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COMPILATION OF BASIC DATA FOR THE REPORT ON THE SYSTEM OF IMPLEMENTING THE “OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE” SUMMARISATION OF OUTPUTS

“Control tools of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF)”
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Table of the Contents

1	Introduction.....	6
2	The Compiler’s Methodical Approach.....	6
3	Suggestion Part – Answers to Evaluation Questions.....	8
3.1	How demanding and comprehensible is the system of implementing the OP TA for implementation structure staffs?	8
3.2	How demanding and comprehensible is the system of implementing the OP TA for target groups and beneficiaries?	9
3.2.1	Is the system of implementing the OP TA efficient?	10
3.2.2	What is the progress in the fulfilment of OP TA strategic objectives?.....	10
3.2.3	Is the publicity of the programme sufficient for target groups (professional public and beneficiaries of the support)?	11
3.2.4	What are the OP TA measures useful for other MA?	11
3.2.5	Is the budget allocated suitably to different activities for efficient use of financial resources?	11
4	Suggestion Part – Recommendations	12
4.1	Recommendations necessary to be executed as soon as possible according to the Compiler. 12	
4.2	Final Summarisation to Recommendations.....	15

List of Abbreviations Used

AA	- Audit Authority
BD	- Budget Department (MRD CR)
CHU	- Central Harmonisation Unit
CRD	- Centre of Regional Development
CoP	- Communication plan
DPAC	- Department of Publicity and Administration Capacities (MRD CR)
ED	- Execute document
HBA	- Handbook for the Beneficiaries and Applicants
IB	- Intermediate Body
IS	- Implementation system
MA	- Managing Authority
MD	- Minister's decision
MF CR	- Ministry of Finance
MRD CR	- Ministry of Regional Development
NCA	- National Coordination Authority
NSRF	- National strategic reference framework
OM	- Operational manual
OP TA	- Operational Programme Technical Assistance
RCE	- Regional competitiveness and employment
SF EU	- Structural Funds of the European Union
TA	- Technical assistance

The present document summarises principal knowledge acquired during execution of the project.

The complete description of the final work and its parts, including outputs, are subsumed in the Final Report¹.

¹ The Final Report is available in the Czech language only.

1 Introduction

The objective of the project called the **Compilation of Basic Data for the Report on the System on Implementing the “Operational Programme Technical Assistance”** was to elaborate a report with suggestions and recommendations for further continuation of the programme for compilation of strategic and other reports on the “Operational Programme Technical Assistance”. **This summarisation features a short description of the project stages and particularly the summarisation of the most important findings and measures proposed.**

This order is part of the “NSRF Control Tools” project defined by the EU structural funds – “Operational Programme Technical Assistance” (herein after as “OP TA” 2007 – 2013). The project is registered under No. CZ.1.08/1.1.00/08.00024 and its holder is the NDRF Control & Coordination Department of the Ministry of Regional Development.

The principal user of the outputs of this project is the **Managing Authority** (herein after as “MA”) **Department of the “Operational Programme Technical Assistance”**.

Based on the Contract for Work of 15/10/2009, the Compiler of the project is “DHV CR, spol. s r.o.” company.

2 The Compiler’s Methodical Approach

The execution of the project was divided into 3 interconnected stages – preparatory, analytic and suggestion phase. The preparatory stage comprised elaboration of the timetable of the project; consequently with **exploration of documents and directed dialogues with representatives of the implementation-structure (IS) subjects and beneficiaries** made in the analytical stage by the Compiler, followed by his suggestions and recommendations in the suggestion stage to optimise the OP TA implementation system divided to recommendations suitable to be executed as soon as possible or within half a year, and further recommendations.

The recommendations came from pieces of knowledge acquired and answers formulated to the evaluation questions:

1. **How demanding and comprehensible is the system of implementing the OP TA for implementation structure staffs?**
2. **How demanding and comprehensible is the system of implementing the OP TA for target groups and the beneficiaries?**
3. **Is the system of implementing the OP TA efficient?**
4. **What progress has been made in the fulfilment of OP TA strategic objectives?**
5. **Is the publicity of the programme sufficient for target groups (professional public and beneficiaries of the support)?**
6. **What are the OP TA measures useful for other MAs?**
7. **Is the budget suitably allocated for different activities to provide efficient use of the financial resources?**

Based on different explorations of documents, the Compiler has acquired a general framework for the function of the implementation system and information on relations between the IS subjects concerned, and formulated several general conditions namely for:

- ➔ Function and role of the MA of the OP TA;
- ➔ Relation of the OP TA Managing Authority and the OP TA mediating subject;
- ➔ Relation of the OP TA Managing Authority and other subjects involved in the OP TA implementation structure;
- ➔ Procedures for transmission of information and cooperation between the subjects;
- ➔ Purpose of framework projects and professional organisation managers of priority axes and their involvement into the implementation;
- ➔ Separation of the IS subjects' functions IS from their action as the OP TA beneficiaries;
- ➔ Preparation and execution of projects.

The main purpose of **controlled interviews** with representatives of the subjects of the implementation structure and the beneficiaries was the following:

1. **Verification of the pieces of knowledge acquired via exploration of documents and completion of data on function of the implementation system;**
2. **Correspondence between the procedures executed and documented;**
3. **Correspondence between the understanding and approaches of the subjects involved in the OP TA implementation;**
4. **Acquirement of complete basic data for answering the evaluation questions.**

Three series of questions were prepared for the interviews – 1 for the managing-authority staffs; 1 for the CRD mediating subject' and 1 for other subjects involved in the implementation structure, including the beneficiaries. The data acquired were processed and evaluated continuously by the Compiler. The questions were elaborated in compliance with information needs of the project to provide comparability and uniformity of the data acquired.

1. Ministry of Regional Development – Department of the Managing Authority of the “Operational Programme Technical Assistance” (OSA OP TA 25) acting as **the Managing Authority;**
2. Centre for Regional Development acting as the **OP TA mediating subject.**

Further interviews were directed to the representatives of other subjects involved in the implementation, and the OP TA beneficiaries:

1. MRD CR – Budget Department – acting as the subject involved in the IS and the OP TA beneficiary;
2. MRD CR – Control & Coordination Department of the NSRF – acting as the OP TA professional organisation manager and beneficiary;
3. MRD CR – Publicity & Administration Capacities Department of the NSRF – acting as the OP TA professional organisation manager and beneficiary ;
4. MRD CR – Monitoring System Administration Department - acting as the OP TA professional organisation manager and beneficiary;

5. MRD CR – Internal Audit & Control Department (PAS) – acting as the OP TA beneficiary;
6. MF CR – National Fund Department – acting as the subject involved in the IS and OP TA beneficiary;
7. MF CR – Audit Department – Central Harmonisation Unit – acting as the subject involved in the IS and the OP TA beneficiary;

The Compiler **did not engage** in an interview with representatives of the MRD CR – Accounting and Financial Services Department.

Semi-structured interviews with the authorities of the implementation structure and the OP TA beneficiaries took place from 21st to 30th October 2009. The survey of the subjects interviewed is shown in Table 2.

3 Suggestion Part – Answers to Evaluation Questions

3.1 How demanding and comprehensible is the system of implementing the OP TA for implementation structure staffs?

The exact framework to be able to answer the first evaluation question correctly was to define exactly the subjects of the implementation structure which was not defined identically in the file of all documents.

The Managing Authority is responsible for correct and efficient management of the programme (primary control and managing system) and providing of assistance from the OP TA in compliance with EU regulations and national legislation. MA is responsible for fulfilment of OP TA targets and resources allocated completely run out.

The MA had delegated a part of its powers to the mediating subject - Centre for Regional Development for the given OP TA – i.e. the state allowance organisation MRD.

Several procedures and processes involving both the subjects have been currently “settled down”. The Authorities prepare jointly some modifications in the implementation processes to predominantly ameliorate the transparency of the system, eliminate “two-rail” processes, relieve administration burden and simplify the whole system for the beneficiaries.

The subjects involved in the OP TA implementation structure are well informed of their possibilities and duties, particularly because of acting in these roles in the long term. Nevertheless, several less working relations may be seen in the system, being influenced by historic development and its impacts to the MA of the OP TA. The current situation has been still influenced by the fact that the MA of the OP TA activities and actions were recently only minimal and significantly impacted by defected continuity in their personnel structures. As a result, the implementation system is missing the argumentation for implementation of framework projects and involvement of professional organisation managers of priority axis.

3.2 ***How demanding and comprehensible is the system of implementing the OP TA for target groups and the beneficiaries?***

The implementation system is comprehensible for the beneficiaries and target groups. Particular subjects are aware of their roles and cooperate with other subjects according to needs. The roles of the subjects involved in the IS and the beneficiaries are separated with some difficulties in several cases because the subjects concerned have not permanently a sufficient number of their staff.

During interviews with selected beneficiaries, the Compiler identified several spheres with the highest occurrence of inconsistency or which were not sufficiently suitably described in the documentation. The spheres may be summarised as follows:

1. At the level of the implementation of the programme

- ➔ Frequent personnel changes in the department of the MA of the OP TA with relating insufficient continuity in defining OP TA implementation processes, as, for example, definition of the information system Benefit7 for entering applications and Monit7+ for administration of projects. Frequent changes in specimen and basic working documents connected with OP TA preparation and execution, as, for example, history of creation of Table 12 showing wage costs for PAS projects;
- ➔ Insufficient definition of the processes for executing TA projects and backward definition of conditions with retrospective completion of basic data to the already executed or eventually terminated projects;
- ➔ Little experience of the staff working in the MA of the OP TA in implementing structural funds (compared to the share of the staff experienced with SF EU for other subjects), in particular non-acquaintance with history of the OP TA programme leading to the inability to provide erudite answers to the problems being solved.²
- ➔ Delays in execution of the NCA project aimed at education with coherent fulfilment of educational needs of the target groups which are informed of educational options only in part.;
- ➔ Complicated administration processes burdening administration capacities and financial resources.

2. At the level of the projects

- ➔ Complicated fulfilment of the project application;
- ➔ Postponements in timetables of the projects caused mainly by delays in starting to take resources from the programme, and relating issues connected with submitting applications for some modifications in the projects. In addition to administrative burden on the beneficiaries' side, the modifications in the planned timetables of the projects result in distorted information on future development of taking financial resources from the OP TA;
- ➔ Ambiguities in organisation of tenders resulting from inaccurate understanding of the Manual for the Applicants and Beneficiaries.

² This remark concerns mainly the previous period. The current situation is considered as considerably better.

Particularly the first aspect (frequent staff changes in the MA) is principal from the viewpoint of successful implementation of the OP TA.

3.2.1 Is the system of implementing the OP TA efficient?

The system of implementing the OP TA has been defined and settled logically and is interconnected with relevant legislation and MRD internal regulations. The cooperation with the mediating subject is good, with a significant positive aspect connected with regular monthly meetings among MA, IB and BD representatives.

3.2.2 What progress has been made in the fulfilment of OP TA strategic objectives?

The level of fulfilling the objectives, expressed through indicators and comparisons of their planned and real values, corresponds to the existing development in the programme which begun with a significant delay.

The execution of the project has involved mainly the projects aimed at input analyses to find out needs of OP TA information systems and audit activities. **The financing has been terminated with these 5 projects (project status P6 Financing of the project terminated):** Audit of conformity of the CR implementation structures involved in taking financial resources from ERDF, ESF and FS (support field 1.2); MS optimisation in 2007-2013 – event No. 3: Elaboration of an independent experts' opinion on relevancy of the price of adapting the SW products Monit 7+ and Benefit7 for the conditions of the EU programme period 2007-2013 (support field 2.1); Extension of IS CRD technologic infrastructure (support field 2.1); Analyse of the systems Monit7+, Benefit7 (support field 2.1); Solution of the security infrastructure of the CRD computer network - Fire Wall (support field 2.1). **In total, only 2 projects have been terminated (project status P5 Execution of the project terminated)** in the support field 3.1: Provision of administrative capacities PCO to control financing resources SF/FS in 2007; Provision of the execution team's activities for the negotiations with the EC on preparation of the programme period 2007-2013.

The processes and activities scheduled in conformity with approved framework projects have a potential to lead to the fulfilment of the OP TA objectives determined. Nevertheless, the current execution is menaced by a significant delay in the start-up of the programme, previous lower activity of the beneficiaries and relating delay in execution of the projects and activities in the framework of particular priority axes.

The biggest threats connected with the postponement of the beginning of taking resources and execution of the projects relate to the achievement of strategic objective 3 *“To provide administrative capacities necessary for the achievement of NSRF objectives through support of coordination authorities (NCA, PCO and AA) and to increase absorption capacities for use of the structural funds”* which relate to the provision of high-quality staff and sufficient education of the NSRF implementation structure staff. To be able to really fulfil their purpose, the educational activities have to be executed already from the beginning of the programme period.

There are several risks even at execution of strategic objective 4 *“To rise the public awareness of existence and use of the EU structural funds, on implementation of the NSRF Cohesion Policy and objectives in the conditions of the Czech Republic and on fulfilment of NSRF objectives. To define the platform of cooperation among the subjects in the implementation structure (NCA, MA, IB) with a view*

to foreknowledge of the target group of the beneficiaries of SF assistance“. The principal emphasis of the publicity activities shall be placed with each programme before and during its initialisation.

3.2.3 Is the publicity of the programme sufficient for the target groups (professional public and the beneficiaries of the support)?

The term of *publicity of the programme* shall mean the activities through which the Managing Authority fulfils requirements on designing the project documentation (contractual documents, educational papers, presentations of projects, designing reports and outputs of a project, etc.), and on provision and distribution of “publicity” objects designed as OP TA. This publicity is carried out thoroughly and without any misconduct. The only complication is the fact that the MA has not resources of its own to provide the OP TA publicity, and shall provide it in the framework of the project using NSRF publicity.

The second type of publicity is the NSRF publicity (activities in support field 4.2) aimed at **the fulfilment of the communication plan of the National Strategic Reference Framework³ in the sphere of action of the beneficiary**, the Publicity and Administrative Capacities Department. From this point of view, this is not anymore considered as the publicity of the programme towards the beneficiaries of the support and professional public. Using special means for such publicity would be unmeaning in the case of the OP TA.

3.2.4 What are the OP TA measures useful for other MAs?

They consist of the implementation positioning and narrow interconnection of the implementation structure subjects being simultaneously the beneficiaries and in many cases also guarantors of priority axes – this surrounding creates suitable conditions for the situations suitably reflecting the beneficiaries’ needs. Nevertheless, from its position of the subject responsible for general output of the programme, the Managing Authority shall coordinate activities and intentions of all particular subjects to be in compliance and to jointly lead to the fulfilment of the objectives fixed for the programme concerned.

Good practice in the framework of the OP TA implementation structure consists of the involvement of experienced staff of NCA and the Budget Department in educational activities for the implementation structure staffs who take part in selected events as lecturers, thus assisting in transmission of practical information.

3.2.5 Is the budget suitably allocated for different activities to provide efficient use of the financial resources?

The Operational Programme Technical Assistance and its orientation financial plan were approved at the end of 2007. The programme draft included the system of framework projects to give a general idea of future projects executed in the OP TA. The beneficiaries in relevant spheres of support thus specified their future requirements in the beginning of the period concerned, they elaborated the plan of expected needs and activities, and submitted it to the Managing Authority in the form of filled syllabi of framework projects. The framework syllabi were approved by the Minister’s decision, and their main purpose is to provide the Managing Authority with basic data on the planning and estimation of the future development, and data on planned resources allocated to be drawn by particular beneficiaries from the OP TA.

³ In detail, see page 75 of the Technical-Assistance Operational Programme OP TA.

The current level of drawing financial resources from the OP TA is significantly negatively impacted by a delay in the beginning of the drawing and execution of the projects. The program was approved at the end of the first year of the programming period (December 2007), and not even functional systems were defined suitably in the beginning of the programme to enable the beneficiaries to immediately begin with submitting and executing the projects.

The total OP TA resources for the whole programming period 2007 – 2013 amount to **EUR 291,509,618**. The allocation of the Community's contribution to particular priority axes and spheres of support is shown in the table and the picture below.

With respect to the volume of financial resources allocated and potential problems caused by delays in the beginning of execution of the programme, the Compiler recommends the absorption capacity evaluation to be made.

4 **Suggestion Part – Recommendations**

The Compiler proposed some recommendations classified in 3 groups according to their urgency. This summarisation comprises only the recommendations that shall be executed as soon as possible in the Compiler's opinion because it is possible to say that further recommendations relate thereto or detail them in a longer time horizon. The last category of the recommendations concerns the modifications to be made in the documentation.

4.1 ***Recommendations to be Executed as Soon as Possible according to the Compiler***

Recommendations for the OP TA strategic management

- ➔ To strengthen the Managing Authority's role and to thoroughly supervise the execution of the objectives – Regular participation in working meetings or working groups of the OP TA beneficiaries; Thorough motivation of the beneficiaries to execute the projects; Supervision of execution of projects and an active role in the phase of planning new projects; Generation of ideas of new projects in particular axes.

The Managing Authority shall be in the position to listen to advice of other subjects in the implementation structure, however, being the subject making final decisions.

- ➔ To strengthen reliance upon the MA in the matter of communication. Based on their previous experience, the beneficiaries address their questions either to CRD or directly to other authorities involved in the implementation.
- ➔ To section the MA to departments and/or groups of staff and if necessary, to strengthen administrative capacities of the MA of the OP TA with the staff to work on particular priority axes to become professionals therein. However, the MA staff shall be very well aware of these issues, orientate themselves in the whole system and in particular, be equivalent partners to other subjects involved in the OP TA implementation (e.g. in the role of professional organisation managers in the priority axes, coordinator, etc.).
- ➔ To execute the OP TA through well organised "system" projects. We may state based on routed interviews that the beneficiaries act towards the OP TA very autonomously. Nevertheless, this role should be held by the MA of the OP TA, having coherent vision upon

the programme and projects fulfilling it and leading to achievement of its objectives. With respect to needs and objectives of the programme and administrative burden connected with the projects, **the OP TA framework should especially comprise the execution of extensive, long-term and precisely planned projects aimed at support of administrative and absorption capacities of the NSRF and OP TA, NSRF publicity, administration of information systems and preparation for the future programming period 2014+.**

- ➔ To assure sufficient numbers of the staff of the OP TA implementation structure subjects, predominantly with the MA of the OP TA and NCA playing a key role in successfulness of the OP TA and NSRF implementation. Moreover, NCA is a key applicant / beneficiary of OP TA, thus there is a significant administrative burden put upon its employees.
- ➔ To evaluate the OP TA absorption capacity to be able to verify the option to draw out allocated resources whose drawing has been late because of late beginning of the programme.

Recommendations to solve impacts of the late beginning of starting to draw OP TA allocations

- ➔ Systematic solution of the fact that at the beginning of the period, no projects were executed, thus no resources were drawn out of the OP TA. At present, we may see some collision of the projects originally scheduled for this period, which increases the burden and risk of mistakes. The situation may be solved in the future mainly via a higher number of staff in the departments taking part in preparation and execution of the projects not only in the MRD, but also in the MF CR.
- ➔ To minimise the measures with retroactive effect in connection with the projects executed in the past under the conditions that had not been defined correctly so that the requirements on retroactive authentication do not repeatedly burden the beneficiary. As few as possible, to modify and change the conditions for drawing resources of the TA, namely if such modifications burden the beneficiary.
- ➔ To herald planned modifications in the documentation sufficiently in advance so that the beneficiaries make prepare for such modifications.
- ➔ To assure harmonisation of the processes and instructions for the projects submitted in the framework of the OP TA not only within MRD, but with all applicants. At present, with the projects already in the OP TA programme, the modifications concerned shall necessarily :
 - **continue** previous processes, available information sources and possibilities of the beneficiaries to modify documents and basic data towards the past;
 - **be controlled and coordinated by the Managing Authority** that shall be responsible for the compliance of such modification with the needs of the programme.

The MA of the OP TA should, in cooperation with IS other subjects IS (BD, CRD, etc.), struggle for the processes to be the most uniform, defined stably, with the minimum administrative burden.

Recommendations for the possibility to be given information on different projects

- ➔ Revisions and contingent updates of the syllabi of the framework projects for particular fields of the support. To assure the possibility of more flexible changes and modifications in the syllabi of the framework projects (e.g. authorisations of the syllabi at the MRD lower

management level that will reduce administrative requirements on provision of all necessary signatures).

- ➔ To consider complete cancellation of the system of framework projects – The framework projects are submitted during the Minister’s meetings, makes delays between the authorisation and beginning of the projects. The cumbersome system of modifications in the framework projects causes problems particularly in the projects of the departments that had not been submitters of the framework projects, but who included thereto their own individual projects. Instead of framework projects, to require a general table of the projects planned for the upcoming period from the submitters at least once a year so that the Managing Authority does not lose valuable information necessary for its managing activities.
- ➔ To define requirements on continuous monitoring of the drawing of all resources allocated to particular OP TA beneficiaries. The MA of the OP TA should specify the form and extent of its requirements to be able to continuously monitor resources allocated drawn out.

Recommendations for publicity

- ➔ To assure that NCA, or the NSRF Publicity and Administrative Capacities Department, respectively, immediately proceeds to schedule and execute a suitable long-term project aimed at improvement of the foreknowledge of the wide and professional public, increase of awareness of the NSRF (SF EU in the CR). The MA of the OP TA shall ensure the achievement of the objectives defined for the programme, for which it should sufficiently cooperate with the beneficiaries and provide them with necessary co-activities.
- ➔ In connection with providing publicity, to analyse in detail the efficiency of the media campaign “You know about us” and based on the pieces knowledge acquired in this way, to use them at planning new NSRF publicity activities. To consider time demanded for preparation of a high-quality project, to provide the beneficiary with necessary support to be able to reach OP TA objectives.

Information-transmission measures

- ➔ To assure an efficient and functional system transmitting information on updates of the documentation (mainly HBA) and relations, including accompanying information events. To assure that during the processing of any modification of the documentation, all relevant changes and modifications include also all relevant subjects (i.e. including audit and certification authorities making checks and certification based on such documents). To care for harmonisation of requirements of the subjects involved in the checking repayments and certification of projects, i.e. the subjects finally working with the given documents (at making evaluations, checks, certifications, etc.).
- ➔ To simplify the process at reporting about substantial changes and modifications. If the IB informs the MA and the Budget Department of a significant modification, the MA need not consequently officially ask the BD for its opinion. The operation manual may define that this happens automatically after having dispatched the information of a substantial modification from the IB to the Budget Department. To consider the cancellation of the duty of written correspondence at each step of reporting on modifications. Such information on modification could be consequently sent by email, with an email answer thereto with the information given by the IB of having registered it, with an instruction how to further proceed through printed correspondence, only if this being really necessary.

4.2 *Final Summarisation of Recommendations*

In conclusion, we may state that one of the identified and several times confirmed findings is the missing continuity during elaboration and execution of the programme, and currently smaller experience of the staff in the MA department of the OP TA. While the staff fluctuation has not been so high in other MRD departments and in the CRD, there have been many personnel changes in the MA of the OP TA already since its establishment (delegation) in August 2008. The changes consequently caused **a lower level of continuity in cooperation of the MA of the OP TA with other subjects involved in the OP TA implementation, and its beneficiaries.** This caused considerable differences in the execution of other departments' functions, both considering the execution of audit activities, and the control of changes or the beneficiary. **The MRD CR departments have well made clear about their needs and expectations towards the OP TA, however, they shall discuss their intentions in detail with the Managing Authority that is competent to appraise contribution of a given intention or project to successfully draw financial resources allocated, and particularly the fulfilment of the programme objectives.** The staff of the departments have otherwise better experience in the SF EU implementation sphere (both in the past and in the present) in relation to the OP TA, SROP or other programmes. The MA competences incorporate a final decision on the projects to be executed and on routing of the programme. With respect to a frequently mentioned low efficiency of the MA of the OP TA before the present management had taken charge of its function, the departments of the MRD CR were forced to act somewhat individually and not to rely upon cooperation and methodical management of the MA of the OP TA.

With view to the above information, the Compiler considers as necessary **to significantly support the function and performance of the MA of the OP TA. It is upon consideration whether this could be done also through execution of suitable educational activities, trainings and also by a right definition, or maintenance, respectively, of the narrow partner cooperation of MA OP TA with both NCA, CRD and BD departments for carry-over of experience, knowledge and know-how.**

Even with respect to the above-mentioned imperfections, we may state that the implementation system of the Operational Programme Technical Assistance is regulated suitably. All subjects involved are sufficiently active and well aware of their role in the IS of the OP TA. For that reason, the Compiler does not recommend any modification to be made in the involvement of the subjects. Nevertheless, the Compiler emphasises that these subjects have to be **submitted to supervision of the Managing Authority.**