

Executive Summary

The ex-ante evaluation of the SOP Economic Competitiveness has been carried out by the Panteia Consortium. Rolf Bergs (PRAC) has acted as the key expert and Professor Daniela Constantin as the Romanian short term expert. In the following, the major results of the evaluation are summarised.¹

The baseline analysis is already well focussed on aspects of competitiveness, i.e. not too broad and fuzzy as it is often the case in such programming documents. However, the structure and presentation of the single sectors is not yet optimal and there are some obvious contradictions and some minor and few major inconsistencies. Therefore the writer has proposed a specific structure of contents. So far the revised version of the baseline analysis is not available. Therefore, the evaluation remarks of the first draft version remain.

The strategic rationale of the programme is fully justified by the analysis of the economic situation in Romania. Innovation and more knowledge-based economic activities are the overarching policy approaches to integrate the Romanian economy into the EU markets and to make it internationally more competitive.

While the rationale is fully justified the intervention logic shows still some weaknesses. So far, the consistency of the strategy is not more than implicit. There is no explicit link to the SWOT synopsis SWOT and strategy are not well geared towards each other. The position of this programme within the overall European policy framework is not described. Furthermore there is only little effort to define what is meant by competitiveness. The aspects of the policy strategy are formulated vague and do not really respond to the specific problem. Furthermore, the structure of contents of the strategy chapter could be improved as described above.

The description of the policy remedies (i.e. the concrete interventions) is more or less satisfactory. There is still some formal information missing. The major points at issue are related to coherence issues with other OPs. In most cases overlapping of intervention can be explained and can be managed by close co-ordination. Practical reasons (ministerial mandates) are often the simple reason. In one case, a consistency problem was caused by the special desire of the European Commission to have a pure environmental measure in the SOP Competitiveness. Apart from that, the internal consistence among the operations reveals a high level of synergy.

As regards the coherence with national policies (SME policy, tourism, R&D policy and also energy policy) the approach of the SOP IEC appears to be well co-ordinated. This can be confirmed in the evaluation report. In the programme

¹ This evaluation could only address preliminary versions of the programme. A concluding assessment of the final programme document is attached to this report in annex 2.

document a comprehensive analysis of coherence and policy synergies is given. There are also no coherence issues regarding Lisbon, the CGC and the environment (except that for the latter some corresponding reference should be added for the tourism priority which has a high relevance for the environment). Equal opportunities should be covered by all priority axes (not only 1 and 3). Major coherence issues only appear when viewing the interaction among the SOPs/ROP.

As regards indicators and quantification it can be said that the specific indicators at the programme level are sufficiently defined and quantified. The indicators and their quantification at operational level (priorities and related operations) are now sufficient. The transmission from the output to the result indicators is implicitly visible for all priority axes. In some cases the definition of indicators should be more comprehensive. Empirical research suggests considerable programme-induced impacts on increasing employment and income. The pursued policy mix and the repartition of the budget (both internally as well as related to the overall NSRF allocations) can be regarded as justified. As regards categorisation and earmarking (the latter is not obligatory to Romania as an acceding country) more than 80% Lisbon-earmarked operations are foreseen. This is twenty percentage points more than the threshold for Convergence programmes. However, a big share of those 80% is related to direct subsidies to enterprises.

The institutional system is already well described. In the programme text there are only some minor (editorial) improvements necessary (monitoring committee, definition of the paying units, the description of the independent audit authority). The evaluation plan should be re-considered as it appears too strict.

In terms of the feasibility of implementation a special ad-hoc study was carried out. The results reveal that there are major risks in the inter-institutional co-ordination, the staff qualification and recruitment and the preparation of project pipelines. The following recommendations are to be given:

- Establishing and observing clear, objective rules for communication and co-operation between MA and IBs.
- Defining precise, effective working procedures for the Monitoring Committee to be established and getting in force soon.
- A flexible employment (personnel) policy, focusing on the staff quality rather than strict quantity levels (including the provision of adequate working conditions, in terms of logistics and salaries).
- Changes in training orientation, with much more emphasis on specialized knowledge, new work procedures, new guide for C-B analysis, etc.
- Clear, effective support for project pipeline envisaging the funding of IBs information campaigns and communication in order to foster project ideas, qualified consulting for project elaboration and primary, formal appraisal of applications.

The annex of this report includes the documentation of text contributions from the writer and the draft Strategic Environmental Assessment.