 2.57 Mil €, Women and Development in value of 0.72 Mil € etc.

A number of important projects has been implemented in the region in framework of decentralization reforms. These include the EC-UNDP funded project "Integrated Support for Decentralization", the SDC funded project "Decentralization and Local Development Program in Shkodra and Lezha Region" (DLDP II), the USAID's "Local Government Program in Albania" (which has expired but a follow - up USAID funded programme is at the inception stage).

Building on strong historical ties, Austria has continued to support Albania's sustainable development and EU integration efforts in areas such as good governance, regional development, social inclusion and protection, gender equality, environment and renewable energy, vocational education, water and sanitation. As part of Albania's convergence with EU standards, special attention is paid to the protection of human rights. Austria's focus has been on gender equality, women's empowerment and social inclusion.

The main programs with special focus on Social policies of Austrian and Swiss Cooperation are: Social inclusion through training and professional training; gender equality as well as development for children security network.

In this cooperation context the Regional Development Programme (RDP) funded by two donors, the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) and the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), implemented from a period of 2011 – 2014, contributed significantly in Shkodra region to an equitable social and economic development (overall objective) while improving 'equal access of citizens to quality public services and economic opportunities, in particular in disadvantaged areas, through strengthening Qark institutions' (programme purpose).

While looking on the way forward, in the road toward the EU integration, the regional development obviously will continue to be dependent on external support as well as in the sustainability of past investments. In this context, the EU and other donor funds should already look into best ways of installing 'absorption capacities' at sub-national levels as they one of prerequisites for effective use of development funding. From the analysis the lessons learned and the messages taken tell us that: The donors should make use of the existing capacities at regional level (Qarks) in the management of grant schemes. The project development up todate require to be considered more and more scaling up some of the investments from very local interventions to supra-local levels, from inter-municipal to regional, and from regional to inter-regional levels should be considered. This on the one hand can counterbalance the fragmented and inefficient territorial administration and on the other create stronger horizontal and vertical linkages among development actors.

3. Future Perspective

3.1 Regional Social Policy Reform in Shkoder in Future IPA Perspective

Albania as a country in the road of joining EU has received funding and support through the only EU channel IPA. Currently, Albania benefits from two components of the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance out of 5, specifically from Component I for Transition Assistance and Institution Building and Component II for Cross-Border Cooperation. However there are opportunities to benefit funding for measures similar to the other components III, IV and V. Furthermore, according to the proposal IPA II regulation in the 2014-2020 programming period all pre-accession countries will be funded through all the available IPA windows: thus Albania will have probably access to all the different funds in the next future.

IPA objective is **to ensure full decentralised management**. Overall policy, legal and programming framework are already developed for this instruments. The strategic Documents on place are:

- IPA Framework Regulation
- IPA implementing Regulation
- Multi-annual Indicative Financial Framework (MIFF)
- Multi-annual Indicative Planning Document (MIPD)

In this framework, Shkodra Region in 2007-2013 benefits particularly from the IPA Component I - Transition assistance and institutional building (which includes as field of investment the social inclusion and civil society development) and IPA Component II - Cross-Border Cooperation, from different programs of EU funds i.e IPA-CBC Adriatic; IPA CBC Albania Montenegro; SEE- South East Europe; MED-Mediterranean. These programmes include investment which: Enhance economic and social development in border areas; Address common challenges in areas of public health; promote joint activities involving partners and border regions; Support networks between urban and rural areas; Develop cooperation in sectors such as health, culture, tourism and education; Stimulate the integration of cross-border gender equality, social inclusion etc..

Meanwhile, the “Sectorial Strategy of Social Protection 2008 – 2013” (SSSP) embedded on the National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI), will serve as a basic documents in determining the Policy Priorities, Medium Term Budget Program design and orientation of donor funding, especially funding from the EU program IPA, for the period 2013-2020.

The main objective of IPA support to the Social sector is to prepare Albania for the implementation and management of the European Social Fund and bringing Albania closer to EU policies. The European Commission recommendations established in the European Partnership with Albania 2011 - 2013 enlists the following priorities:

- improve social protection systems and combat social exclusion;
- adopt measures to increase school enrolment rates at secondary level and among children in rural areas, in particular girls, and in vocational schools;
- improve the education and training system in order to increase the offer of required skills; continue efforts to improve the quality of education and training and establish a modern vocational education and training system; and continue efforts to improve the quality of education and to create a modern vocational education and training system; and promote regional cooperation in the field of higher education.

Furthermore, the aim is to prevent social exclusion and to develop social inclusion policies/measures for the most vulnerable, notably the Roma population, inter alia, and other minorities such as Balkan Egyptians. Finally, equality between men and women as well as the fight against discrimination shall be strengthened.

Taking concrete steps to reinforce the protection of human rights, notably for women, children and Roma, and to effectively implement anti-discrimination policies is a key priority of the Opinion.

The short term perspective under the EU recommendation: The Albanian government confirms that accession to European Union is a strategic objective. The Albanian Government is intensively trying to get the status right after the succesfull election accomplished during June 2013. As such the EU agenda comes as the main priority of all actors – a process which was delayed and kept pending from political class during the 2012 -2013.

Short-term measures addressing the EU priorities and recommendations remain as following:

- ◆ Adoption of National Strategy on Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for the period 2011-2015;
- ◆ Enhancement of women's representative ability to participate in overall decision-making sectors;
- ◆ Promoting the economic empowerment of women, in order to increase their participation in the public sphere and to effectively protect victims of domestic violence.
- ◆ Review of National Children's Strategy 2005-2010 and Action Draft Plan for the period 2011-2015;
- ◆ Completion of legal framework in line with *acquis* and international conventions aiming at the establishment of a functional system for the protection of Children's rights;
- ◆ Completion of legal framework for the persons with disabilities, in line with standards and best practices of the EU countries;
- ◆ Protection of Roma's community rights in line with legislation in force and international conventions.
- ◆ Ensuring effective implementation of the anti-discrimination policies through an enhanced role of the Office of the Commissioner and concrete activities such as awareness-raising.

The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (MoLSAE) has address the EU Priorities through the new action plan "*Action Plan Addressing the Recommendations of The EU Opinion For Albania*" setting up four priorities areas consisting of:

- ◆ Strengthening of the Institutional and Legal Mechanism in order to ensure and monitor the implementation of the Law "On gender equality in society" and the law on "Measures against domestic violence";
- ◆ Greater participation of Women in the Political and Public life through special measures in order to reach equal participation of man and women in the decision-making of all sectors;
- ◆ Social and Economic Empowerment of Women to further reach social and economic security of women and girls;
- ◆ Reduction of the violence against Women and Domestic Violence by improving the legal framework to strengthen the condemnation of violence against women and domestic violence with zero tolerance, supporting the domestic violence victims through different social services, etc.

Beside the IPA/EU funds, achieving these four priorities, UN Women will also fund the costs of the consultancy work. Directorate of Equal Opportunities Policies and Family (DEOPF) and MoLSAE will provide overall technical guidance to the expert as well as facilitate work with appropriate offices in Line Ministries and depended institutions. According the budget of the strategy, the activities of action plan will be realised from the budget of government (MoLSAE and Line Ministries), the budgets of local government and other national/international donors. All actors including the LGU are part of this process and be responsible in the commitment of their budget allocation.

In the adaption of the integral law "On protection of children's rights" (No 10347 of 4.11.2010), MoLSAE has started to review the National Children's Strategy and draft the new Action Plan 2011-2015 with specific measures on the protection of children's rights, as well as all the necessary legal sub acts which enable adjustment and well functioning of responsible structures that operate in this area at central and local level⁸. LGU and other interested parties were part of the consultation process in designing and approving the action plan and policies as well as objective to be achieved when related with LGU responsibilities and structures.

⁸ "Local Democratic Governance in Shkodra Region", by Manuela Murthi, forth report, available at <http://www.cespi.it/SEENET/Shkodra.pdf>

In the road of EU Integration, Albania requires strengthening and consolidation of social protection services institutions reflecting the quality and EU standards for the service offered. Partners working in the reform of Social Protection in Shkoder should focus their work and project objectives to the service oriented towards meeting in a qualitative, fast and efficient manner the users and citizens needs, with building the trust and confidence of the citizens in the system. The policy makers and implementers should design their objectives and intervention to aiming for the contemporary EU required standards.

Absorption capacity to deliver on strategic planning, managing projects, and capacity to maintain and sustain public services and investments will be key for accessing EU funds. Capacities of regional level are almost in a sufficient number but not qualified and skilled for the tasks the regions are going to perform. Local Government does recognize the need for further assistance in the social planning where the SeeNet program can give valuable assistance in capacity and strengthening of structure capacity building. One of the main problematic issues that the Municipality of Shkodra Region is how to increase efficiency through using the public financial resources based on the legal framework, as well as using and combining project donor resources in compliance with its objectives and public spending rules.

In Shkodra Region, while NGOs and civil society representatives seem to be active, there are open issues in the **involvement of the business community** actors in the process of region development through common interests. The LG staff in Shkodra does state that more should be done to increase the private sector participation as a development actor and make it more inclusive in the initiatives presented and/or discussed in various forums or structures of LGUs in Shkodra Region

1. Decentralization and the transfer of all residential services in the administration of the Local Government Units (LGU)
2. expansion of a wide variety of community services and coverage of all groups with basic services in all the districts;
3. expansion of the community services by the year 2013 in all municipalities that have not such services
4. until 2010 piloting guardianship service in two municipalities (Shkodra and Vlora) and expand it until 2013 in other local government units in accordance with the needs and budget possibilities – *according to the actual information from MoLSAE officials the activities to realize this objective will start next year (2012)*
5. de – intitutionalization, consolidation of the "family - homes" service model for children and people with disabilities, expansion of these services for other social groups (youth, elderly);
6. implementation of standards increasing the quality of services for children, disabled and elderly⁹
7. inspection twice a year of all residential services and day care offered by public and private operators
8. Licensing of new providers and periodic re-licensing of all NGOs working in care services.

3.2 IPA new programming according to the perspective of local/territorial development

Albania is in the stage of getting soon the “candidate country” status which mean for it getting on another stage in her way towards the EU. But the EU enlargement process is based on strict conditionalities. For countries and region in transformation enlargment such as Albania, the conditionalities are about implementation and creating track record in areas such as fundamental rights and good governance. In the social sector service, the enlargement perspective implies that the dialogue of employment and social reform programmes has to support policies for inclusive

⁹ Actually the MoLSAE has already set and approved standarts for social services, for care services of the trafficked individuals (or in danger for traffic or in shelter care), and social care of children in residential center.

growth in line with Europe 2020 objective. In this context Albania has to translate EU principles in Programmes which should be practical and include practical measure for the delivery of policies on the ground. The future expectation for the cooperation is that priorities would be addressed through more national and IPA funds to finance the weak social institution.

Cross-border cooperation is crucial for stability, cooperation and economic development in border regions. The aim of EU assistance is to develop local capacity in relation to cross-border cooperation in the beneficiaries' border regions while also targeting specific local development projects. But the Development of cross-border cooperation is dependent on capacity building activities of the relevant local and central authorities. Therefore, institution building activities under IPA Components I and II aim at bringing additionality, complementarity, and catalytic effects between Components and ensuring that cross-border skills built up at the national level are further developed.

Political and economic contacts between bordering regions, especially within the Western Balkans, have been limited. Bordering areas that often share the same challenges and difficulties did not have instruments or possibilities to jointly tackle them, as mutual communication had been almost interrupted in the 1990s.

In North Albania – Shkoder region, cross-border cooperation is a constructive way to reconnect with neighbouring countries after decades of isolation. By fostering the cooperation among local/regional authorities, associations, NGOs and enterprises from neighbouring regions, CBC programmes enhance the capacity of local stakeholders to develop cross-border projects and networks and therefore produce a visible impact on the economic, social and territorial development of border areas.

In the prospect of Europe 2020, the Adriatic and Ionian countries should develop cooperation strategies that take into account the macro-regional dimension of the Adriatic-Ionian area . IPA CBC will offer one of the most relevant framework for further investments opportunities in the forthcoming programming period offering a cooperation instrument for EU and non-EU partners, particularly in the case of the alliances between the Italian regions and the countries of the Western Balkans, case of Albania. The EU initiatives for further dialogues on the employment and social reform programmes with the enlargement countries call for further strengthening of the successful cooperation with Italian counterpart programmes in line and continuation with the already Seenet programme investment.

Eventhough the EU-IPA funds are expected to offer considerable financial support for regional development, a special focus should be given in the use of the inherited experience for ensuring the sustainability of the ongoing investments in social policies and capacity building in social service, in a way to optimize the further upcoming investments. The achievements of the Seenet Programme need to be sustained and boost them in the framework of Albanian integration process bringing Albania closer to EU policy development as well as building institutional and administrative capacity.

As the Minister of MOLSAEO stated during the SeeNET Conference on Decentralization of Social Services” (October 2012): *“Now, local government units should show special care even more attention to manage actual services and raising new owns for providing help to the categories such as children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, etc.. This require from local units that along the budget infrastructure and other voices, to foresee and plan funds for social services”*¹⁰.

3.3 Policies and Perspective in the Adriatic Ionian macroregion framework

IPA CBC support to the process of promoting cooperation at local level between neighbouring regions it has proved to be a valuable tool for the national and sub-national authorities from different countries to come together and to discuss their challenges and projects. This form of cooperation is new for Albanian regions, as Albania is a particular ex-isolated country. It is very

¹⁰ <http://www.mpcs.gov.al/zedhenesi/6-njoftime-per-shtyp/908-ministria-e-punes-dhe-ambasada-italiane-konferenc-per-decentralizimin->

important to note that regional cooperation is essential to make progress on the EU integration agenda for each local country development and good neighbourly relations remain key in the process of enlargement. The latest Brussels Declaration of the XV Adriatic and Ionian Council (27 May 2013) recall *the basic principles guiding the European Union integration process, including regional cooperation*¹¹. This declaration take note that the initiative will pave the way for a broader engagement and role of local/regional communities in this process.

In the forthcoming programming period, the framework for the cooperation across the Adriatic Sea will be most likely offered by the Adriatic-Ionian Macroregional Strategy (EUSAIR) that is expected to be approved by 2014.

The first meeting of National Contact Points of the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) with the theme “Toward the setup of a macro-regional strategy” was held on 12 - 13th June 2013 in Rome, Italy. Held to the Department for Development and Cohesion Policies; Ministry of Economic and Development, the scope of this meeting was built on the meetings of the NCPs held so far for the Maritime strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian seas. Co-chaired by DG REGIO and DG MARE, this was the 1st meeting of the (newly designated/reconfirmed) NCPs of the macro-regional strategy.

Michele Amedeo (European Commission DG Enlargement) on his presentation on “EUSAIR and IPA 2014-2020 planning and programming notes that one of the main changes of EUSAIR compared to the current IPA is the: *Covering five policy areas: transition and capacity building; socio-economic and regional development; employment, social policies and human resources development; agriculture and rural development; regional and territorial cooperation*” which pave the way for the programs such as Seenet in their program interevention on social policies.

In regard with EUSAIR and funding in Enlargement countries he notes that:

- There is an obvious public funding gap between the EU and non-EU countries participating in the Strategy
- The Strategy can be used as a framework to coordinate EU, bilateral and IFI funds
- Its integrative approach can bring together investment, reforms and capacity-building activities
- Think also at alternative sources of EU funding for the Strategy beyond IPA – e.g.: Connecting Europe Facility, Horizon 2020, COSME
- Advantage of having the drafting of the Strategy taking place at the same time of the drafting of the Country Strategy Papers for 2014-2020

During the first joint meeting in EUSAIR the Ms. Rossel Rusca brought the issues of *How to ensure coherence and good alignment of the Italian contribution to the EUSAIR macroregional strategies* for which three main aspects were highlighted:

- **Thematic content**
 - The reference to the 11 thematic objectives of the ESI Funds ensures alignment of all policies, within a territorial place-based approach
 - The strategic territorial options are considered: urban areas, internal (remote) areas, Mezzogiorno
- **Result oriented approach**
 - The reference to concrete and measurable expected results ensures that the contribution to the macroregional strategy is clear, well defined, realistic, and it is possible to monitor and evaluate it
- **Partnership approach**
 - The European code of conduct is the reference.

¹¹ Adriatic and Ionian Initiative, Brussel Declaration of the Adriatic and Ionian Council, 27 May 2013

- Focal points have to ensure that the Italian contribution is in line with national policies and NRPs, and that financial resources other than ESI Funds are correctly mobilised.

The EUSAIR encourage the enhancement of existing cooperations, taking also into account the added value of EUSAIR in terms of optimization of the regional interventions and activities.

As the “Report from the Commission to the EP” note: The objective is a coordinated response to issues better handled together than separately. The Macroregional strategies¹² aim to overcome obstacles holding up development, and unlock the potential of the regions. They seek to place issues in a multilateral setting, and to reach out beyond current EU borders to work as equals with neighbours. The approach encourages participants to overcome not only national frontiers, but also barriers to thinking more strategically and imaginatively about the opportunities available.”¹³

As the above mention report note: The concept of an Adriatic-Ionian Macroregion incorporates principles of:

- ◆ *integration* – objectives should be embedded in existing policy frameworks (EU, regional, national, local, pre-accession), programmes (EU, country-specific, territorial cooperation, sectorial), and financial instruments;
- ◆ *coordination* – policies, strategies and funding resources should avoid compartmentalisation whether between sectorial policies, actors or different tiers of government;
- ◆ *cooperation* – countries should cooperate, and sectors also, across the region, changing the ‘mind-set’ from inward to outward-looking regional development ideas;
- ◆ *multi-level governance* – different levels of policy-makers should work better together, without creating new tiers of decision-making;
- ◆ *partnership* – EU and non-EU countries can work together on the basis of mutual interest and respect.

Albania will take the chairmanship of the Adriatic Ionian Initiative for the period of 1st June 2013 to May 2014: a crucial period for the definition of the Macroregional strategy, as the Albanian Chair of the EUSAIR mention during the interview carried out for this research. In the position of Foreign Affairs deputy Minister, she underlined the importance of this initiative for bringing the Albania Institutions closer to the EU standards. She expressed the hope that the EU would establish by the end of the next year the Adriatic-Ionian macroregion, which she believes will improve the lives of the people by the two seas and also the cooperation of Albania with EU member countries such as Italy. Eventhough Albania will focus on energy, especially the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline, as well as in the environmental protection, the deputy minister identifies other relevant objectives of the Macroregion in cross cutting issues such as improving governance, Welfare (which include further development of social policies, education and trainings) as well as development and innovation. These issues will have important priority during the Albanian Charimanship of the AII and beyond. The interesetes of Albania in the cooperation across the Adriatic sea are evident also if we look at the AII framework. Beside the four pillars of the initiative: Maritime cooperation and Transport; Cooperation among SMEs, Environment and Tourism, as the National Focul Point of this Initiative for Albania mention during the the interview for this research, the priorities and the programme of Albania’s Chairmanship of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative, drafted in close cooperation with the AII Secretariat include the following priorities:

1. The improvement of the economic situation in the region, through creating new jobs.
2. The promotion of touristic attractiveness of our region.
3. Sharing common future by protecting the environment and improving the quality of our life.

¹² Two macroregional strategies have been approved so far: the strategy for the Baltic area (EUSBSR) and the strategy for the Danube area (EUSDR)

¹³ Report from the commission to the european parliament, the Council, the european economic and social committee and the Committee of the regions: concerning the added value of macro-regional strategies; SWD(2013) 233 final

Obviously, the abovementioned does not complete the range of issues that will be addressed during this period. The Chairmanship will remain an open exercise that can bring other items in agenda along with the process (Anex 3).

In order to enhance cooperation in main pillars fields, the most important instruments at disposal of the AII Presidency will be the four thematic Round Tables, organized as follows:

- Round Table on Small and Medium sized Enterprises
- Round Table on Transport – Maritime Cooperation
- Round Table on Tourism
- Round Table on Environment – Focus on Protection against fire
- Round Table on Inter-university cooperation

The Albanian Chairmanship is of the opinion that a very important aspect of AII cooperation is the **Parliamentary Dimension**. Following a proposal made by the Italian Parliament for the establishment of a parliamentary delegation to the AII, Albania was great to learn that this proposal has been accepted by the representatives of all Parliaments of eight Member States. The last AII Annual Meeting of Speakers of the Parliaments was organized under Slovenian Chairmanship in Brdo Pri Kranju on 13 May 2013. The Albanian Parliament will follow this established tradition of cooperation among the AII Parliaments and will organize in March 2014 this event.

In terms of value-added of macro-regional strategies, the National Focal Point and National Contact Point note that the existing macro-regional strategies operate with no additional EU funds, no new institutions, and no new legislation. The macroregion will require more coherence between funds, structures and policies. The strategies have been created so far on the basis of working structures around priority areas, selected in a bottom-up process of consultation, with political leadership in each area taken by participating countries, regions or organisations, supported by the Commission as facilitator.

Knowing the above we evidences that for the priod of 2012-2013 European Comission has allocated a total of 272.75 million for Western Ballkan. These funds are good news as regional cooperation is a central element of EU's efforts to bring forward the reform process in the WB and help region achieves economic prosperity. The funds will support cooperation to mobilize funding, help develop civil society, support education schemes and help beneficiaries meet the requirements for EU membership and align their standarts with the EU. This will complement the funding of individual national programmes by focusing on regional aspects and helping countries and Cross Border region learn from each other's prespective. The execution will be followed by adoption of local strategies based on the regional specific needs.

In implementing the approach, all policies and programmes, including country-specific ones, as well as private sources, support from financial institutions (e.g. European Investment Bank, European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programmes) etc., should be mobilised. If the macro-regional approach is to succeed, it must be embedded in 2014–2020 programming by providing explicit references in Partnership Agreements of IPA Programming Documents. This requires attention across all ministries, to develop a positive investment climate. In general, the approach should increase the impact of all available funding, strengthen the implementation of existing 'acquis', and improve use of existing structures.

Strengthening administrative capacity, local structures and authorities to plan and implement joint programmes remain major challenges which the enlargement countries need to address rigorously from an early stage of the process. One of the problems in the definition and future implementation of the EUSAIR is a lack of inter-sectorial cooperation, limited experience in cross-sectorial and cross-regional management as well as knowledge gaps in particular data needed for initial assessment of marine environment and health, and for establishment of environmental and health targets and associated indicators.

A balanced and sustainable economic development represents an important challenge that the LGUs and local actors have to face in the short and in the medium term. Social cohesion needs to be ensured not only at central level of the qark but also in the peripheral, mostremote areas. As

Stoccherio notes: “*The Macro-regional Strategy is a new soft political institution for transnational territorial cohesion*” (Stocchiero, 2011, p. 12). As such it implies a strong coordination of different policies and delivery mechanisms of financial instruments that apply in the country and regional areas.

Being harmonized with the central level priorities, in regard with social service reform the MoLSAE highlights two main priorities of future partnership in framework of EU perspective:

- Decentralization of services – to encourage and increase the responsibility role of LGU
- Deinstitutionalization of social services through switching to the “house/family” residential services within the community services, where the individual is assisted and supported within its usual environment where he/she lives

While the donors’ criteria and procedures have similarities, there is still room to further harmonize and even align program’s funds. This process must be oriented by the procedures and criteria used by the most important (actual and future) EU IPA funds. The priorities of the IPA 2012 National Programme for Albania are in line with those of the Multi-Annual Indicative Planning Document 2011-2013, of which in social sector are: Reinforce the protection of human rights, notably for women, children and Roma, and to effectively implement anti-discrimination policies; support acquis-related issues in social sector. The indicative financial allocation for the year 2011-2013 for the sector of Social Development are 25.77 million Euro as compared with 13.40 mill Euro for the period of 2007-2010.

Service provision does not have to be provided only by the local government, but can be offered by a mix of governmental and non-governmental providers and actors. Shkoder Region has an intensive and dynamic financing from international donors that covers various regional development aspects. The Strategical Concept of Shkoder Regional Development 2010 – 2016 has detailed the regional development on five fields of action with their respective vision, objectives, priorities, and indicators which include the social services and education training and capacity building among them. What is significantly evident is the ability of LGU to use the funds possibility to boost and achieve their objectives in social policies.

Conclusion

This final report offers a picture of Albania in a very important stage of getting the Candidate EU status. In this perspective the cooperation opportunities and needs for investment results to go towards the institutional strengthening and quality increase of them. In this framework the Seenet Program has significantly contributed in this process through its regional assistance contributing in introducing, boosting and establishing the dialogue between multi-actorness, long-term multilevel perspective, making all the process based on the participatory approach.

Eventhough there is still much to be done, the Seenet program results to be a contributor in building a more just and inclusive society for all citizens. The inclusive approach established did change the old LGU practices where the process of hearing the community voice were left preventing so the

policy choices to reflect the collective preferences and achieving the community adequate standard of service.

Transparency and accountability was also another important pillar of the Seenet assistance toward the LGU, for having a successful implementation for Social policy reform. At central and local level, beside the need to follow the harmonization of action plans with a bottom up approach, there is consistently a need for a monitoring mechanism to optimize the results and add value over the existing investment to boost them. At the horizontal level, the harmonization of the integrated decentralized social service by promoting the involvement of all actors such as local communities, civil society and the business/private sector participation, required the special focus from partners assisting the decentralization process and formulation of clear defined policies.

In its assistance for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of LGU in the field of social Policy, Seenet identified very early that even though the local government tries to do the best, the dynamic of latest development on the way of EU integration process as well as the dynamics of the donors cooperations, create sometimes difficulties for the LGU for being able to deal locally with the challenges they face in particular in the best use of their available financial resources. In this context the Shkodra local government has considered the Seenet assistance as a “success story” in building capacities on the financial public spending in social services, making the LGU able and capable to assist the social structures/institutions and make advocacy to the central government for important intervention in processes and procedures related with the procurement rule for the projects related with social services. However, the regional and local development still for many years will be dependent on external support, and within the EU integration perspectives, the EU and other donor funds should already look into best ways of installing ‘absorption capacities’ at sub-national levels as they are one of prerequisites for effective use of development funding.

As regards decentralisation the MIPD 2011-2013 says, “Albania is a highly decentralised country but the administrative and technical capacities at the local and regional level need to be further strengthened.” Furthermore, local government today are in charge of delivering basic services to citizens for which considerable investments are being carried out in recent years through state budget and EU support. It is necessary that local government capacities in managing these services are increased, as well as the central government’s capacity to coordinate and monitor them for increased accountability.

Using the actual experience of the various projects in the region of Shkodra in the framework of regional development, and in particular for social service, the most relevant recommendation for donor community at this stage is to expand the geographical coverage and numbers of beneficiary institutions, rolling out and promoting successful experiences of previous and current programs and projects. Eventhough there are LGU where specific and/or bulks of investments are done, still the need for further implementation and investment is everywhere.

The expansion and replication of successful implementations might sometime get difficult and suffer the financial limitations as a result of the global crisis. Due to this, the need for efficient use of financial resource increases more than ever. Financial instruments should ensure the achievement of RD policy objectives be applied consistently and transparently, on a competitive basis among regional/local actors.

Eventhough the EU-IPA funds are expected to offer considerable financial support for regional development, a special focus should be given to the ongoing and already investments done in social service and capacity building in social service, in a way to optimize the further upcoming investment. For a sustainable investment in the field of social services the internal development

need to be treated by national and sub-national efforts combined with assistance from the international donor community.

In the prospect of Europe 2020, the Adriatic-Ionian macro-regional strategy could offer a relevant framework to develop a cooperation that goes beyond financial, political, economic and social limits. The European Council looks forward to the presentation by the Commission of a new EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) before the end of 2014¹⁴. The strategy will focus on the areas of macro-regional mutual interest with high relevance for all Adriatic and Ionian countries, with the general objective to promote economic and social prosperity of the region by improving its attractiveness, competitiveness and connectivity.

For the purpose of this research, we could highlight here that the experience developed in Albania through the Seenet programme has paved the way for further cooperation in the multilevel framework of the EUSAIR, in particular for the cooperation aimed at the capacity building and research and innovation. The extensive experience of Seenet, in particular in terms of administrative simplification and harmonization, improving governance, addressing skills needs and support development and innovation, will offer a relevant contribution to achieve the general objective the EUSAIR Program. As analysed in this report, the specific issue of social policies will most likely be very relevant also in the future programming period for Albania, and EUSAIR might offer a relevant framework for further development of cooperation also on this specific section, particularly in the Cross Border areas of Albania.

The EU report¹⁵ note that: The macro-regional approach can only work if there is strong cooperation between regional, national, and local levels to plan together and align funding. It reinforces multi-level governance as an element of Cohesion Policy, given the variety of actors involved. Civil society is also present, and the approach is based on broad bottom-up consultation. The experience gained during the Seenet programme might offer a relevant contribution to the achievement of these general objectives.

ANNEX 1: List of stakeholders interviewed

	Name	Institution	Position	E-mail / Phone
1	Mimoza Selenica	Institution of President of Republic of Albania	President Adviser for Social Affairs	mselenica@president.al 00355664022227
2	Edith Harxhi	Ministry of Foreign Affair	Deputy Minister	edith.harxhi@mfa.gov.al
3	Artes Butka	EU Delegation Albania	Delegation Adviser	Artes.BUTKA@eeas.europa.eu
4	Illir Kurti	Ministry of Interior	General Director of EU Integration	Illir.kurti@moi.gov.al
5	Ilda Zhulali	Ministry of Foreign Affair	General Directorate for	Ilda.Zhulali@mfa.gov.al

¹⁴ European Council Conclusions of 12-13 December 2012 (subject to the evaluation of the concept of macro-regional strategies)

¹⁵ Report from the commission to the european parliament, the Council, the european economic and social committee and the Committee of the regions: concerning the added value of macro-regional strategies; SWD(2013) 233 final

			European Affairs	
6	Agim Pasholli	Ministry of Foreign Affaris	National Focul Point for EUSAIR	agim.pasholli@mfa.gov.al
7	Egla Gollaj	Ministry of Integration	Director of IPA Programme	Egla.Gollaj@mie.gov.al
8	Gezim Musabelli	Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration	National Contact Point for Macro-Regional Strategy	gezim.musabelli@moe.gov.al
9	Manjola Hidri	Ministry of Integration	Social Affairs Unit	Manjola.hidri@mie.gov.al
10	Ridvan Troshani	Shkodra Municipality	Deputy Mayor	ridvantroshani@yahoo.it
11	Alpina Qiriazhi	Department of strategy and donor coordination, Council of Ministers	Donor Coordination	aqiriazhi@km.gov.al

ANEX 2: EU PRESS RELEASE

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

PRESS RELEASE

Brussels, 27 March 2013

EU invests €272.75 million to promote regional cooperation in the Western Balkans

The European Commission has finalised a series of measures to promote regional cooperation between Western Balkan countries totalling €272.75 million for the period 2012-2013.

"These funds are good news as regional cooperation is a central element of the EU's efforts to bring forward the reform process of the countries in the Western Balkans and help the region achieve economic prosperity and political stability", said European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle.

The funds will support cooperation with international financial institutions to mobilise funding, help develop civil society, support education schemes such as student mobility programmes, and help beneficiaries meet the requirements for EU membership and align their standards with the EU. This will complement the funding of individual national programmes by focusing on regional aspects and helping countries to learn from each other's experience.

The funding earmarked today comes under the 2012-2013 Multi-beneficiary and Cross-Border programmes of the EU's Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA).

Background

Since 2007, countries wishing to join the EU have received focused EU funding and support through a single channel – the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). The total pre-accession funding for the period 2007-2013 is €11.5 billion. IPA consists of five components:

Component I: Transition Assistance and Institution Building

Component II: Cross-Border Cooperation

Component III: Regional Development

Component IV: Human Resources Development

Component V: Rural Development

The execution of EU pre-accession aid under the IPA programme begins with the definition of the Commission's intentions in terms of indicative financial allocations. This is followed by the adoption of the strategies, based on the countries' specific needs, which have been adopted over the last few weeks setting out the priorities for EU financial assistance for the period 2011-2013. The next step is the preparation, along with the beneficiaries, of programmes to set the frame for the yearly financial allocation. Finally, the programmes are implemented through specific projects on the country or at the regional level.

Multi-Beneficiary Programmes 2012/13:

Programme	EU contribution	Date of Adoption
Multi-Beneficiary Programme 2013	EUR 100.050.000	15 February 2013
Tempus Programme 2013	EUR 11.700.000	28 February 2013
Regional Housing Programme 2012/2013	EUR 102.200.000	17 December 2012
Civil Society Facility Programme Allocation for 2013	EUR 25.150.000	9 August 2012

Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes 2012/13

Programme	EU contribution	Date of Adoption
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – Greece	EUR 3.130.000	10 August 2012
Albania – Montenegro	EUR 3.400.000	19 November 2012

Albania – Greece	EUR 7.120.000	8 November 2012
Albania – Kosovo	EUR 2.400.000	12 November 2012
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – Kosovo	EUR 2.400.000	26 November 2012
Croatia – Bosnia and Herzegovina	EUR 4.000.000	7 December 2012
Croatia – Serbia	EUR 4.000.000	11 December 2012
Croatia – Montenegro	EUR 2.000.000	11 December 2012
Bosnia and Herzegovina – Montenegro	EUR 2.400.000	8 November 2012
Serbia – Bosnia and Herzegovina	EUR 4.000.000	13 December 2012
Serbia – Montenegro	EUR 2.400.000	13 December 2012

For more information:

http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/instruments/multi-beneficiary-programme/index_en.htm

Contacts :

[Anca Paduraru](#) (+32 2 296 64 30)

[Peter Stano](#) (+32 2 295 74 84)

DATE	VENUE	EVENT
27 September 2013	TIRANA	I Committee of Senior Officials
3rd week of October 2013	ALBANIA	Round Table on Small and Medium Sized Enterprises
November 2013	ALBANIA	Round Table on Transports and Maritime Cooperation
December 2013	TIRANA	Conference of the European Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region – Raising awareness and promoting the EUSAIR
January 2014	ALBANIA	Round Table on Rural Development
January 2014	ALBANIA	Round Table on Tourism
February - March 2014	ANCONA	II Committee of Senior Officials
February - March	TIRANA / BRUSSELS	Conference on the Adriatic Ionian Macro Region in cooperation with the EU Commission
March	ALBANIA	Round Table on Inter-University Cooperation in the framework of UNIADRION
March	ALBANIA	Round Table on Protection Against Fires
March – April	ALBANIA	XII Conference of the Speakers of AII Parliaments
End of May	TIRANA / BRUSSELS	III Committee of Senior Officials
End of May	TIRANA / BRUSSELS	XVI Adriatic Ionian Council

Side Events

DATE	VENUE	EVENT
24-30 August	ANCONA	Adriatic-Mediterranean Festival
Mid September	ANCONA	Visit of the Albanian Ambassador in Rome to the AII Permanent Secretariat

DOCUMENTS SOURCES:

- Albania Ministry of Integration, Action Plan Addressing the Recommendations of the EU Opinion for Albania; 10.06.2011

- European Council Conclusions of 12-13 December 2012 (subject to the evaluation of the concept of macro-regional strategies)
- “Non-paper” on a EU strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) for discussion with NCPs on 13th June 2013.
-
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION; COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION on adopting a National Programme for Albania under the IPA -Transition Assistance and Institution Building component for the year 2012; 9.11.2012
- Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), Multi-annual Indicative Planning Document (MIPD), 2011-2013
- DECENTRALISATION AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME IN THE SHKODRA REGION (DLDP II), Shkodra fact sheet Swiss,
- Developing ICT Strategy to Increase Transparency and Accountability and to Promote Innovative Citizens Communication, 2012
- Government Donor Dialogue, Issue No. 61; Monthly Newsletter – Summer 2012; A Joint Effort of the Department of Strategy and Donor Coordination and the Donor Technical
- Memorandum of Understanding 2010; “The Launch of Fast Trucking Initiative on Division of Labour in Albania” Secretariat
- Report from the commission to the european parliament, the Council, the european economic and social committee and the Committee of the regions: **concerning the added value of macro-regional strategies**; SWD(2013) 233 final
- REINFORCING LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURES IN ALBANIA; Swiss fact sheet
- Regional Development Programme, Northern Albania; Gender Assessment for Shkoder and Lezhe Qark, 2011
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION Brussels, ALBANIA 2011 PROGRESS REPORT Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2011-2012, 12.10.2011; SEC(2011) 1205 final
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION Brussels, Commission Opinion on Albania's application for membership of the European Union, 9.11. 2010, COM (2010) 680, http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2010/package/al_opinion_2010_en.pdf
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION and UNDP Albania, Integrated Support for Decentralization Project “ Working for Regional Development”, 2012
- Republic of Albania; Council of Ministers; Department of Strategies and Donor Coordination, DSDC, Regional Development Policy 2012
- LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND DECENTRALIZATION STRATEGY MINISTRY OF INTERIOR; December 2006

- PROGRAMI I MAXHORANCËS DHE QEVERISË SË INTEGRIMIT EUROPIAN PËR SHQIPËRINË EUROPIANE 2009-2013; Paraqitur në Kuvendin e Shqipërisë; Tiranë më, 16.09.2009
- Republic of Albania, MoLSAEO, Sectorial Strategy of Social Protection 2010 – 20
- Shkoder Regional Council, Strategical Concept of Regional Development 2010 – 2016, September 2010.
- www.shkodra.euic.al/