BUILDING CAPACITIES FOR EVALUATION OF EUROPEAN UNION STRUCTURAL FUNDS IN LITHUANIA

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Since 1988, the evaluation of the EU structural funds has been obligatory. The European Commission (1999) requires to perform ex-ante, interim and ex-post evaluations of different stages of the political cycle and every level (the EU, state and municipality). In the programming period of 1999—2000, external evaluators performed preliminary evaluations as separate tasks or the tasks integrated into the programme development process. During earlier programming periods, preliminary evaluations were performed by the EC; however, this responsibility was transferred to the member states. The EC changed its point of view from stricter to a more flexible one. Member states can perform evaluations, which correspond to their needs, and this allows them emphasizing national questions.

In Lithuania, the Ministry of Finance (MF) in close partnership with an external evaluators have organized several conferences (see Table 1), during which the questions how to improve evaluation capacities in Lithuania and contribute to the formation of evaluation culture in the region of the Baltic states. A latter conference attempted to generalize the first results of evaluation experience and sought for answers on how to improve evaluation quality and pursue the usage of results. In both conferences, the reports were read by the highest level EU civil servants responsible for evaluation, the EC representatives and representatives of Lithuanian and worldwide external evaluators. Besides, in order to improve the capacities, the consortium of external evaluators organized a visit to the EC for the group members of evaluation coordination and other employees of the EU structural support coordination and planning institutions. This meeting attempted to encourage the exchange of information between Lithuanian officials and the EC general directorates, heads of the evaluation units of the General Secretariat and other specialists.

Table 1: Organized events to improve evaluation capacities in 2002—2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>№</th>
<th>Name of the conference</th>
<th>The institution responsible for the organization</th>
<th>Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ex-ante evaluation for SPD preparation</td>
<td>Ministry of Finance</td>
<td>17 of May 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Building evaluation capacities and formation of evaluation culture in Baltic States</td>
<td>Ministry of Finance</td>
<td>28—29 of November 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Evaluation of EU Structural Funds: Reinforcing Quality and Utilisation</td>
<td>Ministry of Finance</td>
<td>26—27 of March 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Cohesion Policy 2014—2020 Towards Evidence Based Programming and Evaluation</td>
<td>Ministry of Finance</td>
<td>4—5 of July 2013</td>
</tr>
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</table>
The quantitative research attempted to clarify what has an impact in initiating evaluations because initiation is a competence to define the problem and incorporate it into the agenda of public policy (see Figure 1). The obtained data show that the main influence in initiating evaluations is made by the EC. 29 per cent of the respondents indicated that the EC has a very big impact, and 34 per cent marked that the EC has a big impact. Thus one can note that according to 63 per cent of the respondents, the EC has a big impact in initiating evaluations. This was confirmed by a respondent of qualitative research who indicated that evaluations are often ‘Brussels-like’ (Interview with the employee of the Public Policy and Management Institute 2009.10.15). Evaluations have to become a tool of the government performance but, according to the present regulations, ex-post evaluations depend on the EU, while the national government orders monitoring and mid-term evaluation. According to 18 per cent of the respondents, administrators have a very big influence on initiating evaluations; 42 per cent indicated that administrators have a big influence on initiating evaluations. Thus one can see that according to the opinion of 60 per cent of respondents, administrators influence the initiation of evaluation. The respondents who marked ‘Something else’ were asked to explain their opinion. Some respondents repeated by mentioning the division or divisions of an institution responsible for initiating evaluation. Thus it can be seen that, according to 60 per cent of the respondents, administrators have influence on initiating evaluation. The respondents, who marked the answer “Something else”, were asked to explain their opinion. Some of them repeated themselves by indicating the subdivision responsible for evaluation or the subdivisions of the institution.

According to 25 per cent of the respondents, planned evaluation has an influence on initiating evaluations, while 34 per cent of the respondents claimed that planned evaluation has a big influence on initiating evaluations. As one can see, 59 per cent of the respondents claim that planned evaluation is important in initiating evaluations. In fact,
such result indicates the effectiveness of using evaluation plans; it is also one of the significant means in initiating evaluations. Considering other factors, which have influence on initiating evaluations, politicians were emphasized. In total, 40 per cent of the respondents marked that this is a very important factor, which has a big influence on initiating evaluations.

Another consequence, which makes us think, is the influence of the civil society (business, non-governmental organizations and service recipients) and other interested parties on initiating evaluations. The poll results reveal that 87 per cent of the respondents do not know or do not perceive the contribution of non-governmental organizations to initiating evaluation. The situation is similar with service recipients: 95 per cent of the respondents do not perceive or do not understand the contribution of the interested parties to the initiation of evaluations. Such limited participation of the civil society and the interested parties in initiating evaluations can be explained by several reasons. On the one hand, evaluations are directed to more technical things (e.g. indication of the baselines) rather than the impact of the reforms, their composition and implementation. On the other hand, evaluation is an obligatory procedure, not a tool for making better decisions. The most important socio-economic partners sometimes participate in the evaluation process because they are the members of the Structural Funds Monitoring Committee. In 2010 the MF organized several discussions of evaluators in order to foresee the topics actual for evaluation and the problems existing in the process of evaluation, as well as to increase networking. However, it is not known whether such discussions will be permanent.

The quality of monitoring data. The monitoring system was started to be created in the programming period of 2004—2006. Foreign and local experts participated in its creation and improvement. Timetables of the monitoring system and its procedures were sufficiently clear in different level institutions; however, the implementation of the information system of Structural Funds Management was late (European Policies Research Centre, 2009). At the time, difficulties were faced in indicating and collecting information of physical implementation indicators; therefore, there were some inaccuracies in interpreting the indicators defined in SPD (European Policies Research Centre, 2009). Information system of Structural funds management was created in order to save, aggregate and prepare the data for reports. It started to function fully only in 2006 (European Policies Research Centre, 2009). However, in reality this information system started providing qualitative data only after 4—6 years of using it. ESTEP (2007) indicated that the quality of monitoring data, temporal presentation stills needs to be improved. The main concern was related to the definition of indicators and the data input to the system on time.

The research provides empirical evidence that the situation of monitoring data is not significantly changed. All respondents of the qualitative research claimed that the monitoring system still lacks data. Under such circumstances, the evaluators admit that they have to use additional methods of collecting data. In order to collect monitoring data and report to the EC, Lithuania uses the evaluation function. This can be interpreted as a positive fact; however, it has to be noted that civil servants do not perform their function, i.e. to collect data: they either do not know how to do this or, maybe, the information system does not provide these possibilities. In fact, only one respondent emphasized that
in order to obtain appropriate data, the most important thing is the structure of the monitoring system, i.e. the ideas of the system creators where the data are obtained from, what is chosen from the projects in order to find out whether the aims of the project were achieved.

According to the European Policies Research Centre (2009), it is complicated to perform the quality assessment of Lithuanian EU Structural and Cohesion Funds monitoring data, but the evaluators of the centre highlighted the following advantages of the rise of monitoring system in Lithuanian public administration: (i) monitoring and information systems are created; (ii) despite difficulties, monitoring data were collected at the level of outcomes and result indicators; (iii) because of different indicator descriptions and interpretations, the institutions used different monitoring techniques and approaches in order to collect and count monitoring data (European Policies Research Centre, 2009).

Another factor which influenced the quality of monitoring information is staff turnover in the Lithuanian institutions, which administer the EU support. According to the Centre for European Policy Studies, in some institutions, staff turnover reached even 50 per cent a year (European Policies Research Centre, 2009). Of course, these changes also affected the quality of monitoring data because new employees had to be trained in order to understand what indicators are, why they are used, how they are measured, etc. According to the data of 2008, 400 civil servants and employees directly related to the EU Cohesion policy were working by contract in Lithuania.

According to Merkys, Brazienė and Kondrotaitė (2008), the definition of indicators is the area where the competence of civil servants and scientists intersects. The scientists strive for a greater specialization of indicators, while the civil servants may need concise and explicit indicators; therefore, the indicators which correspond to these expectations are purposefully chosen. Because of the short programming experience of Lithuanian civil servants, quite a number of mistakes were made while programming, especially while determining the indicators. It happens that they are determined wrongly and do not reflect the existing means, which are influenced by absolutely different macroeconomic things.

The research claims that it is necessary to cooperate more closely in order to obtain more explicit data. Even though cooperation takes place among institutions, the data of microlevel are obtained in a limited way, and there is no possibility to get deeper into the benefit of the results of Structural funds intervention for enterprises and other interested parties because of the inflexibility of the LR Law of Statistics (Interview with the employee of the National Audit Office 2010.03.31). A possible solution under these circumstances is to ask the associated structures to carry out a poll or generalize the data of enterprises. One enterprise of evaluators has attained the status of a private scientific institution in order to access the data of the Lithuanian Department of Statistics because the status of a consultation firm does not provide this possibility.

REFERENCES

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Становление Республики Беларусь как суверенного государства с 1990 г. послужило фундаментом реформ: социальных, экономических, политических. Изменения социальной ориентации общества, переход к рыночной экономике не могли не повлиять на развитие системы высшего образования. Новые условия послужили импульсом к разработке принципиально новых подходов к системе высшего образования, пересмотра ее структуры.

В свою очередь стратегия образования в интересах устойчивого развития должна быть направлена на подготовку высококвалифицированных кадров и формирование интеллектуального потенциала, позволяющего активно влиять на развитие экономики, науки, культуры. Формирование системы образования должно в полной мере отвечать задачам нового этапа развития.

Базисом высшей школы Беларуси в новых условиях явилось сохранение существующих основ и подходов с включением национального компонента, национально-культурной основы образования. Процесс реформирования складывался из комплекса мероприятий правового, организационно-управленческого, научно-методического, кадрового, материально-технического и др. характера.

Потребности республики, в частности, после разрыва межгосударственных связей потребовал создание принципиально новой, уже национальной нормативной базы и пересмотра направлений подготовки специалистов.

Начало реформ можно сопоставить с принятием в 1991 г. Закона об образовании, в котором высшей школе отводилось заметное место [1]. Инновационная составляющая этого Закона в части высшей школы состояла в упоминании об академических свободах и вузовской автономии, введении двух ступеней и новой классификации вузов, которая включала в себя классические и профильные университеты, академии, институты и высшие колледжи. Не все инновационные идеи получили в дальнейшем должное развитие.