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Executive Summary

This report presents results of evaluation of status of development of electronic systems used in Romania within implementation of various Operational Programmes of the 2007-2013 programming period. This evaluation has been concluded within ex-ante evaluation of the Romanian Partnership Agreement – a document prepared on 31 May 2013.

Concise update of the situation was completed, in December 2014, which comprised a general though limited review of changes and amendments introduced to those electronic systems since the first evaluation.

The evaluation aimed at answering to three evaluation questions:

1. Are there enough regulations and procedures in force for the data exchange required by the new regulations?
2. To what extent are electronic systems comprehensive enough?
3. To what extent do electronic systems meet the elements in the checklist to be drafted by evaluators (ease of use, reduced administrative burden, data aggregation, data quality, search options, data availability in due time, data security, etc.)?

Our methodology included use of documentary analysis with the most appropriate qualitative and quantitative methods, consultations and plausibility checks completed with all relevant stakeholders and sector experts:

- Documentary analysis: European Union's Regulations; Romanian regulations; previous evaluations; documentation of electronic systems => in total 29 documents have been reviewed (see annex 8);
- Check-lists containing 9 areas of analysis have been developed for 7 electronic systems that were analysed (see annex 1);
- 3 online questionnaires have been disseminated and completed. The one for beneficiaries was sent by email to over 9440 respondents, out of which 661 replied. The questionnaires for authorities, both for regular users and for coordinators and/or administrators of electronic systems, were sent by official letter to all Managing Authorities and intermediate Bodies (67 institutions). The links to the questionnaires were further distributed inside the relevant organisations to relevant users and coordinators/administrators of electronic systems for data exchange. As a result of this process, the evaluators received 175 answers from users of the electronic systems and 69 from coordinators/administrators (see annex 2);
- In the first half of 2013, interviews with 17 administrators or coordinators of the electronic systems from 8 institutions were held (see annexes 3 and 4);
- 2 focus groups were organised – with 17 representatives of all institutions managing various electronic systems and also with 17 representatives of the Common Strategic Framework 2014-2020 funds' beneficiaries (see annexes 5, 6 and 7).
- Within update of the evaluation in December 2014 interviews and questionnaires were filled by representatives of operators of the systems – providing a general though limited information on:
 - Development of the systems which might eventually happened in 2014 as well as
 - Efficiency and



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Instrumente Structurale
2007 - 2013

- User-friendliness [the questionnaire and received responses are enclosed in annex 9].

The following were the main conclusions of the evaluation responding to the three questions above:

1. Conclusions related to the requirements of the new European Union Regulations and the existing national legal and procedural framework

At completion of the first evaluation all key pieces were in place vis-a-vis the national legal framework that should support the fulfilment of the e-Cohesion requirements – they are regulated by the existing Romanian laws relating to: electronic signature, archiving of electronic documents, electronic time stamping of documents and protection of personal data.

The situation remained the same – positive - in December 2014.

2. Conclusions related to comprehensiveness of existing electronic systems

In terms of fulfilling minimum requirements stemming from the new Regulations of the European Commission for the programming period 2014-2020, the only area of concern remains the specific e-Cohesion requirement – for “*full implementation of the electronic data exchange between beneficiaries and authorities*”. At the completion of the first evaluation as well as during the recent update [end December’14] the existing electronic systems have practically not covered this requirement. Therefore the issue still needs focus of the relevant Romanian authorities. The exceptions are still few and limited.

The MySMIS system that has been developed recently, promised to solve most issues of that problem. For all the current Operational Programmes the system was designed with and for, MySMIS would fulfil entirely the e-Cohesion requirements.

3. Conclusions related to compliance of the electronic systems with the checklist

As a general image, the electronic systems are in place, they fulfil the minimum requirements. However, all the systems do require improvement of quality and functionality. From the technical point of view, all the systems prove to be satisfactory, with only few particular exceptions where improvements are required. These two latter conclusions are yet valid following the recent evaluation update late 2014.

Satisfying the users’ needs constitutes the area where most of the systems disappoint, especially:

- All the systems need to improve their portfolio of predefined reports, in order to produce those reports as their specific users need. Especially, the SMIS lacks mostly the predefined specific reports required by its users, depending on their individual and specific needs.
- All systems would greatly benefit from a major revision in terms of features/functionality and data content as such to become more user oriented.

Recommendations are also split along those three main evaluation questions specified earlier:

Recommendations for ensuring the coverage of the e-Cohesion minimal requirements

1. Finalising the implementation of MySMIS for the current Operational Programmes it was designed for:
 - a. The highest levels of management in each relevant Ministry have to be aware of the MySMIS implementation requirements and support the implementation process of the necessary changes in order to fulfil the requirements and get fully functioning system.
 - b. All coordinating units for the information systems (either Information Technology units or other units) functioning inside each of the various involved bodies (Ministries, Managing Authorities, Intermediary Bodies, etc.) should coordinate and cooperate at all times. That requires, for example, establishment of a working Information Technology group, which would meet regularly to discuss, exchange information on joint implementation of the systems in their respective institutions and lead implementation of joint system in relevant institutions. That group, as one of the solutions, should possess a mandate to lead the coordination process and its conclusions should be implemented by each of the involved institutions.
 - c. Each institution involved in the process should make an effort to implement appropriate and necessary changes stemming from the new system in their internal working procedures in order to ensure effective implementation of that new system.
 - d. Training of users – there is still a need for assuring constant long-term schedule of training of users for any new Information Technology system, including series of trainings for beneficiaries (it can be financed, for example, from Operational Programme Technical Assistance- in the case of institutional beneficiaries).
 - e. Last but not least, ensuring the full package of Information Technology services and resources for the new system (including: system administration, help-desk, data operators and technical maintenance) requires focus on preparing and assuring proper financing of those services, with necessary manpower and budgets.

2. Extending MySMIS in the area of European Territorial Cooperation
This idea of the past to extend MySMIS to European Territorial Cooperation will not be implemented.

3. Covering the minimal requirements for Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development
Extending MySMIS to cover also the specific needs of Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development and replacing ActionWeb with MySMIS.

Recommendations for improving the existing electronic systems used by the authorities

December'14 update evaluation confirmed that all systems should still undergo a major revision, which may be required anyway in order to update the electronic systems to the specific elements of the programming period 2014-2020:

1. Improvement of the portfolio of predefined reports, in order to produce those reports that the users need. The SMIS constitutes the system that needs mostly that improvement.
2. Improvement of features/functionality and data structures, in order to become more user-oriented. All systems should try providing more useful features for their users, allowing them to save working time while using the systems and to reduce the risk of human errors.
3. SMIS should be improved in its user interface (at least for the most important or complex forms currently used) in order to provide: easier understanding, better overview of data in the system, easier retrieving of needed data, etc.
4. SMIS and ActionWeb should ensure enough control mechanisms to allow timely identification of errors existing in the system.
5. SPCDR should revise its mechanisms of validation in order to cover all relevant input data in a reliable manner.
6. Improvement of mechanisms for help-desk and technical assistance for SMIS and ActionWeb is necessary, in order to reduce the rate of minor incidents and to improve the response time in case of incident (at all levels where the system is used).

General recommendations for all evaluated electronic systems

1. Ensuring continuous software development support, especially for MySMIS and SMIS:
 - a. Quick repair of software deficiencies claimed by the users.
 - b. Improvement of support provided to the various programmes, especially for their specific needs.
 - c. Quick update to the changes in the real world environment.

Although limited in scope, the update of the evaluation completed in December confirmed the above needs for continuous support made available.

2. Ensuring continuous training of all users:
 - a. Introductory training for new users (to be repeated constantly every a priori defined certain periods of time).
 - b. Second training for existing users, for refreshing knowledge on less obvious features (needed for more complex systems).
 - c. Advanced training for specific categories of users (advanced features of the system and methods of solving certain complex tasks).
 - d. Promoting important tools, modules, features, etc., that are less known and that might improve the users' experience. For example, Art4SMIS - the reporting tool for SMIS, deserves to be better promoted among the users, as it can allow them to build their own reports, accordingly to their needs. This tool is not so well known by the current regular users because it was added to SMIS at a later stage and only the supervisors benefited of training.