

## **A Review of Operational Programme Quotas May Be Carried Out in 2009**

Membership in the European Union opens up an opportunity for Bulgaria to utilize approximately 7 billion Euros during the period 2007-2013 under seven Operational Programmes. During the National Conference, an event forming a part of the *Be Active* campaign, designed to promote EU Structural and Cohesion Funds, which took part in Sofia, representatives of the business community in the country were familiarized with the opportunities for effective utilization of EU funding. The representatives of the business community expressed interest in specific issues and received specific answers from the Minister of Finance, Mr. Plamen Oresharski, and representatives of two Operational Programmes - *Competitiveness of the Bulgarian Economy* and *Human Resources*.

### **Is it possible to apply with a single project under several Operational Programmes in order to receive funding under the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund?**

**Minister Oresharski:** In principle, a possibility exists to apply with a single project for funding under several Operational Programmes, for example by a project aimed at the development of the business environment, which will be eligible under the *Competitiveness of the Bulgarian Economy* Operational Programme and similarly aimed at improving the skills and quality of the workforce under *Human Resources Development* Operational Programme. However, the recommended approach to follow is to identify a key highlight and apply under one Operational Programme or develop several individual projects. Otherwise the beneficiary runs the risk of running into a host of issues that may be difficult to resolve.

### **Are there any priority sectors of the economy in the context of *Competitiveness of the Bulgarian Economy* Operational Programme?**

**Mr. Atanas Kirchev, Ministry of Economy and Energy (MEE):** As of date no individual sectors have been selected in advance but we expect to see a development whereby certain sectors will be highlighted and funded as a matter of priority. These high-priority sectors will be defined in the final version of the Operational Programme.

### **Technical assistance is available under all Operational Programmes. Could you elaborate on the essence and the relevant application mechanism in respect of this tool?**

**Minister Oresharski:** Technical assistance is a tool intended for the Managing and Interim Bodies, and not the beneficiaries.

*Technical Assistance* Operational Programme will support projects aimed at facilitating and streamlining internal institutional activities funded under the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund, coordinating programmes, streamlining and upgrading the EU Funds Management and Monitoring Information System. The programme further aims to improve public awareness of EU Structural Tools.

The potential beneficiaries under this programme are various units within the Ministry of Finance – the Central Coordination Unit, certifying, auditing or managing bodies in respect of individual operational programmes, units working towards the dissemination of information regarding the structural tools at regional and local level.

**Depending on the rate of funds utilization could we expect a review of the quotas under the individual operational programmes?**

Minister Oresharski: If during the first three years quotas under *Competitiveness of the Bulgarian Economy* Operational Programme and *Human Resources Development* Operational Programme in relation to the respective priorities defined that cover most comprehensively the needs of the business community or are most frequently contracted, a review of quotas may be carried out during the interim review scheduled to take place in 2009 or 2010 but solely if sound grounds for quota reallocation exist. In case of insufficient funding part of the funding available under Operational Programmes of weak funds utilization rates will be used. This is a potential additional source of funding in respect of the two programmes mentioned. All depends on the entrepreneurial spirit of the Bulgarian business community and its readiness to expediently contract an amount of approximately 1 billion EUR available under the *Competitiveness* Operational Programme.

