



Programme Summary of the France-Wallonia-Flanders INTERREG IIIA PROGRAMME



FOREWORD

This document is an output of the INTERACT Point Tool Box (TB) activities,
and is structured as follows:

- A. The “**Facts & figures**” sheet presents a brief overview of the features of the programme, aimed at offering an initial set of basic information for understanding it properly.
- B. This part shows a compilation of the “**Programme main findings**” arisen from the analysis of the INTERREG IIIA programme when identified. This part contains analytical information, distinguishing between the **specificities** and **good practices** developed by the programme, and the main recommendations and conclusions.

The “**Programme in further detail**” document, comprising specific information on the structures in charge of the programme, as well as on the project management and programme performance, will be made available upon request.

The drafting of the present summary has been possible thanks to the excellent collaboration of the INTERREG IIIA France-Wallonia-Flanders programme management in providing their programme documents and feedback, and in particular to the inputs and feedback provided by its Joint Technical Secretariat. Finally, a series of documents have been used as internal sources of information, including the “*Study on the Mid-Term Evaluations of INTERREG programmes for the Programming Period 2000-06*” by the University of Strathclyde, provided by the INTERACT Programme Secretariat.

Thank you very much for your collaboration

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A. FACTS & FIGURES: INTERREG IIIA FRANCE-WALLONIE-VLAANDEREN

SOURCES USED FOR THIS PAPER

√ : document used

Community Initiative Programme (CIP)	√
Programme Complement	√
Mid-term Evaluation	√
Annual Report 2002, 2003	√
Rules of Procedure Monitoring Committee	
Rules of Procedure Steering Committee	
Subsidy Contract	√
Partnership Agreement	√
Agreement between Member States	
Agreement between Managing Structures	
Notification/Grant Letter	
Letter of Intent/Commitment	√
Art. 5 EC Regulation 438/2001 description	√
Audit Guidelines	
Project Application Form	
Application Form Guidelines	√
Programme Manual	
Activity report template	
Financial report template	
Website	√
General conditions	√



Date of Approval of the programme:	31 December 2001
EC decision No:	C (2001) 4098
State in charge of the programme:	Belgium
Programme language(s):	Dutch - French
Programme area:	Western Europe, covering the north-eastern border of France and the southern border of Belgium , involving on the Belgian side both the Walloon and the Flemish Regions/Communities
Programme structures:	Managing Authority: Walloon Region (BE) Paying Authority: Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations (FR) Joint Technical Secretariat: Secrétariat conjoint du Programme INTERREG III France-Wallonie-Flandre asbl (BE)
Background (previous INTERREG experience):	INTERREG I and II
Mid-Term Evaluation done by:	OGM (BE) , in collaboration with IDEA CONSULT (BE) and EURO-INITIATIVE (FR)
ERDF amount :	EUR 86 500 563 (before indexation) EUR 88 697 950 (after indexation)
TOTAL FUNDING:	EUR 173 001 124 (before indexation) EUR 177 395 900 (after indexation)
Programme website:	www.interreg-fwf.org

B. PROGRAMME MAIN FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

The study on the INTERREG IIIA France-Wallonia-Flanders programme was carried out by INTERACT Point Tool Box and finalised in March 2005. The summary was drafted through desk research based on the large number of documents made available by the programme management. Additionally, an interview with the programme secretariat was held.

This report has been produced to give a short general overview of the programme, highlighting its specific features. A detailed description of the programme can be found in the “programme in further detail” document, which can be provided upon request.

1. GENERAL COMMENTS¹

The INTERREG IIIA France-Wallonia-Flanders programme is based on previous participation in the INTERREG I and II programmes. The structure of the programme has evolved over this period as the region was split into three separate INTERREG II programmes during the 1994-1999 period:

- Hainaut/Nord-Pas de Calais/Picardie
- Wallonie/Champagne-Ardenne
- Nord-Pas de Calais/West-Vlaanderen

These three programmes have been merged into a single programme for the INTERREG III programming period, namely the INTERREG IIIA France-Wallonie-Vlaanderen programme, upon a recommendation from the European Commission (EC).

This transition, however, was accompanied by a decrease in the ERDF grant made available to the region, from EUR 120 Million under INTERREG II down to EUR 85 Million under INTERREG III.

This transition to a “one border-one programme” principle can be regarded as an interesting experiment and should be borne in mind from the point of view of the new regulations proposals.

It is worth noting, however, that the programme is split into three sub-programmes, namely:

- France-Wallonie
- France-Vlaanderen
- France-Wallonie-Vlaanderen (tripartite sub-programme covering the other two sub-programmes)

¹ Impression of Tool Box/expert in charge of the report

This split corresponds to the specific institutional situation in Belgium, which is a federal state composed of two main regions, which are partners in the programme: Région Wallonne and Vlaamse Gemeenschap (Walloon and Flemish regions).

The programme, despite this rather complex structure, is regarded as a well-functioning programme by the Mid-term Evaluator of the programme.

In addition, the analysis of the various elements (documents, website) and contacts with programme managers have reinforced this impression, especially concerning the high level of cooperation among the various management structures and the clear division of tasks. More specifically, it can be said that comprehensive programme documentation, providing a clear description of procedures, is available, as is an informative and user-friendly programme website.

2. INTERESTING DOCUMENTS IDENTIFIED (FOR GOOD PRACTICE MODELS)

2.1 The website

The programme website can be regarded as clear, comprehensive and user-friendly. It is presented in bilingual form. Among other things, it contains information about the calls for proposals together with the respective deadlines (a specific deadline is given for each sub-programme as well as for the small projects scheme). It also contains a section devoted to the Steering Committee (SC), namely a brief summary of the last meeting and a presentation of downloadable articles published in the media on that occasion.

2.2 The application form

A specific feature of the application form is that there is the option of including a phase two of the project (phase one can last up to three years). The description and financial plan of the second phase can be included in the original application form, but only the first phase will be subject to a decision by the SC. The second phase will only be approved after a positive evaluation of phase one.

As regards the level of information requested in the application form, the project must be presented as a set of actions:

- Each action must be dated.
- Each action must be budgeted.

2.3 The micro-project application form

This is quite a long document with a great deal of information requested (e.g. durability of the project after the subsidy period, application of the Lead Partner principle). The financial plan is fairly detailed, with financial data to be provided per partner and per budget line and per type of action planned.

For more information on the concept of the “micro-projects fund”, see point 3.12.

2.4 The subsidy contract

Being comprehensive and clearly written, this document is both a contract and a guide for project implementation. A detailed presentation can be found in the summary.

2.5 Organisation of the relationships between project partners

There is no partnership agreement model: When the application form is submitted, both the partners and the Lead Partner of the project sign a letter of commitment, acknowledging their respective roles in the project and undertaking to implement the project as indicated in the application form.

In addition, a discussion template for the decision-making body (“*extrait type de délibération de l’instance décisionnelle*”) must be signed by the legal representative of each project partner, in order to ensure that the institution as such is informed and agrees

to participate in a project (rather than solely the person in charge of the project within the partner institution).

2.6 Content of the annual reports (2002 and 2003)

A detailed description of some of the approved projects, containing the objectives, actions planned, actions implemented, achievement indicators, etc. gives a good overview of the specific implementation of the programme.

3. **MAIN FINDINGS²**

3.1 **One programme – Three sub-programmes**

While the two France-Wallonie and France-Vlaanderen sub-programmes cover a separate cross-border area, the third sub-programme, France-Wallonie-Vlaanderen, covers the overall programme area. Its function is to enable the implementation of projects including partners and activities in the area of the other two sub-programmes. This tripartite sub-programme also has a coordinating function in the programme, since the Technical Assistance (TA) priority is budgeted under this tripartite sub-programme.

- This specificity of the France-Wallonie-Vlaanderen programme, presented in the general comments, implies a distribution of the overall ERDF grant between the three sub-programmes: 59.9% is assigned to the sub-France-Wallonie programme.
- 19.9% is assigned to the France-Vlaanderen sub-programme.
- 20.5% is assigned to the France-Wallonia-Flanders cross-sub-programme.

Another consequence of this “one programme – three sub-programmes” structure concerns the implementation structures: in general, the programme is managed and monitored by a single Monitoring Committee (MC), composed of members from the three parties (French, Walloon and Flemish). Each sub-programme, however, has its own Steering Committee (SC), whose main function is to approve projects submitted in its respective area of intervention. These three SCs are coordinated by the Managing Authority (MA).

3.2 **The setting-up of the programme**

A consulting organ, called the COPPO (Comité de Préparation du Programme Opérationnel), was created to set up the programme. This organ was composed of the representatives of the partners involved and the INTERREG teams, and received the support of a consultant for the drafting of the Programme Document (CIP). It was organised into seven working groups (round tables), implying a bottom-up approach.

3.3 **Setting up an International Public Body to manage the programme**

The Programme Document (CIP), p.254, mentions the plan to set up an international public body (Etablissement Public International) during the INTERREG III period to provide the function of the MA. The Programme Document (CIP) contains a description of how this body should be set up.

A temporary body has been set up for the moment: This is a Belgian private association known as an asbl (association sans but lucratif - non-profit-making association), a description of which is also provided in the Programme Document (CIP).

At the time of the interview with a programme manager from the programme, the international body had not been set up.

3.4 **Managing Authority and Paying Authority: Two functions – two countries**

The MA is situated in Belgium, whereas the Paying Authority (PA) is on the French side of the programme. It is worth noting, however, that the MA and the PA of this programme

² Specificities, good practices and problems identified

are the same as for the INTERREG IIIA programme Wallonia-Lorraine-Luxembourg, and many procedures are similar in both programmes as well, which constitutes a good basis for coordination and exchange of information between the two programmes.

The PA was appointed through a restricted tender procedure with European publicity. Launched on 29 November 2001, the contract was attributed to the French Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations³; the temporary function had been performed by the accounting department of the Walloon Region.

3.5 The Joint Technical Secretariat and the Technical Teams in the field: a decentralised approach

The overall coordination is performed by a Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS), which is a Belgian asbl association.

In addition, a network of seven technical teams/sub-offices is active in the field, and is responsible for running the programme. Two of these are in Belgium and five are in France.

In particular, whereas the JTS is in charge of the overall coordination of the programme, the Technical Teams (TTs) are in charge of supporting the project applicants and project owners during both the preparation and implementation phase.

3.6 The role of the programme Lead Partners (partenaires “chef de file”)

Among the institutions involved in the programme as partners, three institutions carry out a specific national coordination role:

- For the French side: Nord Pas De Calais Region
- For the Walloon side: Walloon Region
- For the Flemish side: Province of Western Flanders

These institutions cooperate with the MA in implementing the programme on their territory: Assessing projects (e.g. compliance with European and national rules); checking the eligibility and regularity of expenditures; auditing expenditures; informing the MA in the event of irregularities; implementing the audit trail and sample checks.

3.7 Many working groups

The programme has set up many working groups, covering topics such as communication, controls, legal status for a managing body, coordination and technical assistance.

These working groups are composed of experts in the various fields tackled by these groups.

Among other things, it is worth noting the “Technical follow-up working group” (groupe technique de suivi): This technical group is composed of the TTs, the auditing bodies, the MA and the programme partners. The group is chaired by the MA.

³ The Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations is a French public financial institution, charged by the State and local authorities with public interest duties (from www.caissedesdepots.fr)

These technical meetings are held at a level just below the SC. In the starting phase of the programme there were more meetings (concerning implementation, problems, etc), but these are seldom held now because there are few problems to be discussed. There are also many other opportunities for meetings, and 80% of the people attending the various meetings are the same.

3.8 Cooperation with adjoining INTERREG programmes

Specific procedures relating to cooperation with neighbouring programmes are indicated in the Programme Document (CIP):

- With the Franco-British programme: The Programme Document (CIP) stipulates that a member of the MC of the Franco-British programme may participate in the SC meetings of the France-Vlaanderen sub-programme. This participation concerns cases of cross-programme projects that cover the areas of both programmes. However, this representative only has an advisory function in these meetings since cross-programme projects need to be approved separately by each programme.
- With the Wallonie-Lorraine-Luxembourg programme: The same procedures apply.

3.9 Technical assistance budget

The budget is divided into four measures:

- “Gestion commune/common management” (corresponds to the funding of the JTS).
- “Animation de proximité/proximity facilitation” (corresponds to the funding of the seven technical teams).
- “Piste d’audit et contrôles/Audit trail and controls”: The checking and auditing of expenditures and second-level control is delegated by the MA to a relevant body on each of the three sides of the programme (relevant body within the “partenaire chef de file” authority).
- Promoting the programme, financial and computerised management, and evaluations.

This budget is funded by the tripartite sub-programme.

3.10 Communication and the sharing of work between management structures (from the MTE)

Advantages:

- The sharing of work between the structures in terms of project management is clear.
- The Mid-term Evaluation notes “excellent cooperation” between the TTs and the JTS, as well as with programme partners.
- The TTs form a kind of “trade union”, and as such are able to bring problems before the MA with one voice.

Disadvantages:

- There is a lack of recognition of the work of others.
- There is a lack of advance planning of activities and tasks.
- There is not always a common understanding of documents and procedures among the TTs.

- According to some managers, there is a lack of communication and exchange of information between the TTs.

3.11 ERDF funding rate

The usual rate is 40%. An increase to 50% is only approved if the project introduces specific arguments (specific sub-programme and measure criteria).

The arguments must be presented in the application form, below the financial form, where the required funding rate is indicated.

3.12 The Micro-projects fund

The programme website contains a section dedicated to this specific scheme for micro-projects, which contains a presentation of the fund and offers the option of downloading the application form (a specific application form was developed for these micro-projects).

Presentation guide to the micro-projects fund – Key interesting findings:

- The fund is aimed at small structures, which would not otherwise be able to participate in an INTERREG project (particularly from a financial point of view).
- Types of actions: Increase contacts between associations, encourage the population to use services on the other side of the border, intensify the dissemination of information on cross-border activities, promote the mobility of the population, promote activities in the fields of young people, health, social assistance, etc.
- Conditions: For projects limited to EUR 20 000, with a maximum of EUR 5 000 per partner.
- The funding rate is 100%.
- 50% of the subsidy is paid when the project is approved.
- The final 50% is paid after the approval of the final report and total expenditures.
- Maximum duration: One year.
- Selection criteria: The same as for other projects.
- Support: By the TTs in the field.
- Selection: A selection committee meets every two months or so to approve actions. Its members are representatives of the partner regions.

3.13 Project Steering Committee

The principle of a project steering committee (PSC) was developed under the INTERREG II programming period (CIP p.252). Regarded as a good experiment, this principle has been applied to the current programming period as well, as it is regarded as both a tool to guide project owners who are not very familiar with structural funds, and also a channel to get the programme partners together (Complement p.11).

Page four of the subsidy contract, presents the conditions and the functioning of such a committee:

- Members: Project partners, representatives of the partner administrations concerned, representatives of the auditing bodies, TTs.
- Tasks: Checking the progress of the project, helping and guiding the partners as regards implementing the project, validating any minor amendments, checking compliance with the EU rules (e.g. public tenders, competition rules, gender

mainstreaming, environment, etc.), and being a place for dialogue and exchange on the project and on cross-border cooperation in general.

- The meetings are organised by the project's Lead Partner (LP) at least twice a year, and within two months of submitting the activity reports.
- It is worth noting that a kick-off PSC is also organised to set up the project and explain the rules, etc.
- The activity report must be sent to the members of the PSC at least two weeks before the meeting (MTE).
- The meetings are organised alternately on the French and the Belgian side, and therefore not necessarily at the LP premises.

3.14 The second phase of the project

Project applicants are offered the option of applying for a second phase of their project, in order to supplement their project activities with additional activities. The second phase of the project must represent an added value, it cannot simply be the continuation of the project.

The procedures related to this second phase are presented in point 3 of this document.

3.15 Activity and financial reporting by project owners

There is regular monitoring of the projects since the final beneficiaries must provide:

- Two activity reports per year (the financial reports of the last two quarters are attached to the activity report).
- Financial reports/declarations of expenditures for each year: These must be submitted within one month of the end of the quarter (which, however, does not leave much time for collecting all the invoices and proofs of payment).

3.16 The current projects: imbalance between the three sub-programmes

The annual report 2003 indicates that most projects (60%) in the programme come from the France-Wallonie sub-programme, whereas this figure is only 17% in the France-Vlaanderen sub-programme and 21% in the sub-programme tripartite.

3.17 The management of the N+2 rule

Firstly, it is important to note that the programme was approved late in 2001, namely on 31 December 2001, which effectively reduced the first tranche of the N+2 to N+1.

The MTE indicates that the programme has had an early high level of commitments, which amounted to 80% of the planned budget by 31 December 2003.

This situation, although positive in terms of the overall progress of the programme, implied a series of difficulties, namely:

- Limited scope remaining for new projects (in some measures at least).
- An early and huge workload for the TTs in terms of project support and management, and less time left for facilitation. (Under normal circumstances, the TTs should have 45% of their time dedicated to facilitation but, in reality, they have 45% of their time

dedicated to support during project development, 45% dedicated to support during project implementation and only 10% left for facilitation).

However, the programme has already reached the targets in 2003 and 2004. A series of measures have been taken in order to reach these targets, at both programme and project level.

3.18 Measures taken to face the decommitment issue at programme level (annual report 2002)

- Making the SC members aware at each meeting.
- Frequent meetings of the “technical follow-up group/groupe technique de suivi” are organised, which deal, among other things, with the issue of raising awareness about N+2, coordination of technical assistance, etc.
- Walloon region: making the authorities aware of the N+2 risk, drafting a circular to allow the auditing to start once the ERDF contract is signed, even if the national co-funding conventions are not yet ready, etc.

3.19 Measures taken to face the decommitment issue at project level (annual report 2002 and 2003)

- Sending a quick notification letter to the applicants after the SC decision, containing a list of documents to be attached so that the subsidy contract to be drawn up as soon as possible.
- The project partners are sent a monthly written reminder to sign the subsidy contract.
- Strict deadlines have been laid down for submitting the cost declarations, and a single calendar applies to the three sub-programmes for coordinating the auditing process.
- Approval of a “venture-capital” project:

This project was already planned and approved under the INTERREG II programme period. The process of drafting and approving the project took a long time since a specific notification to the EC-DG competition had to be submitted. This notification was not approved until 13-14 months later, after some lengthy negotiations. The preparation of the notification itself involved a great deal of work.

This project totals EUR 10 Million, of which EUR 4,4 Million comes from the ERDF.

To manage the project, a GEIE was created (called INTERFI).

Advantages:

- According to the MTE, this type of project allows the payment of funds related to “invests”⁴. This type of payment is authorised even if the final beneficiaries are not known yet.
- According to the programme management, this project made it possible to pay 85% of the total ERDF for the project in one instalment, straight after it was approved, which contributed hugely to the achievement of the N+2 targets. This type of project also contributes to the economic development of the area, where it is generally difficult to develop projects and to involve private companies.

⁴ Invests are funds whose aim is to support companies. These funds are managed by specific bodies, which invest in companies.

3.20 The Monitoring system

The financial data on payments made is recorded by the PA in the monitoring system as well as in the other database developed by the MA where cash flows are monitored.

This double system makes it possible to detect any mistakes.

3.21 The framework programmes (Programmes Cadre)

Definition: These framework programmes are coordinated programmes aimed at solving a specific cross-border issue in the following fields: health, regulations/law, research, ICT, environment, labour mobility.

Functioning:

- The MC identifies an issue/topic.
- Cross-border thematic workshops involving the administrations involved in the topic are set up and have to propose an action plan.
- The MC (modifies and) validates the action plan.
- An operational team (“cellule opérationnelle”) is set up and works in conjunction with the MA to implement the action plan (through working groups, expertise, studies, etc).
- These actions can be financed by ERDF, preferably within the tripartite sub-programme.
- An annual and final report must be presented to the MC.

No information was found on the implementation of these programmes.

3.22 Evaluation of the effectiveness of the communication (Programme Complement p.21)

The programme planned to develop a tool to evaluate the effectiveness of the communication, which is presented in the Programme Complement p.21.

By collecting basic data on the subject of “communication”, the programme can obtain an overview of the effectiveness of its communication strategy, at both project and programme level.

The indicators are collected as follows:

- In the application form, applicants must answer the question: “how did you hear about the programme and its co-funding possibilities?”
- The programme management must record the number of visitors to the website.
- The programme management must ask the opinion of the readers of the newsletter, in the mid-phase of the programme.

No information on the implementation of this tool has been collected.

3.23 Clear presentation of the second-level control procedure

The “Article 5 procedures” document gives a clear presentation on the procedures relating to second-level control:

The main basis for this task is that the checks will be done by different departments in the three programme areas, but that they will be coordinated:

- A sample of the projects to be checked is agreed between the controlling institutions.
- A general meeting between the controlling bodies, the project Lead Partner and other partners is organised.
- Each control report is sent to the relevant Member State, which forwards it to the MA.
- The MA collects all controls and summarises them for presentation to the MC.

3.24 Indicators and evaluation of the cross-border impact

Development of a “Methodological note on the indicators”:

- Following the recommendations of the Mid-term Evaluator, the result and impact indicators are incorporated into a methodology based on the principle of cross-border impact: le rééquilibrage transfrontalier, la plus-value transfrontalière, l’interaction dans la mise en œuvre, la création d’une dynamique de coopération et la pérennité des effets transfrontaliers (cross-border restabilisation, cross-border added value, interaction in implementation, the creation of a cooperation dynamic, and the durability of the cross-border effects).
- The methodology implies that the partners agree together on the indicators, by answering a questionnaire containing 13 questions before the PSC meeting:
 - Each partner provides a mark, evidence and arguments for each question.
 - The results are summarised and average marks given.
 - The choices are presented by the partners and discussed with the PSC members.
 - The TTs and JTS consolidate the various marks for all the projects, in order to obtain results at measure and programme level.
 - The evaluation is updated once a year at the PSC meeting.

4. GENERAL IMPRESSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MID-TERM EVALUATOR

4.1 General impression

The general impressions and main recommendations of the Mid-term Evaluation, carried out by the company OGM, in collaboration with Idea Consult and Euro-Initiative in 2003, can be found below, referring to the situation at the time the Mid-term Evaluation was carried out. The follow-up of these recommendations will be done by the end of 2005 within the framework of the Mid-term Evaluation update, including data resulting from the second half of the programme period.

The evaluator's main impression of the programme is that this is a high-quality programme which is running well, particularly considering its lengthy implementation period (INTERREG I, II and III). The effects of cross-border cooperation are already visible in the field as well as in people's minds.

The structure in charge of managing the programme is considered professional, of high quality and innovative. Support to project applicants is satisfactory.

Finally, the success of the programme can be seen in terms of the level of financial progress: 71.9% of the available ERDF funds had been committed by the time of the Mid-term Evaluation, which shows the early success of the programme. On the other hand, the level of expenditures was below 10% at the time of the MTE, which was considered too low.

4.2 Main recommendations

The main recommendations of the MTE have been summarised in the annual report 2003:

CHAPTER	TOPIC	RECOMMENDATIONS
2. Synopsis	Project assessment	Set up a competitive procedure for proposals, e.g. inspired by the Objective 1 procedures developed by the Walloon Region.
5. External cohesion	Sustainability of projects	Urgently set up institutional and legal frameworks; harmonise the legal tools to improve cohesion. Broaden initiatives to new actors in order to involve the population more.
	Articulate other initiatives in similar fields	Develop more programme coordination, in order to articulate policies and avoid duplicates (duplicate funding?).
6. Quantification of objectives	Establish a management chart	Ensure the collection of all quantitative data when the activity reports are produced, and broaden the data for some projects (in order to give a better picture of the progress to date).
	Establish an evaluation which involves the actors	Adopt the CAF (Common Assessment Framework), organise proper training, try to reach the objective by mid-2004, and aggregate the results at measure and priority level.

7. Effectiveness and socio- economic effects		Try to cover all the measures and the sustainability criteria during assessment , and rigorously try to collect data on indicators and quantified objectives. Ensure the sustainability of the projects by disseminating their results to the relevant networks and the general public.
8. Management quality	Competition and assessment	Broaden the network of potential applicants through the organization of genuine calls for proposals for the last 28% to be committed. Set up a genuine competitive procedure with clear predefined criteria. Shorten the time frames and have more objectivity in project assessment.
	Communication and participation of the general public	More targeting of the general public. More targeting of municipalities and intermediary organizations such as the Chambers of commerce. Define a common strategy for partners. Develop more proactive facilitation through the TTs.

These recommendations have led to a series of action points to be taken by the programme, presented in the annual report 2003:

- Improve the selection and application procedures.
- Improve the process for handling the expenditure declarations: The goal is to accelerate and simplify the process.
- Implement the CAF methodology, and quantify the indicators and objectives.
- Implement a communication plan to disseminate the results and promote the programme towards the general public.
- Continue the analysis of possibilities and set up a single management body.
- Coordinate the policies, and share administrative and cultural knowledge.
- Improve the participation of the general public.

5. PROBLEMS/TOPICS HIGHLIGHTED DURING THE TELEPHONE INTERVIEW

5.1 N+2

The management of the N+2 rule: so far, the management of the N+2 rule has been successful. In 2004, the target value was EUR 23 Million, and the total amount of audited expenditures by 31 December 2004 was EUR 28,409 Million, which represents a significant over-achievement of the target. However, this included expenditures declared but not yet audited and paid out to the final beneficiaries.

5.2 The Franco-Belgian treaty on Cross-border Cooperation

This treaty, which is intended to establish a legal basis for setting up cross-border cooperation structures at the border between France and Belgium, is still in a ratification phase since this ratification process must pass through several parliamentary levels in Belgium.

The programme partners themselves, before the start of the programming period, launched a review on the possible creation of a cross-border structure to manage the INTERREG programme. A few meetings and feasibility studies took place, but the partners concluded that this process might delay and complicate the programme, and they decided not to proceed any further in this direction, at least for the current period, as they were quite satisfied with the function of the Walloon Region as Managing Authority.

5.3 Lack of human resources

There is a general lack of staff for completing the tasks relating to programme and project management. In total, the human resources represent about 30 Full Time Equivalents for the functions of MA, PA, JTS, TTs and Control and Audit departments.

5.4 The framework programmes

The management of these framework programmes appears to be a time-consuming activity because, among other things, they comprise 15 different partners, which represents a great deal of work in terms of coordination. In addition, it can be argued that the programme already receives enough project ideas and proposals.

5.5 The audit departments

The function of auditing the project expenditures is delegated to the three programme national Lead Partners. On the French side, the Region Nord Pas de Calais has signed a specific contract with an external accountant to carry out 600 audits within a six month period. On the Walloon side, the auditing of expenditures is not done within one department but by the 17-18 departments involved in the programme measures, which makes it complicated in terms of coordination.

5.6 Communication activities by the projects

The project partners are expected to be the main source of publicity regarding the programme, since they are in the field and can present specific illustrations and successes of the programme. Indeed, the final beneficiaries are expected to issue at least one press release at the start and one at the end of their project.

At programme level, communication activities towards the media are more complex as there is a lack of interest from the media in the complexity and technicality of the programme, which leads to limited success for press conferences organised after the SC meetings. In order to tackle this issue, the programme management has developed a new programme communication plan for the period 2005-2008, and has launched a call for proposals in order to contract a company for the organisation of a “press-day”.

5.7 The project steering committees

The project steering committees are considered an interesting forum for coordination between the project partners and the programme management on the one hand, and between the programme partner institutions and audit departments on the other. One of the advantages of these meetings is that they take place on the premises of the project partners (Lead Partner or partner), alternately on the French and the Belgian side.

5.8 The capital-venture projects

This type of project is very interesting in terms of its contribution to the N+2 rule. However, due to the lengthy period required for its preparation and for the approval of the various notifications, it is recommended that this type of project should be launched very early in the programming period.

5.9 National co-funding

There is an overall difficulty regarding national co-funding, because the national co-funding institutions cannot provide multi-annual commitments.

CONCLUSIONS

The INTERREG IIIA France-Wallonia-Flanders programme is interesting in terms of the structures and procedures set up for implementing both the programme and the projects. The current situation of the programme is satisfactory, both in terms of financial progress and at project level.

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