

NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The Task Force of Central Europe Programme developed a draft operational programme for transnational cooperation in line with Art. 6 of the ERDF Regulation¹. According to the SEA directive (2001/42/EC) a Strategic Environmental Assessment has been performed. The environmental report was elaborated according to Annex I of the SEA directive.

Current state of the environment

The environmental context in which the transnational programme for Central Europe is proposed for implementation is briefly described, on the basis of European status reports of the environmental situation. Efforts are still needed to improve general conditions for soil, water resources, air quality, fauna, flora and biodiversity. Technological improvements to reduce emissions are overridden by increasing energy and transport demand. The diversity of the natural heritage is one of the biggest assets of the programming area. Although the Natura 2000 network has been established in most member states during the last ten years, the loss of biodiversity did not come to a halt. Cultural landscape and heritage sites represent a part of Central Europe's identity, the integration of these values into economic activities is just at the beginning.

Programme objectives and priorities

In the light of the Community Strategic Guidelines (Lisbon/Gothenburg) the overall strategic goal of the programme is to strengthen territorial cohesion, to promote internal integration and to enhance the competitiveness of Central Europe:

- Priority 1 – *Facilitating Innovation across Central Europe* – will improve the framework for innovation and build up the capabilities to transfer innovation systems and to apply them.
- Priority 2 – *Improving Accessibility of and within Central Europe* – will improve the interconnectivity and intermodality on transport across the cooperation area.
- Priority 3 – *Using our environment responsibly* – develops a high quality environment by managing natural resources and heritage, by reducing risks and impacts of natural and man-made hazards.
- Priority 4 – *Enhancing competitiveness and attractiveness of cities and regions* – will promote polycentric settlement structures and will address the effects of demographic and social change on urban and regional development.

Methodology of impact assessment

For each area of intervention possible effects on the relevant environmental issues were analysed, referring to “guiding questions” and environmental protection objectives based on legislation and strategic policies on international, community or state level. As none of the

¹ Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006

areas of intervention are described sufficiently detailed to perform a quantitative assessment, the assessment concentrates on a qualitative description of possible impacts (positive, neutral or negative) on relevant environmental issues referring to SEA directive (2001/42/EC).

Possible environmental impacts of the programme

The programme addresses the most important environmental issues of Central Europe in a positive way. Priority 1 supports the implementation of best available (or at least advanced) technologies, which – in a mid-term perspective - will lead to an increase of resource and energy efficiency in production and service sector. Priority 2 aims to change transnational framework conditions in the direction of sustainable and energy efficient mobility systems, by implementing multimodal logistics and cooperation networks. Priority 3 supports the overall improvement of environmental conditions in the programming area, with positive impacts on most of the environmental issues including biodiversity and human health. Priority 4 promotes activities to improve living conditions in urban areas, with positive impacts on water resources, soil, air and environmental related health risks.

An assessment of possible positive or negative effects cannot be performed for all areas of intervention, due to the lack of information on details about possible downstream activities. Some activities seem to have only limited impact on environmental issues (e.g. “Capitalizing on cultural resources for more attractive cities and regions”).

Negative impacts on environmental issues cannot be excluded, if the programme supports the preparation of additional physical infrastructure (road, rail, waterways) to be part of Trans-European transport corridors. This could lead to an increase in land take, fragmentation of habitats and additional impact through air and noise pollution in sensitive areas. Ongoing implementation of risk technologies (like gen manipulated seeds) or the enhanced exploitation of energy sources could have indirect negative impacts on landscape, soil and biodiversity, but these impacts will be taken into account by strict project selection criteria.

Main results and recommendations

Most of the programme priorities and areas of intervention will have positive impacts on the relevant environmental issues. Significant negative impacts on the environment can be excluded, as project selection criteria will be elaborated in line with the overall objectives of the programme and the objectives of the priorities.

Programme implementation should focus on key issues of long-term balanced development in a transnational context, like reducing negative impacts of climate change, natural resource management, sustainable transport systems and decrease of emissions, in line with the general principle of “sustainability” as defined in the operational programme.