



## Cohesion policy and EU identity in Slovenia



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## Introduction

Objective of this case study is to **analyse implications of Cohesion policy for the European identity in Slovenia**. The study refers to programme periods 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 (up to the end of 2017).

The key methodological requirement in the Horizon 2020 project call was a **comparative case study** approach based on “genuine and innovative case studies from Members States with different current and historical territorial administrative frameworks and regional identities.”

Case study is based on **mixed-methods design** employing qualitative and quantitative methods (surveys of citizens and stakeholders, in-depth interviews, focus groups, documentary analysis, content analysis of political party manifestos and media framing analysis); and by adopting a cross-cutting approach with a common case study structure to facilitate comparative analysis.

Part 1 of the case study is focused on the socio-economic context and background of identity formation; part 2 on the implementation and performance of Cohesion policy, including policymaker surveys and interviews; part 3 on the communication aspects in terms of the media and the effectiveness of communication strategies, based on the framing analysis, surveys and interviews public perceptions of Cohesion policy and part 4 on the impact of Cohesion policy on identification with the EU, drawing on the citizens survey and focus group tasks.

## 1. Context and backgrounds

### *1.1 Socioeconomic context*

Following accession to the EU, **Slovenia was facing strong growth and was on the way to converge with the average EU development levels** in GDP terms. In 2007, Slovenia was the first of the CEE countries to enter the Eurozone. Competitiveness of Slovenia's economy has been increasing but various **structural reforms were needed** to improve labour productivity and market shares.

The transport policy in Slovenia had prioritized investments into motorway construction while **regional and local traffic connections and railway infrastructure were left behind**. The levels of education were relatively high and improving but **the total share of R&D in corporate sector was too insignificant**. The institutional environment in Slovenia was among the least encouraging for economic development and competitiveness.

The employment rate was slightly above the EU average but **the ratio between those capable of work and old people was expected to deteriorate** significantly in the following two decades from 5:1 to 3:1 and less. Gender equality was high and risk of poverty was low.

Being abundant with forests and clean water Slovenia was still facing **certain environmental problems** such as low energy efficiency, growing emissions, growing road transport, endangered ground waters and water systems, growing quantities of waste and lack of modern infrastructure of waste management.

The cities and urban areas have been the driving force of the economic and social development in Slovenia. **Regional disparities between the Western and Eastern Slovenia were increasing**; while

before the accession Western Slovenia already reached the average EU development level (in GDP terms), Eastern Slovenia was under the two thirds of that level.

**The global economic and financial crisis and the Eurozone crisis** Slovenia had been faced with between 2008 and 2014 exposed **structural problems such as too low cost-competitiveness, low technological complexity and administrative rigidity**. As a result of restrictive pay and labour costs policy, cost competitiveness deterioration came to a halt in 2011. However, Slovenia was trapped in vicious cycle of low economic activity and aggravating conditions in financial sector and public finance. Only in 2015 and onwards, stable GDP growth returned based on the changes in international environment and stabilization of the banking system.

**As a result of the crisis, unemployment increased** reaching 13.5% in 2013, with 59% of unemployed registered in Eastern Slovenia. Projections anticipating rapid population ageing called for adjustment of the healthcare and long term care systems to the demographic and other changes in the environment with tailor-made solutions. In spite of decreasing material prosperity, risk of poverty remained at a relatively low level in comparison with other European states.

During the crisis period, there was no major change in regional terms – the development problems were still concentrated in the Eastern Slovenia.

### 1.2 Political context

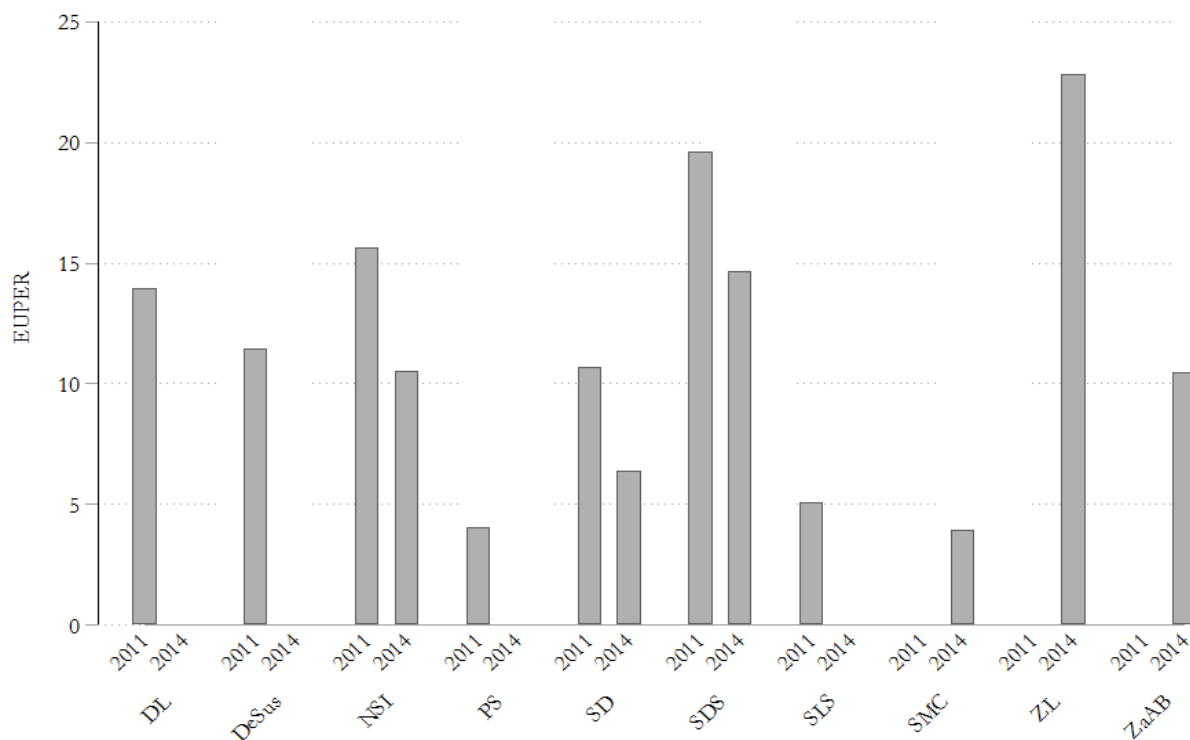
#### *National party positions on European integration and EU Cohesion policy in Slovenia*

Party	European integration			Cohesion policy		
	2006	2010	2014	2006	2010	2014
LDS	6.40	6.55		4.83	6.22	
SDS	6.40	5.82	6.38	5.50	5.89	6.10
SD	6.20	6.55	5.85	6.40	6.56	6.00
SLS	5.00	4.73	6.08	5.60	5.75	6.10
NSi	6.25	4.90	6.46	6.20	6.29	6.10
DeSUS	5.40	4.90	5.77	5.40	5.38	6.10
SNS	2.60	3.00		4.20	4.00	
AS	5.40			5.40		
Zares		6.36			6.11	
SMC			6.42			6.30
ZL			3.69			5.60
ZAAB			6.58			6.30
PS			6.08			5.90

Party policy positions are based on a CHES seven-point scale, ranging from 'strongly opposed' (1) to 'strongly in favour' (7)

According to the analysis of the party programmes, **(almost) all parties in Slovenia have been strongly in favour of the European integration and EU Cohesion policy**. The exceptions are nationalist Slovene national party (Slovenska nacionalna stranka – SNS) and radical left United left (Združena levica – ZL), especially for the European integrations and less so for the Cohesion policy. In 2010 attitudes towards the European integration were more negative, which can be attributed to the role of the economic and financial crisis.

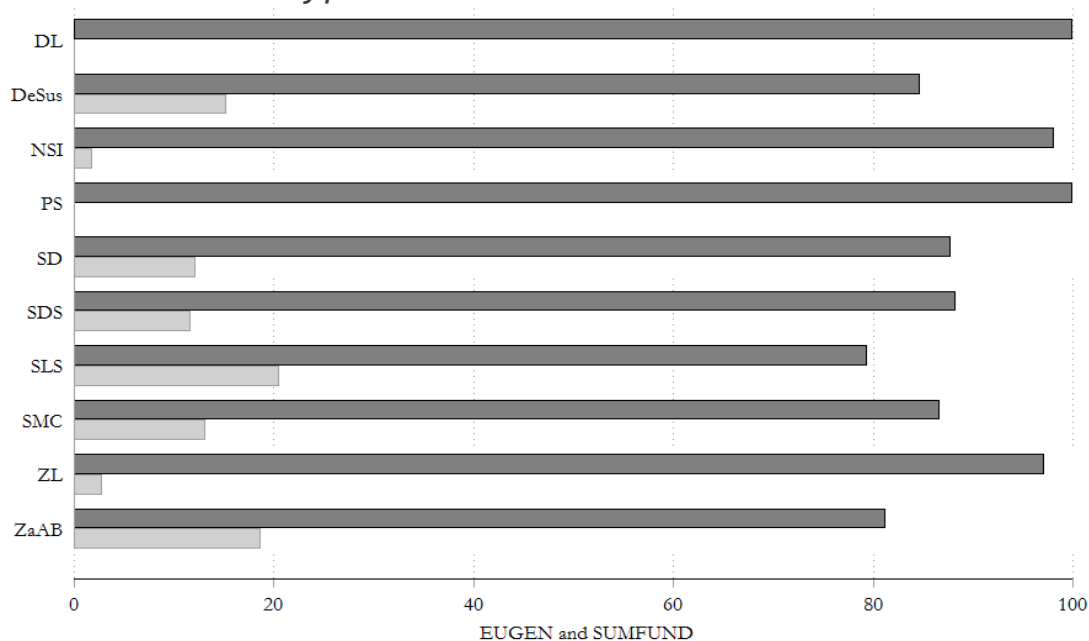
### ***EUPER by parties by election year in Slovenia***



Bars show the percentage of the national manifestos (grouped by party and election year) that focuses on European issues (EUPER). A blank space indicates that a party's election manifesto could not be coded.

In the party manifestos, EU issues account for zero to 25%. Considerable variations between party programmes and years can be observed. The most attention to the EU was devoted by radical left party ZL. In general, the share of EU issues declined.

### ***EUGEN and SUMFUND by parties in Slovenia***



Bars in dark grey show the average percentage of the national manifestos (grouped by party) that focuses on Europe in general (EUGEN). Bars in light grey show the average sum of all categories related to EU funding (SUMFUND) in parties' national manifestos

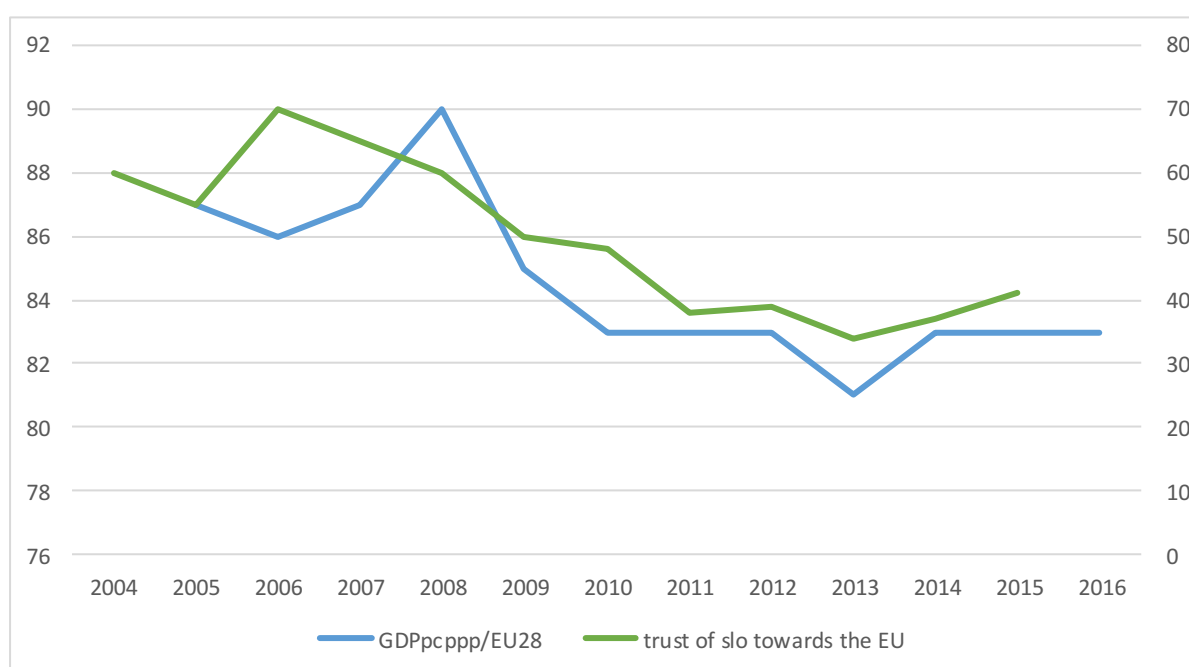
Europe represents a high share in party manifestos, ranging from 80 to 100%, while EU funding ranges from zero to 20%.

### 1.3 European identity

Since the independence, the main objective and source of legitimacy of political elites in Slovenia was to break with Yugoslav past and become part of the Euro Atlantic integrations. Support for the EU membership at the referendum just before the accession was over 90%. Being the forth runner in the group of transition countries – the first to adopt euro, to close the convergence gap and to take over presidency of the EU Council in 2008, helped in giving sense of pride and self-confidence. **Slovenia was constantly among countries, where according to Eurobarometer support for the EU was the strongest.**

This was followed by **the economic and financial crisis** which had hit hard Slovenia, almost facing Troika bailout in 2013. The **euro scepticism increased** although the domestic elites were still the ones to take most of the blame and majority continued to support the EU membership. The European migrant and refugee crisis during which Slovenia faced huge influx came as another shock feeding populism and nationalism in the context of Brexit, illiberal trends in the Eastern Member states and across the Atlantic. However, pro-EU orientation remained and again gained grounds after Western Balkans migrant corridor was closed and as the economic situation improved.

### *Economic convergence and attitudes towards the EU*



Source: Eurostat

Disaggregation of opinion poll results demonstrates that the differences in EU attitudes between the regions are not significant. Support for the EU has been somehow stronger in Eastern Slovenia where, during the crisis, support for leaving the Eurozone was also stronger. This can be explained with more important role of EU supports on one hand and poorer economic situation on the other.

## 2. Cohesion policy implementation and performance

### 2.1 EU Cohesion policy strategic and implementation framework

Slovenia first implemented the Cohesion policy in the 2004-2006 period. At the time, Slovenia was treated as a single cohesion region (i.e. NUTS-II level) eligible for Objective 1 – convergence assistance targeting those below 75% of the EU's GDP average. The EU funds available accounted for €240 million. Some of the projects were funded already before the accession in 2004 from the pre-accession instrument (IPA) and became part of the Cohesion policy with the accession.

In the **2007-2013 period**, some €4.1 billion of European Structural and Investment (ESI) funds were available. Three sectoral operational programmes (OPs) were implemented: **OP for Strengthening Regional Development Potentials (SRDP)**, **OP for Human Resource Development (HRD)** and **OP for Environmental and Transport Infrastructure Development (ETID)**.

For the **2014-2020 period**, one OP with no sectoral or regional approach was prepared. In order to continue to be eligible for supports, Slovenia was divided into two cohesion NUTS-II regions: less developed Eastern and more developed Western Slovenia, with Eastern Slovenia earmarked higher allocation quota from the individual funds. The EU contribution to the programme was €3.1 billion.

#### 2.1.1 Operational Programmes for Slovenia 2007-2013

The Slovenian National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) established as an objective to *improve the welfare of the Slovenian citizens by promoting economic growth, job creation, strengthening of human capital and guaranteeing a balanced and harmonious development, in particular of the regions.*

The objective was broken down into five priorities:

- (1) *Promotion of entrepreneurship, innovation and technological development;*
- (2) *Improved quality of the education system, training and research and development (R&D) activities;*
- (3) *Improved labour market flexibility and employment security;*
- (4) *Promotion of sustainable mobility and*
- (5) *Balanced regional development.*

To attain these objectives, Government Office for Local Self-Government and Regional Policy, being the managing authority, drafted three OPs: OP SRDP, OP HRD and OP ETID, each focusing mainly (but not exclusively) on some of the priorities.

The purpose of **OP SRDP** was mainly to promote **priorities 1 and 5, i.e. entrepreneurship, innovations and technological development and to contribute to the reduction of regional disparities**. OP SRDP in the area of enterprise support and innovations provided support to research and development (R&D) projects, new businesses and investment projects in SMEs. From the financial point of view, the relative focus on the instruments for supporting SME development and innovation was one of the strongest in relative terms amongst the member states. Among measures were also information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and services. Support was also given to e-services for business and citizens and modernisation of broadband networks.



The **OP HRD** aimed to **improve the quality of the educational system and research-development activities and to improve labour market flexibility along with guaranteeing employment security in particular by creation of jobs (i.e. priorities 2 and 3)**. Measures involved promoting the adaptability of companies and workers and increase the range of training given to people employed in enterprises supported. There was also major investments in continuous training to improve skills and knowledge, increase participation in the labour market, and include education and training, labour market and social welfare institutions in accessibility and equal opportunities programmes and to address poverty and social inclusion.

The focus of **OP ETID** was on **ensuring conditions for growth by providing sustainable mobility, improving the quality of the environment and providing adequate infrastructure (i.e. priority 4)**. The OP ETID aimed at improving transport infrastructure and infrastructure related with sustainable management of the environment. In the area of transport, accent was on rail and roads. Key priorities leading to the development of a comprehensive strategy for the environmental sector focused on waste and water management systems. Other priorities and measures were mitigation of the consequences of climate change, use of renewable energy sources and energy efficiency projects.

### **OPs and ESI Funds in Slovenia 2007-13**

<i>Slovenia 2007-2013</i>				
OPs	Fund	€ (billion)	%	%
OP SRDP	ERDF	1.710	41.7	47.1
OP HRD	ESF	756	18.4	18.4
OP ETID	CF	1.412	34.4	34.4
	ERDF	224	5.5	
		1.636		
		4.102	100	100

The **total EU cohesion policy contribution** was **€4.102 billion**. Of that amount, European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) that financed OP SRDP and OP ETI contributed €1.710 billion and €224 million respectively, European Social Fund (ESF) financing OP HRD €756 million and Cohesion Fund (CF) financing OP ETID €1.412 billion.

### **OPs, Priority axes and ESI allocations in 2007-13**

<i>Slovenia 2007-2013</i>			
OP	Priority axes	ESI allocation (%)	ESI allocation (EUR)
SRDP	Competitiveness and research excellence	23.5	402,133,645
	Economic/development infrastructure	23.2	396,934,393
	Integration of natural and cultural potentials	15.4	263,235,116
	Development of regions	36.2	619,442,634
	Technical assistance	1.6	28,003,734
		100	1,709,749,522
HRD	Promoting entrepreneurship and adaptability	34.7	262,114,965
	Promoting employability of job-seekers and inactive	18.5	140,018,678
	Human resource development and life-long learning	21.8	164,661,965
	Equal opportunities and Reinforcing social inclusion	8.4	63,848,517
	Institutional and administrative capacity	12.8	97,051,506
	Technical assistance	3.7	28,003,739
		100	755,699,370
ETID	Railway infrastructure	27.5	449,567,581
	Road and port infrastructure	14.8	241,370,738
	Transport infrastructure	13.7	224,029,886
	Management of municipal waste	12.6	205,568,426
	Environment protection-water sector	19.9	325,483,339



Slovenia 2007-2013			
OP	Priority axes	ESI allocation (%)	ESI allocation (EUR)
	Sustainable use of energy	9.8	159,886,553
	Technical assistance	1.8	29,693,221
		100	1,635,599,744

The total indicative **budget for OP SRDP was €2,011,470,033** of which ERDF contributed €1,709,749,522 (85%) and national budget €301,720,511. The total indicative **budget for OP HRD was €889,058,088** of which ESF contributed €755,699,370 (85%) and national budget €133,358,718. The total indicative **budget for OP ETID was €1,924,234,998** of which CF and ERDF contributed €1,635,599,744 (85%) and national budget €288,635,254.

According to the interviewees, the **Cohesion policy in 2007-2013 mainly addressed the need of creating jobs with higher value added by facilitating investment in R&D and establishing linkages between science and economy** (OP SRDP, priority 1). Among major problems identified was **lack of basic infrastructure**, especially in the areas of the environment such as clean water supply and waste water management systems and municipal waste management, where Slovenia did not comply with the existing EU directives, as well as lack of the transport infrastructure (OP ETID). Also present but to a lesser extent was the need for investments in human resources in terms of activation, addressing long-term unemployment, education and training (OP HRD). Finally, **regional dimension** (OP SRDP, priority 4) also played relatively important role in terms of a bottom-up approach.

As several interviewees stressed, the problem was that **far too many priorities were set**, resulting in **dispersion of funds and lack of a clear sectoral or regional focus**, and that the priorities and allocations were not based on a proper ex-ante analysis. For too often, **the EU funds** were against the additionally principle simply **filling the gaps left by the national policies**. Finally, in spite the fact that the investments in infrastructure were in most part considered as necessary, **the number and scope of investments in physical infrastructure was deemed too high**.

### 2.1.2 Operational Programme for Slovenia 2014-2020

In terms of **competitiveness**, the Slovenian economy was still lagging behind the EU average, with the economic and financial crisis only deepening the problem. During the 2008-2013 period, Slovenia experienced a large-scale economic contraction, with a sharp downturn of -9% of GDP in 2009, a weak recovery in 2010 and 2011 and a second period of recession in 2012. The savings measures introduced to cut the public deficit (reaching 15% of GDP in 2013) reduced funding of many of development programmes and together with the baking crisis deepened the crisis in the private sector. Cuts in wages (unemployment more than doubled, reaching 12%), however, helped to improve the competitiveness. The lag behind was especially in high value added export oriented services. Hence, investments targeting improvement of infrastructure for research and innovation and enhancement of capacities for excellence in this area were still central (Priority allocation - PA 1, see table below). Greater attention was now given to more efficient use of the existing research infrastructure. Enterprises would be eligible for support in all stages of their lifecycle. Due to financing problems in the context of the crisis, financial instruments mechanisms were strengthened (PA 3).

Support was also provided for appropriate IT solutions and administrative processes to increase the transparency and efficiency (PA 2), e.g. in spatial management and construction in order to speed up the investment cycle. The challenge to improve the efficiency of the public administration was also addressed by investments to augment institutional capacity and public services at all levels, to ensure the much-needed reform and good governance and to improve legislation (PA 11).

In the area of **labour market, employment, education and training**, the crisis and problems of Slovenian economy were manifested by the deteriorated situation in the labour market, justifying measures that linked the education sphere and labour market, especially in the area of access to lifelong learning and reduction of labour market disparities (PA 8, 10). In terms of promoting social inclusion and countering poverty, Slovenia was one of the countries with below average risk of social exclusion and poverty. Thus, the attention was on comprehensive social activation measures in addressing the issue of social exclusion (PA 9).

In the area of **resource efficiency and reducing environmental pressures** (PA 4, 5, 6), priority investments supported shift towards low-carbon economy, climate change adaptation and preservation and protection of the environment. Despite the investments made thus far, both cohesion regions still required investments in energy renovation of buildings. Throughout Slovenia, extreme hydrological phenomena were occurring more frequently and becoming more pronounced. The importance of flood risk management and reduction was highlighted (PA 5). One of the more problematic issues pertained to urban wastewater collection and treatment infrastructure in agglomerations with a total load equal to or above 2,000 PE in full. The equipment and the number of people connected to the public sewerage system still did not comply with the requirements set out in the Council directive on protection of waters (PA 6). As a result of delays in the implementation of several projects in this area in the period 2007-2013, priority would now be given to projects that demonstrated maturity.

In the area of **enhancing infrastructure** (PA 7), the majority of structural funds support was allocated to investments in rail infrastructure, which was the condition for shifting freight from road to rail and enhancing the safety and competitiveness of rail transport.

#### ***Priority axes and allocations in 2014-20***

<b><i>Slovenia 2014-2020</i></b>			
Priority allocation	Source of financing	ESI allocation (EUR)	ESI allocation (%)
(1) Strengthening research, technological development and innovation	ERDF	473,915,861	16.4
(2) Enhancing access to, and use and quality of, ICT	ERDF	68,518,277	2.4
(3) Enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs	ERDF	526,078,424	18.2
(4) Supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors	ERDF, CF	281,632,005	9.7
(5) Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management	ERDF, CF	83,021,932	2.9
(6) Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency	ERDF, CF	400,236,672	13.8
(7) Promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures	ERDF, CF	262,760,300	9.1
(8) Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility	ESF, YEI	296,948,138	10.3
(9) Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination	ERDF, ESF	220,303,242	7.6
(10) Investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning	ERDF, ESF	229,020,050	7.9
(11) Enhancing the institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration	ESF	62,073,980	2.1
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,892,332,178</b>	

For **2014-2020**, Slovenia has been allocated around **€3.07 billion in Cohesion Policy funding**. The contribution by ERDF (€1.39 billion) and ESF (€716.9 million) has been divided in terms of €1.26

billion for the less developed region of Eastern Slovenia and €847.3 million the more developed region of Western Slovenia. The €895.4 million under the CF targeted Slovenia as a whole. Contribution by Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) in Eastern Slovenia was €9.2 million.

According to the interviewees, in the programming period 2014-2020 **more attention was paid to investing into people (as opposed to investing in the physical infrastructure)**. This was due to substantial investments in infrastructure in the early period and the pressures of the Commission to reduce those investments, especially the ones under the regional development mechanism (OP SRDP), which were often widely dispersed, as well as to exclude certain sectors such as tourism. Nevertheless, some of the key priorities related with missing infrastructure such as water systems, energy efficiency investments and railway infrastructure remained.

This second period coincided with the **economic and financial crisis**, resulting in challenges such as increased unemployment and social security costs. Slovenia was also facing broader societal challenges such as ageing, pressuring on the pension and healthcare system. Thus, the part of the programme financed by ESF basically remained intact. Due to overall reduction of funds available by €1 billion, mostly at the expense of infrastructure and regional development mechanism, in relative terms, more support went to addressing activation, reduction of structural labour market gaps, activation of socially excluded, developing of social partners to be able to be actively engaged in the European semesters etc.

The red line connecting both of the periods was creating jobs with higher value added, facilitating investment in research and development and science-economy linkages. This priority keeping its central role in the transition between the two periods was linked to the overall development strategy of Slovenia, taking a rather economic approach and focusing on the role of private enterprises, which in the context of the budget stringency even more relied on the EU funds.

#### *2.1.3 Implementation framework and partnership structures*

In the **programming period 2007-2013**, Slovenia was a **single convergence region NUTS-II**. The **Managing authority** responsible for the efficient management of the OPs was the **Government Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Local Self-Government and Regional Policy**. The Certifying/paying authority confirming statements of expenditure was the Ministry of Finance. Audit authority was the Budget supervision office, a body within the Ministry of Finance. **Intermediate bodies**, implementing the tasks conferred by the managing authorities were **several ministries**. Next to these were other participants in planning and spending and beneficiaries.

In practice, an important role was played by **municipalities (NUTS-IV)** whose number is 212, while the 12 statistical regions (NUTS-III) were less important. The other organised units which played a role were the regional councils (NUTS-II), where mayors of municipalities are represented and regional development councils representing municipalities, associations of the economy and NGOs, and the 12 regional development agencies, corresponding to the NUTS-III statistical regions.

In 2013, parallel with the introduction of the Eastern and Western convergence regions and the launch of the new programming period, the two **Development councils of the cohesion regions** were established. The latter consisted of representatives of municipalities, regional development agencies, non-governmental sector and economic partners. In the absence of other ministry or organ responsible for the regional development, they were working in close connection with the Ministry of economic development and technology.

In the **2014-2020 programming period**, **Managing authority** was **Government office for Development and European Cohesion Policy**. The change in the organisation was due to political changes, weakening the regional interests against the central role of the state and strengthening the role of the Ministry of economic development. Based on the experience of the previous period,

a single system of managing and monitoring was established, together with uniform guidelines for intermediate bodies and beneficiaries, taking into account specifics of individual funds. The idea behind was that this would reduce administrative burden on the beneficiaries. There was no change with the certifying and audit authority. In line with the General Regulation, for a first time, a **Monitoring Committee** was established for monitoring the OP (during the 2007-2013 period, each of the OPs had the control board where managing authority, intermediate bodies, economic and social partners, regional interests and civil society were represented).

The monitoring committee consists of:

- (I) **Representatives of ministries, offices and bureaus:** Managing authority (4), Ministry of economic development and technology (3), Ministry of finance (1), Ministry of infrastructure (2), Ministry of environment and spatial planning (2), Ministry for labour, family social affairs and equal opportunities (2), Ministry for agriculture, forestry and food (1), Ministry of education, science and sports (3), Ministry of culture (1), Ministry of health (1), Ministry of justice (2), Ministry of public administration (1), Government office for macroeconomic analyses and development (1), Government office for statistics (1)
- (II) **Economic and social partners:** Chamber of commerce (1), Chamber of crafts and small business (1), labour unions (3), association of employers of Slovenia (1)
- (III) **NGOs and equal opportunities:** CNVOS, umbrella organisation of NGOs (2), advocacy of equality principle (1)
- (IV) **Local communities, urban development and council of regions:** Development council of cohesion region eastern Slovenia (2), Development council of cohesion region Western Slovenia (2), Association of municipalities and towns of Slovenia (1), Community of municipalities of Slovenia (1), Association of city municipalities of Slovenia (1)
- (V) **Disabled:** representative of national council of organisations of handicapped and institution of enterprises by handicapped of Slovenia (1)

The Monitoring committee was characterized by a substantial number of actors and relatively diverse interests. It followed a rather formalistic approach. Nevertheless, with its establishment, for the first time, different stakeholders were involved in the cohesion policy at the national (top-down) level.

According to the interviewees, the **management structure is highly centralized** with strong role played by **the government (ministries)**. In the Monitoring committee, the ministry representatives, which outnumber the rest of the stakeholders, can at any time outvote the other stakeholders. The Monitoring committee plays a rather formal role in terms of adopting OPs and changes to the OPs, forming subcommittees and bodies, discussing reports and issuing recommendations. Important role is also played by the representatives of the local interests, e.g. mayors. Slovenian regional development is characterized by an **absence of regions** as specific political and administrative units. Thus, in practice, there is a tendency towards centralization and/or localization of regional development projects, with insufficient strategic planning and linkages on a regional level. The regional council and development agencies serve as discussion forums and provide for regional development plans. However, without any political or administrative authorities this is not enough to facilitate the regional projects. The establishment of the Development councils of the Eastern and Western cohesion region in 2013 did not change much as the allocations were at the time more or less already agreed.

Following the interviewees, the Monitoring committee is the main forum of the partnership structure when it comes to the overall top-down approach. Important role is also played by the

ministries as the intermediate bodies responsible for implementing parts of the programmes, which sometimes developed their own informal structures, reflecting specific characteristics of the OPs, funds and instruments. Next to these are local authorities and their specific organisations structures. However, the local/regional interests have much less resources and staff available to pair the central government and are rather concerned with partial issues. The same applies to the other stakeholders which mainly act from the position of the potential beneficiaries.

As a result of the central role of the government, **the policy depends on the government coalitions and division of funds between ministries**. When it comes to the rest of the stakeholders, the government can play 'divide and rule'. This brings excessive level of politicization and instability in the process, hindering the development of an independent and more specific governance system.

## 2.2 Assessment of performance

### 2.2.1 Programme performance

On average the **target indicators were exceeded** in spite the fact that during the **2007-2013 period** Slovenia experienced a large scale economic contraction. During the implementation period, there were only **small changes in the policy**: the main shift involved increased support for innovation and R&D and the environment and reduced support for the transport due to delays in implementing the OP ETID, which was partly due to economic crisis (e.g. a number of contractors went bankrupt) and partly due to administrative reasons. Another more specific change in the policy was the introduction of more innovative measures for support for innovation and R&D such as the vouchers.

After an initial delay in absorption due to overlap with the previous period and delays that occurred in the period of crisis and changes in the organisation structure (in the context of the changes in the government coalitions and reorganisation of the ministries, Office for Local Self-Government and Regional policy was abolished and replaced with the Government office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, resulting in delays in procedures), as of 2013, the **absorption** increased, **reaching full rate at the end of the period**.

The Court of Auditors in its revision of the Cohesion policy implementation system argued that in spite of meeting all the legal requirements, the system **should have been more effective**. Among the key issues identified were a **lack of proper ex-ante analysis to determine the actual needs**, which resulted in too much funds being earmarked. Moreover, there was need for **better cooperation between the different public authorities** allocating supports in the same areas. The Court recommended that more attention should also be paid to **the quality of the individual projects/operations**, especially by improving the quality of the calls and selection methodologies. The other issues highlighted were the lack of self-evaluation by the intermediate bodies, problems with the information system and delays in payments.

**Administrative burden** was identified as **the most important cause for generation of bottlenecks**, with administrative difficulties caused by inadequate organisation of tasks, complex regulation and manpower turnover.

### Priority axes, outcomes and results in 2007-2013

OP SRDP	
Priority allocation	Outcomes and results
Competitiveness and research excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- &gt; 650 private R&amp;D projects</li> <li>- 150 research projects in competence centres;</li> </ul>

OP SRDP	
Priority allocation	Outcomes and results
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- &gt; 3,100 projects by SMEs;</li> <li>- &gt; 1,300 innovations and patents and &gt; 5,700 new jobs;</li> <li>- Stimulated private investments of €1.7 billion.</li> </ul>
Economic/development infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 3 renovated natural/technical science faculties;</li> <li>- 15 entrepreneurial education centres;</li> <li>- 10 urgency centres;</li> <li>- &gt; 14,300 broadband connections;</li> <li>- &gt; 90 e-services and e-contents projects.</li> </ul>
Integration of natural and cultural potentials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- &gt; 150 projects in tourism;</li> <li>- &gt; 20 restored and revitalized cultural heritage buildings;</li> <li>- Number of visitors increased by over 766,500;</li> <li>- 155,100 m2 of new and renewed sports and recreational facilities;</li> <li>- &gt; 880 new jobs.</li> </ul>
Development of regions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Access to waste water systems for 118,200 citizens;</li> <li>- 154,200 citizens in smaller communities gain access to higher quality and safer water systems;</li> <li>- &gt; 30 development projects in NATURA 2000 areas</li> <li>- 20 large projects of development, renovation and resolution of urban areas</li> </ul>

The evaluations of the **OP SRDP** found that the instruments of the Centres of excellence and Competence centres (Priority **Competitiveness and research excellence**) adequately addressed the key issues and involved the key target groups and stakeholders, thus fulfilling the objectives. What was identified as a problem was insufficient transfer of knowledge to the market and lack of marketization of the outputs as well as the low sustainability of the projects after the funding period ended. The evaluation pointed out the need for more efficient administration, more coordinated strategic approach and long-term monitoring to establish the real impact. In the area of the **regional development**, the evaluations argued that the overall targets were often too ambitious, not taking into account the limited administrative capacities of the municipalities. Further, there were problems with setting the right indicators and measuring them. There was also lack of the strategic regional projects (against the local ones) and the predominance of investments into physical infrastructure.

#### ***Priority axes, outcomes and results in 2007-2013***

OP HRD	
Priority allocation	Outcomes and results
Promoting entrepreneurship and adaptability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- &gt; 620 young researchers in the private sector;</li> <li>- Mobility of &gt;370 high qualified individuals in business sector;</li> <li>- &gt; 64,700 individuals involved in Lifelong Learning;</li> <li>- &gt; 7,100 recipients of stipends;</li> <li>- 18,600 newly created enterprises (self-employed);</li> <li>- &gt; 730 applied technologies, patents or innovations.</li> </ul>
Promoting employability of job-seekers and inactive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- &gt; 19,700 subsidized employment places for unemployed;</li> <li>- 51% of permanently unemployed involved in active labour market policies;</li> <li>- &gt; 6,400 individuals gaining professional education.</li> </ul>
Human resource development and life-long learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- &gt; 5,100 educational institutions involved;</li> <li>- &gt; 510 projects of e-contents;</li> <li>- &gt; 312,400 participants;</li> </ul>

OP HRD	
Priority allocation	Outcomes and results
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 88% of adults with successfully completed education or training.</li> </ul>
Equal opportunities and Reinforcing social inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- &gt; 3,800 new jobs for vulnerable groups;</li> <li>- &gt; 530 education and &gt;70.000 children involved in programmes of equal opportunities in education</li> <li>- Unemployment of disabled persons reduced by 14%.</li> </ul>
Institutional and administrative capacity:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 800 e-administration services available at www;</li> <li>- &gt; 300 people receive education on quality and safety in healthcare;</li> <li>- &gt;2,600 NGO representatives and social partners involved in training and education</li> <li>- Average time of court proceeding reduced by 4.2 months.</li> </ul>

As far as the **OP HRD** is concerned, the evaluation of the activities to increase **employability of vulnerable** (priority axis Equal opportunities and reinforcing social inclusion) demonstrated that in general the instrument was efficient and well managed and that the intermediate body (Ministry of labour) performed its role efficiently. While most of the operations exceeded the targets set, there were problems in separating the regular activities with those set by the plan. Moreover, some of the indicators proved to be quite difficult to monitor. The evaluation of the **supports to the civil society** demonstrated that the call on the NGOs took into account the feedback from the previous call. Similar to the observations made with other parts of the programme, even though the targets were more than met, the question was whether they were realistic and based on well-founded calculations in the first place. The overall number of people involved in the programmes was very high but there was a problem of double counting. One of the problems identified was the sustainability, i.e. what happens after the end date of the project. Another issue that was raised was on measuring of the social inclusion, which would require a more comprehensive approach.

#### ***Priority axes, outcomes and results in 2007-2013***

OP ETID	
Priority allocation	Outcomes and results
Railway, road, port and other transport infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- &gt; 150km modernized railway tracks located on TEN, including coverage with GSM-R signal;</li> <li>- Cargo reload increased from 8 to 13 million tonnes per year;</li> <li>- 6 out-of-level crossings;</li> <li>- &gt; 50km newly build highways on TEN;</li> <li>- &gt; 130,000 m2 anti-noise fences on highways;</li> <li>- Time savings of €50 million a year based on highway investments;</li> <li>- &gt; 38 km of new cycling roads;</li> <li>- Reload capacity of Koper port increased based on deepening of the ship terminal.</li> </ul>
Management of municipal waste	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- &gt; 150,000 citizens connected to public sewage system;</li> <li>- &gt; 300,000 citizens have better access to safer and clean water;</li> <li>- The number of agglomerations with waste water and water cleaning increased for over 40%</li> </ul>
Environment protection-water sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 5 regional waste management centres;</li> <li>- Increase of separated waste for 295,000 tonnes a year</li> </ul>
Sustainable use of energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CO2 emissions reduced by &gt; 150,000 tonnes;</li> <li>- Energy savings of &gt; 300 GWh</li> <li>- &gt; 300 GW from renewable sources;</li> <li>- Savings based on investment in energy improvements of hospitals, retirement facilities, students' campuses and local community buildings of &gt; €20 million a year.</li> </ul>



The mid-term evaluation of the **OP ETID** argued that the overall feasibility of the programme was “good” with 66 out of 111 projects estimated to be feasible and 44 non-feasible, while the rest were already completed at the time. Among the problems identified were issues non-specific related with the public procurement legislation, building permits and procedures related to the acquisition of land. Concerning the transport, the evaluation was critical towards the fact that cities were still considered as the ‘gravitational centres’ and although contributing towards opening Slovenia to other countries, the programme did not do much for the internal regional development. Further to that there was lack of attention to the railway network and public transport system (against the investments in motorways), where, in fact, steps backwards occurred.

Concerning the **environment**, focus on the waste management system was considered consistent with the needs. The number of people affected by waste water treatment and drinking water supply systems were estimated to be 15-30% lower from those in the project reports (see above table). In 2010, when the mid-term evaluation of the OP ETID was done, the part of the programme focusing on the reduction of the water damage was estimated to be non-feasible. The evaluation also argued that the reduction of the emissions should be achieved at source with producers and suppliers of energy (rather than with energy consumers).

In the **programme period 2014-2020**, as of 2016, systemic conditions for the preparation and implementation of public tenders were in place, including all requirements with the exception of the thematic pre-conditionality in the water sector (i.e. the existence of a water pricing policy and an adequate contribution of the different water uses to the recovery of the costs of water services). By the end of the 2016 several ways of choosing the operations were approved, ranging from public tenders to direct approvals, accounting for 27% of the total funds available.

Some of the early outcomes and results of the programme included big project of building highway Draženci-Gruškovje, co-financing of regional scheme of stipends for students (the rest of the stipend was covered by entrepreneurs interested in particular education profiles) in the period 2016-2022; project of learning for young adults; energy renovation of public buildings; development and establishment of comprehensive social activation model, “Public administration Management 2020” project, monitoring of air pollution, support for children with special needs, start-up of companies in high unemployment areas, support services for innovative environment and support for first employment, resulting in 2,900 newly employed youth in Eastern Slovenia.

According to the interviewees, **the main achievements of the 2007-2013 programme period** implementation of which was extended towards 2016 were a number of important **investments in physical infrastructure**, especially in the **environmental area**, such as the waste water management, drinking water systems, management of wastes, and in transport. There was also a number of other important investments in physical infrastructure such as in the public services buildings, i.e. hospitals, schools, kindergartens, as well as in culture, sports and tourism facilities, which were widely dispersed. A number of these investments were funded from the Development of the regions instrument, accounting for about €600 million, which enabled municipalities to set their priorities. As a result, there was at least one investment in each of the municipalities, meaning that the benefits were widely dispersed across Slovenia.

In the **2014-2020 period**, due to coincidence of both programming periods and delays, there is **not much to show yet**. Thus, most of the interviewees did not want to comment on that.

One of the main challenges of the 2007-2013 period was the **lack of a strategic approach and administrative capacity** in terms of pre-existing strategies, priorities, analyses and evaluations. Secondly, there was a lot of **inflated planning** and thinking in terms of “*Germans are paying for it so why not spend it*” though mostly, this simply meant that lower (and cheaper) standards could be applied. In part, this was related to the pre-crisis context of high economic growth. The third

problem was the absence of functional regions and strong role of central government on one hand and of local municipalities on the other, resulting in **high dispersion and localization of investments** with many inflated, suboptimal investments. The fourth major problem was **low sustainability of projects**, including the high amortisation costs, indicating poor planning and optimism from the growth period. Though things improved, the before mentioned problems were still present during the programming stage of the 2014-2020 period.

The **problem of the implementation was too much bureaucracy and rules**, including inconsistency of different rules, which was a sign of poor administration and insufficient capacity. The fact that not enough projects were prepared in advance resulting in short time for calls resulted in higher number of physical infrastructure projects which were easier to plan and to implement. The problem was also **lack of coordination between the intermediate bodies**.

In the 2007-2013 period **most of the attention was on absorbing the funds available**. The main reason was the political and media discourse which was mainly focused on the absorption. The second reason were delays and fears that the funds will be lost.

The attention on the absorption extended into the 2014-2020 period due to extended implementation of the early period and shortage of national financing sources in the context of the economic and financial crisis. Occasionally, there was more focus on some of the other issues, especially on the achievements and their publication, which was related with the ending of the 2007-2013 period and the launch of the new one. As one of the interviewees said, *"the biggest achievement is that we managed to use all the funds because in 2014 there was a real chance that we will lose a billion. The biggest failure is that we still mostly talk about absorption and not about the goals and achievements."*

How well – in your opinion – have Cohesion policy funds been used in your municipality and region?						
N = 47	Very well	Well	Acceptable	Poorly	Very poorly	Don't know
Municipality	8	25	7	4	1	2
%	17	53.2	14.9	8.5	2.1	4.3
Region	5	24	12	2	1	3
%	10.6	51.1	25.5	4.3	2.1	6.4

According to the survey, **over 70% of the respondents believe that the Cohesion policy funds have been used well or very well in their municipality**, while the results is a bit lower for the **region** (about 62%). This is in line with the results of evaluations and interviews showing that each municipality got something it needed, though from a macro perspective, the resources could be used in more efficient ways. Lower result for the regions corresponds to the absence of the regional governance structures, resulting in localization of the investments.

To what extent have the Cohesion policy objectives reinforced the development objectives of your municipality and region?					
N = 47	Completely	Largely	In some way	Not much	Don't know
Municipality	2	24	13	3	5
%	4.3	51.1	27.7	6.4	10.6
Region	1	19	19	3	5
%	2.1	40.4	40.4	6.4	10.6

**Over half of the respondents believe that the Cohesion policy largely reinforced the development of their municipalities**, while the result for the regions is a bit less convincing, which again relates to what has already been said above. Moreover, overall more sceptical answers compared with the answers to the question how well have funds been used shows insufficient

targeting of the objectives, which is something that also came up in the evaluations and during the interviews.

To what extent have Cohesion policy funds helped to increase or decrease Differences in the development level between						
N = 47	Decreased	Somewhat decreased	Had no impact	Somewhat increased	Increased	Don't know
Poorer and richer regions in your country	3 6.4%	27 57.4%	8 17%	5 10.6%	0 0%	4 8.5%
Rural and urban areas in your region	4 8.5%	25 53.2%	10 21.3%	1 2.1%	1 2.1%	6 12.8%
Poorer and richer areas in your region	2 4.3%	18 38.3%	19 40.4%	2 4.3%	0 0%	6 12.8%
Your country and other European Union Member states	1 2.1%	27 57.4%	11 23.4%	2 4.3%	0 0%	6 12.8%

Up to two third of respondents believe that the cohesion policy helped to decrease the differences in the development level between poorer and richer regions and rural and urban areas in Slovenia as well as between Slovenia and other member states. **The results is lower when it comes to poorer and richer areas in individual regions**, once again showing the implications of the absence of a proper regional development policy. A notable share of those that did not know the answer implies absence of studies and evaluations.

How significant was the impact of the following problems and challenges during the implementation of Cohesion policy projects?						
N = 47	Very significant	Significant	Average	Insignificant	Not at all	Don't know
Scarcity of Cohesion policy funds	12 25.5%	19 40.4%	10 21.3%	2 4.3%	1 2.1%	3 6.4%
Problems with obtaining Cohesion policy financing such as complicated rules for submitting applications	22 46.8%	17 36.2%	5 10.6%	1 2.1%	0 0%	2 4.3%
Excessive, cumbersome reporting	20 42.6%	16 34%	8 17%	0 0%	1 2.1%	2 4.3%
Unclear objectives for evaluating Project results	5 10.6%	21 44.7%	13 27.7%	3 6.4%	3 12.8%	2 8.5%
Poor cooperation between project partners	3 6.4%	10 21.3%	21 44.7%	3 6.4%	6 12.8%	4 8.5%
Excessive audit and control during or after the project completion	9 19.1%	24 51.1%	10 21.3%	2 4.3%	0 0%	2 4.3%
Lack of funds for own contribution (co-financing)	18 38.3%	11 23.4%	12 25.5%	3 6.4%	1 2.1%	2 4.3%
Difficult access to credit and/or loans for own contribution	12 25.5%	11 23.4%	10 21.3%	6 12.8%	2 4.3%	6 12.8%
Lack of capacity such as qualified staff	5 10.6%	20 42.6%	15 31.9%	2 4.3%	3 6.4%	2 4.3%

Following the respondents, **the most significant problems were complicated rules** (over 80%), followed by **excessive reporting** (76%), **excessive audit and control and lack of own funds** (over 70%), which is in line with the results of the interviews and some of the evaluation reports. The

cooperation between project partners was considered the least problematic (though still being more problematic than not). In general, respondents were quite critical, which can, apart from the specific systemic problems such as inefficient administration identified above, be explained with the context of the financial crisis, changes in the organisation structure, reduction of funds available etc.

In the open answers, respondents also highlighted the role of the information system, impractical and contradictory regulations and rules, technocratic approach, undervalued or ineligible costs, which goes in line with the pre-given choices above.

How strongly do you agree/disagree with the following statements					
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Cohesion policy funds finance those investment projects which your municipality/region needs the most					
1	25	12	8	0	1
2.1%	53.2%	25.5%	17%	0%	2.1%
In your municipality/region Cohesion policy funding goes to investment projects which are most valued by the local residents					
2	17	17	7	1	3
4.3%	36.2%	36.2%	14.9%	2.1%	6.4%
There are many irregularities in spending Cohesion policy funds due to non-compliance with EU rules					
0	6	12	22	3	4
0%	12.8%	25.5%	46.8%	6.4%	8.5%
Fraud, such as corruption or nepotism, is common in spending Cohesion policy funds					
0	5	10	21	7	4
0%	10.6%	21.3%	44.7%	14.9%	8.5%
There have been many positive changes in your municipality/region thanks to Cohesion policy funds, which would not have been achieved without the funds					
6	30	10	0	0	1
12.8%	63.8%	21.3%	0%	0%	2.1%
The spending of Cohesion policy funds is adequately controlled					
4	28	8	7	0	0
8.5%	59.6%	17%	14.9%	0%	0%
The money from Cohesion policy funds is in most cases wasted on the wrong projects					
2	4	12	26	2	1
4.3%	8.5%	25.5%	55.3%	4.3%	2.1%
The administration of Cohesion policy has been delivered in an efficient (cost effective) manner					
0	7	16	18	5	1
0%	14.9%	34%	38.3%	10.6%	2.1%

Over half of the respondents agree that the ECP financed investment projects that were needed the most, while the position on whether these are really valued the most by the local residents is a bit weaker, which might suggest **certain problems with communication**. **Only about 10% of the respondents agree that there are many irregularities, corruption** etc. involved in spending and that the money is wasted. Up to two thirds of respondents see positive changes as a result of the ECP and believe that spending is adequately controlled. There is, however, quite some criticism regarding efficient administration, which is in line with what has already been explained.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements						
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
The monitoring and evaluation reports provide adequate information on the	1	24	10	8	1	3
	2.1%	51.1%	21.3%	17%	2.1%	6.4%

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements						
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
implementation and performance of the programme/s						
The monitoring and evaluation reports of the programme/s are easily accessible	0 0%	16 34%	12 25.5%	11 23.4%	1 2.1%	7 14.9%
The monitoring and evaluation reports of the programme/s are easy to understand	0 0%	14 29.8%	16 34%	12 25.5%	0 0%	5 10.6%
The monitoring and evaluation reports results are used to improve policy-making and implementation	0 0%	15 31.9%	11 23.4%	13 27.7%	1 2.1%	7 14.9%

Over half of the respondents believe that the monitoring and evaluation reports provide adequate information. The positions on **the accessibility, being easy to understand and used to improve the policy** are more sceptical, **with a bit less than one third of the respondents** supporting it, showing lack of proper analysis and policy cycle, resulting in suboptimal targeting and planning.

In what Cohesion policy workshop or training sessions did the representatives of your organisation/municipality/region participate in the last two years (select all that apply)?				
	Yes	%	No	%
Management	25	53.2	22	46.8
Control	19	40.4	28	59.6
Monitoring	29	61.7	18	38.3
Evaluation	12	25.5	35	74.5
Communication	23	48.9	24	51.1
Nobody participated in such events	5	10.6	42	89.4

**Most of the respondents participated in at least one type of workshop or training sessions. Low participation concerning evaluation (25%)** is in line with problems identified in this area. The open answers confirm relatively broad inclusion in this type of events.

### 2.2.2 Partnership

#### The programming stage

The OP 2014-2020 was drafted by the Government office for Development and European cohesion policy. All the line ministries were involved in the preparation process from mid-2012 onwards.

The stakeholders and partners involved included the two Cohesion region development councils, working group of the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth, special ad hoc working group consisting of representatives of trade unions and employers, established under auspices of the Economic and social council; special ad hoc working group of representatives of NGOs (17 members were selected through the procedure carried out by the NGO umbrella organisation CNVOS) and representatives of 12 regional development agencies. In addition to these, a wider group of stakeholders also participated in the consultation on the OP, including the organisations representing the interest of persons with disabilities.

Simultaneously with the five workshops which took place in spring 2013, first elements of the OP were forwarded to the general public for consultation, which was launched early in 2013. The first draft of the OP was presented to general public in the second half of January 2014. Altogether,

three public consultations were held, focusing on the priorities and the OP. Stakeholders were also engaged by the entities drafting the ex-ante evaluation.

In March and April 2014, several working meetings were conducted with ministries and representatives of the regional level (Cohesion region development council and regional development agencies). The final workshop with the key representative groups of stakeholders and line ministries took place in September 2014.

In the process, the OP was changed, e.g. new priority axes were added focusing on investment in broadband connection and capacity-building for all stakeholders. There were further amendments to priority axes 1 and 3 text. Based on the comments from the cohesion regions, financial allocations were altered with funds for sustainable mobility in urban centres increased and including community-led local development approach subject to ERDF support. Moreover, the list of eligible beneficiaries was expanded in terms of different types of beneficiaries being able to apply to individual calls (while previously particular calls were only targeting particular beneficiaries).

The key comment by stakeholders, especially those representing the regions was that too much of the ERDF support was earmarked for RDI and competitiveness and that more should be allocated for construction of the missing infrastructure and that there was insufficient focus on regional NUTS-III level development. There was criticism of absence of certain sectors such as tourism, sports and recreational infrastructure in the new OP (as opposed to the period 2007-2013). The environmental NGOs argued for a stronger move away from the motorways to more sustainable forms of transport.

### The implementation stage

The monitoring committee consisted of the managing authority, certifying authority, audit authority, paying authority representatives and representatives of the relevant partners (of regional and local authorities, economic and social partners, NGOs, bodies responsible for promoting non-discrimination). Several consultative groups were formed, such as the technical expert group (a forum to pose operational questions) and the evaluation groups (giving advice and assistance in the design of evaluation studies). A segment of ESI funds was earmarked for capacity building of partners. The managing authority established several cooperation platforms.

Since 2015, 6 meetings of the monitoring committee were held, out of which 3 were regular (in November 2015, May 2016, June 2017), and 3 were correspondence based (in July 2015, June 2016, October 2016). The managing authority published the formal agenda and the conclusions of the meetings but not the minutes. Although indicating participation of the stakeholders and some sort of deliberation and decision-making, the published documents do not allow to assess the quality of the dialogue with the stakeholders and the accountability to the general public.

According to the interviewees, in the **programme period 2007-2013, the requirements concerning the openness and accountability were met in a rather formal way**. The regional development mechanism was keeping the municipalities satisfied/quiet. In practice, regional structures only served to divide the money between the municipalities. As a result, the number of regional projects was low.

There is a disagreement on the efficiency of the management during the early period. For some, there was not enough stress on narrowing down the number of priorities to strengthen the impact of the cohesion policy, which was due to the role of the line ministries and local interests. Further, as a result, there was too much investment in infrastructure. Delays in the process and insufficient administrative capacity were another reason why many of the operations focused on investments in physical infrastructure. For the others, the dispersion of investments and focus on infrastructure resulted in good absorption rate and in addressing of a number of 'real needs'.

During the **programming of the new OP**, Slovenia was facing economic and financial crisis which is why there was need to focus on priorities such as growth and employment. The European Commission no longer supported the inclusion of regional mechanism and investments in areas such as tourism. The Commission in general wanted to see a move towards human resources and more integrated projects. Nevertheless, some of the respondents pointed out that some of the other member states were still able to convince the Commission to allow some investments in these areas.

In this context, **the central government made a pact with the economic and social partners to focus on investments into R&D on one hand and on activation and employment on the other**, while local/regional interests were – at least from their perspective – sacrificed (the ESF allocation basically remained unchanged between the two periods, while the share of ERDF allocated for regional/local investments was reduced substantially). As a result, the representatives of the local/regional interests felt betrayed. Moreover, in their view, fast switch from infrastructure towards soft projects was considered non-optimal for various reasons, including the fact that many of the development issues were still due to the absence of basic infrastructure. The representatives of the government in principle agreed but also pointed out the need to set priorities due to €1 billion less being available and the needs of the economic and social partners in the context of the crisis, which was also in line with the position of the Commission.

In 2013, Office for Local Self-Government and Regional policy was abolished and replaced with the Government office for Development and European Cohesion Policy which was attached to the Ministry of economy. **Changes in the organisation structures and staff disrupted continuity in the programming**. As a result, substantial delays were created, leaving limited time for discussion with the stakeholders. Even though the managing authority did try to run an open dialogue with the stakeholders and find consensus on the programme, cuts in funding and time pressures created negative atmosphere and left limited space for substantial issues, **reducing the dialogue to financial deal**. As one of the interviewees said: “at the end, everyone understood the situation but they would prefer to have more money”.

There was a broad agreement that **in terms of the communication and openness things improved** through there were still problems such as frustrating rules and distrust between different actors. Some issues such as evaluation which were done “in a funny way” during the past period were now taken more seriously. Some pointed out that the culture of dialogue takes time to establish. One of the interviewees explained the openness of the structure in the following way: *“those who have interests are involved. This does not mean that everybody that should be involved is involved. Half of them still do not know or do not care or have not be invited by anyone ... but anyone that wants to be involved can get involved”*.

In the programme period 2014-2020, intermediate bodies tried to facilitate regional projects by requiring regional partner applications. Finally, in the mid-term, due to return of the economic growth, making some of the measures such as financial instruments obsolete, and the new strategic government investment plans such as the second track Divača-Koper, the decision was made to re-open the programme and introduce some changes. Since the agreement of the two Cohesion regions was needed to do that, local interest represented in these two bodies were promised some additional funds for some of the bottom-up regional development projects to compensate for the sacrificing of the regional development mechanism in the programming stage.

**The partnership principle requires the participation of a wide range of partners throughout the different stages of programming and implementation through consultations, monitoring committee work and other mechanisms. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the operation of the partnership principle in practice?**



N = 47	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
The way the programme partnership operates is inclusive, open and fair	0 0%	24 51.1%	15 31.9%	6 12.8%	0 0%	2 4.3%
The operation of the programme's partnership principle facilitates a shared understanding and shared commitments by partners to achieving the programme's objectives	2 4.3%	21 44.7%	16 34%	6 12.8%	0 0%	2 4.3%
Partners are only interested in promoting their own organisational and financial interests	2 4.3%	13 27.7%	16 34%	13 27.7%	0 0%	3 6.4%

Most of the survey respondents agree that the programme partnership is inclusive, open and fair and that it facilitates a shared understanding and commitments, though there is also a number of sceptical voices, confirming problems identified above. **The opinion that the partners are only interested in promoting their own organisational and financial interests is quite strong**, corresponding to strong role of financial bargaining between the line ministries and partial interests of economic and social partners and of the local interests.

### 2.3 Assessment of added value

According to the final evaluation study, the 2007-2013 programming period resulted in additional investment of a bit more than 1.3% of GDP which supported increased GDP in Slovenia in 2015 by around 2.5% above what it would have been in the absence of the policy. According to the estimates, in 2023, it will be 2% higher. In the given period, the regional disparities between Eastern and Western Slovenia narrowed (from 67% in 2007 to 70% of the GDP pc in 2014), though this was mostly due to the higher economic contraction in the West in the context of the economic and financial crisis. The programmes resulted in creating of a total of 5,860 new jobs of which 887 were in tourism.

The **OP SRDP** constituted **the main source of financing for business support in the country (specifically for the SMEs)** thus helping to address the lag in terms of innovation, in particular the dynamics of employment in fast-growing companies and in the export share of knowledge-based services. The OP SRDP facilitated **additional private investment of €1.7 billion**. In time, **support instruments evolved** with more innovative ones being applied (such as research vouchers). An important part of the OP SRDP were investments in cultural and natural heritage, which by improving infrastructure created conditions for boosting **tourism** based development.

The **OP HRD** in the context of high unemployment played an important role, e.g. via **subsidies for self-employment and promotion of first job seeker employment**. In the governance area, OP HRD co-financed projects to strengthen the capacities of NGOs and their cooperation in the policy making and the e-administration, as well as sound recording of the hearings at courts, which was a revolution compared with introduction of computers, contributing to greater efficiency and transparency of the judiciary. There were also several successful projects of **activation of marginalized groups**.

The **OP ETID** funded some very important transport projects such as construction of 60 km of new roads on the TEN-T and improvement of 89 km of railway lines on the TEN-T. It was **the main**

**source of financing of environmental infrastructure** on national level. The investment co-financed resulted in an **additional 291,626 people being connected to clean drinking water supply and an additional 194,160 being connected to new or improved wastewater treatment** facilities. The **amount of waste recycled almost doubled between 2007 and 2013 to over 40%** of the total municipal waste collected. The proportion of waste composted increased and the proportion going to landfill was reduced significantly. Investments in energy efficiency in public and residential building were lagging behind the targets in 2013 (the result was a reduction of GHG emissions of 56,000 tonnes and in energy use of 69GWh – just 16% and 32% of the targets set). However, the pace increased afterwards and the measure among other things helped construction sector to recover.

In administrative terms, there were some changes in terms of **awareness of administration burden, inefficiency** etc. Real improvements in the quality of work were, however, limited. According to one of the evaluation studies, the biggest shift was made on the field of **providing the necessary information to the beneficiaries**, while the communication within the management structures remained insufficient. According to the study, “overall, the transfer of experiences gained in the programme period 2007-2013 to the period of new financial perspective 2014-2020 was not good. The majority took place in the stage of preparation of the instruments (their relevance, reflection of real needs) and objective orientated implementation of projects.” A common problem on the structural level were (a) ignorance of constructive propositions of the employees that were operationally involved in the implementation of the projects, (b) weak role and continuity of leaders and (c) lack of the built-in learning system of the implementation structures based on the experiences and feedback.

Last but not least, **wider EU value added is much less reported than the direct results**, which can be linked with the selection of too broad objectives, lack of focus on particular issues and problems concerning the additionally principle. Moreover, with insufficient attention and standards in dealing with the evaluation and learning, EU value added is hard to assess in more robust way.

Following the interviewees, the main contribution of the cohesion policy in general is that the **governance and administrative structures started to learn how to think in strategic terms**, set long term objectives, design policies and instruments, measure impact and introduce changes based on evaluation and feedback. Policy and issue areas were increasingly integrated, also taking into account macroeconomic situations and current developments such as the introduction of the European semesters.

The biggest problem on the other hand was the understanding that ESI funds should be additional funding and not a substitute for national policy which in fact due to the economic and financial crisis it often was.

While strategic thinking operated on a top-down level, it was much less so on the sectorial and regional level where sufficient structures were missing. Moreover, the strategic thinking was in many ways still insufficient, e.g. in terms of setting priorities, proper analysis and evaluations. There was also constant lack of good projects prepared in advance which would enable to speed the programming and implementation.

Another achievement was that the discussions linked to the programming and implementation as well as the operations contributed to what one interviewee called the “understanding that our society is changing and that we need to act accordingly”. The cooperation facilitated by the cohesion policy **fostered dialogue between the social partners** and other stakeholders. When substantive issues were discussed on expert level, high quality level of dialogue was achieved often leading to innovative solutions and high level of consensus. There were also some achievements in terms of enhanced cooperation on a regional level, e.g. intra-regional between the city municipalities, though regional structures remained underdeveloped.

In terms of operations and projects, the idea to have **pilot projects funded by the EU** in a sense of risk capital that would later on be mainstreamed turned out to be quite successful, e.g. the field of the active employment policy, the rate of successful projects, resulting in new employments, was 50%. Apart from that, low sustainability and discontinuity of projects remained a problem.

A permanent frustration was administration and bureaucracy. There was a sense that there is too much on all the levels and that the situation is even getting worse. As one of the interviewees said: "please do not simplify further since each time you do that you are only making it worse". In part the EU was blamed. However, the interviewees also pointed out overly formalistic approach by the national regulators, which they interpreted as a sign of lack of self-confidence as well as of closed, self-reliant and inefficient administration in general.

### 3. Cohesion policy communication

#### 3.1 Approach to communication

In the **programme period 2007-2013**, one single communication plan was prepared for all three OPs to inform on the operations funded by the CF, ERDF and ESF. The **basic approach** was to inform all potential beneficiaries on the opportunities, calls, mechanisms, etc., to involve partners, media and other target groups, and to upgrade informing with advertising.

Five **general objectives** were set:

- (I) *Amplify the role of the EU for the development of Slovenia and increase the recognition of the individual funds (CF, ERDF and ESF);*
- (II) *Increase the level of recognition of the contribution by each EU fund and recognition of funds in Slovenia;*
- (III) *Provide transparency in finance allocation;*
- (IV) *Provide an informing-promotion campaign for each OP, funds and levels of OPs by using a broad range of communication tools;*
- (V) *Promote inclusion of potential beneficiaries (in the spending of the funds).*

In addition to these, four **specific objectives** were set, referring to different target groups: (a) a broad outreach of information to potential beneficiaries; (b) promoting a positive image of ECP; and to inform on accomplishments and results of (c) each OP and (d) on the level of projects/operations.

Besides the 'internal public' (managing authority, ministries and government agencies), five 'external' **target groups** were identified: potential beneficiaries, beneficiaries, general public, media and partners.

The **measures** for informing the public involved one large information event at the launch of the OPs, including press conference, distribution of materials and presentation of good practices on past projects; one event per year to present accomplishment of each of the OPs, with successful beneficiaries sharing their experiences and media; continuous electronic publication of beneficiaries, operations (projects) and amounts allocated on a special web page.

In the **programme period 2014-2020** Slovenia is divided into two cohesion regions: Eastern and Western. This, however, does not have any implications for the communication activities. The **changes introduced continue to** stress the role of information and communication as an integral part of efficient and effective policy. Key aspects are simplification, limited number of visual images, more targeted communication, involving partners and beneficiaries in active distribution and exchange, two way communication (feedback for improvement of communication activities) and presenting personal stories as a part of presentation of the effects of the ECP in Slovenia.

The **new visual image** is based on 11 thematic objectives of the Strategy EU 2020, each represented by a typographic abstract image of an animal, characteristics of which resemble the objective. A different colour is used for each of the three funds. The visual image manual and video (in Slovenian) can be accessed here:

- <http://www.eu-skladi.si/kohezija-do-2013/ostalo/novice/cgp-konna>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zogLe-uLArw>

The **objectives** of the communication strategy for the programming period 2014-2020 are as follows:

- To inform on the new approach compared with the 2007-2013 period (key documents, resources available, calls);
- To promote the inclusion of beneficiaries;
- To inform beneficiaries on their duties and inform on the role of the ECP in Slovenia and its contribution to the development of Slovenia;
- Raising awareness and building positive image of ECP;
- To provide access to complete information.

The **target groups** include the public administration (management authority, intermediate bodies etc.), potential and actual beneficiaries, general public, media and partners.

Communication strategies/plans					
2007-2013			2014-2020		
Main objectives	Measures	Target groups	Main objectives	Measures	Target groups
- Highlight role of the EU for the development of Slovenia	- Information materials	- Beneficiaries - Potential beneficiaries - General public - Media	- Inform and promote inclusion - Role of ECP in Slovenia and its	- Workshops - Meetings*** - E-bulletin - Webpages - Events	- public administration *** - (Potential) beneficiaries**
- Raise	- E-mail list				

awareness level of contribution by each fund	- Events	- Partners	contribution to the development	- Publications	- General public
- Provide transparency	- Web page		- Raising awareness and buildings	- Social networks	- Media*
- Provide broad information-promotion campaign	- Cooperation with media, advertising campaigns	- Media	positive image of ECP	- e-mail list	- Partners**
			- Access to information	- PR*	
				- Personal approach	
				- Visits	
				- Campaigns*	
				- Education and training**	

In the **programme period 2007-2013**, the following **indicators** were set:

- **Outputs:** number of events according to the Regulation (target value: 24 events), number of other events (target value: 61 events), number of printed and distributed outlets (target value: 10,000 issues), number of radio emissions (target value: 70), number of e-mails sent (target value: 800); number of web page visits (target value: 70,000 visits), number of e-mail recipients (target value: 1,000), and number of news articles and TV reports (target value: 60).
- **Result:** share for those who assess the contribution of the ECP positively with target value of over 50% of respondents.

In the **2014-2020 period**, the following **indicators** were set, to be delivered by 2023:

- **Outputs:** recipients of e-news (the target value was 3,000 while number in 2014 was 2,200), press releases (target value: 2,000), visitors of webpage (target was 150,000 while number of 2014 was 120,000), publications on web portal and social networks (target was 2,000), material printed (target was 30,000), events organized (target value: 40) and publications in electronic media (target value: 500).
- **Result:** visibility of the webpage (target value was 65%, in 2014 value was 43%), visibility of ECP (target value was 90%), number of followers on social network (target value was 2,000, the number in 2014 was 1,100) and growth of online activities (5 while number in 2014 was 3).
- **Impact:** positive perception of ECP in public, with target value 60% (the value in 2014 was 45%)

Monitoring indicators in the Communication strategies/plans 2007-2013		
Output indicators	Result indicators	Impact indicators
Web page visits	Share of those who assess contribution by European cohesion policy positively (>50%)	
Events- regulation		
Events – other		
Outlets printed/distributed		
Radio emissions		
E-mail recipients		
E-mails sent		
Media reports		
Monitoring indicators in the Communication strategies/plans 2014-2020		
Recipients of e-news*	Visibility of <a href="http://www.eu-skaldi.si">www.eu-skaldi.si</a> (60%)*	Positive perception of ECP in public (>60%)*
Press releases*	Visibility of ECP*	
Visitors on webpage*	Number of followers on social network*	
Publications on web portal and social networks*	Growth of online activities)*	
Materials printed*		

Monitoring indicators in the Communication strategies/plans 2007-2013		
Output indicators	Result indicators	Impact indicators
Events organized*		
Publications in electronic media*		

\* By 2023

The **indicative budget** size for the **2007-2013 period** was **€5,000,000**, corresponding to the budget for the 2004-2006 period and taking into account the number of years in each of the periods. In some cases, for example, in the case of the OP Development for environmental and transport infrastructure, additional funds were available on the individual operations level.

The indicative budget for the **2014-2020 period** is **somewhat lower at €3,587,027** (EU share). The budget is divided between the Eastern and Western cohesion region.

Total allocation	Slovenia	Unit
Allocation 2007-2013	€5,000,000	EUR
Allocation 2014-2020	€3,587,027	EUR

In terms of the **organization structure**, in the **2007-2013 period**, the management authority, the Government office for local self-government and regional policy (*Služba vlade za lokalno samoupravo in regionalni razvoj – SVLR*) was responsible for the communication plan. The SVLR reported on the implementation of the plan and individual measures for each of the OPs to the respective control boards and was responsible for preparing the annual and final reports.

Within the SVLR, implementation of the communication plan was in responsibility of the sectors (i.e. departments) for technical assistance, the sector for CF, the sector for ERDF and the sector for ESF. In addition, the public relations and promotion service contributed their share. The sector for technical assistance was in principle responsible for implementation and monitoring of all of the activities concerning informing and communication, e.g. implementing nation-wide campaigns, drafting reports, approving project level communication activities, while within each of the before mentioned sectors one responsible person was determined for giving information on the fund covered by his/hers sector to potential beneficiaries (applicants) and organs involved in implementation of the OPs.

A responsible person would answer questions regarding the information and communication in line with the *Instructions of the management authority for informing and communication with public on the cohesion and structural funds*. The Instructions designated authorities, the responsibilities and tasks of the management authority, intermediary bodies, agents and beneficiaries in the area of informing and communication with public.

In **practice**, communication was based on a very hierarchical, top-down approach. The beneficiaries proposed activities which needed to be approved by the SVLR. In case of approval they were jointly implemented. Only in exceptional cases when this was necessary or made sense from the organisational point of view, beneficiaries could, following approval by SVLR, propose a project of technical assistance involving activities for informing the public. The operations (projects) within the OP ETID which were directly approved (i.e. that were not based on a general call) involved minimum information and communication package which included press conferences, web page production, jumbo posters, printed materials and publications. Activities of information and communication were implemented by the Office for cohesion policy of the OP and by the PR service. The sector for technical assistance was responsible for horizontal implementation of

communication and informing the public. As already mentioned above, a part of each of the sectors-funds, one contact persons was determined.

In the **2014-2020 period**, communication policy was once again centralized and implemented by the managing authority. At the level of the individual investment (**project level**), communication activities that needed to be performed by the beneficiaries have been funded through the operations (projects) approved. The managing authority, when possible and appropriate, has been involved in the communication on the project level, especially in cases of larger projects, where it provided support.

The managing authority set up an **informal cohesion network** to inform target groups on calls and applications, responsibilities, results and effects, participation and promotion activities etc. In practice, the network was based on measures such as an internal e-mail list and exploited existing infrastructure such as meetings, events, visits. The purpose of the network was to better integrate and exploit existing measures and to strengthen communication between the managing authority and beneficiaries. The activities of the network included:

- Integration of activities of informing and communication;
- Encouraging distribution of information using own communication channels and tools;
- Distribution of information to the public online and in e-bulletin;
- Giving proposals on communication activities;
- Informing the managing authority on project activities;
- Meetings and networking;
- Cooperation and networking among various partners.

The communication activities in the 2014-2020 period have been implemented by an internal organization unit within the managing authority, responsible for implementation of the Communication Strategy. The communication and information (on a top-down level) has been implemented by two persons for whom this has been the primary work responsibility.

Governance framework in the Communication	
2007-2013	2014-2020
<i>Communication networks</i>	<i>Communication networks</i>
/	An informal cohesion network
<i>Bodies responsible for implementation of the measures</i>	<i>Bodies responsible for implementation of the measures</i>
Management authority	Management authority
Beneficiaries (Intermediate bodies etc.)	Beneficiaries (Intermediate bodies etc.)

In the **2007-2013 period**, according to most of the interviewees, especially those not directly responsible for the communication, the **communication approach was centralized and rather formal**. A **high number of small projects** implemented was a challenge for how to actually devise the policy communication, i.e. in terms of going beyond the aggregate numbers and explaining the actual impact for peoples' lives. The **tables at the operation sites** were quite visible. There were some personal stories but the communication was facts based, e.g. how much money was allocated, how many people were involved etc. Especially on the local level, the communication was too often just something that had to be done. Moreover, locally (i.e. in the scope of projects implemented in individual localities such as municipalities), there was no systematic monitoring of impact in terms of opinion polls or more comprehensive assessments.



In the **2014-2020 period**, the approach has changed in terms of **improved visual communication**, which has been widely used, e.g. also applied by MA on cars, bikes and is thus very noticeable. In the new period, there are **fewer projects**. Fewer, larger and more integrated projects bring challenges of its own as several beneficiaries applying for funds and implementing projects now need to work together, identify shared challenges, apply to different funds (within the scope of a single project), make a story, see broader picture and provide for continuity. For that reason, a lot of internal communication is needed. Moreover, the **turn from 'hard' towards 'softer' projects** requires identification and depiction of social issues and getting different groups people involved, from experts to final users.

Compared to the previous round, there is more communication with the managing authority (SVRK), specialized meetings, beneficiaries also exploit their own networks to increase outreach. The SVRK, according to their representatives, tries to go beyond the sectoral/ministry approach, focusing on target groups and thematic areas in general. They also try to go beyond the absorption issue, which is also important to overcome the stereotype of projects being there just for the spending of funds.

There is still a lack of progress at the intermediate bodies' level and at the project/operation level, where big differences exist. Another challenge is how to get stories from the field. The managing authority where horizontal level communication is done can be very distant from the level of operations. The beneficiaries, implementing the projects, do not see why they should get in touch with the communication officers who could use their story as a part of a nation-wide campaign. The third challenge is how to communicate with some very specific target groups such as young people, marginalized groups or old people.

How regularly are the following communication tools used to disseminate information about the use of Cohesion policy funds?					
N = 47	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Television	2	10	23	10	2
	4.3%	21.3%	48.9%	21.3%	4.35
Radio	1	10	15	18	3
	2.1%	21.3%	31.9%	38.3%	6.4%
Local and regional newspapers	1	5	11	21	9
	2.1%	10.6%	23.4%	44.7%	19.1%
National newspapers	1	6	20	17	3
	2.1%	12.8%	42.6%	36.2%	6.4%
Workshops, seminars	0	3	13	24	7
	0%	6.4%	27.7%	51.1%	14.9%
Brochures, leaflets, newsletters	1	3	13	16	14
	2.1%	6.4%	27.7%	34%	29.8%
Press releases	0	1	18	18	10
	0%	2.1%	38.3%	38.3%	21.3%
Programme websites	0	1	13	13	20
	0%	2.1%	27.7%	27.7%	42.6%
Short videos/clips	3	13	20	10	1
	6.4%	27.7%	42.6%	21.3%	2.1%
Plaques/billboard with EU flag	0	3	12	10	22
	0%	6.4%	25.5%	21.3%	46.8%
Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube)	2	4	19	17	5
	4.3%	8.5%	40.4%	36.2%	10.6%

How regularly are the following communication tools used to disseminate information about the use of Cohesion policy funds?					
N = 47	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Advertising campaigns on TV and/or radio	3 6.4%	12 25.5%	22 46.8%	9 19.1%	1 2.1%
We have not launched any action	N=18 (38.3%), Y=4 (8.5%)				

According to the survey, **communication tools used most often are plaques/billboards with EU flag and websites, followed by brochures and leaflets.** In the next group are local or regional newspapers, workshops and seminars and press releases. Advertising campaigns on the TV and videos are used the most rarely. This confirms that the communication approach is still rather based on traditional formal tools. The tools that are used the least, such as the TV, are the most expensive and demanding. Relatively weak role of the traditional national media indicates poor cooperation in this area.

### 3.2 Assessment of effectiveness of communication strategies

In the **2007-2013 period**, the **specific objectives** stated above were **monitored and evaluated** via **output based quantitative evaluation** focused on printed materials, media reports, commercials, events, webpage visits, messages sent etc. In addition, the managing authority did an 'internal' monitoring and evaluation (it was not for the public and the results were not present in any of the reports) based on surveys with participants involving (a) quantitative elements such as number of participants at the events, profile of participants and (b) qualitative ones, such as assessments of the attractiveness of the webpage, visual image and promotion materials and user friendliness of text messages, i.e. are they simple and clear. The results of the internal monitoring and evaluation were not made public.

The **general objectives** of the communication were monitored and evaluated based on the annual opinion polls on ECP, which included elements such as knowing the ECP in general, knowing the work of the Managing authority, the funds, the OPs, how does Slovenia perform, is management user friendly, awareness of EU supports and projects etc. In addition, press clipping was analysed.

The **mid-term evaluation of the Communication strategy** which was done in 2010 employed four different types of **methodologies**: (a) evaluation of materials and messages, (b) analysis of the data from the annual reports, (c) analysis of opinion polls and (d) surveys involving those receiving e-bulletin (questionnaire was sent to 1,500 addresses; 209 responses were received with all target groups being represented).

The evaluation aimed to address the adequacy, effectiveness, efficiency and usefulness of the communication. In addition, the aim was also to check progress of the indicator values, present good practices and propose changes and improvements.

Regarding **adequacy**, in the beginning of the programme period, the objectives set seemed to be in line with the needs. Slovenia was recipient of funds only since 2004. Amidst the period, it, however, became obvious that citizens are aware of presence of the EU funds, which is why it made sense to introduce more concrete OP-specific messages.

Regarding **effectiveness**, according to the opinion polls, in the period 2007-2010, 85% of Slovenians knew that the EU gives funds for development of individual member states and regions. Of respondents, 81% knew or have heard of OP ETID while the result for CF was 46% in spite of more funds available. The result for OP SRDP was 45% and for ERDF 84%, indicating that the relation

between the fund and OP was the opposite as compared with OP ETID and CF. For the OP HRD, the result was 28%, while for ESF it was 45%. The inconsistencies implied **differences in operations and communication as well as general lack of more specific knowledge**. Moreover, almost 70% of respondents in 2010 said that the state institutions should do more to inform and communicate on opportunities, requirements and ways of acquiring the EU funds.

According to the Eurobarometer survey, share of those that knew that the EU gives funds actually declined in the period 2008-2010 from 66% to 59%. Knowledge/awareness of the OP ETID and the CF increased slightly, result for the ERDF also showed slight increase, while slight decrease was noted for the OP SRDP and increase for the OP HRD.

Regarding **efficiency**, communication targets were met already by 2010 with less than € 1million which was 20% of funds earmarked for the information and communication activities in the programme period, meaning that the **targets were not ambitious enough** and were not based on a proper ex-ante analysis.

Regarding **usefulness**, according to the survey with the e-bulletin subscribers (businesses, municipalities, research agencies, individuals), out of 209 respondents, 71% were satisfied and 18% were very satisfied with the information and communication activities. Of the respondents, 87% considered the new web page more attractive and user friendly.

According to the mid-term report, some of the **key outputs and results** were:

- Integral visual identity.
- Outlets (key documents, brochures and posters, promotion leaflet for general public), posters for OPs to be used at events.
- E-bulletin "Kohezijski e-kotiček" („Cohesion e-corner") published since 2008 which involved information on open and future calls, contact persons, good practices, education seminars, events, workshops etc. It was distributed to over 1,800 addressees. By the 2010, 26 issues were published.
- Promotion materials: these involved business notebooks, t-shirts, bags, tea cups, USB keys, maps, pencils, reflective tapes, balls, plastic bottle crushers, walking sticks, umbrellas, towels, quilts and slippers.
- Events: annual information event, workshops.
- Web page operational from March 2008 involving basic information, all key documents, projects, calls, beneficiaries list and archive.
- List of subscribers on news feed.
- Media activities: 40 seconds long TV commercial, billboard posters, printed commercials in press etc. Media campaign was implemented in the first half of the 2009 in national and regional media. In the period 2007-2010, 38 radio emissions were broadcasted at local stations presenting projects. This was followed by emissions at a national radio (8 produced in 2010) 159 press releases were sent.

Progress of the monitoring indicators of the Communication strategies/plans 2007-2013							
2007-2013							
Output indicator	Estimated 2007-2013*	% implementation	Estimated 2014-2020	Result indicator	Estimated 2007-2013*	% implementation	Estimated 2014-2020
Materials printed/distributed	142,300/139,900	1420/1390		Positive assessment of the contribution of ECP	36%	72	
e-mails sent	907	113					
e-mail list	1,832	183					
Events-regulation	9	37.5					
Events-other	29	47.5					

Progress of the monitoring indicators of the Communication strategies/plans 2007-2013							
2007-2013							
Output indicator	Estimated 2007-2013*	% implementation	Estimated 2014-2020	Result indicator	Estimated 2007-2013*	% implementation	Estimated 2014-2020
Web page visits	2,067,855	2954					
Radio shows and commercials	38	54.3					
Media reports	228	380					

\* By 2010

In the 2014-2020 period, the baseline levels were set and the indicators will be monitored on an annual basis. Each year an opinion poll will be ordered – it will serve as a basis for monitoring and accommodating implementation of communication activities. The annual communication plan taking into account the implementation stage of the OP will have to include the following elements: phase, means, targets, activities, finances, report on state of indicators.

Impact indicators	Estimated 2007-2013	% implementation (2010)	% implementation (2013)	Estimated 2014-2020
Positive assessment of the contribution of ECP	See above	/	/	/

The **mid-term evaluation proposed to adjust the targets/indicators**, by taking into account the progress in the 2007-2010 period, and to strengthen them by adding qualitative indicators. In communication plan, a table should be set establishing links between objectives and indicators. The objectives referring to the individual OPs should be more concrete based on which the key messages should be brought to front. More stress should be put on coherence and consistency of informing and communication activities.

Good practices examples should be upgraded by **involving personal stories** and **results of the projects** and the way these affected lives of the beneficiaries. These stories should be distributed via various communication tools. Attention should be paid to the younger generation and use of proper communication tools. **New/modern communication tools** such as social networks should be used.

More stress should be put on training of journalists in the area of cohesion policy including via the so called informal briefings. **Cooperation with media** should be enhanced through regular meetings in order to facilitate better understanding and partner relationship.

There is a need to continue to rationalize the use of finances in the field of informing and communication. Synergies for OPs and funds could be enhanced. **Better use** should be made of **multipliers** (existing networks such as research agencies, information points etc.) and of **existing events** (prearranged and unexpected) that relate to the cohesion policy. In annual plans, value added of each of the informing and communication activities should be defined. Annual plans should be prepared earlier on to prevent delays produced by public procurement procedures.

There was need for **better cooperation with beneficiaries and organs**, more active cooperation with DGs on preparing materials to be used in Slovenia. Additional human resources/ reorganisation of human resource structure were also needed.

#### *Annual implementation reports*

Initially, communication and information activities more or less followed what was required by the Regulation (e.g. annual events, printed versions of materials, webpage, basic promotion and

advertising). **Towards the 2010**, when strategy became operational, the **first changes were introduced**: a **simplified, visually improved** versions of textual outlets were made, improved, a more user friendly webpage was set and an advertising campaign in the regional media took place in 2009, which also aimed to introduce the messages specific to the OPs and funds. In 2010, in the context of the **economic and financial crisis**, resulting in lack of finances for another advertising campaign, **more innovative annual events were organised**, to which national level communication and information campaigns accommodated.

The 2010 mid-term evaluation demonstrated that the targets of the communication strategy were already met with just one fifth of the total funds earmarked. Among positive experiences identified was innovative approach towards the annual events which were no longer implemented in a form of formal conferences but were taken to the sites of the major projects funded in the given year. Moreover, apart from political representatives, beneficiaries and media, common people were involved through activities such as open doors, free ticket etc. Previously, only administrative officers and representatives of ministries were present at the events. This enabled to highlight the concrete experiences and gave opportunity to discuss results and ask questions directly (for concrete examples, see food practices section below). On a more negative side, problems with linkages between objectives and indicators were identified. More needed to be done to better target audiences, to go from more general towards OP/funds based messages and to better communicate OPs and the role of the EU in general. Among other things, it was suggested that the new/modern communication tools such as social media should be used to target different audiences.

**In 2012, Communication plan** of informing and communicating the public implementation of OPs in the period 2007-2013 **was revised in line with the recommendations of the mid-term evaluation**. The changes introduced were as follows:

- Revised contacts;
- New table was added linking objectives with indicators;
- Communication tools descriptions were revised;
- Social networks (Facebook) were introduced as a new communication tool;
- Revision of financial plan in line with the realization;
- Revision of indicators based on the findings of the evaluation and inclusion of new indicators (number of individuals linked to profile of EU funds on the Facebook)

Apart from the changes implemented based on the recommendations, due to changes in the government, the SVLR as a management authority was replaced with the Ministry for economic development and technology.

The year 2012 was once again characterized by savings measures which impacted the activities in the field of informing and communication. **As of 2010, new interactive and experience based 'pull' approach was applied in organizing the events that enabled to bring together actors and stakeholders (target groups) in new ways and raised substantial media attention**. The public opinion survey of November 2011 demonstrated that out of all communication-promotion activities in the given year, open doors of regional centres for waste management (see good practices below) was the most visible: of the respondents, 67% noticed it. The share of respondents considering contribution of European funds to be positive increased to 37% which was 10 percentage points more than in 2010. In addition, 2/3 of respondents were able to name at least one of the projects co-financed by the European funds. The practice of innovative annual events continued in 2012 and 2013 (for details, see the below section on the good practices). To a certain extent, the innovative approach also enabled to deliver more targeted messages, especially on OP ETID.

Due to the savings measures, no new materials were printed in 2012. The e-bulletin "Cohesion e-corner" was published each month. By the end of the 2012, the number of subscribers to news feed reached 2,100. In 2012, on the social network Facebook, a profile of EU funds in Slovenia was launched in order to motivate/attract users of the social network through information on EU using this channel. By the end of year 2013, profile reached 930 likes.

On a negative side, there was still insufficient attention paid to educating journalists covering cohesion policy, including through the so called informal briefings. **A number of articles published had negative connotation**, which was considered to be related with a lack of properly informed perspective, e.g. understating of how the system works and of legal acts on which absorption of funds is based.

#### *Communication strategy in 2014-20*

The **Communication strategy for the 2014-2020** reports on the PEST and SWOT analyses of the current state and achievements of the previous period 2007-2013.

The strategy argues that it makes sense to **build on the foundations** of informing and communication set in the previous period. In order to achieve a full potential, there should be **stronger cooperation with the opinion makers, multipliers** (institutions with connecting role) **and other partners**. Secondly, the old and outdated IT equipment should be replaced. Thirdly, **the existing networks** such as those by research agencies, info points of Europe direct as well as synergies with other EU-funded programs **should be better exploited**.

The overall recommendations by the PEST and SWOT analyses were to optimize the existing activities which were recognized as successful, use new ICT and interactivity, use free online tools and take advantage of the existing multipliers.

According to the November 2014 poll, 93% of respondents were aware that the EU gives funds for the development of the member states. Only 46% of respondents, however, believed that the European cohesion policy has strong or very strong positive effect. Eurobarometer survey »Awareness and perception of citizens on regional policy« of September 2013 showed that 60% of the respondents heard about a project co-financed by EU. Out of this group, 84% thought that these have positive effect. Thus, based on these numbers, the authors of the Communication Strategy 2014-2020 concluded that more energy should be put in presenting successful stories of people who received the funds since doubts in success and efficient use of European funds still existed. Moreover, based on the above poll results, successful stories were considered to be the best promoters of the cohesion policy.

Key challenges/actions proposed were as follows:

- Take a more comprehensive approach towards communication;
- Put more stress on co-responsibility of different stakeholders involved;
- Set up an informal cohesion network for better acquisition of information and greater involvement of multipliers,
- Improve communication with (potential) beneficiaries
- Follow the trends in the area of ICT
- Take bolder and more innovative approaches
- Find synergic linkages with other EU programmes and
- Acquire information from intermediate bodies on good practices.

The annual implementation report of 2016 makes reference to the final evaluation of the communication plan for the period 2007-2013 (which is not available online). It argues that all planned activities were implemented except for education and public relations which took place in

other frameworks (no funds were earmarked for these two activities. Final expenditures accounted for €1,528,817.85 which is 45.6% of planned expenditures. All of the indicator target values were reached.

According to the AIR summarizing the communication report, the experience demonstrated that more attention should go to communicating with media and working with press i.e. informing and educating them about achievements, absorption and good practices. Following AIR, these recommendations were already taken into account in the new communication strategy. The other key recommendations referred to more ambitious key indicator values, continuation of online activities and activities related with the TV. The communication strategy for the period 2014-2020 has, according to AIR, already taken a number of this recommendations into account. Moreover, it has set more concrete objectives, better defined communication tools, contents and target groups, strengthening of public relations and contents and tools for cooperation with media.

Media and the ECP: MA opinion polls results for 2015-2017			
	2015	2016	2017
Media where respondents get the most information	TV, internet	TV (80%), internet (64.3%), national newspapers (33%)	TV, internet
Do you know that the web page skladi.eu exists?	43%	39.3%	38%
Average grade for likeliness and usability of the web page	3.6; 3.7	3.54; 3.68	3.5; 3.74
Do you follow the Facebook profile of skladi.eu	2%	2.3%	2%
Do you get information from skladi.eu and svrk.gov	10%; 7%	10%; 6.9%	7%; 4%
Which of the promotion activities have you noticed	Prava ideja (41%), Planica event (33%)	Planica (44.1%), Prava ideja (43.1%)	Prava ideja (42%)
Do you know about the cohesion e-corner	14%	18.1%	14%
How would you grade informing activities by the state institutions	1.9	State institutions do (very) little: 63.3%	1.75

The recent opinion polls (see above) show stagnation of key indicators which might be due to the delays in the implementation of the new programming period.

According to the interviewees, **the communication**, compared to the other aspects of the cohesion policy, **stands out in a positive way**. There was certain **continuity** and learning involved as the two persons responsible have been doing this since 2004.

The overall problem of choosing **priorities influenced the nature of the communication** as it is easier to communicate smaller number of better projects. Secondly, absorption remained as a key catchword in spite of all attempts of avoiding it. Thirdly, lots of misinformation was in circulation, including the examples of ministers not knowing how the system works. While infrastructural projects were very visible, they were also related with different problems such as inflated investments, delays in implementation etc. Soft projects perform well in terms of absorption and have a strong reach: e.g. over 60,000 people were involved in ESF funded programmes. Nevertheless, according to several members of the managing authority more should to be done for effective communication of this sorts of projects.

A general impression was **the existing events have a huge potential** which could be better exploited. A good example was world cup in ski jumps in Planica, a sports centre build with Cohesion funds, attracting huge crowds and media attention.



In terms of use of social network and interactive media, the managing authority went substantially beyond what is typically done by public administration in terms of communication. **Advertising on social media** was cheaper compared with the television and gave better results. Nevertheless, social media could still be used in more effective ways. According to the representatives of the civil society and private sector, the thing is that the public administration is rigid and is averse towards bolder ideas for any mistakes could backfire.

There were some **positive examples of working with traditional media**, such as the “Prava ideja” emission on the national television, presenting successful businesses, including those receiving EU supports.

The **e-bulletin** is close to having 5,000 subscribers. The **“EU project my project”** campaign of choosing successful projects got more than 60,000 votes so far this year.

Remaining **challenges** are to **focus more on target groups and thematic areas** and to use **different means and tools for different target groups** and subgroups (e.g. young people). Some suggested that the communication should also be less formal and more relaxed, e.g. not pushing the EU logos and slogans in the forefront since this might have negative impact.

Sometimes, there is a problem with the basic everyday (internal) communication between the partners in terms of implementation progress, distribution of tasks and responsibilities etc. where communication often fails. A nice webpage cannot solve this issue.

The managing authority is committed towards **transparency**, even when things go wrong, they do not try to hide or cover information, in spite of this occasionally causing some anger in their own ranks.

The experience showed that care needs to be taken in order not to promote projects which might turn out to have violated different laws, e.g. ESF funded projects violating workers’ rights or projects by investors not paying taxes and social security fees, which might be difficult to check with a centralized approach.

How satisfied are you with:						
N = 47	Very satisfied	satisfied	Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied	Don't know
The way Cohesion policy is communicated to citizens	0 0%	24 51.1%	15 31.9%	6 12.8%	1 2.1%	1 2.1%
The branding and messages used to communicate Cohesion policy	2 4.3%	20 42.6%	15 31.9%	7 14.9%	0 0%	3 6.4%
The use of human interest/personal stories	1 2.1%	7 14.9%	28 59.6%	6 12.8%	2 4.3%	3 6.4%
The support from the European Commission on communication	0 0%	16 34.0%	18 38.3%	8 17.0%	1 2.1%	4 8.5%
The targeting of different groups with different communication tools	1 2.1%	21 44.7%	20 42.6%	4 8.5%	0 0%	1 2.1%
The administrative capacity and resources dedicated to communication activities	0 0%	12 25.5%	21 44.7%	10 21.3%	1 2.1%	3 6.4%

Just over half of the respondents to the survey are satisfied with the way Cohesion policy is communicated to the citizens. Satisfaction with the targeting of different groups and branding and messages used is somehow lower. The use of personal stories and administrative capacity comes last. The fact that satisfaction rate declines as the aspects become more specific seems to indicate an overly general and formalistic approach towards communication.

To what extent are the communication efforts effective in:							
N = 47	Very effective	effective	Not effective nor ineffective	ineffective	Very ineffective	Not applied	Don't know
Conveying the achievements of Cohesion policy programmes overall and the role of the EU	1 2.1%	23 48.9%	14 29.8%	5 10.6%	1 2.1%	0 0%	3 6.4%
Conveying the achievements of co-funded projects and the role of the EU	0 0.0%	28 59.6%	12 25.5%	4 8.5%	0 0%	0 0%	3 6.4%
Using social media to promote the programme and projects (e.g. Twitter, Youtube, Facebook)	1 2.1%	20 42.6%	18 38.3%	1 2.1%	5 10.6%	1 2.1%	6 12.8%
Fostering good working relations with the media and press to reach the general public	1 2.1%	17 36.2%	20 42.6%	0 0%	2 4.3%	1 2.1%	6 12.8%

About 60% of the respondents believe that the communication is effective in conveying the achievements of the co-funded project. The result is lower when it comes to the achievements of the ECP in general, followed by using social media and good working relations with the media. This is in line with the above findings as well as with the evaluations of the communication and the interviews.

### 3.3 Good practice examples

#### Case 1: Information and promotion campaign “1,000 courses for 1,000 drivers”

The campaign was organized in 2010 in partnership with the Car and Motor association of Slovenia as a part of the OP ETID. An online quiz on EU projects was launched. Participants had to respond to 7 questions selected by the computer from a large database of questions (in order to prevent answer learning). Answers could be searched on the webpage of the cohesion policy where quiz was published. Those who knew all the right answers were rewarded with a safe driving course. Value added of the campaign was in strengthening knowledge about projects in this field and contributing to safety in traffic. Project was promoted in various media. As a result of the project, 1,000 awards were given. Further 2,000 individuals who knew at least 5 of out 7 answers received consolation prizes. Additional 5,000 participated but failed to give enough right answers. The campaign raised lots of attention in the media.

#### Good practice criteria for assessing communication measures

Criteria	Description
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Degree of dissemination among the beneficiaries and the public in general.	Strong dissemination among general public, multiplier effect, including through media
Presence of innovative elements	Experience based
Relation between the obtained results and established objectives.	
Contribution to a problem or need detected in the territory.	Road safety
Integration of horizontal principles	
Synergies with other policies or public intervention tools	Other EU funded programmes, investments in transport infrastructure, road safety programmes

Source: own elaboration

### Case 2: Annual event of OP SRDP in 2010

The annual information event of OP SRDP in 2010 was focused on tourism. The event took place in the town of Divača, with central part of the event being dedicated to the tour in Škocjan caves which as a natural heritage with tourist potential are important for Slovenia and the region. The operation *Investing in tourism infrastructure in Park Škocjan caves* involved reconstruction of tourist infrastructure in caves which were closed since 1965 due to being damaged by flood. The reconstruction of the elevator enabled to increase its capacity from 30 to 40 persons. The project contributed to conservation of the natural and cultural heritage and increased the number of tourists. In September flyers with achievements of OP SRDP printed on one side and award quiz involving 19 questions on the other (on OP SRDP, Park Škocjan caves and EU in general) were distributed via free newspaper. The right answers were a key to the password "Natural and cultural heritage European development potential" that had to be sent to SVLR, which held two draws to give 550 award tickets for entrance.

### Good practice criteria for assessing communication measures

Criteria	Description
Degree of dissemination among the beneficiaries and the public in general.	Broad reach, multiplier effect
Presence of innovative elements	Experience based (pull against push strategy)
Relation between the obtained results and established objectives.	
Contribution to a problem or need detected in the territory.	Preservation of natural heritage via development of tourism
Integration of horizontal principles	
Synergies with other policies or public intervention tools	

Source: own elaboration.

### Case 3: Informing-promotion campaign "European funds for cleaner environment"

In-between 26-30 September, as a part of the annual information event of OP ETID, open doors events were held by 5 regional centres for waste management (Novo Mesto, Slovenj Gradec, Ljubljana – with 144 million being the biggest environmental project co-financed by CF, Celje and Puconci) and one heating plant (Toplarna Celje), with free public transport organized to the locations and back. The open-doors events were supported by a promotion campaign, e.g. on displays on public transport, and a campaign on waste separation and recycling. The response to the event was very good, especially in Celje where a number of schools decided to participate. Following the public opinion survey of November 2011, out of all communication-promotion

activities, open doors of regional centres for waste management was the most visible (67% of the respondents noticed it).

Criteria	Description
Degree of dissemination among the beneficiaries and the public in general.	Broad reach, multiplier effect
Presence of innovative elements	Experience based (pull against push strategy)
Relation between the obtained results and established objectives.	Awareness of EU funds contribution in general and of OP ETID and CF in specific
Contribution to a problem or need detected in the territory.	Recycling
Integration of horizontal principles	
Synergies with other policies or public intervention tools	Europe 2020, sustainable management of wastes

Source: own elaboration.

#### Case 4: The annual events of 2012 and 2013

In 2012, the central annual communication activity – a joint event for all three OPs – took place in the form of a cycling trip to visit projects between Podčetrtek and Rogaška Slatina. On the way, some 45 beneficiaries presented co-financed projects and how they affected daily lives of individuals. The beneficiaries involved were education and training centres, entrepreneurial incubators as well as other operations in different phases of implementation. The event started in sports hall Podčetrtek (funded by ERDF), followed by cycling on the routes and roads co-financed by ERDF and CF. In Rogaška Slatina, several projects co-funded by ESF were presented. The event ended with a cultural programme in spa and wellness center Terme Olimje, which also received funding from ERDF and CF. The event received very good response by the beneficiaries, local municipalities, national and regional media.

In 2013, the annual event focused on presenting railway infrastructure in Slovenia and specifically the reconstruction, electrification and upgrading of railway track Pragersko-Hodoš, modernization of levelled passages and implementation of under-passages on railway stations. At the time, this was the largest project co-financed with the European funds; its total value was €465.5 million of which contribution by CF was €231.1 million. The event began with a presentation and short cultural program at the railway station in Ljutomer, followed by a train ride to Ormož (approx. 20 kilometres). On the route, the participants witnessed the implementation of project activities which were taking place at full speed at the time. During the ride, moderator was explaining the details to the participants. Invited were general public, journalists, beneficiaries, contractors, municipalities, firms-users of railway infrastructure, important customers of transport services, MPs and representatives of DG Regio.

Criteria	Description
Degree of dissemination among the beneficiaries and the public in general.	Broad reach, multiplier effect
Presence of innovative elements	Experience based (pull against push strategy)
Relation between the obtained results and established objectives.	
Contribution to a problem or need detected in the territory.	Awareness of regional development and contribution towards transport infrastructure
Integration of horizontal principles	
Synergies with other policies or public intervention tools	

Source: own elaboration.

### Case 5: Information-promotion campaign of 2013

In order to present projects co-financed in the programme period 2007-2013, the managing authority together with intermediate bodies organised a campaign with a slogan "What was done with EU money for you and your place?" motivating people to look for any positive examples in their environment and think about concrete improvements of quality of their lives that these brought. This was followed by an exhibition of the photos of the selected projects in October at Kongresni trg in Ljubljana, also serving as an end of one and beginning of another programme period. Moreover, a special video of the selected projects was filmed. Out of 81 proposals, 26 were selected for presentation. The winning project received some 930 votes. At the event, 9 different media were present.

Criteria	Description
Degree of dissemination among the beneficiaries and the public in general.	Good response by media
Presence of innovative elements	Active engagement
Relation between the obtained results and established objectives.	
Contribution to a problem or need detected in the territory.	
Integration of horizontal principles	
Synergies with other policies or public intervention tools	

Source: own elaboration.

In addition to the above mentioned good practices from the AIRs, some further positive examples were identified by the mid-term evaluation.

In September 2008, the first number of the "Cohesion e-corner" electronic bulletin was issued. By 2010, the bulletin was widely recognized. Each month, except in August, bulletin was bringing information on open calls, past events, good practices and other news. The number of subscribers was constantly in rise (webpage visitors were able to subscribe or unsubscribe). As shown by the survey among the subscribers, 84% of respondents found bulletin useful or very useful.

In 2010, the job fair "Professional opportunities and challenges" was held in town of Velenje. It was organized by the sector for ESF of the SVLR in partnership with the Entrepreneurial Education Centre and Employment Service of Slovenia. The number of individuals that participated was 4,000, including more than 1,000 primary, secondary school and university students, and 2,422 unemployed. Other participants were employers, education institutions etc. At the fair, workshops were organized for primary school pupils where they could get acquainted with different professions through practical assignments. There were also workshops on careers and career counselling, on good practices in companies etc.

According to the interviewees, the **new integrated visual identity** of the OP 2014-2020 with stylized animal shapes representing 11 thematic priorities and colours standing for different funds, which is widely used, was given credits for recognisability of the cohesion policy and for the strengthening of the organisational/corporate identity and self-esteem of those involved.

The **official programme web page** was selected as a best example by one of the German PR agencies.

In the 2007-2013 period too much attention was put on promotion materials such as umbrellas which had nothing to do with the individual operations and the way these affected the lives of the ordinary people.

The **experience based information and promotion campaigns** such as promoting mobility on buses, distributing free maps of public transport with new lines of city buses or promotion of waste management centres together with recycling campaign and open-doors events turned out to be very effective and well received.

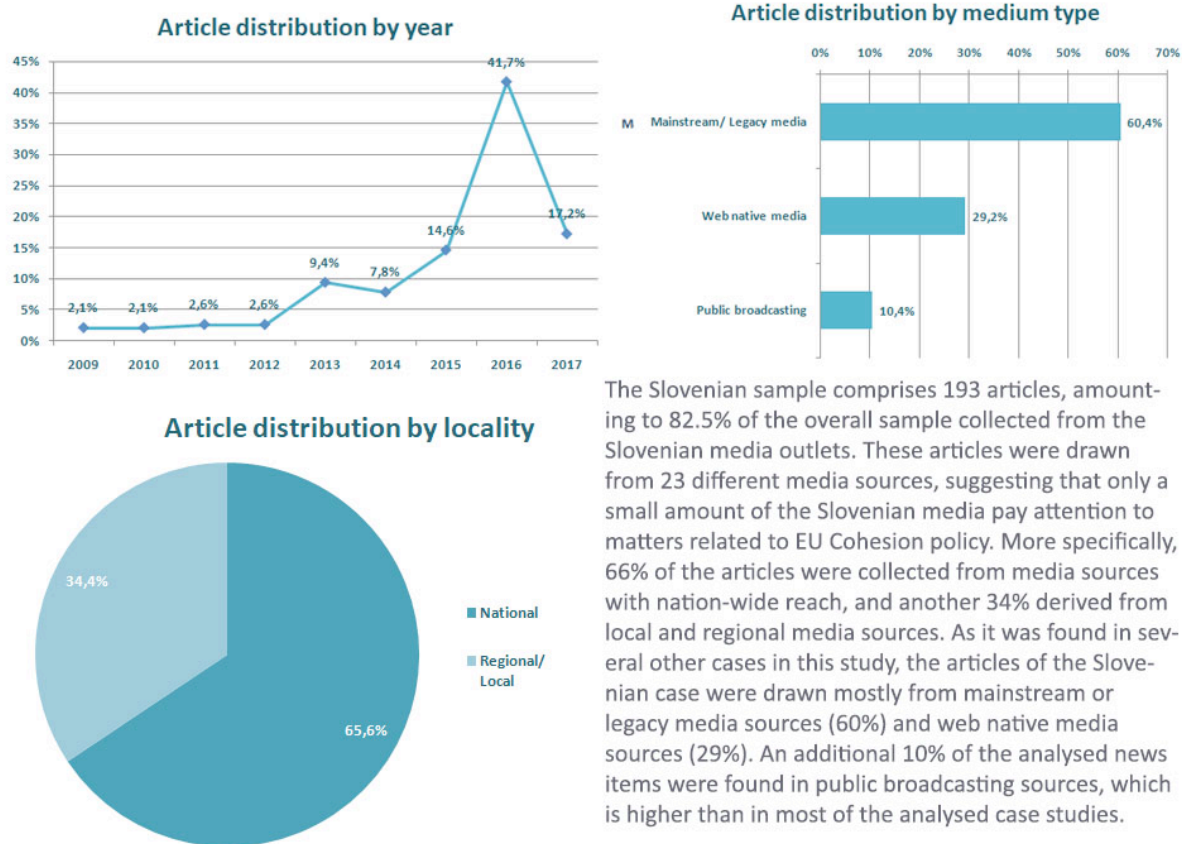
According to the survey respondents, the most effective measures are typically the most expensive ones (e.g. television, radio, media campaigns and events). When these are applied in order to reach the objectives, general public is, however, often critical for withering of the public funds.

Several respondents highlighted the **negative role of the media**. In an instance when the partner in the EU project writes an article and sends it to the media, the reporting is usually correct. However, when a certain media prepares a news report on its own, it is quite often full of misinformation. As one of the respondents to the survey explained, in Slovenia, the journalism and journalist profession in general has lost its value, resulting in low quality products and loss of credibility.

Good communication requires human resources (capacity and skills) and financial capabilities. Communication of results is of key importance. The results should be communicated in a user friendly way – for too often, too long and too complicated explanations are made. Simultaneously, communication should accommodate to the target group. Especially younger generation should be made more aware of the means and opportunities (e.g. by using social networks, communicating results directly via mobile aps etc.).

### 3.4 Media framing of Cohesion policy

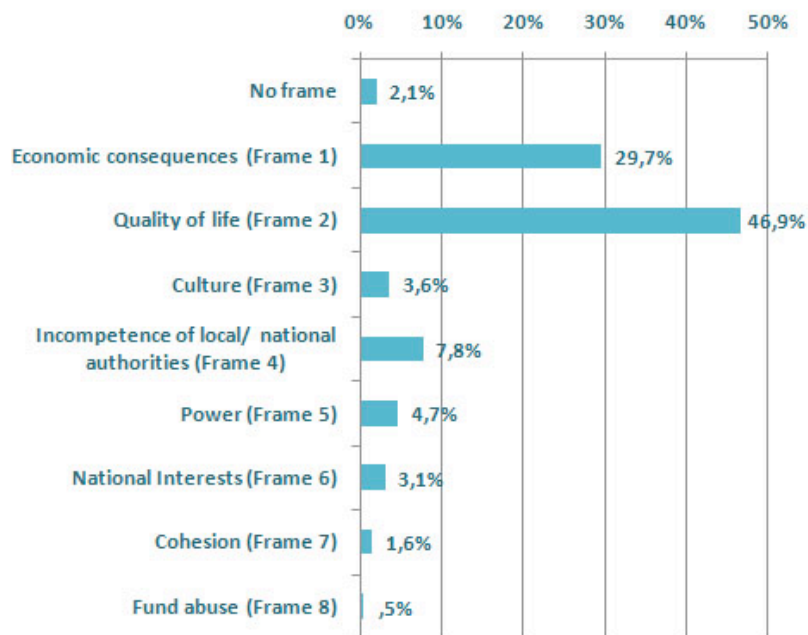
**Figure 3.9.1**  **Slovenia**



The framing analysis of the Slovenian sample reveals that almost half of the analysed articles (46.9%) frame EU cohesion policy in terms of its impact on citizens' "Quality of life". As shown in Figure 3.9.3, this refers mostly to the "Infrastructure" subframe (2.4) that was found as dominant in 24.5% of the analysed items, which is higher than every other case study that was analysed. Another 29.7% of the analysed articles were dominated by the "economic consequences" general frame, which was the second most dominant frame, following the overall trend also found in other cases studies. An important point that is worth noting is that only 2.1% of the news items were coded as containing "No frame", which is one of the lowest percentages among the examined case studies. It is also important to mention that 3.1% of the articles approached EU Cohesion policy in terms of its implications on "National interests" (Frame 6), which higher than any other case study we analysed, while the "Power" frame was also quite salient with 4.7%.

### Dominant Frame Frequencies (Slovenia)

(n= 192)



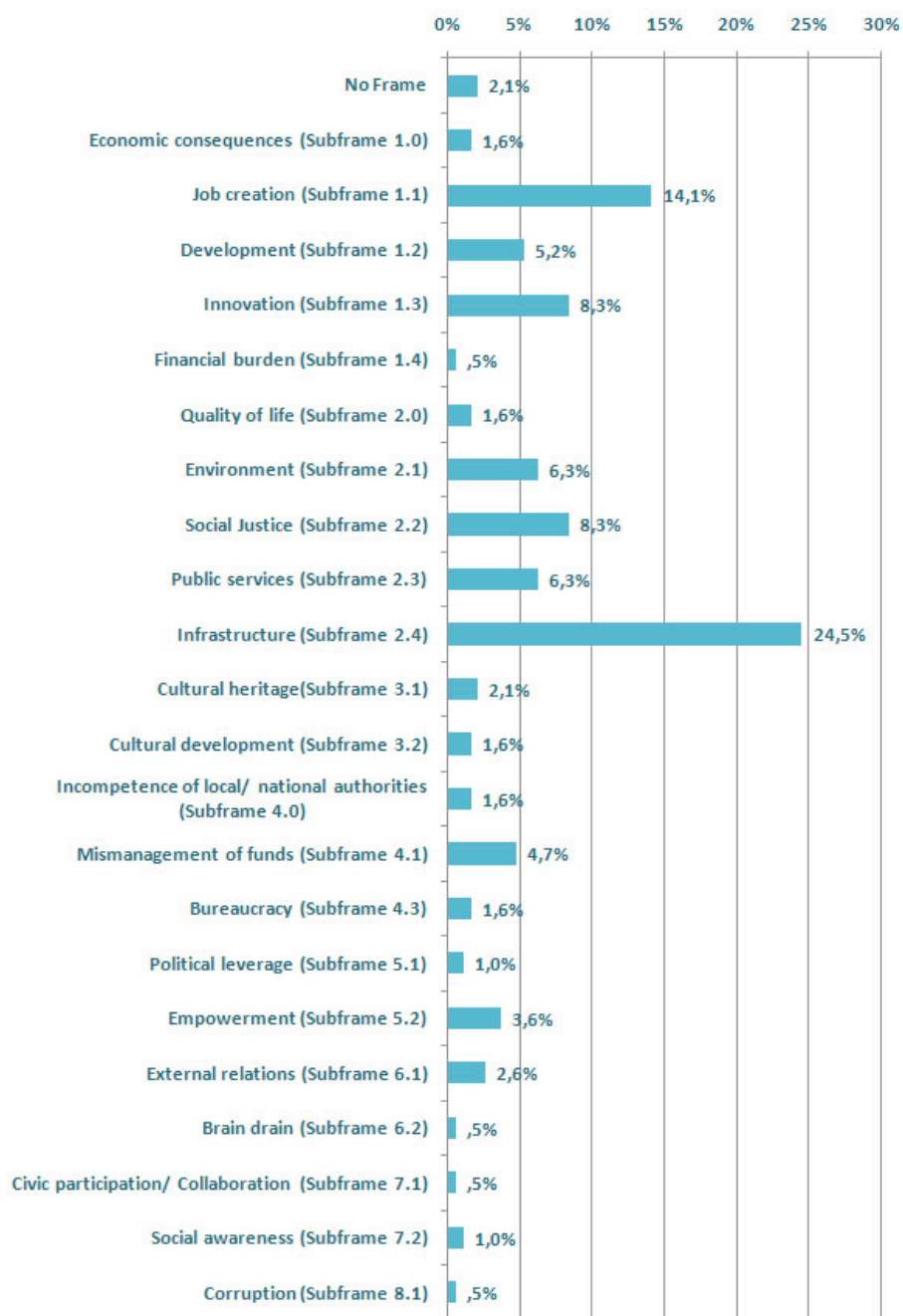
**Figure 3.9.2**

*Dominant frame frequencies in Slovenian media*



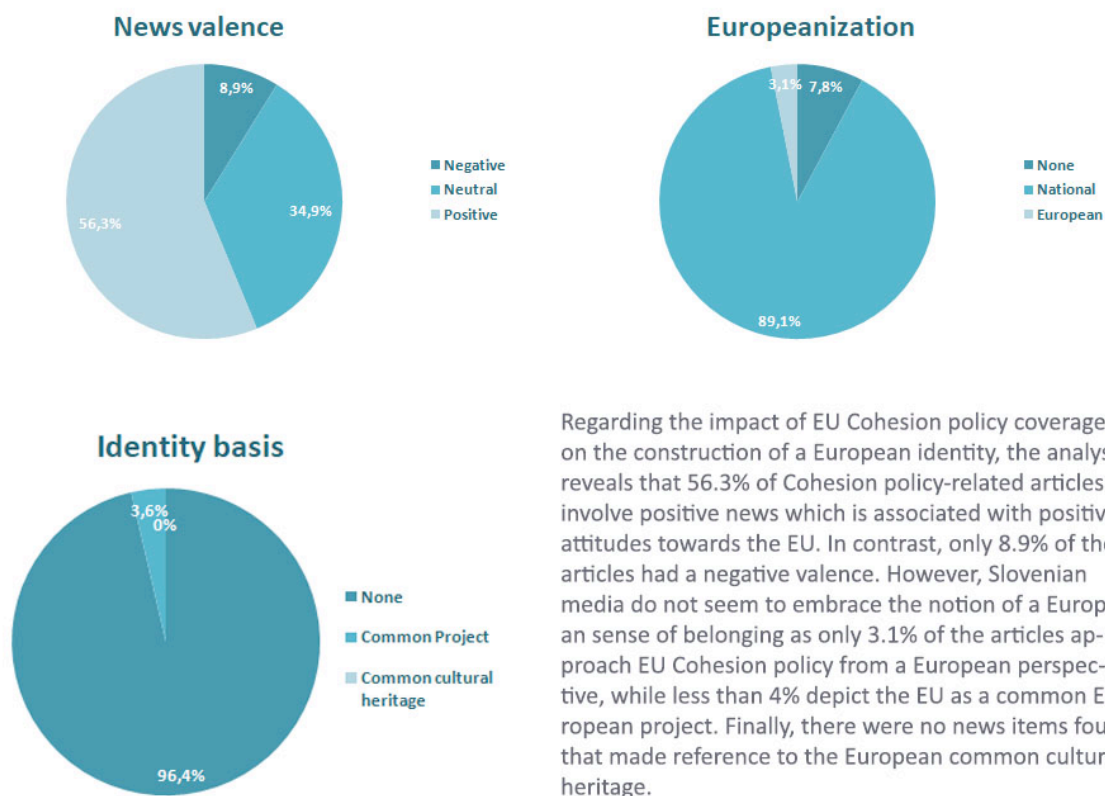
### Dominant Subframe Frequencies (Slovenia)

(n=192)

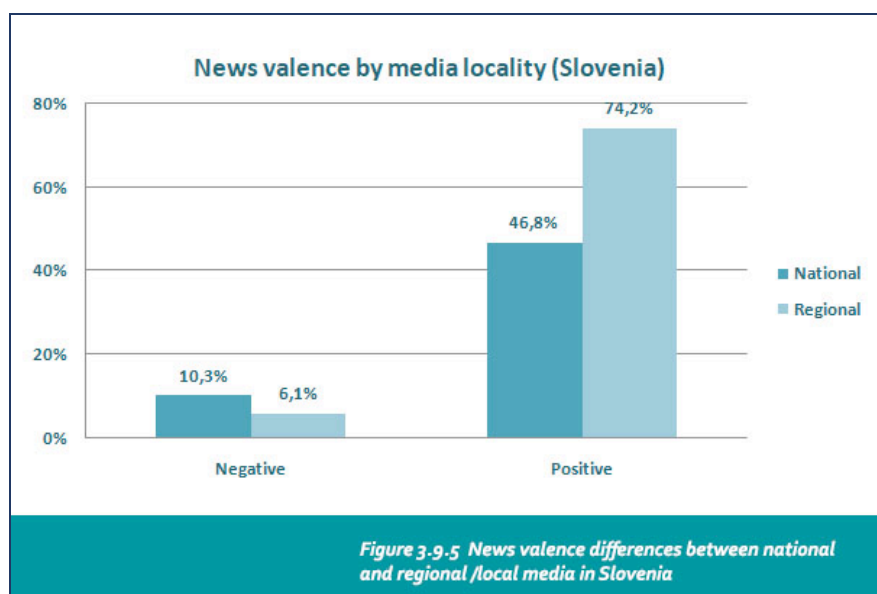


**Figure 3.9.3**  
Dominant Subframe frequencies in Slovenian media

**Figure 3.9.4**  **Slovenia - Europeanization variables**



The analysis of the Slovenian sample did not uncover any differences between national and regional media neither in framing analysis nor in the analysis of the Europeanisation variables. Yet there is one exception that is worth mentioning concerning news valence, which is shown in Figure 3.9.5 below.



According to the interviewees, **most of the media reports**, according to some estimates even 70-80%, **have negative connotation**. Those working at the intermediate bodies/ministries mostly deal with the negative questions. According to them, the journalists have negative assumptions, stereotypes and prejudice about the cohesion policy. While, according to the government representatives, they have an answer to every question, there is often lack of will to listen. In their opinion, this relates to the politicization of cohesion policy where different political and lobby groups use media to put pressure on the government to get more funds. For example, questions often come in waves, typically before the elections, and refer to the stereotypical issues such as absorption which has been explained over and over again.

According to several interviewees, another part of the story is that media make a living by selling their advertising space and they **want to have their share of the cake (cohesion funds)**, especially as the perception is that everybody else is getting something extra out of the cohesion policy while they should do their part for free (or, rather, as a part of their general job). The media often do not see the cohesion policy as something in public interest, which is worthwhile reporting, but rather perceive it as something related with Brussels, which is by definition very technical, bureaucratic and complicated. Also, as several interviewees mentioned, the situation in media in Slovenia is far from good. This is specifically visible in the commercial media which are full of misinformation, fake news and ignorant reporting. Nevertheless, following communication officers working at the managing authority who have been doing this for over a decade, from a long-term perspective, **things are improving slowly**, relations with media are getting better, and there is less and less mistakes in reporting.

Some cooperation did not turn out that well, e.g. several interviews said that TV advertising was very expensive and was later abandoned. As one interviewee mentioned, more recently, in the TV soap opera "Usodno vino" ECP appeared in the role of being a source of money for the corrupted national elites. The interviewees also listed some good examples such as the "Prava ideja" TV show where different business projects are presented from the perspective of entrepreneurs and the way they changed their lives, including those linked to programmes supported by the ECP. What is more, the communications officers responsible for communicating the cohesion policy said that the media more frequently report about the new calls and opportunities – one can even find reports about calls in unexpected places such as in tabloids. Moreover, they do come to the events and take up the materials on positive examples they receive.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements						
N = 47	Strongly agree	agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Don't agree	Strongly oppose	Don't know
The media mainly report negative stories about EU Cohesion policy	3 6.4%	14 29.8%	7 14.9%	21 44.7%	2 4.35%	0 0%
During publicity events, politicians mainly highlight the local/regional dimensions of projects to claim credit for themselves, rather than the role and contribution of the European Union	7 14.9%	21 44.7%	8 17%	10 21.3%	1 2.1%	0 0%
The media do not highlight the European Union role and contribution in a sufficient way	3 6.4%	16 34%	12 25.5%	15 31.9%	1 2.1%	0 0%
The key programme communication messages have adopted an appropriate form to reach their target audiences	0 0%	13 27.7%	24 51.1%	7 14.9%	1 2.1%	2 4.3%
The communication messages have been consistent at country or regional levels	0 0%	18 38.3%	13 27.7%	10 21.3%	1 2.1%	5 10.6%
There is insufficient resources and priority dedicated to communication by programme stakeholders	1 2.1%	10 21.3%	18 38.3%	15 31.9%	0 0%	3 6.4%

The respondents **mostly disagree that the media mainly report negative stories** about the ECP (though over third of the respondents agrees or strongly agrees). There is more agreement that **during publicity events, politicians mainly highlight the local/regional dimension** and that the media **do not highlight the EU role in a sufficient way**. This is something that has come up during the interviews but more in an indirect way in terms of weak communication on certain levels, negative developments such as the Eurozone crisis, discontinuity and reduction of funds available. The communication messages form, consistency and resources are mostly considered to be sufficient.

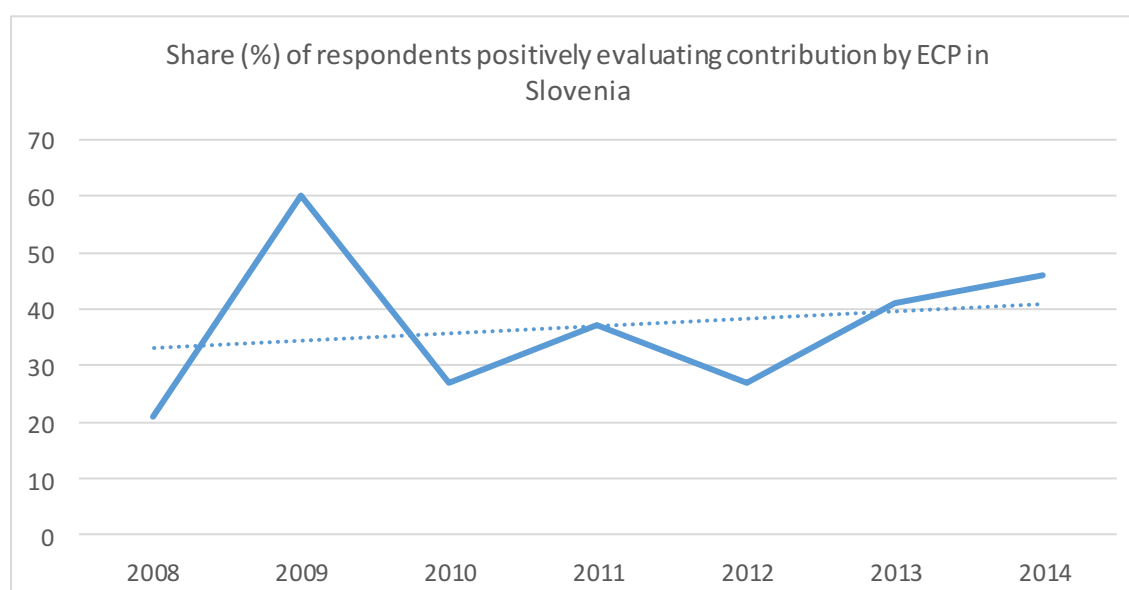
How effective do you think each of these communication measures are in increasing citizens' awareness of EU Cohesion Policy?							
N = 47	Very effective	effective	Not effective nor ineffective	ineffective	Very ineffective	Not applied	Don't know
Television	11	27	4	3	0	0	2
	23.4	57.4	8.5	6.4	0	0	4.3
Radio	6	29	6	5	0	0	1
	12.8	61.7	12.8	10.6	0	0	2.1
Local and regional newspapers	11	24	8	3	0	0	1
	23.4	51.1	17	6.4	0	0	2.1
National newspapers	2	31	8	4	1	0	1
	4.3	66	17	8.5	2.1	0	2.1
Programme websites	4	16	16	7	3	0	1
	8.5	34	34	14.9	6.4	0	2.1
Short videos/clips and presentations	1	20	17	8	0	0	1
	2.1	42.6	36.2	17	0	0	2.1
Plaques/billboard with EU flag	3	25	12	5	1	0	1
	6.4	53.2	25.5	10.6	2.1	0	2.1
Social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn Youtube)	4	24	12	2	0	0	5
	8.5	51.1	25.5	4.3	0	0	10.6
Advertising campaigns on television and/or radio	5	25	12	4	0	0	1
	10.6	53.2	25.5	8.5	0	0	2.1
Press releases	2	17	18	8	0	0	2
	4.3	36.2	38.3	17	0	0	4.3
Brochures, leaflets, newsletters	5	20	14	7	0	0	1
	10.6	42.6	29.8	14.9	0	0	2.1
Events	5	32	6	3	0	0	1
	10.6	68.1	12.8	6.4	0	0	2.1

**The communication measures considered the most effective are television, events, radio, local and regional newspapers.** Those considered the least effective are press releases, video clips and programme websites. In the interviews, there were some dissenting views regarding the cost/benefit ratio of the television. Interestingly, the communication measures considered the most effective are used the least (television) or are related with certain cooperation problems (traditional media).

### 3.5 Implications for citizens CP perceptions and attitudes to the EU

**Share of respondents positively evaluating the contribution of the European funds for the development of Slovenia went from 60% in 2009 to 27% in 2010, in 2011 it increased again to 37% and in 2012 it declined to 27%. In 2013, it was 41% and in 2014, it was 46%.**

The increase in rating in 2009 correlates with the implementation of the huge advertising campaign in the media in that year. In 2010, due to lack of funds as a result of the economic and financial crisis, the advertising campaign was not implemented, which might add to the decline. In 2010 and after, the attempt was made to substitute for the absence of the advertising campaign through more innovative and interactive approach towards the annual events (see above), price games and other forms of cooperation with media, which could explain the overall positive long-term trend from the 2010 onwards. Finally, the decline in positive evaluation of ECP in Slovenia in 2010 and 2012 directly correlates with the economic and financial crisis since in these two years, Slovenia faced the primary and secondary recession. The crisis resulted in negative attitudes towards the public institutions, including the EU.



Knowledge of the ECP: MA opinion polls results for 2015-2017			
	2015	2016	2017
Share of those aware that Slovenia is receiving development funds in the frame of ECP	84%	"very high"	
Share of those who believe Slovenia has €2 billion at disposal (share of those who knew the right answer)	50% (11%)		53% (11%)
Average grade of absorption efficiency	2.6	Not successful: almost 50%	2.77
Share of those who believe that Slovenia respects the principle of closing development gap between regions	52%	About 25%	
Average grade of impact of European funds for the development of Slovenia	3.4	3.16; big or very big: 31%	Positive impact: 92%
Share of respondents who knew at least one project funded by the EU and of which share of those who believe that the projects would not be funded without the EU support	82%; 72%	67%; 82%	62%; 67%
Share of those who have heard of the ERDF, CF and ESF	93%; 75%; 60%	24.3%; 16.5%; 10.1%	88%; 70%; 51%

Knowledge of the ECP: MA opinion polls results for 2015-2017			
	2015	2016	2017
Share of those who have heard about the PA, OP and Smart specializations strategy	52%; 38%; 21%	<10%	42%; 22%; 22%

**The visibility and awareness of the structural funds in Slovenia is very high.** According to the recent Eurobarometer, **80% of people know about the ECP.** The **awareness of the ERDF was 93% and 86% in last two years.** For the ESF it is less, probably as it is more difficult to sell these sort of projects and contents. According to a recent poll, out of 1,500 respondents, **70% knew at least one project**, which was surprising even for the managing authority representatives and could be probably explained with a high number of smaller projects that were completed in the previous years of which in each municipality at least one was implemented. According to some of these indicators Slovenia ranks amongst the top performing countries in the EU.

According to several interviewees, in Slovenia, **people do not see the connection between the EU funds and the role of the EU as such.** In practice, it is more or less those directly involved and beneficiaries who now how the system works. Moreover, those well-informed often see cohesion policy in instrumental terms (e.g. from the perspective of their narrow interests) and publically often complain about obstacles on their way such as administration and rules. Following a high public representative, at least in part, this is part of a more general problem, which is that the Slovenia does not really have an EU policy or an approach towards the EU. The ministry of the EU affairs and the structures established the accession process were largely dissolved and people who had knowledge and experiences took other jobs, often outside the public administration and abroad. According to the same source, today, Slovenia is rather taking a partial approach, e.g. focusing on particular issues and narrow interests such as functioning of the Schengen or absorption of funds which is a very instrumental approach towards the EU in which important elements such as the value added of the EU policy are missing. Not necessarily and we need to know what you mean in this contrast comprehensive/partial.

According to the communication officers, certain inconsistencies in attitudes, e.g. relatively positive perception of the ECP contribution, negative perception of absorption and very good knowledge of projects could also be explained with a combination of instrumental approach by the government and other actors, politicization of the absorption issue and relatively good awareness of the projects due to relatively good performance of the basic communication and informing activities, which is in part related with high dispersion of the investments in the physical infrastructure

Regarding the attitudes towards the EU, following civil society representatives (also being beneficiaries of the funds), Slovenians are well aware of the benefits of the EU such as freedom of travel without passport. However, as they also contribute to the EU budget they do not understand why so much **administration** is needed just to get their money back. This **frustration** has a huge impact on the way ECP is perceived by the beneficiaries. Of course, responsibility for the unreasonable administrative burdens are co-shared with the Slovenian authorities.

As several interviewees, especially those representing the regional/local interests, mentioned, **towards the launch of the new programming period, there was a lot of bad mood** and criticism. Due to **the economic and political crisis**, everything related with the public authorities had negative connotation. Moreover, according to the communication officers and government representatives, **communication of ECP faced a number of challenges** such as:

- How to convince people that we are more developed now and thus in need of less support
- How to explain what the ECP is really about (i.e. that it is not a supplement for the lack of regional policy in Slovenia etc.)
- How to explain soft projects and no more funding of infrastructure

Another thing mentioned by the representatives of the labour unions and of the local/regional interests is that many of the projects were delayed and it was very difficult to communicate positive effects to the public in the context when the Troika was knocking at the door. Furthermore, many of the local projects were completed in the period when local authorities were very angry as they found out there will be no more funds available for the infrastructural projects. Substantial amount of support went to private enterprises but in the context of the crisis this was hard to explain. The social supports, on the other hand, faced the problem of tensions between the EU's savings dictate and the labour unions. In addition, in the context of several programmes depending solely on the EU supports, an impression was created of jobs becoming EU-project dependent on of EU funded operations increasing the share of precarious employments.

Finally, as several of the interviews who have been engaged in this area for a number of years highlighted, a **good communication depends on continuity**. The beneficiaries need to be interested in investing into this in order to get new funds and continue with the old project. One also needs durable objectives to which strategies and projects are linked. This enables to develop effective communication: to build stories step by step, as it also takes some time for results to show, especially when it comes to the softer projects.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements					
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The communication activities have led to an increased awareness among citizens of the contribution of Cohesion policy to regional and local development	2 4.3%	35 74.5%	7 14.9%	3 6.4%	0 0%
The communication activities of Cohesion policy funds increase the sense of belonging of citizens to the European Union	2 4.3%	23 48.9%	16 34%	4 8.5%	2 4.3%
The communication activities of Cohesion policy funds contribute to increasing citizens' support for the European Union	1 2.1%	25 53.2%	16 34%	3 6.4%	2 4.3%
Citizens mistrust Cohesion policy communication activities and messages or consider them to be propaganda	1 2.1%	7 14.9%	23 48.9%	16 34%	0 0%

Almost 80% of the respondents agree that the communication activities have led to an increased awareness of the contribution of the ECP to regional and local development. Most of the respondents believe that it has contributed to increasing citizens' support for the EU and the sense of belonging. Respondents neither agree nor disagree with the statements that the citizens mistrust the communication activities. Relatively good results indicate that the overall communication approach, although often being relatively formal and conservative, is going in the direct direction and that improvements needed are rather specific in terms of improved targeting, individual measures and tools. This is also the position of the interviewees-specialists in this area.

How positive or negative was the impact of the funding of the European Union on your region or city? (Western Slovenia, N = 339)							
Very positive	Positive	No impact	Negative	Very negative	Not applicable	Refused	Don't know
95 28.0%	188 55.5%	36 10.6%	4 1.2%	3 0.9%	5 1.5%	0 0.0%	8 2.4%



Most of the respondents perceive **impact of the funding of the EU on their region or city as positive** (55%), followed by those perceiving it as very positive (28%) and as having not impact (10.6%) while the share of those perceiving it negatively can be neglected. The rather positive attitude is in line with the attitudes towards the cohesion policy and the EU in general as explained in other sections of the report.

Have you heard about the following funds?				
Western Slovenia, N = 500	Yes	No	Refused	Don't know
The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)	442 88.4%	53 10.6%	1 0.2%	4 0.8%
The Cohesion Fund	375 75.0%	118 23.6%	1 0.2%	6 1.2%
European Social Fund (ESF)	246 49.2%	242 48.4%	1 0.2%	11 2.2%

The citizens' survey demonstrated a very strong awareness of the ERDF (88.4%) a good awareness of the Cohesion fund (75%) and average to relatively poor awareness of the ESF (49.2%). The results are in line with the results of the other national surveys and the overall trend of growing awareness. In spite of the arguments of inclusion of a high number of beneficiaries in ESF funded programmes, visibility of some of the projects and innovative approaches towards communication, the **survey results demonstrate problems of softer projects in comparison to investments in hard infrastructure**.

How do you think your region or city would have developed without EU funding? (Western Slovenia, N = 500)							
Much better	Somewhat better	Same	Somewhat worse	A lot worse	Not applicable	Refused	Don't know
17 3.4%	31 6.2%	117 23.4%	186 37.2%	112 22.4%	14 2.8%	0 0.0%	23 4.6%

Most of the respondents believe that their regions or city would have developed somewhat or a lot worse without EU funding (37.2%; 22.4%), followed by those who believe the development level would be the same (22.4) while the share of those believing it would develop somewhat or much better was 6.2 and 3.4%. This shows **a rather positive attitude towards the way EU funds have been used** (though there is much space for improvement) which is consistent with the results of the stakeholder survey.

## 4. Citizens views of cohesion policy and the EU

### 4.1 Citizen survey

The European Union provides funding for infrastructure, business development and training to regions and cities. Have you heard about any such EU funded projects to improve your own region or city? (Western Slovenia, N = 500)			
Yes	No	Refused	Don't know
339 67.8%	151 30.2%	0 0.0%	10 2.0%



Approximately two thirds of respondents have heard about a project funded by the EU, which is 6 percentage points more than in the nationwide Eurobarometer survey of 2013 and 3 percentage points less than in the recent surveys published by the managing authority. The improved result compared with 2013 could be due to a stall in implementation of the OPs for the period 2007-2013 in the years 2011-2013 and growing number of projects completed in 2015. Slightly worse result compared with the one provided by the Managing authority could be explained with the fact that this survey was implemented in Western Slovenia which is more developed and thus receiving less funds and where visibility of projects is weaker due to abundance of other resources.

Where did you hear about it?				
Western Slovenia, N = 339	Yes	No	Refused	Don't know
National newspapers	129 38.1%	210 61.9%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Local or regional newspapers	150 44.2%	189 55.8%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
National TV	194 57.2%	145 42.8%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Local or regional TV	108 31.9%	230 67.8%	0 0.0%	1 0.3%
National radio	126 37.2%	213 62.8%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Local or regional radio	98 28.9%	240 70.8%	0 0.0%	1 0.3%
Internet	99 29.2%	240 70.8%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Social media	50 14.7%	289 85.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Billboard	78 23.0%	261 77.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Workplace	35 10.3%	304 89.7%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Personal experience or knowledge of projects	102 30.1%	237 69.9%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Other	15 4.4%	270 79.6%	3 0.9%	51 15.0%

When asked about the source of information on ECP, most of respondents referred to **national TV** (57%) and **local or regional newspapers** (44%), followed by **national newspapers** (38%), while other sources of information were not much below. This demonstrated more balanced role of different media if compared to the recent surveys provided by MA and might be related with different population (Western Slovenia) and specific characteristics of the sample or questionnaire (more options available, different sequence of options).

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "My country has benefited from being a member of the European Union" (Western Slovenia, N = 500)						
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Refused	Don't know
116 23.2%	225 45.0%	92 18.4%	50 10.0%	10 2.0%	0 0.0%	7 1.4%

A bit more than two third of respondents (strongly) agree that Slovenia has benefited from being a member, which is in line with the results of other surveys and secondary sources, according to which Slovenians are relatively pro-EU oriented and believe that the EU membership has overall contributed to the development of Slovenia, especially in terms of business opportunities, economic welfare and security.

Why do you think there was no positive impact?				
Western Slovenia, N = 43	Yes	No	Refused	Don't know
Not enough funding	25 58.1%	15 34.9%	0 0.0%	3 7.0%
Allocation to the wrong projects	24 55.8%	17 39.5%	0 0.0%	2 4.7%
Bad management	29 67.4%	11 25.6%	0 0.0%	3 7.0%
Not executed on time	22 51.2%	16 37.2%	0 0.0%	5 11.6%
Corruption among government officials awarding EU tenders	30 69.8%	9 20.9%	0 0.0%	4 9.3%
Corruption among beneficiaries of EU funds	32 74.4%	6 14.0%	0 0.0%	5 11.6%
Other reasons	2 100.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%

A minority of those who were critical towards the impact of the ECP on Slovenia listed most often as a reason corruption among beneficiaries (74%) and government officials (69%), closely followed by bad management (58%) while also mostly agreeing on other reasons given. Not to diminish the problem of corruption, the subjective perception of corruption in Slovenia in a number of polls has been unreasonably high meaning that the results should be interpreted with some care. According to the stakeholders and interviewees, the corruption was not one of the major problems and the scope of corruption was not bigger if compared to the state funds.

Why do you think there was a positive impact?				
Western Slovenia, N = 283	Yes	No	Refused	Don't know
Extensive funding	214 75.6%	51 18.0%	0 0.0%	18 6.4%
Allocation to the right projects	250 88.3%	21 7.4%	0 0.0%	12 4.2%
Good management	185 65.4%	62 21.9%	2 0.7%	34 12.0%
Executed on time	182 64.3%	79 27.9%	2 0.7%	20 7.1%
No corruption among government officials awarding tenders	95 33.6%	122 43.1%	3 1.1%	63 22.3%
No corruption among beneficiaries of EU funds	104 36.7%	108 38.2%	3 1.1%	68 24.0%
Other reasons	35 54.7%	28 43.8%	1 1.6%	0 0.0%

A majority of those who were positive about the impact of ECP in Slovenia listed as major reasons allocation to the right projects (88%), extensive funding (75%) and good and timely management (65 and 64%). Low importance of low level of corruption is in line with the perception of causes for negative impact.

Have you benefited in your daily life from a project funded by any of these three funds? (Western Slovenia, N = 500)			
Yes	No	Refused	Don't know
171	305	0	24
34.2%	61.0%	0.0%	4.8%

About a third of respondents have benefited from a project funded by any of the structural funds which is in line with the replies to some of the other questions (e.g. personal experience as a source of information) and surveys. The share is quite high but could be higher given the scope of funding, dispersion and variety of projects implemented over a decade.

How would you describe your general position on European integration? (Western Slovenia, N = 500)								
Strongly opposed	Opposed	Somewhat opposed	Neutral	Somewhat in favour	In favour	Strongly in favour	Refused	Don't know
4	19	5	117	38	209	103	1	4
0.8%	3.8%	1.0%	23.4%	7.6%	41.8%	20.6%	0.2%	0.8%

A bit more than 60% of respondents are in favour of the European integrations while only about 5% are against which is in line with the other survey showing that Slovenians are relatively pro-EU oriented.

Please listen to the following options and pick one that describes best how you see yourself. Do you see yourself as (Western Slovenia, N = 500)					
Country only	Country and European	European	European	Refused	Don't know
182	266	31	18	3	0
36.4%	53.2%	6.2%	3.6%	0.6%	0.0%

Over half of Slovenians see themselves as nationals and Europeans, which is in line with the rest of the results. Given small size of the state and openness of the economy which makes it highly dependent on the EU the share of those feeling European can still be considered relatively small and might be due to recent crises that were linked with the EU such as the Eurozone crisis and migrant and refugee crisis which have strongly affected Slovenia.

People may feel different degrees of attachment to places. Please tell me how attached you feel to:						
(Western Slovenia, N = 500)	Very	Somewhat	A little	Not at all	Refused	Don't know
Your city/town/village	277	133	76	12	1	1
	55.4%	26.6%	15.2%	2.4%	0.2%	.2%
Your region	227	173	80	16	1	3
	45.4%	34.6%	16.0%	3.2%	0.2%	.6%
Your country	265	149	70	15	1	0
	53.0%	29.8%	14.0%	3.0%	0.2%	0.0%
European Union	99	205	119	70	2	5
	19.8%	41.0%	23.8%	14.0%	0.4%	1.0%
Europe	107	195	119	72	2	5
	21.4%	39.0%	23.8%	14.4%	0.4%	1.0%

Very strong attachment to the city or town (55%) and country (53%) and comparably weak to region (45%) can be explained with strong role of national and local authorities (national government and municipalities) and weak role of the regions and regional identities.

Have you noticed any public acknowledgement of EU funding in your region/town in the form of banners, placards etc.? (Western Slovenia, N = 500)			
Yes	No	Refused	Don't know
316	180	0	4
63.2%	36.0%	0.0%	0.8%

The share of those who have noticed public acknowledgment of EU funding in their region or town is quite high, especially considering lesser importance ascribed to this source information in one of the above questions. Moreover, considering high dispersion of investments (at least one in each town) and strong orientation in infrastructural investments in the past, the share could have been higher.

#### 4.2 Citizens' focus groups

Most of the participants in the Slovenian focus groups had heard of the term "Cohesion policy" before. Participants reported that their awareness came from the media or from project publicity boards. In all the three groups, participants associated Cohesion policy with the development of regions and Member States. However, other meanings were attributed to it as well. For example, one participant mentioned that Cohesion policy was about the "transfer of knowledge" for improving living conditions (SI 2, Participant 4) while another mentioned that the purpose of Cohesion policy was to unite Europe or to pursue "integration" (SI 2, Participant 1). In one of the focus groups (SI 1), the Cohesion fund and ESF were mentioned spontaneously.

Most of the participants named an EU-funded project or thematic areas of funding. Infrastructure projects were by far the most mentioned, although investments in sustainable development, culture and human capital were also identified (see Table 1).

Table: Participants' reference to projects' co-financed by EU funds

Infrastructure:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Infrastructure in general, including roads, bridges</li> <li>- Water supply in the municipality of Kamnik, waste water infrastructure</li> <li>- Highway noise barriers</li> <li>- Unspecified investments in railways</li> <li>- Kindergarten in Preddvor</li> <li>- Playground in an unspecified village, gym</li> </ul>
Sustainable development:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recycling center Rcero (Ljubljana).</li> <li>- Energy renovation of buildings and residential homes</li> <li>- Ecological development fund</li> </ul>
Culture and heritage:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Piran salt pans</li> <li>- Medvode Youth Centre</li> <li>- Preserving cultural heritage in Bela Cerkev</li> </ul>

- Unspecified cultural projects, exhibitions, media projects

Human capital:

- Language training
- Employment schemes

When asked about the impacts of the projects, some participants expressed a general sense of appreciation. However, the discussion mostly focused on the challenges of Cohesion policy. All the participants identified a problem in the implementation of projects. Bureaucracy, problems in communication and general mismanagement were identified in all the three groups. Problems with absorption of funds were mentioned in two groups, and one of the participants said there was a lack of accountability when money had to be returned to the EU budget. With regard to red tape, the following quote provides the opinion of a well-informed participant:

SI 2, Participant 5: *"I must mention again complex procedures for applying projects, which are very time and money consuming. It seems to me that in the case of small players, it may be a problem, because tenders can be very extensive, sometimes 100 or 200 pages long. This is for a little private company that may have 1-2 employees too much."*

Communication problems were mentioned in terms of the lack of project publicity, information on how to apply for funding and the negative tone of media coverage. Several participants spoke about the mismanagement of projects. When asked about the impact of projects, one of the participants acknowledged the positive effects while highlighting the poor management at the same time:

SI 2, Participant 2: *"Yes, of course [the impact is positive]. But what if project is not finished? This is almost trend in Slovenia."*

Another participant contextualised the difficulty in assessing the impact and visibility of projects:

SI 3, Participant 5: *"Perhaps this is a little bit dependent on what kind of spatial context you are looking at. Perhaps in a bigger city it is harder to detect the effects, they are more hidden, while in some Osilnica, the smallest municipality in the country, 100 m of pavement is very evident and has a very direct effect on the quality of life."*

Below we provide extracts to highlight the way participants described the problems associated most often with Cohesion policy for the West region of Slovenia.

Mismanagement	SI 1, Participant 5: <i>"In Slovenia and in a valley in Austria: same project, same (EU) money but totally different outcome, very positive for tourism in Austria and not so positive for tourism in Slovenia, due to different execution of the project."</i>
Bureaucracy	SI 1, Participant 4: <i>"Project preparation takes a lot of time, money and knowledge. Although those companies are good because it is impossible for someone to be everything: competent to prepare the project, apply the project and execute the project."</i>
Accountability	SI 3, Participant 5: <i>"Especially local politicians can praise themselves very well. For one small bridge, our mayor will praise himself for</i>

*three more years.”*

According to Slovenian participants, Europeans are united by their common welfare state values but are divided by religion, politics, language and different economic conditions and living standards. The Slovenian participants express a rather stereotypical representation of Europe by defining the similarities and differences between Europeans and countries using classic cleavages rooted in the ideology of nationalism. Participants disputed the existence of a European identity by providing as evidence the absence of Europe when citizens fight for their rights against the state.

Cohesion policy was considered to contribute to European identity when the projects are beneficial to the community and the individual. This argument was further qualified by the clarification that the contribution of EU funding and projects to European identity is less powerful than other drivers of EU identity that foster contacts between people across Europe (Participant 5, SI 2):

*When you have a contact with another culture, with another company, when you sit with someone, when talking to someone in the same room, it is of course another sense of what this European identity is about, [than] if I were walking on a bridge that was funded in God knows which region of Europe.*

Furthermore, participants remarked that the positive impacts of Cohesion policy are cancelled out by other EU policies and actions, such as the response to the refugee crisis, which created division in the EU. Moreover, for Cohesion policy to become a mechanism for enhancing feelings of European identity, there is a need for more Cohesion policy projects to be implemented and to cease the negative publicity that is spread by the media.

## 5. Conclusions

**In the programming period 2007-2013 the Cohesion policy in Slovenia was oriented towards improvement of infrastructure for the technologic development, transport and environmental management.** The financial contribution of ECP was over €4 billion. Slovenia was a single cohesion region (NUTS-II). Organisation structure was highly centralized and managed by government body and ministries functioning as intermediaries. Other stakeholders such as the local communities, business and civil society organisations had minor role and were mostly interested in their part of the cake. The implementation of the programme was affected by the economic and financial crisis.

**The performance of the Cohesion policy was quite good in terms of output.** The main achievement was **high absorption rate reached in the extended period and high level of dispersion of investments** with each municipality getting at least one. In some areas such as waste water and waste management, dispersed investments brought notable systemic improvements.

The problems identified were **lack of proper ex-ante analysis and integrated development strategies, resulting in too many objectives and suboptimal targeting**, disrespect for the additionality principle, distributive logic, including among ministries, support and rent-seeking behaviour of actors involved, inflated costs and too strong orientation on physical infrastructure, localization of projects in the absence of the proper regional management structures, administrative problems and delays as well as weak long-term sustainability of projects.

The approach towards **communication** in the period 2007-2013 was also centralized. It was rather **formal, focused on official documents, annual events and requirements on informing**. Towards the mid-term period improvements were made in terms of user friendly visual communication and web page. The national media advertising campaign was cancelled after one year due to savings and replaced with a more innovative approach towards the annual events, which were organised at the sites of projects and based on practical experience of the ordinary citizens.

The **positive aspects of the communication were respect for the formal requirements, good awareness of the policy and individual operations among the ordinary citizens due to a dispersion of projects and individual innovative experience-based campaigns** which raised some attention and had multiplier effect at relatively low costs. As demonstrated by the opinion surveys, some of these events directly influenced the overall awareness and perception of the Cohesion policy. **On a negative side, communication was rather formalistic, targets were mostly output based and expected costs were inflated**. The objective of positive attitude towards contribution of ECP in Slovenia, which was the only result indicator that was set, was not met, which was partly due to the indirect of the economic crisis. **Most importantly, communication was not applied as a strategic tool for achieving the overall policy objectives**. Further to this, there were problems in internal communication between different partners, and in the relations with media.

The **new programming period 2014-2020**, apart from keeping focus on the technological development and certain environmental and transport challenges, **brought some changes such as greater relative focus on labour market and societal needs**, including ageing of the society and the role of social partners, which was due to the economic and financial crisis that has severely affected Slovenia. The three operational programmes of the previous period were replaced with just one integrated programme with **fixed allocation shares for the newly established cohesion regions**: the less developed Eastern Slovenia and the more developed Western Slovenia. Financial contribution by the European structural and investment funds was reduced to €3 billion. In organisational terms an attempt was made to better involve the stakeholders in the programming and implementation by establishing a monitoring committee and thus open the process.

The **achievements of the new programming period were a more problem-oriented strategic and political approach**, including identifying needs and targets, an attempt to open up the process and engage in negotiations with stakeholders and sufficient co-funding to implement the projects and fully absorb the funds available in the previous period in parallel. Moreover, there were also some elements of policy learning and endorsement of the logic of the policy cycle, enhanced cooperation on inter-local community level and strategic dialogue.

The **problems were that the targeting was still very formal, that lots of distributive and rent-seeking logic was still present and that the overall change was only slow**. There were substantial administrative delays and burdens reported as well as political conflict between the stakeholders. The political crisis resulted in some discontinuity and instability of the organisation structure. The problem of lack of genuine regional development policy (as well as a number of other policies) due to shortage of funds was even more apparent due to the financial strain, resulting in controversies regarding the additionality principle. **The monitoring committee was rather a formal body** which was immediately hampered by the anger of local interests due to the abolition of the regional development mechanism, which was a sort of their sub-budget. The private sector, on the other hand, followed the rent-seeking logic. When trying to apply for funds, local communities faced

shortage of administrative capacities, which was another consequence of absence of regional structures. The softer projects proved especially difficult to manage, requiring specific knowledge, critical mass and networks.

In terms of **communication, while keeping focus on practical experience, the new programming period brought certain upgrades such as substantially improved and integrated visual image** and a new web page, more integrated approach in terms of involving opportunities by other EU funds, better exploitation of the existing networks, indicating more integral role of communication and enhanced user friendliness and usefulness. There were also some improvements in terms of benchmarking and targeting, use of ICT and social networks and internal communication.

The **main achievements of the communication have been more or less in line with those of the previous programming period**: relatively good awareness of policy and projects, relatively positive attitude, continuity of communication and building on the existing best practices. **The communication was affected by problems such as discontinuity, less funds available, delays and tensions between central authorities and stakeholders.** The problems specific to communication were **formalistic targets, especially concerning the results and policy impact, need to integrate communication as a strategic approach in all phases of programming and implementation**, need to raise awareness of overall objectives, achievements and specific value added of the EU policy (as opposed to the preoccupation with the absorption), need to establish better linkages between communication on national and project level and lack of resources for an effective nationwide advertising campaign and better use of social media.

### *5.1 Scientific conclusions*

The Cohesion policy in Slovenia achieved good results on the level of individual operations/projects, some of which have contributed towards the systemic changes in different policy areas, as described above. **The factors contributing to performance have been centralized organisation and strong role of government institutions, effective translation of policy into a series of administrative tasks, high dispersion of funds between different intermediaries and beneficiaries**, strong role of local communities as beneficiaries and focus on physical infrastructure.

The Cohesion policy was **less effective in facilitating improvement in quality of development and regional policy of Slovenia**. The **main reasons for that have been lack of genuine regional and development policy and lack of finance and human resources, instability and discontinuity, affected further by the economic and financial crisis**. There have been some improvements and positive spill overs facilitated by the Cohesion policy in the areas of strategic policy planning, policy cycle and intervention logic, role of private-public partnerships and civil society, proper regional structures and administrative quality. Further improvements in this area depend on time and other resources available, institutional stability and political will.

In terms of communication, the situation has been similar as it has followed the overall logic of the policy implementation. **Communication has performed well in terms of informing and promoting about the programme and projects**. It has developed an experience based approach which was highly appropriate for a high number of localized investments into physical infrastructure. Moreover, some of the elements and tools applied have achieved high level of quality and innovativeness. **What has been missing, however, is use of communication as a global/strategic policy tool throughout the process**, starting with identification of the development problems. The key shortcomings of the communication are not related with communication as such but are rather a symptom of overall characteristics of Cohesion policy in Slovenia.

**The Cohesion policy has certainly contributed towards positive attitudes towards the EU and European identity in Slovenia.** The extent to which this has been achieved is hard to measure due



to lack of result and impact indicators in the monitoring and evaluation of the communications, discontinuity and methodological problems related with excluding the role of other factors. Nevertheless, **high awareness of the policy and of the individual projects as well as of the individual promotion campaigns, correlations between awareness of the projects and positive assessment of the policy imply potentially strong contribution of the Cohesion policy.** The contribution is hampered by general shortcoming of the policy such as focus on few priorities with clear EU linkages, result-oriented approach based on sound evaluation, and use of communication as a strategic tool.

## *5.2 Recommendations*

### *Ad. Global policy*

- Develop genuine national development and regional policy based on experienced gained through the cohesion policy.*
- Strengthen regional structures by transferring tasks, providing for human resource and finance*
- Mainstream strategic thinking, draft strategic plans and project proposals in advance.*
- Foster strategic dialogue with private entities and civil society*
- Invest in human resources in the areas of policy strategy, intervention and policy cycle logic, monitoring and evaluation*

### *Ad. Management structures*

- Strengthen continuity of organisation structures by determining mandates and selection procedures for the monitoring committee*
- Balance representation of different stakeholders, specifically by increasing number of representatives of the private sector, civil society and media.*
- Strategic development of human resources in public administration and with the stakeholders.*
- Outsource tasks to private sector and civil society to enhance their active and more global engagement*

### *Ad. Effectiveness and efficiency*

- More focused and streamlined approach in terms of choosing fewer objectives.*
- More effective and realistic time management*
- Choose priorities and projects with strong linkages with the EU level and EU value added.*
- Allocate certain share of funds for high-risk high-gain projects with potential for mainstreaming.*
- Prepare a joint plan for reducing administrative burdens together with beneficiaries who should be involved in all stages of drafting and implementation.*
- Capacity building in the area of soft projects, e.g. in terms of how to copy good practices from home and abroad*

### *Ad. Communication*

- Apply communication as a strategic approach in all policy phases*
- Enhance internal communication and dialogue*

- *Prefer quality and result oriented approach over quantity*
- *Apply specific mixes of tools for particular objectives/phases and target groups*
- *Develop new partnerships with stakeholders, beneficiaries and media*
- *Apply ICT to improve results and impact and not just for its own sake*

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## Annexes

### Annex 1: List of interviewees

Name	Institution (place of work)	Position	Date	Form
1	Government office for Development and European Cohesion Policy	President of the Monitoring Committee	14.6.2017	In person
2		Representative of the MA in the Monitoring Committee	26.6.2017	In person
3			23.5.2017	In person

4	Ministry for Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities	Representative of the Ministry in the Monitoring Committee	26.5.2017	In person
5	Trade unions	Representative of the Economic and social partners in the Monitoring Committee	13.6.2017	In person
6	Association of employers		7.6.2017	In person
7			7.6.2017	In person
8	AVE Agency	Representative of the NGOs in the Monitoring Committee	6.6.2017	By phone
9	CNVOS		17.5.2017	In person
10	Municipality of Slovenska Bistrica	Representative of the Development Council of the Cohesion Region Eastern Slovenia in the Monitoring Committee	12.6.2017	In person
11	RRA LUR	Representative of the Development Council of the Cohesion Region Western Slovenia in the Monitoring Committee	21.6.2017	In person
12	Municipality of Tolmin		29.5.2017	By phone
13	Municipality of Pivka	Representative of the Association of Municipalities of Slovenia in the Monitoring Committee	30.5.2017	In person
14	Maribor development agency	Representative of the Community of Municipalities of Slovenia in the Monitoring Committee	18.5.2017	By phone
15	Municipality of Celje	Representative of the City Municipalities of Slovenia in the Monitoring Committee	27.6.2017	By phone
16	Municipality of Ljubljana		5.7.2017	In person
17	Government office for Development and European Cohesion Policy	Communications officer responsible for communication of the ECP in Slovenia	23.5.2017	In person
18			23.5.2017	In person

## Annex II: Online survey response rates

Overview of number of responses and response rate by type of actor

	Requests sent	Survey participation (full)	Final response rate
National state authorities	26	16	62%
Regional state authorities	8	5	63%
Local state authorities	37	14	38%
Other public institutions	25	5	20%
Trade union	3	1	33%
Business associations and federations	4	2	50%
Business or commercial organization	2	1	50%
Interest group	2	1	50%
Union or association of local state authorities	4	0	0%
EC official	0	0	/
Other	1	2	200%
	112	47	42%

### Annex III: Focus group characteristics

Three focus groups with 15 participants were conducted in the West region in Slovenia:

FG	Location	Date	Number of participants	Number of female participants	Age range (min age)	Age range (max age)
SI 1	Ljubljana	25/09/2017	5	3	46	54
SI 2	Ljubljana	26/09/2017	5	3	25	65
SI 3	Ljubljana	27/09/2017	5	4	38	55