

## Summary

The Operational Programme Technical Assistance was established in order to support effective and efficient coordination and management of the Structural Funds and of the Cohesion Fund on the national level in the programming period 2007 – 2013. Out of the EU finances allocated for the said programming period, the Slovak Republic could use the maximum of 4% to safeguard a quality implementation of EU Cohesion Policy. The portion of resources projected for technical assistance within the operational programmes was below 3.13%, and the remaining EU financial means amounting to 97 601 421.00 Euros were meant for the Operational Programme on Technical Assistance. The programme was part of the National Strategic Reference Framework 2007 – 2013 and covered all Slovak regions eligible to draw on the SF and the CF within the Convergence and Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective. It reacted to the specific needs of the Slovak Republic and the division of responsibilities within the strategic management of EU Cohesion Policy. Formally, it was divided to 2 priority axes (10 measures); the first was primarily intended for the Central Coordination Authority, and the second for the Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic fulfilling the role of the Certifying Authority and of the Audit Authority.

The OP TA was being developed in 2006 and 2007, whereby at that time the subjects responsible for the programme only had limited experience with the programming and the planning of eligible activities, and their administrative capacities were insufficient. Moreover, in the process of programming the OP TA, the implementation system was only being elaborated on the national level, and kept changing significantly in the course of the programming period. The Managing Authority of the OP TA had to react with great flexibility to the ever changing requirements, which was the main reason behind the frequent adjustments made to the Operational Programme and the related managing documentation, including finances allocated to measures, the eligibility of activities, the target groups, and the eligible beneficiaries.

The OP TA was prepared by the Ministry of Construction and Regional Development of the SR fulfilling the role of the Managing Authority. From 2007 on, when the programme was adopted by the European Commission, the amendments made to the Competency Law were exerting direct influence on the programme's implementation. In practice it meant that the structures responsible for the management of the programme were delimited 3 times to other central state administration authorities. The said delimitations related to the fact that the MA of the OP TA was part of the organisational unit that also fulfilled the role of the CCA. Institutional changes relating to the functioning of the MA (and of the CCA) may be considered politically motivated and were thus reflected in increased administrative burden imposed on the employees.

Institutional changes related to several organisational changes within the Managing Authority. Most organisational changes failed to react to its real needs as far as the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme's implementation is concerned. The carried out organisational changes brought about the need to readjust the management and implementation processes, and to amend the programming and management documentation. The only organisational change that, according to the employees, improved the situation for the Managing Authority, was dividing it into two separate departments: the

Management Department and the Project Implementation Department. In this connection it is necessary to highlight the fact that the MA of the OP TA was, for the major part of the programming period 2007 – 2013, part of the CCA's organisational structures. On the one hand, the Managing Authority was taking advantage of the CCA's expert capacities while fulfilling most of its tasks. On the other hand, the division was slowing down certain processes and the making of certain decisions, as CCA's priority was to deal with its own tasks. This also relates to the fact that MA OP TA only had a limited number of internal employees. The administrative capacities of the Managing Authority increased only towards the end of the programming period based on a Resolution of the Government of the Slovak Republic No.: 519/2014.

Upon a call made by the MA of OP TA, eligible beneficiaries could elaborate and submit application for non-reimbursable financial contribution to finance activities related to the coordination and management of the SF and CF on the national level. In the course of the programming period 2007 – 2013, 191 projects were contracted, amounting to nearly 126 million Euros (for all resources). Until 2010 approximately 70% of all OP TA resources were contracted, and the contracting pace slowed down later on. The course of the financial implementation, i.e. the drawing of OP TA financial resources may be characterised as steady during the entire programming period, except for the last 2 years of implementation, when the amounts drawn on annually went above the average. The course of drawing on the said financial resources reflects the development in the implementation of the SF and of the CF in the Slovak Republic, when a substantial portion of assistance allocated for the programming period 2007 – 2013 was used at the very end of the implementation process (in 2014 and especially in 2015). Due to a growing range of eligible beneficiaries and specifications of eligible activities within single measures, the MA of OP TA made numerous adjustments to financial allocations on the level of single measures.

The physical implementation of the programme was judged based on measurable indicators set out on the level of measures. Due to limited experience and capacities of the MA, the monitored measurable programme indicators had varying relevance towards the set out measures and the quality of delimitation. Despite the identified lacks in the monitoring of the physical progress through indicators, the MA did not revise the series of measurable programme indicators. Due to the reasons named above the achieved values of most measurable programme indicators went well above the set target values at the end of the programming period of 2007 – 2013.

The programme defined the total of 17 programme measurable indicators, whereby every measure detailed at least 1 measurable indicator. Based on the provided data we may state that the programme was – despite all institutional and organisational changes and the changes in the implementation of interventions and limited administrative capacities - able to meet all the set out measurable indicators and projected objectives, except for 3 measurable programme indicators. The lower number of TV spots and programmes did not affect the awareness among the general public on the SF and the CF. Lower values of measurable indicators in the "Number of carried out PPPs" and the "Number of trainings provided to the beneficiaries of indirect forms of assistance and PPPs" were the result of a political decision not to support PPPs directly via the OP TA. This means that the measure's objectives and main activities changed substantially compared to and contrasted against the original strategy to support PPPs, however, the programme's measurable indicators remained the same as originally set

out at the beginning of the programming period. Based on the analyses made we may consider the implementation of the OP TA 2007 – 2013 efficient.

Based on the analyses of further information resources it is possible to state that the OP TA helped create a single SF and CF implementation framework and increase the effectiveness of EU funds management in the programming period 2007 - 2013 by financing the CCA's activities. An important factor in achieving this objective was the conduct of expert analyses, studies, and assessments to support the coordination and management of the SF and of the CF in the Slovak Republic. A certain lack, which, however, was beyond the competence of the MA, was the fact that relevant outputs were only accessible at the very end of the programming period, which resulted in a decreased usability thereof in the programming period 2007 – 2013. During the programming period a robust information system - ITMS II - was established to support the management and implementation. The EC graded ITMS II fourth out of five when assessing the preparedness of the information monitoring systems in the EU member states for eCohesion policy. From the point of view of effectiveness it is necessary to mention the risk of potential corrections made to the ITMS due to possible incompliance with the principles of public procurement. Through centralised education organised by the CCA there was a significant increase in the quality of administrative capacities engaged in the management and implementation the SF and of the CF. After the implementation of the programming period 2007 - 2013 started, the responsible subjects were capable of raising the awareness of EU cohesion policy among the general public using relatively scarce financial resources.

The Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic fulfilling the role of the Certifying Authority have effectively used the resources of the OP TA to elaborate the Strategy to Finance the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund for the programming period 2007 – 2013, the Financial Management System of the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund for the programming period 2007 – 2013, and the guidelines and manuals, to update all the said documents, and prepare aggregated requests for payment including certification, requests for payment submitted with the EC, and to coordinate irregularities, make financial corrections, and settlements of financial relations. The Audit Authority was responsible for the coordination of centralised planning, the conduct of audits, and the monitoring of audit result, which included methodical surveillance over cooperating authorities performing the audit and the persons invited. In order to support efficient fulfilment of tasks of the Certifying Authority and of the Auditing Authority, CEDIS and ISUF information systems were designed. During the audits of the related expenditures no material misstatements were identified that would decrease the efficiency of the resources incurred within the OP TA. In the course of the programming period the administrative capacities of the MF SR were strengthened by increasing the number of employees of the Certifying Authority and of the Auditing Authority, and by providing systemic education to this target group. In relation to measure 2.5 Support of the Introduction of Innovative Financial Tools we may state that based on political decisions the originally envisaged blanket support of PPPs was not carried out in the end, however, an efficiently implemented system of indirect forms of assistance was elaborated and launched.

The assessment included an opinion poll using questionnaires to gain qualitative information on the implementation of the programme from the point of view of target groups (eligible beneficiaries). 23 respondents were highly satisfied with the programme, claiming it corresponded with their needs resulting from the tasks and roles fulfilled in relation to the SF and the CF. Major beneficiaries of the

CCA and of the MF SR consider the programme of key importance in safeguarding the quality of coordination, management, implementation, control, and audit of the SF and of the CF.

Developing a separate OP TA was a suitable tool to support coordination, management, implementation, control, and audit of the SF and of the CF on the national level, considering the specifics of the implementation system in the Slovak Republic. The programme was able to react to the key needs of the target groups when fulfilling their tasks and roles using the resources of EU Cohesion Policy in the programming period 2007 – 2013. We consider the implementation programme justified, effective and, except for a few lacks, efficient in fulfilling the programme's objectives.