



CURRENT BENCHMARKS ON THE NATIONAL RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLAN, AN INSTRUMENT THAT PROMOTES FINANCING FOR RESULTS – DIRECT FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR THE MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEFENCE

Carmen-Gabriela NIȚU (CHITAFES), PhD Candidate*

This article will discuss in detail the role of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NPRR), a topic that deserves attention, because it is a budget support for reform, a new mechanism that has been thought on a totally different logic, correlated with the approach used for the management of cohesion funds and will also highlight the fact that the Ministry of National Defence was introduced among the institutions involved in updating this plan. At the level of the Romanian state, "the Ministry of European Investments and Projects was mandated to coordinate and be responsible for the process of elaboration and negotiation of NPRR with the European Commission". The Ministry of National Defence has the quality of institution involved in the following fields of intervention: Transport, Health, Education, Research, innovation, digitalization as well as Resilience in crisis situations. Through the Recovery and Resilience Mechanism (RRF), the European Union (EU) provides funded Member States for the implementation of systemic and structural reforms and investigations, harmonized with EU priorities and policies.

Keywords: National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR); Recovery and Resilience Mechanism (MRR); investments; phasing.

This article aims at outlining the role and importance of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NPRR), this new tool that the European Commission provides to the Member States, a document being created and implemented based on a completely different logic than the structural and investments European funds. Through the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), the European Union (EU) the member states are given budgetary support to implement systemic and structural reforms and investments, harmonized with the EU priorities and policies, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, for the correction of the economic perspectives in the EU in the coming years.

The volatile and unpredictable results, on a long and medium terms, will be reflected in all the economic sectors. No economy can develop, transform, modernize without financial support. The *investments* are a true benchmark of contemporary economic development.

This is why, in order to define the reforms, so essential for our country, the Ministry of Investments and European Projects (MIEP) closely cooperates with the specialized ministries and central public authorities, named in the Memorandum: "Mechanism for the elaboration of the Romanian Government position as concerns the NPRR" approved during the Government meeting on January 20, 2021.

In this context, MIEP started all the formalities for the elaboration of the NPRR in October-November 2020, when a first version of the document was issued, according to the initial form of the Regulation Proposal no. 480/2020. This was released on November 26, 2020 and published for consultation, thus the first technical discussions with the European Commission were held in November-December 2020. The initial version of the NPRR was structured based on three investment pillars, which included the relevant reforms and, at present, with the update of the NPRR, the aim is to comply with the new provisions of the Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council for the establishment of the RRF, i.e. matching the intervention areas in the NPRR with the six pillars defined in the RRF Regulation, which are: Pillar 1

* "Carol I" National Defence University
e-mail: gabrielachitafes@gmail.com

"Transition to a green economy"; Pillar 2 "Digital transformation"; Pillar 3 "Intelligent, sustainable and inclusive economic growth"; Pillar 4 "Social and territorial cohesion"; Pillar 5 "Institutional health and resilience"; Pillar 6 "Children, youth, education and competence".

It is worth knowing that MIEP, as coordinator and responsible for the elaboration and negotiation of the NPRR with the European Commission, has started to update NPRR, a Technical Commission being established for this purpose, as to contribute to the NPRR. Its members are representatives of the specialized ministries competent for the target sectors. Moreover, in order to negotiate with the European Commission, MIEP suggested representatives of the *Presidential Administration, of the coordinating deputy prime-minister, of the General Secretariat of the Government, of the Ministry of Finance, of the Department for Sustainable Development of the Government*¹ should be involved and attend the meetings, together with representatives of the specialized ministries, covering activities and projects under the NPRR, in order to ensure efficient implementation.

The period for the completion of the implementation of all the set objectives cannot exceed August 31, 2026; there is no possibility for phasing and no projects started before February 1, 2020 can be financed, but the expenses incurred after February 1, 2020 can be settled.

Attempting to understand the term phasing, we can say that it consists of the manner to organize the financing of a project during two programming periods, for the purpose of limiting risk of uncompleted projects (which would thus become non-eligible) and to increase absorption in the first phase². In other words, according to Article 40 letter (d) in the Regulation (EC) no. 1083/2006, "the member state or the managing authority shall provide the Commission with the following information on major projects: a timetable for implementing the project and, where the implementation period for the operation concerned is expected to be longer than the programming period, the phases for which Community co-financing is requested during the 2007 to 2013 programming period"³, the phasing of projects reduces the risk of de-commitment if the projects are not completed until the end of the period.

As there is no possibility of *phasing*, the projects must be mature and feasible and have a

significant impact on the economic development of Romania.

The implementation of the measures established by MIEP, i.e. the elaboration of a working plan and of a timetable of consultations both with the specialized ministries and with the representatives of the private sector, of the civil society, with the unions and with the other dialogue partners, has led to the fast mobilization of all the entities involved in the update of the NPRR.

An important aspect which should not be neglected is that, until January 20, 2021, the technical and coordinating teams in charge with the elaboration of the components at the level of each specialized ministry were appointed.

In this respect, between 01-05.02.2021 there were public consultations with the stakeholders in each area, as follows:

- 01.02.2021 *Transport and Environment, climate change, energy, energy efficiency and green transition;*
- 02.02.2021 *Urban development, cultural heritage and improvement of buildings;*
- 03.02.2021 *Health and Education;*
- 04.02.2021 *Business environment, entrepreneurial ecosystems and Research, innovation, digitalization;*
- 05.02.2021 *Agriculture and rural development and Crisis resilience.*

The second round of public consultations with the above-mentioned institutions is scheduled for the week 15-19.02.2021. During this round of consultations, MIEP, together with the specialized ministries, will:

- establish methods and means to implement the reform and identify the investments in connection with the objectives of each component;
- establish the interim objectives, financial targets, as well as the costs related to the reforms and investments.

At the same time, in February, the technical teams per areas of interventions will convene to correctly define the reforms in the sense of the RRM.

As far as public consultations are concerned, including those with the social and economic partners, we can mention that between 08-12.02.2021 there were daily public debates with the partners in the business environment, NGOs and all the stakeholders for the update of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, i.e.:



- 08.02.2021 – Youth and Rural Development and FNGAL (National Federation of Local Action Groups);

- 09.02.2021 – Association of Municipalities, Business Community and Declic;

- 10.02.2021 – Association of County Councils and Civil Society Development;

- 11.02.2021 – NGOs poverty and Association of Communes;

- 12.02.2021 – NGOs environment and Unions and Employers⁴.

At the same time, the deadline for the update of the NPRR, as a final version, is end of February 2021. This leads us to the idea that the correlation of the NPRR projects with the specific targets in the country recommendations has to be taken into consideration⁵. The reforms and investments undertaken through the NPRR are based on analyses, studies, strategies of the institutions involved in this approach. The underlying documents are the Country Reports of the European Commission for the years 2019-2020.

After the completion of the steps presented above there will be informal discussions with the staff of the European Commission (SG RECOVER) between 08-31.03.2021, in order to negotiate the updated version of the NPRR.

Promoting the importance of the involvement of Ministry of National Defence is updating the NPRR

I have always wondered, as an internal public auditor/counsellor at the Ministry of Investments and European Projects, as well as a Ph.D. student in military sciences, how we can improve the national military capabilities and how we can succeed in identifying practical solutions to access and use European funds at the level of the Ministry of National Defence, as an extra-budgetary resource in modernizing the Romanian army.

This stage of our scientific research has led to reaching one of the essential objectives, i.e. to identify and provide elements useful to the Romanian society, by the Ministry of National Defence accessing European funds, in order to reach the strategic security objectives and to achieve national defence success.

Thus, the contribution of the Ministry of National Defence to the update of the NPRR is, in our opinion, an important step, through the active

and responsible involvement and participation of the appointed technical teams, in order to present the working modalities and to complete the elaboration process. The representatives of the Ministry of National Defence have attended the meetings of the sectors: Transport, Health, Education, Research, Innovation, Digitalization, as well as Crisis Resilience.

The common mission, together with the Ministry of National Defence, is the identification of those projects and investments, new or in progress (since February 2020), in connection with the objectives of each component and with the related reforms.

At the same time, the Ministry of National Defence has to elaborate a list of investments (projects) deemed eligible, adequate, relevant, feasible and mature from the point of view of the RRM regulation. In order to support the specialized ministries, including the Ministry of National Defence, as well as the institutions, organizations and individuals interested in the update of the NPRR, MIEP also proposes a Reforms and Investments Sheet, which a tool helping formulate and submit proposals for the update of the NPRR in a "standardized and simplified form"⁶.

Besides that, in order to timely complete the list of investments and reforms for each sector, the Ministry of National Defence had to appoint a coordinator at political level, as well as a representative at technical level, in charge with maintaining a permanent dialogue with MIEP⁷.

The Ministry of National Defence, as an institution involved in elaborating and updating the NPRR, supports the specialized ministries, appointed as institutions responsible for certain intervention areas, in order to submit an adequate in-depth reforms program in certain areas essential for the EU member states, aiming at approaching the structural deficiencies of the economies and at ensuring the strengthening of their resilience to future challenges. The proposals submitted, which are to be included in the NPRR, shall address reforms in the relevant sector. These reforms are to be followed-up through "milestones", which incorporate "targets" and interim objectives or landmarks, as these are defined in the regulation.

Another conditionality to be taken into consideration refers to the maturity of the projects proposed for funding under the plan by the

Areas of intervention and institutions responsible

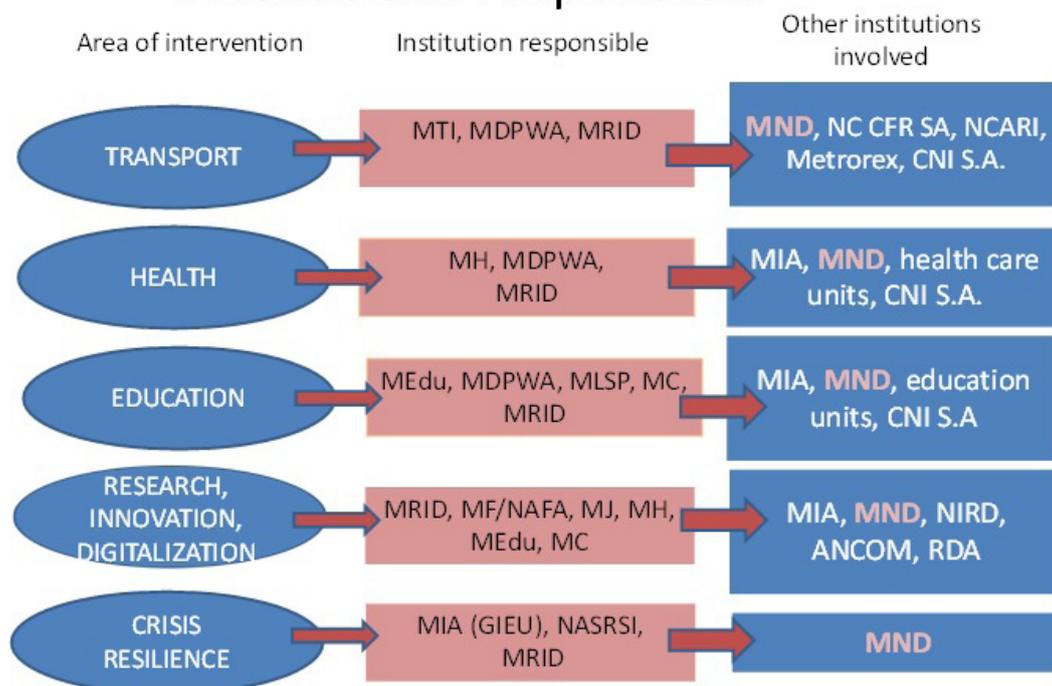


Figure 1 Main area of intervention and responsible entities

Source: Adaptation of the Memorandum: *Mechanisms for the elaboration of the Romanian Government position as concerns the NPRR*, 2021, pp. 3-4.

Ministry of National Defence, a very important element in this respect being that the projects must be completed by August 31, 2026.

As concerns the complementarity and orientation of the NPRR, the suggestion of the European Commission to the Romanian authorities has been to search other funding sources as well, NPRR being practically an alternative for the reforms that cannot be funded from other sources, such as structural funds, programmes managed directly by the European Commission.

Then, the interim objectives, the financial targets, as well as the costs of the reforms and investments are to be set. The interim objectives and the targets must refer to a timeline between 2021 and 2026, as there will be two payment application each year, for which progress must be reported in connection with the interim objectives and with the targets. If the interim objectives and the targets are not met, the costs of the investment are to be paid from the state budget.

NPRR must present a set of in-depth reforms of certain intervention areas essential for the EU

member states, aiming at addressing the structural deficiencies of the economies and to ensure the strengthening of their resilience to future challenges.

For a unitary approach, the sectoral negotiations will be coordinated by MIEP, and the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of External Affairs will facilitate the organization of informal discussion with the staff of the European Commission.

This is why at present Romania is in a position favourable to strengthening the national defence capabilities and we are, at the same time, witnesses to the configuration of partnerships between the Ministry of National Defence and the following specialized ministries in charge, through a common effort, based on the Memorandum "Mechanisms for the elaboration of the Romanian Government position as concerns the NPRR": Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, area of intervention Transport; Ministry of Health, area of intervention Health; Ministry of Education, area of intervention Education; Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, area of intervention Research,



Innovation, Digitalization; Ministry of Internal Affairs, area of intervention Crisis Resilience.

The deadline set for Romania to officially submit the NPRR to the European Commission is April 30, 2021. According to the latest information from the European Commission, the regulation is estimated to be approved in February 2021, and the deadline for the submission of the plan can be deferred. Under NPRR, the investments and reforms must be presented as a coherent package, starting from the Specific Country Recommendations (SCT) 2019-2020. At the same time, it has to be taken into consideration that the investments and reforms covered by the plan must contribute as high as 37% to the climate change objective and as high as 20% to the digitalization objective. Through the GEO no. 155/2020 concerning certain measures for the elaboration of the NPRR required for Romania to access reimbursable and non-reimbursable funds under the RRM, MIEP was appointed coordinator and responsible for the process of elaborating and negotiating the NPRR with the European Commission⁸.

We fully agree that, in order to use the RRM financing instrument, each member state of the EU has to elaborate its own NPRR to decide the investments priority areas. This is where our country is at this moment. Given the very short period of time Romania has, we must focus and pay utmost attention to this priority dossier, proving commitment and determination in updating the NPRR, as well as cooperation, transparency and quick solutions.

In this context, the Ministry of National Defence, as part of the public administration, through its specialized structures and all the component entities, must be permanently prepared to face the current and future transformations and challenges. At the end, the Ministry of National Defence will insert the foreseen reforms and investments agenda in the NPRR, in line with the EU policy objectives, taking into consideration the green and digital transitions. In order to preserve the health and well-being of citizens in Europe and throughout the world, fast and sustained actions are required from all actors across the society. At the same time, we can notice that NPRR contains measures aiming at addressing the deficiencies of the economies in the member states and the stimulation of the growth potential of the economy

in the member state concerned, facilitating the creation of jobs and mitigating the negative effects of the crisis, promoting at the same time gender equality and green transition⁹.

The complex character of the Recovery and Resilience Mechanism

The European Union has decided to establish a temporary financial instrument – #NextGenerationEU, amounting to 750 billion euro, separated from the long-term budget of the EU, the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), for the period 2021 -2027. Its main purpose is to provide support to the member states to face the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis and its economic consequences. RRF is the main pillar of #NextGenerationEU, with an allocated total budget of 672.5 billion euro¹⁰.

The estimated budget allocated to Romania amounts to about 30.5 billion Euro under this RRF financing instrument, of which 13.8 billion Euro are structured as grants and 16.7 billion Euro as loans. The rule set under the Regulation Proposal (still being negotiated at European level) is for 70% of the grants to be committed until the end of 2022, the deadline for accessing the remaining 30% of the grants being December 31, 2023. Besides, the payments for the projects to be included in the national recovery and resilience plans must be made before December 2026¹¹.

Therefore, RRF is a mechanism proposed by the European Commission on May 28, 2020, in order to support public investments and reforms in the member states through grants and loans, helping them overcome the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the difficulties of the flagship and digital transition, by the Regulation Proposal of the European Parliament and of the Council to establish the RRF no. 408/2020¹². The proposed recovery and resilience facility (the "facility") will provide financial support on a large scale for the public investments and reforms strengthening the resilience of the member states economies and better preparing them for the future. The facility will help the member states address the economic and social challenges they are facing even more acutely given the crisis in various sectors, such as social issues, employment, competences, education, research and innovation, health issues, as well as aspects

related to the business environment, including the public administration and the financial sector¹³.

RRF is also an instrument promoting funding against results, i.e. direct financial support to achieve the results proposed and to implement the reforms and public investments among the Member States, in response to the challenges identified in the European Semester¹⁴.

Therefore, MIEP representatives are responsible for the analysis and harmonization of the proposals submitted by the specialized ministries, based on the recommendations made by the dialogue partners. The mission and common effort of MIEP and of the specialized ministries involved in the process is to identify the challenges mentioned in the CSR, representing both structural problems and acute issues. Then, the reforms are defined. The reforms included in the NPRR has to provide for a balanced coverage of the 6 pillars agreed at European level: green transition; digital transformation; economy and competitiveness; social cohesion; health and institutional resilience; new generation (youth and children). NPRR refers to a coherent package of public investments and reforms proposed based on the Country Specific Recommendations 2019-2020. In the spirit of the RRF, the reforms and investments have to support each other. These reforms and public investment projects have to be implemented.

Under the RRF, *investment* is understood as any expenditure of an activity, project or another action in the scope of the Regulation. Investments have to lead to the achievement of the objectives of the Plan. Under NPRR, a vast range of means can be used to implement the reforms. For example: designing new or updated policies; regulations (law, regulatory acts, procedures) elaborated and implemented; construction and upgrade of infrastructure based on the principle "do no significant harm" (i.e. not to support or carry out activities bringing significant harm to an environment objective, as mentioned, as the case may be, in the Regulation (EU) 2020/852 of the European Parliament and of the Council [15] – EU Regulation on taxonomy. The Commission elaborates technical guidelines for orientation as concerns the practical implementation of the principle "do no significant harm", considering the said regulation¹⁵), procurement of equipment; subsidies; vouchers; grants or grant schemes or securities for loans; actions aiming at strengthening

the administrative capacities and to make the central and local authorities more efficient.

RRF financially supports the investments and reforms with a real and sustainable impact on the economy and society. The measures proposed meet the challenges identified in the context of the European Semester, supporting the green transition and the digital transformation, social and economic resilience and creation of jobs. NPRR has to intervene with reforms and investments in the following sectors: Transport; Environment, climate change, energy, energy efficiency and green transition; Urban development, cultural and natural heritage and tourism; Agriculture and rural development; Health; Education; Business environment; Research, innovation, digitalization; Improvement of buildings; Crisis resilience¹⁶.

Conclusions

Given the very short period of time to submit the NPRR to the European Commission, i.e. end of April 2021, a conjugated effort is required from all specialized ministries covering activities and projects under NPRR, with the involvement of the Presidential Administration, of the Government, of the coordinating deputy prime-minister, of the General Secretariat of the Government and of the Department for Sustainable Development of the Government¹⁷ including the Ministry of National Defence.

At international level, changes occur fast and the process of modernization, development and transformation of the Ministry of National Defence in terms of defence and security of Romania, this requires a set of projects closely correlated with the investments.

Modernization is a permanent process, requiring cooperation among all sectors, i.e. Transport, Health, Education, Research, Innovation, Digitalization, as well as Crisis Resilience, as well as a multidimensional process, influenced both by the internal factors of Romania, such as the national economy, the political decisions, as well as the external factors, such as the international political and military changes.

NOTES:

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2 *** Special Report no. 17, *The actions taken by the Commission and by the Member States in the final years of the programmes during the period 2007-2013 have approached the issue of low absorption, but did not focus sufficiently on results*, European Court of Auditors, 2018, https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR18_17/SR_ABSORPTION_RO.pdf, accessed on 14.02.2021.

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8 <https://sgg.gov.ro/new/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/MEMO-7.pdf>, accessed on 07.02.2021.

9 https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2020-0214_RO.html, Amendment 48, Regulation Proposal, Annex II – point 2 – paragraph 3 – point 2.4 – paragraph 1 – paragraph 1 – line 1, accessed on 07.02.2021.

10 <https://mfe.gov.ro/pnrr/>, accessed on 07.02.2021.

11 *Ibidem*.

12 <https://sgg.gov.ro/new/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/MEMO-7.pdf>, accessed on 07.02.2021.

13 [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/DOC/?uri=CELEX:52020PC0408R\(02\)&from=RO](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/DOC/?uri=CELEX:52020PC0408R(02)&from=RO), accessed on 07.02.2021.

14 *** *Regulation for the establishment of the Recovery and Resilience Facility*, Art. 17, updated version, December 2020.

15 https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2020-0214_RO.html, art.2, accessed on 07.02.2021.

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