



EUROPEAN UNION
EUROPEAN REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT FUND

CENTRAL EUROPE PROGRAMME
ANNOUNCEMENT OF A RESTRICTED CALL FOR STRATEGIC PROJECTS
STEP 1 - INVITATION TO THE SUBMISSION OF AN EXPRESSION OF INTEREST
TO JOIN THE FUTURE PROJECT PARTNERSHIPS

12 JULY 2010

1. INTRODUCTION

In order to strengthen its relevance and its contribution to the Lisbon and Gothenburg agendas the European Territorial Cooperation Programme CENTRAL EUROPE has set in place a targeted methodology aimed at the implementation of strategic projects whose themes have been previously identified at Programme level. The limited number of projects to be funded and consequently the limited expected partners' involvement per country require a high commitment of the selected actors which will represent their entire country and - consequently - spread information and reached results at national level and beyond.

The present Announcement is part of a wider methodology strongly characterized by a top-down approach, according to which the CENTRAL EUROPE Monitoring Committee (hereinafter: MC) not only outlines the ideal partners' profile but also the technical content of the strategic projects, whose concepts are provided in Annex 1.

The purpose of this Announcement is to enable the European Territorial Cooperation CENTRAL EUROPE Programme to draw a list of potential interested institutions/bodies to be eventually invited to the submission of strategic project proposals.

Interested institutions/bodies willing to apply as potential partners for the implementation of part of the strategic projects shall be asked of:

- Performing some of the activities listed in the chosen project concept in accordance with the EU, Programme and national rules/laws;

- Cooperating with other partners, mainly coming from the other CENTRAL EUROPE regions, previously identified at national level and finally selected by the MC (see also § 5);
- Committing themselves for a sound project implementation along the entire project duration;
- Ensuring a wide spread of the outputs and results achieved;
- Ensuring the sustainability of the projects results also beyond the region where they are located.

2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

This Announcement is based on § 6.3 of the Operational Programme, approved by the European Commission on 3 December 2007 (No. CCI 2007CB163PO061) establishing the European Territorial Cooperation Programme CENTRAL EUROPE, hereinafter referred to as “CENTRAL EUROPE”.

The detailed conditions for the submission of the Expression of Interest are provided in the present document.

3. THE CENTRAL EUROPE PROGRAMME

3.1 OBJECTIVES

CENTRAL EUROPE is a European Union Programme that encourages cooperation across the countries and regions of Central Europe to improve innovation, accessibility, and environment and to enhance the competitiveness and attractiveness of their cities and regions.

The Programme, financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), runs from 2007 to 2013 and invests EUR 231 million to co-finance EU transnational cooperation activities implemented by public and private organisations from Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

The Programme shall, hence, play a considerable role in strengthening the development efforts of these countries and their regions, while contributing to an integrated development of the entire programme area by promoting trans-national cooperation projects with mutual benefit, tangible outputs and concrete results.

3.2 THE PROGRAMME AREA

The CENTRAL EUROPE Programme area includes regions from Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine^{1 and 2}.

¹ Austria, Czech Republic, Germany (Baden-Württemberg, Bayern, Berlin, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Sachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt, Thüringen), Italy (Emilia-Romagna, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Liguria, Lombardia, Piemonte, Provincia Autonoma Bolzano/Bozen, Provincia Autonoma Trento, Valle d'Aosta/Vallée d'Aoste, Veneto), Hungary, Poland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Ukraine (Chernivtsi, Ivano-Frankivsk, Volyn, Lviv, Zakarpattia).

3.3 THE PROJECTS CHARACTERISTICS

The Programme financially supports the implementation of projects within the following priorities:

1. Facilitating innovation across Central Europe;
2. Improving accessibility to, and within, Central Europe;
3. Using our environment responsibly;
4. Enhancing competitiveness and attractiveness of cities and regions.

Within the specific terms of the restricted call for strategic projects at least one institution/body from each of the 8 EU CENTRAL EUROPE countries shall participate in each project. However, the financing partners shall come from at least 6 CENTRAL EUROPE countries (more information is provided in § 6)³.

The following ERDF co-financing rates apply:

- up to 85 % for applicants of Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia;
- up to 75% for applicants of Austria, Germany, Italy.

In case project applicants intend to implement activities being considered as State Aid relevant, the maximum grant shall be calculated applying the *de minimis* regime⁴ while respecting the percentages above.

4. THE PROJECT CONCEPTS

The strategic project concepts, for which the interested institutions/bodies can send their Expression of Interest, are:

1. Boosting innovation through new cluster concepts in support of emerging issues and cross-sectoral themes;
2. Upgrading of inland waterways and sea ports;
3. Railway hub cities and TEN-T networks;
4. Introduction of regional energy concepts;
5. Demonstration of energy efficiency and utilization of renewable energy sources through public buildings;

² Ukrainian partners do not benefit from ERDF contribution.

³ Stricter requirements apply to the restricted call for strategic projects - notwithstanding the minimum partnership characteristics established in Art. 19 of the Regulation No. 1080/2006 and further specified in § 6.2 of the CENTRAL EUROPE Operational Programme.

⁴ As referred to in the Commission Regulation (EC) No 1998/2006 of 15 December 2006 on the application of Articles 87 and 88 of the Treaty to *de minimis* aid published on the Official Journal of the European Union L 379 on 28 December 2006.

6. Innovative housing and care solutions for the elderly and vulnerable persons in Central Europe cities;
7. Improved governance and management of infrastructures and services in regions and cities affected by demographic change.

The complete strategic project concepts' descriptions are provided in Annex 1 of the present Announcement.

5. THE SELECTION PROCESS FOR AWARDING THE STRATEGIC PROJECTS

The process for funding the strategic projects is characterized by a two-steps approach:

- 1) the identification of suitable partners able to ensure a successful project implementation; their appraisal is performed in accordance with the partner's characteristics included in each project concept (Annex 1) and with the eligibility and quality criteria as laid down in the following paragraphs and chapters;
- 2) the assessment and selection of the projects, elaborated in accordance with the characteristics described in the project concepts by the partnerships established within the partners selected in the previous step 1.

A manageable number of institutions/bodies (as described in § 6) - ideally around 6 per project concept - and consisting of financing partners and associated institutions - shall be selected in each EU country member of the CENTRAL EUROPE Programme. Being selected as a suitable partner at national level may not necessarily give the full right/insurance of being later involved in a strategic project; it will be up to the MC to take the final decision on possible partnerships and to approve projects.

As far as step 1 is concerned, the initial selection process shall be performed at national level by the relevant national authorities or by the CENTRAL EUROPE Managing Authority/Joint Technical Secretariat according to § 10 below. The MC shall discuss, if necessary amend and validate the results of the selection of institutions/bodies performed at national level. Additionally, the MC shall be in charge of approving the proposals elaborated by the constituted partnership (step 2).

6. ELIGIBLE INSTITUTIONS/BODIES

6.1 ELIGIBLE FINANCING PARTNERS

Eligible financing applicants must be **located in the EU CENTRAL EUROPE area** and must be:

- National, regional and local public authorities;
- Public Equivalent Bodies⁵;

⁵ For a definition of public equivalent body please refer to the CENTRAL EUROPE Operational Programme, page 103.

- Private institutions, including private companies having legal personalities.

Consultancy companies having both, in their business activities and within the project, as main scope the provision of project coordination, management, communication or knowledge management services (i.e.: activities to be implemented within the Work Packages 0, 1 and 2⁶) should not be involved as future project partner.

Natural persons are not eligible to apply.

International Organizations both under national or international law are not eligible to apply as potential financing partners but only as associated institutions as described in § 6.2.

In addition to these legal requirements, the eligible institution/body applying for being appointed as potential financing partner must be in line with the characteristics provided in each project concept the applicant is interested in and with the following chapters and paragraphs laid down below.

6.2 ASSOCIATED INSTITUTIONS

Interested institutions/bodies can also be involved in the strategic projects as observers with an associated status (i.e.: associated institutions) without financially contributing to the project.

The following institutions - **located both in the entire EU area and in Third countries** - can apply for being appointed as associated institutions:

- National, regional and local public authorities;
- Public Equivalent Bodies⁷;
- International Organizations (acting under international or national law);
- Private institutions, including private companies having legal personalities.

These institutions/bodies applying for being appointed as associated institutions must also respond to the specific requirements as provided in each project concept and to the criteria described in §10.1.

In case of their selection, also the associated institutions located in the EU CENTRAL EUROPE area (with the exception of the International Organizations) shall be accounted to reach the target number of bodies/institutions to be identified at national level as mentioned in § 5.

In case of final selection by the MC, their role in the project shall be limited to their participation in project meetings: expenditure incurred in relation to their project involvement can be borne by the financing partners.

In any case, the involvement of associated institutions must not enter into conflict with public procurement rules.

⁶ For a detailed description of the content of Work Package 0, 1 and 2, see paragraph 4.2.4 of the Application Manual 3rd call.

⁷ See footnote no. 5.

7. CONDITIONS FOR THE SUBMISSION OF THE EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

The Expression of Interest must be submitted by all the interested institutions/bodies, regardless the type of involvement (Lead Applicant, project partner, associated institutions), their legal status and geographical location.

In case an interested institution/body intends to submit its candidature to participate in more than one project concept, it has to submit as many Expressions of Interest as the number of project concepts it intends to be involved with, with the limitations described below.

With reference to § 6 above and according to the terms of the present Expression of Interest, the following requirements apply in relation to the future potential body's/institution's type of involvement in the strategic project:

Lead Applicant requirements

With reference to § 6.1, the Lead Applicant must comply with the following requirements:

1. Its legal and operational seat must be located in the EU CENTRAL EUROPE area;
2. Private institutions cannot be Lead Applicant;
3. As an exception to point 1, German and Italian national public authorities or public equivalent bodies - which are competent in their scope of action for certain parts of the eligible area but located outside of it (e.g., ministries) - are to all effects assimilated, both in terms of rights and of obligations, to institutions/bodies located in the CENTRAL EUROPE Programme area and can be future potential Lead Applicants;
4. The same institution (or the same department/functional unit in case that the interested institution is structured in several departments/functional units) cannot be Lead Applicant in more than 1 strategic project.

Project Partner requirements

With reference to § 6.1, the project partners must comply with the following requirements:

1. Its operational seat must be located in the EU CENTRAL EUROPE area;
2. As an exception to point 1, German and Italian national public authorities or public equivalent bodies - which are competent in their scope of action for certain parts of the eligible area but located outside of it (e.g., ministries) - are to all effects assimilated, both in terms of rights and of obligations, to institutions/bodies located in the CENTRAL EUROPE Programme area and can be future potential partners. Additionally, also German and Italian private non commercial institutions competent in their scope of action for certain parts of the eligible area but located outside of it, are to all effects assimilated, both in terms of rights and of obligations, to institutions/bodies located in the CENTRAL EUROPE Programme area and can be future potential partners;
3. The same institution or the same department/functional unit (in case that the interested institution is structured in several departments/functional units) cannot be Project Partner in more than 2 Strategic Projects.

Associated institutions

1. In addition to the requirements described in § 6.2, the same institution cannot be an associated institution in more than 2 strategic projects.

8. ALLOCATED PROGRAMME FUNDS

The CENTRAL EUROPE Programme shall allocate up to 20 Million EUR European Regional Development Funds (ERDF) for the restricted call for strategic projects.

9. SUBMISSION OF THE EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

The Expressions of Interest must be completed in English using the specific Form ("Expression of Interest") provided by CENTRAL EUROPE. All relevant material can be downloaded from the CENTRAL EUROPE web site www.central2013.eu.

The Expressions of Interest must be sent:

- to the Joint Technical Secretariat premises, in case the applicant is an International Organization, a body/institution located in Third Countries, a body/institution located in the EU but outside the CENTRAL EUROPE area;
- to the National Contact Points for all other applicants located in the respective CENTRAL EUROPE country.

All relevant addresses are listed in Annex 2.

Applications can be sent by normal post, express courier, or delivered by hand. In any case, they must be received by **17 September 2010 (in case of delivery by hand, they must arrive before 12:00/noon of the above said deadline)**.

The date and time of reception will be proved by stamp/receipt of the receiving institution. **The Expressions of Interest received, for whatever reason, after 17 September 2010, will not be evaluated.**

10. PARTNERS' ELIGIBILITY AND QUALITY CRITERIA

The quality characteristics of the institutions/bodies that have submitted their Expressions of Interest shall be appraised:

- by the CENTRAL EUROPE Managing Authority/Joint Technical Secretariat, with reference to the following institutions/bodies interested being involved as associated institutions:
 - a) International Organizations;
 - b) Bodies/Institutions located in Third Countries;
 - c) Bodies/Institutions located in the EU but outside the CENTRAL EUROPE area.

- By the national relevant institutions, with reference to all the other bodies/institutions located in their territory and fulfilling the requirements as in § 6.1, 6.2 and 7.

In relation to the last indent above, as the selection process is performed at national level, additional documentation might be required by some of the relevant national institutions. Please directly address to the National Contact Points listed in Annex 2 in this respect.

10.1 QUALITATIVE PARTNERS' SELECTION CRITERIA

The received Expressions of Interest shall be assessed according to the following criteria:

1. Representativeness
 - *Territorial representativeness*
 - *Institutional role*
 - *Capacity of target groups and stakeholders mobilization. Capacity in achieving the outputs and results*
2. Transnational dimension
3. Capacity of awareness raising and spreading of achievements.

11. EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST - ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

In order to consider the Expression of Interest as receivable, the candidate has to duly fill-in the Expression of Interest provided by the CENTRAL EUROPE Programme in English language, have it signed by the duly authorized person and deliver it to the National Contact Points to be received within the deadline as stipulated in § 9.

Interested candidates are strongly invited to consult the National Contact Points or the Joint Technical Secretariat.

12. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Application Manual adopted by the CENTRAL EUROPE Programme in view of the launch of its third call for proposals closed on 7 May 2010 is to be considered as a valid source of information to get acquainted on the Programme goals, general project expected characteristics, structure of the future Application Form to be filled-in and eligibility of expenditure. The Manual can be downloaded from the Programme website www.central2013.eu.