



Application



European Entrepreneurial Region

European Entrepreneurial Region Award

2017

REGION OF WESTERN GREECE

1. Fact sheet

General information

Name of the territory	Region of Western Greece (Dytiki Ellada)
Date of application	16/3/2016
Political endorsement	<i>Georgios Angelopoulos, Deputy Head of the Region of Western Greece</i>

Regional data

NUTS code	EL23	GDP/inhabitant (year)	12,100 (2014)
Population	677,727 (2014)	GDP growth rate (year)	-0.82% (2014)
Area in km ²	11,350.0 (2014)	Unemployment rate (year)	28.7% (2014)
Cohesion Policy category	<input type="checkbox"/> More developed region <input type="checkbox"/> Transition region <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Less developed region		

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The territorial EER strategy in a nutshell

After many years of economic growth, Greece is in a seven-year-long recession (2009-15). The situation has been made more difficult especially for SME's with the imposition of capital controls.

Western Greece, is a peripheral, geographically fragmented land, plagued by high unemployment (7th among EU regions), and with little access to finance. Aware that the aggregate demand components in Greece are shrinking, the Head (Governor) of the Regional Administration along with the Regional Council of Western Greece are taking the initiative to reverse the situation via the aggregate supply. This requires a major shift in everyone's mentality, yet the situation is dire and there is no time for delay.

The powers delegated to the Governor and the Council by the central government and the resources available are very limited. However, Governor and Council propose an innovative, low cost, entrepreneurial territorial development strategy which, if deemed worthy, may offer an alternative model from which other regions in Greece, and the country as a whole, may draw. It is based on:

- (1) Equalizing the low support offered by central authorities to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by initiating pilot policies to help SMEs.
- (2) Affecting a close cooperation between the region's private sector and the administration through which all may become more effective in achieving goal (1).

How did you learn about the EER 2017 call?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CoR website	<input type="checkbox"/> E-mail announcement from the CoR
	<input type="checkbox"/> Open Days	<input type="checkbox"/> Announcement in CoR Plenary/Commission meeting
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other CoR event	<input type="checkbox"/> Info table at CoR Plenary
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):	

2. Political vision

Context and unique starting point

Classified as a less developed NUTS II region, Western Greece:

- i. Has gone from (a) an annual GDP per capita rate of +7.4% in 2002-8, to -4.9% in 2008-14, and (b) an unemployment rate of 10.8% in 2002 to 9.7% in 2008, and 28.7% in 2014, suffering considerable job losses, esp. in construction, retail trade, and education, between the first quarters of 2008 and 2015.
- ii. Possesses a workforce that by and large (a) engages in simple activities (production, trade etc.) rather than complex (entrepreneurial) activities intended to further add value, and (b) exhibits more individualistic rather than collective traits.
- iii. Concentrates on primary sector activities (listed among the top 10 across the EU's 272 regions), and is home to (a) a small, developing cluster in microelectronics located in its principal urban center, the port of Patras, and (b) the UNESCO world heritage site of Ancient Olympia.
- iv. Is headed by a bipartite political authority which possesses limited executive (no legislative) powers and funds at its disposal.

The regional development strategy

To achieve a self-powered, extrovert, sustainable reconstruction of the region that is centered on the region's global identity, humanistic values and the environment. (Regional Council Resolution 141/2015, The five year regional development plan (2014-19), page 9).

The strategy will be implemented in an orderly way with the regional political authority:

- a. Obtaining input from (i) stakeholders who form think tanks to deliberate issues, and (ii) academic and other experts invited to study, review and present their findings: all about the best implementation of SBA principles and priorities of related policy initiatives (namely, the Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan and the Green Action Plan), so that they may act upon them.
- b. Trusting stakeholders and experts to help with the implementation of the aforesaid principles and priorities. Consulting with local business representatives and other stakeholders and experts for its own (i.e., the regional authority's) policy-making. Engaging in actions intended to help SMEs advance. Building a culture that relies on cooperation, sharing ideas and experiences, learning-mentoring. Creating a mechanism through which the territorial EER objectives are embedded in the regional development strategy and contribute to achieving the Europe 2020 goals.
- c. Improving the services the regional administration provides to citizens and organizations. Utilizing the financial tools set up by the EU to affect economic growth and the generation of jobs. Promoting the regional Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialization (RIS3) in agro-food, tourism-culture, advanced materials, microelectronics (in connection with item (iii), above). Encouraging the central government on the relevant pecuniary and non-pecuniary steps that need to be taken.
- d. Engaging in complementary activities, namely: Ameliorating intraregional accessibility and social exclusion, facilitating the mobility of residents. Maintaining social cohesion. Protecting the natural and cultural environment. Promoting energy from resources which are naturally replenished, increasing energy efficiency. Exerting its influence on the central government for the completion of the Orient/East-Med trans-European transport network corridor linking Patras to Athens (in the east), and Igoumenitsa (in the north) in order to improve access to national and international input and output markets.
- e. Proposing projects selected in a consistent decision-making manner via multi-criteria analysis.

It is a future-oriented vision in which:

- Entrepreneurship (i.e., the ability of combining inputs in ways that increase the quality and value of output) is regarded as a road to economic recovery and growth.
- The overall environment will become more conducive to the starting and operation of local firms. (This is a field in which Greece ranks third to last among the EU's 28 member-states (World Bank, 2016).

The added value of the EER award for the region

The EER award will: (a) Provide valuable support for the political vision in 2017 and beyond. (b) Help the regional authority convince central authorities on steps that need to be taken. (c) Signal to common folk that there is a way out of the long recession and forward. (d) Improve the climate for investing in Western Greece and the country as a whole

There is a strong and credible commitment to implement the EER strategy in the region

It is expressed in front of the electorate, the political parties and MPs of the region, with the latter pledging their support to the strategy and accepting a role in it.

SWOT analysis

Strengths

- The region exhibits high per capita business activity with the vast majority of businesses being SMEs.
- The basics (quality raw materials, natural resources, human capital) are already present in the region.
- The strategy provides a realistic, low cost solution for growth restoration and job creation, at a time of high unemployment, contraction of public sector jobs, reduction of government spending, and an ongoing 7-year-long recession.
- The strategy is supported by crucial partners in the scientific and business communities and the administration, both within and outside the region. All want to see the strategy succeed.
- The strategy is fully aligned with EU policies and funding.

Weaknesses

- Domestic funding for businesses has very much dried out. New tools such as crowd funding have not yet been set up. There is very little know-how in attracting non-bank finance resources and non-state funding.
- The entrepreneurial landscape lacks many elements of a proper ecosystem
- Chronic delays in the transport corridor's completion prolong hinder economic activity
- Rather low levels of R&D and technology, in relation with the European reality,

Opportunities

- Business prospects in niche products and many sectors of economic activity, such as those (a) identified in RIS3 or (b) undergoing broad restructuring during the recession (e.g., financial services, energy) or (c) driven by global trends (e.g., ICT) are still untapped.
- Building social capital, developing the business skills and outlook of the region's population, and engaging the business-minded community in the regional decision-making process creates a self-propelling mechanism for advancing the strategy.
- Success stories can boost confidence, stimulate interest, reinforce the strategy (additional resources tend to flow to winners) and pave the way for acceptance and support not only within the region but also across the country.

Threats

- Aspiring, yet inexperienced, entrepreneurs may turn to projects with little growth or survival potential. Disappointment may weaken support for the strategy.
- Ongoing disinvestment trend in Western Greece
- The ongoing economic recession

3. Governance and partnership

The strategy was prepared following:

- Fruitful dialogues and cooperation with relevant stakeholders in planning and implementing several projects over the years.
- The need to integrate the fragmentary attempts of certain local authority units (municipalities) to support the flow of innovation between research organizations and SMEs;
- Consultations with government agencies involved in (a) labor market policies for halting unemployment and providing vocational education/training, (b) the promotion of cultural and archaeological sites, agrotourism, local gastronomy etc., (c) economic research and planning.
- Constructive discussions with the Ministry of the Economy, Development and Tourism regarding the Region's will to design and implement a Small Business Act (SBA) plan. The first draft of the plan came in consultation with the national Greek SME's Envoy.

Consequently, this document constitutes the first multi-level (national-regional-municipal) governance initiative regarding SMEs in Greece.

The strategy will be further designed, implemented in 2017 (the EER year) in collaboration with:

- (a) Representatives of the region's economic actors, the municipalities, government agencies, learning and research institutes, and
- (b) Individual businessmen and women, social partners and civil society stakeholders, hereinafter referred to as SEADE Network Board (see Box 1).

These comprise the Alliance for Business Enterprise and Development in Western Greece (*Συμμαχία για την Επιχειρηματικότητα και Ανάπτυξη στην Δυτική Ελλάδα*), SEADE for short, and will interact with the Regional Council and Administration. See Box 2.

Their letters of support are provided in the Appendix.

SEADE and its Network will continue beyond the EER year, integrating the lessons learned in the EER year. Their involvement in the design, implementation and monitoring of the EER strategy, as well as their deliberation of practices employed in other regions, and sharing the experiences gained in Western Greece are described in detail in chapters 4 and 5.

Box 1: Brief description of the SEADE Network

It brings together local business leaders, individual entrepreneurs, SME organizations, educators, researchers, and additional stakeholders who wish to join. It is envisaged as a catalyst and a player who will drive the agenda of the 10 SBA principles in Western Greek society, while taking the social, environmental, innovative and durable growth dimensions into account at a grass-roots level. On the structural front, SEADE will function via think tanks (engaging in deliberations) and action groups (running activities) that report to an overseeing Committee:

- i. The General Assembly will meet at least once a year. Every two years the members elect a Committee and an SBA Assessment Commission. The former sets up the think tanks and actions groups and appoints its 5 member Board.
- ii. The Committee is the SEADE Network's decision making body, unless a matter is raised and decided by the Assembly. New enrolments and good standing are also decided by the Assembly. The Committee meets at least once every quarter, and its Board as often as needed. The Board represents the SEADE Network and reports to the Committee; and the Committee reports to the Assembly.
- iii. Think tanks whose proposals are approved may be asked to continue their work as action groups in order to see their proposed tasks through. Non-members, such as external experts, may be invited by the Committee to help in think tanks and action groups.
- iv. The SBA Assessment Commission consists of non-Committee or Board members and its role is to assess how well the other SEADE Network bodies advance the SBA agenda. It reports to and advises the Assembly. In addition, it may be asked by SEADE and/or the regional authority to monitor the progress of the EER year Action Plan.

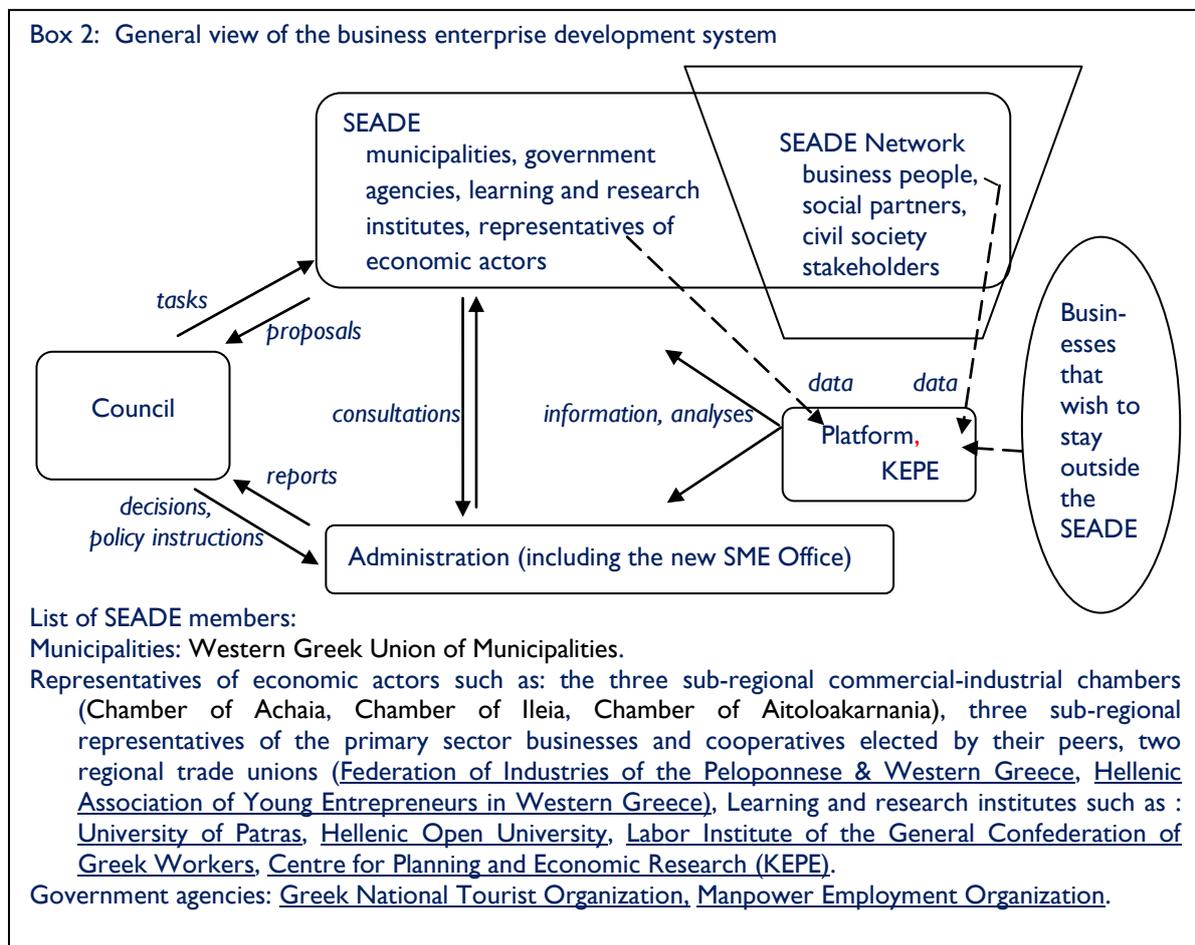
4. Action plan

With the regional authority having no say in a good number of matters (from taxation to school-curricula and teacher-training details, all of which are determined by the central government), the Action Plan proposed hereinafter was drawn given these constrains. It is not a synthesis of existing policies, but consists of concrete actions to implement the SBA principles as well as priorities of related policy initiatives that fall within the territory's competences. Its intention is to make up (a) for the low level of support to SMEs provided in Greece by the central and other authorities over a long period of time, and (b) for the fiscal shortness by (i) tapping into other, human resources, (ii) trying new things and (iii) making steps in the direction of establishing an environment and culture that is friendlier to businesses, provide inspiration, and achieve some tangible results.

To lay the **ground work**:

- The Regional Council decided to ask 132.2 million euro from the EU Cohesion Policy programs to support new businesses, small businesses, green businesses, entrepreneurship, smart specialization, cluster development and related projects in the area (Council Resolution 141/2015, The five year regional development plan (2014-19), pages 707-9).
- The Regional Administration established SEADE and launched a Regional Business Enterprise Data Collection Platform: The former in cooperation with the region's business and professional bodies, government agencies and other stakeholders, to be involved in Actions A-D, below. The latter in collaboration with KEPE, Greece's largest economics research institute, as part of a long term partnership. It will be used to (a) collect suggestions on reducing administrative burdens, (b) construct indicators, and (c) identify glitches along the value chain in order to map the microeconomic environment and carry analyses at the local (zip-code) good or service (NACE rev.2 four digit) level that will help policy-makers engage in well-targeted interventions and businesses improve their operations. This is something that no SME or large business, new or old, could fund or carry out. The suggestions will form a helpful resource to the new SME Office that is proposed in Action D.v.

An overview of the envisioned business enterprise development system is provided in Box 2.



In addition to the microeconomic approach mentioned above, and in order to help chart the region's progress from a macroeconomic perspective, KEPE will provide the Regional Administration and SEADE with annual reports on the state of the region's (a) sectors and subsectors and (b) overall performance vis-à-vis the EU's other 271 regional economies based on a common set of Eurostat indicators. (E.g., [Prodromidis, 2015](#); [Economou, 2015](#).) These will also feed into the Region's overall business enterprise development strategy.

The Action Plan takes into account all ten Principles of the SBA for Europe, namely, to:

1. create an environment in which entrepreneurs and family businesses can thrive and entrepreneurship is rewarded (see Action A.i);
 2. ensure that honest entrepreneurs who have faced bankruptcy quickly get a second chance (see Actions A.i and D.iii);
 3. design rules according to the "Think Small First" principle (see Actions B.i and D.i-ii);
 4. make public administrations responsive to SMEs' needs (see Actions A.i, B.ii, and D.v);
 5. adapt public policy tools to SME needs (see Actions D.iii-iv);
 6. facilitate SMEs' access to finance and develop a legal and business environment supportive to timely payments in commercial transactions (see Actions B.ii, C.i);
 7. help SMEs to benefit more from the opportunities offered by the Single Market (see Actions C.ii and D.v);
 8. promote the upgrading of skills in SMEs and all forms of innovation (see Actions B.ii and C.ii);
 9. enable SMEs to turn environmental challenges into opportunities (see Action D.v);
 10. encourage and support SMEs to benefit from the growth of markets (see Action A.i);
- as well as priorities (pillars) of the Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan and the Green Action Plan for SMEs (see Actions A.i, C.ii, D.v, and C.ii, respectively), and the results of the SWOT analysis. It consists of the following Actions:

The Region of Western Greece will:

- A. Be aided by SEADE (see Box 1) which will constitute think tanks and working groups charged with:
 - i. Collecting and considering best practices for:
 - Stimulating innovative and entrepreneurial mindsets among pupils, students, young researchers and school/university/research institute staff through programs, regular or special activities, awards and other initiatives. [Principle 1]
 - Developing a mentoring-and-support program for business transfers and female entrepreneurs who wish to become entrepreneurs. [Principle 1]
 - Encouraging (a) a constructive dialogue and mutual understanding between SMEs and large buyers, and (b) the coaching of SMEs by large companies in order to bring them to international markets. [Principles 4 and 10]
 - Putting in place schemes for matching transferable businesses with potential new owners. [Principle 1]
 - Informing both the business community and the broader community on the above so as to increase public awareness. [Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan]
 - Promoting a positive attitude in society towards giving entrepreneurs a fresh start via public information campaigns by sponsoring activities (from business discovery events and visits to lectures and theatrical plays) with such messages and themes etc. [Principle 2]
 - Relevant issues arising among its members (e.g., credit advocacy for SMEs, coordination of SME exports, fitting into (or taking advantage) of the regional brand campaign, other synergies). To that end, experts as well as representatives and teams from other EER award regions will be invited to the region to share their experiences, best practices, and collaborate.
 - ii. Making suggestions to the Regional Council so that the latter may pass any resolutions needed, including entrusting/assigning the implementation to SEADE and asking/designating it to report back on the results. The Council's involvement in this and other Actions further ensures the consideration of diverse social, environmental, innovative and economic growth points of view.
- B. Proceed with the following initiatives in collaboration with the academic (university and research) community:
 - i. Issue a call for papers on:
 - the costs and burdens affected upon local businesses by any one policy applied in the region during 2008-17, and
 - the steps that (could had been or) should be taken to minimize the adverse effects.

A conference will be held and the best scientific papers published. See also Action D.x. The exchange of arguments, ideas and facts is expected to broaden the outlook of policy-makers, regional councilors, students, journalists, and the public at large and, hence, improve the quality of decision-making and understanding of the public in the future. [Principle 3]

ii. Order studies on:

- The practices of the EU's best performers with respect to reducing the fees and time required for registering a business. [Principle 4]
- The development of financing programs that address funding gaps (e.g., between 100,000 and a million euro) with instruments combining features of debt and equity while respecting State Aid rules. [Principle 6]
- The feasibility of supporting the development of electronic identities for businesses in order to enable e-invoicing and e-government transactions.¹ [Principle 8]

All will be reviewed by independent experts of the highest standard and legal advice on implementation will be obtained.² The findings will be presented to the business community and to the Regional Council. The latter may vote on the implementation of as many proposed practices or ideas as possible.

C. Proceed with the following initiatives in collaboration with the business community and external experts:

i. Ask SEADE think tanks to discuss and propose:

- Non-tax-related steps that encourage investment in the region, and ways to make full use of the funding available in Cohesion Policy programs and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, in support of SMEs. [Principle 6]
- Methods that ease SMEs' access to funding related to entrepreneurship, innovation and knowledge in the implementation of the Cohesion Policy programs. [Principle 8]

Both sets of proposals will be reviewed by independent experts of the highest standard, and legal advice on implementation obtained. The findings will be presented to the Regional Council, and the latter will decide (vote) on the implementation of the proposals.³

ii. Organize seminars/meetings/information campaigns with expert lecturers designed to:

- Encourage SMEs to make better use of standards and provide feedback on their contents. [Principle 7]
- Improve awareness among SMEs on the ways and means they may defend themselves against unfair commercial practices. [Principle 7]
- Inform SMEs about resource efficiency actions under the COSME, Horizon 2020 and LIFE programs, and the European Structural and Investment Funds. [Green Action Plan]
- Help SMEs (a) evaluate, report, and improve their environmental performance, and (b) acquire the necessary managerial and technical skills to adapt their business towards the low carbon, resource efficient economy, inter alia, through the European Social Fund. [Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan]
- Train SMEs in public procurements. [Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan]
- Provide (a) useful business skills on accounting, marketing, decision making, digital skills (e.g., e-commerce, digital marketing, customer relationship management systems) to entrepreneurs who so wish;⁴ and (b) the relevant certification.

The sessions (a) may be graded according to participants' experience, (b) will be taped in order to provide downloadable versions to those who may wish to benefit from them in the future, and (c) will be accessible via the website of the new SME Office that will be established. The initiative will be reviewed and evaluated at the end of 2017, and its entrustment to the SME Office, along with a revision of the content and inclusion of topics suggested by SEADE Network members or individual entrepreneurs (e.g., how an SME may "go international", develop an electronic identity and benefit from it (following Action B.ii)) will be decided then. Until the SME Office is up and running, the 2016-7 activities will be carried out by the Regional Administration's Development Office.

¹ To the extent the region has a population twice the population of Iceland and half the population of Estonia (two leaders in this aspect), a critical mass may exist.

² The revision element is proposed in this and other Actions in order to improve/ensure quality and secure that any monies and time spent are spent on worthy projects.

³ Ideas and issues that may lie beyond the Council's remit (e.g., peer-to-peer-lending) will be forwarded to the relevant bodies (e.g., Bank of Greece, the Hellenic Capital Markets Commission) to inquire on the ways they may be facilitated.

⁴ A pilot seminar on the sophisticated decision making *PriEsT* software was recently prepared for public servants in the southern part of the region.

- D. Carry out the following:
- i. Turn to SEADE (see Box 1), and consult with it for at least eight weeks prior to making any legislative or administrative proposal that has an impact on businesses. [Principle 3]
 - ii. Require each forthcoming Council initiative be accompanied by at least one expert analysis or opinion on the initiative's impact on SMEs (esp. on minimizing costs and burdens for business), and take the said analysis or opinion into account when designing the proposal. [Principle 3]
 - iii. Allow all local businesses to enroll as the Regional Administration's prospective suppliers. By submitting their email addresses and pertinent NACE code (or codes), enrolled businesses will be in a position to receive updates from the Procurements Department regarding its purchasing needs and make offers. New firms will be informed of the service upon incorporation/registration and able to enroll any time. Municipalities will be encouraged to do the same with their own procurements. In addition, all local businesses will be given the opportunity to sign up in a new internet application (simpler than the Platform mentioned above Box 2 in many respects), the Supplier Network, accessed by (and for the benefit of) the general public. This way, new entrepreneurs, re-starting entrepreneurs and, especially, honest entrepreneurs will be able to advertise, receive comments, and build clientele and reputation much like accommodation providers get bookings through hotels.com, travelocity, expedia and other internet hotel search and booking engines). [Principles 2 and 5]
 - iv. Instruct the Procurements Department to avoid disproportionate qualification and financial requirements, and subdivide contracts into lots where it is appropriate to make sub-contracting opportunities more visible. [Principle 5]
 - v. Set up by late 2016 an SME Office (envoy) that will:
 - Facilitate businesses with the electronic provision of information on the necessary procedures and formalities asked by public administrations for commencing, continuing or winding down business activity. [Principles 2, 4]
 - Operate as a point of contact to which SMEs and stakeholders at large will be able to communicate rules or procedures that are disproportionate and/or unnecessarily hinder their activities (e.g., relating to SOLVIT, national standard bodies, mutual-recognition-principle issues, etc.). [Principles 4 and 7]
 - At the request of a local SME that may be asked by a national, regional or local department/authority to provide information which is already available within the administration, inform the party asking the information that the information is already available within the administration and where this information lies. In time, the Office will set up a digital archive holding copies of the main documents and data that firms supply, so that the copies and data do not have to be generated or submitted anew. [Principle 4]
 - Coordinate SMEs issues across the regional administration and liaise with local chambers and the national or EU authorities which are in a position to (a) reduce/simplify the business license and permit procedure, (b) reduce the cost of access to standards, and/or (b) resolve/help with the issues raised. [Principles 4 and 7, Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan]
 - Serve as a one-stop-shop where SMEs can apply for EU, national and local grants. [Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan]
 - Collect SME proposals regarding (a) eco-friendly products and processes, and (b) the funding needed in order to develop them. The proposals will serve as an input in the drafting of the region's Cohesion Policy funding proposals. [Principle 9]
 - Set up an easily accessible database of professionals through which SMEs may hire/buy/acquire specialist expertise that can help them grow, innovate and go international. [Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan]
 - Update the Regional Council so that the latter may pass any resolutions needed.
 - vi. Offer free office space with internet access and WiFi in/near Patras for a period 3-5 years to ten startup SMEs (including university/research institute spin-offs) (a) with viable, externally-reviewed business plans (b) that want to get involved in the six Lead Market Initiative fast-growing products and services (i.e., eHealth, protective textiles, sustainable construction, recycling, bio-based products and renewable energy) or the RIS3 choices (i.e., agro-food, tourism-culture, advanced materials and microelectronics). As a test (pilot) case, the Regional Administration will also support the said SMEs in:
 - obtaining expert advice on going international through SEADE resources (up to the time the relevant SME Office resource becomes fully operational),
 - being aided by senior and/or postgraduate students of local public educational institutes (i.e., interns) carrying research on relevant topics,
 - being facilitated in engaging in research and innovation via simplified (i) access to the public research infrastructure of local institutes, use of R&D services, (ii) recruitment of skilled employees and (iii)

training, as allowed for in the new Community Framework for State Aid for research, development and innovation. [Principle 8]

The objective is to ensure that these start-ups have significantly better than average survival rates in order for (a) them to contribute to economic growth, (b) the region's economic actors to develop know-how in supporting small businesses in years to come, and (c) the region as a whole to conserve and develop entrepreneurial talent.

- vii. Support the efforts of local businesses to internationalize by (a) financing or (b) obtaining from KEPE annual studies on (i) the determination of the most suited foreign markets for six goods or services (different every time) and (ii) the said markets' characteristics (e.g., [Kanelopoulos and Skintzi, 2014](#)), so that extrovert entrepreneurs may reach informed decisions on the marketing mix needed. [Principle 8]
- viii. Establish a smart matchmaking-and-alerting platform with (a) skill, brief job history, and location preferences fields for job seekers and (b) vacancy, skill requirement, and location fields information for businesses interested in hiring, so that all parties may have a better chance to find what they are looking for in the briefest unemployment/inactivity/understaffing spell possible.
- ix. Set up with the help of KEPE and other experts a "state of entrepreneurship" barometer about W. Greece, modeled after the fields of the [2015/6 GEM report](#) (page 75) to provide updates on the region's progress overtime and vis-à-vis the rest of Greece. The fields concern self perceptions, activities, motivation, gender equality, impact, societal values and the entrepreneurial eco-system.⁵
- x. Organize in late 2017 a three-day conference inviting the full assembly of the SEADE Network and the general public, in which:
 - KEPE's annual reports regarding the regional economy (see paragraph following Box 2, and Action D.vii),
 - round table discussions regarding relevant sectors and products,
 - the papers invited under Action B.i,
 - papers invited from other EER regions on their practices and experiences,
 - the studies invited under Action B.ii, and
 - awards and recognitions selected in each Action A category that a SEADE Network think tank or working group was involved,will be presented.

Measurable targets

One functional network for SMEs (See Boxes 1-2, Action D.i.). One operational SME office. Two new pro-SME practices (Actions D.ii-v). 16 initiatives and studies to prepare/affect an equal number of pro-SME Regional Council Decisions (Actions A..i-ii, B.i-ii, D.vii). 6 useful seminars (Action C.ii). 3 platforms: the Platform prepared by KEPE (just launched), the Supplier Network (Action D.iii), the Job-Matching platform (Action D.viii). 10 start ups (Action D.vi.)

Periodic indicators

The barometer fields (indicators) described in Action D.ix will provide a good sense of the change affected in the region (a) just prior to the Action Plan launch, (b) during the EER year, and (c) beyond. Though currently available at the national level, the proposed indicators are generally accepted by the international community. It is expected they will provide a basis against which the region's overall progress will be measured.

Time table

Actions A.i, B.i-ii, C.i, D.i-ii, v, vii-ix will commence in mid-2016. Actions A.ii, C.ii, D.iii-iv, vi will commence in early 2017. Action D.x will be carried out in the end of 2017.

Worthy projects, optimal use of public funds

In mid-2016, and well as in early and late 2017, a multi-criteria analysis and mathematical programming approach will be performed to ensure maximum benefits and optimal use of funding. The regional authorities have already pilot-tested the procedure. See fn.5.

The Region's (a) collaboration with a credible planning and research institute (namely, KEPE), (b) proposed use of scientific conference procedures (in Action B.i) and reliance on external and/or independent experts and reviewing procedures (in Actions B.ii, C.ii-ii, D.ii, vi, and by the SEADE Network), are all expected to further contribute to the quality and worthiness of final outcome.

⁵ In preparation of this, a pilot survey testing the willingness and capability of 443 businesses to participate was conducted in September-October of 2015, at the request of the Western Greece's Regional Development Fund.

Sequence of actions

Action A.i. feeds into Action A.ii (i.e., a Regional Council decision). Actions B.i-ii feed into Action D.x and, along with Action C.i-ii, into Regional Council policy-making. Actions Di-ii shape Regional Council policy-making. Actions D.iii-x are carried out by the Regional Administration.

Monitoring and following up

The SEADE Network's Assessment Commission (see Box I, item d) will monitor progress. It will be placed in a position to talk to Regional Council members, Administration staff, external experts, and report its findings (esp. on the things that need to be completed) to the Regional Council, the Administration, the SEADE Network bodies and/or the press. KEPE's analyses, and the new SME Office will also provide input on how things progress. Overall, there will be multiple, even alternative, routes for monitoring progress and informing/advising the Council, the Administration and the Network of glitches and setbacks.

The barometer will provide additional food for thought to all stakeholders involved on issues that may have to be addressed.

Sustainability beyond 2017

The Action Plan is design to set new things in motion, and establish precedents.

Once established, SEADE and the SEADE Network will take on lives of their own by (a) promoting the SBA principles and interests of their members, and (b) initiating new Actions. Their interaction with the society, access to the Regional Administration, and active cooperation with the latter will continue.

Ceteris paribus, the SME procurement arrangement (Actions D.iii-iv) will continue, the SME Office (Action D.v) and the job-matching platform (Action D.viii) will grow, and the 3-5 year SME start up project (Action D.vi) will go on. All things considered, the culture of doing business, esp. small business, in Western Greece (and, probably, the rest of Greece) will change for the better.

5. Communication plan

If awarded the EER label, the Region of Western Greece will try to make its EER year as effective as possible.

- a. To inform the local community of the development and possibilities, and to strengthen ties within the region and forge new ones with other regions, the regional authority will:
 - i. Organize a public kick-off event with press-conference and analyses to present the full program.
 - ii. Provide press-conference updates on a quarterly basis, in which representatives and teams of other EER award recipients will also be invited to share their experiences.
 - iii. Facilitate observers from other Adriatic-Ionian Macroregion members, neighboring Cyprus and Malta, to sit in the SEADE meetings and functions.
 - iv. Set up a special webpage regarding the Region's EER year supplying details regarding the run up to it, the EER year activities, as well as all future economic development and SBA-related activities the Region will be involved. To better relay the new spirit in the region and increase the visibility of the EU and of the Committee of the Regions, the page will operate in two or more European languages.
- b. To signal, share, activate and disseminate to local entrepreneurs and to their associates beyond the territory, and to potential investors overseas the commitment to affect change, the regional authority will use the EER label throughout the EER year as a quality label:
 - i. In all its economic development, entrepreneurship and innovation related publications and promotion materials. In particular, e-mails, e-fliers and e-booklets will bear the logo with a link to the EER website for all to visit.
 - ii. In all Action Plan events and activities, including, the SME start-up complex, electronic platforms, seminars, school visits, closing conference, reports, awards, the call for papers and its product: a scientific volume under the auspices of the Conference's scientific committee. An electronic version of the said publication will be supplied in English in the webpage regarding the Region's EER year. If successful, in years to come, the publication will turn into a journal.
 - iii. In all key economic development activities taking place in the region.
 - iv. In all regional missions to national and international trade shows, workshops, and business exhibitions.
 - v. In its official portal, as well as social network channels (e.g., facebook, twitter, youtube).
 - vi. On the welcome-to-the-region signs situated by the key highway, sea- and air-port entry points to Western Greece.
- c.
 - i. To help SEADE members and people involved in its activities (pupils, young researchers and entrepreneurs etc.) hold to the spirit and experience, the label will be used on badges and other mementoes distributed to them.
 - ii. Mementoes with the label will also be made available to tourists, for instance, visitors to the Patras carnival as well as local carnival participants,⁶ and anyone who may want to spread the word.
- d. To the extent the EER label will be seen as a recognition of the willingness not only of the regional authority, but also of its partners (key and other stakeholders in the region) to affect change, it is expected that most businesses in all three constituent prefectures across all economic sectors will enthusiastically join the SEADE Network and proudly place the EER label in their own websites for all visitors to see: from hotel owners in Ancient Olympia to olive growers and wine exporters in Aetoloakarnania.

Overall, Actions under items:

- a.i-ii, b.i-iii, and c.i are expected to publicize the region's policy within the region and to reach and affect local entrepreneurs, key actors, and local society at large.
- a.ii, and b.iv are expected to publicize the region's policy beyond its confines and reach and affect people outside the region about doing business in or with Western Greece,
- a.iii, b.i, iii-v and ii (in particular the call for papers and the publication of the scientific volume) are expected to ensure the visibility of the EU and of the Committee of the Regions.
- a.iv, b.vi, c.ii and d are expected to work in all three directions.

⁶ The Patras Carnival is the largest event of its kind in Greece and one of the biggest in Europe. 35-40 thousand people generally join every year in the final parade.

Please submit your application for the EER 2017 label in electronic format (Word document or PDF) in English to: eer-cdr@cor.europa.eu. Please include a **declaration of political commitment** from the competent political authority. Further letters of support may be added to your application. For a full list of **assessment criteria** applied by the jury, please consult the call for applications.

Deadline for applications: 18 March 2016