

## **WORKSHOP: “IMPROVING THE COMMUNICATION OF ESI FUNDS: THE WAY FORWARD”**

### **Paolo Praticò, introductory speech**

- 1) First of all, I would like to thank all of you for being here today. It's a great pleasure for our Region to host this workshop.

Let me also thank CPMR for its support in the organisation of the workshop, and the European Commission and all the panellists for participating in the event.

- 2) We have more than one reason to believe that communication is a key aspect of public policies and, specifically, a critical one in the management of the European Structural and Investment Funds. In my view, the role of communication in cohesion policy must be seen from two different point of views.

- 3) First of all, communication plays an important part in raising more awareness among citizens and decision-makers about the added value of cohesion policy. This is also important considering the risk that cohesion policy could be weakened in the post 2020 financial framework. We know that in many countries there is still a limited awareness about cohesion policy and, what's more, in some states, such as Italy, too many citizens still have a negative opinion of the impact of the funds as the latest Eurobarometer Citizens' perception of EU regional has shown.

- 4) On the other hand, even most interesting in my opinion, is the fact that communication can be a sophisticated tool that directly contributes to improving the management and the impact of the operational programme. For instance, in the case of our programme, the strategic choice to have a more integrated communication has clearly affected the programming process contributing to more integration and coordination of different actions. Communicating more and better also means an increased commitment towards the citizens, and thus it intensifies the public pressure on the public administration to deliver. In other words: The more we communicate the more we put our reputation at stake, the more we are forced to make more efforts to preserve and expand this reputation.

- 5) This is why, we should look at communication as a central element of the management processes, on an equal footing with key aspects such as the selection of operations, control and monitoring. Communication should not be seen as the mere action of informing citizens about opportunities and results of the programme, but it should be considered, more broadly, as an aspect affecting the whole designing and implementation of the programme.

- 6) Based on the experience we have had in closing the operational programme 2007/2013 and starting the current one, in this short introductory speech I'd like to offer some ideas to the following discussion.

- 7) Before that, I'd like to say a few words about the approach on which our programme, and its communication, are based.
- 8) Some key elements of this approach are:
- a. a strong concentration of the operations around few issues through the adoption of integrated action plans.
  - b. more transparency and a full digitization of all the procedures to access the funds. For instance, we display on our webpage the main data regarding the implementation progress of the programme. Calls are posted on the webpage of the Managing Authority in advance prior to their official publication in order to gather inputs. In addition, the submission process for all the calls can be done only digitally: this helps applicants to cut the submission costs and have access to more information.
  - c. a reorganization of our databases, which has also seen the creation of online tools to facilitate the use of open data. One of these tools is the Logical platform which enables any user to graphically explore in an easy way the results of the programme.
  - d. a strong focus on participation of stakeholders in the designing and implementing the programme with an extensive application of partnership principle.
- 9) Accordingly, the paradigm adopted by our communication strategy in 2014-2020 was based on five key words: integration, differentiation, participation, inclusiveness, transparency. Francesco will explain in detail how these principles have been translated into actions.
- 10) In conclusion, our experience has led us to develop a number of considerations for the future which we would like to share with you today. There is no doubt that over the years communication has been given a more prominent role in the cohesion policy. In order to reinforce this in the post 2020 cohesion policy, our suggestions are:
- a. regulation could explicitly establish the communication as a key principle of Cohesion Policy and a central feature of its implementation.
  - b. The European Commission could explore the option of adopting a code of conduct in order to support and facilitate Member States and managing Authorities in communication activities
  - c. the Commission could require MAs to set up a specific strategy or policy document for digital and social media platforms.
  - d. It is also important to promote more involvement of social and economic partners in the communication activities given their important role in helping increase the ownership of cohesion policy
  - e. more attention should be paid to the monitoring and the evaluation of communication activities

- f. the involvement of beneficiaries in communication could be reinforced through more responsibilities and guidance/assistance