

1.4 Methodology

One should bear in mind that the purpose of the ex-ante evaluation is to optimise the allocation of resources and to improve the quality of programming. It should therefore:

- Be an **interactive process** whereby judgement and recommendations are provided by experts on the content of programmes drawn up by those responsible for their composition.
- Be an **iterative process** whereby the recommendations of the experts are taken into account by the planners in subsequent drafts of different parts of programmes.
- In this regard, it is important to facilitate a **constructive dialogue** between the people responsible for programme formulation and the experts. Of course, the relevant public authorities are responsible for the final text of the programme.

For the aforementioned processing in principle two main kinds of information sources are available:

- *Document and data analysis* for an evaluation of the experiences and results of preceding programmes. In addition, the contractor will be taken into account; the draft new and earlier operational programs, mid-term evaluations of the existing SPD and the pre-accession programmes and monitoring results. Also updated statistical information and reports on sector developments will be used, as well as other themes that are relevant for the draft of the new operational programme;
- *Interviews with key persons* "Key persons" refers to all decision makers and responsible persons or participants who have taken part in the programme development at the different levels. The interviews will serve to provide a broader assessment of the efficiency of the attainment of the objectives, as well as the procedures and the organisational structures;
- *Feed-back sessions* with the teams that are responsible for drafting the Operational programmes and their Complements.

1.5 Lessons learned from previous evaluations

In the Thematic Report of the Phare Program on the sector: Phare support to Economic & Social Cohesion it was mentioned that "the speed of preparing Phare ESC assistance seems to have picked up, but this is largely in consequence of the introduction of multi-annual planning, which has resulted in enhanced programming efficiency". However concerning the implementation performance it was further stated: "while institution building programmes now run reasonably smoothly, infrastructure projects in both countries suffer pervasive problems in contracting and disbursement, which show no sign of abating".

The key lessons learned are the following:

- Firstly, everything possible should be done to arrange national responsibilities and organisational structures so as to secure the overall coherence and coordination of the various preparations for access to the Structural and Cohesion Funds, and consequently the most logical sequencing of activities and therefore the best value for EU and national money.
- Secondly, procedures for managing these Funds should be as simple and flexible as is consistent with conforming to the EU rules.

- Thirdly, more attention than heretofore needs to be paid to strengthening regional bodies and systems.
- Fourthly, all those responsible for programming should focus more on the quality of programmes and their close relevance to proper Structural and Cohesion Fund objectives, and reduce the emphasis on the disbursement of allocated funds.
- Fifthly, in the light of the New Member States' experience, Bulgaria and Romania should put in place adequate monitoring machinery to ensure that the lessons learned from their early experience of 'live' SF implementation are fully and quickly taken into account.

Preparation for the ESC was seen more problematic for Bulgaria and Romania than it was for the Member States which acceded in 2004. Whereas the current New Member States (2004) are now experiencing a 3-year period for their first Structural Funds programme which allows them to build stronger and more successful programmes for the 2007-2013 period. Bulgaria and Romania, acceding later, will not have the benefit of that 'trial period'.

One of the key issues rose in this report, and one which is equally applicable to the NMS and to Bulgaria and Romania, has been weakness with regard to the logical order of interventions. Although this weakness has been clear for some time, there does not seem to have been any attempt to transfer this 'lesson learned' to Bulgaria and Romania while there was still time for them to benefit from it. Although a large variety of systems, skills and tools need to be built up in a short time for SF, there was generally no clear concept of 'critical path' or of what to do first.

1.6 The evaluation process

When the evaluation team started its activities in August 2006 the first draft of the ROP had already been send to the European Commission (May 2006). So, the ideal approach as proposed in the new working paper on the ex-ante evaluation and in the original proposal of our consortium could not completely be followed. The planning team was during that period permanently busy to prepare new draft on the basis of signals from the European Commission, while the Commission's comments on the ROP were hardly delivered in an official form. Only during a couple of weeks the evaluation team and the planning team had the opportunity to exchange extensively their views on the existing draft. Later on – on the basis of the so-called follow-up tables – it had been possible for the evaluation team to influence the drafting process.

The main sources of written material used for the evaluation were:

- Regulations on the Structural Funds (General and ERDF) for 2007 - 2013;
- Draft Commission Strategic Guidelines on Cohesion Policy 2007 - 2013 as well as the Lisbon Agenda.
- The National Strategic Reference Framework 2007 - 2013
- Commission Draft Working Papers on ex ante evaluation (October 2005) and on indicators (January 2006);
- The reference documents as listed in the CD which was received from the Evaluation Central Unit during the informal kick off meeting;
- The results of previous evaluations executed for current PHARE programmes (e.g. ISPA);
- Additional information on Romanian Policy papers as they appear important during the execution of the evaluation activities;
- The Programme and Programme Complement of the ACD O.P.

Also *face-to-face meetings and/or interviews* with representatives of the planning team, with the European Delegation, with a number of national stakeholders and with representatives of three RDAs were held and a survey with and among stakeholders was organised. Annex I of this report contains an overview of all people / organisations who were interviewed.

An *e-mail survey* was sent to about 1200 stakeholders from all Romanian regions. Data-bases with stakeholders for each region had been sent by the MA ROP to the evaluation team (in total 1400 addresses). Because of a great number of addresses were not linked to persons or concerned people from same organisations, this list was cleaned up. The total response was between 475 and 375 (30 – 40%), because the respondents did not answer all questions. The results of this survey are presented under the relevant chapters of this report, while the questionnaire itself is contained in annex 2 of this report.

Besides the face-to-face meetings / interviews with the planning team members as well as with other main stakeholders, also *common meetings* were organised during this evaluation:

- Kick-off seminar in September 2006 with all national and regional stakeholders for all Operational Programmes, and
- Two consultation meetings with the representatives from the MA CSF, MA ROP and the Evaluation Central Unit (ECU).

These consultation meetings took place on the basis of the above mentioned *follow-up table* which contained remarks, comments and suggestions from the evaluation team on the latest version of the ROP. During these meetings these tables were discussed and appointments for further elaboration of them in the draft ROP were made. These fruitful meetings can be considered as part of the iterative and interactive approach as asked for in the EU working paper on the ex-ante evaluation.

Together with an international senior expert, a special *workshop on indicators* for the ROP was organised. On the basis of the discussions the expert proposed an overview of indicators to be used for the monitoring of the ROP during its implementation. In a second meeting the proposed list of indicators were discussed again.

The results, conclusions and recommendations of the final evaluation report will be presented during a *second dissemination seminar with the main stakeholders* for the implementation of all Operational Programmes.