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Extraordinary Programme Steering Committee Meeting

Belgrade, 24 December 2014

Minutes



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I Agenda of the Steering Committee

1. Welcome and introduction speeches
2. Update on European PROGRES developments
3. Requests for approval
4. Voting
5. Other business

II Minutes

Agenda item 1

Welcome and introductory speeches

Branko Budimir, the Head of the Department for Planning, Programming, Monitoring and Reporting on European Union Funds and Development Aid of the European Integration Office of the Government of Serbia (SEIO) and the Chair of the European PROGRES' Steering Committee (PSC) welcomed all participants. He called for continuing engagement of the PSC members in the work of the Committee, as this was instrumental for monitoring of European PROGRES.

Agenda item 2

Update on European PROGRES' developments

Marko Vujačić, European PROGRES National Programme Manager, presented current Programme developments, while highlighting successful conduct of public calls for technical documentation, partnership projects of civil society organizations (CSOs) and local self-governments (LSGs), and for updating tax payers' registries.

Agenda item 3

Presentation of requests for approval

Recommendations for funding of projects through Citizens' Involvement Fund Call for Proposal

Biljana Kerić, European PROGRES Programme Associate for Social Inclusion, presented the results of the First Call for Proposals of the Citizens' Involvement Fund (CIF). Out of 77 applications that were received from 32 municipalities, 20 projects were recommended for funding, primarily contributing to social inclusion and employability of vulnerable population, 18 proposals were placed on the reserve list, 27 were not recommended, and 12 were disqualified for failing to meet the basic criteria.

Budimir said it was important to ensure that applicants receive good quality information about the results of the Call. He asked why some projects that have issues with sustainability were recommended for funding and why there was a low number of applications tackling migrations and inter-ethnic cooperation. **Kerić** confirmed that the Programme will inform all applicants about the status of their proposals as well as that the effort will be put to provide reasoning for refusals. She



also explained that European PROGRES, in several cases, recommended funding of projects despite identified issues with sustainability or other evaluation criteria. The Programme will, however, seek further evidences that the identified issues will be addressed and only if these are provided, a grant will be issued. It is difficult to ensure sustainability of inter-ethnic initiatives and this is one of the reasons why limited number of applications was received in this area. Furthermore, there were very few CSOs in the Programme area specialized in migrations and this explains the low interest for this theme.

Ana Stanković, the Project Manager in the Delegation of the European Union, said it was necessary to coordinate CIF activities with the Fund for Civil Society to avoid overlapping. She encouraged European PROGRES to organise a workshop or a similar function in order to present to applicants the good practices and mistakes that were made during this Call.

Petar Vasilev, the National Programme Officer in the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) said that there were initiatives that tackled migrations, such as Peacebuilding and Inclusive Local Development (PBILD) Programme or EU PROGRES. Improving public services, creation of new jobs and enhancing access to education are all measures that tackle migrations.

Budmir underlined that within efforts to ensure transparency it was important to agree a method and criteria for possible funding of the projects from the reserve list. **Kerić** explained that the reserve list was also developed on the basis of the scoring. If funding becomes available, European PROGRES would recommend projects from the reserve list.

While considering evaluation results, **Budimir** concluded that the projects resulting from partnerships that included two CSOs and two LSGs were less successful than proposals involving one CSO and one LSG. This was to some extent contrary to the intention to promote broader partnerships. **Kerić** explained that the Evaluation Commission assessed applications on the basis of a set of criteria and that, despite desire to promote double partnership proposals, weaknesses in these applications determined their lower overall scoring.

Milica Rodić, the Advisor to the Director of the Coordination Body for Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa, said that some of the submitted budgets included lump sums and that these had to be specified and justifiable. **Kerić** confirmed that European PROGRES conducted thorough check and sought clarifications wherever needed regarding the applications, especially budgets, before issuing grants. The Programme will seek from beneficiaries to specify lump sums, where needed, request adjustments of set values of budget items if necessary and similar.

Budimir concluded that the criteria for the next CIF Call should incorporate lessons learned through this Call. For example, the Programme should research ways to encourage CSOs to develop projects tackling migrations or inter-ethnic cooperation, possibly through modification of the scoring criteria. The lessons learned should be shared with applicants. The PSC will consider possible requests for funding of projects that were put on the reserve list through written procedure. **Stanković** added that possible funding of projects from the reserve list must follow the submitted ranking list. If the funding is not sufficient for funding of the best ranked project on the reserve list, the funding will be reallocated for the second CIF Call.

Recommendations for funding of projects supporting upgrade of Tax Payers' Database



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Bojan Marčič, European PROGRES' Programme Associate for Municipal Management, presented results of the Call for Proposals (CfP) for Improvement of the Tax Payers' Registry. Out of 34 LSGs, 30 submitted applications, and 16 proposals were recommended for funding.

Budimir asked why some proposals that had the lowest score against the specific sub criteria were recommended for funding. **Marčič** explained that there were several cases when applicants made technical mistakes when preparing, for example, work plans in Excel sheet and this determined the lowest score for this aspect. However, other elements of the proposals demonstrated consistency of objectives, results and activities, and potential for economic impact, hence resulting in high overall score and recommendation for funding.

Dušan Čukić, European PROGRES' Technical Programme Advisor added that the key evaluation criteria was impact that update of the tax payers' database would have on the collection of the local revenues. Preparation of the work plan is a technical thing that can be corrected, if necessary, before issuing the grant, and it doesn't essentially affect the quality of the project.

Vasilev asked clarification regarding the budget line for external staff. He highlighted importance of the link between collection of revenues and transparency of the budgeting process. He noted that some of the LSGs that received assistance through the predecessor Programme, EU PROGRES, were again recommended for funding. **Marčič** explained that the engagement of external staff was related to the people who will work on the update of registries, which is the main purpose of the Call. He said that "contribution to good governance, especially transparency and citizens' participation" was one of the key evaluation criteria.

Čukić confirmed that four municipalities (Priboj, Blace, Bujanovac, and Preševo) that were supported through EU PROGRES were recommended for assistance again because the room for further improvements of taxpayers' was significant. Good examples were Preševo and Bujanovac, where despite progress achieved during EU PROGRES, more efforts are needed to enhance the collection of local taxes.

Criteria for provision of support for capital investment planning and programme budgeting

Čukić said that European PROGRES used Competitiveness Study of 34 LSGs as the basis for preparation of the criteria for provision of support for capital investment planning and programme budgeting. Thirty LSGs are eligible to apply, while five LSGs that were supported through EU PROGRES in capital investment planning will, in line with the Programme Document, be supported in the programme budgeting.

Budimir asked clarification regarding sub criteria 3.1 dealing with the position of Local Economic Development Office (LED) and how the Programme would check the average number of days for issuance of the construction permits (sub criteria 2.1) since this data is already available in the Competitiveness Study. **Čukić** explained that the sub criteria 3.1 referred both to whether the LED Office was systematized and operational. This did not imply forming of the new LED offices. He also said that the Competitiveness Study provided insight into the capacities of the LSGs, but applications will be more detailed, and hence will show who has intention and capacities to implement activities in this area.



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Budimir said that the Programme should encourage beneficiaries to link the Capital Investments Plans, planning and technical documentation, with opportunities to access funds for implementation of the infrastructure projects. **Stanković** added there were LSGs, such as Vranje, which facilitated investments on the basis of local strategies and developed technical and planning documentation.

Nina Zelić, Advisor in the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government asked whether this activity has been coordinated with the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SCTM). **Marčić** said that the SCTM and Exchange 4 were consulted and confirmed that coordination will continue.

Vasilev praised European PROGRES' efforts to include good governance aspects in the criteria for the selection of beneficiaries for CIP and PB activity.

Stanković requested modification of the phrase in the draft criteria about "right to European PROGRES Programme Manager to make the final decision on the selection process results".

Concept for the first European PROGRES' campaign

Dejan Drobnjak, Communication Officer of European PROGRES, presented the concept for the first European PROGRES' campaign, while confirming it has been prepared in consultations with the SEIO, DEU and SDC. The campaign focuses on presenting the benefits of the European integrations process to various target groups.

Stanković said that the PSC needs more detailed breakdown of costs than the one provided. The activities should be coordinated with the campaigns planned within other EU funded actions. **Drobnjak** explained that the breakdown of costs would be available after completion of UNOPS' selection of the consultancy that will implement the campaign. He also confirmed that activities would be coordinated with the relevant stakeholders.

Zorica Vukelić, Deputy Secretary General of the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities reiterated necessity of coordination. She said that European PROGRES should link campaign with the ongoing SCTM activities, and especially take into consideration the survey on European integrations.

Agenda item 4

Voting

The PSC unanimously approved the following:

- 20 CIF projects that were recommended for funding in the amount of up to 397,765 Euros
- 16 projects supporting update of taxpayers' registries in the amount up to 145,123 Euros
- The criteria for provision of support for capital investment planning and programme budgeting
- The concept for the first European PROGRES' campaign in the amount of up to 100,000 Euros.

Agenda item 5

Other business



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Vasilev said that European PROGRES should coordinate activities with several other SDC funded actions: in East Serbia, with the German Development Agency – GIZ; in South Serbia, with the Regional Agency for Economic Development and Entrepreneurship – VEEDA; and in Zlatibor, with a joint programme of the Red Cross and UNICEF.

Vujačić said that the next regular PSC is planned for the mid-February 2015. The location will be confirmed in January while considering geographic balance criteria and weather conditions. Vujačić also added that the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, Kori Udovički expressed interest to attend the PSC meeting. This could influence the final decision on the meeting’s date and location. European PROGRES will keep the PSC informed.

Budimir thanked everyone for participation.

List of participants

	Name	Institution/Organisation	Function
1.	Branko Budimir	Serbian EU Integration Office	Head of the Unit for Planning of EU Funds and Development Assistance and Coordination of Programmes in the Area of Economic and Social Cohesion
2.	Ana Stanković	Delegation of the European Union	Project Manager
3.	Petar Vasilev	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation	National Programme Officer
4.	Nataša Šimšić	Ministry of Finance	Assistant to the Minister
5.	Veljko Jovanović	Ministry of Economy	Advisor to Minister for International Cooperation
6.	Miona Popović	Ministry of Economy	Advisor



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7.	Nina Zelić	Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government	Advisor
8.	Staša Lukić	Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government	Ministry Representative, Department for European Integration
9.	Nikola Veža	Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure	Advisor
10.	Milica Rodić	Coordination Body for Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa	Advisor to the Director
11.	Zorica Vukelić	Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities	Deputy Secretary General
12.	Marko Vujačić	European PROGRES	National Programme Manager
13.	Dušan Čukić	European PROGRES	Technical Programme Advisor
14.	Dragan Mladenović	European PROGRES	Manager of Good Governance and Social Inclusions Sector
15.	Dejan Drobnjak	European PROGRES	Communications Officer
16.	Biljana Kerić	European PROGRES	Programme Associate for Social Inclusion
17.	Bojan Marčić	European PROGRES	Programme Associate for Municipal Management