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NATIONAL RURAL NETWORK AS A MEASURE SUPPORTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EU RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Abstract

The subject of this article is to present the characteristics of the National Rural Network (NRN) as a legal-administrative form of supporting the process of implementation of the EU rural development policy in Poland. In particular, the analysis covers the issue of the effectiveness of the adopted legal and organizational solutions in the context of the implementation of the Network's objectives, taking into account the experience of subsequent programming periods in the financial perspectives 2007-2013 and 2014-2020, as well as in the currently designed conditions. It has been assumed that the structure of the NRN in Poland, as a Member State, includes administrative entities of central and regional character interacting with other entities involved in the implementation of the rural development policy. The activities of the Network are intended to ensure the inclusion of the stakeholders of the public policy in question (including industry organizations, cooperatives, chambers of agriculture, state research institutes, research and development units, non-governmental organizations, and individuals) in the processes of exchange and development of knowledge. They are also supposed to promote interaction between these stakeholders, which is the essence of "networking" aimed at the better use of support instruments from the funds of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy.

KEYWORDS

rural areas, social capital, development support, NRN+, Strategic Plan for the Common Agricultural Policy

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obszary wiejskie, kapitał społeczny, wsparcie rozwoju, KSOW+, Plan Strategiczny dla Wspólnej Polityki Rolnej

1. INTRODUCTION

The National Rural Network established by Council Regulation (EC) No. 1698/2005¹ is a network for the exchange of information and cooperation between organizations and institutions whose activities are aimed at the better use of support instruments from the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy. It is intended to serve a better flow of information between institutions and organizations involved in activities implemented for the benefit of rural areas and their inhabitants. In terms of subjects, the NRN is a specific organizational structure, including administrative entities of central and regional character interacting with other entities involved in the implementation of the rural development policy. The activities of the Network are intended to ensure the inclusion of the stakeholders of the public policy in question (including industry organizations, cooperatives, chambers of agriculture, state research institutes, research and development units, non-governmental organizations, and individuals) in the processes of exchange and development of knowledge. They are also supposed to promote interaction between these stakeholders, which is the essence of "networking" aimed at the better use of CAP support instruments.

A rural network operates in every Member State of the European Union. The Polish National Rural Network is part of the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) and has been in operation since 2009.

The subject of this article is to present the characteristics of the National Rural Network (NRN) as a legal-administrative form of supporting the process of implementation of the EU rural development policy in Poland. In particular, the analysis covers the issue of the effectiveness of the adopted legal and organ-

¹ Council Regulation (EC) No. 1698/2005 of 20 September 2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) OJ. L. 277 of 21 October 2005, p. 1.

izational solutions in the context of the implementation of the Network's objectives, taking into account the experience of subsequent programming periods in the financial perspectives 2007-2013 and 2014-2020, as well as in the currently designed legal and financial conditions.

2. THE GENESIS OF NRN IN POLAND

The political and programmatic assumptions of the Polish National Rural Network, as well as the purpose of its existence, were initially defined in the National Strategic Plan for Rural Development 2007-2013,² as a response to the European Union guidelines, contained in the Council Decision No. 144/2006 of 20 February 2006 on Community strategic guidelines for rural development (programming period 2007-2013).³ The provisions of Decision No. 144/2006 set out guidelines relevant to the implementation of the Union's priorities, in particular, with regard to the objectives of sustainable development and the renewed Lisbon Strategy for growth and employment as translated into rural development policy.⁴ From the point of view of the NRN, the most significant one was Guideline No. 4 on building local employment capacity and diversification. According to its wording, the funds earmarked for LEADER Axis 4 should support the priorities of Axis 1 – “Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector” and Axis 2 – “Improving the environment and the countryside” and, in particular, Axis 3 – “Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy”. But they also play an important role in the horizontal priority of improving governance and mobilizing the internal development potential of rural areas. The guideline encouraged focusing on supporting key activities such as building local partnership resources, stimulating and promoting skills acquisition, promoting private-public partnerships, promoting cooperation and innovation, as well as improving local governance.⁵ It pointed out that local initiatives and support for diversification could play a crucial role in introducing people to new ideas and solutions which are meant to support innovation and entrepreneurship, and can support the activation and provision of local services.

² National Strategic Plan, document prepared by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in July 2007, text: <https://www.zbp.pl/photo/alprez/pliki/2.1.1.1.2.1-krajowy-plan-strategiczny.pdf> (accessed 30 October 2023).

³ Official Journal of the EU L 55/20 of 25 February 2006.

⁴ M. Król, *Funkcjonowanie Krajowej Sieci Obszarów Wiejskich ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem struktur organizacyjnych, jak również dostępności informacji w ramach KSOW*, Warszawa 2010, p. 4.

⁵ Paragraph 3.4 of Council Decision 144/2006 of 20 February 2006 on Community strategic guidelines for rural development (programming period 2007-2013).

This approach and reference to the LEADER approach, which has been implemented across the Union since 1991, focuses on seven key features, i.e. territoriality, “bottom-up” (understood as broad community participation in the formation and implementation of the strategy), integration through comprehensive use of local resources and linking of different economic fields and cooperation of different interest groups, innovation, local management and financing, cooperation (networking) through the exchange of experience and good practices, as well as partnership. This outlines the general character of the NRN as a network that brings together entities that contribute to the development of rural areas and have a direct or indirect impact on the better use of the instruments of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. These include, in particular, regional governments of provinces, as well as local governments of municipalities and counties, professional organizations, chambers of agriculture, departmental institutes, NGOs, research and development units, local action groups, and networks, as well as agreements of these entities. The operation of the network is to foster the realization of the principle of partnership and a modern and effective way of exchanging information and transferring knowledge.⁶

The doctrine emphasizes the nature of the NRN as a tool for building social capital.⁷ Rural development is sometimes rightly characterized as local development, and this as category of socio-economic development is defined as “the comprehensive formation of the best possible living conditions in the local environment”.⁸ The success of local development depends on the building of social capital and its strong commitment to the issues of importance to the community. Given the enormous functional diversity of rural areas (food production, production of raw materials for non-agricultural purposes, as well as non-productive functions of a general social nature: environmental, hydrological, landscape, tourism and recreational, residential, social, and cultural)⁹ development of these areas should be sustainable and form the basis of policy in general. However, this multifunctionality, specificity, a certain problematic nature, significant variation in economic and social potential, and even distrust of the central policy, requires the involvement of local clout through the inclusion in the structures of the program responsible for its implementation of all entities interested in its dissemination and at the same time acting as a kind of authority for the recipients of the information carried by the NRN. At the same time, in order to maintain the consistency of action and realiza-

⁶ For more on the provisions of the National Strategic Plan for Rural Development 2007-2013 regarding the National Rural Network: M. Król, *ibidem*, p. 5 *et seq.*

⁷ B. Kutkowska, T. Pilawka, *Rola Krajowej Sieci Obszarów Wiejskich (KSOW) w budowaniu kapitału społecznego wsi*, “Prace naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu”, 2014, No. 341, p. 105 *et seq.*

⁸ J. Chądzyński, *Nowe koncepcje rozwoju - w kierunku rozwoju lokalnych, (in:) Region i jego rozwój w warunkach globalizacji*, Warszawa 2007, p. 63 *et seq.*

⁹ J. Wilkin, *Wielofunkcyjność rolnictwa. Kierunki badań, podstawy metodologiczne i implikacje praktyczne*, Warszawa 2010, p. 17.

tion of the goal of such a huge apparatus involved in the initiative to disseminate information on instruments of support for rural development, it is necessary to structure the institutions responsible for its implementation and execution in such a way that, without losing the purpose and nature of its action, its effectiveness, consistency, quality, and continuous development are ensured.

For the period 2007-2013, the assumptions for the creation of national rural networks were expressed in the provision of Article 68 of Council Regulation (EC) No. 1698/2005.¹⁰ As indicated, the primary rationale for the introduction of provisions for national rural networks by the European Commission in the quoted regulation was the weaker competitive position of rural areas in relation to urban areas and the need to level the playing field and ensure increased territorial cohesion of the entire territory of the Union. By design, the NRNs were to absorb and, to a much greater extent, replace the networks established under the implementation of the LEADER program. In this context, the NRNs were to become one of the tools supporting the realization of much broader objectives than in the case of the said program.¹¹ In the Polish legal order, the purpose of the creation of the network was defined by the National Strategic Plan for Rural Development 2007-2013,¹² defining it as “carrying out activities for the development of rural areas, through the exchange and dissemination of information on them among all interested partners, identification, and analysis of good practices, exchange of information relevant to the development of rural areas and transfer of ‘know-how’ in this regard”.¹³

Based on the above-mentioned legal framework and on the basis of EU and national regulations, in particular the Act on RDP,¹⁴ the conditions for the functioning of the National Rural Network in Poland were formulated and the Polish organizational structure of the National Rural Network was created, ensuring the implementation of the Network’s objectives set out in RDP 2007-2013. The positive assessment of its functioning at that time led to the maintenance of the National Rural Network also under RDP 2014-2020.¹⁵ The basis for the European Network

¹⁰ Council Regulation (EC) No. 1698/2005 of 20 September 2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD); OJ L. 277 of 21 October 2005, p. 1.

¹¹ M. Drygas, *Krajowa Sieć Obszarów Wiejskich. Dylematy i pożądane kierunki rozwoju na przykładzie doświadczeń wybranych krajów realizujących tego typu przedsięwzięcia*, Warszawa 2010, p. 32.

¹² M. Król, *ibidem*, p. 5 *et seq.*

¹³ National Strategic Plan for Rural Development 2007-2013, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, p. 53.

¹⁴ Act of 7 March 2007 on supporting rural development with the participation of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (Journal of Laws of 2007, No. 64, item 427, as amended).

¹⁵ Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, p. 769 *et seq.*, <https://www.gov.pl/web/rolnictwo/-program-rozwoju-obszarow-wiejskich-2014-2020-prow-2014-2020> (accessed 24 October 2023).

and the National Rural Networks in the 2014-2020 financial perspective were the provisions of the Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council (EU) No. 1305/2013.¹⁶ Poland sanctioned the functioning of the National Rural Network for 2014-2020 in the content of the Rural Development Program, and the detailed provisions of the Program were the Act on RDP 2014-2020¹⁷ and the implementing regulations of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.¹⁸

3. NATIONAL NETWORK OF THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY – NATIONAL RURAL NETWORK+ (NRN+)

The activities of the NRN will also continue under the Strategic Plan for the Common Agricultural Policy for 2023-2027. On 31 August 2022, The European Commission approved the Strategic Plan for the Common Agricultural Policy, prepared by the Polish government, which provides for the operation of a network called NRN+. The network, in the new financial perspective, will cover a wider range of issues, since it will also cover aspects of the functioning of the first pillar of the CAP. The objectives of the NRN+ are indicated in the Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council (EU) No. 2021/2115,¹⁹ and its functioning structure in Poland is sanctioned by the provisions of the Strategic Plan Act.²⁰

NRN+ is an organizational and legal form of the continuation of the National Rural Network operating since 2009 and the Network for Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas (SIR) operating since 2015. The provisions of the partnership model also have not changed. However, its broader scope of jurisdiction remains important. The NRN+ will cover the entire Common Agricultural Policy,

¹⁶ Regulation of 17 December 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No. 1698/2005 (OJ L 347/487, 20 December 2013, p. 1).

¹⁷ Act of 20 February 2015 on supporting rural development with the participation of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development under the Rural Development Program 2014-2020 (Journal of Laws 2015, item 349 as amended).

¹⁸ In particular, the Regulation of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development of 17 January 2017 on the National Rural Network under the Rural Development Program 2014-2020 (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 148).

¹⁹ Regulation (EU) No. 2021/2115 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 December 2021 laying down rules on support for strategic plans drawn up by Member States under the common agricultural policy (CAP strategic plans) and financed by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Regulations (EU) No. 1305/2013 and (EU) No. 1307/2013 (Official Journal of the EU of December 6, 2021 L 435/1).

²⁰ Law of 8 February 2023 on the Strategic Plan for the Common Agricultural Policy for 2023-2027 (Journal of Laws of 2023, item 412).

i.e. pillar I and pillar II issues of the CAP, and will, therefore, undertake networking activities for all areas of intervention identified in the Strategic Plan, and will include a wider range of stakeholders than the NRN in previous years.²¹

4. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE POLISH NATIONAL RURAL NETWORK

The planned institutional structure of NRN+ (including the participation of agricultural advisory units) and the involvement of partners (including research institutes, organizations working for agriculture and rural areas, farmers, and entrepreneurs) in the network's tasks are expected to ensure adequate coverage of the network's relevant stakeholders in both pillars of the CAP.

The organizational and institutional structure of the National Rural Network+ (i.e., the so-called network support units) will be formed by the Managing Authority – the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Agency for the Restructuring and Modernization of Agriculture, provincial governments, and agricultural advisory units. The network will be supported by the Steering Committee for the National Rural Network+, constituting an opinion and advisory body of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, and the implementation of the network's activities, in addition to the network's support units, will involve, as in previous years, partners, i.e. entities actively involved in rural and agricultural development, including those implementing innovations or developing innovative solutions. Access for partners is open and the opportunity to register is available at any time.

The Managing Authority which is the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development remains unchanged. His tasks include horizontal matters such as drafting regulations and guidelines, overseeing the operation of the Network, responsibility for the preparation of the Action Plan and the CAP Communication Strategy, approval of operational plans, and the implementation of operations under these plans.

The administering entity of NRN+ remains the central unit (from 2007 to 2013 functioning under the name of the Central Secretariat). It is worth mentioning at this point that the role of the central entity at the beginning of the operation of NRN in Poland was entrusted to the Foundation of Assistance Programs for

²¹ Strategic Plan for CAP, <https://www.gov.pl/web/wprpo2020/zatwierdzony-przez-komisje-europejska-plan-strategiczny-dla-wspolnej-polityki-rolnej-na-lata-2023-2027> (accessed 3 October 2023).

Agriculture FAPA. This occurred through an executive regulation²² to the Act on RDP 2014-2020.²³ FAPA then implemented the NRN Action Plan for 2007-2013, as well as the NRN Operational Plans under RDP 2007-2013 and the Operational Plans until 2015 under RDP 2014-2020. On 1 January 2018, there was a change in the entity administering KSOW by entrusting the role of the central unit to the Agricultural Advisory Center in Brwinów (CDR in Brwinów).²⁴ The rationale for the change was the need to consolidate the tasks of the minister responsible for agriculture around the units of the public finance sector competent in these matters, subordinate to or supervised by the minister, as well as to increase his influence and means of supervision in shaping policies related to agriculture in the broadest sense.²⁵ The Agricultural Advisory Center in Brwinów, together with its branches in Kraków, Poznań, Radom, and Warsaw, is a state organizational unit reporting directly to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. The statutory goal of the Center's activities is to improve the knowledge and skills of its advisory staff and to raise and standardize the standard of services provided by advisors to farmers. The CDR in Brwinów was established by the

²² Pursuant to the provision of Article 55(4) of the Law on RDP 2014-2020, the minister in charge of rural development could authorize, by regulation, a unit of the public finance sector or a foundation whose sole funder is the State Treasury to act as the central unit of the RDP. In the execution of the statutory authorization, on 30 July 2015. The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development issued a regulation authorizing the Foundation of Assistance Programs for Agriculture FAPA to act as the central unit of the national network (Journal of Laws of 2015, item 1104).

²³ J. Jagielski, *Fundacja jako podmiot administrujący*, (in:) P. Litwiniuk, A. Milewska, M. Wasilewski (eds.), *Prawne i ekonomiczne uwarunkowania funkcjonowania fundacji*, Warsaw, 2019, p. 91 *et seq.*

²⁴ By the Act of 21 April 2017 amending the Act on supporting rural development with the participation of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development within the framework of the Rural Development Program 2014-2020 (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 892), by virtue of Article 1(1) of the same Act, changing the wording of Article 55(4) of the amended Act, the possibility of entrusting the role of the central unit of the National Rural Network to a foundation whose sole funder is the State Treasury was excluded, and the existing entrustment expired on 31 December 2017. In implementation of the above, by a decree of 12 September 2017 on authorizing the Agricultural Advisory Center, based in Brwinów, to act as the central unit of the National Rural Network under the Rural Development Program 2014-2020, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development authorized the Agricultural Advisory Center, based in Brwinów, which is a unit of the public finance sector, organizationally subordinate to the minister responsible for rural development, to act as the central unit of the National Rural Network. For more on the role of the Foundation of Assistance Programs for Agriculture FAPA in the implementation of RDP 2014-2020, see P. Litwiniuk, *Fundacja Skarbu Państwa jako podmiot wdrażający instrumenty Wspólnej Polityki Rolnej*, (in:) *Integracja europejska jako determinanta polityki wiejskiej. Aspekty prawne*, P. Litwiniuk (ed.), Warszawa 2017, p. 32.

²⁵ Explanatory Memorandum to the Draft Law on Amendments to the Law on Support for Rural Development with the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development under the Rural Development Program 2014-2020, <https://www.sejm.gov.pl/sejm9.nsf/PrzebiegProc.xsp?nr=2736> (accessed 21 October 2023).

Act of 22 October 2004 on agricultural advisory units,²⁶ which came into force on 1 January 2005. In addition to the CDR in Brwinów, there are 16 provincial agricultural advisory centers within the agricultural advisory units. The task of the CDR in Brwinów, as the central unit of the NRN, is to ensure the functioning of the network and the implementation of its tasks at the national level and the provincial level – to the extent not reserved for regional units. In particular, its task still involves all issues related to the implementation of the operational plan, including the implementation of individual operations at the national level, cooperation with network units, monitoring and reporting. Very important issues from the point of view of the nature of NRN, also include the identification of entities cooperating within NRN+, enabling them to join in the implementation of the network's tasks and activating them. Other tasks concern the matters related to the administration of the network: servicing the steering committee, setting up thematic groups, supporting cooperation and information flow between the network's support units and other entities.

The question of the future functioning of the regional units of the NRN is an interesting one. Both provincial governments and provincial agricultural advisory centers (WODR) have been designated for this role. Their tasks have not been differentiated in principle. One and the other, as regional units, will carry out the tasks of the network at the provincial level aimed at topics related to the development of rural areas, through the implementation of activities under the operational plan. In the previous programming period, the division of tasks was different. The provincial governments remained the regional units of the NRN, while the provincial agricultural advisory centers were responsible for coordinating the Network for Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas (SIR) operating within the framework of the NRN in individual provinces, and only within the scope of this thematic network did they implement the objectives of the NRN. It should be noted that before the transfer of the functions of the central unit to CDR in 2018, the Center acted as the coordinator of the SIR Network.

In the new financial perspective, the tasks of regional units, both provincial governments and provincial agricultural advisory centers, include, in particular, the identification of partners, cooperation with network units, the creation of thematic groups, and the conduct of information and promotional activities on the CAP Strategic Plan, in accordance with the Communication Strategy for 2023-2027. Diagnosing the needs of the provinces in terms of the actions necessary to be taken towards improving the implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy and cooperating with the local contact points of European funds in terms of information on existing opportunities for support from national and

²⁶ Act of 22 October 2004 on agricultural advisory units (Journal of Laws of 2004, No. 251, item 2507, as amended).

European funds for the development of rural areas is left to the sole responsibility of local governments.

The very extensive management apparatus of the NRN also includes the Agency for the Restructuring and Modernization of Agriculture, which, as in previous years, will carry out the tasks specified in the CAP Communication Strategy for 2023-2027, as well as the Steering Committee for the National Rural Network+ formed by the representatives of public administration, science, agricultural consulting, as well as partners: social and industry organizations operating in the field of agriculture and rural areas. The Committee is to indicate and correct the directions of the network and facilitate the exchange of knowledge, experience, and cooperation of various entities.

5. CURRENT OBJECTIVES OF THE NATIONAL RURAL NETWORK+

For each CAP programming period, an NRN Action Plan is adopted, which is a projection of the Network's intervention logic, responding to the specific needs of rural development policy as defined in programming documents. The intervention logic of the NRN includes the program priorities, which constitute the thematic objectives of the Network, and illustrates the links between the objectives of the NRN and the tasks of the Action Plan through which the objectives can be achieved. The premise of the NRN intervention logic is to effectively achieve the goals of the Network and support the implementation of the priorities of the Common Agricultural Policy. Within the framework of the Action Plan, operational plans (previously biennial, and under the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan, annual) are developed, listing all operations that will be implemented to achieve the goals of the NRN.

The functioning of the NRN is intended, in particular, to increase the involvement of all stakeholders in the implementation of rural development policy (from 2024 onwards, including the first pillar of the CAP), to inform the public about the implemented programs and funding opportunities, as well as to disseminate information about the results of the implemented support policies. This is done through the dissemination of good practices, the creation of platforms, the organization of forums and events to facilitate the exchange of experiences between stakeholders, the collection of information and the facilitation of its dissemination, as well as the networking of funded structures and projects, such as LAGs and EPI operational groups.

Taking into account the numerous and very diverse group of addressees of NRN activities, the operations undertaken are carried out through a variety of

means. These include pieces of training, seminars, meetings, workshops, conferences and congresses, fairs, outdoor events, exhibitions, publications, press releases, broadcasts, films, advertising spots on radio and television, analyses, expertise, and scientific research. Of course, the listed forms of activities are not a closed catalog. The operations proposed by the units of the NRN management apparatus, including external partners, are evaluated, in particular, from the perspective of the policy priorities they are to implement, as well as from the perspective of the NRN objectives to be achieved. Each operation implemented within the Network is to play a supporting role in relation to rural development policy.

The NRN+ activities defined for 2023-2027 are as follows:

1. Collection, analysis, and dissemination of information on activities and good practices implemented or supported under the CAP Strategic Plan.
2. Developing the competence of the administration and other entities involved in implementing the CAP Strategic Plan.
3. Exchange of experiences and mutual learning among stakeholders.
4. Promote cooperation and networking of EPI and LAG operational groups or similar structures.
5. Develop links with other strategies or networks funded by the European Union.
6. Contribution to the further development of the CAP.
7. Participation in the activities of the European CAP network.
8. Information and promotion of the CAP Strategic Plan.

Each operational plan, which is a kind of executive act of the action plan, will include a description of the operations planned for implementation with an indication of the priority to which the operation corresponds and the objective and name of the RSPC activity with which the operation is consistent. Structured in this way, the document seems to realize the basic objective of supporting the state's CAP policy. Keeping in mind that although the NRN covers the entire country, yet is supposed to present a bottom-up and local approach to the implemented operations, each year's operational plan consists not only of a plan developed centrally by the central unit but also regional plans created by regional units. While such a "fragmentation" of the plan raises the risk of duplication of the implemented operations, it should at the same time ensure full utilization of resources and reach the widest possible audience. An important role in the effective selection of tools used will be played by the adopted procedure for qualifying operations for the plan and the distribution of funds allocated for operations implemented by units remaining part of the institutional apparatus of the NRN and external partners, whose cooperation within the NRN determines the implementation of the idea of effective networking.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The NRN is the first formal legal and organizational structure to deal with agricultural and rural development policy at the central and regional levels in a way that differs from the traditional sectoral approach.

It seems that the continuation of the process of socialization of the structure of the NRN understood as the involvement in its work of an increasing number of administrative entities in the area of agricultural policy and social partners, may justify the purpose of creating and the legitimacy of the functioning of this structure. NRN in its current form, where all the institutions involved in the implementation and functioning of the Network are organizationally subordinate to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, raises some reservations about the mechanism's fit with the process of decentralization and deconcentration of public administration and the transposition of strategic decisions at the NRN level into the area of local needs.

The functionality of the new National Rural Network will be determined by the policy of the Managing Authority, which should include measures aimed at strengthening its efficiency, greater credibility, and democratization of processes, taking into account the bottom-up perspective and issues of equality of access to the services offered. Thus, the issue of designing the procedural process of qualifying operations for implementation remains important, as well as the distribution of funds provided for their implementation between institutions involved in the administration of the NRN and social partners. It seems that this division should take into account, first of all, the criterion of effectiveness of the actions taken, and not only the institutional location of their operators.

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