



Media release

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Switzerland's enlargement contribution rated highly

An independent evaluation has confirmed the federal authorities responsible have achieved good results in implementing Switzerland's enlargement contribution to the new EU member states. The in-depth assessment showed that the projects, of which there are some 300, are making a positive contribution towards promoting social and economic development in the 13 partner states. The objectives are being attained or even exceeded in the vast majority of projects. Various recommendations encourage further efficiency and greater thematic and geographic focus.

Through its enlargement contribution, Switzerland aims to help reduce the economic and social disparities in the enlarged European Union (EU). To assess whether the goals set are being accomplished, the federal government authorities responsible – the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) – commissioned an external evaluation in 2015. This independent evaluation, which has now been presented by the German company GOPA Consultants, concluded that the programme's overall concept – which entails the close involvement of the partner states – has proven very successful and that the objectives set are being met and often even exceeded. Relations between Switzerland and the partner states have been intensified and a positive image of Switzerland conveyed thanks to numerous bilateral partnerships.

The around 300 projects tackle challenges in fields such as economic growth, the improvement of working conditions, social security and public safety, environmental protection and the strengthening of civil society. Switzerland is providing support with preventative measures in Poland's healthcare system, for example. Assistance is being afforded in Slovakia with the construction of wastewater collection and treatment facilities while small-scale entrepreneurs in Latvia are benefitting from subsidised micro-loans, enabling them to create new jobs.

Objectives achieved in most cases

The evaluation indicated that the projects were very well devised and planned. This is explained by the relatively long preparation period of up to two years. Even though the project objectives were accomplished in most cases, delays sometimes arose, often due to protracted tendering procedures for the acquisition of goods and services or owing to overly optimistic planning targets.

The projects' sustainability was rated positively in most instances. As the partner institutions played a major role at planning stage, experience shows that they have a strong interest in the project succeeding. They also generally contribute 15% towards funding the project costs.

Recommendations for the remaining programme term

For the programme's remaining term, the evaluation recommends further simplification of administrative procedures, the continuation of exchange with Swiss partners and the stepping-up of information activities in the partner countries. The partner states should also be required to define a smaller number of thematic and geographical priorities in the event of further support from Switzerland in future. The Federal Council will decide on any renewal of Switzerland's enlargement contribution in the light of how overall relations between Switzerland and the EU develop.

Parliament approved a CHF 1 billion framework credit in June 2007 for the ten states that joined the EU in 2004, namely Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. The implementation period for this tranche of the enlargement contribution expires in June 2017. A second framework credit of CHF 257 million was endorsed by Parliament in December 2009 in favour of Bulgaria and Romania, which joined in 2007. The projects concerned must be completed by December 2019. Parliament then gave the go-ahead for a further CHF 45 million in December 2014 for Croatia, which became an EU member state in 2013. The implementation period for this tranche ends in December 2024.

The issues and recommendations set out in the evaluation report are also of great interest to the SDC and SECO in areas beyond the enlargement contribution. Involving partner institutions, delegating responsibility and the way in which target achievement is measured are all key aspects of international cooperation in general terms.

The full evaluation report is available in English and, together with the summarised version 'EVALUATION REPORT ON THE SWISS CONTRIBUTION 2015 - Key points in brief', is publicly accessible at www.erweiterungsbeitrag.admin.ch.