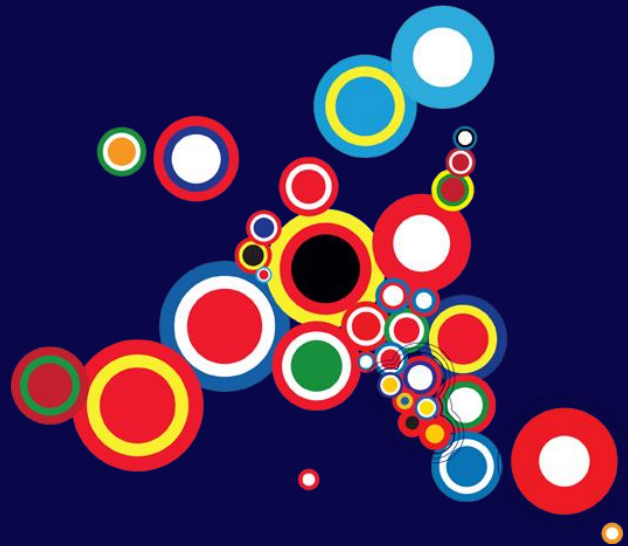




## INSTRUMENT FOR PRE-ACCESSION ASSISTANCE (IPA II) 2014-2020

### MULTI-COUNTRY SEED+



#### Action summary

Since its implementation started in 2010, the Systematic Exchange of Data – SEED - project significantly contributed to overcome the inefficiencies in the Western Balkans' border management systems which often resulted in complicated and time-consuming procedures for legitimate transit flows. SEED has also contributed to reducing the security risks in the area and to making consistent steps in reaching EU standards and towards the European perspective. The new intervention logic stems from the conclusions of the Western Balkan Summits of Vienna (August 2015) and Paris (July 2016) within the wider framework of the Berlin Process, and also from the intention of the members of CEFTA to deepen regional economic integration as reflected in their Ministerial statement of December 2016. More specifically, the establishment of an enhanced trade facilitation instrument at customs level (as the proposed improved System), is one of the key priority included in the Trade Facilitation Agreement recently negotiated among the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) members. Taking into account the conclusions of that process, the project is aimed at securing the needed maintenance to the current SEED whilst developing new elements related to enhance progressive harmonisation and transparency of procedures among involved Beneficiaries. The maintenance of the current SEED will allow CEFTA members to continue in the path of simplifying border crossing procedures with positive effects on flows of goods and services in the region. The new features and developments which responds to what agreed among CEFTA members, during the negotiations of the Trade Facilitation Agreement, will move in the direction of enhanced regional integration and improved harmonisation of procedures. Furthermore the initiative will strengthen the role of CEFTA Secretariat, as the entity that overlooks and promotes the implementation of CEFTA agenda towards trade facilitation and overall progressive regional integration.

<b>Action Identification</b>			
<b>Action Programme Title</b>	IPA II Annual Multi-country Action Programme 2017		
<b>Action Title</b>	Systematic Exchange of Electronic Data – SEED+		
<b>Action ID</b>	IPA 2017/039-402.10/MC/SEED+		
<b>Sector Information</b>			
<b>IPA II Sector</b>	9. Regional and territorial cooperation		
<b>DAC Sector</b>	33130 Support to regional trade arrangements		
<b>Budget</b>			
<b>Total cost</b>	EUR 4.8 million (maximum amount)		
<b>EU contribution</b>	EUR 4.8 million (maximum amount)		
<b>Budget line(s)</b>	22.020401 – Multi-country programmes, regional integration and territorial cooperation		
<b>Management and Implementation</b>			
<b>Management mode</b>	Direct management		
<i>Direct management: European Commission</i>	DG NEAR – Unit A.3 Thematic Support, Monitoring and Evaluation		
<b>Implementation responsibilities</b>	DG NEAR – Unit A.3 Thematic Support, Monitoring and Evaluation		
<b>Location</b>			
<b>Zone benefiting from the action</b>	Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Serbia) and Moldova <sup>1</sup>		
<b>Specific implementation area(s)</b>			
<b>Timeline</b>			
<b>Final date for contracting including the conclusion of delegation agreements</b>	31 December 2018		
<b>Final date for operational implementation</b>	31 December 2021		
<b>Policy objectives / Markers (DAC form)</b>			
<b>General policy objective</b>	<b>Not targeted</b>	<b>Significant objective</b>	<b>Main objective</b>

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

<sup>1</sup> Moldova is member of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA). The initiative will strengthen the role of CEFTA Secretariat, as the entity that overlooks and promotes the implementation of CEFTA agenda towards trade facilitation and overall progressive regional integration. For these reasons, and following Article 9 of the IPA II Regulation, the eligibility of this action is necessarily extended to Moldova.

Participation development/good governance	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Aid to environment	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gender equality (including Women In Development)	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trade Development	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reproductive, Maternal, New born and child health	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>RIO Convention markers</b>	<b>Not targeted</b>	<b>Significant objective</b>	<b>Main objective</b>
Biological diversity	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Combat desertification	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Climate change mitigation	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Climate change adaptation	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 1. RATIONALE

### PROBLEM AND STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

Since its first implementation phase the project for Systematic Exchange of Electronic Data (SEED) has moved forward as regards the enhancement of the border management approach at regional level in the Western Balkans, fostering the cooperation and the sharing of information among Customs Administrations of the relevant IPA II beneficiaries (namely Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia).

Starting from 2010, the SEED project has along the years significantly contributed to overcome the inefficiencies in the Beneficiaries' border management systems resulting in complicated and time-consuming procedures for legitimate transit flows. SEED has also contributed to reducing the security risks in the area and to making consistent steps in reaching EU standards and towards the European perspective.

The SEED maintenance has been supported by an IPA funded initiative (Maintenance of the SEED System in the Western Balkans II - 2014/345-232) which ended in July 2016. Another phase of SEED, entitled "SEED Maintenance & Development", was supported by the Commission through a programme contracted in August 2016, and designed for:

- The continuation of the support of the maintenance of the SEED and INES+ infrastructures.
- The extension and improvement in the customs field, especially in terms of trade facilitation and law enforcement.
- The technical and organisational preparation of inspection agencies and other relevant authorities, in view of the future implementation of the SEED+ System /Project.

The action current state of affairs is as follows:

- Legal bases for the electronic data exchange are established throughout the region, on the basis of bilateral protocols signed between neighbouring Customs Administrations;
- Operational guidelines and instructions for the SEED system usage have been adopted by each Beneficiary Administration. Certain procedures (especially one related to the Unique Reference Number (URN) of the cross border movement) have been defined.
- IT infrastructure and system are in place, which will accomplish business objectives: automatic data matching and alarm module on pre-arrival data.
- On November 25, 2013, after the adoption of the appropriate Conclusions of the Serbian and Kosovar authorities, the Customs Administrations of Serbia and Kosovo simultaneously started sending messages, via the neutral server located in Rome at the premises of the *Agenzia delle Dogane e dei Monopoli* (contractor working the project implementation). The SEED project team has provided remote maintenance of the equipment and the communication links at all three locations (Rome, Pristina and Belgrade) during the entire reporting period.
- There is increased communication among different administration in the region and the SEED Programme has contributed to improve exchange of data at custom level with a positive impact on intra-regional trade flows.

In 2014, SEED beneficiaries, within the framework of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), launched negotiations with an aim to conclude a Trade Facilitation Agreement (Additional Protocol 5) that should lead to further simplification of inspections and exchange of data at customs level but also move forward towards enhanced transparency and cooperation of trade partnership programmes. Trade facilitation will also be instrumental to increase the competitiveness of Western Balkans as a region, as harmonised legislation and practice are expected to increase trade and investments among the business

communities of the relevant IPA II beneficiaries. In July 2016, during the Paris Summit on the Western Balkans, CEFTA Parties announced that they had reached agreement at technical level on the Trade Facilitation Agreement. This was reconfirmed during the CEFTA Ministerial meeting on 9 December 2016. It is expected that the Trade Facilitation Agreement (Additional Protocol 5) would be signed mid 2017.

The mutual recognition of the AEO Programmes and border documents on the basis of EU Compliance are foreseen by the Trade Facilitation Agreement. Such mutual recognition will require electronic exchange of documents between customs authorities and technical agencies.

Article 3 of the CEFTA Additional Protocol 5 on Trade Facilitation recognises that the exchange of data among customs authorities is one of the objectives of the agreement. Furthermore, article 13 provides that data shall be changed on central and international level by customs-to customs data exchange infrastructure in order to begin processing prior to the arrival of goods with a view to expediting the release of goods upon arrival.

Within this framework , the need for an enhanced technical instrument that can combine all these elements has clearly emerged and has led to an upgraded version of the current SEED with additional features and functionalities deriving from the contents of the Trade Facilitation Agreement, SEED+,. Thus, it is indispensable that SEED + continues the maintenance of the existing SEED infrastructure (both the hardware and software elements), whilst introducing new functionalities according to the conclusions of mentioned negotiations on the Trade Facilitation Agreement. The new elements will expand the scope of the existing system, involving non – customs administration in the exchange of data and thus contributing to the progressive regional harmonisation of trade related legislations and practices.

Additionally, the proposed action foresees a prominent role for CEFTA members and implicitly of CEFTA Secretariat in the overall implementation of the initiative and, consequently, in the process of trade facilitation among the Western Balkans. The Secretariat has supported and facilitated the negotiations on the Trade Facilitation Agreement (Additional Protocol 5). The establishment of groups within CEFTA Secretariat, working on several trade-related topics, is a key element to support the progressive harmonisation as well as transparency in legislation of CEFTA members and therefore in view to achieve the expected results of the initiative the proposed action would require the involvement of all relevant CEFTA structures in the SEED+ initiative to the maximum extend.,.

## **OUTLINE OF IPA II ASSISTANCE**

The intervention logic of the proposed "SEED+" action stems from the conclusions of the Vienna and Paris Western Balkan Summits (August 2015 and July 2016), within the wider framework of the Berlin Process, related to the development of trade facilitation measures and policies among the Western Balkans. Moreover, as mentioned, the establishment of an enhanced trade facilitation instrument at customs level is a key element for the implementation of the Trade Facilitation Protocol under the CEFTA Agreement.

The maintenance of the current SEED will allow the CEFTA members to continue in the path of simplifying border crossing procedures with positive effects on flows of goods and services in the region. The proposed initiative will allow each of the participating Beneficiaries to continue the work on simplifying border procedures as defined at Beneficiary level. The new phase of SEED will also address additional bottlenecks according to the needs expressed by participating Beneficiaries. The new features and developments which have been agreed among the CEFTA members, during the negotiations of the Trade Facilitation Agreement, will move in the direction of enhanced regional integration and improved harmonisation of procedures, expanding the scope of the existing system by involving non-custom related administrations.

## **RELEVANCE WITH THE IPA II MULTI-COUNTRY STRATEGY PAPER AND OTHER KEY REFERENCES**

The objective of the IPA II Multi-country Indicative Strategy Paper 2014-2020<sup>2</sup> (hereafter referred to as Strategy Paper) is to support efforts for improving the currently low levels of competitiveness, intra-regional trade and trade integration in global markets while enhancing the capacities of market participants. The Strategy Paper indicates that the support is to be provided through CEFTA and other trade-related organisations and identifies inter-regional trade and trade integration as vehicles for boosting competitiveness and innovation to allow participating in the global economy and improving the overall business environment including the capacity for innovation.

SEED+ is aimed to continue supporting data exchange among custom administrations whilst introducing functionalities and new elements aimed to foster progressive harmonisation of procedures, in support of the operational objectives of the trade facilitation agreement. Furthermore, the new initiative will start expanding the scope of the assistance provided by addressing policies and practices related to non-tariff barriers which currently hampers trade flows in the Western Balkans region. All these features will contribute to the objective set out in the strategy paper.

### **LESSONS LEARNED AND LINK TO PREVIOUS FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

European Union technical assistance has been given to the Western Balkans in the field of Customs and Taxation since 1996 by means of the CAFAO<sup>3</sup> and the TACTA<sup>4</sup> Programmes. The CAFAO programme included the development of a secure form of transmission of information among the Balkans Customs Administrations known as the South East Europe Messaging System (SEMS).

During the implementation of SEMS, a new concept (SEED) was developed which greatly improves the electronic exchange of information in the Western Balkan region. This brought about an increase in the collection of Customs duties as well as improvements in the fight against counterfeiting, money laundering and illicit trafficking.

The SEED project started on 15 September 2010 with an overall duration of 24 months, extended by 1 month until 14 October 2012. In order to provide for the sustainability of the concept of electronic exchange of data, additional technical assistance was required.

Successive additional contracts (in 2012, 2014 and 2016) were awarded to the Agenzia delle Dogane to allow for the maintenance of the SEED system and to establish SEED data exchange between the Customs Administrations of Serbia and Kosovo via the middle server located in Rome, Italy.

The current contract with the Agenzia delle Dogane covers not only the maintenance of SEED but also the preparatory work for SEED+, including consultation with all stakeholders to design the most effective technical solution both at Beneficiary level (for intra-agencies communication) and at regional level (how to upgrade the existing SEED to cater for exchanging non-custom data).

SEED+ will build on past and ongoing assistance from IPA to CEFTA parties in relevant areas, such as customs, SPS, TBT, industrial policy, property rights, public procurement, state aid, taxation, etc.

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<sup>2</sup> C(2014) 4293, 30.06.2014.

<sup>3</sup> Customs And Fiscal Assistance Office (141688, 141696, 141698, 141748)

<sup>4</sup> Technical Assistance to Customs and Taxation Authorities (147596)

## 2. INTERVENTION LOGIC

### LOGICAL FRAMEWORK MATRIX

OVERALL OBJECTIVE	OBJECTIVELY VERIFIABLE INDICATORS (*)	SOURCES OF VERIFICATION	
To enhance trade facilitation and regional integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Level of efficiency and transparency of border administrations' trade enabling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>World Economic Forum, report on "Global enabling trade", 2020 edition</li> </ul>	
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE	OBJECTIVELY VERIFIABLE INDICATORS (*)	SOURCES OF VERIFICATION	ASSUMPTIONS
To develop and implement the key technical (Information Communication Technology) tool – SEED+ in line with the provisions and actions agreed upon by CEFTA Parties in the framework of the regional Trade Facilitation Agreement (CEFTA Additional Protocol 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data exchanged systematically for intra-CEFTA trade via SEED+ from all documents listed in the technical annexes of the Additional Protocol 5 and MoUs by all CEFTA Parties</li> </ul>	Reports on CEFTA Joint Committee meetings, Steering Committees and Workshops Ad-hoc meetings Prime Minister Meetings (Western Balkan Summits of the Berlin Process)	Additional Protocol 5 ratified in the Parliaments of all 7 CEFTA Parties CEFTA Parties allocated needed resources within the central budget for implementation of the CEFTA Additional Protocol 5
RESULTS	OBJECTIVELY VERIFIABLE INDICATORS (*)	SOURCES OF VERIFICATION	ASSUMPTIONS
1. SEED+ IT infrastructure is in place to support the implementation of the CEFTA Additional Protocol 5 on trade facilitation, enabling extended data exchange between CEFTA Parties.	SEED+ IT cross-border infrastructure is functional and allows the exchange of customs and non-customs data.	Regular and Ad-hoc Project Reports; Regular meetings of relevant CEFTA Structures (Sub-committees and Working Groups), Steering Committees and Workshops	Relevant authorities from CEFTA Parties provided necessary information and communication equipment
2. Regular and systematic data exchange between all institutions/governmental authorities (AP5 stakeholders) and the Customs Authority in the Beneficiaries established, in all CEFTA Parties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MoU between non-custom agencies and custom authority are adopted</li> <li>Agencies IT systems are upgraded to allow data exchange with custom authority and SEED+</li> <li>Information flows between Agencies IT systems and custom authorities are defined and in place</li> </ul>	Regular and Ad-hoc Project Reports; Regular meetings of relevant CEFTA Structures (Sub-committees and Working Groups), Steering Committees and Workshops	Relevant Governmental institutions provide necessary hardware and infrastructure for communication links, in each CEFTA Party
3. Operational instructions for all stakeholders drafted and adopted by all relevant institutions in all CEFTA Parties.	New operational guidelines at border crossings and inland offices to support functioning of the SEED+ and consequently speed-up trade flow are developed and applied by CEFTA Parties	Regular and Ad-hoc Project Reports	Governments of CEFTA Parties and Management of relevant institutions support adoption of new operational instructions
4. Regional databases are developed, fed by relevant data and regularly updated	Number of operational regional databases accessible to the public and for authorities (anonymously, as well as for authorised users);	Regular and Ad-hoc Project Reports	CEFTA Secretariat or Regional Cooperation Council agreed to host Regional Databases

## DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

SEED+ stems from the provisions of the Trade Facilitation Agreement – Additional Protocol 5 (AP5) – finalised by CEFTA members in 2016 and foreseen to be adopted by mid-2017. The initiative will represent the key instrument for the implementation of that agreement supporting pre-arrival exchange of data, harmonisation and transparency in trade among the relevant Beneficiaries.

Building from the existing Systematic Exchange of Electronic Data (SEED), the new initiative will widen its scope, entailing measures and activities on non-customs related areas. The expected overall impact is for the new programme to contribute to the progressive regional economic integration, by actively supporting harmonisation of legislations and practices in the area of trade facilitation.

Starting from the discussion held at CEFTA level with relevant Beneficiaries, preliminary activities have been identified. They will be structured around the following blocks:

- **Validation of the areas of interventions** based on AP5; this will include a final review of the legislative framework (incl. for instance ensuring that the regulations / agreements are in place to develop intra-agencies exchange of information).
- **Upgrading SEED into SEED+ (result 1)**

This will cover the development of an external communication node for SEED+ to be able to communicate with external agencies; improvement of the IT system for SEED+ to become the “backbone” for also non-customs related cross-border data exchange, as defined by the AP 5; support to the preparation of the administrative guidelines for operators.

- **Upgrade of the IT & Communication system at Beneficiary level and preparation of the related operating guidelines (result 2 and 3)**

This will include the design and deployment of IT solutions at the level of involved agencies to enable data exchange via SEED+; establishment of secure and reliable electronic data exchange between individual agencies and the custom authority; support to preparation of the administrative guidelines for operators.

- **Establishment of regional databases as per AP5 (result 4)**

Putting in place the digital infrastructure to develop and host the regional databases defined in the AP5. These databases will be fed and maintained during the lifetime of the action, and relevant documents will be accessible for the operators (for instance publication of documents required for clearance of products in each bi-lateral Trade). User's guides will be produced.

## RISKS

- The Trade Facilitation Agreement is not adopted according to the agreed timeframe; this would influence the purpose of SEED+ and could delay implementation;
- Political instability at the level of the IPA II beneficiaries and/or instability of senior management and other staffing within their Customs administrations and other public bodies involved;
- Lack of continuous willingness of the six Customs Administrations and other public bodies involved to cooperate and share pre-arrival information;
- Lack of political will to ensure the deployment of SEED+ by the Beneficiaries beyond Customs Administrations only;
- Lack of skills amongst the staff in charge of SEED+ in the administration of the Beneficiaries.
- Commitment, included budgetary, from different stakeholders within the Beneficiaries for development and maintenance of the IT system.



## **ASSUMPTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

- Protocol AP5 is adopted and implemented. Exchange of info between customs and agencies operational.
- Smooth cooperation amongst public bodies involved in SEED+ in order to maintain and expand the scope of exchanged information;
- Each relevant administration remains committed to upgrade its own IT system in order to be able to meet the objectives of SEED+;
- Smooth flow of information through the CEFTA parties for fostering trade facilitation, amongst others via the implementation of risk management, the respect of the rules concerning intellectual property rights, SPS, TBT and in general terms, law enforcement;
- Skilled people are appointed to use and analyse data exchanged in the framework of SEED+;

## **3. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS**

### **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

- CEFTA Parties (excluding Moldova) are the beneficiaries of the action; the main institutional stakeholders in each CEFTA party will be the respective Ministries of Trade that will coordinate SEED+ activities at Beneficiary level. The Ministries of Trade will involve all relevant agencies/regulatory bodies concerned by SEED+ activities, such as customs administrations, SPS agencies, quality infrastructure institutions (certification, accreditation, laboratories, market surveillance...), offices for statistics, etc.
- All relevant CEFTA structures will contribute to a smooth implementation of the programme; they will notably ensure that the pace of the SEED+ implementation matches the objectives of the CEFTA additional protocol AP5 for Trade Facilitation.
- On the European Commission side, the contracting authority will be represented by DG NEAR, Unit A3; however, due to the broad spectrum of activities to be implemented, relevant DGs will be involved in a Trade Facilitation Working Group, which will be convened to steer strategically the implementation of the action. Depending of the needs, the Trade Facilitation Working Group may include: DG TRADE, DG TAXUD, DG SANTE and DG GROW.

### **IMPLEMENTATION METHOD(S) AND TYPE(S) OF FINANCING**

The action will be implemented under direct management by DG NEAR Unit A3 and it will be delivered via a service contract, which will be procured using a restricted tender procedure.

## **4. PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT**

### **METHODOLOGY FOR MONITORING (AND EVALUATION)**

The European Commission may carry out a mid-term, a final or an ex-post evaluation for this action or its components via independent consultants, through a joint mission or via an implementing partner. In case a mid-term or final evaluation is not foreseen, the European Commission may, during implementation, decide to undertake such an evaluation for duly justified reasons either on its own decision or on the initiative of the partner. The evaluations will be carried out as prescribed by the DG NEAR Guidelines on linking planning/programming, monitoring and evaluation. In addition, the action might be subject to external monitoring in line with the European Commission rules and procedures.

## INDICATOR MEASUREMENT

Indicator	Baseline 2016	Target 2020 (3)	Final Target (year) (4)	Source of information
Level of efficiency and transparency of border administration (average regional value)	4.74	5.75 (EU average)	5.75	2020 edition of the "Trade Enabling" report from the World Economic Forum
SEED+ IT cross-border infrastructure is functional and allows the exchange of customs and non-customs data.	SEED is functioning with Custom Administrations	SEED+ covers all agencies involved in external trade in the region	SEED+ covers all agencies involved in external trade in the region	SEED+ action report
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MoU between non-custom agencies and custom authority are adopted</li> <li>• Agencies IT systems are upgraded to allow data exchange with custom authority and SEED+</li> <li>• Information flows between involved agencies IT systems and custom authorities are defined and in place</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> <li>• Stand-alone systems exist</li> <li>• None</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All MoUs are signed</li> <li>• All IT systems in agencies involved are upgraded and capable of exchanging data with custom authorities</li> <li>• Systematic exchanged of data between involved agencies and custom administrations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All MoUs are signed</li> <li>• All IT systems in agencies involved are upgraded and capable of exchanging data with custom authorities</li> <li>• Systematic exchanged of data between involved agencies and custom administrations</li> </ul>	SEED+ action report
New operational guidelines at border crossings and inland offices to support functioning of the SEED+ and consequently speed-up trade flow are developed and applied by CEFTA Parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operational guidelines are used by the agencies</li> </ul>	Operational guidelines are used by the agencies involved	SEED+ action report

		involved		
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- (1) This is the related indicator as included in the Indicative Strategy Paper (for reference only)
- (2) The agreed baseline year is 2010 (to be inserted in brackets in the top row). If for the chosen indicator, there are no available data for 2010, it is advisable to refer to the following years – 2011, 2012. The year of reference may not be the same either for all indicators selected due to a lack of data availability; in this case, the year should then be inserted in each cell in brackets. The baseline value may be "0" (i.e. no reference values are available as the Action represents a novelty for the beneficiary) but cannot be left empty or include references such as "N/A" or "will be determined later".
- (3) The target year CANNOT be modified.
- (4) This will be a useful reference to continue measuring the outcome of IPA II support beyond the 2014-2020 multi-annual financial period. If the Action is completed before 2020 (year for the performance reward), this value and that in the 2020 target column must be the same.

## **5. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES**

### **GENDER MAINSTREAMING & EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**

The Action will require professional qualifications and competences and will ensure equal opportunities for women and men to participate in its implementation and in the selection of experts. The implementation teams will emphasize at the outset that the composition of any of the project structures - such as the operational contact points, sector specific Expert Groups, and pilot project implementation teams - should reflect a gender balance. Likewise, workshops, trainings and working groups will be equally available to men and women.

### **MINORITIES AND VULNERABLE GROUPS**

The development of policy responses and implementation of pilot projects will take into account the main pillars of the SEE 2020 Vision (see annex 3). Specifically, paragraph I (iv) of the SEE 2020 Vision calls for policy reforms and actions to encourage greater participation of, including vulnerable groups and minorities. Therefore, participation of the implementation of the Action will be guaranteed on the basis of equal access regardless racial issues or ethnic origin, religion and beliefs, age or sexual orientations. The same considerations regarding equal opportunities apply.

### **ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY (AND IF RELEVANT OTHER NON-STATE STAKEHOLDERS)**

The development of this action has included detailed consultations with various stakeholders including government officials, as well as representatives of the business and academic communities in the Western Balkans. All activities described above rely on the active participation and contributions of stakeholders outside of government, in particular representatives of the business communities. The implementation teams will continue the practice of encouraging the participation of relevant stakeholders in the implementation of this Action.

Dialogue between public and private sector is especially important for the implementation of this action. The private sector will be involved closely to identify how to best develop regional market access and facilitate intra-regional trade. Moreover, the private sector will contribute to stimulate the demand in the private sector for better quality public services and higher level of public commitment to remove market access barriers. Both the civil society and the private sectors will be involved in the validation of the areas of interventions, notably in the review of the legislative framework.

### **ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE (AND IF RELEVANT DISASTER RESILIENCE)**

The activities envisaged under this action do not imply direct and major impact to environmental issues. The development of policy responses and the implementation of projects will take into account the main pillars of the SEE 2020. SEE 2020 specifically calls for actions to be greener and encourage more resource-efficient development.

Climate action relevant budget allocation: EUR 0
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## **6. SUSTAINABILITY**

The action is based on the protocol on trade facilitation that has been already agreed by CEFTA parties, which guarantees the commitment of the main stakeholders of the action in each relevant IPA II beneficiary.

During the action implementation, the private sector participation will be crucial to ensure that the trade facilitation measures obtained thanks to SEED+ are leading to increased trade between the Beneficiaries.

Sustainability is subject to the continuous commitment of beneficiaries and should result in enhanced trade facilitation. After the development of the SEED+ software and the establishment of the legal framework, beneficiaries should take ownership, although limited central management of the IT system will be required.

In particular, with regard to the review of the legal framework, assistance will focus on providing analytical prerequisites such as concept notes, options analyses and support to impact assessment. Support in legislative drafting shall be paired with capacity building of the beneficiaries (introduction of international examples, detailed explanation of proposed texts, etc. the action will also ensure that the new pieces of legislation are consulted among the relevant institutions and with the target groups which are likely to be affected by the new legislation).

Written operational guidelines will be developed with the involvement of the Beneficiaries; they shall be simple enough to be regularly updated and changed by the staff of the beneficiary organisations without additional external support and shall not contradict with any legal provision of the Beneficiaries.

The involvement of European Commission services through a Trade Facilitation Working Group during the action implementation will ensure that SEED+ is fully compatible with the EU and other international commitments.

## **7. COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY**

Communication and visibility will be given high importance during the implementation of the action. The implementation of the communication activities shall be funded from the amounts allocated to the action.

All necessary measures will be taken to publicise the fact that the Action has received funding from the EU in line with the Communication and Visibility Manual for EU External Actions. Additional Visibility Guidelines developed by the European Commission (DG NEAR) will have to be followed.

Visibility and communication actions shall demonstrate how the intervention contributes to the agreed programme objectives and the EU accession process, as well as the benefits of the action for the general public. Actions shall aim at strengthening general public awareness of the objectives pursued. The actions shall aim at highlighting to the relevant target audiences the added value and impact of the EU's interventions and will promote transparency and accountability on the use of the funds.