



# IOB Evaluation Newsletter

## # 15 06

## The Matra programme in the Eastern Partnership countries

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### Findings

- The accessibility and flexibility of the Matra programme gave it added value within the broader donor landscape.
- Most projects attained their goals, but their joint contribution to the programme objectives could not be established.
- Programme management by the ministry of Foreign Affairs decreased during the period of analysis.

### Lessons learned

- Retain flexibility but give more attention to results at programme level.
- Use a differentiated approach for countries with and countries without an association agreement with the EU, but avoid new divisions.
- Clarify the programme's expected contribution to bilateral relations.
- Reinforce programme management at the ministry and increase interaction between implementing organisations.

# Background

Since its launch in 1994 the Matra (social transformation) programme for Central and Eastern Europe has aimed to contribute to the development of democratic, pluriform states governed by the rule of law, where there is space for dialogue between the government and the people. Matra focuses on capacity building and institutional strengthening of civil society organisations (CSOs) and government institutions.

The programme comprised various components ('sub-programmes') and was repeatedly adapted to new developments in the partner countries as well as to shifting insights and political priorities in the Netherlands. For example, some sub-programmes focused specifically on supporting countries in the EU accession process. The list of countries eligible for support was also updated regularly.

This evaluation examines the implementation of the programme from 2008 to 2014 in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. These are six republics of the former Soviet Union, with which the European Union (EU) maintains relations within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership (EaP).

The following sub-programmes were implemented in the EaP countries:

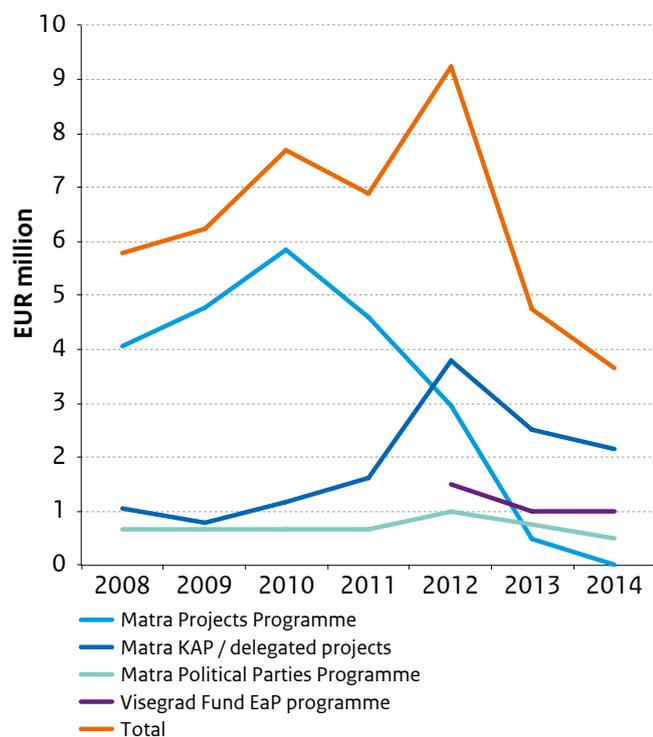
1. *The Matra Projects Programme (MPP)*: the projects funded under this sub-programme were relatively large (budget between EUR 300,000 and EUR 700,000) and took the form of partnerships between a Dutch organisation (the contracting partner) and one or more organisations in a Matra country. The programme was managed by the ministry of Foreign Affairs (BZ) in The Hague. The programme was phased out between 2010 and 2013.
2. *Matra Small Embassy Projects (KAP) / delegated projects*: projects had a maximum budget of EUR 25,000, which was raised to EUR 300,000 in 2010. Most projects were carried out by local organisations in the Matra countries and the programme was managed by the Dutch embassies in the countries concerned.
3. *The Matra Political Parties Programme (MPPP)*: foundations attached to Dutch political parties received grants from this programme to build and maintain an international network and promote the leadership and networks of sister parties in the Matra countries. The amount of the grants allocated to each political party was based on their number of seats in the Dutch parliament. As of 2013, management of the programme was transferred from BZ to the ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations.



The European Union and the Eastern Partnership countries.

4. *The Visegrad Fund's Eastern Partnership (V4EaP) programme*: the Visegrad group (V4: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) launched an Eastern Partnership programme, which the Netherlands financially supported from its inception in 2012, to promote democracy and strengthen civil society in the EaP countries in small-scale projects, using the transformation experience of the V4.

The minister of Foreign Affairs decided to end the Matra EaP programme in 2011, but parliament extended the budget on a year-by-year basis. A total of EUR 44.3 million was disbursed via Matra in the six EaP countries between 2008 and 2014; EUR 22.7 million via the MPP, EUR 13.1 million via Matra KAP / delegated projects, EUR 5 million via the MPPP and EUR 3.5 million via V4EaP.



Development of expenditure per sub-programme 2008-2014.

## Findings

**Relevance** – Projects addressed relevant problems in the countries in various ways, including strengthening independent media, the judiciary, parliament, civil society organisations and civic spirit in general. All sub-programmes were structured in a way that enabled them to adapt to local needs, warranting local ownership.

What set Matra apart from most programmes carried out by other countries and international organisations was its accessibility for relatively small and new CSOs and its flexibility in adapting to new developments. The programme could thus contribute to the development of a civil society in which citizens take responsibility for their community and engage in an open dialogue with their government.

The country-specific contexts in which the programme was implemented differed strongly. Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine (that have all signed an association agreement with the EU) sought closer association and integration with the EU and implemented several political reforms. In the other countries, by contrast, little progress has been made. The social and political climate in Azerbaijan and Belarus in particular has become increasingly repressive. The ministry's Matra guidelines for the embassies were not always sufficiently tailored to their local contexts, so it was good that embassies were allowed to interpret the programme's guidelines broadly and apply them flexibly.

**Effectiveness** – Most MPP and delegated projects attained their individual goals and, as such, can be considered effective. However, the overall contribution of the projects to the objectives of strengthening democracy, the rule of law or capacity of local government and civil society cannot be established due to the limited size of the programme and the wide variety of themes that were addressed, in a demand-driven way. Progress in the EaP countries in these areas was mixed. Progress at macro level could not be attributed specifically to the Matra programme, due to the many other factors at play in this complex environment.

The four sub-programmes contributed to the Netherlands' bilateral relations with the EaP countries in different ways and with varying success. The MPP reinforced ties between CSOs in the Netherlands and in the Matra countries. The delegated projects contributed to the local networks and enhanced the embassies' information position. The MPPP strengthened the ties between Dutch political parties and their sister parties in the Matra countries. The Dutch co-funding of the V4EaP increased goodwill among the V4 countries, but had little impact in the EaP countries. Generally speaking, there was not a great sense of urgency with regard to this objective.

**Management** – The ownership and central coordination of the programme by the ministry decreased during the period covered by the evaluation. This was mostly due to changes within the programme and reorganisations and reduced staff capacity at the department responsible. The management of the Matra Political Parties Programme and the contribution to the Visegrad Fund in particular were not focused clearly enough on achieving results.

Delegating more responsibility and funding to the embassies from 2010 onwards worked out positively for the relevance and flexibility of the Matra programme. Management by the embassies was labour-intensive because of the small scale of the projects, the flexibility provided and the strong involvement of the embassies with the target groups. At the same time, these were precisely the strengths of the programme.

The different components of the Matra programme were implemented in isolation from each other. There was little communication between the implementing organisations. Especially the embassies would have benefitted from being better informed about the MPPP and the V4EaP.

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## Lessons learned

- The Netherlands and the EU have a clear interest in seeing the European neighbourhood develop, which demands a long-term effort with a clear focus on results and a vision on the added value of a relatively small Dutch support programme. This can be achieved by developing a results framework explaining how the programme intends to contribute to social change. The results framework must take account of the different country contexts and should at the same time allow for sufficient flexibility for country-specific implementation.
- This last point means that the programme will have a different focus in countries with and countries without an association agreement with the EU. At the same time, hard divisions within the programme should be avoided, for example by facilitating cross-border projects.
- Implementing organisations need clarity on the expected contribution of promoting bilateral relations between the Netherlands and the Matra countries in implementing the programme.
- In the interests of keeping a keen eye on the desired results, Matra's overarching management structure at the ministry should be clarified and strengthened. More intensive communication is also required between the ministry, the embassies, political parties and the Visegrad Fund.
- The IOB evaluation report also sets out lessons learned for each of the sub-programmes.

## About the study

The evaluation comprised a desk study of academic literature, policy documents and project files, as well as interviews with several policy officers, project implementers, target groups and independent experts. IOB also conducted field country studies in Belarus, Georgia and Moldova.

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