

1 Introduction

1.1 Objectives of the evaluation

The purpose of the ex-ante evaluation is to provide quality assurance to the programming process and the final programme document. Quality means in this connection also a cost-efficient budgeting. The ex-ante evaluation is not only a programme evaluation in a strict sense, it goes far beyond that as the evaluators are part of an interactive and iterative consultation process. Their role is not restricted on assessment and evaluation but much more on coaching and guidance.

1.2 Methodology

The methodological approach comprises the following aspects. These are both, based on the methodological guidelines from the DG Regio (Working paper on the ex-ante evaluation) as well as on specific ad-hoc requirements:

- Assessment of the economic baseline analysis (plausibility, focus, analytic depth of focus)
- Active advise and support for improvement (including text parts for the programme)
- Assessment of the logic and consistency of the SWOT synopsis (including methodological support)
- Assessment of the strategy relevance and coherence (intervention logic) including coaching
- Assessment of the policy coherence including coaching
- Assessment of the reliability, feasibility and applicability of the indicator system (advisory liaison with the client)
- Assessment of the quantification of objectives (advisory liaison with the client)
- Assessment of the viability and feasibility of the administrative implementation system (in co-operation with a local short term expert)
- Training on specific aspects (demand driven)

The evaluation of the SOP IEC could be carried out according to the a.m. aspects. The indicator system and the quantification of the objectives have been done centrally for all OPs.

The following inputs were provided in terms of coaching:

- Detailed advise to review and recast the Economic Baseline Analysis including submission of data and instruction how to obtain Eurostat data from the internet (see annex)
- Detailed advise to review the SWOT synopsis (see annex)
- Analysis of the consistency and intervention logic (see annex)
- Detailed advise to re-formulate the strategy chapter (see annex)
- Advice to improve the specification of priority axes and measures including the treatment of overlapping and co-ordination issues

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- Analysis of the consistency between strategy and the priority axes Support to interpret and deal with comments from other stakeholders (e.g. the Commission)
- Analysis of the implementation provisions (including a feasibility analysis)
- Further on-the-spot advice

In fact, the evaluation of the Operational Programme 'Increase of Economic Competitiveness' started only on 12 September 2006. Due to the early withdrawal of the original key evaluator, the evaluation work had to be done within two and a half months. For the core evaluation and coaching process this time frame was sufficient. However, a more in-depth evaluation (allowing to view project levels and to undertake rigorous empirical research among SMEs, research organisations, municipalities, energy suppliers and the tourism sector etc.) for a programme of that size (i.e. five billion Euro), would require minimum around twelve months of full field and desk work.

Apart from intensive desk work, missions to Romania of the ex-ante evaluator between September 2006 and January 2007 took place as follows:

- 12-15 September 2006: Inception meeting with the MPF and the Managing Authority Meeting with the Managing Authorities of the SOPs IEC and Human Resources (policy coherence between both programmes)
- 25-28 September 2006: Inception workshop, Coaching meeting with the MA (statistics, structure of contents etc.)
- 10-13 October 2006: Second meeting with the MA; briefing of the short-term expert for the institutional analysis; first de-briefing presentation
- 9-11 November 2006: Second de-briefing meeting, meeting with the short-term expert
- 5-7 December 2006: Presentation and discussion of the draft evaluation report
- 16-19 January 2007: Discussion of the indicators (together with the expert for the overall indicator system) and meeting with the MA and a local expert for the revision of the baseline analysis.

Consultations and or meetings with the following stakeholders took place:

Ministry of Public Finance: Ms Claudia Bedea (Co-ordinator of the evaluation), E-mail: Claudia.bedeas@mfinante.ro

Ministry of Economy and Trade (Managing Authority): Ms Catalina Melita, Deputy Director, Ministry of Economy and Trade, Directorate for Programmes with International Organisations, 152 Calea Victoriei, Bucharest 1, Phone: 021-2025272, e-mail: cmelita@minind.ro

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Directorate General for Energy Policy within the Ministry of Economy and Trade: Ms Felicia Racasanu, Deputy General Director; phone/fax: 202.53.89/202.53.94; e-mail:fracasanu@minind.ro

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European Commission: Ms Doroteya Petrova, phone: 0032-2-2997929, e-mail: doroteya.petrova@ec.europa.eu

European Central Bank: Mr Adalbert Winkler, phone: 0049-69-13440, e-mail: adalbert.winkler@ecb.int

1.3 Conceptual remarks

The writer's approach of that evaluation has been predominantly based on dialogue with the Managing Authority. Due to the time shortage a deductive approach with a broad consultation of opinion among any possible stakeholders (principally the future monitoring committee) could not be ensured. Rather, the approach has been inductive with the emphasis on the leading interest of the technical assessment of the quality and feasibility of the programme. This does not mean that there was no consultation of stakeholders apart from the Managing Authority. The institutional analysis has stipulated a close involvement of all Intermediary Bodies. Moreover exchange with the European Commission was realised.

It was not regarded necessary at this stage to have specific discussions with regional authorities and social partners. As the programme intervenes at national level the thrust has no deliberate regional dimension (although there will be regional impacts as in any such programmes). The consultation with social partners is always a political dialogue in which the evaluator has to restrict him/herself to neutrality. As long as there are no visible imbalances in the programme approach the consultations on the approach should be at ministerial levels.

It was seen as the paramount objective of the evaluation to coach the Managing Authority via the required iterative and interactive approach. Coaching has involved active support to the Managing Authority. This support consisted of active contribution to the elaboration of the programme (model chapters for the economic baseline analysis, a graphical contribution to illustrate the strategic system of interacting objectives, provision of Eurostat data), logistical support (a programmed Excel sheet to calculate the indicative financial tables) and support to interpretation of and response to conceptual comments on the programme draft from the part of the EU Commission.

The iterative approach has been embedded in three informal meetings with the Managing Authority and two de-briefing meetings in which the results of the evaluation and the respective recommendations were provided. Apart from that a comprehensive institutional and inter-institutional analysis of the implementation system and its programme-specific feasibility was carried out.

The inter-active approach was ensured by a permanent dialogue on analysis results and recommendations and the discussion on their acceptance (or rejection) or possible issues of clarity and comprehensiveness.

The evaluation was faced by the problem of assessing a changing output within a process instead of just assessing an output (i.e. the programme document). A particular problem was that the existent project pipelines could not be evaluated in detail. A closer look at the quality of the single projects would have helped to have a clear view on variations of quality and the general risk of success of the programme².

By and large it would have been unfair to just regard the programme versions of April and also that of November as the static objects of critical assessment. It was therefore much more a step-by-step advice within the process. Therefore, it also turned out to be difficult to keep an argumentative structure 'analysis – conclusions – recommendations' as usual in evaluations³. Instead, the major part of the evaluation consists of recommendations determined by the coaching activities (i.e. how to structure chapters, how to improve the programme). In order to fulfil the desire of the Ministry of Public Finance, the conclusions and recommendations for the actual status of the programme (January 2007) are summarised at the end of all major sections of the report.

Unfortunately it has not been possible to evaluate the final programme version, however, the writer is convinced that all important recommendations of that evaluation report will be carefully considered by the Managing Authority, so that the programme text will hopefully meet the requirements of the European Commission. A concluding assessment will be done after submission of the final programme (cf. annex 2).

In the report most of the comments and recommendations of stakeholders who so far reviewed this report are considered. The writer is responsible for any shortcomings in the evaluation text. He is furthermore aware that an evaluation of that relatively limited scope cannot be regarded as really sufficient in analytic depth of focus (particularly with respect to a programme budget of around 5 billion Euro). As this programme aims at generating strong leverage effects on the Romanian economy in terms of raising its international and intra-EU competitiveness, this relatively simple feasibility assessment of the SOP IEC can only be a minor factor in supporting the success of the programme. The information base needed for a more dependable evaluation could not be provided – at least not in that short time. It is therefore stressed that a permanent M&E and an accompanying scientific advisory service is needed in order to manage the programme successfully and with the results and impacts expected.

1.4 Lessons learned from former relevant evaluations

After reviewing the evaluations so far prepared for Romanian pre-accession programmes, the writer came to the conclusion that those are not sufficiently relevant for the purpose of the OP Competitiveness.

² An evaluation at project level is not within the mandate of the ex-ante evaluation although it would have been useful to do, just for that programme.

³ as it was a steady process of analysis, conclusions, recommendations, their acceptance or rejection, revised recommendations and so forth.