**External Evaluation on the Thematic Fund Security
of the Bulgarian-Swiss Cooperation Programme BSCP**

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

1. Background

This is the management response to the final report (December 2018) on the Thematic Security Fund (TFS) in Bulgaria (Module 2), which is part of the External Review of the Swiss Contribution in the security sector. This wider evaluation consists in 3 modules, one referring to Romania, one to Bulgaria and a third covering a broad review of the Swiss Contribution in security and justice related themes. The main objectives of this External Review are:

- Assess the impact and results achieved by the TFS thus contributing to the **accountability** towards stakeholders both in Bulgaria and in Switzerland;
- Identify good/poor practices and innovative approaches, generate lessons to be retained and draw **recommendations**, both at country level and in the theme security for a possible extended Swiss support in reducing economic and social disparities in the Enlarged EU.

The final report is the result of a mandate commissioned by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) to a team of three independent experts (two internationals and one Bulgarian national), who conducted the external evaluation in the period September 2018 – December 2018. The module 2 is based on a review of 5 case study projects selected by SDC. It has involved a desk review of TFS framework and individual project documentation, meetings with executing agencies and other stakeholders in Bulgaria as well as meetings with Swiss project partners. Mission in Bulgaria took place from 15 September to 22 of October 2018.

The purpose of this management response is to present a consolidated appraisal of the Division New EU Member States in Bern and the Swiss Contribution Office in Bulgaria on the findings and recommendations shared in the report. Its main addressees are: SDC and NCU (to build on lessons learnt for similar projects or for a possible next Swiss Contribution), Bulgarian and Swiss Institutions involved in the projects (to capitalise on lessons learned and assure, where relevant the sustainability of the results achieved) and the review team.

Since the launch of the Swiss-Bulgarian Cooperation Program in 2010, a total number of 12 security projects have been elaborated in Bulgaria. 9 of them are implemented while 2 were discontinued. At the time of the evaluation, the portfolio of the TFS consisted of 8 projects still under implementation. 37% of the TFS funding in Bulgaria has been allocated to policing, 24% to the protection of victims of trafficking, 20% to combating organised crime and corruption, and 17% to juvenile justice.

2. General Appreciation of the Evaluation Report and Evaluation Process

SDC acknowledges the receipt and approves the final report(s) prepared by the evaluation team. Overall, the report on Module 2 and its annexes are good, concise and correspond to

the ToRs and main evaluation questions defined in the frame of the inception report. The level of details, comments and recommendations is strategic, what is compliant with SDC expectations. SDC acknowledges that the assessment is based on good knowledge of the projects and procedures and that the evaluation team managed, within the restricted time of the mandate, to comprehend the complexity of the TFS and the changing context in which the projects have been implemented. The good structure of the report written in an easy to comprehend language and complemented with illustrative figures is also appreciated.

3. Position towards main findings

Relevance
SDC agrees to a great extend with the evaluation findings as regards "Relevance". Lack of strategic orientation of TFS is obvious while looking at "project" level. However the relevance needs to be considered while having in mind that complementarity and subsidiarity were dominant principles for the selection of the projects[1]. SDC is of the opinion that niche approach and perseverance in pursuing initially agreed objectives are additional ingredients for the relevance of the Swiss Contribution. This is particularly valid for the projects Organised Crime (PORB) and Trafficking in Human Beings in which sub-sectors the Swiss Contribution is among the few to dare to engage beyond just punctual or sporadic interventions.

Effectiveness
SDC agrees to a great extent with the evaluation team's findings as regards "Effectiveness", particularly the limited information about outcomes. Important changes at project level were achieved, but the general overview on how to embed them into the domestic system is missing.

In the case of the Juvenile Justice project a more effective risk management would have resulted in an earlier response to the frequent shifts in Government priorities along with the lack of management capacity. An appropriate mitigation measure would have been to expand the involved stakeholders while seeking for broader policy support. Focusing the project entirely on the priorities of and with a set up solely within a state institution (Ministry of Justice) increased dependence of this project on political changes and shifts in political agenda, while overall the topic remains high in public space[2].

SDC agrees with the evaluation conclusion that Swiss partners made important contributions to most of the projects but that their role in the projects need to be further clarified for better mutual benefits. As regards involvement of Swiss partners and prospects for the future partnerships, SDC is of the opinion that there should be better understanding and delineation between the two main roles of Swiss counterparts - the one of a "service or know-how provider" or the one of "reciprocal institutional exchange in a partnership dynamic".

Efficiency
As mentioned above, SDC agrees with the conclusion that the lack of systematic outcome monitoring at project and at TFS levels made it sometimes difficult to identify specific changes resulting from the project(s). The recommendation of the evaluation in this respect is valuable. Lack of a systematic monitoring at activities level and its triangulation within the dynamic context was maybe a deficiency of the SIB due to the lack of local counterpart.

The SIB and TFS modalities allowed for implementing simultaneously projects with multitude of actors – state institutions (Police/Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice), judicial authorities (PORB), para state authorities (NCCTHB) and NGOs while maintaining sufficient level of congruence. SDC recognises the important role of the SIB as an independent operator outside of constrains intrinsic to the Bulgarian administrative system. This needs to be duly considered in the search of an optimal management mechanism for possible consequent support in this domain, in light also of the limited expertise at SDC on security domain and approaches.

---

[1] Main TFS Activities were defined in the period 2009 – 2010 based on the prevailing national priorities back then.
[2] See reactions and debates on recently unveiled National Strategy for Children

SDC takes note of the opinion that remuneration to operational staff/civil servant for their involvement in project activities may be considered as a factor of motivation. Nevertheless ineligibility of "topping up" on salaries of involved civil servants was a principle adhered throughout the entire BSCP since its very beginning. It would be however advisable in case of an extended support in this domain to understand better how time and task attribution in relation with project's activities are articulated in the respective institutions.

SDC agrees to a great extend with the findings and recommendations of the evaluation on the role of the TFS Steering Committee. In fact, this stakeholder platform was designed to provide strategic opinions and advice, but it focused mostly on operational aspects.

As regards cumbersome procurement process contributing to significant delay of the projects, SDC agrees only partially with this finding. In most of the cases, the lack of anticipation, planning and discipline in systematic follow up on the process are key causes for such delay. However, involvement of Swiss expertise on important elements (technical specifications in the case of "Stolen Vehicles" project) and supervision by SIB improve the efficiency in procurement process. In case of a future support in this domain where combination of soft and hard measures is foreseen, a good procurement plan and capacity building allocation are part of the measures to mitigate risks of inefficiency.

Intermediate review/assessment was not planned in the TFS. It is recognized that this measure can help to address efficiency aspects.

Sustainability
SDC agrees with the evaluation team that the sustainability prospects are generally good on short term and that in the longer term the prospects for institutionalizing and further development of projects benefits are less positive, due to often changing political priorities and considerable rates of staff turnover in state institutions and agencies.

As regards sustainability in the legal and policy framework, SDC is of the opinion that earlier political analysis and consideration of ongoing support activities by other donors can contribute a lot in understanding the policy making in Bulgaria and in securing complementarity to better aims towards systemic changes.

"Face-to-face" contacts and personal exchange between Swiss and Bulgarian authorities were important ingredients for establishing the partnership and for its continuation beyond projects.

As regards THB programme where a "programmatic" approach was chosen, sustainability considerations prevail through empowering NCCTHB as central authority coordinating the efforts of multiple players at National level.

Swiss added value and benefits to Swiss partner institutions
We find the conclusion of the evaluation with regards to Swiss added value and the benefits to Swiss partner institutions as very relevant. SDC believe that the level of satisfaction of partners is mainly due to the SIB constant support to the Swiss and Bulgarian parties.

Peer reviews performed by respective Swiss counterparts/homologs that were endeavoured under few of the projects (Stolen vehicles, Forensic, Polygon) proved to be instrumental in understanding how the Bulgarian systems function and where the Swiss expertise can be targeted best. To streamline mutual benefits in project implementation, it would be beneficial to consider "early matching exchanges" between Swiss and Bulgarian homologs active in different sub-sectors of the security and justice sectors, as recommended by the evaluation.

4. Management Response to the recommendation
Please, refer to the table in the Annex 1.

Annex 1:

Recommendations and Management Response on main country level recommendations

Recommendations	Management Response	Responsibility / Timing
1. A more strategic approach to the identification and prioritisation of security and justice needs in Bulgaria would facilitate planning for a future TFS. While strategic planning in these areas is not the responsibility of the NCU, it could perhaps promote and facilitate a more strategic approach with regard to the planning of a future TFS.	<mark>Response: Partially agree</mark> Although not being directly in charge of developing and implementing strategic framework/policy NCU is formally constituted to secure respect and coherence of various reform streams and financial (non-state) instruments including the ones of the EU (compliance, avoiding duplications, complementarity). The NCU however lacks management capacity (human not hardware) but shows some progress in certain sectors but less in "Security". With little improvements of NCU strategic steering in "Security" domain, a lot can be catalyse to improve this situation. The role of national authorities to maintain the strategic coherence is of crucial importance. Niche approach while maintaining ties to the policy aspects may prove more pragmatic particularly when field experience/expertise is translated into policy adjustments (bottom-up approach worked well in Bulgaria). Programme approach is one additional measure to adopt a more strategic angle. In the program approach, the correlation b/w operational progress (outputs level) and reforms/policy process can be better articulated. Measures: 1. Map relevant strategic policy framework(s) at National (strategies 2027) and EU level (enforcement of Directives). 2. Exchange with Norway/EEA players (Brussels level) to delineate/complement interventions. 3. Explore local needs (outside Sofia). 4. Define, together with Swiss homologs, niches of possible mutual/operational interests. 5. Devise a NCU embedded "Security" cluster (group of experts). Assess capacity and demands there to better coordinate abundance of instruments and multiple financing in this sector.	1-3: by the experts teams mandated after the 1st technical discussion + SCO/NCU (share of tasks) 4: HQ with support of security expert.

Recommendations	Management Response	Responsibility / Timing
2. There should be greater emphasis on outcomes at all stages (changes in the performance or behaviour of target institutions, systems, or groups). Expected or desired outcomes should be clearly identified at the planning stage, and data on actual outcomes should be systematically collected during implementation, analysed, and reported in project and programme reports.	**Response: fully agree** Recommendation is relevant. But in a niche and subsidiary strategic approach in many subdomains (if decided), portfolio may remain scattered, thus making systematic monitoring at program level (aggregation, etc.) a challenge. Outcomes/effects shall be determined using the theory of change at program level at early stage. It is important also to highlight, to the extent possible, how the desired outcomes (supported by the Swiss Contribution) are contributing to intrinsic/own "tasks" or national programs of the local recipient institution. Measures: • Consider a training in "Theory of change" (ToC)and PCM for all the EAs that will/may be involved in the programme. • At start of design process, arrange for Logical framework based on ToC at program level, with few but clear outcomes indicators; the objective systems of the program components will be developed based on the program logframe and show clear contribution/articulation to it. • Cross check/verify relevance of outcomes with intrinsic agenda/tasks of Bulgarian partners. • Devise a monitoring system for benchmarking operational progress with "outcome" ingredients at program level. • In the frame of the approval process, analyse, as part of capacity and stakeholders assessments, how the "internal control" and "decision" systems in the respective state institution/domain works in order to better place measures for an upscale of results at policy/institutional level. • Foresee a PCM controller at TFS/programme level.	NCU, Program Operator, EA when designing the program based on clear guidance of the Swiss side
3. In the event that a future Swiss Contribution TFS in Bulgaria continues to channel funds through a fund manager, it is recommended that SDC limit the role of such a body. In particular, it is recommended that	**Response: Partially agree** As a matter of principle SDC prefers to look at management modalities holistically thus shaping characteristics of an effective model/approach in the given country context rather to stick to a "ready-made model" that may work(ed) everywhere. Same applies for the tasks/roles.	

Recommendations	Management Response	Responsibility / Timing

the following are specifically excluded from its remit as it appears there may have been over-reliance on the SIB under the current TFS:
 	
   a. Preparation and editing of project documentation, budgets, etc.
   b. Coordination of the Steering Committee and provision of its secretariat.
	The solution of a state operator would be more relevant and logic to favour ownership and the use of country system, provided that leaving the full responsibility to the Bulgarian authorities takes precedence over progress and quality demanded by the Swiss party. Other risk factors can also appear in this modality– misuse of funds and corrupted procurements, accumulating delays, lagging reporting etc.
	
	It is also to be mentioned that SIB has put a lot of energy in assisting the Swiss and the Bulgarian partners in the project management tasks (quality and standard), since these structures did not necessarily possess PCM knowledge and reporting, invoicing and other such tasks were a challenge for them.
	
	Limiting the role of the management instance may affect the quality of the projects development, preparation, assessment of risk factors etc. Considering the current situation, the implementation of the security programme may take much more time and the results will be much more difficult to achieve if the management instance does not assist these tasks.
	
	In the case of SC1, SIB was tasked as the first level of screening and assessment of project proposal and had to ensure quality assurance before submission of the credit proposal and project document to the Swiss side.
	
	We agree that the concept/role of the Steering Committee shall be revisited. In the case of TFS it was in fact an "operational board" rather than a platform for strategic steering.
	
	The Coordination and the Secretariat of a security programme Steering Committee could be taken by a Bulgarian authority in order to increase the ownership on the programme, provided that this body is mandated by the NCU. An extended "Board of Experts/Advisors" can be complemented to advise on subdomains aspects but also improve on transparency and strategic positioning.	

Recommendations	Management Response	Responsibility / Timing
	Measures: • Establish a list of characteristics for an efficient (local) management body and identify the model on this base, in dialogue with NCU; • Assess the needs to include in a security program a capacity building component with specific measures to support the development of local capacities and revise the role of the program operator (PO) and its Swiss/international backstopping accordingly; • Consider hiring the PO and its backstopper before program and program components are defined and planned.	
1. While the role of the Switzerland-based SIB has been essential in facilitating contacts and partnerships between Swiss and Bulgarian institutions and organisations, it is recommended that a **future fund manager incorporate a Bulgarian institutional partner** (e.g. an NGO or consulting firm) to facilitate coordination and communication locally, to perform some management tasks, and to provide systematic capacity building in the areas of project design, management, and outcome assessment. The scope of fund management activities undertaken in Switzerland should be reduced accordingly. It is likely that there will still be a need for some kind of presence in Switzerland to facilitate partnerships between Bulgarian and Swiss institutions, among other things. This function could be performed by an entity or individual independent of the fund management structure.	Response: Partially agree Having a strong Bulgarian counterpart in case a backstopping component should be devised is also important to follow closely on domestic context changes and propose adequate adjustments, where relevant in project implementation (steering at national domain level). At the same time, the Bulgarian counterpart should reinforce the coordination, the communication and the administrative process at the programme level. The Security domain (Police, Justice) is sensitive one. It is not given that the Swiss partners will be willing to assume the financial and image risks to cooperate directly with Bulgarian institutions or NGOs as fund manager or EAs. Moreover, there is a risk that an NGO promotes its own agenda during the implementation of the security programme or if not, simply be accused to do so. Therefore, SCO recommends the involvement of a Swiss/international institution to facilitate partnerships between Bulgarian and Swiss institutions. Measures: Ensure that the Swiss/international institution to backstop the programme operator, in whatever form, is also able to monitor the context, has the capacity to support locally and manage project development of Bulgarian partners and at the same time to coordinate efficiently the cooperation with possible Swiss partners.	

Recommendations	Management Response	Responsibility / Timing
5. It is recommended that the terms of reference for a **future fund manager** or intermediate body provide greater detail on key aspects of its role and responsibilities (e.g. regarding outcome monitoring and assessment, among other things).	<mark>Response: fully agree</mark> Yes, see measures suggested above	
6. It should be ensured that EAs fully understand Swiss funding rules and procedures from the start. The SIB did provide financial guidelines, project manuals, guidelines for the use of the logo, reporting templates etc. at the first Steering Committee meeting, but it seems that they may not have been clearly understood at the time.	<mark>Response: fully agree</mark> Measures: Also to simplify the requirements (reporting for example) and to arrange for training and capacity building upfront (see also above). Include in this briefing considerations on procurement modalities, associate risk factors and strategies to mitigate delays.	
7. It is recommended that **NCU** and the **SDC/ SCO** ensure that the roles and responsibilities of different actors in a future TFS are more clearly defined, as well as the lines of communication.	<mark>Response: Not agree</mark> The roles and responsibilities were clearly defined in the TFA. It is another perspective if they were well understood and mainstreamed throughout implementation. However, the commitment and capacity of the actors involved was different from what was initially assumed. In order to have project progressing and having a chance of success, and in response to recurrent institutional weaknesses, the Swiss side (SDC/SIB) had to intensify its involvement and expend its role in Fund implementation. Elaborating more rules or defining very detailed procedures will not necessarily improve the implementation quality and the commitments of actors (NCU Management and Control system in the case of SECO projects proved otherwise). On the contrary, there is a need to redefine roles based on capacity and competencies of involved partners.	

Recommendations	Management Response	Responsibility / Timing
	Measures: • Better define the roles based on capacity and competencies of involved partners and agree them with the partners. • Systematically crosscheck/verify if assumptions/roles are duly respected particularly at the beginning (at annual events or mid-term reviews). • Better define the communication lines and enforce discipline.	
8. The experience of the Juvenile Justice project suggests that the risks and objectives of projects aiming to develop legislation and policy should be more thoroughly assessed before funding is committed.	<mark>Response: Partially agree</mark> Transformation of results into policy/legislative adjustments is an important sustainability/impact ingredient. Indeed successful implementation based on risk mitigation in pursuing policy/legislative adjustments require different instruments and skills. Measures: • In program design, risks assessment and mitigation strategy shall require more attention. • Consider to devise a reserve fund in the program for supporting evaluation, evidence-based research and capitalization to foster upscaling and follow up in sustaining (policy) measures. • Expand the group of constituencies/stakeholders to back up reforms beyond just institutions (state).	
9. It would be highly desirable to reduce the time between project concept development and project start, and also to reduce project implementation time, for example by limiting the use of no-cost extensions to exceptional circumstances. Multiple factors are involved and improvements will involve dialogue between the **SDC**, the **NCU**, **EAs**, the	<mark>Response: Fully agree</mark> Yes, but not always possible. Difficult balance between attainment of results and respecting deadlines. Nevertheless "extension" should be considered as last resort and dealt with due consideration on case by case basis. In general the Fund manager/program operator shall have the leverage to push the progress and anticipate deviation with action plans. Measures: Condition possible extension/reallocation of funds to findings and recommendations of internal or mid-term reviews.	

Recommendations	Management Response	Responsibility / Timing
fund manager and potential Swiss partners.		
10. The NCU should advocate for the status of staff of Bulgarian state institutions who work on projects to be clarified. In particular, their institutions should remunerate them for their work on projects, and their other responsibilities/ workload should be reduced accordingly.	<mark>Response: Partially agree</mark> NCU can advocate but out of scope of the BSCP. It is important to understand better how time and task attribution in relation with project's activities are articulated in the respective institutions. Topping up shall be excluded in principle. <u>Measures:</u> Clear stipulation and rules at the level of the bilateral framework agreement.	
11. Project proposals involving the introduction of new training methodologies or curricula should incorporate activities to ensure that they are properly institutionalised, reused, and adapted and updated as necessary. This may mean involving additional project partners, such as the National Institute for Justice. This should be assured by the **NCU** and a **future fund manager**.	<mark>Response: fully agree</mark> In addition they must always be in reference/aligned to the present work/job profiles/skills and not an isolated set of trainings. System of credits and professional advancement have to be considered. Involvement of additional project partner may not always bring desired capacity hence it needs to be considered based on stakeholders analysis. <u>Measures:</u> Identify curricula/behaviour adjustments early during project design and anticipate/map entry points for institutionalisation. Identify "institutional" body in charge at National but also at local level.	