

SUMMARY

The published report presents results of the study on the effects of the Neighbourhood Programme INTERREG-TACIS CBC Poland – Belarus - Ukraine 2004-2006. The study was contracted out by Polish Ministry of Regional Development – The Department of Territorial Cooperation and executed by the research team of the EGO s.c. – Evaluation for Government Organizations company, consisting of: dr Karol Olejniczak, Bartosz Ledzion, dr Anna Domaradzka-Widła, Elżbieta Kozłowska, Katarzyna Krok, Andrzej Krzewski, Adam Płoszaj, Łukasz Widła-Domaradzki, Michał Wolański, Katarzyna Wojnar, Katarzyna Zalewska.

The main objective of the research was to assess the impact of the Neighbourhood Programme Poland – Belarus - Ukraine INTERREG III A / Tacis CBC 2004-2006 on economic, social and territorial cohesion at the border area covered. This included the explanation of the mechanism responsible for the scale and quality of this impact. The subject of the analysis was the PBU Programme as a whole (Polish, Ukrainian and Belarusian side), thematic groups of projects and single investments, as well as areas on which the Programme was realised.

METHODOLOGY

The research concept was based on three key assumptions. The first involved implementing the Theory Driven Evaluation – an approach that, including the analysis of the effects, considers contextual factors and the mechanism of change on the area of intervention as well as relates the Programme to broader theories – in this case, regional development and territorial cooperation. Secondly, the dual character of cross-border cooperation programmes was taken into consideration as well as two types of effect were studied – improving the standards of life and socio-economic integration of border regions. Thirdly, the empirical research was focused on a local level (districts and individual projects).

A broad range of quality and quantity methods were used in the study. These include: an in-depth review of literature on territorial cooperation, analysis of national and regional statistics, desk research on Programme documents, logical models, interviews with 23 key members of the process of programming and implementing of the Programme, 80 individual interviews with beneficiary and local authorities representatives, carrying out surveys on 95 beneficiaries, project countries (231 of Polish beneficiaries and 147 foreign partners) and microprojects (157 projects), visits to specific investment project areas (60 projects located in

Poland, Ukraine and Belarus), carrying out surveys of twin communities located near and far from the border with and without the INTERREG (Zwierzyniec, Szczepieszyn, Włodawa, Hrubieszów) projects, as well as a preliminary survey of local and regional press.

CONCLUSIONS

To sum up the overall activity of the Programme, The main conclusion is that Programme has mainly local effects and it has rather “close-to-border” than “transborder” nature. Its effects were noticeable mainly locally. However taking the difficult context of the Programme activity into account (low level of development, the border as a strong barrier) the fact that so many projects were implemented despite unfavourable conditions has to be assessed undoubtedly as a success of the Programme.

The study identified five key issues concerning the effects and also a broad scope of factors explaining the current state the situation.

1. There was a disproportion between the activity of Polish and eastern beneficiaries.

This observation is proven by allocation of the funds divided into territorial units and concentration of funds on the Polish side, concentration of projects on the Polish side, partnership structure, disproportion between the number of projects implemented by Polish, Ukrainian and Belarusian institutions.

The identified disproportion is a result of four contextual factors. The first key explanation concerns a major disproportion in funds allocated by the European Commission for the Polish side as a part of INTERREG IIIA (amounting to EUR 37 million) and for the Belarusian and Ukrainian side as a part of TACIS-CBC (EUR 7 million). The second factor is that partners from Ukraine and Belarus come from the other side of the border - a barrier that continues to grow stronger and tighter (visas requirements, limited capacity of border crossings, differences in law, political situation). The third factor that determines the level of activity was the experience of potential beneficiaries. Ukrainian and Belarusian institutions had lower *know how* concerning applying for Union programmes than Polish counterparts. Finally, higher activity of the Polish side could also be a result of the fact that Polish beneficiaries often had readymade ideas for projects (although these ideas didn't concern cross border projects).

2. The Programme was mainly focused on the local quality of life, and to lesser extent on cross border integration.

This conclusion is based on the results of an assessment of most considerable financially transport system and environmental protection projects groups. Their actual results considered improving the quality of life with the "cross-borderness" index being very low (the effects were visible only to local inhabitants). Moreover, in all of these cases, foreign partners participated only as observers.

There are several explanations of this situation. Low level of the border area development was the contextual factor. Potential beneficiaries were trying to secure their basic development needs - mainly of infrastructural nature. At the same time, the potential "cross-borderness" of actions was blocked by high impermeability of the border (including the incompatibility of INTERREG/TACIS-CBC systems). In practice, the Polish side, due to difficulties in running common investments, ran the investments independently, consulting with eastern partners about their shape. The small scope of these projects limited the influence of its effects on the other side of the border. The factor resulting from the European Commission regulation concerning the rules of implementing INTERREG and TACIS-CBC and the process of choosing projects was another important reason. The Programme allotted a considerable sum for infrastructural actions, a sum practically unobtainable for eastern partners (due to TACIS-CBC regulations), and at the same time it did not define a distinct demarcation line between INTERREG IIIA funds and other programmes available to Polish beneficiaries. In practice, the infrastructure on the area of Poland was supported by funding from ZPORR/IOPRD, INTERREG IIIA, rural programmes (PROW/RADP) and sometimes from RPO/ROP.

3. The improvement of life quality was mainly local and “close to border”.

The main reason is the scope of intervention (the Programme resources amounted to 2% of EU resources invested in analysed Polish regions), the size of individual projects (usually far below EUR 1 million) as well as their dispersion on the area. In practice, the effects were invisible and uncountable on a regional scale. The localness of the effects is best shown by the results of expert analyses and study visits. The Programme improved the quality of life on Polish areas, which are far more developed, while only individual infrastructural initiatives (5 projects) were implemented on the Belarusian and Ukrainian side.

There are possible infrastructural projects that while being realised on one side of the border influence the other side and result in positive cross-border effects. Yet it requires a considerable investment that is focused on issues important for all partners. It did not happened in the PBU Programme which was a result of two factors. First of all, Programme

resources were insufficient to support truly cross-border investments. Secondly, even though the area along the border had priority, the resources became scattered.

4. The cross-border integration occurred mainly on an institutional level, and to lesser extent, on target groups level.

The high number and structure of partnerships as well as positive results of partnership evaluation demonstrate excellent institutional integration. It is also important to mention the results of the analysis of Measure 2.1 that showed the integration of businesses and professional groups as well as connections between projects of Priority 2 and 1 (smaller projects, especially microprojects served as foundations for bigger initiatives). On the other hand, the results of studies on chosen local communities show that even high concentration of microprojects did not have an impact on the awareness of local communities and was not associated with the Programme. The analysis of microprojects illustrates the lack of a self-sustaining mechanism and low popularisation among broader target groups.

This situation can be explained by a combination of several factors. First of all, the theory of implementation of the Programme forced institutional partnerships (applicants received a high number of points for demonstrating partnerships). Secondly, in the case of projects financed by one source (INTERREG), the rules of qualification of costs prevented big events from happening on the Ukrainian or Belarusian side. As a result, the effects of organised events reached only the communities on one side of the border and invited guests. Thirdly, the conditions of implementation and subject matter of proposed projects resulted in developing a mainly expert formula of Measure 2.1 initiatives. Fourthly, in the case of Measure 2.2 projects, some of them are being carried out according to simplified schemas, seldom are they developed bottom-up by local communities.

5. Projects concerning tourism and security resulted in the highest improvement of the quality of life and integration.

This statement is proven by the result of an expert analysis based on data from the monitoring system, beneficiaries and gathered during field visits.

There are two explanations of this observation. First of all, cubature projects gave broader possibilities of development than local road construction projects and environmental protection projects. Secondly, they could be combined (which was common practice) with other cultural, educational and transnational initiatives. It resulted in subsequent multiplier effects and increased the stability of investments. Security projects belonged to a specific subsection. Their subject matter had a cross-border nature and after signing proper

agreements, their products could be used by all partners. This increased the level of integration, and as a result, the quality of life level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Using the conclusions from the evaluation of the Neighbourhood Programme Poland – Belarus - Ukraine INTERREG III A / Tacis CBC 2004-2006, 5 recommendation group for the future Programme were presented.

Recommendation 1: Maximising "cross-boarderness" of the Programme.

The Programme has to be focused on cooperation and cross-border integration with the emphasis on the "quality of life improvement" affecting the area on both sides of the border, not local activities visible only to one side of the border. We propose three solutions. First of all, we suggest implementing a distinct criterion of cross-boarderness as a "filter" of the presence in the Programme. All project proposals would have to clearly describe the ways of reaching the aim of cross-border integration. Only after fulfilling this condition, the value of the project regarding quality of life improvement can be analysed. Secondly, we suggest to resign from road construction and environmental protection projects that are purely local or apply only to one side of the border (e.g. local roads, water pipes, local water treatment plants, sewage treatment plants located far from the border). We suggest to allow the possibility of financing only the projects concerning building transport routes leading directly to border crossings, or environmental projects that can demonstrate a strong cross-border effect. Thirdly, we suggest to increase resources available to projects concerning business-related infrastructure and tourism development. Experience shows that they have great potential, are very influential and result with multiplier effects.

At the same time we suggest to tighten the supervision and increase content-related support for aforementioned infrastructural projects. Experience gained from the current Programme shows that most projects realised on the Ukrainian side have considerable delays, problems with procedures, etc. They result from lack of experience on one hand, and on the other hand, too optimistic and often superficial planning during the process of applying. Therefore we suggest that all projects that win the competition be thoroughly checked before signing the final agreement, and its procedural and organisational principles be meticulously discussed and put into details in cooperation with the beneficiary. This type of procedure will improve the effectiveness of implementing, the knowledge of beneficiaries and will allow to avoid numerous errors and delays in the contract.

Recommendation 2: Increasing support for institutional efficiency initiatives as well as local communities activity.

When local and regional institutions possess proper organisation culture, *know how* (effective procedures, processes, clear rules) as well as the ability to plan social and economical development strategically, it is a challenge for effective use of development resources. Therefore we suggest to create bigger reserve for projects concerning transferring experience and administrative practices between public institutions. The second, equally important side of the process involves reinforcing local communities activities, which is to say grass-roots initiatives originating in local communities and their NGOs. This is followed by our suggestion to increase resources for microprojects but only those that actively engage local communities.

Recommendation 3: Intensifying activities to increase the permeability of the border.

It appears to be justified to undertake such initiatives that will (in a limited way though) increase the permeability of the border. We suggest to create a Measure focused on safety and permeability of the border. As part of it, infrastructural projects considering border crossings, but above all, all innovative projects considering improving procedures, flow of visa traffic, flow of information, security and border traffic comfort could be financed. That would also be a place for common safety projects, e.g. traffic safety, environmental protection, coordination of rescue services.

Recommendation 4: Improving the monitoring system of the Programme.

We suggest a flexible approach towards indexes. It indicates a clear, short and Programme-wide list of indexes on the level of products and results (with a possibility of a division into project's thematic groups) as well as a declarative approach towards result indexes and the effect of indexes of each project. The base of the new system could be the study of the European Policies Research Centre, Strathclyde University carried out in 2003 for Władza Wdrażająca Programy Europejskie (Implementing Authority for European Programmes).

Recommendation 5: A reference to a broader European debate concerning territorial cohesion.

The European Union is in the process of developing a common and clear concept of "territorial cohesion". The current stage of development leads only to the conclusion that this term suggest a more horizontal, systemic approach to the question of cohesion. The opinion of the Polish government in this debate shows the need for a functional and integrated, that is focused on the development on endogenous potential, facilitating transfers and reinforcing

SUMMARY of a report from the “Evaluation of impact of the Neighbourhood Programme Poland – Belarus - Ukraine INTERREG III A / Tacis CBC 2004-2006 on achieving the economic, social, and territorial cohesion in areas covered by Programme’s support” research.



functional bonds between areas. In the light of these interpretations, future Poland – Belarus - Ukraine neighbourhood programmes should abandon border initiatives and focus on cross-border cooperation using the areas on all three sides of the border as the field of operation and supporting initiatives and projects that are capable of developing functional bonds between local and regional partners and three aforementioned areas. Constructing functional bonds and development based on endogenous potential naturally requires an evaluation of own resources and chances of development (finding a niche and defining own comparative advantage). It is worth to consider allowing projects considering the border area as a common resource, conducting common diagnostic studies and common development strategies for the cross-border area defined as a whole and not as a sum of activities of individual actors.