

POST-ACCESSION PRIORITIES: ROMANIAN NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR DEVELOPMENT 2007-2013

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ABSTRACT: Since January 1st, 2007, Romania has entered a new era of progress where the focus is on the economic convergence with the other European Union member states. The National Plan for Development 2007-2013 represents the strategic and financial multi-yearly planning document that directs the sustainable economic-social development of Romania in step with the Cohesion Policy of the European Union. This paper examines the issue of absorption funds as main determinant of Romania's success during the post-accession period. Considering the global objective and also the specific objectives of the Strategy of Development 2007 – 2013, we analyze the absorption of the community funds on the six priorities of the National Plan for Development - competitiveness, transport infrastructure, environment, human resources, rural development and regional development, presenting a multi-yearly comparative analysis of the financial programming 2007 – 2013.

Keywords: post-accession, national plan for development, national strategy of development, structural funds, structural funds absorption rate

JEL Codes: O19, O20

Introduction

The National Plan for Development (NPD) is a concept specific to the European policy of economic and social cohesion, meant to present a coherent and stable conception in regards to the development of European Union member states, translated into development priorities, programs, projects, in accordance with the principle of the structural funds programming. Within the context of Romania's accession to EU in 2007, NPD has an essential role to align the national development policy to the community priorities of development, by advocating for the measures that are considered determinants of sustainable social-economic development at a European level.

NPD 2007-2013 represents the document of strategic planning and multi-yearly financial programming, approved by the Government and drafted in a large spectrum partnership, which orients the social-economic development of Romania into the direction of the cohesion policy in the European Union.

As far as the cohesion policy is concerned, NPD is a tool that helps prioritize the public investments for development, mainly concentrated on the priorities and objectives that are compatible with the fields of intervention of the Structural and Cohesion Funds.

The key components of the cohesion policy are the three financial instruments (European Fund for Development, Social European Fund and the Cohesion Fund), as well as the below three **objectives:**

- *convergence* – related to the regions with a GDP under 75% of EU average, which receives 81.54% of the cohesion policy funds;
- *regional competitiveness and employment* – covers all the other regions and gets 15.95% of the funds;
- *European territorial cooperation* – (trans-frontier cooperation, trans-national and inter-regional), which receives 2.52% of the funds.

The Community Strategic Guidelines on Cohesion (the Council Decision on October 6th, 2006) mentions the three **priorities** of the cohesion policy:

- attractiveness improvement for the member states, regions and cities, by increasing the accessibility, provision of high quality services and environment preservation;
- encouragement of innovation, entrepreneurship and development of knowledge-based economy by promoting the research and innovation capacities, mainly the new information and communication technologies;
- creation of more and better jobs, by attracting a bigger number of people among the employed population, and by entrepreneurial activities, and, at the same time, improving the adaptability of workers and companies and increasing the investments in the human capital.

To this effect, the specific character of NPD 2007-2013 should be highlighted – it does not substitute for a National Strategy of Economic Development, but it is one of the major components herein. NPD 2007-2013 supports, among others, the strategic priorities and objectives for development that will be negotiated with the European Commission with the purpose of financing the Structural and Cohesion Funds for 2007-2013.

NPD is the document that backs up the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) 2007-2013, representing the strategy agreed upon with the European Commission to use the structural instruments, like the Operational Programs that will help implement such funds. For this purpose, the NPD drafting has taken place in parallel with the Operational Programs to implement the Structural and Cohesion Funds, which thus become coherent with each other. The NPD 2007-2013 drafting has been done in conformity with the GD no. 1115/2004 regarding the drafting in partnership of the National Plan for Development. This document sets the methodological principles, the inter-institutional framework and the mechanisms of the partnership consulting. NPD 2007-2013 includes the following main sections: I. Analysis of the current situation; II. SWOT Analysis; III. Development strategy; IV. Financial programming; V. Partnership.

The analysis of the current social-economic situation. The structural funds absorption rate

The ‘Analysis of the current situation’ chapter includes a quantified description of the current social-economic circumstances that relates the gaps between Romania and European Union, and also the development potential. This description incorporates a general analysis of the social-economic situation (general geographic view, the analysis of the demographic and the macro-economic situation, including the 2007-2013 macro-economic perspectives), as well as the sector and regional social-economic analyses.

At the sector level, the social-economic analysis approaches the productive sector from the competitiveness (manufacturing industry, the area of research-development and innovation, the SMEs and tourism), infrastructure (both the infrastructure of transport, energy and environment), agriculture, rural development and fishery, as well as the human resources in a more ample perspective: the description of the educational system and professional formation, the description of the labor market and the employment situation, which regards the social inclusion (the current situation of the disadvantaged groups on the labor market, the general situation for the social assistance, the assessment of the ‘fair chance’ issue between men and women as far as the labor market opportunities perspective, including the existent constraints), the medical field and the population health issue.

For the regional level, the NPD 2007-2013 social-economic analysis presents the regional disparities in the economic development, from the perspective of the population employment degree, entrepreneurial development and access to the transport infrastructure, the differences in the social infrastructure and of tourism, as well as the discrepancies in the regions' urban development.

The NPD 2007-2013 social-economic analysis also covers the description of the situation in the European territorial cooperation (Romania's relation with the neighboring states and Romanian regions' participation in the cooperation programs among various European regions) and an analysis upon the country's administrative capacity, which applies to the system of the public administration, legal and the public order domain. The last chapter of the social-economic analysis investigates the spatial development situation, from the point of view of the territory administration and the defining framework for Romania's territorial development.

Currently, the European funds absorption represents an opportunity for economic development of Romania, where their utilization would mean a yearly capital inflow that is 5% of GDP. Reaching an absorption rate lower than 10% in 2007 places Romania behind the states that acceded into the European Union in 2004. Upon the first accession year, the absorption rate of those ten states rose to only 20%. The 10 new Member States reached for 2000 – 2006 period an average rate of 75% of absorption of their financial allocations, varying between 62% for Cyprus and 82% for Hungary. As far as EU 15 countries are concerned, average execution reached 84%, varying between 65% for the Netherlands and 91% for Ireland.

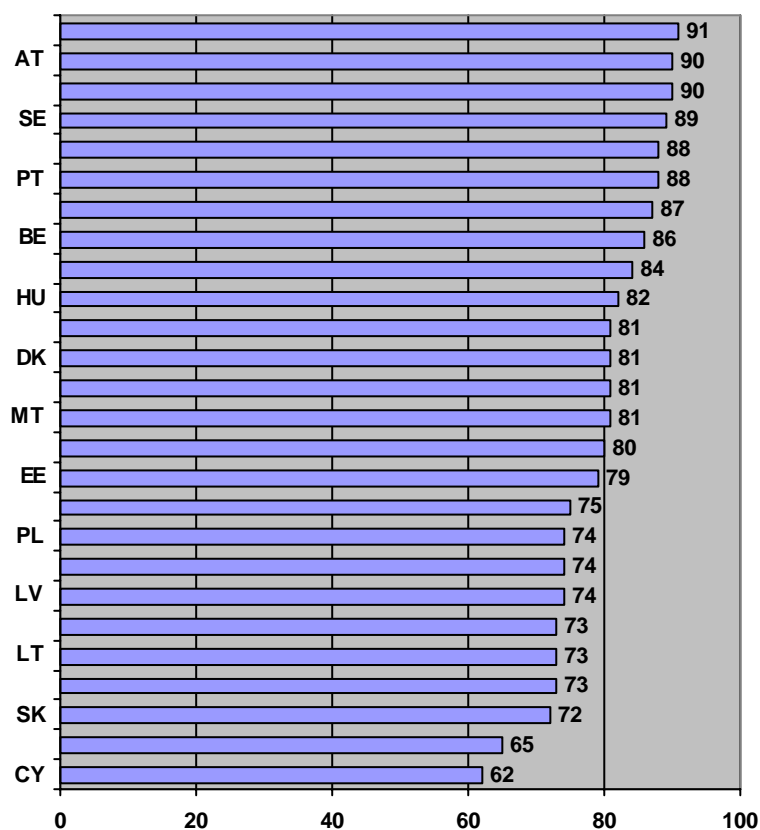


Fig. nr.1. - Period 2000 – 2006: 4 Structural Funds – Comparing SF absorption rates

Source: IP/08/204, Brussels, 12 February 2008

The European Commission has adopted almost all the operational programmes for the period 2007 – 2013, representing 98% of the EUR 347 billion to be invested. For these new programmes, first advance payments carried out in 2007 amount to about EUR 7 billion. Regarding Romania situation, considering the fact that the 10 new Member States reached in 2007 an average rate of

absorption of 75% after a rate of 20% in the first year of accession, and Romania reached in 2007 an average rate of approximately 10%, we can easily estimate for Romania an average absorption rate in 2010 of approximately 40%. The delays that Romania has registered might as well place our country in a similar situation of the 2004-wave states, which find themselves now on the brim of losing the reserved funds. In 2008, the Romanian authorities have set as a target the absorption of the structural funds of almost EUR 2.5 billion – approximately 800 million for agriculture and a billion for projects related to the before and after accession times.

Strategy of development 2007-2013 – general objective and specific objectives

The NPD 2007-2013 development strategy is a reflection of Romania's development needs, in order to reduce its current gaps compared to the European Union. The NPD 2007-2013 strategy is focused on both the cohesion-related community strategic orientations and the priorities on the Lisbon Agenda and Göteborg objectives - competitiveness increase, full employment and the environment durable protection.

In 2004, Romania was placing at about 31% of the EU average from the point of view of GDP per capita¹. Considering this important gap versus the European Union average development level and the NPD role as an instrument to reduce such difference, the NPD 2007-2013 **global objective** has been therefore established: a fast as possible reduction of the social-economic development disparities between Romania and the European Union member states. According to the estimations, Romania might recuperate approximately 10% of the gap by 2013, and thus reaching 41% of the EU average.

The global objective is supported by three **specific objectives**:

- *The long-term competitiveness growth of the Romanian economy;*
- *The basic infrastructure development in accordance the European standards;*
- *The improvement and better use of the local human capital.*

In order to reach the global and specific objectives, and also from the issues in the social-economic analysis, **six national priorities for development** have been formulated for the 2007-2013 period:

1. *Economic competitiveness increase and the development of the knowledge-based economy;*
2. *Development and modernization of the transport infrastructure;*
3. *Environment quality protection and reformation;*
4. *Human resources development, full employment promotion and social inclusion and the administrative skills consolidation;*
5. *Rural economy development and productivity increase in the agricultural sector;*
6. *Development disparities reduction among the country's regions.*

The establishment of a limited number of priorities helps to provide the concentration of the available resources on achieving the objectives and measures with maximum impact over reducing the discrepancies compared with European Union, and the internal ones. It is worth mentioning that, within such priorities, numerous specific domains/intervention sectors – i.e. education, health, energy, communications and IT, natural risks prevention – are being approached. Based on the above priorities, the Romanian authorities and the European Commission have established, during the negotiations under Chapter 21, the Operational Programs that facilitate the access to the Structural and Cohesion Funds.

¹ Within the Cohesion Policy, this indicator is considered to be the most general expression of the development level of a country/region. This indicator helps commensurate the development disparities in the EU.

On July 25, 2007, Government gave green light to the National Program of Reforms (NPR) 2007-2013, a document that represents the strategy adopted by the Executive body to increase competitiveness – the list of objectives includes the maintaining of the single taxation quota and the yearly distribution of 6% of GDP to education. The program recommends an economic increase of 6.2-6.3% for 2008, a decrease of the checking account deficit from 10.5% in 2007 to 9.7% in 2010, budget appropriation out of GDP of circa 6% for education and 0.7% for research and a CAS decrease by 6% in 2008. PNR also suggests an improvement of the taxes collection by 1% out of GDP in 2007, by 0.5% per annum during 2008-2011, as well as the keeping the single taxation quota. The government binds itself that, by 2010, circa 80% of the built budgets to be drafted, in conformity with the EU norms, into programs. In PNR 2007-2010, other issues are mentioned, such as the energy intensity reduction by 2.5-3% per annum before 2010, compared to 2001, the increase of the nuclear energy percentage in the energy mix to 16%, upon the starting of the reactor 2 in Cernavoda and 30% for the reactors 3 and 4. Moreover, 33% from the produced energy should come from renewable resources and 5.75% in the fuel should be bio until 2010.

The National Program for Reforms (NPR) owns a personal system of monitoring, which started in September 2007 – when the first visit of the EU peer review mission occurred and assessed the PNR engagements fulfillment.

The national priorities for development during the period 2007 – 2013

The increase of the economic competitiveness and the knowledge-based economy development

Due to the important competitiveness gaps between Romania and other European Union states, the general strategic objective of such priority is *the increase of competitiveness of the Romanian companies to reduce the disparities versus the medium productivity in the European Union. By 2015, the target is to attain an average productivity increase of circa 5.5% per annum of the EU average.* The following sub-priorities should be closely considered:

- *The productivity increase by the improvement of the access to market of the companies, mainly the SMEs* – done by supporting the lucrative investments (new equipment and technologies), certification of the companies and products, development of the business infrastructure (incubators, business centers, emergent clusters), promotion of the internationalization efforts of the companies, as well as the encouragement of the Romanian tourism potential.
- *The knowledge-based economy development by promoting the research and innovation and stimulation of the informational society progress*, which also involves the advance and efficiency of the modern electronic public services (e-Government, e-Education and e-Health).
- *The improvement of the energy efficiency and the capitalization of the renewable energy resources* by investments that are meant to reduce the energy intensity and to improve the energy efficiency, as well by the capitalization on the energy recyclable resources.

The transport infrastructure development and modernization

The general goal of the strategy in the transportation field is to provide an *extended, modern and durable transport infrastructure, as well as the other terms that regard the sustainable development of economy and the improvement of life quality, in such a way that the volume of the transport in GDP to raise from 3.6 billion EUR (at the present moment) to at least 7.0 billion EUR, before 2015.*

For fulfilling this objective, the strategy of the transport development and modernization will be put in practice by the below priorities:

The development and modernization of the trans-European infrastructure and connection networks, by the modernization and construction of trans-European road infrastructures, railway, naval and airport and the modernization and construction of connection networks at TEN-T. It is worthwhile mentioning that the projects that relate to the Pan-European corridor IV will be accordingly developed.

The development and modernization of the transport infrastructure of national interest and the improvement of the related services, by modernization and construction of the road, railway (including the relevant services) and naval infrastructures.

The sustainable development of the transportation sector, by promotion of the inter-modality, the improvement of the traffic safety for all the transport means, the decrease of the impact of the transport works and activities upon the environment and securing the transport infrastructure.

The protection and improvement of the environment quality

The general strategic objective of this priority in NPD is the protection and improvement of the environment quality, in step with the economic and social needs of Romania, and thus triggering the significant improvement of the life quality by promoting the sustainable development. This objective will be therefore attained by approving of the following sub-priorities and also, of the fulfilling the engagements that Romania has bound itself to during the EU accession negotiations, under Chapter 22 'Environment Protection':

The improvement of life standards by providing public services at the requested quality and quantity standards in the sectors of water and waste, by developing the systems of water and used water infrastructure in the targeted localities and creation/consolidation of the relevant regional companies and by developing the integrated systems in the waste management (collection, transport, treatment/release of waste in the targeted localities; the closing of the non-compliant storage places).

The improvement of the sector systems of environment management, focused on: the development of the specific systems of *water and waste management*, of the ones regarding the *natural resources management* (preservation of the biological diversity, ecological reconstruction of the damaged systems, the prevention and intervention for the *natural risks* – mainly flooding), as well as the *improvement of the air protection infrastructure*.

The development of the human resources, promotion of employment and social inclusion and consolidation of the administrative capacities

It is widely known the fact that human resources represent the engine of the knowledge-based society, and the general strategic objective stands for the *development of the human resources and its competitiveness on the labor market, by providing equal chance for learning in the entire life and development of a modern, flexible and inclusive labor market that will lead, by 2015, to the durable integration into the labor market of 900,000 people*.

The measures and actions to be kept in view for this priority may be grouped into four sub-priorities, as follows:

- *The development of the human capital*. The investments made herein will focus on: the initial education system (by promoting reforms in the lifelong learning context), learning disseminators (human resources in education), learning content (diversification and quality assurance of the education offers and initial and continuous training) and the continuous professional training system.

- *Promotion of full employment.* The main measures that have been considered are concentrated on: the increase of the labor force and companies adjustability; the development of initiatives for the social partners; the improvement of transition from school to the employment place and the promotion of the entrepreneurial culture during education and training, the identification and capitalization of all opportunities of labor market penetration; the modernization and strengthening of the administrative capacity of the employment public service.
- *Promotion of social inclusion.* The main areas of intervention that will be considered herein are: labor market integration and fight against discrimination, the improvement of access and participation into compulsory and continuous education for the vulnerable groups, the promotion of sex equality and fight against the women's social exclusion, the development of an efficient system of social services that are meant to reduce the marginalization risk and social exclusion, trans-national initiatives in the inclusive education and trans-national initiatives on the labor market.
- *The development of the administrative capacity and of good governance.* This sub-priority aims to promote and support the creation, centrally and locally, of a public administration that should become an essential factor of competitiveness, development, progress and cohesion. Also, other two sectors will be targeted in the strengthening process of the administrative capacity: the justice and order and the public safety.

The development of the rural economy and the enhancing of productivity in the agricultural sector

The general strategic objective herein concentrates on the *development of a competitive agriculture, based on knowledge and private initiative, as well the protection of the cultural and historical natural patrimony and the rural regions in Romania.*

The sub-priorities that have been identified for this paragraph are as follows:

- *The competitiveness increase for the agro-alimentary and forest economy by adjusting the offer to the market requirements* – here, a financial aid is granted, mainly for the modernization of the farms and the improvement of the human capital in agriculture (consultancy and support services for young farmers, encouragement for producers' associations), as well as for the improvement of the products' quality.
- *The increase of the life standards in the rural areas by diversification of the rural activities*, like: the stimulation of the non-agricultural activities, promotion of the agro-tourism, as well the development of the micro-companies that provide better quality services.
- *The sustainable economic development of the farms and the forest exploitations* targets the implementation of certain actions that regard the durable utilization of the agricultural and forest land, tangible as payments for agro-environment and animals' welfare, reimbursements for the not-so-favorable lands, and also forestation bonuses and actions that will prevent natural disasters.
- *Promotion of the LEADER-type initiatives*, which aim to stimulate the local initiatives to enable the growth of the rural communities' ability to develop partnership-based business initiatives.
- *Assuring the sustainable fishery and aqua-culture development*, where the goal is to develop the aqua-culture and fishery in the national waters, the fishery products processing and marketing, modernization of the fishing vessels, and the durable development of the coastline fishing areas.

Decrease of the development mismatches among the country's regions

The general objective is constituted by the *more accelerated economic growth of the poorly developed regions, in order to decrease the inter-regional and intra-regional development disparities.*

The NPD priority that regards the balanced development of all the country's regions will be able to be applied by an integrated approach, based on a combination of public investments in the local infrastructure, active policies of stimulating the business enterprises and the support for the local resources capitalization, with the below sub-priorities:

- The *improvement of the regional and local public infrastructure*: the increase of the regions' competitiveness as locations for business by improving the transport infrastructure, health infrastructure, social and education services, as well as the infrastructure of public safety for emergency conditions, natural and technological disasters .
- The *consolidation of the regional and local business environment*: the development of the business infrastructure and the support for the local business activities of an innovative nature, favoring the creation of necessary connections between the lucrative activities and the research-development-innovation ones.
- The *development of the regional and local tourism*: the increase of the attractiveness level of regions, by creating a proper infrastructure and improvement of the specific services, the development of tourism alternative forms, the protection and promotion of the natural and cultural patrimony at a local and regional level.
- The *sustainable urban development*: the revival of the urban zones that have been affected by the industrial restructuring or have serious social-economic problems, and also the consolidation of the urban centers network that possesses a great development potential that will make them turn into engine of the regional economic growth.
- The *European territorial cooperation*. At this moment, this sub-priority is included in the new Intervention Objective within the Cohesion Policy for 2007-2013, '*The European territorial cooperation*', meant to the harmonious and balanced integration of the entire EU territory, by supporting the cooperation among its various territorial entities at trans-frontier, trans-national and inter-regional levels, for issues that have a community significance. The sub-priority will be carried out by promoting actions in the trans-frontier, trans-national and inter-regional cooperation, so that the border zones will be social-economically assimilated and Romania's regions grow their attractiveness and accessibility level within the European territory.

The financial 2007-2013 programming, implementation and partnership

The NPD strategy, focused on the priorities and objectives that are compatible with the intervention fields of the Structural and Cohesion Funds, will have multiple financing sources. As mentioned earlier, NPD 2007-2013 represents an instrument to prioritize the public investments for development, providing the general support for the public funds distribution into the investments that influence on a large scale the economic and social development, from internal sources (state budget, local budgets, etc) or external (EU structural instruments, structural EU funds for agriculture, rural development and fishery, external credits, etc.)

The NPD financial programming has intended to compile a more realistic chart of the development financing sources that should be used for the 2007-2013 intervals, for a faster convergence with the EU. The global estimative amount is of approximately EUR 58.7 billion distributed on the six national NPD development priorities:

Table no. 1

Global financial programming NPD 2007 – 2013

- mil. euro -

Priorities NPD	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
P1. Competitiveness	651,48	620,72	793,14	882,76	842,95	761,25	682,12	5.234,43
P2. Transport infrastructure	2.094,99	2.517,48	2.465,25	2.071,29	1.819,84	1.832,20	1.853,75	14.654,79
P3. Environment	753,18	898,70	1.099,11	1.160,45	1.069,54	810,78	806,23	6.597,98
P4. Human Resources	711,65	912,51	1.297,08	1.317,59	1.313,22	1.115,85	940,72	7.608,60
P5. Rural Development	1.585,56	1.757,72	2.200,96	2.335,49	2.395,08	2.445,15	2.517,37	15.237,32
P6. Regional Development	1.294,79	1.280,99	1.397,96	1.336,37	1.342,35	1.344,55	1.342,97	9.339,98
Total	7.091,6	7.988,12	9.253,50	9.103,95	8.782,98	8.309,78	8.143,16	58.673,10

The structure of the financial sources of NPD 2007 – 2013 is:

NDP 2007 - 2013: Structure of financial sources

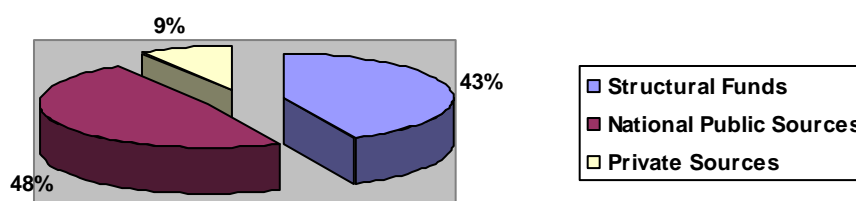


Fig. no. 2. 2007 – 2013 Structure of financial sources

Upon analysis of the NPD financial programming distribution for the 2007-2013 interval for all six development priorities, as shown in the following chart, we notice that most funds are allocated to priority 5 – Rural development (26%), followed by priority 2 – Competitiveness (25%) and priority 6 – Regional development (16%).

NPD 2007 - 2013: Distribution of financial programming on the six priorities

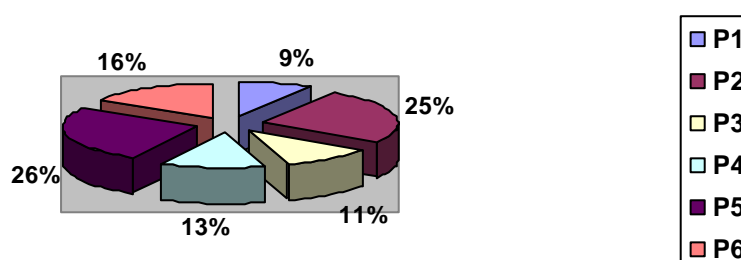


Fig. no. 3. 2007 – 2013: Distribution of financial programming on the six priorities

A multi-yearly comparative analysis of the financial programming per total and for each and every priority reflects the fact that 2009, 2010 and 2011 will be the years of the highest expenses for all six identified priorities in NPD 2007-2013.

Comparing annual financial programming

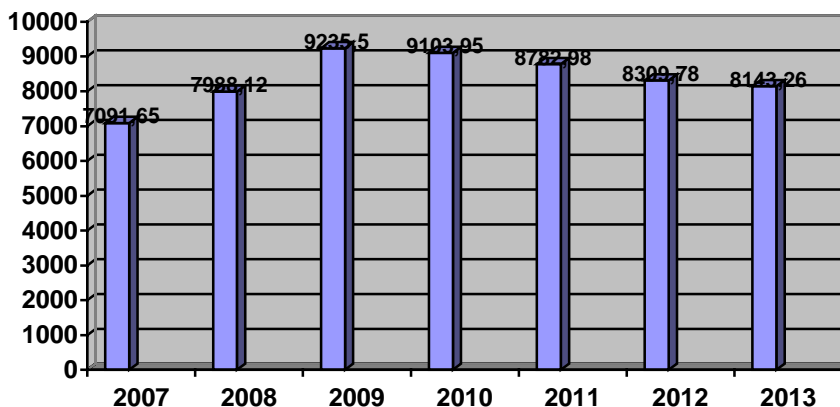


Fig. no. 4. Comparing annual financial programming

Comparing P1-P6 annual financial programming

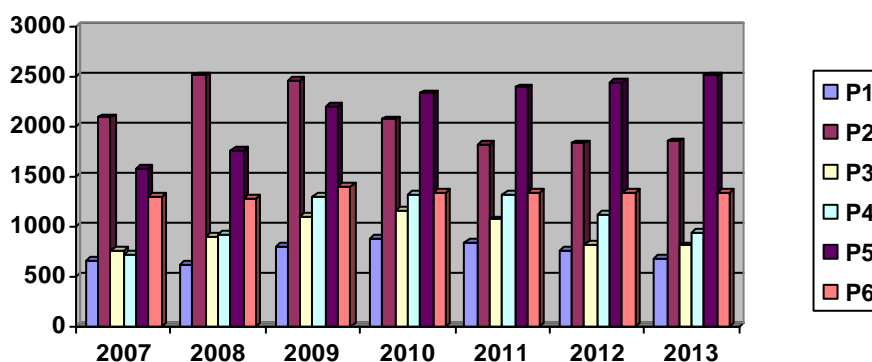


Fig. no. 5. Comparing P1-P6 annual financial programming

The implementation of the NPD 2007-2013 stipulations, in step with its strategy and in terms of efficiency, strictness, transparency and financial correctness, implies great efforts on the end of public institutions and beneficiaries.

We should therefore highlight the role of NPD – orientation and coordination of the prime investment programs for development. The investments that will be made as derived from the NPD directives will not, though, be directly administered by means of NPD but they will follow the specific regulations that apply to the financing sources of such investments. The NPD implementation mechanisms are, in a nutshell, a sum of these implementation regulations of the programming documents for the European funds, of the national and local budget investment programs, reimbursable finances granted by the international financial institutions, etc.

In Romania, the institutional system of programming and implementation of the Structural and Cohesion Funds is in full process of construction, starting from the stipulations of the

Complementary Document for Position in Chapter 21 ‘Regional policy and coordination of the structural instruments.’

By the Authority of Management for the Community Support Framework, the Department of Public Finances (DFP) fulfills the duty of a national supervisor of the institutional, legal and enforcement system of programming and implementing the structural instruments. Also, DFP constitutes itself as the Authority of Certification and Authority of Payment (the competent organisms for honoring the payments) for all three structural instruments.

Table no.2.

2007-2013 Operational Programs

Operational program	Authority of Management	Mediator organisms	Funds
Increase of the economic competitiveness	Minister of Economy and Commerce	- The National Agency for Small and Medium Enterprises and Cooperatives - Minister of Education and Research, Division of Research - Minister of Telecommunications and Informational Technology - Minister of Economy and Commerce, Energy Division - The National Authority of Tourism	ERDF
Infrastructure of transport	Minister of Transportation, Constructions and Tourism	-	ERDF + CF
Environment protection	Minister of Environment and Waters Management	The Regional Agencies for Environment Protection	ERDF + CF
Regional development	Minister of the European Integration	The Agencies for Regional Development	FEDR
Human resources development	Minister of Labor, Social Cohesion and Family	- The National Agency of Employment - Minister of Education and Research, Division of Education	SEF
Development of the administrative skills	Minister of Internal Affairs and Administrative Reform (MIRA)	- Authority for Coordination of MIRA Structural Instruments	SEF
Technical support	Minister of Public Finances	- Authority for Coordination of DFP Structural Instruments	ERDF
Trans-frontier cooperation	Department for European Business	-	ERDF

Note:

ERDF – European Regional Development Fund

CF – Cohesion Fund

SEF – Social European Fund

In accordance with the European principle of partnership, the process of NPD 2007-2003 elaboration involved not only the public authorities but also representative non-governmental partners: regional organisms, labor unions, patronage institutions, research and higher education entities, non-governmental organizations, etc. The partnership consultations took place within the partnership structures constituted for NPD elaboration in respect of GD no.1115/2004 regarding the partnership of the National Plan for Development.

Conclusions

The 2007-2013 time intervals will be a historical period for Romania in terms of the social-economic development potential. The absorption of the structural funds represents the opportunity and the main challenge for Romania for this period of time. But, beyond the numbers, it is the processes that matter greatly, the effect of multiplying investments in economy, the acceleration of the economic growth with impact in sustainable development, as well as the attaining the competitiveness objectives at the community level.

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