

**to the Commission Implementing Decision on the financing of the multi-country multiannual action plan in favour of the Western Balkans and Turkey for 2021-2022**

**Action Document for “Support to the Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA)”**

## 1. SYNOPSIS

### 1.1. Action Summary Table

<b>Title</b>	<b>Support to the Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA)</b> Multi-country multiannual action plan in favour of the Western Balkans for 2021-2022			
<b>CRIS/OPSYS number</b>	IPA III/2021/043-643/06			
<b>Basic Act</b>	Financed under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III)			
<b>Team Europe Initiative</b>	No			
<b>Zone benefiting from the action</b>	Western Balkans (Republic of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia, and Republic of Serbia)			
<b>Programming document</b>	IPA III Programming Framework			
<b>PRIORITY AREAS AND SECTOR INFORMATION</b>				
<b>Window and thematic priority</b>	Window 2: Good Governance, EU <i>acquis</i> alignment, good neighbourly relations and strategic communication Thematic priority 1: Good governance.			
<b>Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)</b>	SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and <b>build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.</b>			
<b>DAC code(s)</b>	15110 - Public sector policy and administrative management			
<b>Main Delivery Channel @</b>	Other multilateral institution- 47000			
<b>Markers (from DAC form)</b>	<b>General policy objective @</b>	<b>Not targeted</b>	<b>Significant objective</b>	<b>Principal objective</b>
	Participation development/good governance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Aid to environment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Gender equality and women’s and girl’s empowerment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

\* 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.

	Trade development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Reproductive, maternal, new-born and child health	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Disaster Risk Reduction	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Inclusion of persons with Disabilities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Nutrition	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>RIO Convention markers @</b>	<b>Not targeted</b>	<b>Significant objective</b>	<b>Principal objective</b>
	Biological diversity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Combat desertification	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Climate change mitigation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Climate change adaptation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Internal markers</b>	<b>Policy objectives</b>	<b>Not targeted</b>	<b>Significant objective</b>	<b>Principal objective</b>
	Digitalisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Migration	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	COVID-19	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>BUDGET INFORMATION</b>				
<b>Amounts concerned</b>	Budget line: 15 02 01 01.01 Total estimated cost: EUR 4 350 000 Total amount of EU budget contribution <b>EUR 4 350 000 – year 2021</b>			
<b>MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION</b>				
<b>Type of financing and method(s) of implementation</b>	Project Modality <b>Direct Management</b> through: Grants			
<b>Relevant priorities and flagships from Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans</b>	Priority on “Governance, Rule of Law, Public Administration Reform”			
<b>Final date for concluding contribution / delegation agreements, procurement and grant contracts</b>	At the latest by 31 December 2022			
<b>Indicative operational implementation period</b>	72 months following the adoption of the Financing Decision			

## 1.2. Summary of the Action

The overall goal of the proposed action is to support public administration reforms and building institutional quality in the Western Balkans in line with the Principles of Public Administration and the European integration process. In this

regard, the action will directly and significantly contribute to the Western Balkans' progress toward EU accession preparation. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia are Members of the Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA). Kosovo is also benefiting from ReSPA's activities. ReSPA and its Members will seek to achieve these goals, through focusing the proposed action/support in the following areas: Public Administration Reform (PAR); European integration process and accession negotiations as well as Quality management (QM).

In this regard, the proposed action is organised in three expected outcomes:

- **Capacities, innovative practices and regional co-operation in the area of PAR is enhanced and strengthened.** This outcome is directly linked with the thematic areas where ReSPA has been operating in the recent years, and in which has established regional structures (networks, working groups, committees).
- **Regional co-operation in the Western Balkans, in the domain of European integration and accession negotiations is enhanced.** The accession process remains an important driving force for the Western Balkans for advancing in their reform path, including in PAR. Therefore, ReSPA will devote to this process a specific focus aiming to enhance and promote regional co-operation and exchange of experiences and knowledge in the domain of European integration and accession negotiations;
- **Increased capacities and institutional conditions in the administrations for QM implementation through the Regional Quality Management Centre (RQMC).** Five years of ReSPA directed efforts in promotion of QM have recognised this domain as an important tool for developing public administrations and have resulted in the endorsement by the Western Balkans governments to give the mandate to ReSPA to host within its structure the Regional Quality Management Centre, whose initiatives will be enhanced under the proposed action.

ReSPA is currently coordinating several thematic working groups related to PAR / PFM (see description of the organisation of ReSPA in section 4.5). These thematic working groups might further evolve, as appropriate, based on findings of the mid-term evaluation of ReSPA Strategy 2019-2024. Any evolution of ReSPA's working structures will be based on demand and will be discussed and agreed with the Governing Board. In addition, by mid-2024 ReSPA will define its new Strategy which will cover the years 2025-2030 and reflect any changes. Another novelty is the extension of ReSPA support and networking toward local level (regions and municipalities).

In tailoring its support to its Members and Kosovo, ReSPA is inspired by its extensive experience in the region, the findings and recommendations of the European Commission reports, the SIGMA evaluations as well by the new National Strategic PAR/PFM Frameworks for the upcoming period.

## 2. RATIONALE

### 2.1. Context Analysis

**The revised enlargement methodology** "Enhancing the accession process - A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans"<sup>1</sup> endorsed by the European Commission in February 2020, recognises PAR as a fundamental cornerstone of the whole accession process, considering it equally important with rule of law, fight against corruption and economic governance. The methodology appeals the Western Balkans to deliver more credibly on their commitment to implement the fundamental reforms required as well as ensuring the proper functioning of democratic institutions and public administration.

According to the 2021 Communication on **EU enlargement policy**<sup>2</sup>, Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia are moderately prepared as regards PAR and there has been overall progress in the region. The Communication emphasises that while there has been some good progress over the past year, the main shortcomings relate to various forms of politicisation. Policy planning has improved somewhat, but further efforts are needed to ensure a strong quality

<sup>1</sup> COM(2020) 57, 5.02.2020.

<sup>2</sup> COM (2021) 644, 19.10.2021

control by central governments and to strengthen capacities for evidence-informed policymaking and enhancing a culture of evidence-based policymaking in the public administration. Policy monitoring capacities should be increased. Managerial accountability and professionalisation of the civil service still need to be ensured in most of the Beneficiaries and excessive politicisation addressed. *Transparent and merit-based procedures* for recruitment, promotion, demotion and dismissal need to be embedded in the legislative frameworks and consistently implemented across public services. The structure of the administration should ensure effective lines of accountability. The role of regional and local authorities in the EU alignment process and eventual application of EU rules needs to be taken into account.. Enhanced inter-institutional co-ordination is needed to implement public administration reforms.

The administrations in the Western Balkans acknowledge that the administrative capacity and professional standards of bodies charged with the *implementation of the EU acquis* need to be strengthened and the independence of regulatory bodies safeguarded. Another essential task is to enhance transparency and accountability, in particular ensuring the effective, efficient and transparent functioning of the public procurement system and public finance management.

As regards the **Public Finance Management (PFM)**, can be stated that it has improved in the last years but there are still many efforts needed to reach the international standards. Budget credibility (revenue and expenditure), budget comprehensiveness and budget transparency need further improvement in the region as well as public investment, public procurement, internal control and external audit. Fiscal risks, cash, debt management, financial integrated systems and tax administrations are other areas that do not have the necessary capacities for a sound financial management that allows the strategic allocation of resources for efficient and effective public policies and service delivery.

Support to PAR remains one of the main priorities of **the new financial perspective IPA III (2021-2027)**. Financial assistance dedicated to this area, will be delivered under Window 2 of the IPA III Framework “Good Governance, *acquis* alignment, strategic communication and good neighborly relations”, which will mainly tackle areas such as PAR, PFM, governance at regional level, statistics, economic governance, etc.

## 2.2. Problem analysis by areas of support

The main area of support that will be tackled under the proposed action is public administration reform. The latter remains one of the main pillars of European integration process and as such, demands strong commitment of ReSPA and its members. In addition, the proposed action will aim to enhance regional co-operation and capacity development in the domain of accession negotiation, but shall always take into consideration the *close link between the accession process and the reforming of the public administration*.

Referring to the *clustering of the negotiating chapters*, it is noted that PAR falls under Cluster 1 “Fundamentals”, which indicates the crucial importance that this area has in the accession process. In addition, strengthening democratic institutions and ensuring inclusive democratic processes remains key priorities for the ReSPA Members. Beside the institutions that ReSPA has traditionally supported the proper functioning of independent institutions and parliaments, is a key condition for EU accession. Therefore, ReSPA will seek to target independent institutions as well during the implementation of the proposed action, especially under the envisaged pillar related to EU accession process. The challenges faced by the ReSPA Members and Kosovo in the domain of PAR are similar, but nevertheless, each of the administration faces its own difficulties and obstacles to overcome.

*Albania* is making concrete efforts in enforcing the guidelines on Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) across line ministries, in developing the legislative package related to policy planning, in increasing the number of e-services and improving transparency in data collection and human resources management between central and local level. Implementation of PAR and PFM reform strategies has continued by extending the action plans until 2022. In the following period, Albania should in particular continue building capacity in line ministries to effectively implement regulatory and budgetary impact assessments; upgrade further the regulatory framework on policy planning and monitoring; and advance preparations to adopt a salary policy for civil servants.

In *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, efforts are made in completing essential steps in public administration reform towards improving the overall functioning of the public administration by ensuring a professional and depoliticised civil service and a coordinated countrywide approach to policy making. The Council of Ministers and the Republika Srpska entity have established working groups to develop strategies on public financial management for 2021-2025. A PFM Strategy of the Republic of Srpska 2021-2025 was adopted in June 2021. To guarantee a professional civil service, civil service procedures must be based on merit principles and free from political interference. In the coming year, Bosnia and Herzegovina should in particular start the implementation of the measures envisaged in the action plan for public administration reform and strategic framework for public financial management; establish a political decision-making body to steer co-ordination of public administration reforms across all government levels; and amend civil service laws to ensure respect of the merit principle at all levels of government.

*Kosovo* has made efforts in increasing transparency of the public administration and of public procurement. Implementation of the package of three public administration reform laws adopted in February 2019 is stalled. Overall, weak central and inter-ministerial co-ordination continues to hamper the implementation of cross-cutting reforms. *Ad hoc* policy-making, in cases influenced by special interests, remains an obstacle for inclusive and evidence-based policy-making. In the coming period, Kosovo should make the necessary legislative amendments to the Law on public officials in line with the Constitutional Court ruling; increase accountability in the public sector by implementing the action plan on the rationalisation of agencies and creating a clear framework for managerial accountability and the delegation of responsibilities; and ensure full respect for merit-based recruitment and dismissal of public officials, especially senior management.

In *Montenegro* the medium-term policy planning framework, merit-based recruitment, human resource management and rationalising the organisation of the state administration has continued to advance well. Strong political will is still needed to effectively address de-politicisation of the public service, ensure the optimisation of the state administration, and effective implementation of managerial accountability, including the delegation of decision-making. In the coming period, Montenegro should in particular: draft and adopt new PAR and PFM strategies with realistic objectives; continue with optimisation of the public administration through effective implementation of the plan; and improve citizens' access to public information by finalising the Law on access to information.

*North Macedonia* has improved transparency, with the adoption of the 2019-2021 Transparency Strategy, the operationalisation of the open government data portal and the publication of government finances data. The public consultation process is improved, with an increasing number of comments to draft regulations and greater involvement of civil society in policy-making. In the coming period, the country should, in particular put in place a legislative framework that ensures full respect of merit-based recruitment for senior civil service and other positions; finalise the horizontal functional review and start implementing it to ensure clear accountability lines between institutions; and ensure full implementation of the Law on General Administrative Procedures.

*Serbia* has further developed e-services delivery while there was no sizeable reduction of the excessive number of acting senior manager positions. Line institutions need to further take into account the quality control role of the Public Policy Secretariat, whose opinions are mandatory – meaning that the Secretariat must be consulted – but not legally binding. Despite the adoption of a decree on capital projects management, the recommendation to develop a single mechanism for prioritising all investments regardless of the type and source of financing still needs to be fully addressed. In the coming period, Serbia should in particular: start recruiting senior civil servants effectively through a merit-based procedure and reduce the excessive number of acting positions; ensure a strong quality control role of the Public Policy Secretariat; and put in place a unified, comprehensive and transparent system for capital investment planning and management.

In tailoring its support to its Members and Kosovo, ReSPA will be inspired by the abovementioned needs as well as in the findings and recommendations of the reports prepared by the European Commission. In addition, the upcoming period is crucial as regards the *re-dimension of the PAR Strategic Frameworks*. Albania has extended the timeframe of

implementation of the current Strategy till 2022, thus upgrading the respective Action Plan. Serbia will prepare a new strategy with implementation date till 2030, while Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and North Macedonia will also prepare new strategies, but with a lesser timeframe. The proposed ReSPA action, shall assist and contribute in addressing the priority actions envisaged in the new strategic frameworks of PAR in the Region, either through capacity development activities as well as through direct support mechanisms of ReSPA such as in beneficiary support, mobility scheme, etc.

### 2.3. Relevance and complementarity with strategies supported by key stakeholders

The activities included in the proposed action are designed to strengthen the targeted beneficiaries (ReSPA Members and Kosovo) capacities to fulfil their obligations under the accession criteria and the Stabilisation and Association Process. In particular, their objective is to strengthen the institutional and administrative arrangements in the 6 horizontal PAR core areas as identified for the first time in the 2014-2015 Enlargement Strategy and further defined by the Principles of Public Administration: Strategic Framework of Public Administration Reform; Policy Development and Coordination; Public Service and Human Resource Management, Public Finance Management; Accountability; and Service Delivery.

The proposed ReSPA action contributes to the objectives outlined in the *revised Enlargement Methodology* as well as (more indirectly) to other regional initiatives in the Region, such as the Berlin Process, the Regional Economic Area/Common Regional Market, etc. Under the revised accession negotiations methodology, PAR falls under Cluster 1 “Fundamentals”, indicating the crucial importance that PAR has in the accession process. The proposed action also contributes indirectly to enhancing governance and rule of law/ fundamental rights by further improving the professionalism of the public service, building capacity and improving efficiency of service delivery, strengthening public financial management and thus enhancing the overall quality, reliability, integrity, transparency and accountability of public administrations. All ReSPA members, except for Bosnia and Herzegovina have developed specific regulations and guidelines for strategic planning, including coordination and improved the quality of the monitoring and reporting systems with the support of the European Commission. In the Western Balkans, the responsibilities for the central planning guidance fall under the General Secretariat/ Prime Minister's Office. This guidance has been followed by all ReSPA members and Kosovo for the preparation of the revised/new strategic frameworks for PAR/PFM. The envisaged ReSPA support under the proposed action fits into the strategic frameworks for PAR/PFM and therefore is fully in line with the main priorities identified by the Western Balkans administrations.

### 2.4. Relevance and complementarity with EU policy and EU and other donors' assistance

The mid-term review of the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance II which was carried out at the end of 2016 highlighted that IPA II has become more strategic and has increasingly focused on the three “fundamentals” of the enlargement strategy (the rule of law, strengthening democratic institutions and public administration reform, and economic governance). In addition, *PAR remains an important area of support also under IPA III*. The draft IPA III Regulation emphasises that strengthening good governance and public administration reform, remain key challenges in most of the IPA III beneficiaries and are essential in order for them to come closer to the Union and later to fully assume the obligations of Union membership. One of the five specific objectives of IPA III is “to reinforce the effectiveness of public administration and support structural reforms and good governance at all levels”. The proposed ReSPA Action will directly contribute to *Window 2 - thematic priority b of the IPA III assistance* Reforming public administrations in line with the Principles of Public Administration. Interventions under this thematic priority shall aim at: strengthening public administration reform frameworks; improving strategic planning and inclusive and evidence-based policy and legislative development; enhancing professionalisation and de-politicisation of public service by embedding meritocratic principles; promoting transparency and accountability; improving quality and delivery of services; eGovernment; strengthening public financial management, etc.

In addition to the revised Enlargement Methodology, specific emphasis is made to PAR also in the *Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) for the Western Balkans*<sup>3</sup>, which aims to bringing the Western Balkans closer to the EU single market. The EIP makes, as well, some observations on the importance of the PAR. The Plan emphasises that Good governance is the foundation for sustainable economic growth and the functioning of democratic institutions and public administration are the main engines for the economic recovery of the region. The Plan recognises that improving public administration is essential for an environment favourable to entrepreneurship, job creation and sustainable investment. In terms of investment management, the Plan states that the Western Balkans need strong capacities (in terms of public administration) in order to identify, prioritise, develop and manage future oriented infrastructure and other strategic investment projects.

Last but not least, even the *Green Agenda in the Western Balkans*<sup>4</sup> makes relevant considerations to PAR. The document states that increasing the focus of EU public administration reform assistance in the Western Balkans on policy coherence and the green growth dimension could make a major contribution to the Green Agenda. This could specifically target inter-institutional co-ordination, statistics and administrative data (through for example common data spaces for public administration, to improve transparency and accountability) to support decision-making, improved strategic planning and impact assessments for legislation, policies and infrastructure investments.

## 2.5. Lessons learned and links with previous financial assistance

Since its establishment, ReSPA activities have been funded by the European Union, and this continuous co-operation has helped ReSPA on one hand, to grow and further expand its priorities and portfolio of expertise, and on the other hand, to become a reliable partner of the Commission in the Western Balkans towards the common goal: reforming public administration in the Western Balkans. Thanks to the support and advice of its Members as well as that of the European Commission, ReSPA activities have evolved from being fragmented and addressing a wide set of PAR/EU-related issues into more focused, strategic and tailor made support to PAR. In the recent years ReSPA has concentrated the efforts on a limited number of key horizontal areas: policy co-ordination, quality management, better regulation, service delivery, human resource management and EU integration. The latter is not seen as a process *per-se*, but is tackled in full synergy with PAR related priorities in the region. Due to its composition and structure, ReSPA has proved to be very effective in boosting regional cooperation on PAR and European integration issues in the Western Balkans.

In addition to ReSPA, other PAR support under IPA II has shown the importance of:

- *Effectiveness*: coordination of TA support, reform advice and policy dialogue at *central* level with all stakeholders in the framework of the PAR Strategies in the Western Balkans, led by the governments and facilitated by the EU Delegations/Office;
- *Sustainability*: supporting the implementation of policy advice with focused capacity building, a medium-term approach accompanying administrations with more *on the job training* and advise through the use of local experts (rather than short term missions and delivery of TA reports);
- *Relevance for Ministries in charge of PAR/PFM*: facilitating peer exchange and learning within the region on current topics and challenges, e.g. managing the fiscal risks from loan guarantees provided during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- *Accountability*: strengthen engagement with wider society – support and cooperation with academia, civil society, parliamentary committees etc. – and ensure that this work feeds back into EU policy dialogue.

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<sup>3</sup> COM(2020) 641, 6.10.2020.

<sup>4</sup> SWD(2020) 223, 6.10.2020.

### 3. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION

#### 3.1. Planned results and intervention logic (describing causal links between impact, outcome(s) and output(s) and including assumptions)

The overall objective of the proposed action is to *assist the reforming of public administrations in the Western Balkans in line with the Principles of Public Administration and European integration process, contributing, among others, to good governance in the region*. In this regard, the action aims to directly and significantly contribute to the Western Balkans' progress in their accession path, advancing to the next phase of the process, respectively. ReSPA and its Members will seek to achieve these goals, through organising the proposed action (and subsequently, its support) via the following areas, which will constitute the main expected outputs of the proposed action:

- Capacities, innovative practices and regional co-operation in the area of PAR is enhanced and strengthened;
- Regional co-operation in the domain of European integration and accession negotiations in the Western Balkans, is enhanced;
- Increased capacities and institutional conditions in the administrations for QM implementation through Regional Quality Management Centre (RQMC).

The proposed Action will indicatively cover the following outcomes and respective outputs:

##### ***O.1 – Capacities, innovative practices and regional co-operation in the area of PAR is enhanced and strengthened.***

Activities under this outcome will absorb most of the efforts and resources under the planned action. This outcome is directly linked with the thematic areas where ReSPA has been operating in the recent years, and in which has established regional structures (networks, working groups, committees). The regional structure meetings contribute to the systematic exchange of experience, identifying shared priorities and joint commitment to PAR. The regional networks and regional groups meetings improve the co-ordination and co-operation among the central administrations, as well as with relevant regional and international organisations in the specific areas of work. All these regional structures have precisely described the functions, the composition, as well as the role of its members. The already established regional structures will be gradually adapted to new needs which arise from changing environment. The thematic areas (and sub areas) to be tackled by ReSPA under the action are described below:

**The thematic area on policy planning and co-ordination role of Centre of Government institutions** deserves particular attention of ReSPA. More efficient PAR through improved co-ordination among public policies will be one of the vital leading guidelines for future ReSPA engagement in this area. The complexity of work of institutions that perform the role of “Centre of the Government” asks future many-sided approach. Governments of Western Balkans have developed important steps in establishing basic legal and institutional framework for improved co-ordination of various public policies. The co-ordination of the public policies belongs to centre of government institutions that differ in the Western Balkan region. Within their work, many specific best cases, or at least good examples, have been developed, and ReSPA will ensure a mutual exchange of the most valuable experiences.

ReSPA will help its Members respond to raising budgetary constraints for PAR and provide fundamental inputs in developing more efficient administrative structures. The main objective is to enable public administrations of ReSPA Members to “do more with less” and utilise modern agile and digital solutions to overcome obstacles caused by fewer sources and higher demands.

Despite some improvements in the *area of Better Regulation*, still the beneficiaries of the region are behind the desired level of implementation of better regulation principles and methodologies in the development of their policies and laws. There is still a need to continue the started efforts to align the standards of the administrations in the Region with the “EU better regulation agenda”, aiming to have evidence-based policy-making including anticipating evidence needs, facilitating consultation with stakeholders and experts, and the use of foresight and forward-looking tools, transparent design and evaluation of policies and laws, inclusion in the law/policy – making process of those who will be affected as well as increase of focus on delivering where it matters the most. Under this thematic area, ReSPA may assess what current evidence-based policy-making mechanisms are in place in the Governments of Western Balkans, and how they

could be strengthened by fostering both mutual learning exchanges in the region and connections with existing practices in EU Member States.

**Thematic Area of Public Finance Management (PFM)** – Along with increased transparency and accountability, a sound public financial management remains essential for a more professional administration and successful PAR implementation. While most of ReSPA Members have developed public financial management strategies/programmes, their implementation is, overall, at an early stage. There are deficiencies and challenges in planning, execution, monitoring and evaluation capacities as regards this area. For this reason, ReSPA is introducing a dedicated Regional Group on PFM, which will make together, mainly, representatives from the Ministries of Finance. Under this thematic area, ReSPA and its members will aim to take stock of the developments and bottlenecks as regards the respective Public Financial Management Reform Programmes in the Western Balkans and improving capacities in planning, execution, monitoring and evaluation. Through this thematic area, ReSPA Members shall acknowledge that public finance management reform remains key towards a functioning system of internal control in public sector. Various regional studies, baseline and comparative analysis, guidelines and methodologies, to be developed under the proposed Action, will directly contribute to this essential area for the Region.

**Thematic area on Human Resources Management and Development** – ReSPA members invested in their efforts to increase professionalisation of the civil service. The most recent wave of reforms led to the amendments of civil service laws or adoption of new laws. Despite these reform efforts politicisation of civil service recruitment remains widespread across the region. Recruiting civil servants on the basis of merit further helps to increase the speed and accuracy of transposing EU policies as well as improving the quality of their implementation. *ReSPA will continue with its efforts to support professionalisation and depolitisation of the public services.* The focus will be placed on merit-based recruitment, performance appraisal, leadership, career development, Human Resource Management Information System (HRMIS). ReSPA will continue to support and promote new trends in HRM in particular agile approach and other innovative approaches that will, among other, contribute to changing of organisational culture and more active role of HR units as agents of change in the civil service.

#### **Thematic area on Service Delivery/ Public Service Delivery**

##### Sub-area: Digital Transformation

This thematic level encompasses actions related to “*E Government*” (*e GOV*) and “*Open Government Data*” (*OD*) and “*Open Government Partnership*” (*OGP*). The common theme is digitalisation of public services for citizens and businesses as the users, whose needs define the digitalised services (E GOV and OD), but who also should be invited to co-create policies and services (OGP).

##### Sub-area: Quality Management

The recognition of applied quality management in achieving excellent results in service delivery has been reflected in the Public Administration Award that ReSPA has implemented together with SIGMA/OECD in 2020. The continuation of this action on biannual basis is crucial and will show constancy of ReSPA in dedication to outstanding performance and contribution to society based on the application of QM. Unique PA Award Follow up action that has characteristic of ReSPA flagship will be implemented on biannual basis following the PA Award.

##### Sub-area: Green transition

This thematic sub-area encompasses will cover economic and social risks associated with climate change, risks of investments into future stranded assets and opportunities associated with climate change adaptation and smart low-carbon development promoted through the Green Agenda for Western Balkans. The sub-area will provide opportunities to critical thinking and open debates on issues that public administrations in the Western Balkans may face when promoting various transformations inspired by the European Green Deal<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> COM(2019) 640 final

## ***O.2 – Regional co-operation in the Western Balkans, in the domain of European integration and accession negotiations is enhanced***

The accession process remains an important driving force for the beneficiaries in the region for advancing in their reform path, including the public administration reform. Therefore, ReSPA will devote to this process a dedicated Outcome aiming to enhance and promote regional co-operation and exchange of experiences and knowledge in the domain of European integration and accession negotiations (the output). Serving for many years as a regional hub, ReSPA recognises its task to further develop capacities of its Members' administrations to successfully conduct the accession process, manage EU funds and instruments, transpose *acquis* into internal legal frameworks and provide adequate grounds for better regional exchange in this regard.

Currently, Montenegro and Serbia have advanced in their accession negotiations with the European Union, Albania and North Macedonia (as candidates for membership) are in the eve of starting the negotiations, while Bosnia and Hercegovina and Kosovo are still potential candidates. Despite the different stages of accession process, ***ReSPA Members and Kosovo face similar challenges in meeting a number of conditions defined in the frame of the European accession process*** and reforming their PAs. Efficient co-operation among different institutions within the administration remains essential for managing the accession process, even though the main "burden" falls to the "Centre of Government", mandated with coordinating the process. On the other hand, every single central institution has a demanding role, among others, in the alignment of legislation with the EU *acquis*, and therefore the process requires an efficient public administration, motivated and agile. Being a cross cutting issue, the European Integration process requires a coherent approach by all relevant stakeholders and therefore there is a permanent need to support development of adequate administrative capacities in this domain.

The improvement of public administration efficiency is crucial for the success in the EU accession process and the link among the accession process and principles of Public Administration remains direct. Through the proposed action, among others, ***ReSPA will aim to ensure transfer of know-how and knowledge*** (even of translated legislation) among its members. More specifically, the experience gained during the years by Serbian and Montenegrin administrations can be further transferred to colleagues in Albania and North Macedonia, while colleagues from Albania and North Macedonia can serve as knowledge builders for the administrations of Bosnia and Herzegovina and somehow Kosovo. This transfer of know-how shall be performed ***with the support of ReSPA specific instruments***, such as mobility schemes, peer-to-peer learning and in specific support.

Due to its novelties and the additional required skills, ***ReSPA support will be focused also in enhancing administrative and human capacities in the WBs administrations for processing IPA III funds***, portfolio as well as regional projects (connectivity agenda). In this regard, in order to address the needs that ReSPA Members have in this direction, ReSPA will assist strengthening of relevant administrative capacities by organising Seasonal Schools on IPA III and other EU funds/programmes, workshops and trainings, networking events in the form of thematic working group meetings and conferences. ReSPA expects that this area will be characterised by a large number of mobility schemes, aiming to proliferate throughout the region the existing expertise among public servants, who have directly been dealing with the process.

In order to achieve the main goal under this outcome, through its activities and actions, ReSPA will focus its efforts to strengthen administrative capacities for the successful conduct of accession process, support administrative capacities for the successful management of IPA III, enhance the successful harmonisation of internal legislation with the EU *acquis*, as well as improve internal co-ordination of accession process within the administrations of ReSPA Members.

## ***O.3 – Increased capacities and institutional conditions in the administrations for QM implementation through Regional Quality Management Centre (RQMC).***

Systematic efforts of ReSPA in QM area resulted in establishing the Regional Quality management Centre. Five years of ReSPA directed efforts in promotion of Quality Management and implementation of CAF (Common Assessment Framework) as a QM tool developed for public administration, have resulted in the recognition by the Western Balkans governments to give the mandate to ReSPA to host within its structure Regional QM Centre. In the absence of central organisers in WB its role of the body to externally evaluate (PEF evaluation) the implementation of CAF in public administration for excellence in performance, has been given to RQMC. Supported on the ministerial level and later endorsed, Memorandum of Establishment and Operation (MoEO) has envisaged the contents and activities that would enable RQMC to become central regional place where the Western Balkan administration can find resources and support to develop and maintain the quality management as the service delivery domain emphasised in all PAR strategies as the one that needs concrete measures, resources and time for strategic improvement.

### 3.2. Indicative type of activities

ReSPA will continue to provide support to its beneficiaries through its unique networking and peer-to-peer learning platforms, aiming to further boost mutual exchange of experiences and practices in the broad area of PAR and European Integration. ReSPA will work on the organisation of high-level ministerial political dialogues, conferences, networking events, working visits, mobility schemes, the delivery of capacity-building activities (workshops, seminars, training, seasonal schools), production of analytical papers, studies and research, followed by policy recommendations based on the best regional, European and international practice, and other innovative methodologies. Through these kinds of activities, ReSPA will transfer new knowledge and skills, as well as facilitate the exchange of experiences and best-practice examples both within the region and between the Western Balkan administrations and the EU Member States. ReSPA will ensure the mutual exchange of experiences and practices in the area of PAR and the role of PA in other public policies and therefore the peer-to-peer learning will be an important segment of all further actions.

Therefore, ReSPA interventions will be simultaneously organised in a twofold manner: regionally – to cover the common interests of its Members; and directly as support answering on the specific demands by its members. ***Through support mechanism, peer-to-peer and mobility schemes ReSPA will target the specific need-driven topics in each of the abovementioned thematic areas.*** These three instruments will aim to address the specific needs of each ReSPA Member by influencing on the work of public administrations respectively compliant with the ReSPA Programme of Work. Proposals/Applications for these mechanisms are expected to be raised and inspired by:

- the operational conclusions from the PAR Special Group meetings;
- or the deficiencies identified in the action documents for implementation of PAR strategies;
- or the findings of the European Commission on PAR at the Annual Enlargement Package;
- or policy recommendations emerging from the ReSPA regional studies;
- or during the ReSPA working groups meetings;
- In-country support.

Considering the importance of the role of the European Commission and SIGMA, ReSPA can contribute to help its Members in maintaining regular exchange and cooperation with them, to ensue synergies and complementarities and avoiding non-coordinated requests for data collection or similar activities towards the same beneficiaries. This will help enhance information flow and regional co-ordination, ensure better involvement and exchange of information with EU Delegations in ReSPA Members, streamline PAR and economic reforms, ensure participation in ReSPA activities and events, and strengthen the linkage between the different bodies coordinated by ReSPA.

### 3.3. Risks and assumptions

Risks	Risk level (H/M/L)	Mitigating measures
Lack of political will and support on ReSPA mandate by its members	<b>H</b>	ReSPA unique role in the region as the only hub for Regional co-operation in the Western Balkans shall be continuously emphasised to Ministers representing ReSPA Members during the Ministerial meetings. ReSPA results and achievements shall be better

		promoted in the region and wider to the right stakeholders.
Lack of readiness and response of ReSPA Members' administrations to address the recommendations of ReSPA Studies and Papers	<b>M</b>	Through the annual monitoring exercise ReSPA will enhance its "pressure" to the Members' administrations to fulfill to a satisfactory extent (at least 30%) the recommendations of the ReSPA studies and papers.
Lack of readiness and interest of senior and mid-level officials from the Western Balkans to enhance their knowledge and attend ReSPA activities	<b>M</b>	With the substantial participation/inclusion of the members of the Regional Groups, ReSPA will prepare an attractive/innovative Plan of Activities which shall attract the attention and interest even of highly qualified officials, thus ensuring full ownership to the Regional Groups. Curricula and topics of ReSPA outputs shall always be up-to-date and qualified experts shall be recruited.
Longer than foreseen COVID-19 consequences and restrictions	<b>L</b>	ReSPA will organise large scale activities online and/or will reduce the number of attendees of face-to-face activities.

**Assumptions (to be reflected in the Logical Framework Matrix above) – grouped by outputs and outcomes**

**Outcome 1**

- Political will and support on ReSPA mandate and role in the Region as a unique intra-regional organisation is ensured;
- Readiness and response of ReSPA Member administrations to address the recommendations of ReSPA studies and papers is ensured;
- Readiness and interest of senior and mid-level officials from the Western Balkans to enhance their knowledge and attend ReSPA activities in the thematic areas of ReSPA is ensured.

**Outcome 2**

- Political will and support on ReSPA mandate/role and
- Participation/interest of the institutions in charge for EU accession negotiation in ReSPA Programmes is ensured.

**Outcome 3**

- Continued support from the Western Balkans administrations to develop regional resource for QM.

### 3.4. Mainstreaming

The principles and practice of equal opportunity and gender equality will be guaranteed to ensure equitable gender participation in the activities to be funded by the proposed action. The principles mentioned above will apply also in relation to the beneficiaries and training participants coming from the different central administrations. In addition, ReSPA ensures that during the capacity building and networking activities in the thematic areas covered by ReSPA (including HRMD), gender mainstreaming shall be discussed as a fundamental cross-cutting issue. Following senior level discussion, positive actions shall be considered to strengthen the understanding of gender related issues and relevant capacity building of officials to enhance gender mainstreaming into central policies and programmes.

The proposed action shall make every effort to encourage central administrations to consult widely, recognising the role of civil society in stimulating Public Administration reforms and ensuring that it remains close to the citizens and business. ReSPA will continue to cooperate with think tanks, academic institutions, research institutes and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from the Western Balkan who are dealing with public administration reform issues, and with European integration. In particular, ReSPA will envisage the participation of representatives of such civil society organisations (CSOs) in some of its events (especially regional conferences), and will invite CSOs' representatives to participate at various networking events. On the other hand, ReSPA will continue to provide its representation at conferences and events organised by CSOs in the Western Balkan region, in particular when such events will tackle topics of importance for public administration reform and European integration process.

ReSPA shall promote the protection of Environment and Climate change at its events as deemed appropriate. In particular, ReSPA will contribute to strengthening Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIA) including environmental

assessments. Overall, most of the Western Balkans lack a systematic approach to better regulation and regulatory policy management. RIA systems also lack openness and transparency in most administrations. The action is in line with Gender Equality Strategy of European Union 2020-2025, which emphasises importance of support to mainstreaming gender in public administration reform processes.

### 3.5. Conditions for implementation

Political commitment of ReSPA Members to PAR is the main condition for implementation. ReSPA Secretariat will organise Annual Ministerial meetings and High-level Policy Dialogues to raise awareness on the importance of PAR and increase the commitment of the Ministers in the region.

3.6. Logical Framework for PROJECT MODALITY (3 levels of results / indicators / Baselines / Targets / Source of Data / Assumptions - no activities)

Results	Results chain: Main expected results (maximum 10)	Indicators (at least one indicator per expected result)	Baselines (year)	Targets (year)	Sources of data (1 per indicator)	Assumptions
<b>Impact</b>	<b>To assist the reforming of public administrations in the Western Balkans in line with the Principles of Public Administration and European integration, contributing, among others, to good governance.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Western Balkans progress in their accession path, advancing to next phase of the process.</li> <li>2. Readiness of enlargement region on public administration reform.</li> </ol>	2022	2027	ReSPA Evaluation Report  Commission reports	<i>Not applicable</i>
<b>Outcome 1</b>	Capacities, innovative practices and regional co-operation in the area of PAR is enhanced and strengthened	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1 Increased institutional capacity to address and manage systems, organisation, approaches and technologies, as well as possible effects on reforming areas related to ReSPA thematic areas.</li> <li>1.2 Personal professional improvement, including stronger leadership/career improvement in the ReSPA thematic areas.</li> <li>1.3 Percentage of participants that applied the skills, methods and procedures, presented at the networking events.</li> </ol>	2022  2022  2022  2022	2027  2027  2027  2027	ReSPA Monitoring reports (including Annual reports)	Political will and support on ReSPA mandate and role in the Region as a unique intra-regional organisation is ensured;  Readiness and response of ReSPA Member administrations to address the recommendations of ReSPA studies and papers is ensured; Readiness and interest of senior and mid-level officials from the Western Balkans to enhance their knowledge and attend ReSPA activities in the thematic areas of ReSPA is ensured.

<b>Outcome 2</b>	Regional co-operation in the domain of European integration and accession negotiations in the Western Balkans is enhanced.	2.1 Increased institutional capacity to address and manage systems, co-ordination, approaches as well as possible effects on reforming areas related to EU accession negotiations.	2022	2027	Commission reports  ReSPA Annual Monitoring Reports	Political will and support on ReSPA mandate/role and Participation/interest of the institutions in charge for EU accession negotiation in ReSPA Programmes is ensured.
		2.2 Personal professional improvement, including stronger leadership/career improvement in the area of European integration and accession negotiations.	2022	2027		
<b>Outcome 3</b>	Increased capacities and institutional conditions in Public Administrations for QM implementation through Regional Quality Management Centre (RQMC).	3.1 Increased institutional capacity to address and manage systems, organisation, approaches and technologies for quality management	2022	2027	RQMC Annual Report	Continued support from the Western Balkans administrations to develop regional resource for QM.
<b>Output 1 related to outcome 1</b>	Capacity development actions (seminars, workshops, conferences, networking events, etc.) properly organised.	1.1.1 Number of institutions from the region represented at regional networking events;  1.1.2 Quality and relevance of capacity building, exchange of experiences and networking activities in the domain of EU integration and accession negotiations, as perceived by participants to ReSPA activities  1.1.3 Number of innovative practices awarded and supported through the Public Administration Awards in the Western Balkans.	2022	2027	ReSPA Monitoring Reports (including Annual reports)  SIGMA Reports	Interest of civil servants from the region to attend ReSPA activities and participate in the PA Awards process is ensured.
<b>Output 2 related to outcome 1</b>	Specific PAR actions supported.	1.2.1 Number of PAR actions supported through ReSPA mechanisms (enlargement package, mobility scheme, etc.).	2022	2027	Reports from beneficiaries after the conclusion of the required assistance.	Interest of ReSPA Members' administrations to apply for the ReSPA

						support mechanisms (in country support, mobility scheme, etc.) is ensured.
<b>Output 3 related to outcome 1</b>	Policy recommendations on PAR developed and promoted.	1.3.1 Percentage of recommendations from ReSPA studies/analyses implemented in Western Balkan administrations.	2022	2027	ReSPA monitoring reports on the implementation of the recommendations of ReSPA studies/analysis.	Attention of ReSPA Members' administrations to apply the recommendations steaming from ReSPA studies/analysis is ensured.
<b>Output 1 related to Outcome 2</b>	Regional co-operation and exchange of experiences and knowledge in the domain of European integration and accession negotiations enhanced and promoted.	2.1.1 Number of capacity building, exchange of experiences and networking activities in the domain of EU integration and accession negotiations  2.1.2 Quality and relevance of capacity building, exchange of experiences and networking activities in the domain of EU integration and accession negotiations, as perceived by participants to ReSPA activities	2022	2027	Regional Network minutes of meetings, summary and conclusions.  ReSPA Monitoring Reports (including Annual reports)	Participation and interest of the institutions (and civil servants) in charge for EU accession negotiation in ReSPA Programmes related to EUI is ensured.
<b>Output 1 related to outcome 3</b>	Introduced and promoted QM systems on the basis of CAF model at central and local levels by RQMC.	3.1.1 Number of Institutions at central and local level that applied CAF.	2022	2027	Information from periodical Assessment of the use of QM in PA conducted by RQMC.	Readiness and interest to apply QM system and maturity of institutions to undergo CAF evaluation.

## 4. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

### 4.1. Financing agreement

In order to implement this action, it is not foreseen to conclude financing agreements with the targeted IPA III beneficiaries.

### 4.2. Implementation modalities

The Commission will ensure that the EU appropriate rules and procedures for providing financing to third parties are respected, including review procedures, where appropriate, and compliance of the action with EU restrictive measures<sup>4</sup>.

#### 4.2.1. Direct Management (Grants)

##### **Grants: (direct management)**

##### **a) Purpose of the grant**

The grant aims to assist the reforming of public administrations in the Western Balkans in line with the Principles of Public Administration and European integration process through ReSPA and its Members contributing to achieving all outcomes and outputs under section 3.

##### **(b) Justification of a direct grant**

Under the responsibility of the Commission's authorising officer responsible, the grant may be awarded without a call for proposals to ReSPA.

Under the responsibility of the Commission's authorising officer responsible, the recourse to an award of a grant without a call for proposals is justified based on Article 195 (f) of the Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, i.e. "for activities with specific characteristics that require a particular type of body on account of its technical competence and its high degree of specialisation, on condition that the activities concerned do not fall within the scope of a call for proposals. The reason for that is that ReSPA is the only, genuinely regional institution created by all beneficiaries to deliver training and networking activities, including peer-to-peer exchanges among the senior civil servants of the ReSPA members in the area of public administration reform in the Western Balkans.

### 4.3. Scope of geographical eligibility for procurement and grants

The geographical eligibility in terms of place of establishment for participating in procurement and grant award procedures and in terms of origin of supplies purchased as established in the basic act and set out in the relevant contractual documents shall apply, subject to the following provisions:

The Commission's authorising officer responsible may extend the geographical eligibility on the basis of urgency or of unavailability of services in the markets of the countries or territories concerned, or in other duly substantiated cases where application of the eligibility rules would make the realisation of this action impossible or exceedingly difficult.

### 4.4. Indicative budget

	<b>EU contribution (amount in EUR)</b>	<b>Indicative third party contribution, in currency identified 2021</b>
	<b>2021</b>	
Grants (direct management) with the <b>Regional School of Public Administration) - cf section 4.2.1</b>	4 350 000	N/A
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4 350 000</b>	<b>N/A</b>

#### 4.5. Organisational set-up and responsibilities

RESPA has established regional structures (thematic working groups) based on members' demand and subject to endorsement by the Governing Board. The current structures are:

- **The Programme Committee** ensures and coordinates operations of inter-sector coordination of the themes and activities performed by ReSPA and its regional working groups.
- **Centres of Government working group** ensures the regional co-operation between the “centre of government” institutions in the field of policy co-ordination through regular exchange of best practices and enhancing the quality of financing of reforms, coordination of public policies with European Integration agenda, as well as further development of integrated planning systems.
- **Better Regulation working group** is devoted to ensuring the efficiency and quality of regulations and regional cooperation in this policy area.
- **Human Resource Management and Development (HRMD)** working group has task to help the creation a dynamic HR capacity in public administration of the Western Balkans, and focused on the improvement of professionalisation and de-politicisation of public administrations and therefore has two areas of intervention: Merit-based recruitment and selection, and Performance appraisal and career development.
- **eGovernment working group** has been focused on digitalisation of public services based on the specific needs of the Western Balkans and it has been influenced by the relevant global and regional eGovernment developments.
- **Quality Management working group** contributes to the improvement of the quality of public services and the establishment of Quality Management Regional Centre in ReSPA.

The ReSPA Strategy 2019-2024 states that “during the period covered by the Strategy, possibilities will be opened up for the continuation of previously established working groups and/or the creation of other working groups”. The action would allow for an evolution of these thematic working groups. Possible new themes could for example include a focus on public financial management, or European integration. Any changes to existing working groups or the setting up of new working groups will be discussed and agreed with the ReSPA governing board.

All ReSPA regional structures shall be composed of high-level officials and top or senior managers/senior public servants. Regular meetings of these structures have and will continue to contribute to the ongoing exchange of experience, identifying shared priorities and joint commitment to various aspects and PAR segments interconnected with European integration issues, especially with the EU accession process.

## 5. PERFORMANCE/RESULTS MONITORING AND REPORTING

### 5.1. Internal monitoring

ReSPA developed its Strategy for 2019-2024 with an Intervention Logic which serves as a base for monitoring and evaluation of its activities. Since the ReSPA Strategy will expire during the Action implementation, an updated strategy will be prepared (covering period 2025-2031). In support of Strategy implementation a two-year programmes of work are developed regularly. Two programmes of work will be developed in support of implementation of this Action (PoW 2023-2024 and PoW 2025-2026).

ReSPA has developed a Monitoring toolkit for Strategy implementation. The toolkit provides the ReSPA's monitoring framework with a list of output and outcome indicators, assessment methodology, measurement criteria and descriptions of tools for monitoring. This Monitoring toolkit will be used for monitoring of the indicators defined in this Action document.

The Action will be regularly monitored through internal monitoring of both outputs and outcomes. Monitoring of outputs will be conducted through post event questionnaires which will be filled out by the participants after each event. The questionnaires will focus, among others, on quality and relevance of the activity. The obtained information will be included in the reports that are submitted to the European Commission on quarterly basis (Quarterly reports). The outcome indicators in the Logical framework of this Action will be assessed once a year. This yearly monitoring exercise will involve all participants of ReSPA activities and it will be conducted through an online questionnaire. The assessment will be based on the perception of the beneficiaries. The assessment will target individual changes which should reflect the skills obtained through ReSPA activities, the application of these skills in the PAR process, as well as contribution of ReSPA to the institutional changes and performance of the institution. The annual reports will be prepared based on the information obtained and they will be discussed and adopted by the ReSPA Governing Board at the Ministerial level at the end of each year. Following the adoption, the report will be shared with the Regional groups, Governing structures and the European Commission. The annual reports will also be annexed to the Interim/Final report.

## 5.2. Roles & responsibilities for data collection, analysis & reporting

The methodology has been developed for data collection and analysis. ReSPA staff will be in charge of data collection, analysis and preparation of the report. Regional groups will also participate in the result analysis and interpretation as deemed appropriate.

## 5.3. Evaluation

With regard to the importance of the action, a final evaluation will be carried out for this action via independent consultants. It will be carried out for accountability and learning purposes at various levels (including for policy revision), taking into account in particular the regional cooperation in advancing PAR.

The Commission shall inform the implementing partner at least 1 month in advance of the dates foreseen for the evaluation missions. The implementing partner shall collaborate efficiently and effectively with the evaluation experts, and inter alia provide them with all necessary information and documentation, as well as access to the project premises and activities.

The evaluation report shall be shared with the ReSPA members and other key stakeholders following the best practice of evaluation dissemination. ReSPA and the Commission shall analyse the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluations and, in agreement with the ReSPA members, jointly decide on the follow-up actions to be taken and any adjustments necessary, including, if indicated, the reorientation of the action.

The financing of the evaluation(s) shall be covered by another measure constituting a financing Decision.

## 6. AUDIT

Without prejudice to the obligations applicable to contracts concluded for the implementation of this action, the Commission may, on the basis of a risk assessment, contract independent audits or expenditure verification assignments for one or several contracts or agreements.

The financing of the audit shall be covered by another measure constituting a financing Decision.

## 7. COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY

Visibility of EU funding and communication about objectives and impact of Actions are a legal obligation for all Actions funded by the EU, as set out in the EU communication and visibility requirements in force.

In particular, the recipients of EU funding shall acknowledge the origin of the EU funding and ensure its proper visibility by:

- providing a statement highlighting the support received from the EU in a visible manner on all documents and communication material relating to the implementation of the funds, including on an official website and social media accounts, where these exist; and
- promoting the actions and their results by providing coherent, effective and proportionate targeted information to multiple audiences, including the media.

Visibility and communication measures shall be implemented, as relevant, by the public administrations (for instance, concerning the reforms linked to EU budget support), entrusted entities, contractors and grant beneficiaries. Appropriate contractual obligations shall be included, respectively, in financing agreements, delegation agreements, and procurement and grant contracts.

The measures shall be based on a specific Communication and Visibility Plan, established and implemented in line with the EU communication and visibility requirements in force. The plan shall include, inter alia, a communication narrative and master messages for the Action, customised for the various target audiences (stakeholders, civil society, general public, etc.)

Visibility and communication measures specific to this Action shall be complementary to the broader communication activities implemented directly by the European Commission services and/or the EU Delegations and Offices. The European Commission and the EU Delegations and Offices should be fully informed of the planning and implementation of the specific visibility and communication activities, notably with respect to the communication narrative and master messages. It is the responsibility of the implementing partner(s) to keep the EU Delegations/Office and the European Commission fully informed of the planning and implementation of the specific visibility and communication activities.

Communication on this Action should also take into consideration the risks from misinformation and disinformation, and the ways of countering these in order to avoid undermining the Union's efforts and image in the Western Balkans.

## 8. SUSTAINABILITY

ReSPA has developed a structured, institutionalised and reliable framework for co-operation and support since 2010 in the area of public administration, has strengthened exchange with the EU and its Members and has contributed to the development of administrative and human capacities in the Western Balkans in accordance with the European Principles of Public Administration. During this period, ReSPA has demonstrated its ability to reconsider its concrete programmes and activities within the given mandate in order to adapt its operations and co-operation modalities to the best needs of the region. Thus, ReSPA has evolved from a training institution into a regional hub offering a wide range of co-operation modalities and support instruments to its Members. ReSPA shows continuing readiness to adapt its way of work to the changeable environment and more and more demanding needs for capacity development of public administration in its Members.

The impact of ReSPA products on the reform agenda of the Members is the most important factor of sustainability as well as an indicator of success of ReSPA operations. Sustainability of ReSPA is ensured with its capability to provide added value to the PAR processes in Western Balkans and to the EU enlargement policy and EU accession negotiation process. That proves readiness of the Western Balkan region to finance and provide full political support to ReSPA existence and work, as well as their readiness to implement and utilise products developed by ReSPA. ReSPA will ensure transfer of its training materials, presentations, comparative studies, methodologies, guidelines (some of which will be also translated into local languages) and examples of successful and best practises which ensures benchmarking and bench learning within the region. In such a way, central institutions will be able to continue and multiply ReSPA's efforts on their central and local levels.

ReSPA ensured sustainability of regional co-operation established over different areas of mutual exchange and enhanced support among the involved parties and their connections, not only with the EU but also with its Members, other international organisations and third countries.

One of the basic conditions for ReSPA's sustainability is that ReSPA's Members continue to pay their annual contributions to cover its operational costs. In 2017 ReSPA's Members agreed the extension of ReSPA's international agreement until 2024. The proposed Action document is prepared with the assumption that the ReSPA Members will regularly extend the mandate for the period till 2031.

Another important condition for the sustainability of ReSPA is solving the issue with finalisation of the procedures for official membership of Kosovo.

From the mid-term and longer-term point of views, sustainability of ReSPA depends of its capability to provide added value to the public governance and public administration reform agenda of its Members and to their EU association and accession policies. This ensures readiness of the European Commission and the Governments of EU Members to provide funds for ReSPA operations.