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# Interreg Europe Action plan

An action plan is a document that provides detailed information on how the lessons learned from cooperation will be implemented to improve a given policy instrument tackled within that region. The minimum information that must be provided about each activity is an explanation of the relationship between the activity and the project, the nature of the activities undertaken, the schedule, stakeholders involved, costs and sources of funding. If several partners are working on the same policy instrument, only one action plan is required. The plan should also contain actions if they were initiated in the first stage of the project.

## Action plan for the North-West Bulgarian region

### Part I – General information

Project: Preservation and promotion of cultural and natural heritage through GreenWAYS (OUR WAY, PGI05077) OUR WAY

Partner organisation: Chamber of Commerce and Industry Vratsa

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### Part II – Policy context

The Action Plan aims to impact:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Investment for Growth and Jobs programme
<input type="checkbox"/>	European Territorial Cooperation programme
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other regional development policy instrument

Name of the policy instrument concerned by the Action Plan:

- **Operational programme “Regions in Growth ”2014-2020**
- **Integrated Territorial Development strategy – North-west region 2021-2027**

## - **Management plan of “Vrachanski Balkan” Natural Park**

The Level 2 **Integrated Territorial Development strategy** for the Northwest Area is a strategic planning document setting out the overall political, spatial, economic and thematic framework for the development of the region in the years of the new programming period 2021-2027. The Regional Spatial Development Scheme of the Northwest Region of Level 2 for the period 2021-2027 was developed in accordance with the National Spatial Development Concept for the period 2013-2025 (Update 2019) and takes into account the forecasts of the sectoral strategies at the regional level in economic development, health, education, science, social services, transport, water, energy, broadband, tourism and the environment.

The Level 2 **Integrated Territorial Development strategy** of the Northwest Area puts economic, social and territorial cohesion at the heart of the set strategic priorities of the Integrated Territorial Development Strategy of the Northwest Region:

### **PRIORITY 1: ACCELERATING THE GROWTH OF REGIONAL ECONOMY**

The important point here is that, in addition to catching up with specific targeted support from national and regional policy, the NRF should mobilize and incorporate its specific potential and growth factors into that growth and improve their quality. This priority should be achieved by attracting investment, which is a major factor in the development, restructuring and growth of the economy. On the other hand, emphasis should be placed on developing and improving the competitiveness of the regional economy through innovation, digitization, economic change and high value-added industries through targeted investment. Resource utilization in an efficient and sustainable way is another opportunity for the development of the region, stimulation of regional economic growth and employment.

### **PRIORITY 2: SUSTAINING AND DEVELOPING HUMAN CAPITAL**

The National Program for Bulgaria 2030 emphasizes the importance of education as a key aspect of economic potential and a decisive factor for the development of the information society. In order to increase the attractiveness for living in the North-West region, the implementation of targeted measures for the development of the following social systems is planned: health, social services, cultural and sports (including tourism, museums, community centers, etc.). The measures will cover both the continuation or introduction of new activities for social development and support, improvement of health care, development of sport and cultural sphere, which must be secured on site and on a resource basis.

### **PRIORITY 3: TERRITORIAL CONNECTION, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND REDUCING INEQUALITIES**

The isolation of the Northwestern region in the transport and digital fields in the country defines this priority as very important in the efforts to support its economic growth and social development. Investments to improve existing rail, road and inland waterway infrastructure will improve conditions for business and commerce, while also contributing to a higher level of safety in the country's transportation system.

Despite the overall estimates for the socio-economic development of the area, in tourism terms, it is still a little-known "pearl". Nature and history have cancer here, but man has done very little to promote all this is a single territorial product.

Protected areas are created both for the protection of biological diversity, natural resources and related cultural values, as well as to provide conditions for recreation and tourism. In this sense, they are a tool for regional and local development. The world practice imposes the Management Plan (MP) as a document that is developed in order to regulate the actions for nature protection and sustainable use of its

resources for a certain period of time, and forms a long-term vision for the development of the protected area. The main normative acts regulating the Management Plans of the Protected Areas in Bulgaria are the Protected Areas Act (PAA) and the Ordinance for the development of protected areas. The management plans of the protected areas have an attached structure, which pays attention to tourism as part of the cultural and socio-economic characteristics of the protected area. The structure is mandatory and contains: Summary; Introduction; Part 1: Description and assessment of the protected area; Part 2: Long-term goals and constraints; Part 3: Norms, regimes, conditions and recommendations for carrying out the activities; Part 4: Operational tasks and prescriptions for protection and use; Part 5: Review of the implementation of goals and objectives;

The management plan of Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park was developed in 2009 and adopted by Decision № 750 of 14.10.2011 of the Council of Ministers. According to the legislation, it must be updated in 2021.

### Part III – Details of the actions envisaged

#### **ACTION 1**

#### **Preparation of a Terms of Reference for revision the Management plan of the Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park**

1. **The background** (please describe the lessons learnt from the project that constitute the basis for the development of the present Action Plan)

During the implementation of the project OUR WAY, representatives of the Directorate of Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park actively participated in the organized meetings and exchange of experience with the partners. On the territory of the park there are over 15 eco trails and thematic routes, which are managed by the administration. After an analysis conducted by the Park Directorate, Vratsa CCI and Vratsa District Administration, the Botev Pat route was identified as suitable for its development as a green road. This is a historical route that passes through the territory of Vratsa District (including 4 municipalities, the territory of Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park and Natura 2000 areas). Its total length is 120 km, and most of it passes through specially built non-motorized alleys and paths. It is suitable for walking as well as for bicycles and horse riding. Once a year a march is organized along the route in honour of the Bulgarian national hero Hristo Botev. During the rest of the year, the route is rarely visited by tourists, mostly due to lack of information materials, maps and guides. Also, the route is known mainly as a historical site, not as a tourist attraction and opportunity for sports. In this regard, the partners agreed on the need to develop promotional and information materials for the route to advertise it as an affordable tourist destination throughout the year. This promotion will stimulate the local population and businesses to offer various services such as accommodation, guidance, camping places, dining places and more.

As the route passes through the territory of a large number of settlements and protected areas, the joint work of the Municipal and state administrations will be necessary for its development and promotion.

For this purpose, the practice of Poland - Cooperation of the Eastern Poland Regions with the promotion of the Eastern Cycling Trail Green Velo will be used. The joint efforts of several institutions in the construction, maintenance and promotion of green roads will be used by the Bulgarian partners.

To implement the idea, the Vratsa Regional Administration and the Directorate of Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park will have to include the necessary activities in their programs and work plans to ensure their financing. After this step, the institutions will be able to develop a concept for joint construction and promotion of the route.

The Directorate of the Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park will include activities for the improvement and promotion of Botev Road in the new Park Management Plan. The territory of the park includes 8.5 km of the route, which starts from Kopana Mogila locality and reaches Okolchitsa peak and Yolkovitsa locality. In 1999, the Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park, together with the Vratsa municipality, built a continuation of the route that follows the path of the rebels after the death of detachment commander Hristo Botev. In this sense, the route descends to Rashov dol, where every year on June 3 large celebrations are held and continues to Cherepish Monastery - the most important monastery in NW Bulgaria. That is, on the territory of the park are the most attractive 15-16 km. from Botev road.

For this purpose, it is necessary to prepare a task for revision the Management Plan and subsequent administrative steps for its adoption and implementation.

2. **Action** (please list and describe the actions to be implemented)

**Preparation of a Terms of Reference for revision the Management Plan of the Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park**

The main objective of the activity is to provide the administrative base for carrying out and financing activities for improvement and promotion of the Botev road by the Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park. In order to achieve this goal, a procedure for preparation of a Terms of Reference for revising the MP of the Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park should be started.

The action plan will include the followings tasks:

1. **Selection of a subcontractor and contracting.** The responsible partner is Directorate of Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park. Deadline for implementation: October 2020.
2. Preparation of a Terms of Reference for the MP of the Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park – Implementation period: 3 months (until the end of January 2021). The tracking of the task will be performed by Directorate of Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park.
3. Coordination of the assignment with the Executive Forest Agency - Deadline: 1 month (until the end of February 2021) The monitoring of the implementation of the task will be performed by Directorate of Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park
4. Approval of the assignment by the MoEW - term 1 month (until the end of March 2021) The monitoring of the implementation of the assignment will be performed by Directorate of Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park

5.

According to Art. 11 of the Ordinance for development of the MP, a Terms of Reference for updating the Plan will be developed, which will contain:

1. The subject of the plan;
2. Structure of the plan with description of the expected content of the points included in it in accordance with the appendix;
3. The necessary appendices to the plan - maps, schemes, lists, etc.;
4. Stages, phases and terms for development;
5. Other conditions or requirements to the contractors.

Part 2 will include a point for the development of a concept for improvement and promotion of the part of the route "Botev Road", which passes through the park. The selected subcontractor will have to develop in detail the concept, which should include the construction of small-scale infrastructure and promotional activities.

The output of this action is approved technical document that permit to contract the revision of the Management Plan of the Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park, according to the Bulgarian legislation.

3. **Players involved** (please indicate the organisations in the region who are involved in the development and implementation of the action and explain their role)
  - Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park Administration- undertake the necessary activities for the preparation of the Terms of Reference for the update of the MP;
  - CCI Vratsa - assignment and consultations
  - Subcontractor - the respective legal entity that will prepare the assignment

#### 4. **Timeframe**

**Selection of a subcontractor and the development of the Terms of Reference will take about 4 months. The procedure is expected to start in October 2020. After the elaboration of the assignment it will take about 2 months for its coordination with the Executive Forest Agency and the MoEW and its final adoption. The monitoring will be done after 6 month period.**

#### 5. **Costs** (if relevant)

2000 euro

#### 6. **Funding sources** (if relevant):

### **ACTION 2**

Revision of the Management plan of the Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park

**1. The background** (please describe the lessons learnt from the project that constitute the basis for the development of the present Action Plan)

After the preparation of the Terms of Reference for revision the MP of the Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park, it is necessary to take the next administrative steps for the development and adoption

of the new plan. These steps include: selecting a subcontractor to complete the Assignment; Development of a new updated management plan; Conducting public dissuasions; adoption of the MP by a decision of the Council of Ministers;

The new management plan will contain plans and projects that will correspond to the objectives of OP "Growing Regions" 2014-2020 and more specifically with priority axis 5 "Regional Tourism"

## **2. Action** (please list and describe the actions to be implemented)

The purpose of this activity is to prepare a work plan / project for renovation and promotion of the route Botev road, falling on the territory of Vrachanski Balkan National Park as a "green road". This plan will be included in the updated management plan of Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park. At the map with orange line is indicated the route.

According to the Bulgarian legislation the structure of the MP is obligatory and contains: Summary; Introduction; Part 1: Description and assessment of the protected area; First assessment; Part 2: Long-term goals and constraints; Second assessment; Part 3: Norms, regimes, conditions and recommendations for carrying out the activities; Part 4: Operational tasks and prescriptions for protection and use; Part 5: Review of the implementation of goals and objectives; applications.

As only an update of the plan is made, the part related to geology, geohydrology, habitat factors, etc. will not be redeveloped. The parts related to flora and fauna will be partially developed and the parts related to functional zoning and plans and programs will be mainly revised (part 3 and part 4). In these parts will be added activity for improvement and popularization of the route "Botev road", which will be described in detail - activities, financing, responsibilities, etc.

The main tasks in this activity are:

1. Selection of a subcontractor for the preparation of an updated management plan. The procedure is carried out by the Executive Forest Agency, according to the Bulgarian legislation. Expected implementation period June-September 2021

2. Development of a new management plan for Vratsa Balkan National Park. Term for implementation: about 1 year. (September 2021- September 2022). This activity includes conducting public condemnations

3. Submission of the Plan for approval to the MoEW - Deadline for implementation: 2 months (September - November 2022)

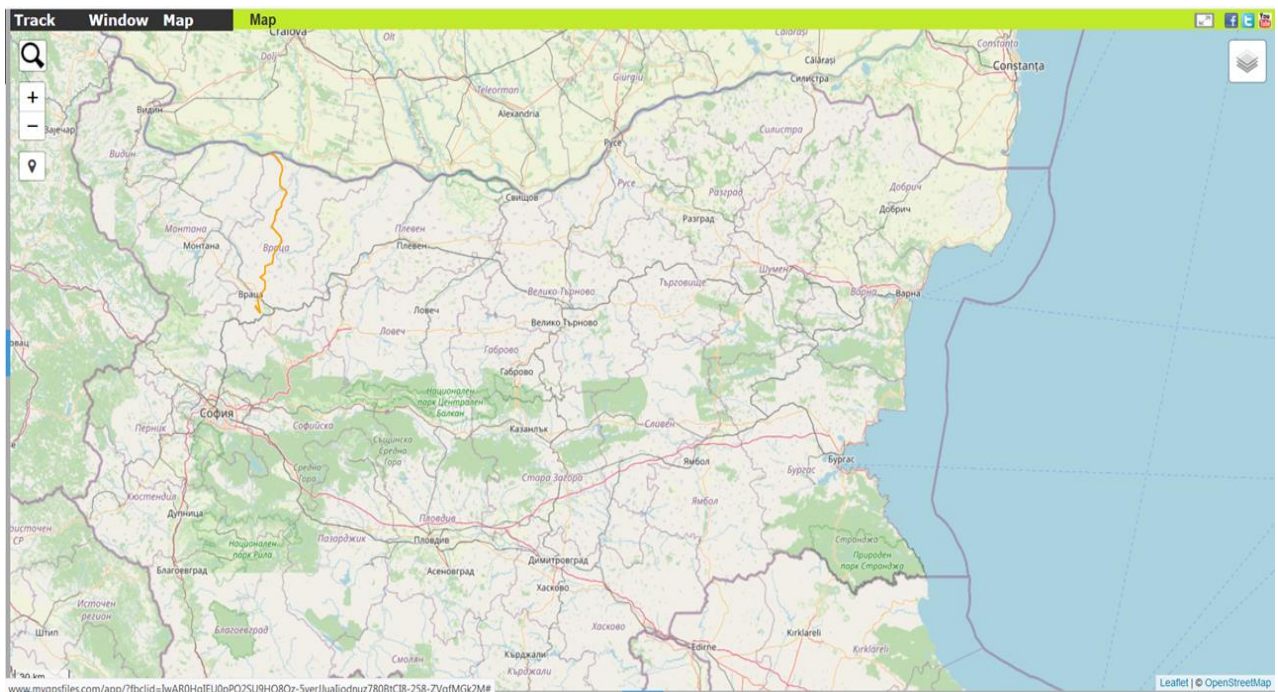
4. Adoption of the MP by a decision of the Council of Ministers - Deadline for implementation October 2022.

The Directorate of the Vachanski Balkan National Park will monitor the implementation of the tasks described above.

The output of this action is developed technical document for the management of the natural park in the next 10 years. It will include new concrete actions linked to the Botev route promotion within the Natural Park.

In case of delay in the adoption of the updated management plan - the Park Directorate will initiate the implementation of activities for development and promotion of Botev pat route. They will be included in the annual working plan of the Directorate for 2022. The Park Directorate will implement the following

activities: cleaning the route, placing information boards and issuing a brochure. The activities will be financed from the budget of the directorate.



7. **Players involved** (please indicate the organisations in the region who are involved in the development and implementation of the action and explain their role)

- Directorate of Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park
- Subcontractor, who will develop a new management plan;
- All stakeholders - state, regional and municipal structures, civil society organizations, landowners, etc.

8. **Timeframe**

The production is expected to take one year from June 2021 to September 2022. The monitoring process will be organized every 6 months.

9. **Costs** (if relevant)

EUR 200,000 to be provided by the Ministry of Agriculture or on current European programs. Currently there is a similar practice, as three of the Management Plans of Bulgarian Nature Parks were funded by Operational Program.

10. **Funding sources** (if relevant):

**ACTION 3**

Botev Road - integrated project on the territory of Vratsa District in the new programming period 2021-2027. Monitoring of the situation and its possible progress.

**11. The background** (please describe the lessons learnt from the project that constitute the basis for the development of the present Action Plan)

In view of the Action Plan to be as comprehensive as possible as a third action, we would like to present another opportunity for a green road in Vratsa District. It is important to note that this activity is possible to be realised and monitoring in the next programming period, and could not be fundamental to the current action plan, but we will follow-up the Action 3, in the meetings we will have with our stakeholders. We will follow-up any items connected with Botev road situation and if there is any progress during the period will be discussed. We have plan to continue monitoring the news regarding the Botev road and in case if there are any news about it, e.g. the approval of the plan, this will be included in the activities carried out. This action will be added value to our Action plan.

During the implementation of the OUR WAY project aims to preserve, protect, promote and develop natural and cultural heritage through greenways. Thanks to the use of experience and solutions proposed by partners of this project, also members of Stakeholder Working group members, it is planned in Vratsa region to increase interests in using greenways. The integrated project will support the development of the region and its inhabitants.

During the implementation of the project, as well as through the involvement of the stakeholders, was define a great need for concept of green way, as well as how it fits into reality at present.

During the implementation of the OUR WAY project and thanks to the representatives of the Regional municipality and stakeholders from the Stakeholders working group gained experience and knowledge in creating, managing, promoting “greenways”, their role in preserving, protecting and promoting cultural heritage, as well as the impact on the local economy.

At the end of the 2019 the regional authorities started updating the Integrated Territorial Development strategy – North-west region 2021-2027. During the discussions, actions are taken to take into account the conclusions drawn from the implementation of the OUR WAY project.

On 04.12.2019 the project and the idea for including the Botev Road as an idea for an integrated project on the territory of Vratsa District in the new programming period 2021-2027 was presented to the Regional Development Council of Vratsa.

As part of the above action, the following good practices were identified during the learning process (interregional thematic workshop and study visit):

**Joint promotion of the Easter Cycling Trail Green Velo -2000 km marked trail running through the territory of 5 regions of Eastern Poland.**

The partnership cooperation of 5 regions of Eastern Poland (EP) is to serve the development of a tourist product which is the Eastern Bicycle Trail-Green Velo-the first Polish tourist product on such a large scale (over 2000 km route). Maintaining uniform standards for this network product requires cooperation and integration of activities between many stakeholders. Cooperation takes place on many levels, including on the interregional level. The specificity of the product, its complexity, the area covered by its functioning and a large number of components being the subject of the offer for cycling tourists makes it necessary to involve many partners at each stage of product development.

In order to maintain the continuous development of the Route, conduct the coordinated promotion and strengthen the reputation of the Route brand, a cooperation agreement was signed between 5 regions of



EP: regions support and finance joint promotional activities of the Route. The agreement is updated annually. The promotion of the Green Velo Trail includes a joint, comprehensive presentation of the offer at tourism fairs, domestic and foreign events, printing promotional publications, running a joint promotional campaign (e.g. on the websites of the largest daily newspapers in Poland), promotion on social media (Fb, YT), application updates on smartphones. The goal of the cooperation is also to develop solutions for maintaining the infrastructure of the route after the project's durability.

**12. Action** (please list and describe the actions to be implemented)

In Bulgaria, the definition "greenway" by its nature and definition is not used. In order to take action on this, it is necessary to give a specific definition, according to what opportunities and resources are available, for a greenway definition.

In view of the discussion at the moment of the Integrated Territorial Development Strategy, the Level 2 regions for the period 2021-2027, and in connection with the implementation of the OUR WAY project, proposals will first be made to define a definition of a greenways on the basis of which such funding routes through priority integrated projects can be included. This will also lead to change and updating of the legislative base on the one hand, and on the other hand to the updating of strategic and planning documents at national and regional level.

One element one route to be defined as a "greenway" is that it follows important historical routes that can be complemented and adapted to the needs of the public in connection with slow or light non-motorized traffic.

The Botev Road with its features can be included as a place to turn into a great green road. This is a place that tourists can use as an alternative way to explore the city, the region and our beautiful nature. This time, as a route, it is also related to the protection of the environment and the improvement of the ambient air, the reduction of energy costs and the waste generated.

A very important opportunity that Botev Road, as one of the "greenway" can give to the local community, is to contribute to improving the economic development of the places where this route passes by creating new jobs related to conservation and enriching the route, on the one hand, and on the other, related to improving competitiveness, by building a technical and business structure.

One of the main tasks which will be carried out in order to implement the idea is to create the promotion partnership between the different municipalities through the Botev road. The promotion partnership will be implemented at the level of the regions by signing a cooperation agreement (the content of the agreement will be established later) in which the regions commit themselves to jointly promote the route. The agreement will be signed every year and the annex to the agreement is crucial, which sets out the promotion activities and the amounts to be allocated for them. Given the fact that the actual activities of the integrated project will be implemented in the next programming period, we could not commit a specific amount for promotion from each region at the moment. In addition, the regions will carry out activities promoting and developing the trail on their own.

In order to establish promotional activities, at least twice a year, regions' meetings will be held to discuss proposals for promotional activities adapted to the financial resources for each region.

The main key performance indicators will be number of tourists crossed the route as well as number of tourists visited the historic sites. Survey of tourist traffic on the trail under the partnership agreement will be developed. The survey will cover the tourist traffic of users.

**13. Players involved** (please indicate the organisations in the region who are involved in the development and implementation of the action and explain their role)

► Ministry of Tourism – The leader of national policy for tourism sector

- Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works – It is an institution that is associated with the construction of appropriate infrastructure to and from tourist sites. Also, this institution is in charge of OP "Regions in Growth 2014-2020", Priority Axis 5 "Regional Tourism", related to the project.
- District Administration
- **Regional Development Council** - discuss and propose initiatives and schemes for resource provision of the implementation of the Regional Development Strategy, including for financing municipal projects;
- **Regional Tourism Council** - The Regional Tourism Council carries out its activities in accordance with the national priorities for tourism development, taking into account the local and regional tourism resources and the Regional Development Strategy.
  - Municipal administration - Advisory Board on Tourism in the Municipality of Vratsa - The Advisory Council on Tourism in the Municipality of Vratsa is a collective, permanent advisory body that discusses and approves the program for the development of tourism in the municipality in accordance with the priorities of the municipal strategy and according to the local tourist resources and needs, as well as the report on its performance.
  - Members of Stakeholders Working group (representatives of local and public authorities, non-governmental sector, associations, foundations etc.).

#### 14. Timeframe

“Botev Road” will operate through the Integrated Territorial Development strategy – North-west region 2021-2027 during the next programming period.

#### 15. Costs (if relevant)

The costs will relate to the organization and function of the “Botev road” greenway.

#### 16. Funding sources (if relevant):

The cost related to the organization and function of the greenway “Botev road” will be covered by the small priority integrated projects, part of the Integrated Territorial Development strategy – North-west region 2021-2027.

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Stamp of the organisation (if available):** \_\_\_\_\_

