

Executive Summary

Objectives

The objective of the mid-term review evaluation is to provide an external assessment of the Instrument for Nuclear Safety Cooperation over the period 2014-2017, contributing to lesson-learning and accountability; the focus of the evaluation is on the Instrument, and on whether it is fit for purpose and still a valid basis for the Commission's undertaking of its activities in a changing context.

Context

The evaluation is part of a broader effort of assessment of the EU's nine External Financing Instruments (EFIs), with a view to inform i) the Mid-Term Review Report of the nine EFIs, ii) the definition of the Multiannual Financial Framework for the next generation of Instruments, and iii) the final evaluation of the EFIs 2014-2020. All evaluations employ a common set of six Evaluation Questions, based on the DAC (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Assistance Committee) evaluation criteria.

The support to nuclear safety in third countries by the EC started in 1991 under TACISⁱ in response to increased awareness of transboundary effects of the Chernobyl accident (1986) and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The new independent states had an urgent need for assistance for safe operation, regulation and remediation of legacy waste. International cooperation (IAEA, G7/8, EBRD) was at the basis of the EC cooperation which – after addressing highly urgent needs – became more centred around assistance to regulators, safe management of radioactive waste and safeguards while the geographic scope since 2007 was enlarged to a world-wide dimension with focus on countries near the EU.

Key challenges and methodology

The analysis mostly concerns the Instrument regulations, mechanisms and processes while attention to project implementation and results supports the analysis of efficiency and effectiveness. Evaluation challenges included the early stage of implementation of INSC-II, with few results yet on the ground and only limited availability of external assessments and monitoring data.

Data collection tools included document review, interviews with a broad range of Instrument stakeholders (in Brussels and Ukraine) and a comparative analysis of documents at strategy, programming and project levels, including Action Documents and Result Oriented Monitoring (ROM) reports. A detailed case study was developed for Ukraine, to which over 40% of the INSC budget has been allocated. A survey questionnaire was also designed and addressed to relevant INSC stakeholders. Data have been triangulated through close team coordination and the use of an evaluation matrix.

Main findings

The findings on the six Evaluation Questions (EQs) are summarized as follows.

EQ 1 on relevance. INSC-II specific objectives are well aligned on the EU policies and priorities and are relevant to partners' needs and priorities. The pursued promotion of high-level regulations, standards and practices are in-line with the Europe 2020 strategy whereas the environmental remediation (of radioactive waste legacy sites), building strong regulators and life-long learning are at the core of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The main objectives of the INSC-II are based on the promotion and transfer of the Union's nuclear safety approaches, rules, standards and practices. The INSC's legal basis, the Euratom Treaty, substantiates this cooperation with nuclear safeguards expertise and a set of three Directives on radiation protection, nuclear safety, and management of radioactive waste and spent fuel. High standards in Member States underpin the regulatory basis.

The INSC promotes international coordination with Conventions on nuclear safety and radioactive waste management, and respect for the NPT (Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons). The Commission has had long-standing cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

Compliant with the INSC-II Regulation, partners' policies and needs are accounted for through consultations, road maps, strategies and dedicated structures. The conditionality under which partner countries ratify these provisions allow for a periodic peer review of relevant national systems. The reports of the peer reviews also provide an external view of the state of the play and identified needs in nuclear safety. Proper oversight of evolving international challenges is provided through meetings with IAEA, EBRD and the G7/8-Nuclear Safety and Security Group. The flexibility of the instrument is adequate for adjusting to evolving challenges (for example through mid-term strategy revisions and adjustments to MIP).

EQ 2 on effectiveness. Since 2007, the Instrument has been consistently delivering outputs contributing to its specific nuclear safety objectives. The INSC has also been contributing to EU cross-cutting issues, particularly the goals of a better environment and sector governance, and to a minor extent also to ownership and gender equality.

The analysis also reveals that the Instrument does not support measurability of outcomes and lacks a comprehensive monitoring system for following its achievements at outcome and impact level. Strategy and programming documents are in need of increased detail. Baselines have not been developed systematically at national and regional levels and programming documents do not define measurable targets for expected changes.

The instrument processes and documents are well-focused on activities and delivery of outputs, but overall "results orientation" needs to be developed and better documented with constant attention to management processes for the achievement of expected measurable changes. Over the evaluation period the Instrument made very limited use of external evaluations constraining lesson learning and accountability.

EQ 3 on efficiency. INSC-II is a well-performing Instrument with mechanisms and resources appropriate to support the project pipeline and the delivery of outputs. A 2014 workload assessment, however, showed how human resource limitations were affecting the time dedicated to supporting quality processes. An important factor constraining project performance is the limited absorption capacity of Partner Countries. Support arrangements provide adequate capacities comprising technical expert support (JRC) and dedicated support for the beneficiaries and end-users in Ukraine. Centralized management of the INSC-II is a justified arrangement to ensure that qualified assistance is provided on the basis of high-level nuclear expertise. Centralized management in the same unit also supports close coordination of the INSC with the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP dealing with nuclear security).

INSC-II responds satisfactorily to CIR requirements and cross-cutting issues. In particular, the Instrument contributed to a better environment and good sector governance. The Instrument is also well aligned for flexibility, speed of delivery and partially in promoting ownership. However, policy markers in the Action Documents can be improved.

EQ 4 on added value. The Instrument fosters unique added value to engagement in nuclear safety cooperation with third countries, well beyond the capacities of Member States and other donors, *viz.*:

- the institutional framework allows the Commission to act at a global level on nuclear safety cooperation with consultations with the G7/8, and features specialized know-how and expertise, high nuclear safety standards and exclusive EU powers to address nuclear safeguards;
- a relatively substantial financial provision and continuity for nuclear safety cooperation with a track record of over a quarter of a century.

The Instrument allows the EU to assume a world leading role in nuclear safety and permits engagement in policy level dialogue with Partner Countries and, in specific cases, the triggering of political dialogue in the wake of nuclear safety negotiations.

EQ 5 on coherence, consistency, complementarities and synergies. Internal coherence and complementarity of actions is ensured through the adopted mechanisms and management processes, including the committee reviews such as those by the Quality Support Group, Inter-Services Consultation, and INSC Committee, and consultations with the Working Group 1ⁱⁱ of the European Nuclear Safety Regulator Group (ENSREG).

The INSC is set up as a specific instrument with limited scope for interaction with other instruments (e.g. IPA II, ENI and DCI), owing to its specialized thematic focus on nuclear safety. The instrument established synergies with other instruments, particularly related to the environment and security and there is scope for further strengthening and documenting these interactions.

EQ 6 on leverage. The INSC supports leveraging of both political engagement and financial resources for the nuclear safety sector. The EU plays a leading role in following up challenges and initiatives identified in the G7/8 Nuclear Safety and Security Group.

The Instrument can provide swift reactions through the promotion of a concerted political and policy effort and giving the EC the opportunity to lead civil cooperation on nuclear safety, as demonstrated by INSC-I and INSC-II interventions. In specific cases the instrument has proved that it works as a door-opener to the EU for political engagement. The policy dialogue is supported by sound coordination between DEVCO, DG ENER, JRC and EEAS.

The Instrument also contributes to the leveraging of significant financial resources for nuclear safety cooperation from donors as well as from partner countries.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions: The findings of the six Evaluation Questions led to the development of four main Conclusions:

C.1 The Instrument is fit for purpose and is well aligned with nuclear safety priorities and EU cross-cutting issues (*conclusion based on all EQs*).

C.2 Instrument processes, including strategy, programming and project design are well coordinated within the Commission and Member States. However, the different phases of the INSC project cycle need strengthening with increased attention to results orientation and measurability (*conclusion based on EQ 2*).

C.3 The INSC has been consistently delivering outputs enhancing the nuclear safety culture, the regulatory framework, the safe management of radioactive waste and safeguards measures (*conclusion based on EQ 2 and Case Study*).

C.4 INSC-II programming and implementation is closely coordinated with relevant Commission DGs, Member States and the ENSREG Working Group 1, while the INSC promotes international cooperation, all of which contributes to supporting value added and sector leadership, with scope for strengthened interactions and complementarities (*conclusion based on EQs 4-5*).

Recommendations: the foregoing Conclusions support the following set of Recommendations:

R.1 EU Cooperation on nuclear safety, radiation protection and safeguards should be continued under the Instrument for Nuclear Safety Cooperation and possibly reinforced to meet priority needs, maintaining its current features of centralized management, highly technical content, transfer of know-how and international outreach (*recommendation linked to conclusion C1*).

R.2 The Instrument should develop an approach in which criteria for the selection process as well as results appraisal need to be better documented, shifting away from the current focus on activities and outputs towards more results-focused and measurable processes. Capacities in management-by-results should be strengthened at all levels. Strategy and programming documents should be more specific. A comprehensive monitoring system should be developed. ROM review missions need to be regularly applied to representative project samples to strengthen accountability and results-orientation. Evaluations should be used as a standard lesson-learning and accountability tool. An impact evaluation should be carried out. The Instrument's visibility and communications performance should also be increased (*recommendation linked to conclusion C2*).

R.3 To reinforce result delivery the Instrument should continue to address evolving challenges and new issues, including with a more comprehensive approach to safeguards, preventing creation of new legacy waste sites and address long term operation of nuclear power plants follow-up and visibility of cross-cutting issues should be strengthened (*recommendation linked to conclusion C3*).

R. 4 Political and policy dialogue should be reinforced including through strategies, plans, results frameworks, close monitoring and external assessments. ENSREG working group 1 should have an important role in the Programming as well as for the appraisal of the results delivered. Support services should assist in the process of result orientation, improving the instrument measurability and strengthening strategies and quality of programming and action documents. Complementarities with other instruments should be reinforced, with special attention to reinforcing safety and security linkages. In general, INSC should "open up", working less in isolation and increasing relevant interactions with Delegations and other EU players. Finally, human resources should be adjusted to meet the challenges of all these recommendations (*recommendation linked to all conclusion*).

ⁱ Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States

ⁱⁱ Working Group 1 (WGNS) - Improving Nuclear Safety arrangements.