**SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS**

Technical meetings MA-NA-SZPO-JS on Programming process

via Zoom, September 03rd and October 08th, 2020

Participants (September 03rd): Managing Authority: Mrs. Adriana Ivancea, Mrs. Diana Gheorghe

National Authority: Mrs. Horváth Nikoletta, Ms. Dékány Dóra, Ms. Hujbert Szilvia, Mr. Molnár Tamás

SZPO: Ms. Bartha Nóra, Ms. Erdős Krisztina, Mr. Szécsi Jenő

BRECO/JS: Mrs Livia Banu, Mrs. Monica Terean, Mrs. Cristina Vesa, Mrs. Adriana Ghiță, Ms. Mihaela Cozma

Participants (October 08th):

Managing Authority: Mrs. Diana Gheorghe

National Authority: Mrs. Horváth Nikoletta, Ms. Dékány Dóra, Ms. Hujbert Szilvia, Mr. Molnár Tamás

SZPO:

BRECO/JS: Mrs. Monica Terean, Mrs. Cristina Vesa, Mrs. Adriana Ghiță, Mr. Marius Olariu

The following topics were discussed at the meetings:

1. **Terms of references for specialized technical assistance to be provided to potential applicants, in order to prepare high quality projects (strategic/normal) to be submitted within the Interreg Programme between Romania and Hungary, for 2021-2027 period;**
2. **Simplification and acceleration measures to be implemented in the future programme**
3. **Agenda of the 2nd Programming Committee Meeting (online)**
4. **AOB**

**OBJECTIVE OF THE MEETINGS:**

The Technical meetings were organised in the context of programming process, in view of reaching consensus on specific topics, in order to better prepare the future decisions of the Programming Committee or in case the future Monitoring Committee.

1. **Terms of references for specialized technical assistance to be provided to potential applicants, in order to prepare high quality projects (strategic/normal) to be submitted within the Interreg Programme between Romania and Hungary, for 2021-2027 period**

The technical assistance services to be acquired by the JS/IP from the current TA budget aim at assisting potential applicants in developing high quality projects - either strategic or normal. Such assistance will be provided through webinars, focus-groups and help-desk activities or any means with the same aim, and will be related to specific domains of interventions addressed by the future programme and/or will tackle administrative/legal issues that might impact the projects' preparation, or future implementation. In order to ensure a better/complete communication/understanding, activities are envisaged parallel in Romania and Hungary, to be performed in national languages, while translation will be also available, if necessary.

The need was identified to clearly indicate the time-sequences and correlation of activities performed in relation to strategic projects. The following clarifications are to be considered:

**Consortium elaborating the future Cooperation Programme (CP)** will develop a pipeline of strategic projects (see extract from the Inception Report attached as annex 1). Specifically, the experts will elaborate (1) a qualitative analysis of the past projects, they will develop the (2) concept of the strategic project and they will deliver (3) the methodology and criteria to identify projects of strategic importance.

The process will be participatory, involving interviewing of relevant stakeholders at regional and national levels, members of the Programming Committee, etc.

Following this exercise, the possible strategic interventions are to be identified, in view of being listed in the CP (conditioned by the approval of the Steering Committee and at the end endorsed by the Programming Committee with CP approval).

The estimated timeframe for the development of the pipeline of the strategic projects is October 2020 (PC approves the Territorial Analysis, Methodology and criteria for strategic projects) 13 February 2021 (Steering Committee approves strategic projects to be listed in the CP).

Accepting that the Consortium will develop a set of key prioritization criteria matrix that could help obtaining a list of strategic interventions with a high degree of feasibility, maturity, relevance and complementarities with other sources and strategies, the documentation submitted by the strategic projects’ applicants should be quite simple (e.g. intention letter), thus not requiring intensive assistance for its preparation.

Thus, the **TA services to be provided to any potential beneficiaries in order to help them develop high quality strategic projects** will be provided after the strategic projects are selected and listed in the CP and only to them. The scope is to have ready-to-implement projects immediately upon Programme’s approval by the COM (estimated timeframe of the services contract: February – December 2021).

Consequently, the ToR for TA services dedicated to strategic projects will be finalized accordingly, from the timeline perspective. This approach is to ensure the ideal sequence in time of the two types of services, as well as a clear separation of tasks.

Unitary approach and equal treatment in relation to assistance provided are most important, which is why the activities to be performed must be available for all potential applicants/beneficiaries and similar on both sides of the border.

The calendar of future services contracts activities between February - December 2021 - for strategic projects and normal projects after the call is launched - , as well as the type of support offered will be correlated both with the programming process and the activities performed under the programming services contract, in order to ensure the time-sequence of actions and avoid double financing.

**Conclusion:** The technical assistance services should be acquired by the JS/IP from the current TA budget and the activities should be correlated both with the programming calendar and the activities performed by the external experts for programming, ensuring avoidance of double financing and coherent sequence of timeframe. The activities performed under the technical assistance services contracts should be the same whilst procurement strategy of such services might be decided by each Member State.

The context of the support provided by the Programme for generating high quality strategic projects clarified and agreed during the technical meeting held on **October 8.**

The outcome of the strategic project generation process, including the national consultations in both countries and the decision of the Steering Committee, will be a list of strategic ideas that can be included in the first draft of the Cooperation Programme (February 2021).

Technical Assistance is going to be provided starting with the moment that the strategic projects are selected to be included in the CP by the Steering Committee.

Thus, the technical assistance experts will help the applicants to develop their project ideas to become Full Applications, by the time the Cooperation Programme should be submitted to the Commission (June 2021). Also, in terms of normal projects the assistance will start at the moment that the first Call for Proposal is launched, until the moment the applications will be submitted.

It was discussed whether or not the time schedule for development of strategic projects pipeline, September 2020 – February 2021, is realistic, as in fact the timeframe for development of strategic project concept is 2-3 weeks, if we consider that the national consultations in view of identifying projects of strategic importance will start in early December, after the 2nd PC meeting. According to the Inception Report, this timeline is anticipated by the experts, but minor deviations are expected (e.g. the delay caused by the IR approval).

Related to the strategic projects applications, templates will be designed by the programming experts but it was agreed that these should be simple documents, focusing entirely on the idea/ the strategic character.

In order to eliminate any risk, it was agreed that a **“long list**” of strategic ideas will be approved by the Steering Committee, including “reserve projects”, as well.

After the projects ideas are selected by the Steering Committee based on their strategic character, the applicants will elaborate the Full Applications, with the support of the TA.

Taking into account the reference to the current experience, the estimated number of strategic projects to be supported by the future Programme is 10. Thus, the estimated number of the online events is 1 for the webinar and 10-12 for the focus-groups. As the financial allocations for the next Programme is not yet available, it was proposed by HUNA that the applicants should design their projects based on building blocks technique, to make sure some pieces can be removed without endangering the whole concept.

It was also identified the need that the future online events to be coordinated and this aspect should be requested in the Terms of references for both parties. The Terms of References might include that the events will be organised by the Programme Structures and the experts will facilitate.

HUNA specified that the minimum requirements proposed for the experts are low (e.q. the involvement in just one project). Consequently, the Terms of References should include more specifications related to the experts - requirements related to the leadership experience, knowledge of the RO/HU language at advanced level, expertise in environmental field, expertise in building/infrastructure sector etc. The JS confirmed that the requirements included in the ToR proposal for the experts are minimum requirements. As similar expectations related to the experts should be consider by both parties, HUNA was invited to provide input on this topic.

It was agreed that the best time to launch the procurement for the specialized technical assistance is after the future PO’s are decided.

In order to be able to facilitate from the technical point of view the future events, the hired experts should have knowledge related to the Regulations set out by the European Parliament and by the Council that will govern for the forthcoming period and being in relation to the projects of strategic importance (i.e. the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) Regulation, the Common Provisions Regulations (CPR) applicable to the ERDF, the European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund (ERDF-CF) Regulation). Also, they should take into account that, at the end of the programming process, the Cooperation Programme shall be accompanied for information purposes by a list of planned operations of strategic importance, with a timetable (appendix 3a). Related to this provision, it was raised the question if the project of strategic importance listed in the Cooperation Programme will fail, the CP modification would be needed? Further discussion are needed as regards this topic, the Commission should be consulted as well.

**B. Simplification and acceleration measures proposed by RO side to be implemented in the future programme**

1. Preparing simplified Guides for applicants in parallel with the process of drafting the cooperation programme and launching the call(s) for project proposals as soon as possible (maybe even before the approval of the programme by the COM, subject to comply with relevant legal provisions).
2. Simplifying the general procedural framework at programme level. Upon MA’s proposal, joint working groups for drafting relevant documents related to future programme's implementation –Guide for Applicants, Projects Implementation Manual and Common FLC Manual (if the case) - are going to be established. These groups should start by analysing the last versions of the relevant documents of the current programming period and come up with simplification proposals.
3. Launching the entire available allocation at once, but with gradual deadlines for submission, based on types of projects (e.g.: shorter deadlines for soft projects and longer periods of submission in case of hard projects).
4. Exempting the Programme from the State Aid incidence - i.e. to support only projects that are not falling under state aid incidence.
5. Using the same or very similar IT system, i.e. the updated version of the eMS, that proved to be an efficient and user-friendly tool both for the beneficiaries and the Programme bodies as well.
6. Introducing in the Guide for Applicants the recommendation regarding the use of the electronic signature in order to ensure a smooth implementation of the projects (eliminates the need to print, fax, scan and post paper documents, considerably reduces the deadlines). It has been underlined that the costs with the electronic signatures could be reimbursed as preparation costs.
7. Introducing a flexibility rate at project level, similar to the one applied by the COM to cooperation programmes. Thus, within a project, 10% of the allocation for a budget line can be transferred to another budget line, for activities already approved within the application form and for the project’s objective, without the prior approval of JS/MA and with no actual modification of the application in this respect.
8. Analysing the projects on the reserve lists of the current Programme, as a good opportunity for a faster start for the future programme implementation. MA considers this an option, subject to fitting in future Programme’s context (selected POs, eligibility criteria). Once the projects have been included in the reserve list, they had undergone an assessment process and had a good quality score. They have a certain advantage in terms of experience, or have technical documentations already elaborated; they could be submitted by the first deadline of the call for proposals. Analysis of projects approved on the reserve lists within the framework of current RO-HU Programme is to be carried-out/discussed upon; further discussions on the topic are needed with the external experts (according to the Inception Report).

**Conclusion:**

The Programme bodies agreed on the following topics:

* Establishing joint working groups for drafting relevant documents for future programme's implementation (Guide for applicants, Projects Implementation Manual, Common FLC Manual), using the existing documents as starting points.
* Introducing a flexibility rate at project level similar to the one applied by the COM to cooperation programmes has been agreed upon, as well.
* Using the projects on the reserve list might be option but its feasibility and details needs to be clarified.
* Application of SCO more than currently used

Further discussions are needed as regards the following topics above others mentioned since there is a disagreement:

* to support only projects that do not fall under the state aid incidence;
* launching the entire allocation
* using the same IT system, i.e. the updated version of eMS;
* use of the electronic signature in order to ensure a smooth implementation of the projects;
* how to use reserve list (concept has not been sent yet)

Note: The Programming Committee will be informed about the possible direction of simplification and acceleration proposals for the future on which agreement has been reached on technical level. Nevertheless, future MC should be involved as more strategic decision-making body in those questions.

**C.** **Second meeting of the Programming Committee agenda**

The Second meeting of the Programming Committee is scheduled for November 2020 (the exact date will be set later on, via email). Subject to modification of the Inception report, the envisaged agenda includes the following topics:

* Approval of the Territorial Analysis,
* Decision on Policy Objectives (including ISOs) based on external experts' strategic orientation decision-making proposal;
* Setting up the Steering Committee for Selection of Strategic Projects (SCSSP) and approval of the relevant RoP;
* Approval of the methodology and criteria for selection of Strategic Projects

**Conclusion:** The Programme bodies agreed on the Agenda of the 2nd PC Meeting.

The Territorial Analysis will be submitted to PC approval through written procedure, in November, when the meeting of the Programming Committee is envisaged as well, for selecting the Policy Objectives/ISOs, based on strategic orientation decision-making proposal made by the external experts. Also, the methodology and criteria for selection of Strategic Projects will be submitted to PC approval.

The only remaining open issue is the RoP for the Steering Committee. By the time the Steering Committee approves strategic projects to be listed in the future Cooperation Programme, the procedural context regarding the setting up of this structure has to be clear. Consequently, the relevant RoP should be included on the Agenda of the 2nd PC Meeting and approved by it (November 2021). The draft of the RoP has been circulated between the Programme Structures and technical remarks related to the voting ratio, members (voting members and observers) were made. The Steering Committee will be designated by the Programming Committee and the only task that it has to accomplish is to select the long list of strategic projects to be included in the CP.

It was agreed that the Steering Committee members should not be endangered by any conflict of interests and should have the ability to assess the strategic perspective. Further discussions are needed regarding the proposal on the Steering Committee composition.

**D. AOB**

* Setting up the 1st working group, for drafting the Guide for applicants for 2020+.

RO and HU will designate participants.