



## Misconduct in the evaluation process and the audit authority's findings



Public Procurement Principle: **Access, Transparency**



Procurement Stage: **Pre-tendering**



Audience: **Procuring entity**

### Description

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In 2017, Slovak media brought attention to structural irregularities in the evaluation process of research projects applying to be (partially) financed by EU funds. These were brought to light by an incident where a project evaluator demanded a 20% bribe in order to grant a company the required evaluation points which would qualify it for a EUR 7 million EU contribution to its long-term research project.\*

In response, the audit authority identified critical concerns and recommendations in its audit reports of the implementation of calls in the programming period 2014-2020 II. In particular, it has found that the long-listing of evaluators is not based on a transparent selection process and the suitability of these is not assessed objectively. The database of these evaluators was under the auspices of the managing authority, back then the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport (MoESRS), until 11 November 2016, when it was transferred to the Research Agency.

More specifically, the manual for evaluation leaves too much room for subjective assessment. In the call OPVal-VA / DP / 2016 / 1.2.1-02 for instance, half the questions and 31 points out of a total of 45 could be awarded based on subjective criteria. Further, very limited explanations regarding the scaling of the points fostered trust on the subjective understanding of the evaluator.

This in turn exacerbates the problem that the two evaluators per project are not evaluating on a uniform basis. In addition, many of the evaluators did not fulfil the eligibility criteria. As such, they:

- did not meet the condition of at least three years of experience in research and development and/or industrial innovation
- did not possess professional experience in the relevant areas of the specific objectives of the Operational Programme Research and Innovation (OP R&I)
- evaluated areas of specialisation in scientific areas where evaluators would be available, even though these areas were not relevant to the application
- did not demonstrate knowledge of the priority axis, specific objectives and activities of the OP R&I within the audited calls.

Pursuant to these findings, the audit authority has recommended improving the manuals and ensuring the experience and skills of evaluators so as to ensure more objective assessments and better informed and uniform evaluation as well as to enhance impartiality and transparency.

\*<https://e.dennikn.sk/838618/podozrenie-z-korupcie-zvlastne-firmy-a-sns-v-pozadi-o-com-je-skandal-s-eurofondmi-na-vedu>.

Sources: OECD (2021) "Promoting research and innovation in the Slovak Republic through an effective use of European funds" <https://doi.org/10.1787/f0e9d786-en>

