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# **Ex-ante Evaluation**

of the

## **Operational Programme INTERACT III 2014-2020**

### **Ex-ante Evaluation Report** (on OP draft version 2.3 from April 2014)

31.07.2014

FINAL REPORT

**ÖAR**



This report has been prepared by the Ex-ante Evaluation team. The findings, conclusions and interpretations expressed in this document are those of the authors alone and should in no way be taken to reflect the policies or opinion of the Bratislava Regional Self-Government.

## Project Identification

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## Glossary of Acronyms

AA	Audit Authority
CBC	Cross Border Cooperation
CSF	Common Strategic Framework
CPR	Common Provisions Regulation
EaE	Ex-ante Evaluation
EC	European Commission
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EU	European Union
FLC	First Level Control
IP	Investment Priority
JTS	Joint Secretariat
JWG	Joint Working Group
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
NKE	Non-key expert
OP	Operational Programme
P/P	Plan / Programme
SEA	Strategic Environment Assessment
STE	Short-term expert
TO	Thematic Objective

## 1 Introduction and context of the Ex-ante Evaluation

### 1.1 Introduction

According to governing EU regulations an Ex-ante Evaluation and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) are compulsory for such type of EU Programmes (like the INTERACT Programme 2014-2020)

Based on the available OP draft an interim Ex-ante evaluation is conducted according to the contract. Main aim of this ex-ante evaluation step is the improvement of the quality and consistency of the OP.

This report is based on the latest draft of the OP, version 2.3 from April 2014.

Before drafting this report, the evaluators absolved various meetings with the Managing Authority. Moreover, a meeting was held with INTERACT IP Vienna regarding output indicators, and a conference call was held with INTERACT IP Viborg regarding result indicators. It should be mentioned that during the pre-contractual phase, one evaluator participated at the INTERACT Monitoring Committee meeting in Vilnius on April 3, 2014.

This evaluation is executed on the basis of a series of evaluation questions, formulated according to the Terms of Reference of the assignment and the methodological guideline from the European Commission.

This report is part 2, covering all evaluation questions, but excluding General findings, and excluding results from the Strategic Environmental Evaluation.

### 1.2 Time-plan of the ex-ante evaluation

The indicative time-plan for the ex-ante evaluation can be simply presented as below.

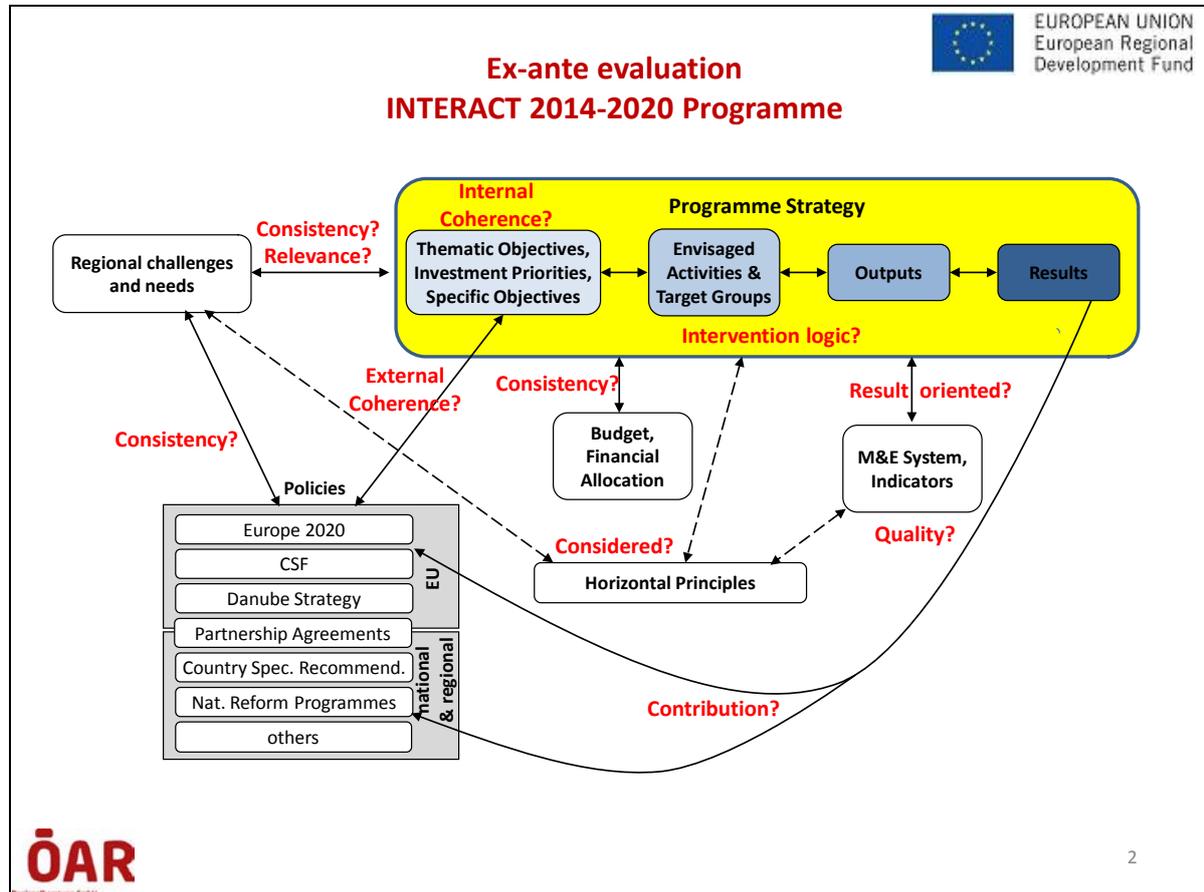
<i>Phase</i>	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Dates</i>
Pre-contractual	Meeting M.A., MC (Vilnius), INTERACT IP Vienna, collect and analyze documents	17.3.2014 – 15.5.2014
Inception	Set methodology, communication with M.A. and IPs Vienna and Viborg, collect and analyze documents, draft Inception report / Report part 1.	15.5.2014 – 30.5.2014
Implementation	Draft Report part 2.	1.6.2014 – 16.6.2014
Executive summary	Comments to Draft Report part 2, issue executive summary	17.6.2014 – 17.7.2014
Final	Draft Final Report including SEA*	17.7.2014 – 31.7.2014
Closing	Complete Final report – including comments from the EC	15 days after receiving the comments

\*The timing of SEA will depend on findings and delays in competent institutions such as the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak republic.

## 1.3 Ex-ante Evaluation

### 1.3.1 Components of Ex-ante Evaluation

The ex-ante evaluation has as overarching objective the improvement and strengthening of the final quality of the programme.



Picture 1: Scope of Ex-ante Evaluation

According to Article 48(3) of the CPR<sup>1</sup>, the appraisal of the ex-ante evaluation needs to cover the following Components:

1. **Programme strategy.** The evaluation will appraise the proposed Programme strategy by verifying the coherence, consistency and relevance of the Programme objectives with the identified challenges and needs within the Cohesion Policy framework outlined by the Europe 2020 Strategy, as well as the adequacy of the selected Thematic Objectives and Investment Priorities.

The evaluation will also examine the internal coherence of the Programme strategy as well as its relation with other relevant instruments and policies (external coherence).

<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund

- a. Consistency of thematic objectives and priorities
  - b. Internal and external coherence
  - c. Intervention logic of the Programme
  - d. Horizontal principles
2. **Indicators, monitoring and evaluation.** The evaluation will appraise the chosen output and result indicators with regard to their relevance to the Programme Priority axes (objectives and actions to be supported), as well as their clarity in terms of understanding and interpretation. The appropriateness and realism of the set baselines and target values as well as the suitability of the milestones selected for the performance framework will also be evaluated.
- The evaluation will also examine the adequacy of human resources and administrative capacity for the management of the Programme, as well as the suitability of the procedures for monitoring the Programme and collecting the data necessary to carry out evaluations. The evaluation of these elements will take into account also previous experiences of the relevant Programme authorities.
- a. Appraisal of the Programme indicator system
  - b. Appraisal of the arrangements for monitoring/data collection and Programme-level evaluation
3. **Consistency of financial allocations.** The evaluation will appraise the consistency of the allocation of budgetary resources with the objectives of the Programme, looking at the identified challenges and needs that were the reasons for choosing the objectives as well as at the planned actions.
- a. Appraisal of the consistency of financial allocations
  - b. Appraisal of administrative capacity and efficiency
4. **Contribution to Europe 2020 Strategy.** The evaluation will appraise the potential contribution of the programme to the Europe 2020 objectives and targets, in connection with the evaluation of the Programme strategy and taking into account the size of the Programme.
5. **Integration of Strategic Environmental Assessment.** The final ex-ante evaluation report will integrate the results of the SEA summarising the SEA process and outlining how it was taken into account in the programme design (including the opinions expressed).

This Strategic Environmental Assessment is a separate procedure that is conducted in parallel to this Ex-ante Evaluation and it is also reported separately.

## 2 General findings

OP INTERACT III has been developed over a sufficiently long period of time, from 2012 until May 2014. A Programming Task Force with representatives of the Member-States, M.A. and IPs was created. The draft OP has been consulted at the MC meetings and was commented in great detail by the MC members.

The OP is based on a needs' survey that identified challenges and needs among ETC programmes. A new management structure and division of tasks was developed through ample consultations. Possible problems with financing were identified in advance and addressed by requesting clear financial commitments for own contributions from the Member-States. The OP is logical and consistent and it contributes to Strategy 2020, macro-regional strategies and the use of innovative approaches.

The ex ante evaluation did not identify any substantial objections against OP INTERACT III, but suggests minor adjustments to the indicators.

As regards the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), based on the formal announcement (report) that was submitted, the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak republic has informed the MA that no SEA procedure is required. The MA has circulated a written confirmation of this opinion to the partners of the programme.

## 3 Evaluation questions

The following table provides an overview of all evaluation questions, based on the suggestions and standards from EU COM (cf. EU COM, 2013b: 56). The questions are structured along the components of the Ex-ante evaluation, including the programme strategy, the indicators, monitoring and evaluation, the financial allocation and the contribution to Europe 2020 strategy.

Comp	Theme	Subtheme	#	Evaluation question
1	Consistency	Europe 2020; challenges and needs/CSF	EQ 1.1	Are the identified specific objectives and identified national or regional challenges and needs in line with the Europe 2020 objectives and targets, the Council recommendations and the National Reform Programmes?
			EQ 1.2	Do the Programme priorities and their specific objectives consistently reflect the identified challenges and needs?
		Consistency of objectives with challenges and needs	EQ 1.3	Are the identified challenges and needs consistently translated into the objectives of the OP (meaning: the thematic objectives, investment priorities, specific objectives, and their prioritisation)?
	Coherence	Internal coherence	EQ 1.4	Have complementarities and potential synergies been identified between the specific objectives of each priority axis and between the specific objectives of the different priority axis?
		External coherence	EQ 1.5	Is the programme coherent with other relevant instruments at regional, national and EU level, specifically Partnership Agreement and Danube Strategy?
1	Linkage between supported actions, expected outputs and results (intervention logic of the programme)		EQ 1.6	Are the proposed actions to be supported in each priority axis, including the main target groups identified, the specific territories targeted and the types of beneficiaries sufficiently described?
			EQ 1.7	Do the proposed actions take into account the (non-exhaustive) list of key actions provided in the Common Strategic Framework?
			EQ 1.8	Will the proposed actions lead to the expected outputs and intended results?
			EQ 1.9	Were external factors that could influence the intended results identified (national policy, economic trend, change in regional competitiveness)?
			EQ 1.10	Are the policy assumptions underpinning the programme logic backed up by evidence (from previous experiences, evaluations or studies)?
			EQ 1.11	Do other possible action or outputs exist that would be more conducive to the intended results?
			EQ 1.12	Is the proposed form of support suitable for the types of beneficiaries and the specific objectives of the Programme?

	Horizontal principles	Measures to promote equal opportunities between man and women	EQ 1.13	Has the principle of equality been taken into account?
		Measures to promote sustainable development	EQ 1.14	Are the planned measures adequate to promote equal opportunities and non-discrimination?
			EQ 1.15	Are the planned measures adequate to promote sustainable development and secure resource efficiency, climate change mitigation and adaptation, disaster resilience and risk prevention and management?
Comp.	Theme	Subtheme	#	Evaluation question
2	Evaluation of the Programme indicators' system	Relevance of proposed programme indicators	EQ 2.1	Does each priority axis include at least one but no more than two result indicators?
			EQ 2.2	Do(es) the <i>result indicator(s)</i> reflect the operations and objectives of the priority axes?
			EQ 2.3	Is (Are) the <i>result indicator(s)</i> relevant, do they cover the most important intended change, is their value influenced as directly as possible by the actions funded under the priority axis?
			EQ 2.4	Are the <i>output indicators</i> relevant to the actions supported?
			EQ 2.5	Are the intended <i>outputs</i> likely to contribute to the change in result indicators?
			EQ 2.6	Are the <i>common indicators</i> used where relevant to the content of the investment priorities and specific objectives?
		Clarity of proposed programme indicators	EQ 2.7	Do programme-specific indicators have a clear title and an unequivocal and easy to understand definition?
			EQ 2.8	Do the indicators have an accepted normative interpretation?
			EQ 2.9	Are the indicators robust?
			EQ 2.10	Are data sources for result indicators identified and available?
		Quantified baseline and target values	EQ 2.11	Does the baseline use the latest available data?
			EQ 2.12	Is it possible to set a quantified baseline?
			EQ 2.13	Is the targeted value realistic taking into account the actions and forms of support as well as the financial allocation to priority axes and the indicative allocation at the level of categories of interventions/investment priorities?

Comp.	Theme	Subtheme	#	Evaluation question	
2	Evaluation of the Programme indicators' system	Suitability of milestones	EQ 2.14	Are the milestones relevant, do they capture essential information on the progress of a priority?	
			EQ 2.15	Can they be realistically achieved by 2016, 2018, 2022, considering also the rhythm of implementation of the current programme and available resources?	
			EQ 2.16	Is the availability of data for informing the milestones at the key review points (progress reports 2017 and 2019) plausible?	
			EQ 2.17	In case milestones for 2018 also include result indicators: Could result indicators for 2018 be influenced by external factors out of control of the MA, putting the programme at risk of not meeting its milestones and targets?	
	Appraisal of the arrangements for monitoring/data collection and programme-level evaluation	Administrative capacity, data collection procedure and evaluation	EQ 2.18	Are there any possible bottlenecks which might impede management, monitoring and evaluation of the programme based on previous experience? If yes, are there any preventive measures such as awareness raising or training that could be recommended?	
			EQ 2.19	Is the monitoring procedure likely to provide data in order to feed into decision making, reporting and evaluation based on an assessment of the sources of information and how the data will be collected?	
			EQ 2.20	Are the monitoring procedures likely to provide data in time to provide information on result indicators?	
			EQ 2.21	Are adequate procedures in place to ensure the quality of data (e.g. a precise definition of the content and source of each indicator)?	
				EQ 2.22	Is the proposed management structure adequate (considering experiences from INTERACT II, new objectives and new regulations)?
				EQ 2.23	What main evaluations have to be executed during the programme period, when and how ?

Comp.	Theme	Subtheme	#	Evaluation question
3	Evaluation of consistency of financial allocation		EQ 3.1	Do the financial allocations concentrate on the most important objectives in line with the identified challenges and needs and with the concentration requirements set out in the Regulations (Art. 16 of the CPR)?
			EQ 3.2	Are the financial allocations to each priority axis and to categories of interventions consistent regarding the identified challenges and needs that formed the objectives as well as the planned actions?
4	Contribution to EU-2020 and macro-regional strategies		EQ 4.1	What is the potential contribution to/benefit from the programme to EU-2020 objectives and targets?
			EQ 4.2	Taking into account the size of the programme and the plans of national and regional actors and partners to prepare a framework for alignment of funding with the strategic content of the EUSDR as well as the regional situation and trends, what is the potential contribution to/benefit from the programme to the Danube Region Strategy?
	Process	Application of partnership	EQ 5.1	Have all relevant partners (stakeholders, targets) been duly involved in the design of the programme?
			EQ 5.2	Does the programme foresee a proper involvement of key partners in implementation (incl. monitoring and evaluation) of the programme ?

Table 1: Evaluation questions

## 4 Component C1 – Programme strategy and Intervention logic

The programme strategy illustrates the casual relationship between the regional challenges and needs, the thematic objectives referring to Europe 2020 and investment priorities with specific objectives and associated measures. Within the evaluation the coherence, consistency and relevance of the OP's objectives with the framework of Europe 2020, the thematic objectives and investment priorities are analyzed (intervention logic). Besides, external coherences based on other investments and policies should be taken into account.

### 4.1 Europe 2020 challenges and needs

#### 4.1.1 Evaluation question EQ 1.1

*“Are the identified specific objectives and identified national or regional challenges and needs in line with the Europe 2020 objectives and targets, the Council recommendations and the National Reform Programmes?”*

#### Findings

The *Europe 2020 strategy* is about delivering growth that is: *smart*, through more effective investments in education, research and innovation; *sustainable*, thanks to a decisive move towards a low-carbon economy; and *inclusive*, with a strong emphasis on job creation and poverty reduction. The strategy is focused on five ambitious goals in the areas of employment, innovation, education, poverty reduction and climate/energy:

1. Employment - 75% of the 20-64 year-olds to be employed
2. R&D - 3% of the EU's GDP to be invested in R&D
3. Climate change and energy sustainability
  - greenhouse gas emissions 20% (or even 30%, if the conditions are right) lower than 1990
  - 20% of energy from renewables
  - 20% increase in energy efficiency
4. Education - Reducing the rates of early school leaving below 10%, and at least 40% of 30-34-year-olds completing third level education.
5. Fighting poverty and social exclusion - at least 20 million fewer people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion

The *Council recommendations and National Reform Programmes* vary from Member-State to Member-State. For many countries, improving employment for youth and women, and improving education, are recommended. Public finance and taxation are usually targeted as well. Recommendations may further cover energy policy, public administration reform, health care and pension systems, and other topics.

According to the OP, the specific objectives of the OP INTERACT III are:

Specific objective 1.1: To improve management and control capacity of ETC Programmes.

The aim is to contribute to an efficient and effective implementation of ETC programmes, addressing also the shift towards more simplified and standardised programme management. Management is to be understood in a broad sense and covers all aspects of the life cycle of ETC programmes: from the programming phase to the closure, including all programme and project management issues as well as finance, control and communication.

Specific objective 1.2: To improve the ETC capacity in capturing and communicating the programme results.

Smooth implementation of ETC programmes as regards the thematic concentration and the focus on results. In addition, the effects of ETC on Cohesion Policy should be more clearly identified. Increased visibility of ETC as a whole, on the basis of the results achieved. Increased networking, also at a strategic level.

Specific objective 1.3: To improve the cooperation management capacity to implement innovative approaches (EGTC, Revolving Funds, MRSs, Article 96, ITI etc). New mechanisms have emerged over time to simplify cooperation, make it more sustainable, effective and appealing for new partners. INTERACT III shall enhance this, in identifying and sharing innovative practices. Cooperation in objective 1, Integrated Territorial Investment, Community-led Local Development, Revolving Funds, and EGTCs are only some of the tools. Synergies with other programmes/funds shall be enhanced, through thematic work with macro-regions and interregional programmes.

### **Judgement**

The OP INTERACT III aims to improve the management of ETC programmes, i.e. public administration bodies managing those programmes. The Partners to INTERACT (the EU Member States and the European Commission) have identified the need to 1. Continually support and improve management of ETC programmes 2. To improve measuring of results of ETC programmes, and to improve communicating them to stakeholders and the public and 3. Support ETC programmes in applying innovative instruments.

All three specific objectives directly contribute to strengthening public administration, which is a priority of the Strategy 2020, 2014-2020 ESIF and of many National reform programmes.

Moreover, the ETC programmes themselves include funding for projects within the 11 thematic objectives of ESIF. It is assumed that all ETC programmes include one or more of the five Europe 2020 priority areas (employment, R&D, climate change and energy policy, education, and poverty/social inclusion). Cross border mobility of workers, students and researchers may especially contribute to optimisation of labour markets, of the use of education programmes and to development of R&D. All three specific objectives therefore indirectly contribute to achieving the Europe 2020 objectives.

In terms of needs and challenges, the evaluators would like to stress that the OP addresses some more fundamental conditions, that are necessary for proper use of ETC funds and for supporting their contribution to the Europe 2020 strategy. Beside proper management in general, this especially regards activities under specific objective 1.3 – the proper implementation of new policy Instruments such as revolving funds and ITI.

More importantly, the Europe 2020 objectives will be difficult to achieve, if there is no peace and stability in Europe, or if nationalistic forces weaken cooperation in the EU. Recent developments in the Ukraine highlight that peace and stability cannot be taken for granted. The elections of the European parliament indicate, that in some countries nationalistic feelings and EU-scepticism are gaining ground. The evaluators stress that the ETC programmes have a key role in supporting cooperation among the people of the EU and neighbouring countries. In the light of the above developments, the importance of ETC programmes is only increasing, and their effective implementation, to which INTERACT III shall contribute, is of utmost importance.

### **Recommendations**

The INTERACT programme is implemented through regular assessments of the needs of the ETC programmes. These assessments focus on particular management issues or other ETC/sectoral themes.

In order to underpin the contribution of INTERACT III to the Europe 2020 strategy, it is recommended that the above needs' assessments shall explicitly invite the ETC programmes to express their interest in topics related to the five Europe 2020 priority areas (employment, R&D, climate change and energy policy, education, and poverty/social inclusion). It is recommended to evidence and report on these activities.

#### 4.1.2 Evaluation question EQ 1.2

*“Do the Programme priorities and their specific objectives consistently reflect the identified challenges and needs?”*

##### Findings

The OP does not explicitly state how it assessed the needs and challenges that it addresses in the OP. However, from February to May 2013, the INTERACT Programme Management executed a programming survey among the MA/JTS/CA, AA/FLC, national networks and EU institutions and associations. The survey identified needs and challenges for territorial cooperation in the 2014-20 period.

Main needs and challenges according to the MA/JTS/CA were found to be:

- ✓ To simplify and make programme management more effective (29 % of respondents)
- ✓ To capitalise on the results of Territorial Cooperation (13%)
- ✓ To increase the overall visibility of Territorial Cooperation achievements (13%)
- ✓ To enhance the exchange of good management practices (12%)
- ✓ To link up Territorial Cooperation with the wider funding context (11%).

Main needs and challenges according to the AA / FLC were found to be:

- ✓ To enhance the exchange of good practices (23%)
- ✓ To better coordinate with EU level ETC stakeholders (23 %)
- ✓ To better coordinate national networks of Cooperation experts (13%)
- ✓ To address Territorial Cooperation thematic specificities and exchange (13%)

Main needs and challenges according to the national networks were found to be:

- ✓ To simplify and make programme management more effective (40 %)
- ✓ To enhance the exchange of good management practices (20%)
- ✓ To address Territorial Cooperation thematic specificities and exchange (20%)

Main needs and challenges according to the EU institutions and EU associations were found to be:

- ✓ To capitalise on the results of Territorial Cooperation (36%)
- ✓ To better coordinate national networks of Cooperation experts (22%)
- ✓ To enhance the exchange of good management practices (21%)

Beside this survey, it should be mentioned that in February 2014, the European Commission issued a letter to all ETC Programme Management Authorities, underlining the challenge of

aggregating the outputs and results of the ETC programmes and requesting the MA's to submit a summary of the achievements.

### **Judgement**

The OP INTERACT III priority and specific objectives cover and adequately reflect the needs and challenges that were identified through the programming survey.

### **Recommendations**

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## **4.2 Consistency of objectives with challenges and needs**

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### **4.2.1 Evaluation question EQ 1.3**

*“Are the identified challenges and needs consistently translated into the objectives of the OP (meaning: the thematic objectives, investment priorities, specific objectives)?”*

### **Findings**

The OP INTERACT III is a very specific ETC programme, to the extent that it addresses the capacity of public administration for implementing ETC programmes, and has only one thematic objective – theme 11: Enhancing institutional capacity and an efficient public administration by strengthening of institutional capacity and the efficiency of public administrations and public services related to implementation of the ERDF, and in support of actions in institutional capacity and in the efficiency of public administration supported by the ESF.

In line with that, it has only one Investment Priority - Promoting the exchange of experience in order to reinforce the effectiveness of territorial cooperation programmes and actions as well as the use of EGTCs.

For the specific objectives, we refer to EQ 1.2 above.

### **Judgement**

The identified challenges and needs were consistently translated into the thematic objective, investment priority and specific objectives of the OP.

### **Recommendations**

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## 4.3 Coherence of the programme

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### 4.3.1 Evaluation question EQ 1.4 – Internal coherence

*“Have complementarities and potential synergies been identified between the specific objectives of each priority axis and between the specific objectives of the different priority axis?”*

#### Findings

The OP INTERACT III has only one priority axis. The OP does not explicitly discuss complementarities and potential synergies between the specific objectives of its priority axis. Complementarity and synergy is indicated in section 2.A.6 (Actions):

*The actions shall directly contribute to the achievement of the specific objectives, such as e.g.: For seminars and trainings, target groups needs will be assessed in the planning phase, and target groups will be involved during the development, in order to assure that the knowledge provided during the events can be effectively used and contribute to a more efficient management of cooperation (i.e. **first and third objectives** of INTERACT). Experts working groups, composed of experienced programme managers, will be gathered in order to enable knowledge sharing and transfer on management issues, innovative tools or thematic issues (**first, second and third objectives** of INTERACT). For an effective knowledge management, it is important that concrete outcomes of these networks are recorded and disseminated, e.g. in joint working papers or studies available online (**first, second and third objectives** of INTERACT). Moreover the results of cooperation shall be captured, be made accessible and analysed (**second objective** of INTERACT). Databases or online tools are essential tools for this, as well as promotional activities, which shall increase the visibility of cooperation results, but also enable knowledge sharing on successful management practices and innovative tools (**first, second and third objectives** of INTERACT).*

#### Judgement

The specific objectives of the OP each cover a specific area within a closely linked general objective – the support to and improvement of ETC programmes. The complementarity and synergy among the topics dealt with in the specific objectives is actually obvious. For example, the application of innovative approaches (specific objective 1.3) will have to be properly managed (specific objective 1.1) and could also be communicated (specific objective 1.2).

For each specific objective, similar actions - events, tools and other actions may be implemented, and the same beneficiaries (target groups) are included in each specific objective. The OP is implemented by one coordinated organisation – INTERACT M.A. and IPs. Due to the concentration of topics, target groups, methods and actions for implementing the OP, and executing body, the evaluators expect that complementarity of the specific objectives shall be used to the benefit of the programme, and that a high level of synergies shall be generated.

#### Recommendations

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### 4.3.2 Evaluation question EQ 1.6 – External coherence

*“Is the programme coherent with other relevant instruments at regional, national and EU level, specifically Partnership Agreement and Danube Strategy?”*

#### Findings

Coherence with other instruments is especially described in Section 4.4. of the OP:

*Based on the above INTERACT III is to build on the achievements of the period 2007- 2013 in all these areas, developing further its role of catalyst for effective cooperation. Then aim being better development and implementation of macro-regional and sea-basin strategies and better exploitation of further enforced coordination of EU financial instruments. Based on these elements the INTERACT III structure will strengthen further the cooperation dimension overall of Cohesion Policy, addressing gaps to overcome borders and other barriers, and to give a wider EU perspective to regional development approaches. For achieving this, in complement to the work of the Commission in this respect, INTERACT III will deliver support to ETC programmes, macro-regional and sea basin strategies and for operations using the potentials of Articles 70 and 96 in their cooperation in country specific programmes. INTERACT III contribution is given in form of various activities that promote Exchange between strategies:*

- *support placing the strategies in the overall EU policy approach, e.g. by ensuring their links to other EU policies and programmes (Horizon 2020, Connecting Europe etc.);*
- *facilitate links to all relevant ESIF programmes by facilitating embedding of the perspective in the strategic design of all relevant ESIF programmes and by facilitating use of all outward-looking provisions (Articles 70 and 96 etc. of the CPR);*
- *provide KEEP databases and facilitate the information on the possible financing sources;*
- *promoting the exchange of good practice among the various existing strategies.*

#### Judgement

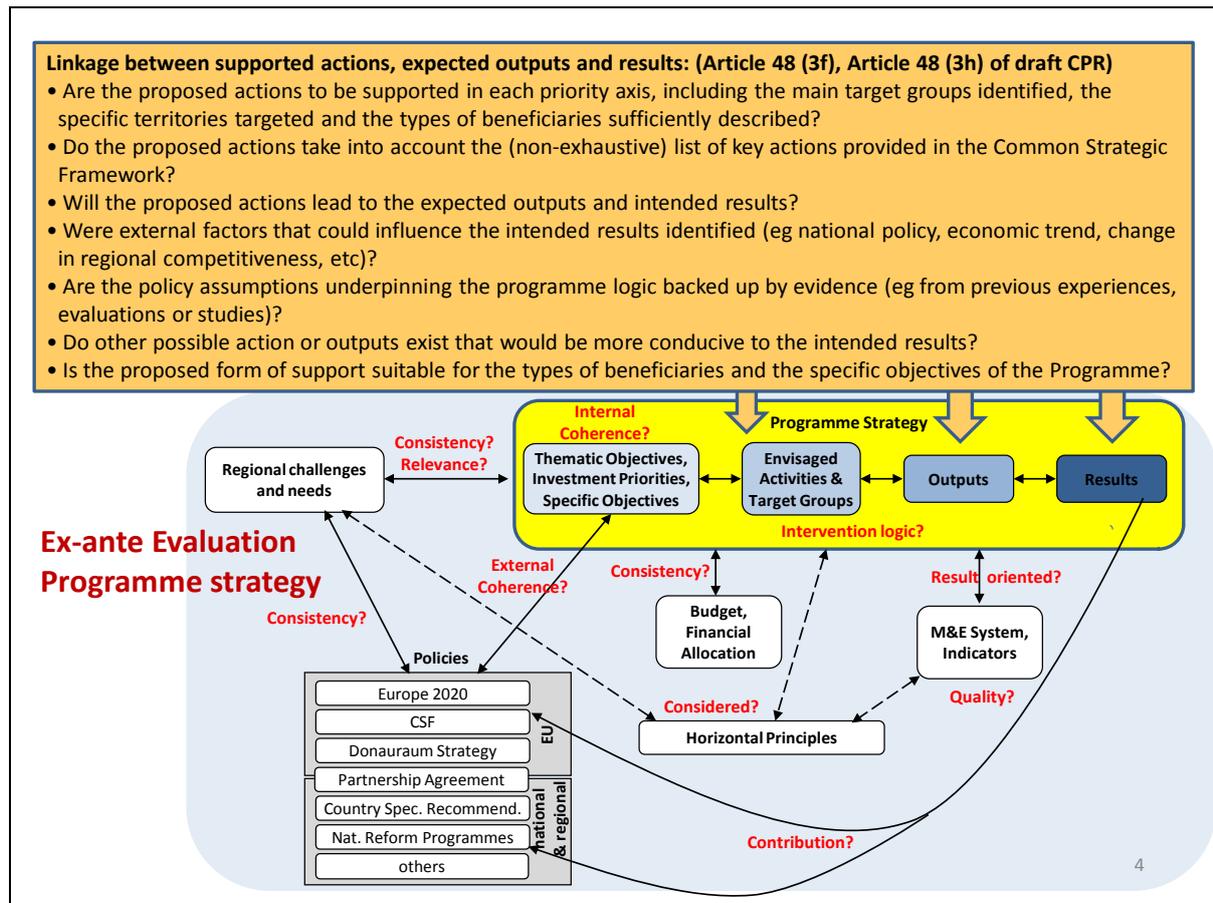
The OP INTERACT III is a very specific programme , in that it supports implementation of the ETC programmes, including the Danube Strategy. As such, the OP is coherent with those other relevant instruments *by definition*.

Regarding coherence in the area of communication (specific objective 1.2), it should be mentioned that as per the EC regulations, proper communication should be part of the management of every ETC programme already (specific objective 1.1), and that particular attention should be paid to optimising the use of the regular communication of ETC programmes - in line with strategies and approaches developed under specific objective 1.2.

#### Recommendations

With respect to communication of the programme results, it is recommended that INTERACT develops a concise guideline for communication planning and implementation of such plans for ETC programmes. The ETC programmes could be invited to one or more workshops for drafting their communication plans. The ETC programmes can then implement this guideline, using financing from their regular T.A. budget. Besides that, and as foreseen in the OP, INTERACT shall coordinate EU-wide communication on (the results of) ETC.

## 4.4 Intervention logic of the programme



Picture 2: Ex-ante Evaluation: Assessment of Intervention logic

### 4.4.1 Evaluation question EQ 1.7

*“Are the proposed actions to be supported in each priority axis, including the main target groups identified, the specific territories targeted and the types of beneficiaries sufficiently described?”*

#### Findings

Section 2.A.6.1 of the OP describes the proposed actions, main target groups identified, the territory covered and the beneficiaries.

#### Judgement

The description of the proposed actions, main target groups identified, the territory covered and the beneficiaries is elaborate and also reflects on the development from INTERACT II to INTERACT III. The description is more than sufficient.

#### Recommendations

-

#### 4.4.2 Evaluation question EQ 1.8

*“Do the proposed actions take into account the (non-exhaustive) list of key actions provided in the Common Strategic Framework?”*

##### Findings

For the theme enhancing institutional capacity and ensuring an efficient public administration, the CSF states that the priority should be on *reducing the administrative burden on citizens and business and increasing the transparency, integrity and quality of public administration as well as its efficiency in delivering public services in all sectors (including though up-skilling in the fields of policy development, organisational innovations, e-governance and public procurement of innovative solutions).*

As key actions, the CSF mentions *strengthening institutional capacity and the efficiency of public administrations and public services related to the implementation of ERDF and in support of actions in institutional capacity and in the efficient public administration supported by the ESF, including where necessary the provision of equipment and infrastructure to support the modernisation of public services in areas such as employment, education, health, social policies and customs.*

According to the CSF, *actions under this thematic objective should focus on enhancing the efficiency of public administrations as part of public administration and public sector reform. This requires an integrated approach addressing **institutional bottlenecks** in the administration as a whole, **rather than focusing on individual sectors and projects and/or funding-absorption rates.** The actions should address **strategic planning capacity, information collection and evaluation related activities, including results-based management approaches, human resources, capacity to implement EU legislation, and the capacity to implement reforms and public investment programmes and to reduce administrative burdens.** Actions should focus on bottlenecks, as well as building up capacity to address new tasks, including tasks associated with integrating climate change mitigation and adaptation across programmes. **In addition, the capacity of bodies involved in the delivery of CSF Fund programmes may be strengthened through the ‘technical assistance’ available from all CSF Funds.***

Actions included in the OP are:

##### Organisation of events

- Seminars, workshops, conferences, trainings
- Initiate, support networks
- Develop, test joint products, approaches
- Exchange good practices

##### Making of tools

- Studies, working papers, factsheets, survey outcomes, newsletters, promotools – flyers;
- Data-bases, IT applications, e-Learning tools, promotools (video)

##### Other actions

- Guidance and direct work with ETC programmes and their decision makers
- Extensive analysis, stakeholder involvement and constant reinforcement at the programme level

- Mapping relevant target groups, monitoring of the implementation of existing and new tools, appropriate knowledge management, and promoting this to the ETC stakeholders
- Distribution of INTERACT outputs, communication in order to achieve the practical use in ETC programmes

### **Judgement**

OP INTERACT III clearly targets several key actions given by the CSF. The CSF indicates, that actions should focus on **structural improvements** in the capacity of public administration, in this case, the ETC programme management organisations. This requires that knowledge, know-how and tools are long-term applied by the ETC programme management organisations. It also indicates that the OP should focus on the identification of bottlenecks in the functioning of ETC programmes, and on provision of structural solutions, for example by benchmarking among ETC programmes and exchange of good management practices, of which the latter is explicitly foreseen in the OP. Finally, the CSF stresses the possibility for the ETC programmes to finance implementation of approaches and tools developed by INTERACT from their own technical assistance funds. This is important to realize, because it means that INTERACT can also develop approaches for more complex follow-up actions. INTERACT would stimulate the effective use of technical assistance funds and function as a catalyst for follow-up action to improve public administration. This focus is not explicitly mentioned in the OP.

### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that during implementation of the OP, actions shall focus on achieving structural improvements in capacity of ETC programmes.

The OP should focus on the identification of bottlenecks in the functioning of ETC programmes, and on provision of structural solutions, for example by benchmarking among ETC programmes and exchange of good management practices. Such good management practices do not need to come from ETC programmes only – useful practices may also be found in mainstream programmes or policies.

It is recommended that INTERACT actively stimulates the practical application of knowledge, know-how and tools that is developed by ETC programmes.

#### 4.4.3 Evaluation question EQ 1.9

“Will the proposed actions lead to the expected outputs and intended results?”

#### Findings

The actions are mainly described in section 2.A.6, the outputs (indicators) in section 2.A.7 and the results in Section 2.A.5. They are summarized in the table below.

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Outputs / Output indicator</b>	<b>Results / Result indicator</b>
		Section 2.A.5 page 12
<b>Organisation of events</b> Seminars, workshops, conferences, trainings Initiate, support networks Develop, test joint products, approaches Exchange good practices	Events / Number of events	(Objective 1.1). • A more wide-spread application of simplified and harmonised approaches with the aim of reducing the administrative burden, attracting new types of beneficiaries (e.g. private) and mitigating the risk of errors. This will require for example development of simplified and harmonised tools, <b>guidance and direct work with the programmes and their decision makers in order to ensure the actual change in the programmes;</b>
<b>Making of tools</b> Studies, working papers, factsheets, survey outcomes, newsletters, promotools – flyers; Data-bases, IT applications, e-Learning tools, promotools (video)	Tools (Number of tools)	• A more widespread use of identified good practice and quality standards, which could serve as a benchmark for evaluating performance of the programmes across ETC. This covers all aspects of programme management in line with the policy and regulatory requirements (e.g. results orientation, focus, sound financial management, First Level Control Quality Assurance). <b>This will require extensive analysis, stakeholder involvement and constant reinforcement at the programme level in order to ensure the take up of the existing good practice and development of new one;</b>
<b>Other actions</b>  <b>Guidance and direct work with ETC programmes and their decision makers</b>  Extensive analysis, stakeholder involvement and <b>constant reinforcement at the programme level</b>  Mapping relevant target groups, monitoring of the implementation of existing and new tools, appropriate knowledge management, and	Meetings, Consults Communications	• Improved communication between the ETC programme management bodies and the Member States representatives. On strategic level there is a need for improved communication in the decision processes with special attention to stakeholder involvement and buy-in. On operational level, there is a need for better information flows, especially in areas of MS responsibility. (Objective 1.2) Increased thematic expertise / competence within the ETC programmes thanks to the INTERACT support. Territorial aspects and specificities will be addressed as well. This will

<p><b>promoting this to the ETC stakeholders</b></p> <p><b>Distribution of INTERACT outputs, communication in order to achieve the practical use in ETC programmes</b></p>		<p>require building thematic networks with experts, thematically specialised programmes and the ETC community. Knowledge management procedures within thematic fields will be established <b>and operated</b> (in close cooperation with other network programmes, especially INTERREG-Europe);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>A repository of ETC results is established, which can be used by the ETC community and the relevant decision makers at any time. This will require continuation, improvement and further development of the KEEP initiative but strongly linked to the thematic networks;</b></li> <li>• Leadership of integrated ETC communication strategy established. This will require establishing a strong communication network with acceptance of INTERACT role in it.</li> </ul> <p>Objective 1.3: Increased knowledge about the new and existing tools. <b>This will require mapping the relevant target groups and monitoring of the implementation of these tools, appropriate knowledge management, and promoting this to the ETC stakeholders;</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workable models developed, adjusted to ETC context. Building on the body of knowledge gathered, this will require an active work with relevant experts and ETC programmes in order to develop and test such models. Considering ETC resistance to higher risk initiatives, active support of the Commission and the MSs will be required;</li> <li>• <b>Increased awareness in the ETC programmes about other EU funding schemes and their complementarities with their strategies. This will require establishment of a relationship with non-ETC programmes and creating sustainable networks around similar programme objectives;</b></li> <li>• Increased awareness of the mainstream programmes about the advantages of cooperation as an implementation tool. This will require monitoring of use of Article 96, promotion of its positive results and flagging the risks/challenges experienced. Macro-regional approaches might play an important role, if appropriately supported.</li> </ul> <p><i>Result indicators:</i> <i>Satisfaction level of ETC programmes with INTERACT products and services (for each specific objective) – score from 1 to 5</i> <i>% of ETC programmes using INTERACT products and services (for each specific perspective).</i></p>
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## Judgement

The actions organisation of events and tools are clearly stated in the OP, and logically lead to the required outputs (events, tools).

One-to-one meetings, consults and communications are not counted in the outputs. After consultation with the MA and IPs, the ex ante evaluator concluded, that these one-to-one activities are not considered substantial enough to be included in reporting and monitoring.

In order to achieve the desired results, and to positively influence the value of the result indicators, the issue of acceptance and practical application of acquired knowledge, know-how and tools must be addressed. As is indicated in the description of the results, the organisation of events and development and distribution of tools only may not have the desired effect, i.e. that the acquired knowledge, know-how or tools shall be used or applied in practice. As the OP indicates, in certain cases it shall be required to provide personal support and to communicate effectively with the ETC programmes to achieve that. For the acceptance and practical application the European Commission could play a key role, by co-developing tools and by adopting them as guidelines, recommended for use by the ETC programmes.

## Recommendations

The M.A., IPs and EC are recommended to permanently assess possibilities to ensure acceptance and practical application of knowledge, know-how and tools by ETC programmes. The possibility for such practical application can be openly discussed with participants in events and potential users of tools. A major contribution can be made by the European Commission, in case that it adopts tools developed through INTERACT, for example by classifying them as Guidance documents and by recommending their use by the ETC programmes.

### 4.4.4 Evaluation question EQ 1.10

*"Were external factors that could influence the intended results identified (national policy, economic trend, change in regional competitiveness)?"*

## Findings

As is known from implementation of INTERACT II, external factors influencing the intended results are mainly the level of cooperation and acceptance of INTERACT services and products by the ETC programmes and other relevant actors. For example, the development of KEEP has been delayed, among others because there was no obligation for ETC programmes to provide data for it.

Over the past years, INTERACT has dealt with this challenge, among others by including relevant actors into the programme. For example, staff from authorities that certify or audit expenditures of ETC programmes have been included in the INTERACT programme. In this way, INTERACT is trying to influence the acceptance of INTERACT services and products by such external decision makers.

In the OP INTERACT III, cooperation with non-ETC programmes is mentioned as a necessary activity (intended results, objective 1.3). The OP further mentions that decision makers should be influenced. If the OP is to achieve structural improvements (see EQ 1.8), such as changes in procedures and systems, acceptance by final decision makers will be necessary. ETC programmes are often embedded in national Ministries or regional governments, so this will in many cases mean that support from high level superiors in those institutions, or even outside those institutions (certifying and/or audit authorities) has to be generated.

## Judgement

Through its flexible and demand driven approach, INTERACT is continuously delivering added value to the ETC programmes and other relevant actors. This approach will help to generate cooperation and acceptance from them.

As is indicated in the OP, for the acceptance of more complex services and products that lead to structural changes, special approaches may be needed. The OP does not clarify what approaches shall be used – presumably they would be determined on a case-by-case basis.

## Recommendations

The evaluators recommend considering a more strategic approach to achieving cooperation and acceptance of services and tools, for example by identifying key decision makers in advance and by planning and implementing structural communication with them.

As discussed in EQ 1.9, it is recommended to obtain support from the European Commission for this purpose, as it may strongly influence cooperation and acceptance of INTERACT services and products.

Cooperation and acceptance by ETC programmes and decision makers outside ETC programmes might also be augmented by involving them more directly in management of the programme (e.g. programming, monitoring and evaluation, planning), for example on a regional or thematic basis. The evaluators recommend considering such involvement (see also EQ 5.2 below).

### 4.4.5 Evaluation question EQ 1.11

*“Are the policy assumptions underpinning the programme logic backed up by evidence (from previous experiences, evaluations or studies)?”*

## Findings

The main evidence underpinning the programme logic are the experiences and results from INTERACT I and INTERACT II programmes. The INTERACT II programme is considered to be successful, which is evidenced by the clear support to INTERACT III, as pronounced by the EU Member-States and the European Commission.

A particular evaluation that supports the programme logic is the survey executed on the satisfaction of participants of events. In the INTERACT document *Baselines for INTERACT III indicators*, this survey is summarized as follows:

### ***“Data on satisfaction rate and data limits***

*Events are evaluated on two main dimensions from the customer perspective:*

- *Meeting objectives for participating in the event and getting new knowledge, and*
- *Materials and delivery methods supporting the above objectives*

Each of these dimensions are composite indicators measured by 4 questions on a 5 point likert scale (from strongly agree to strongly disagree).

Outcome event objectives and learning	Outcome materials and methods
1. This event was useful	5. The presenters were effective
2. This event met my objectives for attending	6. The chosen method suited the event objectives
3. As a result of this event I have gained important knowledge	7. The materials provided were clear and useful
4. I will be able to use this knowledge in my work	8. Most of the material was covered during the event

Annex 1 contains more details on accumulated evaluations from the baseline year 2013, which is the latest available data. It is based on 30 evaluated events with the total of 1.180 participants and 750 returned evaluations. In summary the evaluations are as follows:

Questions from Evaluation Form	Average rate (scale 5-1)
1. This event was useful	4,35
2. This event met my objectives for attending	4,09
3. As a result of this event I have gained important knowledge	4,24
4. I will be able to use this knowledge in my work	4,21
<b>Outcome event objectives and learning</b>	<b>4,22</b>
5. The presenters were effective	4,27
6. The chosen method suited the event objectives	4,14
7. The materials provided were clear and useful	4,09
8. Most of the material was covered during the event	4,12
<b>Outcome materials and methods</b>	<b>4,16</b>
<b>Outcome total</b>	<b>4,19</b>

### Judgement

The programme logic is backed up by experience from INTERACT I and II and by a specific survey on satisfaction of participants in events. Said survey does not cover satisfaction with services and products that were not delivered in the context of an event.

### Recommendations

It is recommended that in the future, broader evidence shall be obtained to underpin the impact of the programme, by measuring satisfaction with – and use of services and products longer after acquiring them, for example after six months. This should regard not only services and products from events, but also those acquired outside events (e.g. materials downloaded from the INTERACT website).

#### 4.4.6 Evaluation question EQ 1.12

“Do other possible actions or outputs exist that would be more conducive to the intended results?”

## Findings

Briefly stated, INTERACT III is aiming at long-term and geographically widespread improvement of management and control capacity of ETC Programmes, improvement of ETC capacity in capturing and communicating the programme results, and improvement of the cooperation management capacity to implement innovative approaches. For this purpose, the Programme needs to realise a large number of events throughout the EU and in its neighbouring countries, deliver tailor-made support throughout the EU and to its neighbouring countries, and to develop and distribute a large number of tools (products), all this over a period of seven years. INTERACT will use its geographically widespread structure with qualified and experienced staff and established cooperation networks. It is not imaginable that any other action would be able to effectively deliver such scope of services and products, over such long period of time and at such geographic scale.

## Judgement

More conducive action could be achieved through implementation of considerable (technical assistance) projects to improve for example management or control capacity of ETC programmes. As indicated in EQ 1.8, it is recommended to stimulate the use of technical assistance funds from the ETC programmes for that purpose; the role of INTERACT is to be an initiator of such action. In other words INTERACT could provide methodologies and other inputs to initiate such improvement projects. This particularly applies to the development and implementation of communication strategies for ETC programmes.

It should also be considered that other useful inputs - for example best management practices – may have been generated in other (EU) programmes. The OP foresees a better exchange of information with mainstream programmes, which could facilitate identification of best practices in mainstream programmes and their transfer to ETC programmes through INTERACT.

Other possible action that would be complimentary to, or part of, the INTERACT communication plan, would be the use of awards for ETC programmes. This would require developing quality criteria for ETC programmes, and their evaluation.

## Recommendations

It is recommended that INTERACT provides input to possible follow-up actions to the services and products that it delivers, such as improvement and communication projects financed from regular ETC technical assistance budgets.

It is recommended that the collection of best practices and other useful products will not only take place among ETC programmes, but also from mainstream programmes and policies.

It is recommended to consider using awards to promote good management practices in the ETC programme management community.

### 4.4.7 Evaluation question EQ 1.13

*“Is the proposed form of support suitable for the types of beneficiaries and the specific objectives of the Programme?”*

## Findings

The high level of satisfaction of users of INTERACT, EU Member-States and the European Commission, and the high participation rate of ETC programmes in events (100 %) demonstrate that the proposed form of support is suitable for the types of beneficiaries and the specific objectives.

The proposed support shall be tailor-made according to needs' assessments executed by, and annual working plans made by INTERACT. This is also a guarantee for the use of suitable forms of support.

In terms of types of financing, INTERACT mainly finances activities and costs of own staff and costs related to the delivery of services and products, e.g. costs of events, costs of expertises etc. INTERACT does not cover the travel costs and costs of subsistence of participants in events, nor does it provide grants for ETC programmes. Participants of events typically cover those costs from ETC technical assistance budgets.

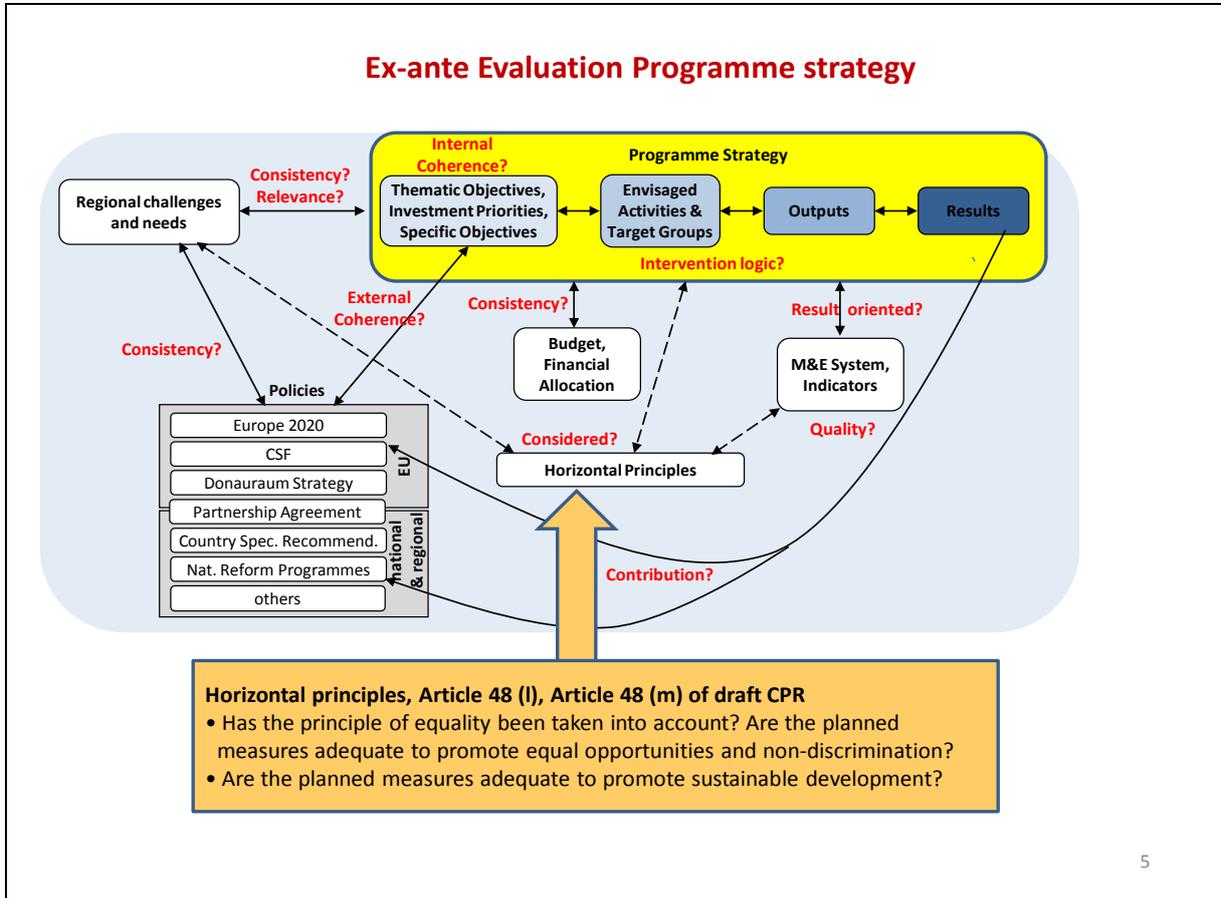
### **Judgement**

Although it could be considered that covering costs of participants or providing specific grants to ETC programmes might stimulate acceptance of INTERACT services and products, the present 100 % participation rate of the ETC programmes indicates, that this is not necessary. Budget constraints of INTERACT would also not support such an approach.

### **Recommendations**

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## 4.5 Horizontal principles



Picture 3: Ex-ante Evaluation: Assessment of Horizontal Principles

#### 4.5.1 Evaluation question EQ 1.14

*“Has the principle of equality been taken into account?”*

##### Findings

According to article 8 (7) Regulation 1299/2013, the programmes URBACT, INTERACT and ESPON are exempt from the application of the horizontal principle of equality. The principle of equality is embedded in primary legislation of the EU; to the opinion of the ex ante evaluators, it should not be exonerated.

The evaluators raised this issue at the Monitoring Committee meeting, which agreed that certain reflections on equality should be included in the Operational Programme.

##### Judgement

Evidently, the principle of equality has not been considered during preparation of the OP, and no specific arrangements are foreseen for implementation.

The principle of equality can be applied at two levels: on the INTERACT programme management itself, and on the services and products that it is offering.

As regards the INTERACT staff (M.A. and IPs), out of a total of 40 staff, 26 are women. Women predominate in management positions as well. The Member-States' representatives in the Monitoring Committee are predominantly women as well, varying from about 60 % to even 85 % of the representatives.

The participation of women and men in INTERACT events is not being monitored.

INTERACT is actually paying some attention to equality issues in its products. For example, the spring 2012 information sheet paid attention to the project *“Gender Resources Centres for Orientation and Professional Qualification of Socially Excluded Women in Albania and Montenegro”*, financed by the IPA Adriatic cross-border cooperation programme.

There are various examples of active approaches to gender equality in cross-border programmes and macro-regional programmes, such as the Baltic Sea Region Programme.

##### Recommendations

It is recommended to monitor the application of equality of men and women in human resource management of INTERACT.

It is recommended to monitor the participation of men and women in INTERACT activities, especially events.

It is recommended to pay particular attention to the need for support in dealing with gender equality in the ETC programmes, to provide services and tools related to gender equality, and to monitor the activities of INTERACT in this respect.

## 4.5.2 Evaluation question EQ 1.15

*“Are the planned measures adequate to promote equal opportunities and non-discrimination?”*

### Findings

According to article 8 (7) Regulation 1299/2013, the programmes URBACT, INTERACT and ESPON are exempt from the application of the horizontal principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination. The principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination is embedded in primary legislation of the EU; to the opinion of the ex ante evaluators, it should not be exonerated.

### Judgement

The horizontal priority of equal opportunities and non-discrimination has not been considered during preparation of the OP, and no specific arrangements are foreseen for implementation.

As with the principle of equality, this priority can be applied at two levels: on the INTERACT programme management itself, and on the services and products that it is offering.

As regards the INTERACT programme itself, the staff of the M.A. is composed of a variety of nationalities, which generally speaking creates a situation in which discrimination on the basis of nationality could occur. Some staff are living abroad as expatriates and embedded in the national organisations housing the M.A. or IPs, which may create an unequal situation.

There is no explicit policy for dealing with discrimination issues in INTERACT.

In certain EU countries relatively large minority communities are living in border regions. The presence of disadvantaged groups in border regions may give rise to cross border criminality and requires specific cross border approaches. Among others due to these factors, there are various ETC programmes that take an active approach to minorities and even fund specific projects for this theme. The evaluators have not found evidence that INTERACT is paying particular attention to this topic, for example by exchanging best practices in this field.

### Recommendations

It is recommended to monitor the application of equal opportunities and non-discrimination in human resource management of INTERACT. It is particularly recommended to assign a complaints' officer, a trusted person to whom INTERACT staff could ventilate discrimination issues and who would be authorized to process and solve problems raised.

It is recommended to pay particular attention to the need for INTERACT services and products related to issues of minorities, disabled groups or persons, and discrimination in the ETC programmes, to provide services and tools related to these topics if so requested, and to monitor the activities of INTERACT in this respect.

### 4.5.3 Evaluation question EQ 1.16

*“Are the planned measures adequate to promote sustainable development and secure resource efficiency, climate change mitigation and adaptation, disaster resilience and risk prevention and management?”*

#### Findings

According to article 8 (7) Regulation 1299/2013, the programmes URBACT, INTERACT and ESPON are exempt from application of the horizontal principle of sustainable development and secure resource efficiency, climate change mitigation and adaptation, disaster resilience and risk prevention and management.

To the opinion of the evaluators, this principle should be taken into consideration in the programme.

#### Judgement

The horizontal priority sustainable development (...) has not been considered during preparation of the OP, and no specific arrangements are foreseen for implementation.

As with the principles above, this priority can be applied at two levels: on the INTERACT programme management itself, and on the services and products that it is offering.

There is no explicit policy for applying green procurement in the programme itself.

As regards the organisation of events, no particular attention is paid to the ecological footprint of such activities.

The evaluators note, that from an efficiency point of view, pan-European events and MC meetings could best be organised on central locations that can be easily reached, so practically either in Brussels, or in Central-Europe (Vienna, Bratislava, Prague, Budapest), the latter especially when many persons from the MA and CO participate.

As regards the products and services that INTERACT delivers, it should be noted that serious attention is being paid to this horizontal priority. For example, INTERACT and the Intelligent Energy Europe Programme (IEE) jointly organized a two-day seminar “Accelerating change at local level for effective delivery of sustainable energy solutions”, in May 2013 in Brussels, and IP Valencia is cooperating in a Mediterranean Lab Group for energy efficiency. However, INTERACT is not explicitly monitoring or reporting how many products and services it delivers in this area.

#### Recommendations

As regards management of the OP, although the programme does not include any investment component and therefore has a relatively low impact on the environment, special attention should be paid to the application of green procurement in its management. Green procurement can be applied to office consumables, furniture and ICT.

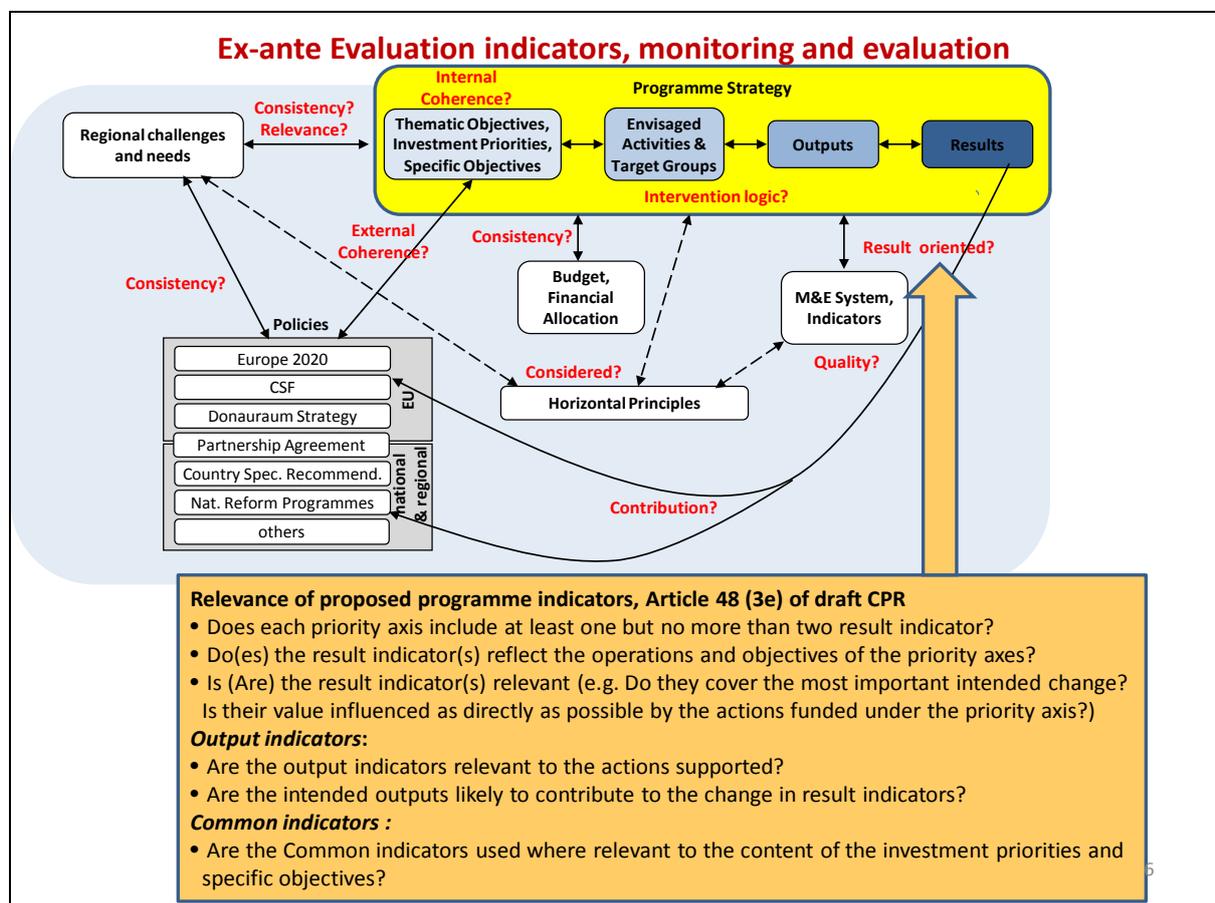
It is recommended to consider reducing travel time and environmental stress of MC meetings by organising them (more often) in central locations that can be reached by direct flight or train connections. If more persons from the MA and CA assist, such locations would

preferably be Vienna, Bratislava, Prague, or Budapest (closer to the geographical centre of the capitals of the EU).

It is recommended to reduce the ecological footprint of events and to compensate for carbon emissions.

It is recommended to monitor and report on INTERACT products and services covering topics that fall under this horizontal priority of sustainable development and secure resource efficiency, climate change mitigation and adaptation, disaster resilience and risk prevention and management. In this way, OP INTERACT shall be able to demonstrate its contribution to this horizontal priority.

## 5 Component C2 – Evaluation of the indicator system and of programme arrangements for monitoring and evaluation



Picture 4: Ex-ante Evaluation: Assessment of Indicator System and Monitoring

### 5.1 Relevance of proposed programme indicators

#### 5.1.1 Evaluation question EQ 2.1

“Does each priority axis include at least one but no more than two result indicators?”

#### Findings

In version 2.3 of the OP, six result indicators are proposed, two indicators for each of the three specific objectives. The first indicator is *Satisfaction level of ETC programmes with INTERACT products and services (aimed at each specific objective)* and the second indicator is *% of ETC programmes using INTERACT products and services (aimed at each specific objective)*. So in total:

1. Satisfaction level of ETC programmes with INTERACT products and services aimed at improving the management and control capacity of ETC programmes

2. % of ETC programmes using INTERACT products and services aimed at improving the management and control capacity of ETC programmes
3. Satisfaction level of ETC programmes with INTERACT products and services aimed at improving the ETC capacity in capturing and communicating programme results
4. % of ETC programmes using INTERACT products and services aimed at improving the ETC capacity in capturing and communicating programme results
5. Satisfaction level of programmes with INTERACT products and services aimed at improving the cooperation management capacity to implement innovative approaches
6. % of programmes using INTERACT products and services aimed at improving the cooperation management capacity to implement innovative approaches

## Judgement

As regards the interpretation of result indicators 2, 4 and 6 if the term *using* is understood as any use of an INTERACT product or service, the level of % is at 100 % for INTERACT II.

As regards the use of six result indicators, this seems rather complicated for measuring general progress achieved in one priority axis. When the indicators are broken up per specific objective, indicators for specific objectives where a low number of events are realized become rather sensitive to extreme values, for example in specific objective 1.3. DG REGIO recommends to limit the number of result indicators (e.g. to just one programme-specific result indicator for each investment priority and its specific objective). The six proposed result indicators do not seem to provide a more accurate view on the result/impact of the programme than for example two indicators that cover the same intended changes – without covering the specific objectives. More specific information can be collected within the quality management system.

## Recommendations

It is recommended to use just 2 result indicators, the same as included now, but not broken down per specific objective:

1. Satisfaction level of ETC programmes with INTERACT products and services - target is increase of value of 4.19
2. Level of % of programmes using INTERACT products and services (composite of application, usefulness and impact)

It is recommended that the second result indicator keeps the same name, but that the word *using* is interpreted towards the actual application and impact of INTERACT products and services (know-how gained ...) in the practice of ETC programme management, measured not directly at the end of events (as result indicator 1), but longer after – for example after half a year. In other words, the indicator shall reflect the **usefulness** of INTERACT products and services.

It is recommended to assess the usefulness of INTERACT products and services through a survey of ETC programmes. They will be requested to score the following questions on a likert scale from 1 to 5:

1. Were you able to use **know-how** that you acquired during INTERACT events in your work?

2. Did that help to improve i. the management and/or control capacity of your programme, or ii. the capacity in capturing and communicating the programmes results, or iii implementation of innovative approaches ?
3. Were you able to use **tools** that you acquired from INTERACT in your work ?
4. Did that help to improve i. the management and/or control capacity of your programme, or ii. the capacity in capturing and communicating the programmes results, or iii implementation of innovative approaches ?
5. If you were not able to apply certain know-how or tools yet, was that due to a lack of quality or practicality of the know-how/tool (score = 1) or due to other factors (score = 5)?

*Note: if the Programme decides to keep 2 indicators per specific objective, so in total six, the above questions can be adjusted (split up) accordingly.*

It is recommended that ETC programmes shall only be considered to be *using* INTERACT products or services, if the so-called usefulness level is higher than 4. This value is based on the value resulting from the satisfaction survey, which the programme already executes at the end of each event. The value 4 reflects the outcome of satisfaction survey questions 4 (*I will be able to use this knowledge in my work*) and 7 (*The materials provided are clear and useful*), resp. 4,24 and 4,09, with a downward correction. The correction is based on the assumption that after 6 months, not all know-how/tools shall have been used; and on the normative opinion, that on a scale of 1 to 5, the minimum score should be good (4). The minimum usefulness level shall therefore be 4.

It is recommended to set the baseline and target value for this indicator in a practical and effective way. As found in the ex ante evaluation, the baseline for using INTERACT services and products is 100 %. The target shall be 100 % as well, but it shall include the suggested usefulness factor, an additional quality criterion that reflects the ambition of the program to provide high quality services.

### 5.1.2 Evaluation question EQ 2.2

*“Do(es) the result indicator(s) reflect the operations and objectives of the priority axes?”*

#### Findings

According to the OP, the specific objectives of OP INTERACT III are:

Specific objective 1.1: To improve management and control capacity of ETC Programmes.

Specific objective 1.2: To improve the ETC capacity in capturing and communicating the programme results.

Specific objective 1.3: To improve the cooperation management capacity to implement innovative approaches (EGTC, Revolving Funds, MRSs, Article 96, ITI etc).

The above objectives shall be realised by delivering services and offering products (tools) to the ETC programmes.

The first result indicator will measure satisfaction with the services and products aiming at realising the specific objectives. The second indicator will measure the application and usefulness in practice of INTERACT services and products (see EQ 2.3 below).

### **Judgement**

The result indicators directly reflect the operations and objectives of the priority axis.

### **Recommendations**

-

### 5.1.3 Evaluation question EQ 2.3

*“Is (Are) the result indicator(s) relevant, do they cover the most important intended change, is their value influenced as directly as possible by the actions funded under the priority axis?”*

#### Findings

As explained in EQ 1.11, result indicator 1 (Satisfaction level of ETC programmes with INTERACT products and services) expresses the satisfaction of ETC programmes with events. The indicator reflects a measurement at the end of the event and covers a variety of elements:

1. This event was useful
2. This event met my objectives for attending
3. As a result of this event I have gained important knowledge
4. I will be able to use this knowledge in my work
5. The presenters were effective
6. The chosen method suited the event objectives
7. The materials provided were clear and useful
8. Most of the material was covered during the event

Result indicator 2 (% of ETC programmes using INTERACT products and services) expresses the usage of products and services; no further explanation of measurement is given.

#### Judgement

The most important changes to be achieved by OP INTERACT III are:

1. the realisation of transfer of useful know-how, particularly through the realisation of high quality events and provision of high quality tools.
2. the improvement of management of ETC programmes (including capturing of result, communication, and use of new instruments) through the practical use of INTERACT products and services.

Result indicator 1 directly relates to intended change 1 above, and its value is directly affected by actions executed in the OP.

Result indicator 2 may directly relate to intended change 2 above, however it is necessary to specify the term *using* in the indicator. The evaluators found that in the current programme (INTERACT II), 100 % of the ETC programmes participated in events. *Autrement dit*, for INTERACT III it is expected that over a period of seven years, each ETC programme will at

least once use a service of INTERACT. Measured in such way, the value of 100 % of using does not provide a clear target, nor does it express the actual intended change – improvement of management by applying INTERACT services or tools.

### Recommendations

It is recommended to establish the value of result indicator 2 on the basis of measurement of two factors:

- a. The degree of application of knowledge / know-how acquired through events, and the degree of application of tools
- b. Satisfaction level, perception of usefulness and estimate on impact of application of application of knowledge / know-how acquired through events, and of tools.

This measurement could be made through a survey, taking place for example six months after the event took place or the tool was offered.

The indicator - Level of % of programmes using INTERACT products and services (composite of application, usefulness and impact) will be measured through a survey of ETC programmes. They could be requested to score the following questions on a likert scale from 1 to 5:

1. Did you apply **know-how** that you acquired during INTERACT events in your work?
2. Did that help to improve i. the management and/or control capacity of your programme, or ii. the capacity in capturing and communicating the programmes results, or iii implementation of innovative approaches ?
3. Did you apply a **tool** / tools that you acquired from INTERACT in your work ?
4. Did that help to improve i. the management and/or control capacity of your programme, or ii. the capacity in capturing and communicating the programmes results, or iii implementation of innovative approaches ?
5. If you did not apply certain know-how or tools, was that due to a lack of quality or practicality of the know-how/tool (score = 1) or due to other factors (score = 5)?

*Note: if the Programme decides to keep 2 indicators per specific objective, so in total six, the above questions can be adjusted (split up) accordingly.*

It is recommended that ETC programmes shall only be considered to be *using* INTERACT products or services, if the so-called usefulness level is higher than 4. This value is based on the value resulting from the satisfaction survey, which the programme already executes at the end of each event. The value 4 reflects the outcome of satisfaction survey questions 4 (*I will be able to use this knowledge in my work*) and 7 (*The materials provided are clear and useful*), resp. 4,24 and 4,09, with a downward correction. The correction is based on the assumption that after 6 months, not all know-how/tools shall have been used; and on the normative opinion, that on a scale of 1 to 5, the minimum score should be good (4). The minimum usefulness level shall therefore be 4.

It is recommended to set the baseline and target value for this indicator in a practical and effective way. As found in the ex ante evaluation, the baseline for using INTERACT services and products is 100 %. The target shall be 100 % as well, but it shall include the suggested usefulness factor, an additional quality criterion that reflects the ambition of the program to provide high quality services.

#### **5.1.4 Evaluation question EQ 2.4**

*“Are the output indicators relevant to the actions supported?”*

##### **Findings**

The indicators proposed in OP version 2.3 are number of events, and number of tools.

##### **Judgement**

The actions through which OP INTERACT III intends to realize its objectives are the organisation of events and offering of tools. The output indicators relate directly to them. It should be noted however, that INTERACT is also providing individual consults, which are now not included or counted as events, although they possibly are important outputs.

##### **Recommendations**

In cooperation with the MA and IPs, the ex ante evaluators assessed the importance of individual consults. It was found that this was not substantial and not apt for inclusion in the indicator.

#### **5.1.5 Evaluation question EQ 2.5**

*“Are the intended outputs likely to contribute to the change in result indicators?”*

##### **Findings**

The intended outputs are events, tools and participants in events, tailored to ETC programmes. If realised in sufficient quality and quantity, they will affect the satisfaction level of ETC programmes with INTERACT products and services, and the % of ETC programmes using INTERACT products and services.

##### **Judgement**

The intended outputs are set in such a way, that they directly contribute to the defined result indicators.

##### **Recommendations**

-

### 5.1.6 Evaluation question EQ 2.6

“Are the common indicators used where relevant to the content of the investment priorities and specific objectives?”

#### Findings

The investment priority (category) is the *Institutional capacity of public administrations and public services related to implementation of the ERDF or actions supporting ESF institutional capacity initiatives*.

The specific objectives of the OP INTERACT III are:

Specific objective 1.1: To improve management and control capacity of ETC Programmes.

Specific objective 1.2: To improve the ETC capacity in capturing and communicating the programme results.

Specific objective 1.3: To improve the cooperation management capacity to implement innovative approaches (EGTC, Revolving Funds, MRSs, Article 96, ITI etc).

OP INTERACT III will realize events, and develop and offer tools for achieving the above objectives.

The indicators proposed in OP version 2.3 are number of events, and number of tools.

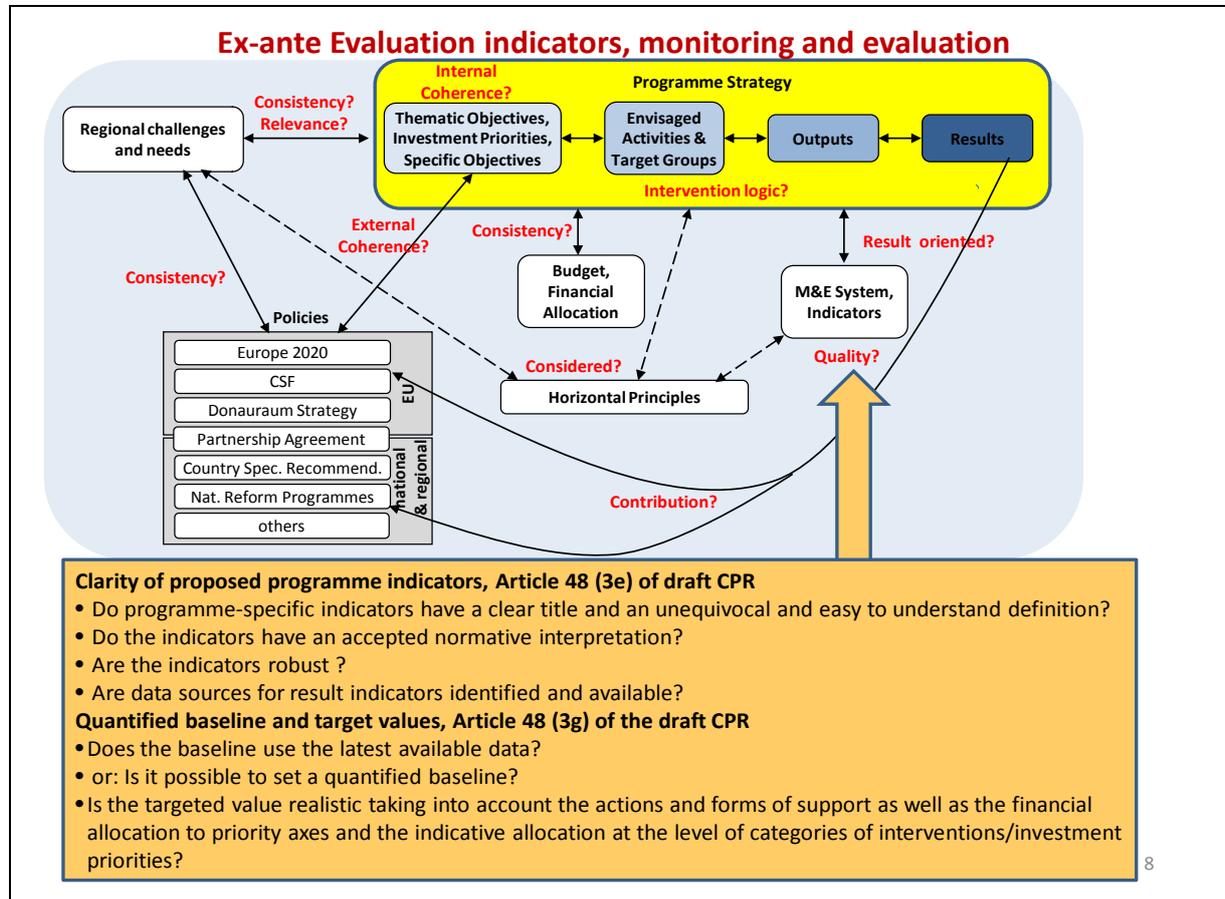
#### Judgement

The common indicators provided in Annex I of Regulation 1299/2013 do not directly apply to the investment priority and specific objective of OP INTERACT III, however a strong parallel can be observed with the priority *Labour market and professional preparation*, for which the common indicator is number of participants in activities. This is also a common indicator under ESF, which is particularly focused on human resource development.

#### Recommendations

It is recommended to add the output indicator „Number of participants in events“. The indicator shall reflect the number of participants in events organised by INTERACT as a lead organiser (otherwise INTERACT is not registering the participants and is not able to generate the data). Considering the aim to provide high quality services, the target shall be to reach the same number of participants as in INTERACT II (no increase).

## 5.2 Clarity of proposed programme indicators



Picture 5: Ex-ante Evaluation: Assessment of Indicator System and Monitoring

### 5.2.1 Evaluation question EQ 2.7

*“Do programme-specific indicators have a clear title and an unequivocal and easy to understand definition?”*

#### Findings

The output indicators are number of events, number of tools and number of participants in events (recommended by ex ante).

The result indicators are the satisfaction level of ETC programmes with INTERACT products and services, and the % of ETC programmes using INTERACT products and services.

#### Judgement

The output indicators are easy to understand.

The result indicators are clear and easy to understand; of course the reader needs to know how satisfaction and using of services and products is measured.

#### Recommendations

-

### 5.2.2 Evaluation question EQ 2.8

*“Do the indicators have an accepted normative interpretation?”*

#### Findings

The indicators are listed under EQ 2.7.

#### Judgement

The output indicators represent number of events, number of tools and (recommended) number of participants in events. It should be noted that the number of events and number of tools are not the actual number, but a *weighted* number, calculated on the basis of the weight set for each type of output. For example, if INTERACT is the lead-organiser of an event, the event counts as 1, but if INTERACT is only a co-organiser, it counts as 0.5. Likewise for tools, a newsletter requiring limited resources counts as 0.3, while other regular tools count as 1.

The result indicators represent satisfaction rates and usage rates, which are generally based on surveys. The indicators reflect usage of terms in normal practice.

#### Recommendations

It is recommended to call the first output indicator ***weighted number of events*** and the second output indicator ***weighted number of tools***.

### 5.2.3 Evaluation question EQ 2.9

*“Are the indicators robust?”*

#### **Findings**

The output indicators are weighted numbers of events and tools, and the number of participants in events (proposal ex ante).

In version 2.3 of the OP, six result indicators are proposed, two indicators for each of the three specific objectives. The first indicator is *Satisfaction level of ETC programmes with INTERACT products and services (aimed at each specific objective)* and the second indicator is *% of ETC programmes using INTERACT products and services (aimed at each specific objective)*.

#### **Judgement**

The output indicators are established according to a clear methodology and series can be followed over time without complications. There are no outliers or extreme values that could influence them.

The result indicators are proposed to be split up into six indicators, in which case the sample to be assessed in one specific objective could be relatively low, for example for the indicator related to the use of new instruments, and therefore sensitive to outliers or extreme values. However, based on the recommendation of ex ante under Evaluation Question 2.3, just two result indicators would be set, which reflect satisfaction with and using of a substantial number of products and services. In this way, the result indicators are less sensitive to outliers and extreme values and more robust.

#### **Recommendations**

As mentioned under EQ 2.3, it is recommended to establish the value of result indicator 2 on the basis of measurement of two factors:

- a. The degree of application of knowledge / know-how acquired through events, and of tools
- b. Satisfaction level, perception of usefulness and estimate on impact of application of application of knowledge / know-how acquired through events, and of tools.

#### 5.2.4 Evaluation question EQ 2.10

*“Are data sources for result indicators identified and available?”*

##### **Findings**

The data for the indicators are available from reporting on the M.A./IP activities, and from surveys managed by the M.A./IPs among ETC programmes and participants in events.

##### **Judgement**

The sources have been identified and are available.

##### **Recommendations**

-

### 5.3 Quantified baseline and target values

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#### 5.3.1 Evaluation question EQ 2.11

*“Does the baseline use the latest available data?”*

##### **Findings**

The baseline for the satisfaction rate (result indicator 1) is set on surveys for 2013, the baseline for % of ETC programmes using ... (result indicator 2) shall be set on the basis of a new survey.

##### **Judgement**

The baselines are based on the latest available data. It should be noted that INTERACT II shall continue well into 2015, so that at the moment that INTERACT III really starts, newer data for 2014 shall be available, which could also be taken into consideration.

##### **Recommendations**

It is recommended to set new baseline values before INTERACT III actually starts, for example by calculating the average value for the two indicators for 2013 and 2014.

### 5.3.2 Evaluation question EQ 2.12

*“Is it possible to set a quantified baseline?”*

#### Findings

Result indicator 1 (satisfaction) is based on quantification on a 1 to 5 likert scale.

Result indicator 2 (% of ETC programmes using ...) is based on the actual percentage of programmes using INTERACT products and services, according to the definition given.

#### Judgement

The result indicators both have quantified baselines. We refer to EQ 2.3 for an assessment of the result indicators, especially result indicator 2.

#### Recommendations

As regards result indicator 2, it is recommended that ETC programmes shall only be considered to be *using* INTERACT products or services, if the so-called usefulness level is higher than 4. This value is based on the value resulting from the satisfaction survey, which the programme already executes at the end of each event. The value 4 reflects the outcome of satisfaction survey questions 4 (*I will be able to use this knowledge in my work*) and 7 (*The materials provided are clear and useful*), resp. 4,24 and 4,09, with a downward correction. The correction is based on the assumption that after 6 months, not all know-how/tools shall have been used; and on the normative opinion, that on a scale of 1 to 5, the minimum score should be good (4). The minimum usefulness level shall therefore be 4.

It is recommended to set the baseline and target value for this indicator in a practical and effective way. As found in the ex ante evaluation, the baseline for using INTERACT services and products is 100 %. The target shall be 100 % as well, but it shall include the suggested usefulness factor, an additional quality criterion that reflects the ambition of the program to provide high quality services.

### 5.3.3 Evaluation question EQ 2.13

*“Is the targeted value realistic taking into account the actions and forms of support as well as the financial allocation to priority axes and the indicative allocation at the level of categories of interventions/investment priorities?”*

#### Findings

All targeted values are based on experiences (values) achieved under INTERACT II. INTERACT III is very similar to INTERACT II, the priority, focus, activities and budget are comparable.

As stated under EQ 2.8, the output indicators represent number of events, number of tools and (recommended) number of participants in events. It should be noted that the number of events and number of tools are not the actual number, but a *weighted* number, calculated on the basis of the weight set for each type of output. For example, if INTERACT is the lead-organiser of an event, the event counts as 1, but if INTERACT is only a co-organiser, it

counts as 0.5. Likewise for tools, a newsletter requiring limited resources counts as 0.3, while other regular tools count as 1. This method is clear and effective, but in case of dedicating relatively large inputs to an output (time or money), it could be justified to assign larger values to an event or a tool.

### **Judgement**

The targeted values are based on values achieved under INTERACT II, with a similar budget. The budget of INTERACT III is slightly higher due to a correction for inflation. This means that with a view to the financial allocation, the targeted values are realistic.

### **Recommendations**

It is recommended to enable the MA/IPs to assign larger values to the output indicators number of events and number of tools, in case that relatively large input is dedicated to such event or tool. Due to the specific character of each event and tool, it is extremely complicated and not effective to pre-define a methodology for this. It is therefore recommended that the MA/IPs shall identify such cases individually and assign a value upon joint deliberation. This procedure shall be transparent and subject to monitoring by the Monitoring Committee and evaluations, which provides sufficient guarantees for its proper use.

As mentioned above, it is recommended to add the output indicator „Number of participants in events“. The indicator shall reflect the number of participants in events organised by INTERACT as a lead organiser (otherwise INTERACT is not registering the participants and is not able to generate the data). Considering the aim to provide high quality services, the target shall be to reach the same number of participants as in INTERACT II (no increase). The basis for setting the target of this output indicator should be sufficiently solid, e.g. directly extracted from a counting system in place for the last year(s) of implementation. In order to define a target for the OP 2014-2020, upon ample consultation with the MA, the ex ante evaluator recommends to use the following methodology (data/figures extracted by the MA):

- Use of 2013 as sample year for actual calculation of participants. In order to define the events to be taken into account it has been agreed to use the events of 2013 present in the Event Registration Tool minus those that were indicated as “Support to external events” in the Annual Implementation Report;
- Calculation of 2013 events has been reduced by 6 events (3 with most participants and 3 with least participants) to eliminate extremes.

Based on the described methodology the final count has been of:

- a. 49 events;
- b. 2101 participants.

After the reduction:

- a. 43 events;
- b. 1724 participants.

In order to obtain an estimation of participants for the previous years in which INTERACT II activities took place (2008-2012), we have taken into account the amount of events of those years and per each year applied a coefficient calculated on a proportion between the events of each year and the events in 2013:

The following numbers were established:

- 2008: 23 events, 53,49% of the events in 2013;
- 2009: 41 events, 95,35% of the events in 2013;
- 2010: 50 events, 116,28% of the events in 2013;
- 2011: 47 events, 109,3% of the events in 2013;
- 2012: 36 events, 83,72% of the events in 2013.

By applying the coefficient the estimated numbers of participants for the previous years are (and considering for 2007 the average number of participants of the other years):

- 2007: 1891;
- 2008: 1124;
- 2009: 2003;
- 2010: 2443;
- 2011: 2296;
- 2012: 1759;
- 2013: 1724.

The total estimated amount for 2008-2013 of participants to INTERACT events, and target for the next programming period is **13240**.

## 5.4 Suitability of milestones

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### 5.4.1 Evaluation question EQ 2.14

*“Are the milestones relevant, do they capture essential information on the progress of a priority?”*

#### Findings

The milestones are values for weighted number of events (390 by 2018, and 890 by 2023) and for weighted number of tools (100 by 2018, and 250 by 2023).

#### Judgement

The milestones express interim values for output indicators of INTERACT III. They describe the progress by 2018 and are relevant. No milestone is set for 2016.

#### Recommendations

If included as an output indicator, a milestone for participants in events should be set.

### 5.4.2 Evaluation question EQ 2.15

*“Can they be realistically achieved by 2018 and 2022, considering also the rhythm of implementation of the current programme and available resources?”*

#### Findings

As explained in the additional qualitative information on the establishment of the performance framework in section 2.A.7 of the OP, the milestones have been set while taking into consideration that INTERACT III will start in July 2015 and will run on until 2023. A correction has been made for the late start, and continuation of the OP is foreseen until into 2023.

As regards the rhythm of implementation of INTERACT II and available resources, the resources available in INTERACT III are comparable, but an improvement is foreseen with respect to liquidity of the programme. Based on experience from INTERACT II and the EC policy for limited advance payments, the Certifying Authority / Managing Authority have requested the Member States to express their commitment to early payment of the own contribution to the programme. This commitment has been clarified, each Member State has expressed its opinion and shall pay according to the commitment it made in April 2014.

#### Judgement

Based on the assessment of the budget, availability of resources, and timing of execution, the milestones can be realistically achieved.

#### Recommendations

-

### 5.4.3 Evaluation question EQ 2.16

*“Is the availability of data for informing the milestones at the key review points (progress reports 2019) plausible?”*

#### Findings

The data for the indicators are available from reporting on the M.A./IP activities, and from surveys managed by the M.A./IPs among ETC programmes and participants in events. The availability of these data, that the M.A. generates itself directly or through external surveys, is under control of the M.A.

So far, only data on registered participants are available electronically. Data on actual participation are available in hard-copy (signed participation lists), but not electronically.

#### Judgement

The timely availability of data for establishing the milestones is plausible.

#### Recommendations

A system has to be set up for electronic data on actual participants in events.

Likewise, if individual consult shall be included in the indicator events, a system for their evidence should be created.

### 5.4.4 Evaluation question EQ 2.17

*“In case milestones for 2018 also include result indicators: Could result indicators for 2018 be influenced by external factors out of control of the MA, putting the programme at risk of not meeting its milestones and targets?”*

#### Findings

The milestones do not include result indicators. It should be noted however, that the result indicators shall be reported on an annual basis, for quality management and monitoring of the programme.

#### Judgement

-

#### Recommendations

-

## 5.5 Administrative capacity, data collection procedure and evaluation

### 5.5.1 Evaluation question EQ 2.18

*“Are there any possible bottlenecks which might impede management, monitoring and evaluation of the programme based on previous experience? If yes, are there any preventive measures such as awareness raising or training that could be recommended?”*

#### Findings

The management structure of the programme is being changed. Upon ample consultation among the MA, IPs, and MC, the IS has been trimmed and competencies for specific activities moved to IPs. This structure has been worked out in a paper, and has been approved by the MC. The paper includes the following overview:

Specific Tasks (non-exhaustive list)	Lead by
MA responsibilities defined in the Regulation: Reporting to EC, supporting MC, financial management, Monitoring System, programme data servers, emails, intranet, external programme evaluation, fulfilling core communication requirements, supervising the sound implementation of the programme, including quality assurance	MA / IS
Administration and finance management and assuring the audit trail + Control + CA and payment tasks + Audit (system and operations)	AA-CA-FLCs and ALL bodies
Quality assurance: Joint quality standards for all activities, quality review, staff training needs, on-going collecting evaluation data	Viborg
Programme Communication strategy implementation: consistency way to communicate INTERACT products to target groups, website content (webmaster), on-going publications (e.g. newsletters), ad hoc promotional products, visual identity	Vienna
Making ETC communication more effective: tools to increase visibility of thematic results of ETC programmes, EU-wide campaigns, to EU-level stakeholders, training and tools communication managers	Valencia
Gathering projects results of ETC programmes: Database, tools for thematic analysis, website (incl. KEEP)	Turku
Providing events and tools based on annual work plans, in line with the 3 specific objectives, addressing /involving all identified target groups (a - ETC, IPA, ENI programme authorities and stakeholders, b- Objective 1 regional and national authorities and stakeholders, c-EU-wide institutions and stakeholders)	All IPs

The procedure for monitoring is set and no complications are expected there.

The evaluation shall be executed by an external advisor.

### **Judgement**

Based on the mid-term evaluation (MTE) of INTERACT II, three critical points may be mentioned:

1. Clear assignment of tasks, setting deadlines, control of progress. It resulted from the MTE, that it was sometimes not clear who should do what by when. In the new structure, the intention is that the MA stands more at a distance from the activities (smaller IS, IPs have more tasks), and shall execute a control function at arm's length. This can have a positive effect.
2. Procurement. Procurement procedures according to Slovak law are subject to frequent legislative changes and sensitive to human err. If not started well in advance, the required services or products may arrive late.
3. KEEP. With difficulties and delays, KEEP has been established and is a data-base with a lot of interesting information on ETC projects. However, on-line access to / working with the data-base should still be made more user-friendly, and the added value of KEEP should be demonstrated and communicated to the stakeholders and larger professional community.

### **Recommendations**

1. It is recommended that the MA shall prepare and execute public procurement well in advance before services or goods are actually needed in the programme.
2. It is recommended that KEEP shall be brought to the high quality status that is needed, and that its added value shall be demonstrated and communicated to stakeholders and the larger professional community.

### 5.5.2 Evaluation question EQ 2.19

*“Is the monitoring procedure likely to provide data in order to feed into decision making, reporting and evaluation based on an assessment of the sources of information and how the data will be collected?”*

#### **Findings**

The data for the indicators are available from reporting on the M.A./IP activities, and from surveys managed by the M.A./IPs among ETC programmes and participants in events. The availability of these data, that the M.A. generates itself directly or through external surveys, is under control of the M.A. Data are collected continuously and the feedback loop is often closed in a very short time, especially when assessing the satisfaction of participants in events (at the end of the event).

#### **Judgement**

The monitoring procedure is adequate for providing data in order to feed into decision making, reporting and evaluation.

#### **Recommendations**

-

### 5.5.3 Evaluation question EQ 2.20

*“Are the monitoring procedures likely to provide data in time to inform result indicators?”*

#### **Findings**

We refer to question 2.16.

#### **Judgement**

The monitoring procedures are expected to provide data in time for reporting on result indicators.

#### **Recommendations**

-

#### 5.5.4 Evaluation question EQ 2.21

*“Are adequate procedures in place to ensure the quality of data (e.g. a precise definition of the content and source of each indicator)?”*

##### **Findings**

The output indicators are weighted number of events, weighted number of tools and number of participants in events (recommended by ex ante). The definition is set according to the weight for each type of activity, and the assessment by the MA/IP. The sources are the data collected/generated by the MA/IPs and the Annual Implementation Reports that they are processed into.

The result indicators are the satisfaction level of ETC programmes with INTERACT products and services, and the % of ETC programmes using INTERACT products and services. The way of measuring satisfaction and the source (feedback from participants at events) is clear. As regards the % of ETC programmes using INTERACT products and services, this indicator will measure the intended change resulting from the OP, but the original interpretation would give a number of 100 % and not provide much insight in actual application of knowledge/know-how or products.

##### **Judgement**

As regards the quality of data, for the output indicators and result indicator 1 the quality is clear, but for result indicator 2 a more elaborate definition is to be defined, along the lines of the ex ante recommendation.

##### **Recommendations**

As stated under EQ 2.3, it is recommended to establish the value of result indicator 2 on the basis of measurement of two factors:

- a. The degree of application of knowledge / know-how acquired through events, and of tools
- b. Satisfaction level, perception of usefulness and estimate on impact of application of application of knowledge / know-how acquired through events, and of tools.

This measurement could be made through a survey, taking place for example six months after the event took place or the product was offered. The ex-ante evaluators provide a paper with reflections on this indicator to the M.A. for further development and approval by the MC. After that, the baseline for 2014 could be set.

## 6 Component C3 – Evaluation of the financial allocations and the adequacy of human resources and administrative capacity

### 6.1 Evaluation of the consistency of financial allocations

#### 6.1.1 Evaluation question EQ 3.1

*“Do the financial allocations concentrate on the most important objectives in line with the identified challenges and needs and with the concentration requirements set out in the Regulations (Art. 16 of the CPR)?”*

#### Findings

The OP INTERACT III is a specific programme, which beside its technical assistance completely concentrates on one priority axis, being increasing the capacity of public administration to manage ETC programmes. Specific objectives have been set on the basis of a survey executed among the ETC programmes and related stakeholders, such as the European Commission and national authorities responsible for ETC.

#### Judgement

The financial allocation fully concentrates on the most important objective and is in line with the identified challenges and needs.

#### Recommendations

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#### 6.1.2 Evaluation question EQ 3.2

*“Are the financial allocations to each priority axis and to categories of interventions consistent regarding the identified challenges and needs that formed the objectives as well as the planned actions?”*

#### Findings

The OP has two priority axis, which each focuses on one category of intervention. An over view is given in the table below.

Axis	Category of intervention	Total budget
Priority axis 1 – Service development and delivery	096 Institutional capacity of public administrations and public services related to implementation of the ERDF or actions supporting ESF institutional capacity initiatives	<b>43.100.576</b>
Priority axis 2– Technical Assistance	121 Preparation, implementation, monitoring and inspection	<b>3.244.130</b>
		<b>46.344.706</b>

## **Judgement**

The main financial allocation has been made to priority axis 1 – service development and delivery and in this axis, the complete allocation has been assigned to category of intervention 096 - Institutional capacity of public administrations and public services related to implementation of the ERDF, which fully corresponds to the identified needs and planned actions.

## **Recommendations**

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## 7 Component C4 – Evaluation of the contribution of the Europe 2020 strategy

### 7.1 Contribution to EU-2020 and macro-regional strategies

#### 7.1.1 Evaluation question EQ 4.1

*“What is the potential contribution to/benefit from the programme to EU-2020 objectives and targets?”*

#### Findings

The 5 targets for the EU in 2020 are:

1. Employment - 75% of the 20-64 year-olds to be employed
2. R&D / innovation - 3% of the EU's GDP (public and private combined) to be invested in R&D/innovation
3. Climate change / energy greenhouse gas emissions - 20% (or even 30%, if the conditions are right) lower than 1990 , 20% of energy from renewables, 20% increase in energy efficiency
4. Education - Reducing school drop-out rates below 10%, at least 40% of 30-34-year-olds completing third level education
5. Poverty / social exclusion - at least 20 million fewer people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion

OP INTERACT III aims to improve the management of ETC programmes, i.e. public administration bodies managing those programmes. The OP shall 1. Continually support and improve management of ETC programmes 2. Improve measuring of results of ETC programmes, and to improve communicating them to stakeholders and the public and 3. Support ETC programmes in applying innovative instruments.

#### Judgement

As described in Evaluation Question 1.1, OP INTERACT III directly contributes to strengthening public administration, which is a priority of the Strategy 2020, 2014-2020 ESIF and of many National reform programmes.

Moreover, the ETC programmes themselves include funding for projects within the 11 thematic objectives of ESIF. It is assumed that all ETC programmes include one or more of the five Europe 2020 priority areas (employment, R&D, climate change and energy policy, education, and poverty/social inclusion). Cross border mobility of workers, students and researchers may especially contribute to optimisation of labour markets, of the use of education programmes and to development of R&D. All three specific objectives therefore indirectly contribute to achieving the Europe 2020 objectives.

The Europe 2020 strategy explicitly calls for stronger synergies between different EU programmes and national policies, and for the use of integrated and multi-country approaches. The needs' survey executed for drafting the OP stressed the need for better coordination of ETC programmes with national programmes, and INTERACT III will tailor to

that need. Specific objective 1.3 aims at supporting ETC programmes in applying innovative instruments, such as EGTC, revolving funds, ITI etc. OP INTERACT III will also in this way contribute to realisation of Strategy 2020.

## Recommendations

*We refer to recommendations under EQ 1.1*

### 7.1.2 Evaluation question EQ 4.2

*“Taking into account the size of the programme and the plans of national and regional actors and partners to prepare a framework for alignment of founding with the strategic content of the EUSDR as well as the regional situation and trends, what is the potential contribution to/benefit from the programme to the Danube Region Strategy?”*

## Findings

After the endorsement of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region in 2009, and of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region in 2010, INTERACT II has in close cooperation with the EC delivered a variety of products and services to support these strategies.

Based on its mandate by the EU Member States and the European Commission, INTERACT is offering dedicated support to cooperation programmes involved in the preparation and implementation of EU Macro-Regional Strategies:

- INTERACT Point Turku is contact point for ETC programmes within the Baltic Sea Region Strategy and is also leader of a Laboratory Group with Senior experts representing ETC programmes, Mainstream Programmes, ENPI Programmes and International Financial Institutions to support the implementation of the Strategy.
- INTERACT Point Vienna is contact point for ETC programmes within the Danube Region Strategy and coordinates the Danube LabGroup, whose functioning and composition are comparable to those of the Baltic Sea LabGroup.
- INTERACT Point Valencia is contact point for ETC programmes within the Adriatic-Ionian Region Strategy.

## Judgement

INTERACT has a key role in promoting the macro-regional strategies and in facilitating their implementation. INTERACT II has delivered a variety of products and services for this purpose, and INTERACT III is set to continue this work.

The evaluators note that there is some scepticism among officials across the EU about implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. This may relate to the fact, that the EUSDR has very limited own budgets for funding projects. The EUSDR is divided over 11 priorities, of which some seem to be moving forward faster than others, depending on the complexity of the priority and the capacity of the responsible institution(s). If INTERACT III spends considerable resources on priorities that are less successful, this may have a negative effect on the impact of the OP.

## Recommendations

It is recommended that INTERACT III assesses the priorities of the EUSDR and that it supports those priorities, which have most potential to be successfully developed and realised.

## 8 Component C5 – Evaluation of the process of programming and implementation

### 8.1 Evaluation of the process of programming and implementation

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#### 8.1.1 Evaluation question EQ 5.1

*“Have all relevant partners (stakeholders, targets) been duly involved in the design of the programme?”*

#### Findings

For designing the OP, a Programming Task Force was created, with representatives of the Member-States, EC, MA and IPs participating. This PTF was operational from 2012 until 2014.

The M.A./IPs have executed a survey among ETC programmes, the EC, national representatives for ETC, and other stakeholders to assess the needs and challenges to be addressed during the 2014-2020 period.

Various aspects of the new OP, such as the management structure, have been developed and then consulted with the Monitoring Committee. The Monitoring Committee has commented draft OPs over a period of more than a year.

#### Judgement

For drafting the OP, the MA and IPs have gone through a thorough process of consultations. Special attention has been paid to identifying needs among the target groups, and challenges have been developed on that basis. The members of the MC (Member-States) have had the opportunity to comment the OP at various MC meetings, and also through their representatives in the Programming Task Force. The partnership principle has been duly respected.

#### Recommendations

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### **8.1.2 Evaluation question EQ 5.2**

*“Does the programme foresee a proper involvement of key partners in implementation (incl. monitoring and evaluation) of the programme?”*

#### **Findings**

Monitoring of the programme is primarily executed by the Monitoring Committee, on the basis of Annual Work Plans and (external) evaluations. The annual work plans are defined on the basis of annual needs' assessments among the ETC programmes. Evaluations shall include satisfaction and usefulness surveys. As such the key partners are involved, or their opinions represented, in monitoring and evaluation.

#### **Judgement**

Through the MC, the participating Member States and the EC are directly involved in monitoring and evaluation. The ETC programmes themselves have possibilities to express their needs and satisfaction, however they are not directly represented in the MC.

#### **Recommendations**

It is recommended to consider involving the ETC programmes themselves more directly in monitoring of the OP, for example by inviting representatives of ETC programmes as observers to MC meetings on a rotational basis. This would provide a possibility for direct contact between ETC programmes and MC members, and for ETC programmes to express their point of view to specific points on the agenda.