

European Projects and Programs in Romania and in the South-West Oltenia Region

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Abstract

A project involves complex elements, completed by efficient management of design, elaboration, implementation, and other activities related to project realization. The most used programs are the European funds, which include a wide range of projects after going through all the stages of implementation within these programs. Projects, through their role, actively contribute to the realization of strategic partnerships that can support the exchange of good practices, the acquisition and development of basic skills, the support of social inclusion and civic participation, and the increase and implementation of entrepreneurial skills. Thus, the purpose of the research is to show where is Romania situated in Europe when it comes to the European funds' programs, to see what impact had the European funds to the development of Romania and, especially, to the South-West Oltenia Region and what the funding they obtained.

Key words: project, European program, European funds, investments, signed contracts.

J.E.L. classification: F02, F20, F36

1. Introduction

Projects are an increasingly used solution for implementing many ideas, in-depth study of various fields of research, and the mechanisms for their implementation are more and more programs.

Projects are present in various forms and different areas of implementation, considering the project innovation and its unique character.

The concept of the project itself can be seen as "a scientific operation that leads to achieving a material goal by changing reality with the help of human actions that have been selected and ordered in advance, according to certain criteria" (Ciocoiu, 2014, p. 75).

The project can also be seen from another perspective, namely, a specific action, characterized by its uniqueness and the logical sequence of activities of which it is composed, coordinated, and controlled actions, which have an innovative character, being organized, methodical and progressive, being limited by time, resources and cost, having as finality complex results, necessary for the satisfaction of clearly defined objectives (Opran, 2013, p. 66).

2. Theoretical background

The project is successful when it leads to a much better result than expected, considering the objectives set, good coordination of human resources involved in the project, ensuring their security, favorable management of quality, and costs generated by project activities. (Urbanski et al., 2019, p. 26)

No matter how large a project would be to solve a complex problem, this is difficult to accomplish, perhaps even impossible, so a sustainable solution has been reached by grouping several projects into programs, which defines the program as a series of specific interrelated tasks (projects and additional activities), managed in a coordinated way, which allow the achievement of objectives within a comprehensive strategy (Grossu, 2016, p. 100). Creating a program that includes several projects with similar characteristics has allowed solving the same type of problems in several ways, thus leading to even more complex and complete results (Burlea-Schiopoiu et al., 2017).

Development programs consist of mutually exclusive projects (substitutable projects), projects involving the choice of one and the choice of another (contingent or interdependent projects), or independent projects (Easter, 2010, pp. 11-12)

Thus, clarifying the main elements of the project and the program, we reach Romania, which is among the countries with a high absorption rate in European funds, having numerous active projects in as many areas as possible, all with the help of funding programs.

3. Research methodology

At the European level, Romania is positioning itself quite well in terms of using European funds, which means that we have good specialists in the field of project writing, but also their implementation, these being essential elements in submitting and approving funding for a project (Burlea-Schiopoiu, 2011). Therefore, if a project is not well written from all points of view so that all its parts (field, activities, human resources, financial part) are well highlighted, it is not well implemented, it has no way to obtain financing, or if it does obtain it, it may reach the point where it must return the amount received (Burlea-Schiopoiu and Remme, 2017).

Thus, the situation of the funds allocated to Romania, in the period 2014-2020, by the European Commission is the following:

- By the end of January 2020, Romania absorbed 11.6 billion euros out of the 31 billion euros, having a rate of absorption of European funds of 38%, below the European average of 41%;
- At the level of Europe, Romania and Bulgaria have the same absorption rate of 38%, while the Hungarian neighbors have 43%, and at the regional level, Poland, 43%, and the Czech Republic, 40%, are above Romania in terms of attracting European funds.
- Romania had the most significant funding from European funds in the National Rural Development Program, approximately 4.8 billion euros, followed by the Large Infrastructure Operational Program, 2.7 billion euros, and the lowest funding was in the Operational Project Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, 52 million lei (Financial newspaper, <https://www.zf.ro/>).

4. Findings

4.1. European funds at a national level

Romania has received much funding from the European Union. Even at county level, a classification can be made, depending on the data published by the Ministry of European Funds, regarding the financial year 2014-2020.

Table no 1. The counties with the highest values of EU contracts

County	Signed contracts	Value of EU funding (billion lei)	Total value of contracts (billion lei)
Ilfov	60	7	10,4
Bucharest	312	5	8,3
Constanta	236	4,3	6,2
Cluj	411	3,4	5
Dolj	233	2,7	4

Source: www.mfe.gov.ro and authors contributions

As seen in table 1, the county with the highest funding in Ilfov County, with a total value of contracts of 10.4 billion lei, out of 7 billion lei, is funding from the European Union. However, in terms of the number of contracts, although they seem few, compared to Cluj County, which has 411, Ilfov has very high-value contracts, especially projects within the Large Infrastructure Operational Program, where sums of about 6 billion lei for only five contracts are financing.

Thus, the other counties, even if they have a large number of contracts, respectively Bucharest - 312, Constanta - 236, Cluj - 411, Dolj - 233, the value of funding received is relatively low compared to that received by Ilfov County, both the value of funding received from the European Union, as well as the total value of the contracts signed.

Bucharest and Constanta have similar values in terms of the number of contracts (Bucharest - 312, Constanta – 236). The value of European Union funding and the total value of signed contracts is close, which means that they have invested values not very large in quite a few projects, counting more the number of projects completed than their value.

In Cluj and Dolj counties, if we look at the number of signed contracts, the situation is the opposite; Cluj County has many signed contracts (411), while Dolj County has almost half less (211), which would lead to the conclusion that Cluj County has carried out several projects. A conclusion that is so pertinent, towards the value of financing, the situation is different because where Cluj County, with 411 signed contracts, had a value of European Union financing of 3.4 billion lei and a total value of 5 billion lei, Dolj County, for 211 signed contracts, had at its disposal a value of European Union financing of 2.7 billion lei and a total value of signed contracts of 4 billion lei. Thus, here is an approximately opposite conclusion, in the sense that, although Cluj County has signed more contracts than Dolj County, it has invested much less in them, in total, while Dolj County, although it had a smaller number of contracts signed, preferred to invest much more in them, compared to Cluj County.

Therefore, according to table 1, Ilfov county leads are detached as the value assigned to signed contracts but are coded to the number of signed contracts. We consider that Cluj County should be in the last place in this category because it allocated a much lower amount of investment for many contracts.

However, all these values are billions of lei, which makes all five counties in table 1 deserve their place among the counties with the highest values of contracts financed by the European Union in the financial year 2014-2020.

Table no 2. Countries with the lowest values of EU contracts

County	Signed contracts	Value of EU funding (billion lei)	Total value of contracts (billion lei)
Teleorman	53	264	356
Braila	47	278	368
Covasna	56	300	409
Ialomita	51	370	470
Giurgiu	78	339	472

Source: www.mfe.gov.ro and authors contributions

In table 1, the situation is excellent, with many contracts, respectively five counties, with a total of 1252 signed contracts, with a total value of European Union funding of 22.4 billion lei and a total value of signed contracts of 33.9 billion lei.

Values of billions of lei, which leads the discussion to the opposite pole, the counties with the lowest values of contracts financed by the European Union, where we are talking about values of millions of lei, which, although according to table 2, seem high values, are small compared to table 1, where we talk about values in billions of lei.

This does not mean that things are not good here at all because we are talking about funded contracts, respectively, projects that have been allowed to implement, with funding established according to specific criteria, depending on the areas and programs in which they were applied (Burlea-Schiopoiu et al., 2014).

In table 2, the situation is not significantly different between counties because, as several contracts, they have similar quantities, but also the value of European Union funding and the total value of contracts, of course, with minor discrepancies. Indeed, it is not at all gratifying that for 53 contracts, you have such little funding.

The current funding situation in Romania is relatively tiny compared to other European countries, and several reasons could contribute to this, such as:

- a) Poor structuring and organization of the project by the project manager
- b) Non-involvement of the project team in the process of defining and elaborating the project plan
- c) Making a faulty and inadequate calendar of activities
- d) Non-involvement of the project team in solving the problems appeared within the project
- e) Poor communication, even poor communication with the project team, partners, and/or beneficiaries;
- f) Inadequate or unrealistic administration and systemic logic of the whole project
- g) Formulating the project objectives in an ambiguous, vague, or even erroneous manner by the project manager
- h) The monitoring and control of the project are done at a very poor quality (Tudoroiu, 2019, p. 32).

4.2. European funds in the South-West Oltenia region

As it was observed, Romania is relatively good at absorbing European funds, having a rate of 38% at the European level, although it is below the average of 41%. Still, this value is better than not at all.

At the national level, the share by counties is relatively similar, especially in the counties with the lowest absorption rate of European funds. However, we continue, in more detail, reaching the South-West Oltenia region, where, at the national level, Dolj County is among the counties with the most signed contracts, being the only representative of this region.

We will detail the situation of the contracts signed for each county, and then we will make a comparative analysis between counties.

Table no 3. Breakdown of contracts signed in Dolj County

Program	No. financing contracts	Value EU (LEI)	Total value (LEI)
Large Infrastructure Operational Program (LIOP)	19	1.853.895.691	2.673.567.536
Regional Operational Program (ROP)	262	1.462.489.745	2.009.864.480
Human Capital Operational Program (HCOP)	73	406.924.771	482.419.196
Competitiveness Operational Program (COP)	25	158.359.270	215.652.631
Administrative Capacity Operational Program (ACOP)	10	11.809.743	13.961.956
Technical Assistance Operational Program (OPTA)	1	1.170.060	1.381.498
TOTAL	390	3.894.649.280	5.396.847.298

Source: www.mfe.gov.ro and authors contributions

Dolj County is among the counties with the most signed contracts - 390 but also with a total value of signed contracts - 5,396,847,298 lei. As shown by the table, the highest funding was for the Large Infrastructure Operational Program, where for the 19 signed contracts, a total value of 2,673,567,536 lei was reached.

In total, Dolj County, until March 2021, has 390 signed contracts. Considering the number of signed contracts, they would be for the Regional Operational Program. However, the most significant investment was made in the Large Infrastructure Operational Program, over 2 billion lei, even if there are fewer signed contracts, respectively 19.

Let us look at the number of contracts signed. Most are within the Regional Operational Program - 262, followed by the Human Capital Operational Program - 73, the Competitiveness Operational Program - 25, the Large Infrastructure Operational Program - 19, the Administrative Capacity Operational Program - 10, and Technical Assistance Operational Program - 1.

But if we take into account the total value of investments in these signed contracts, the situation is completely different, respectively we find the largest investment in the Large Infrastructure Operational Program - 2,673,567,536 lei, followed by the Regional Operational Program - 2,009,864,480 lei, Human Capital Operational Program - 482,419,196 lei, Competitiveness Operational Program - 215,652,631 lei, Administrative Capacity Operational Program - 13,961,956 lei and Technical Assistance Operational Program - 1,381,498 lei.

Table no 4. Breakdown of contracts signed in Olt County

Program	No. financing contracts	Value EU (LEI)	Total value (LEI)
Large Infrastructure Operational Program (LIOP)	5	957.666.700	1.411.098.869
Regional Operational Program (ROP)	166	562.803.168	794.015.463
Human Capital Operational Program (HCOP)	8	52.071.979	60.071.893
Competitiveness Operational Program (COP)	2	38.068.493	126.636.460
Administrative Capacity Operational Program (ACOP)	5	9.274.728	10.943.510
Technical Assistance Operational Program (OPTA)	0	0	0
TOTAL	186	1.619.885.069	2.402.766.194

Source: www.mfe.gov.ro and authors contributions

In Olt County, the situation is entirely different; we have a much smaller number of contracts to be signed - 186, in fact, and a lower value of investments in these contracts - 2,402,766,194 lei. As in Dolj County, the most significant investment was made in the Large Infrastructure Operational Program - 1,411,098,869 lei, for only 5 signed contracts, and, in antithesis, the smallest investment - 794,015,463 lei, for the most significant number of signed contracts - 166, is within the Regional Operational Program.

Therefore, most of the signed contracts are within the Regional Operational Program - 166, followed by the Human Capital Operational Program - 8, the Large Infrastructure Operational Program and the Administrative Capacity Operational Program with five contracts signed each, the Competitiveness Operational Program - 2, and for the Program Operational Technical Assistance no contract has been signed.

Regarding investments, the highest value of contracts was within the Large Infrastructure Operational Program - 1,411,098,869 lei, followed by the Regional Operational Program - 794,015,463 lei, the Competitiveness Operational Program - 126,636,460 lei, the Human Capital Operational Program - 60,071 .893 lei and the Operational Program Administrative Capacity - 10,943,510 lei.

Table no 5. Breakdown of contracts signed in Mehedinți County

Program	No. financing contracts	Value EU (LEI)	Total value (LEI)
Large Infrastructure Operational Program (LIOP)	7	225.307.454	320.388.759
Regional Operational Program (ROP)	77	619.234.259	853.536.451
Human Capital Operational Program (HCOP)	11	68.349.187	79.012.863
Competitiveness Operational Program (COP)	1	18.418.179	29.513.507
Administrative Capacity Operational Program (ACOP)	5	9.380.197	11.065.659
Technical Assistance Operational Program (OPTA)	0	0	0
TOTAL	101	940.689.276	1.293.517.239

Source: www.mfe.gov.ro and authors contributions

On the other hand, Mehedinți County is not very good at the number of signed contracts, having only 101, with a total investment of 1,293,517,239 lei, where the most significant investments were made in the Large Infrastructure Operational Program, respectively 320,388 .759 lei for a small number of projects, namely 7 signed contracts.

Thus, of the 101 contracts signed at the county level, most are signed within the Regional Operational Program, respectively 77, followed by the Human Capital Operational Program - 11, the Large Infrastructure Operational Program - 7, the Administrative Capacity Operational Program - 5, and Competitiveness Operational Program - 1.

Nevertheless, the total value of the signed contracts changes the previous order, in the sense that the most significant investments were within the Regional Operational Program, respectively 853,536,451, followed by the Large Infrastructure Operational Program - 320,388,759 lei, the Human Capital Operational Program - 79,012,863 lei, Operational Program Competitiveness - 29,513,507 lei and Operational Program Administrative Capacity - 11,065,659 lei.

The Technical Assistance Operational Program did not benefit, even in Mehedinți County, from financing because no contracts were signed within this program.

Table no 6. Breakdown of contracts signed in Gorj County

Program	No. financing contracts	Value EU (LEI)	Total value (LEI)
Large Infrastructure Operational Program (LIOP)	12	993.159.176	1.432.590.663
Regional Operational Program (ROP)	107	638.612.765	849.213.098
Human Capital Operational Program (HCOP)	14	52.096.377	60.052.149
Competitiveness Operational Program (COP)	3	19.956.228	33.217.884
Administrative Capacity Operational Program (ACOP)	8	10.541.086	12.531.226
Technical Assistance Operational Program (OPTA)	0	0	0
TOTAL	144	1.714.365.633	2.387.605.019

Source: www.mfe.gov.ro and authors contributions

Gorj County, until March 31, 2021, for the financial year, had several 144 signed contracts, with a total value of 2,387,605,019 lei, where the most significant investments are also within the Large Infrastructure Operational Program, respectively 1,432,590,663 lei, compared to the small number of signed contracts - 12.

A large number of signed contracts were within the Regional Operational Program, respectively 107, followed by the Human Capital Operational Program - 14, the Large Infrastructure Operational Program - 12, the Administrative Capacity Operational Program - 8, and the Competitiveness Operational Program - 3.

The total value of their contracts differs, compared to the number of contracts signed for each program, in the sense that the most significant investments are in the Large Infrastructure Operational Program, respectively 1,432,590,663 lei, followed by the Regional Operational Program - 849,213,098 lei, The Human Capital Operational Program - 60,052,149 lei, the Competitiveness Operational Program - 33,217,884 lei and the Administrative Capacity Operational Program - 12,531,226 lei.

Like the previous counties, Gorj County had no contracts signed within the Technical Assistance Operational Program, so no funding was granted.

Table no 7. Breakdown of contracts signed in Valcea County

Program	No financing contracts	Value EU (LEI)	Total value (LEI)
Large Infrastructure Operational Program (LIOP)	10	267.410.292	390.176.866
Regional Operational Program (ROP)	195	899.408.889	1.275.141.280
Human Capital Operational Program (HCOP)	11	81.289.328	94.215.989
Competitiveness Operational Program (COP)	3	100.729.241	119.069.474
Administrative Capacity Operational Program (ACOP)	7	14.692.421	17.313.244
Technical Assistance Operational Program (OPTA)	0	0	0
TOTAL	226	1.363.530.171	1.895.916.853

Source: www.mfe.gov.ro and authors contributions

Valcea County signed several 226 contracts, with a total value of 1,895,916,853 lei.

Thus, the number of contracts signed differs from the value of investments.

Within the Regional Operational Program, most contracts were signed, respectively 195, followed by the Human Capital Operational Program - 11, the Large Infrastructure Operational Program - 10, the Administrative Capacity Operational Program - 7, the Competitiveness Operational Program - 3, and the Assistance Operational Program Technique - 0.

Regarding the total value of the signed contracts, the situation is slightly different respectively the most investments were made within the Regional Operational Program - 1,275,141,280 lei, followed by the Large Infrastructure Operational Program - 390,176,866 lei, the Competitiveness Operational Program - 119,069,474 lei, Operational Program Human Capital - 94,215,989 lei, Operational Program Administrative Capacity - 17,313,244 lei, and no investments were made within the Technical Assistance Operational Program.

Table no 8. The centralized situation of projects in South-West Oltenia Region

County	Total numbers of contracts	LIOP	ROP	HCOP	COP	ACOP	OPTA	Total value (lei)
Dolj	390	19	262	63	25	10	1	5.396.847.298
Olt	186	5	166	8	2	5	0	2.402.766.194
Mehedinți	101	7	77	11	1	5	0	1.293.517.239
Gorj	144	12	107	14	3	8	0	2.387.605.019
Valcea	226	10	195	11	3	7	0	1.895.916.853
Total	1047	53	807	107	34	35	1	13.376.652.603

Source: www.mfe.gov.ro and authors' contributions

Therefore, we highlighted the situation of the projects for each county. Now we will compare all the counties to see how the situation of these projects is, centrally, at the level of the Oltenia region.

Dolj County, we established from the beginning that it is, at the national level, among the counties with the most significant investments in projects, as it appears from our situation, but we will explain all aspects comparatively.

In total, the South-West Oltenia Region, during the financial year 2014-2020, signed 1047 contracts, where in Dolj County were the most, respectively 390, followed by Valcea County - 226, Olt County - 186, Gorj County - 144, and Mehedinți County - 101.

The financing programs did not have similar numbers of signed contracts at all, in the sense that most contracts were signed within the Regional Operational Program, respectively 807, followed by the Human Capital Operational Program - 107, Large Infrastructure Operational Program - 53, Operational Program Administrative Capacity - 35, Operational Program Competitiveness - 34 and Operational Program Technical Assistance - 1.

If we still get to the financing part, at the regional level, the most were invested in the Large Infrastructure Operational Program, respectively 6,227,822,693 lei, for a relatively small number of signed contracts - 53, and the least was invested in Technical Assistance Operational Program, respectively 1,381,498 lei, for only one signed contract.

The total value of the 1047 contracts signed at the regional level is 13,376,652,603 lei, of which half the value is given by the investments within the Large Infrastructure Operational Program. Thus, the largest investments in the signed contracts are in Dolj county, respectively 5,396,847,298 lei, followed by Olt county - 2,402,766,194 lei, Gorj county - 2,387,605,019 lei, Valcea county - 1,895,916,853 lei and Mehedinți county - 1,293,517,239 lei, which had the smallest investments, until March 31, 2021, for the financial year 2014-2020.

5. Conclusions

The idea of a project represents the most valuable and used solution for implementing and conducting research in a particular field, which can lead to funds from specific programs because programs provide the financial support and mechanisms needed to carry out a project in the best conditions.

European funds are the largest sources of funding but also the most commonly used to support projects in Romania, and those funds come, especially from the Operational Programs such as the Large Infrastructure Operational Program (LIOP), Regional Operational Program (ROP), Human Capital Operational Program (HCOP), Competitiveness Operational Program (COP), Administrative Capacity Operational Program (ACOP), Technical Assistance Operational Program (OPTA).

Although Romania is not ranked among the first countries to attract the European funds, the percentage is started to grow because there are a lot of new specialists applying for the funds needed to implement a project. This area of specialists is found in the Southwest Oltenia region, and we can see that in the growing number and value of projects signed and implemented through European funding programs.

Romanian researchers have implemented many projects because they want to improve the quality of life through constant research of new, better ideas, which can be seen through so many projects implemented. The counties with the highest values of EU contracts are Ilfov, Bucharest, Constanta, Cluj, and Dolj.

The Southwest region of Romania, Oltenia, has a lot of projects implemented through its counties Dolj, Olt, Mehedinti, Gorj, and Valcea, and they sum up a total of 1047 contracts with a value of approximately 14 billion lei.

Slowly but progressively and with a lot of work, Romania is climbing the ladder of the future regarding research and the innovative solutions resulting from the successful projects implemented.

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