

Alexander Bozhkov, Co-Chairman of the Economic Development Centre and First Negotiator with the EU for Bulgaria:

The good projects under the EU Funds are doomed to succeed

Bulgaria has the opportunity to utilise up to EUR 7 billion during the first 7 years of its EU membership under 7 Operational Programmes.

The utilisation of the EU Funds is a bilateral process. The state administration presents the procedures, but you, the beneficiaries, are the ones that have to be the active party. Each Bulgarian citizen has the opportunity to utilise more or less of this grant.

What are the good projects and what impact European moneys have on the Bulgarian economy? These questions are answered by Alexander Bozhkov, Co-Chairman of the Economic Development Centre and the first negotiator with the EU for Bulgaria.

The good project

The misbelief exists that the EU Funds are just some money, which we are entitled to and we only have to ask to get them. In fact, these Funds are raised by the taxes paid by each European taxpayer, including the Bulgarian, therefore their utilisation should be beneficial for Europe, and not the private interest of the recipient. This is why the fundamental thing that each EU moneys' applicant should read and understand are the common European goals and priorities stated in the common European documents. Then the applicant should decide whether the personal idea for the implementation of which he would like to obtain funding, falls within these European goals and priorities. There is a point in applying only if there is overlapping of the applicant's own ideas and the European ones.

I reiterate once again that the European moneys are intended to achieve the European goals and priorities, and not the personal enrichment ambitions of the beneficiaries. And the European goals and priorities are aimed at better and prosperous life of everyone, at more employment and income, cleaner environment, higher competitiveness of the European economies globally. The most important result of each project, financed using European funds, is to achieve progress in the area of one or several of these goals. If no such result is obtained, the moneys are either not granted, or are subject to repayment.

It is time for the active people to start reading and getting ready

For the time being the overall funds' application, granting, spending and reporting procedure is completely unclear for the Bulgarian municipality, company, civil association or individual that intend to apply for EU funds. There are very few Bulgarian who are aware of the key Bulgarian documents in this area: the National Strategic Reference Framework, the seven Operational Programmes, as well as the Agriculture and Aquaculture

Programmes. Until now it was also not very interesting to read and study these, as the mandatory application forms, rule books, manuals and other practical documents aimed to disclose the technology of the money flow under a specific project were not ready.

More funds that we are able to utilise are set aside for Bulgaria

It must be clear that no one is going to knock on your door and beg you to take money from the European funds. Efforts are required to have access to any financing. The huge advantage of the European funds is that more money have been set aside for Bulgaria than we will be able to utilise today and over the next couple of years. This means that the major impediment before any application for funds – there are not enough money for everybody - does not exist. The possibility for not getting the money if you have a good project is non-existent too, since the administration will be assessed by the number of projects approved, and not by the number of projects rejected. This is why you should read, get ready and apply! Good projects are doomed to succeed.

About the European and Bulgarian moneys

Contrary to the common belief that European funds will be the major driver of the development of our country over the next few years, I afford to remind that all the seven billion are a lot less than our, Bulgarian budget funds, which are utilised today without visible effect and specific results. On the other hand our organised system for preparation, approval, financing and reporting of European projects, leads to specific visible results. The simultaneous work using European and Bulgarian moneys will very quickly force both the central and the local administration to introduce the same reporting, focus and effectiveness of the utilisation of the Bulgarian budget funds, as is mandatory for the EU funds. Thus, apart from the direct impact of obtaining (God, held us!) seven billion from the outside, we will learn to use better our own seventy billion from the expenditures side of the Bulgarian state budget and the municipalities' budgets.

Is Bulgaria going to be one of the “excellent students” in utilising the European moneys?

It is the obligation of the government and the state administration not to create impediments for the utilisation of the European funds, “not to clog” their way with incompetence, bureaucracy and corruption. The Bulgarian citizens should be uncompromising in these requirements to the ministries, agencies and the other administrative units responsible for the European funds. The good functioning of the administration is a must for the effective utilisation of the funds.

It is required, but it is not sufficient. Like in that joke about the man who prayed to God to win the lottery but never bought a ticket, in order to utilise the funds there should be sufficient number of good projects for this purpose. And this is where the initiative is with the people.

Be active! Read, educate yourselves as to how to utilise the European moneys and for what, to be able to prepare meaningful and effective projects. There will be not problems in the utilisation if we have a lot of projects and good administration.

