



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Regulatory Scrutiny Board

Brussels,
Ares(2017)

Opinion

Title: Evaluation/ European Neighbourhood Instrument 2014-2017

Overall 2nd opinion: POSITIVE

(Resubmitted version of 28 September 2017)

(A) Context

The European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) supports EU cooperation with 16 countries in North Africa, the Middle East, the Caucasus and Eastern Europe. Broad goals are shared prosperity and good neighbourliness. ENI promotes relationships founded on cooperation, peace and security, and commitments to democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights.

Following recent crises in Ukraine and with migration, EU policy with these neighbours has come to emphasise stabilisation goals. These goals have political, economic and security dimensions. The ENI has a budget of €15.4 billion for the period 2014-2020. Most ENI funding supports bilateral cooperation, tailor-made to each partner country. The ENI also funds some regional programmes.

This mid-term evaluation sheds light on how the ENI is working. Its timing also matches evaluations of other EU external financing instruments (EFIs) that complement the ENI.

(B) Main considerations

The Board takes note of the limitations that this evaluation has faced concerning tight timing, lack of monitoring data and a changed context in many partner countries.

Given these limitations, the Board gives a positive opinion, but considers that the report should still be improved with respect to the following key shortcomings:

- (1) The report does not do enough to draw lessons for the future.**
- (2) The report does not adequately take up and examine critical feedback from the Court of Auditors and stakeholders.**
- (3) The report is not reader-friendly enough.**

(C) Further considerations and recommendations

(1) The report should apply the intervention logic more systematically throughout. A new section summarising partner country contexts (see also point 3 below) could form a basis for assessing the extent to which the 'key contextual factors' have applied and the 'intervention assumptions' were met. The section on limitations of the report should discuss associated implications for ENI performance and draw any lessons for the future.

(2) Annex 3 contains some useful material on stakeholder concerns, and the report might refer to this in its responses to evaluation questions. More generally, these are concerns that the evaluation could follow up on, triangulating across other data sources to provide policymakers with a clearer understanding of alleged shortcomings. The same holds for the recommendations of the external evaluation and the critical comments from the Court of Auditors. Commission services should account for these concerns and explain why they are not taken up in the report.

(3) In order to make the report more readable and more self-standing, as well as to better present the current context of the ENI, the report could summarise separately the situation and context of the 16 partner countries in question. This might take the form of either a summary table or a dedicated section. The objective would be to describe the context in which ENI has been operating and to give the reader an overview of the varied and often deteriorating circumstances in recipient countries during the review period. An overview table of the 16 countries might usefully set out the main challenges the countries have faced that have complicated ENI implementation. As programme effectiveness relies on partner country co-operation, this section should link with a section on limitations (see below). The limitations section could then address associated consequences for programme implementation and evaluation. The report should discuss how changes in political commitment of partner countries may have lowered ENI performance in this context.

The executive summary is mostly easy to follow. The main report is less accessible, with language that often seems aimed at insiders. More could be done to communicate the main points in plain language, especially in the conclusions section.

Some more technical comments have been transmitted directly to the author DG.

(D) RSB scrutiny process

The lead DG is advised to ensure that these recommendations are taken into account in the report prior to launching the interservice consultation.

The lead DG is also advised to make sure that the ENI programme is being a subject to a proper evaluation in the future, making sure that the timing is right and that a proper monitoring system to collect data is put in place.

Full title	Evaluation of European Neighbourhood Instrument 2014-2017
Reference number	2017/NEAR+/002
Date of RSB meeting	Written procedure



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Opinion

Title: Evaluation / European Neighbourhood Instrument 2014-2017

Overall opinion: NEGATIVE

(A) Context

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The ENI has a budget of €15.4 billion for the period 2014-2020. Most ENI funding supports bilateral cooperation, tailor-made to each partner country. The ENI also funds some regional programmes.

This mid-term evaluation sheds light on how the ENI is working. Its timing also matches evaluations of other EU external financing instruments (EFIs) that complement the ENI.

(B) Main considerations

The Board considers that the report contains important shortcomings that need to be addressed, particularly with respect to the following key aspects:

- (1) The Staff Working Document (SWD) does not do enough to draw useful lessons and implications from evidence that has been collected.**
- (2) The SWD is not a self-standing document. The analytical approach and its limitations are not clear.**
- (3) The report fails to support its assessment and conclusions with evidence or examples, notably with regard to effectiveness. The report does not examine how well the instrument has delivered in comparison to previous programmes or against what the related ex-ante impact assessment expected.**

(4) The report omits some critical views from stakeholders, and does not explain the Services' assessment of the findings of the external evaluation study or the European Court of Auditors' reports on ENI functioning.

Against this background, the Board gives a negative opinion and considers that in its present form this report does not provide sufficient input for preparing a successor programme.

(C) Further considerations and adjustment requirements

(1) Presentation, scope and lessons learnt

The SWD should be revised to become a self-standing document, which a non-expert reader can understand without having to consult the external study. It should do more than summarise positive aspects and conclusions of the external study. In its analysis, findings and conclusions, the SWD currently appears to overlook critical views expressed in the external evaluation, European Court of Auditors' reports and by some stakeholders. The SWD should be transparent about these and explain where the Services may not agree with the assessment of the external evaluation study and why (e.g. crisis prevention, flexibility, involvement of national authorities, multiple strategy scenarios).

Since the results of this mid-term evaluation will feed into developing the future instrument, the SWD should identify and cover aspects that are relevant to learning from past experience. This includes assessing what design features (e.g. priority setting, programmed vs flexible support, delivery mechanisms, incentive-based approach) of the instrument work well or not. It would be helpful to indicate any countries or sectors that receive more than sufficient funding (e.g. 'donor congestion') and where there are shortages. It would also be helpful to include an assessment of the degree of coherence and complementarity with other financing instruments.

The report should critically assess the existing monitoring and reporting arrangements. It should present any lessons for future data collection that would facilitate a better-informed and more useful evaluation in the future.

(2) Effectiveness, efficiency and intervention logic

The SWD should explain its metrics for assessing effectiveness of the ENI. Firstly, it should clarify the ENI's objectives (e.g. contribute to stabilisation in the region, alignment with the EU values and rules, ...). Secondly, it should explain how ENI interventions are intended to work towards reaching those objectives (the 'intervention logic'). It should also incorporate relevant experience with the predecessor programme (ENPI) and expectations as set out in the impact assessment for the current ENI. In doing so, the SWD should specify which design features of the ENI make it effective or not (e.g. flexibility, budget support, conditionality).

Using the intervention logic, the SWD should specify what benchmarks it will use to assess the performance of the instrument. The SWD should also describe what the ENI adds to other programmes, and compare against a country or set of countries where this instrument does not operate. Finally, it should explain how changes in the Neighbourhood policy have affected the effectiveness of the ENI.

The SWD should identify any potential for simplifying processes and procedures. It should include basic information relevant to conclusions on ENI efficiency in terms of procedures, processes and the ratio of administrative costs.

(3) Relevance and coherence

The SWD should assess the continued relevance of the ENI as a geographic instrument covering countries in very diverse circumstances and with very different needs. It should discuss the trade-offs in using geographic versus thematic instruments in the countries covered by the ENI.

The SWD should explain what design features make ENI complementary to other financing instruments, e.g. the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, the Development Cooperation Instrument, as well as instruments like Erasmus+. It should explain relevant sequencing considerations when there is overlap between the geographic and thematic focus (e.g. short-term crisis prevention by thematic instruments followed by long-term stability by geographic instruments).

(D) RSB scrutiny process

The lead DG is advised not to proceed with launching the interservice consultation before substantially amending and complementing the report, so as to mitigate the above-mentioned shortcomings.

The lead DG may decide to resubmit this report to the Board, in which case the report should be adjusted in accordance with the above-mentioned requirements prior to its resubmission.

Full title	Evaluation of European Neighbourhood Instrument 2014-2017
Reference number	2017/NEAR+/002
Date of RSB meeting	13/09/2017