



PRESERVATION OF SMALL PROJECT FUNDS IN INTERREG

Czech Perspective on European Territorial Cooperation after 2020



Position

The Czech Republic supports preserving the system of Small Project Funds (SPF) in cross-border programmes as an important instrument for the development of small-scale non-investment projects. They support people-to-people meetings and cooperation within local communities and serve as an incubator of cross-border cooperation where future promising partnerships arise. At the same time, the Czech Republic supports further strengthening of the strategic approach in implementation of SPF.



Rationale

To boost cohesion of cross-border regions and to remove obstacles brought by the existence of borders, it is necessary to involve local communities and people living in the area into a cross-border cooperation. Small Project Fund (SPF) is an ideal tool for that. It is used by approximately 1/3 of cross-border Interreg programmes in the EU. It enables realising a large number of people-to-people projects, thus it can address a wide population. The management of SPF is usually implemented at the local / regional level (in particular at the level of Euroregions) and the scale of projects is also mostly local. This means that the bottom-up approach and local “ownership” is ensured. Small projects support various local events that bring people together in the fields such as culture, sport, history, they bring contacts between schools, kindergartens, help exchange of knowledge and sharing good practice among institutions through stages or excursions. All these activities contribute to increasing mutual understanding, trust among people living in border areas, breaking mental barriers and improving cooperation among institutions across the border. As small-scale local cooperation is well accessible for a wide range of subjects, such as municipalities, educational institutions, NGOs and local initiatives, SPF is a good incubator of subsequent large-scale cooperation.

In spite of a long tradition of this instrument and its importance for CBC, some debates about legal status of its implementation under the current regulatory framework occurred.



Example

In the programming period 2014 – 2020, the implementation of SPF in some of the CBC programmes was subject to discussion with the Commission (COM). The reason was the current system of implementation of SPF through a specific type of a project – so called “umbrella project”, which proved to be well functioning during the preceding programming periods. This setup caused certain doubts in the COM, with some opinions that SPF should be treated as a “global grant”. The discussions resulted in acceptance of the current approach with certain conditions, but it caused legal uncertainty for the beneficiaries and final recipients as some of the SPF projects had been already running at that time.

To avoid that in the future, we propose to codify the SPF in the regulatory framework for the next programming period and, at the same time, to give the Managing Authorities of the programmes enough flexibility to decide on which model of would be the most suitable for its CBC programme.



Suggested change

The Czech Republic supports the implementation of people-to-people projects through the current model of Small Project Fund. However, it is necessary to anchor it in the future regulatory framework at the EU level. The regulatory framework should give the Managing Authorities flexibility to use a model most suitable for its programme.

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