

EVALUATION OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE IN ABSORPTION OF EU STRUCTURAL ASSISTANCE

SUMMARY

Article 11 of the EU Council Regulation No. 1083/2006 obliges the Member States to adhere to the principle of partnership in the stages of programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The partnership in this context is defined as an involvement of various partners – regional and local authorities, social and economic partners, NGOs and other organisations – into the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the operational programmes.

This evaluation aimed to determine how this principle is respected in Lithuania. Three aspects have been evaluated: firstly, application of the legal provisions in the field of partnership as well as effectiveness and benefits of different partnership forms; secondly, factors influencing a partnership and the capacity of partners; and, thirdly, good practice partnerships.

The evaluation found positive and negative aspects. The positive aspect is that from the beginning of programming process of the Single Programming Document of Lithuania for 2004-2006 a significant progress was made in implementing the partnership principle. In addition, surveys found that the majority of both the responsible authorities as well as social and economic partners are more satisfied than dissatisfied with the implementation of the partnership principle in Lithuania and understand the benefits of this principle. It was also found that participants of the partnership process believed that the partnership impact on the use of EU structural support process is moderate, i.e., partnership is not only a formal requirement.

The evaluation has also identified some negative aspects. Firstly, regulation of partnership principle in the Lithuanian legislation is rather abstract and does not encapsulate all the aspects mentioned in the EU regulation. Furthermore, the internal documents of the institutions, specifying the national legislation, are not sufficiently clear in definition of the partner involvement in the decision-making mechanisms (rights, responsibilities, partner selection principles and criteria, possibilities to participate in the decision-making process (who, when and how), etc.).

Secondly, in the stages of programming, implementation and evaluation of the EU assistance, the partners have actively participated in the debates on the already-prepared decisions. However, there was a lack of systematic and extensive inclusion of the partners in the early stage of decision-making process. It is not always and not for all partners clear when the certain decisions are being prepared, and when they have an opportunity to engage into discussions, to make suggestions, alternatives.

Thirdly, the resources and abilities of partners to aggregate the interests of different socio-economic groups and to represent them in a decision-making process is an important barrier to effective partnership. In addition, most of the social and economic partners have indicated that one of the major reasons for organisation to participate in the partnership process is an aim to represent members' interests through using the EU support. This may pose a risk to proper implementation of the transparency and impartiality principles.

An evaluation provided a detailed response to eight evaluation questions, identified five risks and formulated five recommendations for the improvement of the partnership process in the field of the EU Structural Funds.