



Ex-ante Evaluation
Operational Programme
Technical Assistance

Romania
(Final)
EuropeAid/121373/D/SV/RO

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Bucharest, January 30, 2007



The views expressed are those of Panteia and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Commission

This report has been prepared as a result of an independent evaluation by Panteia being contracted under the Phare programme

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Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
1 INTRODUCTION	6
1.1 Objectives of the evaluation	6
1.2 Methodology	7
1.3 Conceptual remarks	9
1.3.1 General approach for evaluation of the TA OP	9
1.3.2 Main questions to be answered by the ex-ante evaluation and the way current report addresses these questions:	10
1.3.3 The following steps for the evaluation have been carried out:	11
2 APPRAISAL OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC/SECTOR ANALYSIS AND THE RELEVANCE OF THE STRATEGY TO THE NEEDS IDENTIFIED	13
2.1 Analysis of the current situation	13
2.2 SWOT	15
2.3 Relevance of the strategy	16
2.4 Partnership	17
2.5 Relevance	17
2.6 Overall conclusions	18
3 EVALUATION OF THE RATIONALE OF THE STRATEGY AND ITS CONSISTENCY	20
3.1 Assessment of the rationale of the strategy	20
3.2 Assessment of the consistence of the strategy	20
3.3 Contribution of priorities and key areas of intervention to the global objective	24
3.4 Overall conclusions on rationale and consistency	30
4 APPRAISAL COHERENCY OF THE STRATEGY WITH EU, NATIONAL AND REGIONAL POLICIES AND THE COMMUNITY STRATEGIC GUIDELINES	31
4.1 Appraisal of the compatibility of the strategy with regional, national and EU policy objectives	31
4.2 Appraisal compatibility with NSRF	32
4.3 Complementarity	35
4.4 Overall conclusions on coherency of the strategy	36

5	EVALUATION OF EXPECTED RESULTS AND IMPACT	37
5.1	Quantification of objectives at program and priority level	37
5.2	Evaluation of expected results	44
5.3	Justification of the proposed policy mix	45
5.4	Overall conclusions on expected results and impact	45
6	APPRAISAL OF THE PROPOSED IMPLEMENTATION SYSTEM	46
6.1	Management	46
6.2	Monitoring	47
6.3	Evaluation	47
6.4	Financial management and control	47
6.5	Overall conclusions implementation system	48

Executive Summary

Evaluator's approach is based on the role of the TA funds: to help the programs perform. Performance relies on two basic factors:

- Proper management of the program (staff, systems, tools, processes, etc.)
- Existence of sufficient projects to absorb the funds („project pipeline“)

Current programme clearly support the first factor. One consequence of this is, that the programme is relevant, its objectives coherent with the ones of other OP's and NSRF, but the other one is that second factor has to be addressed elsewhere, in the other OP's.

The drafts of the programmes have been provided by the appointed MA for the TA OP. Drafts included all relevant elements and structures required for an OP, therefore provided proper basis for the ex-ante evaluation.

During the evaluation two feed-back sessions have been organized, both with the participation of the staff of the TA OP Managing Authority and members of the Technical Assistance Working Group (WG), made up by officials of MA's for sectoral and regional OP's, responsible for the TA priorities within the OP.

Current programme contains the proposed amendments discussed and accepted by the MA and the WG. Programme – and report -also contains relevant results of a specialist expert's proposal and a workshop on the indicator system of the OP's.

To summarize relevancy of the programme, evaluator concludes that analysis and concept of TA OP covers the most important challenges Romania faces in relation to the coordination of the management of structural and cohesion instruments (SCI), an essential element to improve absorption capacity. Also in a wider socio-economic context the utility of the programme is justified by the clear need to move towards a more coordinated delivery of the programmes. Although lack of available data in certain areas slightly affects clarity of the analysis, main issues are identified correctly, analysis sufficiently supports global objective of the programme.

The proposed objectives and measures are logically linked to the situation analysis and their contribution to the global objective is clear, too. Minor amendments are proposed by evaluator to improve fit of strategy with situation in Romania, related to the proposed indicative operations.

Strategy is coherent with relevant national policies and EU legislation and policies, too. Its complementary nature with the TA priorities represents an important risk of overlap that can efficiently be managed by intense coordination in the implementation phase.

Expected results are sufficiently quantified and targets can realistically be achieved in the current programming period. Real impact depends largely on how strongly the activities of the programme can be coordinated with TA priorities of

other OP's, how this coordination will be able to help MA of TA OP to provide timely and relevant assistance to the other entities of the management and implementation system and, finally, to the extent flexibility can be maintained, enabling the MA solve upcoming systemic problems during the implementation.

Most of the activities of TA OP contribute to the development of institutional or IT systems. The probability of lasting operation and further development of these systems (their "sustainability") is high, given the general strong commitment of the Romanian government to increase effectiveness of public administration.

Implementation mechanisms are simple, number and quality of staff of the MA is sufficient. Effective implementation largely depends on the efficiency of the operational coordination at Working Group level (Steering Committee proposed by evaluator). At MC level the extension of the partnership with stakeholders interested in increased absorption is proposed.

To conclude, the programme in general is of sufficient quality and well prepared. Further minor amendments aiming to improve expected impact can be made, either by fine-tuning of the OP or at the level of implementing document (PC).

1 Introduction

1.1 Objectives of the evaluation

The ex-ante evaluation generally takes place at the beginning of the cycle before a programme has been adopted.

Romanian Operational Programmes are intended to be submitted at the beginning of 2007, as soon as the country becomes member of the EU. Evaluation activities of TA OP started in August 2006, when general strategy, as well as priorities and measures of the OP had already been drafted.

Two complete drafts of the programme have been examined by the evaluator, both versions were almost complete in terms of necessary content and both were structured according to the relevant regulations, thus, are considered as proper documents for carrying out the evaluation. First comments and proposals were formulated on the basis of an April 2006 version of the document "Technical Assistance Operational Programme 2007-2013", by the Ministry of Public Finance of the Government of Romania, then, current report is based on the amended version of the same programme, dated November 2006.

General objective of an ex-ante evaluation is to help ensure that the final programme is as relevant and coherent as possible. Current report aims to briefly summarize recommendations made by evaluator on the first version of the programme, and, and also provide conclusions proposed to be integrated into the programme when further decisions are made.

The ex-ante evaluation activity intended further to:

- Focus primarily on an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses and evolving needs of Romania.
- Provide the relevant authorities with a prior judgement on whether needs have been diagnosed correctly, whether the strategy and objectives proposed are relevant, whether there is any incoherence in relation to Community policies and guidelines, whether the expected impacts are realistic.
- Serve as a a-priori quality assurance of programming and a cost-efficient budgeting, thus optimization of the program effects with consideration of the limited resources available;
- Provide also the required foundations for monitoring and for future evaluations, by ensuring that there are explicit and, where possible, quantified objectives.
- Help to specify selection criteria for the selection of projects and to ensure that Community priorities are respected.
- Finally, help to ensure the transparency of decisions by allowing for a clear explanation of choices made and their expected effects.

Current report focuses on the first four points as mentioned above, however, aims expressed in remaining points are touched upon, too. Selection criteria, nevertheless, is one of the core elements of the evaluation of the Draft Programme Complement, being subject of a separate report.

Some recommendations made in course of the evaluation has also relevancy for further documents Romanian authorities intend to use for internal management purposes, e. g. the Programme Complement.

1.2 Methodology

The standard procedure for ex ante evaluation is laid down on the Commission's draft guidelines document (October 2005). Information has been gathered and validated via:

Document and data analysis for an evaluation of the experiences and results of preceding programmes as well as current drafts and background studies for analysis of objectives and strategies. In addition, evaluations on pre-accession programmes have also been studied.

The main written sources of information are:

- Draft regulations on the Structural Funds ("General", 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 and "ERDF", 1080/2006 of 5 July 2006) for 2007 – 2013, with special emphasis on the management requirements regarding the Funds
- Draft Commission Strategic Guidelines on Cohesion Policy 2007 - 2013
- The National Strategic Reference Framework 2007 – 2013 for Romania, with special emphasis on the needs and management framework (tools, systems and policies) regarding the coordinated implementation of the NSRF (version October 2006)
- Commission Draft Working Papers on ex ante evaluation (October 2005) and on indicators (January 2006);
- Documents received from the Evaluation Central Unit on the existing training mechanisms as well as foreseen other capacity development actions like staffing plan.
- The results of previous evaluations executed for current PHARE and ISPA programmes, with special emphasis on one hand the lessons learned regarding the implementation and absorption of these funds, on the other hand the size and quality and human and institutional capacities these programmes developed
 - Sectoral Interim Evaluation of the EU pre-accession instrument Phare, Sector: Economic and Social cohesion, (report R/RO/ESC/0609, by ECOTEC, 27 July 2006)
- Additional information on Romanian Policy papers as they appear important during the execution of the evaluation activities;
 - Analysis of Absorption Capacity of the EU funds in Romania (2006, European Institute of Romania)
 - Study on the potential and needs of the new MS's – country report Romania (2005, edited by EPRC, Glasgow, UK)
 - Single Action Plan aiming at improving the EU funds management systems in Romania , pre-accession funds and structural instruments (Annual report, January 2006)

- National Evaluation Strategy (October 2006)
- OP for Administrative Capacity, version April 2006 and October 2006
- The TA priorities of all proposed Programme under the NSRF, versions April 2006

Interviews with key persons "Key persons" refers to decision makers and responsible persons or participants who have taken part in the programme development at the different levels. For the purpose of current report, face-to-face interviews have been carried out with Head of Managing Authority and pre-accession advisers of Ministry of Finance.

Feed-back sessions with the teams that are responsible for drafting the Operational programmes and their Complements. Two feed-back sessions have been organized, both with the participation of the staff of the Managing Authorities and members of the Technical Assistance Working Group, made up by officials of MA's for sectoral and regional OP's, responsible for the TA priorities within the OP.

After initial assessment of the objectives of the NSRF and the proposed structure of OP's within, the following additional elements of the methodology can be given concerning the ex-ante evaluation of the Technical Assistance OP:

In order to appraise TA OP correctly, outline appraisal of the TA components of SOP's and ROP's is inevitable. Areas of concern covers

- Potential overlaps of activities between SOP/RTA OP and TA OP (main concern about training, publicity & information)
- Right balance between assisting project and project pipeline development on one hand and management/administration of funds on the other
- Appropriateness and availability of TA resources for the MA's of the ROP and SOP's to effectively implement "their" OP's

Other potential risks for overlaps has already been identified with the Administrative Capacity OP. Focus areas of appraisal covers

- Potential overlap in the field of training activities
- Coherence of objectives and expected results between the two OP's, regarding mainly capacity development goals for the longer term

Findings of the evaluation will then be based on the content of these OP's, too.

Nevertheless, major limitation of this evaluation method is that obviously handles TA similarly to "normal" programme aiming for socio-economic development in a certain sector or region. TA resources are for assisting these programmes, therefore must provide appropriate resources to solve various kind of - very often unexpected - problems occurring in the course of implementation. Due to the fact that Romania never had to face with a challenge of implementing Structural Funds, upcoming difficulties of the programme management and implementation are difficult to "program" for the whole period, therefore responsiveness and flexibility of the program shall be maintained. By following strictly the program may very easily result in a situation when activities are carried out according to the program but still, the interventions fail to address real important issues, bottlenecks or obstacles coming up in the process.

The risk inherent with the limitation shown above is to be handled by efficient management of the program. This efficiency can only partially be evaluated ex-ante, given the fact – as referred above – that no really relevant previous experience exists in Romania for the management of the Structural Funds.

1.3 Conceptual remarks

1.3.1 General approach for evaluation of the TA OP

Basic aim of TA funds is to help the programs perform. Performance relies on two basic factors:

- Proper management of the program (staff, systems, tools, processes, etc.)
- Existence of sufficient projects to absorb the funds („project pipeline“)

Additionally, also covered by regulation, TA funds can also contribute to the longer term capacity development of the recipient MS.

Taken this approach, following preliminary remarks have been made on potential problem areas:

- TA OP concentrates mainly (not exclusively, nonetheless) on assisting the management of programmes. During the evaluation justification will be sought whether this concentration of resources is effective, whether sufficient resources are available also for sectoral and regional OP's and whether assumed bottlenecks of project pipeline are addressed in these OP's.
- Pre-accession funds achieved a lot preparing Romania for the use of SCF. Evaluation of the TA OP shall prove that capacities built earlier are used and smoothest possible transition between EDIS and SFs is secured in order to avoid non-necessary duplications in training and system developments. Specific attention will be given to assess the feasibility of the SMIS, as key element of monitoring absorption.
- TA components (priorities) are planned in the ROP and the SOP's, too. Justification of transparent and clear „demarcation“ of certain activities will be sought, with specific focus on training-, publicity- and information-related activities.
- Training programmes are foreseen both in the ROP's and the SOP's TA priorities and TA OP, training is also central element of the Administrative Capacity Development (ACD) OP. Overlap may exist, additionally, absorption capacity of targeted groups may be limited. TA components of ROP/SOP's will be evaluated in a coordinated way with TA OP, as well as with AC OP, focusing on training in the latter case.
- Sustainability of activities and systems to be put in place with the assistance of the TA OP shall also be looked at, to ensure that funds are contributing to create a sound administrative system that performs substantially better after program period, too.

1.3.2 Main questions to be answered by the ex-ante evaluation and the way current report addresses these questions:

1. *Does the programme represent an appropriate strategy to meet the challenges confronting the country?*

Evaluation results on analysis, SWOT and strategy are drafted in Chapter 1. First findings and recommendations of the evaluator were discussed on the first follow-up meeting between evaluator and the Technical Assistance Working Group and the Managing Authority. Most of the initial comments were taken on board and current draft was drafted accordingly.

2. *Is the strategy well defined with clear objectives and priorities and can those objectives be realistically achieved with the financial resources allocated to the different priorities?*

Evaluation results on the strategy are drafted in Chapter 2. First findings and recommendations of the evaluator were discussed on the second follow-up meeting between evaluator and the Technical Assistance Working Group and the Managing Authority. Most of the initial comments were taken on board and current draft was drafted accordingly.

3. *Is the strategy coherent with policies at regional, national (including the National Strategic Reference Framework) and Community level? How will the strategy contribute to the achievement of the Lisbon objectives?*

Evaluation results on the external coherency of the strategy are drafted in Chapter 3.

4. *Are appropriate indicators identified for the objectives and can these indicators and their targets form the basis for future monitoring and evaluation of performance?*

5. *What will be the impact of the strategy in quantified terms?*

Evaluation results on the appropriateness of objectives and the expected results are drafted in Chapter 4. First findings and recommendations of the evaluator were briefly discussed on the second first follow-up meeting between evaluator and the Technical Assistance Working Group and the Managing Authority. More extensive discussion on the topic took place on a workshop dedicated to the indicator system led by short term specialist expert. Results of the workshop are incorporated.

Impact is looked at from the point of view of the implementation in Chapter 5. First findings and recommendations of the evaluator were discussed on the second follow-up meeting between evaluator and the Technical Assistance Working Group and the Managing Authority. Most of the initial comments were taken on board and current draft was drafted accordingly.

Issues will be covered also by the evaluation of draft Programme Complement, a step following the evaluation of the TA OP.

1.3.3 The following steps for the evaluation have been carried out:

- 1) The first step, following the standard approach is the appraisal of the socio-economic analysis and the relevance of the strategy to the needs identified.

In this case examination and appraisal of the relevant problems will take place in this phase, looking at the potential risks of absorbing the Structural Funds, concentrating on the management capacities.

Long term development strategies regarding the need to improve effectiveness of public administration have also been considered.

Methods encompassed mainly desk research (analysis of documents outlined above). Findings of this assessment were discussed with TA OP MA staff.

- 2) The second step is an evaluation of the rationale of the strategy and its consistency and policy mix.

Mainly on the basis of desk research an assessment of the rationale of the strategy was made and an opinion of the evaluators on the internal consistency prepared. Split of activities between TA OP and SOP's/ROP was examined, opinion of experts assigned to other OP's considered on issues like the justification of resources allocated to the types of activities as project development, training, publicity & information, project- and financial management, control, information system, etc.).

In this phase short term specialists have been assigned to help focus the assessment of effectiveness and efficiency of proposed training activities in the OP's as well as the development needs and feasibility of the proposed SMIS.

- 3) The third step is an appraisal of the coherence of the strategy with EU and national policies and the National Strategic Reference Framework for Romania.

Based on desk research an assessment of the external coherence was made. Documents reflecting strategies for future administrative reform were also taken into account.

- 4) The fourth step is an evaluation of the expected results and impacts.

The indicators proposed in the draft OP have been checked on the basis of the SMART principles and also their quantification. Their possible aggregation from project to priority and program level has been assisted by specialist short term expert.

- 5) The final step is the appraisal of the proposed implementation system for managing, monitoring and evaluating the Programme.

Evaluation in this phase followed two paths, in an interlinked manner: one is to assess whether TA OP itself can be implemented in a smooth and lawful way against relevant regulations and demand, the other is whether TA OP can effectively contribute to overcome the identified problems potentially hindering the implementation of other SOP's/ROP. Work in this phase encompassed assessment of staff's and systems' availability for the right management of the TA OP.

Evaluator's remark on the evaluation process:

1) adequacy of the ToR

Essential elements of the ToR that are considered necessary to draft proper ex-ante evaluation report of the TA OP were drawn up adequately, therefore no changes have been proposed to this end.

2) dialogue and feedback and dissemination of the draft results

Evaluation findings were discussed with MA staff and TA OP WG members (list of members annexed to the report). On behalf of the MA very good cooperation has been established at the level of the head of MA and twinning adviser. Wider partnership, due to the specific nature of this programme has not been considered appropriate by evaluator. TA OP WG members channelled their opinion through MA that also has been considered as appropriate for this program.

2 Appraisal of the socio-economic/sector analysis and the relevance of the strategy to the needs identified

2.1 Analysis of the current situation

Programme's situation analysis focuses on factors of preparedness of the institutional system, relevant for the activity fields covered by TA OP. Areas covered by the Chapter are as follows:

- Institutional system for implementing EU assistance in Romania
- Strengthening the administrative capacity for the management of EU funds
- Coordination of structural instruments and system of financial management and control
- The current status of preparations within the MA for TA OP
- Human resources and training
- Evaluation
- Single Management Information System
- Publicity and information
- Absorption capacity

Description is detailed, updated and reflects outcomes of consultations between the evaluator and the MA, including the follow-up on the two interim meetings. It's important to mention that scope of TA OP does not cover all aspects and factors of the absorption of the structural funds, therefore analysis focuses on issues to be addressed by the OP. E.g. potential risks of under-staffed MA's and IB's as well as possible lack of proper quality projects has not been analysed.

Impact of pre-accession period, focusing on experiences gathered and some lessons learned has been analysed in the chapter.

Linkages between pre-accession assistance and roles and responsibilities of institutions, acting as MA and IB, are highlighted. Role and impact of EDIS accreditation process described, however, no conclusions are drawn from the fact, that only four of institutions of the post-accession management system had direct experience with EDIS, other appointed MA's, IB's and Beneficiaries have only indirect experience, not covering whole range of activities. Whereas programme strategy reveals that the development of the institutional system directly linked to a given OP shall be the subject of the TA priority within the OP in question, supposed differences with regard to the preparedness within the institutional system might have an impact on the strategy of TA OP, too, not necessarily at the level of objectives and priorities but maybe later, in the implementation phase (e.g. timing of activities).

Although TA OP MA stated that existence of pre-accession programs with MA's and IB's does not make substantial difference regarding preparedness, therefore it does not influence targeting, evaluator recommends revisiting the issue in the finalization of the PC.

Recommendations from evaluations of Phare ESC programmes are incorporated with analysis, but, still, reasons of some failures in the pre-accession phase has not been analysed in detail e.g. slow implementation of certain type of ISPA or Phare ESC projects, thus, possible general lessons learnt are still missing.

On the evaluator's opinion the entire analysis could still be more focused on the results achieved until now and the exact problems detected, however, it also became clear during meetings and interviews that every possible efforts were made to identify quantifiable impact of previous programmes, but no more quantified data is available on the preparedness level of the management system.

Identification of quantified baseline indicators is very difficult, by a number of reasons:

- There is an overlap in time between Phare and Structural Fund funded activities. Implementation of Phare-schemes are still underway and not all of the output has been realised until now
- By nature, TA activities target activity areas (institution building, performance improvement) where quantification is complicated.
- Structural Funds are new for the institutional system, no performance indicators deriving from past performance can be used

Analysis, however, provides some basic statements on current state of affairs of the readiness as well as the future tasks of the institutional system and its elements that sufficiently allow for identification of the stage of development in each of the area covered by the TA OP, as linked to the sub-chapters below:

Institutional system for implementing EU assistance in Romania
(By the end of 2006 ...):

Entire institutional system is in place
Approved procedures for all institutions

Strengthening the administrative capacity for the management of EU funds

No baseline status or data provided, Single Action Plan update expected, complementarities to be assured

Coordination of structural instruments and system of financial management and control

No baseline provided, description of institutions and tasks

The current status of preparations within the MA for TA OP

Identification of preparedness, skills. No gap between current and desired status has been identified

Human resources and training

Identification of training need in terms of staff to be trained, training mechanism described

Evaluation

Identification of future tasks to be carried out

Single Management Information System

Concept defined

Status defined as "*(system) capable to fulfil all the relevant functions for the programme's definition and management, projects approval and modification, monitoring and evaluation, audit and funds flow management*". Expected outcome of valid Phare-funded

contracts also identified as further development of the system as well as support the start up phase, already in the period of SF, until September 2007.

Publicity and information

Results of previous activities and studies spelt out in detail, baseline situation identified

Absorption capacity

Key success factors of improvement quoted as strengthen cooperation between national and regional level as well as cross-sectoral coordination at the regional level, project pipeline preparation and training for the final beneficiaries.

The Chapter provides clear, sometimes very detailed description of tasks and responsibilities of the various elements of the management systems, but little quantified data or gap assessment on preparedness of these institutions has been made available.

As acknowledged later in the SWOT analysis of the document, "*updated information concerning progress made in preparing SCF implementation is hard to find*". Thus, analysis does not contain assessment on the gap between current and desired status of the institutional system. It is supposed, that system is basically ready by the time the implementation of the programme starts. However, tackling initial weaknesses may require intervention of the TA OP at all areas and all levels of the system, thus, for the first year of implementation the commissioning a thorough assessment of the gap is recommended. Despite this weakness evaluator's conclusion is that related to the intervention areas (content) of the OP, the baseline situation is satisfactorily shown.

2.2 SWOT

SWOT table has been elaborated carefully; all the SWOT-variables are explained and supported by the analysis chapter and the variables represent real strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Variables are basically independent from each other, they're expressed clearly and can simply be translated into operations/actions. Nevertheless, major weakness of the analysis is reflected in the SWOT: the lack of data, therefore, the low level of measurability of the factors ("variables") of the SWOT. Still, despite the lack of quantified, measurable variables, SWOT provides valid assessment of the situation covered by the programme.

Important element of the analysis, however, has not been incorporated with the SWOT: the conclusion from EC CMR report regarding the necessity of strengthening cooperation between the national and the regional level as well as the cross-sectoral cooperation at regional level and the continuation of the preparation of proper project pipeline, as quoted by sub-chapter 1.9. (Absorption Capacity). These elements clearly are important weaknesses of the system and, as they obviously have an impact on the quality of the management of the programmes of the NSRF, should be addressed by the OP.

Grouping variables would make SWOT easier to follow and easier to be linked to both preceding analysis and subsequent strategy.

One possible grouping of variables could be:

- Coordination
- Institutional system
- Human resources
- Management system
- Public awareness

Ranking or weighting variables according to their importance would also be helpful to better focus the subsequent interventions. However, this ranking for TA OP would primarily reflect the level of urgency of certain actions based on the current status of the preparedness that influence only first steps of programme implementation. Therefore, priority setting among problems and actions shall be preferred in a later stage, to be included with documents that help the implementation of the programme ("PC").

Other potential weaknesses regarding the available capacities for the preparation and management of projects are also lacking, but these elements will not be covered by the strategy of the TA OP either. TA priorities of the sectoral and regional OP's have to deal with this issue and address obvious weaknesses properly within corresponding programmes.

2.3 Relevance of the strategy

The purpose of the strategy is to provide resources for a more intense, therefore more effective coordination of the SCF interventions, covering areas that are not restricted to the remit of any given programme but are generally to be addressed for each of the institutions managing and implementing Structural and Cohesion Funds.

Programme's strategy has been derived from the recognized weaknesses and the threats of the SWOT. Links between the identified weaknesses and the concrete needs to be addressed by the programme have been constructed properly: needs have been identified to eliminate weaknesses and, in the same time reduce possible impact of the most important threats. This way of devising the strategy is appropriate for its purpose.

On this basis, supported by the needs identified, the scope of the strategy covers areas of

- coordination and networking
- training
- monitoring system
- dissemination of information.

All the needs are also relevant from the general perspective of improving management of the Structural and Cohesion Funds.

Scope of the strategy does not include all areas that are of essential importance from the point of view of improving the absorption capability of the Romanian system. As became clear during the execution of the ex ante evaluation the development of an appropriate pipeline of projects - including targeted delivery of information and assistance for project development for potential beneficiaries

- will be the responsibility of the management of the regional and sectoral OP's and the cost of related activities will be covered by the budget of the TA priority axes of those corresponding programmes.

Evaluator must note that – despite a clear commitment of all actors involved with the management of the SCF - legal backing of the intention of the Romanian government for the strong coordination – in the form of an approved piece of legislation – is still lacking. As one consequence of this, institution intended to be responsible for the coordination (DCSIM) appears some places in the text as CSF MA, despite of the fact that such function does not exist under the relevant EU legislation.

The goal of the strategy (as identified by the programme as its “global objective”) is “to ensure support for the coordination and to contribute to sound, effective efficient and transparent implementation and absorption of the structural instruments in Romania”. Formulation of the objective is clear, relevant in relation to the overall needs as well as the overall purpose of technical assistance operations as stipulated by the “coordination regulation” (EC 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006, par. 44.).

2.4 Partnership

Due to its specific nature directly affected main stakeholders of the programme are governmental organizations, among these the ones having direct interest of managing and implementing SCF programmes. To consult this group of stakeholders a Technical Assistance Working Group was established and operated, with the participation of all MA's, the coordinating body (CSF MA in the past) and Certifying and Audit Authorities. The WG served as a forum for discussion of various issues related to the use of TA budget of the Romanian NSRF, among these the content and also the demarcation of the TA OP from the TA priorities of the SOP's and the ROP. TA OP's strategy has been devised in continuous talk with the group and its member organizations.

Wider partnership that would involve social partners or other organizations was not involved in the planning process and it was neither considered relevant or necessary by the evaluator in the case of this particular OP. Thus evaluator considers that partnership principle, as required by Art. 11 of the “coordination regulation” (1083/2006 of July 11) has been properly implemented during programming TA OP.

2.5 Relevance

In the specific case of the TA OP the obvious question is whether the need of a separate programme for TA-funded interventions is well justified or actions, to be funded by the TA budget should better be incorporated in the various sectoral and regional programmes.

Analysis – while explaining continuous joint efforts of the EU and Romania in the pre-accession period - reveals numerous weaknesses of the administration and demonstrates need for instruments that help Romanian authorities to manage

Structural and Cohesion instruments in a more coordinated manner. Romanian public authorities' ability to act in an effective and efficient way is still below European standards and coordinated actions as well as experience, therefore efficiency in programme management and implementation is among the major weaknesses. Relatively weak and inexperienced structures with new tasks obviously can benefit from and approach that concentrates available resources. The TA OP, as an operational programme on its own, represents an effort to concentrate available TA resources of the NSRF and is expected to increase coordination and improve management of the sectoral and regional Operational Programmes, therefore to substantially help attain objectives of the large scale investment programmes.

Experiences in especially new Member States show that strong coordination of the programmes contributes to better performance in contracting and actually spending Structural Funds. Also considering that relevant EC regulations do not contain obligations for the appointment of a coordinating authority any more (former CSF MA), it is of crucial importance for Romania, to operate, on its own initiative, an institutional system that has the capability to effectively coordinate the operation of the whole system of management and implementation of the NSRF. TA OP shall be considered as main vehicle to resource the functioning of this coordination.

It is obvious that for Romania, as a new Member State, encountering Structural Funds for the first time, it is of extreme importance to develop the effective mechanisms to use the Funds. Concentration of TA resources may provide means and opportunity to transfer existing knowledge in the system from more experienced institutions to the less experienced ones, exploiting synergies and, at the end, may result in a more homogeneous and effective management structure. More coordinated management structure offers more possibilities also to spread good practice, therefore to maximize impact of community added value in various fields of fund- and programme management, such as horizontal priorities, exchange of experiences and sound financial management.

Against this background TA OP's global ("main") objective has been formulated as follows: "Ensuring support for the coordination and contributing to sound, effective, efficient and transparent implementation and absorption of the structural instruments in Romania."

On the basis of above, the TA OP's global objective has been considered as relevant, also, in wider social and economic context the programme itself as a utile instrument for the next period of Structural Funds for Romania.

2.6 Overall conclusions

To summarize relevancy of the programme, evaluator concludes that analysis and concept of TA OP covers the most important challenges Romania faces in relation to the coordination of the management of structural and cohesion instruments (SCI), an essential element to improve absorption capacity. Also in a wider socio-economic context the utility of the programme is justified by the clear need to move towards a more coordinated delivery of the programmes. Although lack of available data in certain areas slightly affects clarity of the

analysis, main issues are identified correctly, analysis sufficiently supports global objective of the programme.

3 Evaluation of the rationale of the strategy and its consistency

3.1 Assessment of the rationale of the strategy

Main ("global") objective of the programme is broken down into two specific objectives, as follows:

Specific objective nr 1.: *Ensuring support and appropriate tools for an efficient and effective coordination of structural instruments coordination and implementation during the period 2007 – 2013 and preparation of future structural instruments intervention*

Specific objective nr 2.: *Ensuring coordinated delivery of general messages related to the structural funds and Cohesion Fund at national level and implementation of the communications plan of the DCSIM*

Priorities linked to the Specific objective nr 1.:

Priority axis 1: *support to the implementation of structural instruments and coordination of programmes*

Priority axis 2: *further development and support for the functioning of the Single Management Information System*

Priority linked to Specific objective nr 2.:

Priority axis 3: *Dissemination of information and promotion of structural funds*

Proper logical links between priorities and the elements of SWOT exist. Strategy clearly concentrates on issues and institution that are common for all programmes. The selection of priorities has been done accordingly, taking into account Polish and Hungarian practice and experiences, too.

3.2 Assessment of the consistence of the strategy

While assessing whether selection of priorities follows or not a clear and justifiable rationale, TA priorities of the ROP and SOP's of the NSRF are to be assessed as well.

As far as the strategic level of programming is concerned, an agreement has been reached on the content of the TA OP and the SOP's and ROP as quoted below:

TA priorities of SOP's and ROP are:

- designed to provide tools to MA's to manage the OP
- strongly oriented to the specific need of each programme
- restricted to the institutional framework and beneficiaries of each OP.

Whereas TA OP is:

- designed to serve the need of coordination among OP's and provide common tools for each institution having management role in SCF, including Audit and Certifying Authority
- oriented to common needs across the system

Evaluator's view is, that although every effort has been made by drafting team of the TA OP and the planners in charge of drafting TA priorities in other OP's, risk of overlap between activities "common" for the system and between activities linked to only one OP cannot be eliminated totally in the programming phase. Therefore, the operation of an effective and efficient coordination mechanism is of absolute necessity to avoid loss of efficiency of TA activities due to overlaps in the implementation phase. Issue of coordination will be revisited when assessing management structure of the TA OP and assessment on potential overlap is made on the level of proposed key areas of intervention, too.

Planned TA OP resources account for 19,42% of the total of TA resources of Romanian NSRF. Brief justification has been provided in Chapter 4. (Financial Plan) that highlights some considerations on the reasoning behind this figure. As in principle allocation to the programme as a whole shall not necessarily be justified in the programme itself, effort made by planner is notwithstanding appreciable. However, evaluator's recommendation is to re-phrase related text in order to be clearer than as it is in current version of the OP. In principle, evaluator, based on his personal judgment, can agree that roughly one fifth of the TA budget is allocated to feed common needs of the system, as spelt out by the strategy, but, in the absence of quantified analysis the risk of failure still exist, that can essentially be reduced by strict monitoring and feedback to programmes.

Acknowledging the difficulties of quantification of the analysis and objectives in the case of a TA programme, calculating method for the 19,42% fulfils basic criteria of justification. Calculation is made on the basis of personnel accounting for 12% in institutions being exclusively subject of assistance of TAOP (coordination, certification, auditing), then, in order to cover costs of additional horizontal activities, additional 1% is added per OP, altogether additional 6 %. Final figure was then modified by series of "bottom-up" estimation of needs of the OP MA's, as described in the programme.

On the other hand, evaluator assigned to TA OP considers that more than 80% of TA budget, remaining with the MA's of the OP's shall be sufficient to cover the OP-specific needs of the MA, including developing and stimulating activities related to the project pipeline of the given OP. However, this general judgment in no case intends to substitute opinion of sectoral experts assigned to evaluate the individual OP's, and, as part of this job, the role and effectiveness of the TA priority within the context of the given programme.

Specific objectives of the TA OP are right, valid objectives, even well defined, even though the formulation of them might seem to be vague, far from being quantifiable, let alone "SMART". However, this is a Technical Assistance program that, as in its name, provides substantial contribution ("assistance") to the attainment of socio-economic goals, but, alone, is without any substantial meaning. Thus, when analyzing objectives, emphasis is not put on whether objective is "SMART" enough, but, instead, opinion is formed about how, and to what extent the support might contribute to the global objective, formulated correctly.

Considering that evaluation revealed weaknesses related to quantification of various elements of the analysis, not surprisingly budget allocation to various priorities and objectives is neither supported by quantified data. However, considerations given to Financial Plan in the programme document (Chapter 4.) provide some rationale for the distribution of budget between the priorities.

Evaluator agrees with the appraisal of the programme that "the first two priority axes represent the substance of the support having the management system acting according to common standards and procedures in a coordinated way, including trained staff and proper IT system". Elements listed and supported by the first two priorities are crucial from the point of view of an effective management system of SCF Romania needs to ensure the absorption of funds, thus, allocation of 80% of the programme budget to these two priorities can be considered as justified. On evaluator's opinion, this figure shall be considered as minimum share for these priorities, as communication activities (priority axis 3) are covered and will be carried out by TA priorities of the SOP's and ROP, too. Therefore, risk of insufficiency of resources for communication purposes is very low, whereas lack of resources for the system development type of activities and for coordination might put the delivery of the NSRF at risk.

Share of the first two priorities is 48,64% for the first and 31,36% for the second priority. Justification for this allocation is not supported by data either, MA experiences on the field (by Phare projects) and experiences from Poland and Hungary have been used to arrive to the figures.

While evaluator basically agrees with planners' on the rough share of these two priorities from the budget, the programme still does not prove how accurate figures have been calculated for the allocations. Given the experience of the future MA in managing programmes of similar type as well as recognizing the fact that exact calculations would not been possible to do in current stage even if analysis would be better supported by figures, evaluator's view is that this deficiency does not represent serious risk of reducing the effectiveness of the OP, but either strict monitoring and feedback arrangements or a change in the programme structure for increasing flexibility could contribute to a better impact of the programme, according to following recommendation:

Given the great deal of uncertainty of these allocations, evaluator's recommendation is that MA should consider the merger of priority axis nr 1. and nr 2. Merger would not reduce transparency of the programme given that SMIS is an essential coordination tool, thus one merged priority axis attached to specific objective nr 1. could focus on the same areas as the current two. The disadvantage of reduced visibility of resources allocated to SMIS and of the "less balanced" structure would be – on evaluator's opinion – counterweighted by the increased flexibility of the programme in the implementation phase.

The fact that detailed accurate planning for the whole period can not be carried out for the programme calls for measures for an effective monitoring, ongoing evaluation and feed back of monitoring results. By this reason evaluator finds it extremely important that – at least for this particular programme – an initial interim evaluation takes place after a one year period, that provides useful feedback on the considerations for "fine-tuning" the allocations at priority level, taking into account both results of all the

projects of the pre-accession phase and the weaknesses of the management system that will be identified during the first year, seen as "test period" implementing the SCF.

Although risk of overlap exists, neither specific objectives nor objectives of priority axes in SOP's and ROP can be considered as potentially conflicting ones. On the contrary, if coordination mechanism works sufficiently in the implementation phase, interventions may benefit from synergetic effect between actions financed by TA OP and the ones by ROP or SOP.

Strong complementarity and potential synergy exist between priority axis 1 and 2, both supporting Specific objective nr 1. to the extent that would even justify merger of the two priorities, as argued before.

The existence of the TA OP – the fact that a separate programme has been constructed to cover certain central activities of TA – in itself represents a concentrated approach with as regard to management of the funds.

Current regulations of SCF provides for supporting interventions aiming at improving the quality of public administration. NSRF for Romania also identifies weakness of administrative capacities as one of the key issues from the point of view of achieving the objectives of the NSRF. (*"Public services are weak and provide low customer satisfaction. Lack of sufficient administrative capacity is reflected by poor management structures, insufficient skills of civil servants, inadequate inter-institutional cooperation, which ultimately lead to poor quality of the services delivered to the society, and thus jeopardize socio-economic development"*)

Besides enabling Romanian administration to improve its absorption capacity and implement NSRF's programmes, certain activities to be implemented in the framework of TA OP complement efforts planned to be realized in ACD OP to tackle issues identified by NSRF. Objective "Building an Effective Administrative Capacity" can benefit from actions to be carried out by TA provided these actions are seen as "pilot" exercises, whose evaluation then can feed into design and implementation of mainstream Romanian policies and programmes, also to actions, financed by the ACD OP. Tentative pilot areas can be the followings: role and organization of monitoring and evaluation activities as well as results feeding back the programmes, (modeled by IT based SMIS, the Monitoring Committees and the evaluation of the OP's) service level type of agreements between organizations (modeled by relations between MA and IB), etc.

Concentration of the TA resources in one programme also means that – although initial efficiency gains are clear – some extra efforts for the dissemination of results and practices to regional and local actors is necessary to achieve lasting, sustainable impact.

3.3 Contribution of priorities and key areas of intervention to the global objective

Priority axis 1

Aims:

- ensuring efficiency and effectiveness of the process of programming, monitoring, financial management, control and internal audit of the structural instruments;
- developing a common „culture of evaluation“ among structures involved in structural instruments management over the whole programming period;
- preparation of highly qualified staff, capable of efficient and effective implementation of structural instruments;
- ensuring successful (effective and efficient) implementation of the Technical Assistance Operational Programme
- ensuring appropriate functioning of the structures involved in ensuring the coordination of structural instruments implementation and organisation of NCC and working groups meetings

Aims of the priority axis are relevant ones, both assessing against general criteria of a structural funds management system (set by relevant regulations and Member State experiences) as well as the specific situation and preparedness of the Romanian institutional environment, analyzed by Chapter 1. of the TAOP.

Aims can be considered consistent and cover all important areas that contribute to the achievement of the objective. Thus, the priority is expected to contribute to the lasting improvement of the administration of the SCF by developing appropriate human and institutional capacities and securing stable working environment in this area.

Key areas of intervention:

Support to the management and implementation of structural instruments

- reviews on the systems and general procedures linked to certain areas of management and monitoring, certification and payment system, as well as control, based on weaknesses identified at the level of all OP's;
- development of common standards and guidelines for the managing authorities;
- elaboration and distribution of reports of activities and guidelines with best practices for all institutions involved in management of the structural instruments;
- different analyses and studies concerning the effectiveness and efficiency of the systems put into place for the implementation of structural instruments;
- studies concerning the impact of structural instruments, macro-economic model, links between structural instruments and macroeconomic factors
- comprehensive support for the process of preparation for the future structural instruments interventions,
- events and activities connected to exchange of experiences at national and EU level

Indicative operations under this Key Area of intervention are consistent with the corresponding aim of the priority ("ensuring efficiency and effectiveness of the process of programming.....") and provide a consistent set of indicative activities likely to be implemented fully in the implementation period. Actions can be built on results achieved by pre-accession assistance projects.

Potential complementarities of the operation with assistance to be provided by the sectoral and regional OP's to "their own" MA and IB's shall be exploited in the implementation phase by ongoing coordination.

Evaluator also proposes to consider the weakness identified in analysis chapter, though left out from SWOT, as a basis for further indicative operation ("the necessity of strengthening cooperation between the national and the regional level as well as the cross-sectoral cooperation at regional level")

Evaluation

- Implementation of a methodological specific assistance and training sessions for people in charge of evaluation in each MA to give them common tools
- Implementation of a methodological assistance on project evaluation
- Elaboration of grouping evaluation reports (meta evaluation) at the national level
- Elaboration of specific evaluation reports on specific items
- Publication of the evaluation reports and dissemination of evaluations results
- the ex-ante evaluation for NDP, NSRF and TA OP for the next programming period
- ongoing evaluations of TA OP, NSRF and NDP;
- ad hoc and strategic evaluations proposed by ECU and approved by the National Coordination Committee or, as the case may be, by the TA OP Monitoring Committee.
- support to the Evaluation Central Unit and its activity especially connected to the evaluation working group and evaluation steering committees (staffing, training, administrative costs related to the organisation of the meetings, etc.)

Indicative operations under this Key Area of intervention are consistent with the corresponding aim of the priority ("developing a common culture of evaluation...") and provide a consistent set of indicative activities likely to be implemented fully in the implementation period. Actions can be built on results achieved by pre-accession assistance projects in the field of strategy development, institution building and training for evaluation.

Potential complementarities of the operation with assistance to be provided by the sectoral and regional OP's to evaluate "their own" OP shall be exploited in the implementation phase by ongoing coordination, as well as the potential to provide useful input to the implementation of the National Evaluation Strategy, planned to be supported by ACD OP and measures by domestic resources.

Horizontal training in the field of the management of programmes/projects

- support for the activities of the working group for the coordination of training in this field
- creation and update of the database for the planning and monitoring of the training in EU funds management
- organization of training events, including training of trainers, training sessions delivery and elaboration of training materials
- elaboration of training reports of activities and guidelines with best practices
- review the impact of the trainings

Indicative operations under this Key Area of intervention are consistent with the corresponding aim of the priority ("preparation of highly qualified staff...") and also substantially support higher level objectives, related to the improvement of the Romanian absorption capacity in general. OP provides a consistent set of indicative activities likely to be implemented fully in the implementation period.

Actions can be built on results achieved by pre-accession assistance projects, both in terms of institutions as well as methods and trained staff.

Potential complementarities and risk of bad coordination and overlap with training assistance to be provided by the sectoral and regional OP's to "their own" institutions and beneficiaries shall be addressed in the implementation phase by ongoing coordination, to be managed by TDCU. Possible synergies with training programmes on "non-structural policies and interventions" provided by ACD OP are to be exploited, too.

Functioning of TA OP, DCSIM, certifying and audit authorities

- employment of contractual staff employed by DCSIM, TA OP Managing Authority, Certifying and audit authorities to support their functioning in connection to structural instruments management and control;
- support to carrying out the activities of DCSIM, certification, paying and audit authorities (running expenses, events, supplies, equipment, etc.);
- TA OP management (including organisation of Monitoring Committee meetings and other relevant meetings, preparation, publication and distribution of materials essential for the Programme management and implementation process, costs of preparation, selection and checking of assistance, etc.)
- Organisation and functioning of national committee for coordination and its subcommittees and coordination between national representatives including preparation of specific documents needed for their work.
- Expertise and advices to improve the functioning of the TA OP MA, DCSIM, Certifying and Audit Authorities

Indicative operations under this Key Area of intervention are consistent with the corresponding aim of the priority ("ensuring.... implementation of TA OP" and "ensuring....functioning of the structures...") and provide a consistent set of indicative activities likely to be implemented fully in the implementation period.

Whereas related operations are relevant, functioning of the units can be considered as contribution to the other relevant aims of the priority, therefore, evaluator proposes to consider merger of this Key Area with the other ones under current priority, distributing its foreseen budgetary share among those, corresponding to the participation of the institutions in achieving those objectives.

Priority axis 2

Aims:

- To ensure effectiveness and efficiency of SMIS for the whole programming period.
- To endow with coordination and human resources for the deployment and the implementation of the IT system
- To provide the necessary equipment to the correct operation of the system

Aims of the priority axis are relevant ones, both assessing against general criteria of a structural funds management system (set by relevant regulations and Member State experiences) as well as the specific situation and preparedness of the Romanian institutional environment, analyzed by Chapter 1. of the TAOP. SMIS can play an extremely important role in both managing the funds transparently and efficiently as well as helping increase absorption by delivering relevant data in a timely manner. SMIS development is built on previous developments under pre-accession assistance. Aims can be considered consistent and cover all important areas that contribute to the achievement of the objective. Thus, the priority is expected to contribute to the lasting improvement of the administration of the SCF by developing the appropriate human and IT capacities and securing stable working environment in this area.

Key Areas of Intervention

Development and maintenance of the SMIS

- elaboration of studies and analyses regarding the functioning of SMIS and the needs for future development;
- elaboration, testing and installation of new versions of SMIS;
- transfer of data from one version to another;
- elaboration of procedural guides;
- performance of SMIS maintenance activities.

Indicative operations under this Key Area of intervention are consistent with the corresponding aim of the priority ("ensure effectiveness and efficiency of SMIS....") and provide a consistent set of indicative activities likely to be implemented fully in the implementation period. Actions further develop the system that expected to be built by pre-accession assistance projects.

Functioning of the SMIS Unit

- employment of contractual staff employed for SMIS Central Unit and coordination network;
- support to carrying out the activities of SMIS Central Unit (running costs, administrative costs related to the organisation of meetings, supplies etc.);

Indicative operations under this Key Area of intervention are consistent with the corresponding aims of the priority ("ensuring effectiveness and efficiency..." and "to endow with coordination and HR ...") and the provided indicative activities are likely to be implemented in the implementation period.

Whereas operations are notwithstanding relevant, functioning of the unit can be considered as contribution to the other relevant aim ("ensure effectiveness...") of the priority, therefore, evaluator proposes to consider merger of this Key Area with the other one under current priority, adding its foreseen budgetary share to it.

Training of the users, distribution of user guides and communication related to SMIS

- organisation of SMIS training events, including elaboration and distribution of training materials
- training of SMIS trainers
- elaboration and distribution of user guides
- elaboration of questions/answers guide on the functional aspects of SMIS
- organisation of regular meetings and presentation seminars.

Indicative operations under this Key Area of intervention are consistent with the corresponding aim of the priority ("to endow with coordination and HR ..."). OP provides a consistent set of indicative activities likely to be implemented fully in the implementation period.

Potential complementarities and risk of bad coordination and overlap with training assistance to be provided by the sectoral and regional OP's to "their own" institutions and beneficiaries shall be addressed in the implementation phase by ongoing coordination, that involves SMIS unit and TDCU.

Supply of equipment

- assessment of the IT equipment needs;
- endowment with servers, computer hardware used as SMIS terminals, hardware used in local and wide area SMIS networks and IT and telecommunication devices.

Indicative operations under this Key Area of intervention are consistent with the corresponding aim of the priority ("providing the necessary equipment ..."). OP provides a consistent set of indicative activities likely to be implemented fully in the implementation period.

Initial delivery of equipment can expand results of pre-accession assistance projects. As MA's of sectoral and regional OP's might equip themselves and "their own" IB's with IT equipment, coordination is necessary and need for it shall be addressed in the implementation phase.

Priority axis 3

Aims:

- to inform the potential applicants about opportunities;
- to promote greater public awareness of the objectives and achievements of the Structural instruments and the National Development Plan and to ensure recognition of the role of the EU Structural instruments.

Aims of the priority are linked to a draft national level action plan for communications. The strategy proposed through the draft communication plan highlights that the public information activity is "structured in three elements which have the role of channelling the interest of the citizens towards developing projects...and to improve the perception of Romanian citizens on transparency of EU funds implementation". Thus there are: i.) the mass information campaign (through the mass-media), ii.) the central point that all potential beneficiaries interested in funding will contact: website and information and call centre (via single phone number), iii.) dissemination of the information and information provided to potential beneficiaries by the managing authorities and the intermediary bodies.

TA OP strategy and its objectives intend to implement points i.) and ii.), while point iii.) is intended to be realized by the TA priorities of the SOP's and ROP. Considering this, evaluator's conclusion is that the aims of the priority axis are relevant ones, both assessing against general criteria of a structural funds management system (set by relevant regulations and Member State experiences) as well as the specific situation and preparedness of the Romanian institutional environment, analyzed by Chapter 1 of the TAOP. To avoid loss of efficiency and waste of resources it is essential that coordinating activities cover the communication planning of the MA's and IB's of individual OP's and that activities of these entities are carried out strictly in line with their respective communication plans.

Key Areas of Intervention

Dissemination of general information and publicity activities regarding the structural instruments allocated to Romania

- organization of campaigns and events (seminars, conferences) to be undertaken to promote a greater understanding of the funds and the implementation and monitoring arrangements in Romania
- preparation, publication, translation and distribution of materials (publications, brochures, folders, CDs and other possible formats) with information and promotion of the structural instruments.
- publicity actions and materials connected to TA OP
- carrying out opinion polls
- supporting national information campaigns on TV, radio or other media
- analysis of impact of the promotion and publicity activities

Indicative operations under this Key Area of intervention are consistent with both of the aims of the priority. OP provides a consistent set of indicative activities likely to be implemented fully in the implementation period.

Potential complementarities and risk of bad coordination and overlap with information dissemination activities provided by the sectoral and regional OP's to "their own" beneficiaries shall be addressed in the implementation phase on the basis of the communication plans as well as the targeting of messages and information: direct applicants and clearly sectoral stakeholders are targeted by SOP's and ROP, general public and potential beneficiaries by TA OP.

Operation of the Structural Instruments Information Centre

- remuneration of staff operating the Information Centre
- purchasing books and materials for the Information Centre
- communication about the Centre and its possibilities
- construction and maintenance of the web page
- organisation of events connected to the activity of the Centre.

Indicative operations under this Key Area of intervention are consistent with both of the aims of the priority. OP provides a consistent set of indicative activities likely to be implemented fully in the implementation period.

Given, however, the size of the country and the level of knowledge on the SCF in general, the establishment of a single centre is not considered sufficient by evaluator. In order to take information closer to the potential beneficiaries it is proposed to consider the extension of the centre with regional or even local "sub-centres" and/or "antennas", forming a network that provides uniform and reliable information on all programmes and opportunities of the NSRF. Regional and local entities of this info-network should be attached to existing, operating institutions, e.g. town halls, RDA's, etc.. By extending the scope of the centre the proposed way, justification of the allocation of 20% of the resources of the OP for communication activities would be strengthened by providing more value of these costs.

3.4 Overall conclusions on rationale and consistency

To conclude, the proposed objectives and measures are logically linked to the situation analysis and their contribution to the global objective is clear, too. Minor amendments are proposed by evaluator to improve fit of strategy with situation in Romania, related to the proposed indicative operations.

4 Appraisal coherency of the strategy with EU, National and Regional policies and the Community Strategic Guidelines

4.1 Appraisal of the compatibility of the strategy with regional, national and EU policy objectives

Due to the specific nature of the programme, policy fit is to be evaluated in a slightly different way than investment programmes. Obviously a strive to increase of the impact of the Community funds played a crucial role in current reform of the structural instruments, reflected in the new regulations, those, Romania will be the subject of, too. By introducing a more strategic approach to programmes and a more decentralized management of those, responsibility of the Member State that implements the programmes will become more obvious regarding the attainment the goals set out by the programme. Considering also that no direct experience exist in the Romanian administration regarding the management of Structural and Cohesion Funds, concentration of some resources to key coordination and system-related tasks can be considered as a relevant response to the challenge.

The recognition by the administration that delivery systems – naturally – are far from being perfect and that risk of loss of funds is still relatively high in the first years of membership as well as some examples of pre-accession period of having severe difficulties with absorbing European funds also led to the conclusion that most effective use of assistance is to be sought, justifying relative strong concentration related to the use of TA resources.

Important national policies and their relation with the TA OP objectives

Most important strategic document that provides basic strategies for the TA OP is the "Single Action Plan aiming at improving the management systems for the operation of the EU funds in Romania (SAP)". Detailed explanation on complementarity of TA OP and SAP is provided by the Analysis chapter of the programme document, ensuring that the two strategies are harmonized.

Existence of (draft) National Evaluation Strategy (NIS) also influences the strategy of the TA OP. While main elements of NIS are intended to be implemented via ACD OP, TA OP provides also important contribution to this strategy via its corresponding intervention (Evaluation, within priority axis nr 1.)

Management of TA OP also substantially affected by the strategic decision of the Romanian Government that – also in the absence of an "obligatory" CSF Managing Authority - creates a relatively strong coordinating institution within Ministry of Finance. The fact that this institution has the role of MA of the TA OP shows that the programme's potential has been recognized by the relevant decision makers, too.

As a conclusion, the strategy of the TA OP is well embedded with EU and Romanian strategies. On this basis chances of impacts and results of the programme for sustainability are high.

Cross-cutting objectives, in general relevant for SCF programmes and projects, have little relevance for the strategy of TA OP. By contributing to the success of the "other" OP's of the NSRF, achievements in the fields of horizontal policies (employment, equal opportunities and environment) primarily depend on the strategies implemented by those programmes. Nevertheless, TA OP helps implement these strategies, therefore, if those strategies are well designed, , indirectly can contribute to positive results on these fields, in accordance with the specific features of priority axes of the TA OP, like:

Priority nr 1: coordinated implementation of general principles of horizontal themes in course of implementation of various OP's, by various MA's

Priority nr 2: availability of "cross-OP" data on horizontal issues

Priority nr 3: increased awareness on horizontal aspects.

No risk of negative impact of TA OP on horizontal themes has been identified by evaluator.

4.2 Appraisal compatibility with NSRF

The weakness of administrative capacity has been recognized as "Key Issue" in the analysis of the NSRF. Thematic priority has been defined as response to key issue accordingly:

"Building an Effective Administrative Capacity – The strategy will improve governance in the public sector. Investment will help to improve policy formulation, planning, delivery and management of central and local Government services. Actions will be targeted to the sectors of the administration where the greatest impact can be achieved to aid economic and social development, support business growth and to fight deficiencies of the Romanian economy. "

The thematic priority "Administrative capacity development" supports the effective implementation of the public policies, with a positive impact on the delivery of the Structural Instruments and accounts for 5% of expected NSRF resources. Thematic priority has been designed in full conformity with Guideline 1.3.4 "Administrative capacity" of the Community Strategic Guidelines (CSG).

Thematic priority is to be implemented through TA OP and ACD OP.

Administrative capacity to manage the EU funds has been considered as "one of the building blocks for achieving higher levels of economic and social development in Romania". Strategy outlines future tasks as : *"Building on the experience with pre-accession funds, increased efforts will be needed to set up the new system for managing efficiently and effectively the Structural Instruments. Currently, there is a certain level of unsystematic and uneven knowledge among the staff of the future institutions managing and implementing Structural Instruments. Also, a large number of civil servants have been newly employed within this system, so they require training and coaching. In Romania*

there is still an insufficient level of access to the general information on Structural Instruments and there are few sources of information regarding the mechanism for Structural Instruments implementation." Strategy of the TA OP is fully consistent with above-quoted outline strategy in the NSRF.

Further potential for synergies between ACD OP and TA OP exist. As ACD OP aims at more general improvements regarding the quality of the Romanian administration, practices to develop and methods to apply in TA OP can serve as case studies and good examples to be further developed, adopted and disseminated by the ACD OP in order to help the developments in areas and institutions not receiving or managing Structural Funds directly. This way, "via the ACD OP" and TA OP could increase its impact on the development of various systems of the Romanian administration outside the structural funds (e.g monitoring and evaluation of domestic programmes and policies, financial management and control, etc.), promoting the long term stability of the system of SF-management, too.

Main lesson learnt as outlined by NSRF, including evaluator's comments on to what extent they've been taken into account when TA OP has been designed:

"Tasks delegation: The experience of EDIS preparation for Phare and ISPA was essential for establishing a proper financial control mechanism and a sound management of SCF, with emphasis on setting up an adequate mechanism of supervision of delegated tasks from the Implementing Agency towards Implementing Authorities. The institutions involved in programme management were provided with a basis for evaluating the gaps, by indicating the areas where improvements are needed, including the estimation of the necessary resources to perform adequately their future tasks. "

The strategy of TA OP builds on achievements in the pre-accession period, however, no differentiation is made according to the past experiences of institutions, having management or implementing responsibilities in the programmes. This approach might be re-visited in the implementation phase. Helping MA's with advice and model agreements as well as model procedures is part of the activities of Priority nr. 1. of TA OP.

"Technical Assistance: The technical assistance has been used widely for project preparation and the TA beneficiaries have learnt to better identify the needs that can be addressed by the help of technical experts. "

Experience with managing Technical Assistance helps MA for TA OP to execute its task properly. Training for beneficiaries at general level (awareness, principles of PCM, etc.) is supported by the TA OP. Further specific training, necessary for the compilation of fundable projects of a given OP as well as advice for project development is outside the scope of TA OP, being the remit of the TA priorities of the ROP and SOP's.

"Beneficiaries' preparation: The beneficiaries learned to identify needs and to design projects for accessing non-reimbursable financing sources."

Direct assistance is not provided by TA OP, but helps sharing experiences between various type of beneficiaries, by priority nr. 1.

"Project implementation: The difficulties encountered during project implementation in the pre-accession period (such as public procurement procedures, land expropriation or cooperation of the local public authorities) have been assessed in order to prevent possible obstacles for SCF management (i.e. through the eligibility and selection criteria, promoting specific legal measures etc.)."

TA OP plays a crucial role in providing assistance if – during implementation of the programmes – any similar "systemic" type of problem is identified, via priority nr 1.

"Partnership: Working in partnership brings value added to the programming and implementation process. The partnership groups set up at regional and national level, including decision-making bodies such as the Monitoring Committees for ISPA and SAPARD programmes, are more and more involved in programmes design and implementation. "

TA OP can be helpful in sharing experiences among the institutions working with various partnerships specific according to the stakeholders of a given OP. For TA OP wider partnership is less crucial than for investment programmes, but strong and effective coordination is essential. However, Monitoring Committee is to be constructed on a basis of involving wider circle of stakeholders, too.

Further efforts are identified to improve administrative efficiency and ensure a good absorption of the SCF:

"Continuous efforts are required in order to strengthen the administrative capacity with regard to SCF management and implementation at central, regional and local levels;"

TA OP represents a decisive contribution to this effort via priority nr 1. and 2.

"Strengthen the coordinating role at the national and regional level, including the correlation of the SCF operations with the national programmes;"

TA OP represents a decisive contribution to this effort via priority nr 1. and 2.

"The development of a substantial and high quality project pipeline in due time needs to be given high priority;"

TA OP does not focus on this issue; thus, TA priorities of the specific SOP's and ROP have to concentrate on ensuring availability of fundable projects for "their" programmes

"Careful preparation of major projects, which require key decisions, extensive studies, cost benefit analyses and complex procedures; "

TA OP does not focus on this issue; thus, TA priorities of the specific SOP's and ROP have to concentrate on ensuring availability of fundable projects for "their" programmes

"The political consensus among the public authorities involved in the implementation of large projects has to be obtained;"

TA OP does not focus on this issue; thus, TA priorities of the specific SOP's and ROP have to concentrate on ensuring availability of fundable projects for "their" programmes

"Ongoing support should be given to the potential beneficiaries in preparing and implementing the projects;"

TA OP does not focus on this issue; thus, TA priorities of the specific SOP's and ROP have to concentrate on ensuring availability of fundable projects for "their" programmes. TA OP can contribute to address this issue by "general" training and information (via priority nr 1 and nr 3) as well as helping authorities to share information on best practice

"The new public procurement legislation needs to be applied correctly and efficiently, which requires intensive training of beneficiaries;"

TA OP can provide meaningful contribution via "general" training component of Priority nr. 1.

"Sound and efficient financial management and control system needs to be fully in place across the entire range of institutions involved in the SCF implementation."

By helping Certifying and Audit Authority and providing forum for exchanging views of MA's and other authorities, TA OP can provide substantial contribution to this effort.

4.3 Complementarity

As referred to in the text of the TA OP, the programme is complementary to the TA priorities of the ROP and SOP's of the NSRF. Strategy of the TA OP has been designed properly; however, advantages of complementarity can only be exploited if "cross-OP" level coordination mechanisms work properly. (as evaluated in chapter 5 of current report)

To demonstrate complementarity more clearly, evaluator proposes to re-draft relevant text of the OP (3.4.Complementarity with other Operational Programmes) in a way that in one (or a couple of...) paragraph(s) uniformly describes the objectives and key areas of interventions of the other OP's (uniform text relating all the programmes), then, if relevant, specific focus or specific key areas per programmes should be listed.

Although it is outside the scope of current evaluation, evaluator strongly recommends to give proper emphasis in TA priorities of OP's for interventions aiming at i.) development the project pipeline for the OP ii.) ongoing assistance to beneficiaries in project management issues

4.4 Overall conclusions on coherency of the strategy

Strategy is coherent with relevant national policies and EU legislation and policies, too. Its complementary nature with the TA priorities represents an important risk of overlap that can efficiently be managed by intense coordination in the implementation phase.

5 Evaluation of expected results and impact

5.1 Quantification of objectives at program and priority level

As quantification proved to be difficult at the level of analysis and the SWOT, it is obviously a difficulty in the process of strategy development, too. Indicators linked to the global objective of the programme are practically impossible to be quantified, however, setting of some key aspects that help approximate the impact of the TA components of the NSRF can be helpful to be used during the evaluations.

Thus, although impact indicators are not considered obligatory for TA OP by the EC, evaluator recommends to work out an indicative frame of expected impacts that covers all impacts of all sources of TA., because, due to the structure of the OP's, impact of TA OP can not be separated from the impact caused by the results of the TA priorities of the ROP and SOP's. Possible impacts could be:

Indicator linked to global purpose of TA resources:

Loss of funds within n+2/n+3 limits minimized (say, below 2%)

Indicators linked to the performance of the delivery system:

Reasonably quick processing of project applications (within pre-set timeframe),

Reasonably quick processing of payments (within pre-set timeframe)

Smooth management of programmes (decisions both programme and project level taken and implemented reasonably quickly, no blockage of programmes/priorities due to lengthy or non-regulated decision-processes, availability of background data and information for decisions to be taken in the programme)

occurrence of irregularities kept reasonably low

Indicators linked to the capability of the system to produce fundable projects

Awareness of possibilities offered by the OP's of the NSRF

Number and value of project applications compared to available budget

Number and value of selected applications compared to available budget and compared to submitted applications

Differences (in number and value) between selected applications, contracted projects and successfully closed projects

These possible aimed impacts of TA activities are proposed to be used as orientations to be considered, both quantitatively and qualitatively when interim evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the TA operations is carried out. Such framework of indicators can not be included with the OP itself, but is recommended to be set up as part of the evaluation activities at "cross-OP" (NSRF) level, possibly financed by TA OP. Basic target values for the proposed indicators that measure OP-performance are also recommended to set as part of this exercise.

Objectives assigned to the priority axes are formulated clearly, on evaluator's opinion all objectives at this level can be considered specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timed ("SMART") for priority nr. 1 and nr 2., less specific and therefore less measurable in the case of priority nr. 3., as information dissemination activities are to be done both by TA OP and SOP's and ROP, too. Result expressed with indicator "*increased number of citizens informed*" has to be understood as a combined result of all the TA priorities of the programmes. Evaluator acknowledges that at programme level further specification is too complicated and is not necessary, however, calls the attention on the necessity of qualitative investigations to measure the approximate contribution of TA OP to the results related to this objective in the course of interim evaluations.

Output and results indicators linked to the objectives have been developed in a quantified way.

As a principle, only a limited number of key output and result indicators is proposed to be incorporated with the programme, further indicators, to be used for monitoring purposes are to be developed in a later stage and incorporated with the implementation document ("PC").¹

Evaluator still considers that outlining the indicative financial share of the key areas of intervention from the global resources allocated to the priority would make the programme more informative and this way the likelihood of attaining targets would also be assessable on a firmer basis. Such indication of allocations within the priority are, however, not obligatory in the OP and can still be incorporated with implementation documents ("PC") later.

Evaluator also recommends to link output indicators to the proposed indicative operations of the programme, but, in order to maintain the necessary responsiveness of the program, these linkages are to be established in the implementation document ("PC"). Instead, limited number of "key indicators" are proposed to set (as below), both at output and result level.

Proposed set of indicators is inserted below:

¹ Definition of key output and result indicators builds on outcomes of a workshop dedicated to this purpose and conducted by specialist short term expert Mr Weltz. Priority level indicators, both output and results are further discussed and agreed in an internal workshop with MA staff on January 18, 2007.

Programme Indicators

Indicator	Unit	Baseline	Baseline Year	Source	Target (2015)
Impacts					
Public awareness of SF instruments and SOP interventions				Monitoring Report / survey	
Information needed is provided by SMIS in time for Country Reports and Beneficiaries				SMIS Central Unit	
Effectiveness of management and implementation system / Effective and efficient programme cycle management	Absorption of SF funds in %			DCSIM / Evaluation and Monitoring Reports	100
Improved financial management and control system				Evaluation / Budget Monitoring	
Coherence and Coordination of SF implementation				survey	

**Priority axis 1:
 Support to the implementation of structural instruments and
 coordination of programmes**

Indicator	Unit	Baseline	Baseline Year	Source	Target (2015)
Output					
Elaborated surveys, analysis, studies	No.	13	2006	ANCIS	105
Elaborated methodological and technical information materials	No.	30	2006	ANCIS	30
Elaborated surveys, analysis, studies, methodological and technical information materials	No.	43	2006	ANCIS	135
Additional experts employed for the ANCIS, CA, AA, DTA	No.	0	2006	SMIS	35
Training sessions	No.	75	2006	ANCIS, SMIS	500
No. of people trained	No.	1500	2005	ANCIS, TDCU	14000
Events focused on exchanging experience on fund implementation and meetings of relevant committees and working groups	No.	525	2006	ANCIS	1141
Events focused on exchanging information	No.	0	2006	ANCIS	15
SCF working groups' meetings	No.	25	2006	ANCIS	70
Participants to working groups' meetings	No.	500	2006	ANCIS	1000
NCC meetings	No.		2006	ANCIS	14
OPTA monitoring committee meetings	No.	-	-	MA for OPTA	14
OPTA selecting committee meetings or written consultation	No.	-	-	MA for OPTA	28
Result					
Assessments surveys, analyses, studies and concepts which include recommendations reacted to in improving structural instruments managing system	share among all commissions in %	0	2006	ANCIS	100%
Training effectiveness assessment (based on the participants' evaluation)	%	-	-	ANCIS, TDCU	80
Quality of documents prepared for the national committee for	Assessment by the NCC	-	-	ANCIS	4

Ex-ante Evaluation
 Technical Assistance Operational Programme

Indicator	Unit	Baseline	Baseline Year	Source	Target (2015)
coordination and its subcommittees	members (scale of evaluation: 1-5)				
Activities of the ANCIS, CA, AA appreciated by the managing authorities	scale of evaluation: 1-5	-	-	ANCIS	4

**Priority axis 2:
 Further development and support for the functioning of the
 Single Management Information System**

Indicator	Unit	Baseline	Baseline Year	Source	Target (2015)
Output					
SMIS updated versions	No.	1	2006	SMIS Central Unit	7
Data transferred from one version to another	%	-	2006	SMIS Central Unit	100
Studies and analyses	No.	2	2006	SMIS Central Unit	15
Procedural guides elaborated and disseminated	No./version	1	2006	SMIS Central Unit	1
Number of persons employed for ensuring the operation and development of the SMIS system (within the SMIS Central Unit and network)	No.	-	2006	SMIS	30
Training sessions attended by each SMIS user	No.	-	-	SMIS Central Unit	2
SMIS training sessions	No.	-	-	SMIS Central Unit	500
Number of meetings, seminars	No.	-	-	SMIS Central Unit	32
Number of publications on the system	No.	-	-	SMIS Central Unit	25
Units equipped or reequipped	No.	-	-	SMIS Central Unit, MA for OPTA	50
Result					
User's satisfaction index for SMIS	%	-	-	SMIS Central Unit	80
Duration of SMIS unavailable	Hours/month	-	-	SMIS Central Unit	Less than 15
Quality of on-line advice	Quality of on-line advice to be evaluated by system users in a survey (on a scale 0-10)	-	2006	SMIS	8

Ex-ante Evaluation
 Technical Assistance Operational Programme

Training effectiveness assessment based on the participants evaluation	%	-	-	SMIS Central Unit	80
SMIS users having adequate equipment for appropriate use of SMIS	%	-	-	SMIS	100

**Priority axis 3:
 Dissemination of Information and Promotion of structural instruments**

Indicator	Unit	Baseline	Baseline Year	Source	Target (2015)
Output					
Copies of brochures, information leaflets and any other materials of this sort	No.	14000	2006	ANCIS	1000000
Supported events (conferences, seminars, workshops) promoting structural instruments interventions	No.	17	2006	ANCIS	70
Campaigns	No.	1	2006	ANCIS	14
Opinion polls	No.	1	-	ANCIS	7
Result					
Increase in the number of citizens informed about EU structural instruments per year	%	-	-	ANCIS	2.5
Connections on the web site	No./month	-	-	ANCIS	30,000
Satisfaction degree of visitors of the Information Centre	%	-	-	ANCIS	80
Satisfaction degree of visitors of the web site	%	-	-	ANCIS	80

Indicators shown with grey background are proposed to be considered as key output and result indicators, thus, proposed to be included with the OP, while rest of the indicators above should be considered as monitoring indicators, i.e. not to include them in the OP but the document that will be drafted for internal implementation purpose ("PC"), and shall be monitored regularly using SMIS. Further monitoring indicators can be developed, linked to the drafting process of such implementation document ("PC").

5.2 Evaluation of expected results

Based on experiences of the drafting team of the TA OP and the evaluator, too, results are realistically achievable, therefore they are likely to contribute to desired positive impact of the programme. As argued also in previous chapters of current evaluation report and also in the text of the OP, results have to be complemented by results of TA priorities of the SOP's and ROP, implementing successful programme-specific measures that i.) enable the MA and the IB's of the OP to make use of general tools provided by priorities of TA OP and ii.)

ensure the availability of sufficient number of investment projects to be funded by the priorities of the OP.

Maintaining flexibility regarding the choices for interventions is of extreme importance for the TA OP. This programme is one of the most important tools for Romania to solve systemic problems and weaknesses that may hinder the use of the funds provided by the programmes of the NSRF. Therefore, it is of extreme importance that relation between the expected overall impact of TA resources (mainly "*absorption within the time limits*") and the expected results of the TAOP are constantly monitored and evaluated (see evaluator's proposal on evaluation), to make sure, that expected results are in accordance with the overall goal of good absorption of the funds, even if it requires changes in programme objectives due to identification of unexpected weaknesses or bottlenecks anywhere in the management and implementation system.

5.3 Justification of the proposed policy mix

Choice of interventions to be centralized in TA OP is considered right. Priority nr 1. and nr 2. clearly and well measurably contribute to expected impacts of TA funds on the implementation of the NSRF, while this, in case of priority nr 3., is less measurable, however, visible. Though the clear contribution of the priority to the objective of "*increase the number of informed citizens*" is difficult to measure, the need to deliver general, coordinated messages to the general public has been justified by both the analysis and experiences of MS's, too. Thus, strategic choice regarding the division of tasks between the SOP's and ROP on one side and the TA OP on the other one is considered acceptable and does not constitute any risk related to the achievement of the expected results.

Risk, however, has to be handled at the level of contribution of results to the overall impacts. To achieve impact strong and effective coordination of the programmes is required, therefore even if results at programme level are to be relatively safely achieved, still impact may be low if no proper coordinating skills are developed or little legal power is attached to coordinating unit, including the MA of the TA OP.

5.4 Overall conclusions on expected results and impact

Expected results are sufficiently quantified and targets can realistically be achieved in the current programming period. Real impact depends largely on how strongly the activities of the programme can be coordinated with TA priorities of other OP's, how this coordination will be able to help MA of TA OP to provide timely and relevant assistance to the other entities of the management and implementation system and, finally, to the extent flexibility can be maintained, enabling the MA solve upcoming systemic problems during the implementation.

Most of the activities of OP TA contribute to development of institutional systems. The probability of lasting operation and further development of these systems (their "*sustainability*") is high, given the general strong commitment of the Romanian government to increase effectiveness of public administration.

6 Appraisal of the proposed implementation system

6.1 Management

TA Directorate (DTA) of DCSIM, Ministry of Finance been appointed as MA for the TA OP. Due to its direct links to the units playing decisive role in management of SCF (Analyses and programming, Monitoring, System coordination incl. SMIS, ECU), and the direct access to the General Director of DCSIM the institutional setting of DTA is convenient to act effectively in the system. Situated in the Ministry of Finance co-operation with Certifying Authority is easy to organize, too.

With specific regard on the cross-sectoral nature of TAOP that require intense coordination efforts to avoid overlaps, evaluator strongly recommends the inclusion of a Steering Committee with the management system of the programme. Earlier version contained such committee and also NSRF sets out the post-accession role of the various Working Groups (WG) that played important coordinative role in the planning phase (communication, training, TA). Evaluator's proposal is, therefore, to convert TA WG into a Steering Committee of the TA OP, with the role of coordinating operations of the TA OP on an almost day-by-day basis to ensure consistency and coordination of activities, financed via the TA budget. Steering Committee, as the current WG, in line with former text of the programme, would consist of representatives of the TA priorities in SOP's and ROP, as well as the CA and the AA. Views formulated by WG's for training, communication and SMIS shall also be represented in the committee, chaired by the MA of the TA OP. By the activity of such a group it's expected that risk of overlap inherent with the structure of programmes can be substantially reduced.

Current draft of the OP is recommended to be checked in order to eliminate draft notes on project selection methods that are advised to be included with the implementing documents ("PC") instead of the OP.

Evaluator considers quality of coordination the major success factor regarding the efficiency of the programme. Having adequately trained and relatively experienced staff, MA will very probably be able to cope with the implementation of the various TA projects, but quality, therefore real impact at the end depends on how effectively the task of coordination will be carried out.

To coordinate and assist other entities effectively, MA staff has to be able to act pro-actively – initiate and propose actions themselves– instead of relying entirely on demands and applications from other entities. To this proactive behaviour high level professional knowledge as well as specific skills in management are necessary.

6.2 Monitoring

General arrangements on the Monitoring Committee fulfil requirements of the relevant regulation. No composition of the Monitoring Committee is described in the programme draft. Neither evaluator recommends that full composition shall be described in the programme document; nevertheless, inclusion of some principles would be desirable. Monitoring committee should include, on evaluator's opinion, wider representation of partnership, in line with desired impact of the programme on absorption and also shall reflect the possibility to contribute to objectives, wider than the scope of the technical assistance activities. Thus, representatives of civil society, municipalities and businesses should have a role in the committee's work and should be mentioned in the text of the OP.

Although a separate Chapter is devoted to the SMIS, its contribution to the work of the MC should be referred to. Also, if recommendation on Steering Committee is accepted, its relation to the MC should be described.

6.3 Evaluation

Evaluation's crucial role in the process of continuous improvement is clearly recognized by the OP. Evaluation Central Unit, established within the Ministry of Finance is in charge of evaluating TA OP and, in the same time, is one of the recipient entities of the assistance of the TA OP. Evaluation of each of the programmes is foreseen to follow evaluation plans.

For the implementation period two interim evaluations are foreseen, the first one at the end 2009/2010 and the second one in 2012. Evaluator of the TA OP shares the opinion of the other members of the evaluation team that first evaluation in 2009 or 2010 would be too late to eliminate weaknesses and bottlenecks that will very probably be identified in the first period of implementation of the programmes. Evaluator's recommendation is to carry out first evaluation that concentrates to identify bottlenecks and weaknesses of the delivery system of the NSRF and feed back evaluation results to programmes, including the TA OP already in 2008.

6.4 Financial management and control

TA OP is intended to be implemented in the uniform framework of financial operations designed for the implementation of the NSRF. Certifying Authority, the Competent Body for Payments as well as the Audit Authority has been appointed, all in line with relevant provisions. Financial flow of the programme follows indirect payment system, where Paying Unit makes payments on the account of the Beneficiary of the project and it's the Beneficiary's responsibility to arrange payment with contractor/service provider. On evaluator's assessment this method is appropriate for the TA OP's beneficiaries and also provides necessary security, as beneficiaries of the OP are entities of the national public administration. Paying Unit of the MA is expected to fulfil its obligations smoothly, on the basis of the experiences with projects financed by the Phare pre-accession instrument.

6.5 Overall conclusions implementation system

Implementation system in Romania benefited substantially from pre-accession assistance. TA OP's appointed MA benefited especially lot from pre-accession programmes, being responsible for similar task then the management of the TA OP. Current staffing is one of the most prepared ones in the administration, therefore administration capabilities does not represent serious risk for the implementation of this particular OP. However, the still lacking official approval of the Government Decree on reinforcing the coordination roles and responsibilities of DCSIM² represents a non-negligible risk on the effectiveness of the implementation of this OP (and, of course, on the effectiveness of coordinated delivery of the NSRF, too).

The OP is far the smallest one and entities in charge of implementing it, both as managers, and recipients of the funds, are experienced organizations with trained people. Efficient implementation of operations therefore is not at considerable risk. The main issue regarding the programme is not whether it can be implemented or not, but whether it will be implemented in a way that gives a real positive impact on the performance of all the other programmes. Evaluator argued several times that quality of coordination – the skills and the mechanisms – is considered as the key element of the success of the programme.

Project selection criteria and procedures are to be designed carefully in complementary documents to be drafted to help manage the programme ("PC") in order to avoid both over-complicated bureaucracy and lack of transparency and competition. In general, selection of TA projects shall be rather driven by identified need, weakness or bottleneck then by open competition of ideas or the formal quality of applications.

Monitoring, evaluation and financial management of the TA OP follows procedures common for all programmes of the NSRF, are in the same time subjects of the interventions of the TA OP and do not represent real risk for the successful implementation of the TA OP.

² NSRF, version approved by the Romanian Government on 26 October contains reference to this decision : *"The National Authority for the Co-ordination of Structural Instruments (ANCIS) is the institution entrusted with the coordination of management and delivery of the Structural Instruments in Romania, assuming the responsibilities assigned to the "CSF Managing Authority" in Government Decision GD No 128/2006 modifying GD No 497/2004. ANCIS is located within the Ministry of Public Finance. Its tasks are to coordinate the programming, development and implementation of Operational Programmes under the NSRF to ensure coordination and coherence between the programmes and also with the Rural Development Programme and Operational Programme for Fisheries."*