

PROJECT CONTEXT

Dolj, Olt, Mehedinti counties and Pleven, Vidin, Montana, Vratsa districts represent one of most undeveloped regions in their countries, and of EU-27, according to national and European statistics. The economic crisis negative impact is even more visible in these regions, where few investments in supporting business environment have been done and where a small number of enterprises became competitive on national and international markets.

Representative figures show how economic situation of this cross-border area aggravate in the last months:

- at the beginning of 2009, in Dolj and Mehedinti, more than 2000 enterprises have ceased their activities. In Olt, several companies, including ALRO Slatina, the most important economic operator in the area, were confronting with difficulties
- in March 2009, the rate of unemployment in Dolj (9,5%), Mehedinti (10,7%) and Olt (6,7%) was higher than the national average
- despite progresses registered in last 15 years by regions of Northwestern Bulgaria (Vidin, Montana, Vratsa districts) in what concerns the rate of unemployment, which decreased below 10% in September 2008, as well those registered by Pleven district (with 4,72% coefficient of unemployment registered in July 2008), the situation changed towards the end of the year because of global economic crisis. Numerous uncompetitive enterprises have dismissed employees, reduced or even stopped their activities, as for example Lom Port or the Plant for floor tiles in Montana.

According to European and international experts and leaders innovation represent the best way out of economic crisis. Now, more than ever, enterprises should increase investments in innovation and quality. Therefore, **2009** was declared **the European Year of Creativity and Innovation (EYCI)** – “**Creativity** is a driver for **innovation** and a key factor to the development of personal, occupational, **entrepreneurial** and social **competences** and the well-being of all individuals in society” (European Parliament and Council).

ACCED-COM project is **developed in line with European vision**, aiming to develop **sustainable infrastructure** and a **coherent Strategy and action plan** for supporting **the competitiveness of sectors of local economy**:

- **industries** developed in the cross-border area (machine building; chemical; wood industry; construction raw-materials industry, heavy industry and metallurgy; automobile industry, ship construction) have enormous potential in becoming competitive on European and international markets, by increasing their quality through innovation. The virtual infrastructure (*Virtual Stock Exchange for services, technologies and brokerage*), as well the *research activities, consultations, exchanges of experience, brokerage events and exhibitions, network, elaboration of work methodologies* etc. will facilitate enterprises’ access to newest technologies, inventions, services and will contribute to their development.
- **agriculture and agricultural and animal food production** are economic activities with long tradition in the cross-border area. New global market conditions and development directions, as well EU regulation in these specific sectors request high quality level of agricultural and animal products. The majority of agricultural producers are represented by small, individual producers, who do not have technical capabilities to make a proper quality analysis and control of their products. The current project creates the basis of future investments in the physical infrastructure (*Cross-border Laboratory for testing animal and agricultural products*) in the benefit of local farmers and food producers, and prepares them for using the new infrastructure.