

Evaluation Report

Implementation of the EU Quality Policy in Slovakia

1. Introduction

1.1 Objectives

The evaluation is focused on the effectiveness of the implementation of the EU Quality Policy in Slovakia, covering the territory of the whole country. It is a public scheme in charge of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak republic. For its effective implementation at national level it requires active involvement and initial interest from the private sector and civil society organizations. The evaluation period extends over all 17 years of its implementation since its introduction in June 2003, before the accession of Slovakia to the EU (01.05.2004). The evaluation is based on the publicly available data and survey conducted over the period of 1 month (23rd October – 20th November 2020).

The EU Quality policy promotes original and traditional agricultural and food products of high quality at the EU level. It aims at protecting the names of specific products to promote their unique characteristics, linked to their geographical origin, traditional know-how and local culture.

Timing of this national evaluation is highly pertinent since the European Commission launched in May 2020 the EU wide public consultation (open for 18 months) on its promotion policy for agricultural and food products in order to get feedback from citizens and stakeholders on the effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of the current measures, as well as their coherence with EU action in other areas and the added value of this kind of policy being implemented at the EU level.

Therefore, the aim of this evaluation is to assess what is the level of awareness in Slovakia regarding the EU Quality policy implementation and what are the positive and negative experiences with its implementation at the national level. The evaluation period will cover all 17 years of its implementation from its introduction in June 2003. Special attention is given to what needs to be done in order to improve its implementation in Slovakia and to increase the number of the Slovak products holding this prestigious label.

For the sake of transparency and relevance, important for the execution of the evaluation is involvement and feedback from a wide range of relevant stakeholders to be achieved through a short survey and direct communication.

The overall goal is to evaluate the level that this promotion policy contributes to increasing the competitiveness of the Slovak agro-food products at the national, European and global level and to formulate recommendations for possible ways of its improved implementation.

The conclusions and recommendations will be shared with the general public and the relevant national authorities and will feed also into the on-going EU wide consultation on assessment and improvement of the current EU Quality policy and thus findings will contribute to further policy development as well as improvements in its implementation at the EU level.

1.2 Context of the evaluation

This evaluation is being carried out within the Horizon 2020 project titled Future Oriented Collaborative Policy Development for Rural Areas and People (in short PoliRural). It will contribute to its deliverable D 4.5.1 Perceived effectiveness of rural interventions in 12 regions: A PoliRural Evaluation. This deliverable will incorporate results of comprehensive, multi-source, multi-method evaluation of rural interventions in the regions.

The evaluation of the implementation of the EU's Quality Policy in Slovakia is directly connected with the top challenges and priority needs for action in the pilot region of Slovakia. These came out as a result of the needs gathering exercise within PoliRural project. There were 6 main priority needs of the region identified in a complex inclusive process involving many relevant stakeholders (beneficiaries and policy actors) at the regional level. This evaluation is related to the following three of them:

- I. Need to elaborate a long term vision for the development and stability of rural areas and agriculture with the aim to restore the self-sufficiency, including increasing transparency of direct payments for farmers and rural development program projects and special attention and support given to young, family and small farmers.
- II. Need to have sustainable settlements, regions and landscape in the context of climate change, specifically improving access to drinking water, sewerage and clean resources available, sustainable urban development, preventing climate change and protecting terrestrial life.
- III. Need to improve quality of public services, for example create and support tele-working opportunities, improve the mobility possibilities to the main city and the connections between rural and urban areas, increase good medical (primary attention) services and adequate public support for the provision of e-health, e-daycare and/or e-learning services, simplify the rules for direct sales of products from farms and restore local market halls and places.

This evaluation also feeds into the foresight exercise within which the "Vision for more attractive rural areas in Slovakia" is being developed in a robust, transparent and inclusive process. Currently, there have been identified the top main drivers influencing change in rural areas. Some of them are directly connected with the evaluated policy, e.g. food security, sustainability, job opportunities, diversification of rural economy, rural tourism, personal health and civil engagement.

Ultimately, the evaluation is directly connected to supporting the implementation of the vision for the region which is constantly being updated over the duration of the PoliRural project. At this stage the definition of the vision for Slovakia region is as follows:

"To increase the attractiveness of the region, well-being of the existing rural population and attract newcomers, while not affecting the symbiosis between city and rural areas, by supporting sustainable and resilient food systems, rural tourism and increasing active and inclusive civil engagement."

By systematically promoting the traditional Slovak agricultural and food products significant increase of the attractiveness of rural areas and jobs can be achieved and much needed further investments can be attracted. The priority of the current Slovak government to increase the self-sufficiency of national agro-food production can be substantially supported by

improving and increasing the implementation of the EU Quality Policy on national level. Major impact on the thriving of rural areas can be envisaged.

1.3 Structure of the evaluation report

The structure of the evaluation report is following:

Chapter 2 provides a detailed information on background and state of the play of the implementation of the EU Quality policy in Slovakia, including the analysis of legislation. It also contains current status of the policy measure.

Chapter 3 contains the main body of the evaluation report, including comparison of the scheme implementation in various EU member states as well as analysis of several other competing, complementing and differentiating registration schemes of agricultural and food products available in Slovakia with separate and much diverse procedures. Furthermore, this chapter analysis the results of the public survey with the focus on effectiveness, relevance and coherence of the policy measure.

The last Chapter 4 provides the summary conclusions and number of general and specific recommendations are provided.

The Annex 1 contains the detailed list of currently registered Slovak food products with PDO and PGI, including all relevant dates in line with the registration procedure.

2. Background

2.1 Background of the policy measure

The EU Quality Policy is the promotion policy for the EU's agricultural and food products. The objective of the EU's promotion policy for agricultural and food product is to boost competitiveness and consumption of EU products in and outside the EU. Promotion measures contribute to raising consumer awareness of the merits of the EU's agricultural products and production methods, as well as the awareness and recognition of EU quality and organic farming schemes. The EU promotion policy for agri-food products policy has been in place in its existing form since 2014. Main activities include participation in trade fairs in and outside the EU, high-level missions with participation of EU producers, and communication campaigns. The allocated budget has been increasing on an annual basis reaching €200.9 million for 2020.

It was introduced in Slovakia as part of the process of accession to the EU and it was introduced in June 2003, shortly before the entry of Slovakia to the EU in May 2004.

The EU Quality Policy is a philosophy of developing the quality of original, traditional agricultural products and foodstuffs and promoting cultural traditions and the regions in which these products are produced. The system was created in response to the growing counterfeiting of products and the misuse of traditional names, which built on the reputation of traditional regional products.

The term EU Quality Policy means ensuring the protection of agricultural products and foodstuffs and promoting their sale, these foodstuffs must meet certain quality parameters that distinguish them from other similar products by their well-defined requirements for their raw material composition and production process.

As part of the EU's Quality Policy, the European Union accepts, protects, promotes, registers and controls products divided into three categories marked as:

- Protected designation of origin (PDO)
- Protected geographical indication (PGI)
- Traditional specialty guaranteed (TSG).

Geographical indications establish intellectual property rights for specific products, whose qualities are specifically linked to the area of production.

Recognised as intellectual property, geographical indications play an increasingly important role in promoting local production and trade. They are also important for emphasising the traditional production process or products.

The implementation instruments in Slovakia include following three pieces of legislation:

1. Law No. 195 from 20th March 2007 amending and adjusting the Law of the National Council of the Slovak Republic 152/1995 on Foodstuffs as amended
2. Law No. 469/2003 on Designations of Origin and Geographical Indications of Products and on Amendments to Certain Acts
It was amended 3 times: in March 2007, July 2007 and November 2009.
3. Statute of the Commission of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic (herein after referred as “the Ministry”) for the assessment of applications for registration of protected designations (protected designation of origin, protected geographical indication, traditional specialty guaranteed) of agricultural products, foodstuffs, spirits and objections to them No. 2735/2013 – 820.
The last time the Statute was updated was in June 2013.

The **Law No. 152/1995** on Foodstuffs lays down the general legal framework for the EU policy implementation in Slovakia. It sets eligibility and requirements for applying for the protection of a designation of origin or geographical indication through the Industrial Property Office of the Slovak Republic. Eligible are associations of producers or processor of agricultural products or foodstuffs or a natural or legal person who, at the time of filing the application is the only one producing, processing and preparing a product. Before submitting an application, it is necessary to have prepared a specification of agricultural product or foodstuff, which needs to be professionally assessed and approved by the Ministry. The Ministry is responsible for liaising with the European Commission and for coordination of the whole registration process based on Law No. 469/2003.

There is a different, a simpler procedure for application for traditional specialties guaranteed, which goes only through the Ministry. It will publish the application for entry in

the register in its Gazette "Journal of Agriculture". A natural person or legal entity may raise objections to an application within two months from the date of its publication in the Ministry's Gazette. If no objections have been raised to the application shall be entered in a register kept by the Ministry. The Ministry sends the request for further action to the European Commission. If objections have been raised to the application, the Ministry shall assess their admissibility and ensure opposition proceedings. The Ministry shall send the application to the European Commission only after the end of the opposition proceedings. Official control of agricultural products and foodstuffs with a protected designation of origin, protected geographical indication or with the designation of a traditional specialty guaranteed are carried out by the bodies of the State Veterinary and Food Authority.

The **Law No. 469/2003** on Designations of Origin and Geographical Indications of Products regulates the conditions for obtaining the right to protection of a designation of origin of a product or geographical area designation of the product, the conditions for the protection of that right and the procedure for obtaining that right for the territory of the Member States of the European Union.

The **Statute** is an implementation tool established on the basis of the Slovak Law No. 152/1995 Coll. on Foodstuffs and it defines the establishment, status, composition, tasks, rights and obligations of Commission for the assessment of applications for registration of protected designations products, foodstuffs, spirits and objections to them.

The **Commission** is an advisory body to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic responsible for the professional assessment of applications for the registration of protected designations of agricultural products and foodstuffs in order to obtain a protected designation of origin, a protected geographical indication and guaranteed traditional specialties. It is also responsible for consideration of objections to changes to applications for registration of protected agricultural designations products, foodstuffs, spirits and in the detection of deficiencies in control. The Chair, Vice-Chair and seven members of the Commission are appointed by the minister of agriculture and rural development and it includes representatives from the food department of the Ministry, Industrial Property Office of the Slovak Republic, State Veterinary and Food Administration of the Slovak Republic, and Research Institute Food and Public Health Office of the Slovak Republic.

2.2 Current status of the policy measure

The current number of granted indications is as follows:

- 2 PDO – Protected Designation of Origin
- 10 PGI – Protected Geographical Indication (+1 published + 1 applied)

Geographical Indications (GIs) for spirit drinks and aromatised wines are not part of this evaluation.

There is some interest for an easier registration procedure for Traditional speciality guaranteed (TSG) which highlights the traditional aspects such as the way the product is made or its composition, without being linked to a specific geographical area. The name of a product

being registered as a TSG protects it against falsification and misuse. There are 7 Slovak products registered at the moment. Four of them have a shared registration with Czechia.

The list of Slovak food products with PDO and PGI is provided in the Annex 1.

3 Evaluation of the impacts of the policy measure

3.1 Background of the policy measure

Slovakia started with the implementation of the EU Quality Policy together with the new EU Member States much later than the older EU Member States. It is also reflected in the number of food products holding the various registration.

The comparison with several selected EU countries is provided in Tab. 1. It clearly demonstrates the need for increased effort, especially in the area of PDOs, where Slovakia is among the few countries with a very low number of registrations. Much more successful are some other new Members States, such as Croatia with 18 PDOs, Slovenia and Hungary each with 9 PDOs and Poland with 8 PDOs.

Table 1: Food products with PDO, PGI and TSG in selected EU countries

Country	PDO	PGI	TSG
Austria	11	7	3
Bulgaria	1	2	5
Croatia	18	22	-
Cyprus	2	7	-
Czechia	6	25	4
France	105	157	2
Germany	17	90	-
Greece	80	36	1
Hungary	9	22	3
Ireland	4	7	-
Italy	188	147	5
Poland	8	24	10
Romania	1	8	1
Slovakia	2	10	7
Slovenia	9	13	4

Source: eAmbrosia – the EU geographical indications register available at <https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/food-safety-and-quality/certification/quality-labels/geographical-indications-register/>

Overall, the statistics after more than 17 years of implementation are fairly low, since only 19 products are registered in total and only two in the highest category of PDO. There is a significant space for improvement based on the evaluation of the implementation of the current national instruments and policies in place.

In the beginning of the policy implementation there was an interest from group of producers to use this instruments which enables consumers to trust and distinguish quality products and at the same time helping producers to market their products better. In the recent years we can see a stagnation and no product was registered since 2016.

Furthermore, there are several other competing, complementing and differentiating registrations of agricultural and food products available in Slovakia with separate and much diverse procedures:

1. National program of support for agricultural products and food "QUALITY LABEL SK" (in Slovak "Značka kvality SK")
2. Quality from our Regions
3. Traditional regional product

The National Program is run by the Ministry following the example of other EU Member States. The **Food Quality Label with logo SK** aims to draw Slovak consumers' attention to quality domestic food and facilitate also foreign food products. It distinguishes other products mainly by higher quality. It was established in 2004 in order to support the consumption of domestic food production and develop a competitive environment after Slovakia's accession to the EU. The aim of the program is to support the traditional domestic production of food, which has an irreplaceable place on the domestic market, because they are a guarantee of "domestic traditional quality" for the consumer. The consumer is becoming more and more demanding and expects not only sufficient quality and a certain "above standard", balanced biological value, attractive packaging, but also attractive appearance and in some cases reduced energy value, all, of course, at a reasonable price. The SK quality mark is a guarantee of the highest quality of agricultural and food product and informs the consumer that each product with the brand logo has met the requirements set by the principles of assessment and award, that the manufacturer follows the declared technological process and higher quality parameters, which clearly distinguishes these products from similar products on the market.

"Quality from our Regions" is a national educational project of social responsibility focused on supporting the macroeconomic stability in Slovakia and it is run by a civil society organisation called Quality from our Regions. The project serves to support the sale of Slovak products and services. It is a social responsibility project based on consumer education through media campaigns and consumer competitions. It explains the impact that a greater preference of the Slovak over the foreign will have, whether in the area of purchasing food, industrial goods or services on our economy. It also points out how such a change in consumer behaviour will affect the improvement of the quality of life in Slovakia. The project started as a reaction to insufficient and constantly declining interest of Slovak consumers in domestic products and unfavourable development of the agro-food sector in long term. The main objective is to educate the consumer why it is necessary to buy domestic products, how the economy works and how citizens can participate in their shopping behaviour to improve the quality of life of the society in which they live, what impact it has on improving education, health, infrastructure, employment etc.

Traditional regional product label is awarded by Local Action Groups (LAGs) or Public-Private Partnerships operating on the principles of LEADER. The aim of regional labelling is to promote and provide visibility for individual regions, support local producers and service providers, preserve the values, traditions and uniqueness of the regions and support the use of local resources. It also contributes to the development of sustainable tourism. The system of regional labelling of products and services in Slovakia does not yet have an official representation at the national level. It is open to any region that has clearly defined boundaries. There is a local regional coordinator in each region who is responsible for regional labelling

activities and communicates with local producers and service providers. There is an ongoing discussion taking already a long time to design uniform minimum criteria a logo for local products and services to be respected in all regions, while each region can take its own specificities and exceptionality into account in its own regional policies. Another weakness is that there is a lack of continuity due to the changing composition of LAGs.

3.2 Effectiveness of the policy measure

From Table 2 below it is evident that in the beginning of the implementation there was an enthusiasm for the EU Quality Policy which was slowly declining over the years as it is demonstrated by the number of registered products going down to the current very low interest. The last PDO was registered 5 years ago and there are 2 ongoing registration processes.

Furthermore, since 2018 there is no overall progress with registration at all. No further request from associations are being registered. The initial enthusiasm of the policy implementation in the first years eased over the years. This change can be attributed to many different factors, which will be elaborated further in this report.

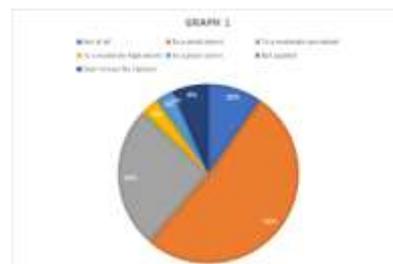
Table 2: Registration years for products as PDOs a PGIs

Year of registration	PDOs / PGIs	Number of registered products
2007	PGI	4
2010	PGI	3
2014	PGI	2
	PDO	1
2015	PDO	1
2016	PGI	1
Ongoing	PGI	2

Source: <https://www.mpsr.sk/politikakvality/index.php?go=6>

According to the results of the survey the implementation of the EU Quality policy in Slovakia did not achieve its goal of protecting the names of Slovak agricultural products and foodstuffs as it is indicated in Graph 1. Majority of respondents thinks that it contributed only to a small extent or moderate low extent and only 10% to a great extent.

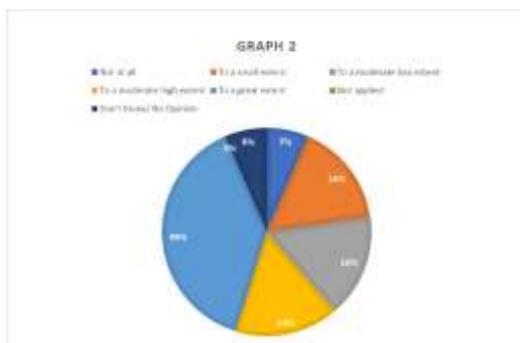
Graph1: To what extent the EU Quality Policy achieves its goals of protecting the names of Slovak foodstuffs



These results demonstrate that there is a very low awareness about the aim of the EU Quality Policy to protect the names of specific products in order to promote their unique characteristics, linked to their geographical origin as well as traditional know-how.

Beside the low awareness about the EU Quality Policy the **key obstacles** hindering the process are availability of different other registrations in Slovakia for foodstuffs as specified in 3.1. and a very long time needed for obtaining the registration. The average span is 2 – 3 years, occasionally even 4. For the national programme it is much shorter and more simple procedure.

Graph 2: Extent of external factors contributing to the achievement of the EU Quality Policy objectives in Slovakia



External factors, such as political, social, economic, environmental and technological are not considered by the relevant stakeholders as main contributors to the achievement of the policy objective as it is indicated in Graph 2.

However, the need for real support benefitting producers with a protected designation over other producers was highlighted. More is expected than just marketing.

Generally, higher support of domestic food producers from the public authorities is highly encouraged. It should move from the position of only control and sanction into exploring the possible ways for more support.

There is an expectation for responsible public authorities to have more interest into this policy implementation in Slovakia and to be more proactive for ensuring its more effective implementation. The National Strategy prepared in broad consultation process with relevant stakeholders could be one of the tools that can kick start the public discussion on this issue and also positively contribute to rising awareness on EU Quality Policy in Slovakia. This strategy can address important issues already identified by stakeholders, such as very strict national legislation for the implementation of the EU legislation, and find many others that need to be addressed. The national legislation should reflect the specific interests and requirements of local entrepreneurs and set very simple and clear rules, avoiding to much complicating their life, but instead find the ways how to make it as simple as possible and less demanding. Local conditions and needs need to be reflected when adapting the European legislation to the Slovak perspective and thus avoid any harm or hardship for domestic producers.

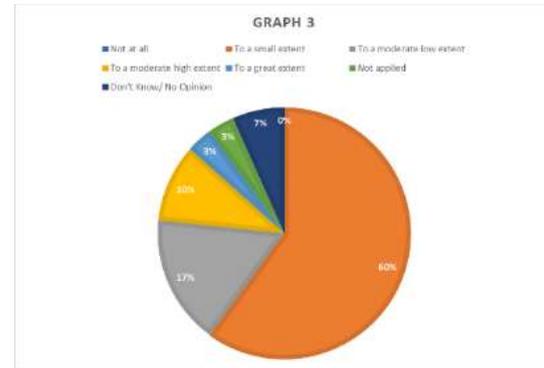
Specific attention is required in the area of imports of lower quality food products to Slovakia without certificates and quality control that are requested from the local producers.

Traditional food products require a specific and targeted support and protection. It should be in the interest of state to protect and safeguard its traditional products, recipes for their production.

3.3 Relevance of the policy measure

The Graph 3 demonstrates a low understanding of EU Quality Policy in Slovakia since majority of respondents states that it does not correspond very much to the needs in Slovakia. Following Graph 4 further supports this with high turnout of respondents not finding this policy relevant for Slovakia.

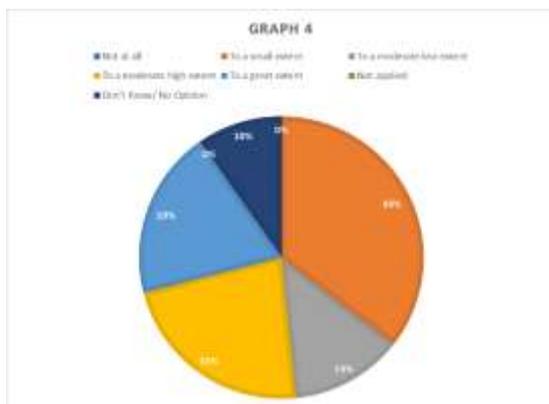
Graph 3: To what extent does the implementation of the EU Quality Policy corresponds to the needs in Slovakia



Furthermore, this fact was also supported by answers found in the open questions of the survey, where respondents stated that the main contribution of the EU Quality Policy is to protect traditional products, support the sale of domestic products and reduce imports of low-quality food from the EU.

However, the respondents almost did not perceive the context that the implementation of the EU Quality Policy can bring for domestic production.

Graph 4: To what extent is the EU Quality Policy relevant for Slovakia



There is a need to explore the ways how to make the EU Quality Policy more relevant for Slovak producers by better understanding what are the main constrains.

The implementation should focus more on regular consultations with producers to find out what are their needs and constrains. An active, inclusive and open network of relevant actors could be one of the solutions.

Furthermore, there is a need with specific work with consumers and general public on highlighting the importance and contribution of traditional products with traditional recipes and their benefits and quality over other products. Change of consumer behaviour in favour of giving preference to traditional Slovak quality products is needed.

When setting the national supporting mechanism for farmers the EU Quality Policy could be considered in order to increase the support for traditional domestic production and improve the position of farmers producing traditional food products. Local production can be stimulated by this.

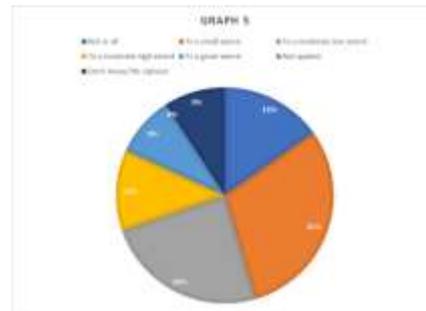
More targeting of young generation can generate benefits, not only for the EU Quality Policy implementation in Slovakia, but it can have multiple positive effects on new entrants coming to live in countryside and to keep the young people already living in countryside there. It could be one of the options for dealing with aging rural populations. More possibilities and funding targeting young people through all different programmes can also contribute to safeguarding traditional agricultural and food production and can bring back life to abandoning rural areas.

Another important target identified it to establish quality management system by creating quality manuals for food quality.

Overall, better targeting on the EU Quality Policy implementation can contribute to the goal of the current government to increase the food self-sufficiency in Slovakia.

As Graph 5 demonstrates the EU Quality Policy contributes significantly to rural development in Slovakia. It also shows low level of knowledge about its contribution.

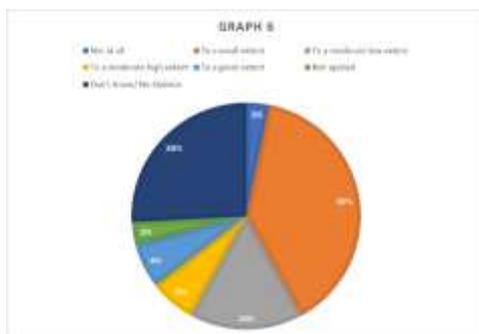
Graph 5: To what extent the EU Quality Policy contributes to rural development in Slovakia



3.4. Coherence of the policy measure

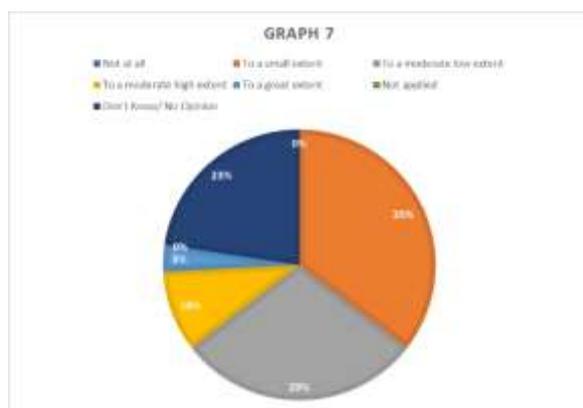
Following graphs 6 – 9 reflect low level of coherence of the EU Quality Policy implementation with other local and national policies in place with similar objectives as well as with other policies and rural programmes.

Graph 6: To what extent is the EU Quality Policy coherent in its objectives and actions

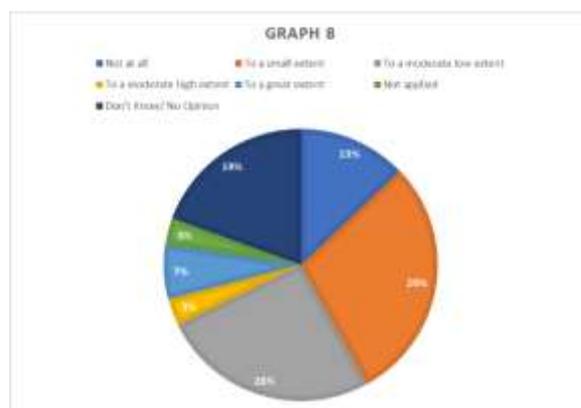


An example of misunderstanding is the respondents' opinions that it is necessary to comply with local conditions and not to take over nationwide or European regulations in Slovakia, which cannot be applied in practice in our country and harm domestic producers. In this context, it is necessary to increase the awareness (not only) of the rural population and producers about the importance of the EU Quality Policy from the point of view of traditional local production.

Graph 7: To what extent is the EU Quality Policy in line with other similar policies in Slovakia

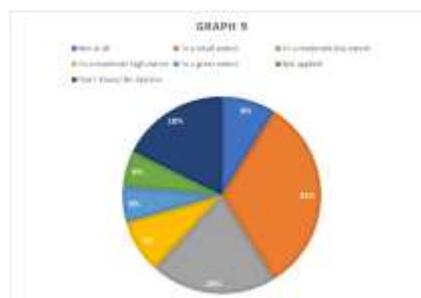


Graph 8: To what extent is the EU Quality Policy part of other rural programmes or policies



In responding to the question whether the EU Quality Policy is in line with similar policies in Slovakia, or whether it is in line with other EU policies (Graph 9), almost 23% of respondents stated that they have no knowledge or knowledge of possible contexts. This can be considered a major shortcoming - if the impact of the EU Quality Policy on the legislative environment for national food quality schemes is not clear, it is not possible to succeed with domestic production to compete with imported products.

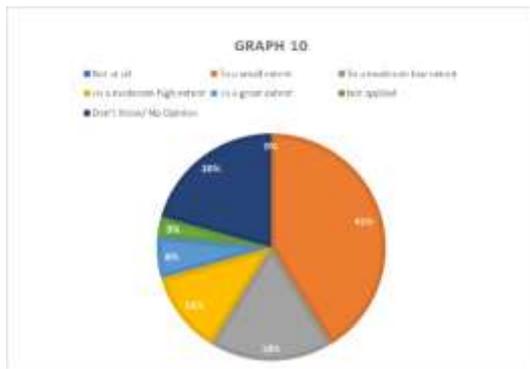
Graph 9: To what extent is the EU Quality policy linked to other local, regional and national programmes and policies



Significant is a very low impact of the policy implementation on the increase of sales of registered agri-food products, which might be one of the main expectations of the producers (graph 10). As a consequence, this might be the main reason why producer organization lost an interest in recent years in this policy. However, it would be appropriate to carry out a survey as to whether there are obstacles in the implementation process, excessive bureaucracy and lack of clarity of available information, or simply the lack of interest of potential producers in the quality registration mark.

It is closely connected to a relatively very low extent of information disseminated about the benefits of the EU Quality policy as showed in Graph 11.

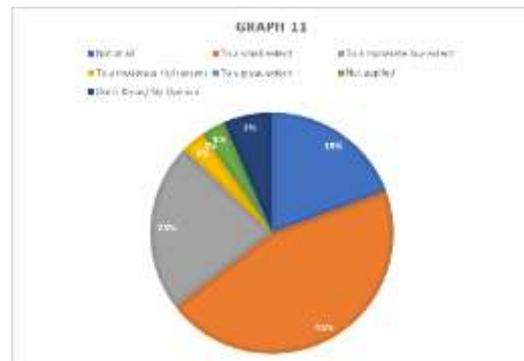
Graph 10: To what extent has the EU Quality Policy supported sales of registered agro-food products



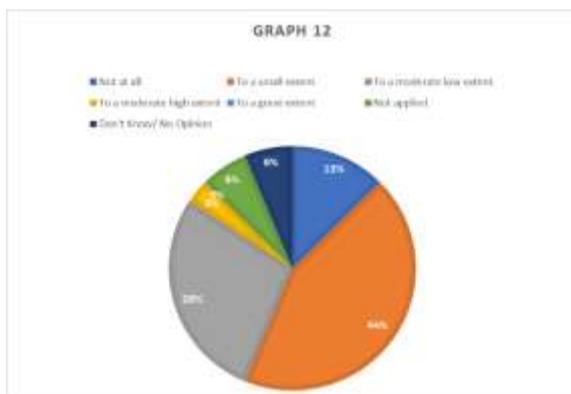
Almost half of the respondents are convinced that the implementation of the EU Quality Policy has little potential to support the sale of registered agri-food products, as evidenced by the lack of information campaign related to the impact of the EU Quality Policy on domestic production, agritourism and rural development in general.

At the same time in the Graph 11, the representation of 45% of respondents with small extent level of the dissemination of information on the implementation of the EU Quality Policy in Slovakia, documents the low level of awareness of relevant interest groups. In this respect, an information campaign focused on examples of good practices, where certified products helped local producers to compete in the competition, would clearly help.

Graph 11: To what extent is the information disseminated about the benefits of the EU Quality Policy in Slovakia

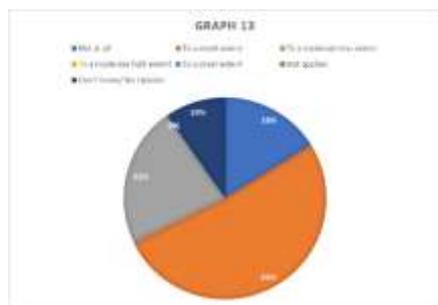


Graph 12: To what extent is the information available on method and process of registration



Graph 12 demonstrates that there is not much information available on method and process of registration of food products within the EU Quality Policy.

Graph 13: To what extent are the registered products promoted



Majority of respondents identified insufficient promotion of the registered products. Some good marketing strategies are lacking here.

4 Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

Overall the implementation of the EU Quality Policy in Slovakia was designed and implemented appropriately and coherently since its introduction in 2003. The national legal framework allowing the implementation of the EU Quality Policy in Slovakia is appropriate and in line with the EU legislation. In this regard, additional **attention needs to be given to other voluntary labels being used on the national level** especially in terms of informing the consumers on differences between them. This would be highly beneficial for improving the EU Quality Policy implementation in Slovakia.

Some positive results have been achieved over the last 17 years, but there is still **a lot of space for improvement** of the EU Quality Policy implementation in Slovakia and increasing its effectiveness. This measure **requires more attention** from the responsible Ministry, relevant associations, retailers and consumers. Therefore, the decision needs to be taken at the national level if **more effort and resources** shall be put into this measure or not, depending on the available capacities of the relevant public authorities and interest of group of producers.

The main issue that came out of the evaluation process is **very poor information** on EU Quality Policy implementation process in Slovakia. At the moment there is just website run by the MofA&RD of SR. Furthermore, there is **not much motivation for producers** to have an interest in the registration process. Therefore, priority should be given to overcoming this.

Recommendations

To break the stagnation in registration over the last few years the **set of 8 main recommendations** came out of the evaluation process. These can significantly contribute to improve implementation of the EU Quality Policy in Slovakia in coming years:

Recommendation No 1

Increased effort in the area of promoting the EU Quality Policy is needed in Slovakia. This requires more proactive attitude of the responsible MofAR of the Slovak republic by kick starting the **drafting process of a National Marketing Strategy** prepared in broad consultation process with relevant stakeholders and actors. This could be one of the tools to start the public discussion on this issue and also positively contribute to rising awareness on EU Quality Policy

in Slovakia. This strategy can address important issues already identified by stakeholders, such as very strict national legislation for the implementation of the EU legislation, and find many others that need to be addressed. The national legislation should reflect the specific interests and requirements of local entrepreneurs and set very simple and clear rules, avoiding to much complicating their life, but instead find the ways how to make it as simple as possible and less demanding. Local conditions and needs need to be reflected when adapting the European legislation to the Slovak perspective and thus avoid any harm or hardship for domestic producers. It should include regular information campaigns on the explaining the EU Quality Policy and difference from other similar policies, organizing regular events focused on the presentation of the aims of the EU Quality Policy and contribution it can have to protecting, safeguarding and promoting the production of local domestic products not only on national, but also on European and global levels. Successful implementation of the marketing strategy requires **allocation of adequate financial resources** to support it. The financial contribution should be continuous and not a single case or option. This could be one of the factors positively influencing the interest and motivation of producers to get involved and start the registration process.

Recommendation No 2

There is a need to support and help producers to market their protected products better. In order to better **promote the products already holding the registration requires involvement of all actors**, at all production levels from farm to table. The useful tool could be common crafting of the **National Plan for promotion** of the products holding the registrations. The registered products should be used also officially by public institutions and authorities as part of national honour and pride. This could **generate more interest from producers and their organizations to apply** for the various registrations.

Recommendation No 3

Protected products require a **specific recognition and work with consumers** to inform them that these are the quality products that they can trust and learn to distinguish them from others. Special promotion campaigns dedicated to PDOs, PGIs and TSGs are necessary to be introduced. They can be prepared and implemented in joint collaboration of the Ministry and associations involved.

Promotion campaigns should include information on the **quality of raw material** and ingredients used for the production of registered foodstuffs to distinguish them from the others and the prices the consumers will have to pay for them, which are usually higher than other similar products. **Positive impact on human health and environment** should be highlighted. Closer the food products are produced to consumer the lower is the impact on the environment, since transportation and handling is limited. Slovak consumers need to be better inform to make the right shopping choices and establish regular shopping habits. The EU Quality Policy crates a legal framework for support and protection of original and traditional food products of quality and at the same time safeguarding traditions and culture of the given region. It can also have a positive effect on stimulating the local and regional agricultural and food production. These products are more attractive and interesting for consumers and provide a higher guarantee of food safety since they are more in depth controlled by authorized public control authorities. This creates an additional value of these agricultural and food products.

Recommendation No 4

Special focus needs to be dedicated to the PDOs since there are only 2 at the moment holding the registration, which is quite low in comparison with neighbouring and other EU countries. Both of them were register some time ago. First one in 2014 and the second one in 2017. PDOs contribute the most to local production since there is a close production cycle in a certain territory.

Recommendation No 5

Establish a communication and regular contact with other EU countries in order to exchange experiences, views and obstacles hindering the implementation of the EU Quality Policy and finding jointly ways how to overcome them.

Recommendation No 6

Establish a regular channel of communication with all relevant stakeholders and actors via a **specific platform or network**, which is open, active and effective.

Recommendation No 7

Explore the possible ways of **reducing the time needed for obtaining the registration** since the current span of 2 – 3 years, sometimes even 4 years, which might significantly contribute to decreasing the attractiveness of the EU Quality Policy for producers and their associations.

Recommendation No 8

Generally, **higher support of domestic food producers** from the public authorities is highly encouraged. It should move from the position of only control and sanction into exploring the possible ways for more support.

Producers and their organisations have greater expectation for support from the national responsible authorities, not only in terms of marketing, but a real support of local production. One of the option could **be to find a way within different national support schemes** how to prioritize and/or favour over others those producers that are dedicated to local production with higher added value such as the registered products within the EU Quality Policy. Positive effects will be also on local employment and economy, thus contributing to thriving of rural areas. Special focus should be given in this regard to young generation in order to make this way of lay attractive for them and thus ensure generation exchange in agriculture and food production sectors and keep the rural areas lively. Significant contribution would be to small and medium sized producers and development of rural tourism and agrotourism.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all the stakeholders who have been surveyed as part of the present study for their willingness to share information with the project team. Special appreciation is expressed to the responsible people of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak republic for their willingness and interest for cooperation.

Annex 1: Profile of policy measure

List of products in the Slovak Republic as a protected designation of origin and a protected geographical indication (PDO, PGI) according to Title II of Regulation (EU) No 182/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council 1151/2012 of 21 November 2012 on quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs

<i>Product name and type of registration</i>	<i>Submitted in Slovakia</i>	<i>Applied to the EC</i>	<i>Publication date in Official Journal</i>	<i>Current situation – Registration day in the register kept by the EC</i>	<i>Name and place of Association</i>
Skalický trdelník PGI	2.8.2005	18.8. 2005	21.4.2007 2007/C88/02	14.12.2007 PGI - 2007/L330/130	Skalický trdelník Skalica
Slovenská bryndza PGI	27.4.2004	22.9.2004	4.10.2007 2007/C323/10	16.7.2008 PGI – 2008/L189/19	Cech bryndziarov Považská Bystrica
Slovenský oštiepok PGI (on the basis of Lisabon Agreement)	22.11.1967	30.3. 2007	19.12.2007 2007/C308/10	25.9.2008 Agreement with Poland.	Slovenský mliekarenský zväz Bratislava
Slovenská parenica PGI	23.6.2005	19.7. 2005	24.10.2007 2007/C249/13	10. júla 2008 PGI - 2008/L183/15	Cech bryndziarov Považská Bystrica
Oravský korbáčik PGI		30.10.2007	13.7.2010 2010/C 188/10	11.3.2011 PGI - 2011/ L 66/19	Združenie zázrivských korbáčikárov Zázrivá
Zázrivský korbáčik PGI		30.10.2007	13.7.2010 2010/C 188/11	11.3.2011 PGI - 2011/ L 66/9	Združenie zázrivských korbáčikárov Zázrivá
Tekovský salámový syr PGI		14.4.2008	24.7.2010 2010/C 202/05	11.3.2011 PGI - 2011/ L 66/11	Levické mliekarne a.s. Levice
Klenovecký syrec PGI	11.11.2010	22.6.2012	15.8.2014	6.1.2015 PGI - 2015/ L 8/2	Cech bryndziarov Považská Bystrica
Zázrivské vojky	28.10.2011	13.8.2012	11.4.2014	29.8.2014 PGI - 2014/ L 271/15	Združenie Zázrivských korbáčikárov

PGI					Zázrivá
„Paprika žitava“/ „Žitavská paprika” PDO	5.1.2012	10.8.2012	11.2.2014	5.2.2014 <i>PDO - 2014/ L 40/12</i>	„Capsicum“- Združenie šľachtiteľov, pestovateľov a spracovateľov koreninovej papriky Močenok
Levický slad PGI	18.02.2013	20.11.2013	28.4.2016	27.4.2016 PGI	OSIVO a.s. Zvolen
Stupavské zelé PDO	14.6.2013	26.10.2015	26.10.2015	26.4.2017 PDO	Mestský potravínový spolok v Stupave Stupava
Liptovské droby PGI	17.2.2017	31.10.2017		Request for registration presented to the EC on 31.10.2017	Občianske združenie Liptovské droby
Hrušovský lepník PGI	04.01.2018	08.06.2018		Request for registration presented to the EC on 08.06.2018.	Občianske združenie Cesta hrušovských obyčají Hrušov

Annex 2: Description of the fieldwork (i.e. sample size, type of stakeholders/beneficiaries targeted, return rate, pilot-specific questions)

The fieldwork focused mainly on survey accompanied by communication and consultation with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic, Director General of the Section for Food Industry and Director of the Food Department. The Ministry is the main national body responsible for the implementation of the EU Quality Policy in Slovakia.

The survey was conducted in Slovak language and required translation of recommended questions prepared by JIIP. Two specific questions related to the EU Quality Policy implementation in Slovakia were added to the end of the questionnaire. In total there were 16 questions, out of which 14 were closed and 2 open. Afterwards, the online survey was created using google docs. The survey was officially launched on 23 October, 2020 during the online event organized by Rural Parliament in Slovakia, one of the Slovak PoliRural partners.

Afterwards, the request to fill in the survey was distributed through communications channels of Slovak pilot team, web pages of the Slovak pilot plus a new dedicated web page to PoliRural project (www.atraktivnyvidiek.sk), social media, mailing lists of partners' organisations, emails of the Slovak pilot panel members. Furthermore, the distribution was increased by e-mail addresses of different organisations and producers either already holding the registration within the EU Quality Policy or with the potential to apply for it. In total this expanded mailing list covered 147 contacts. Overall, hundreds of emails were distributed with the request to participate in the survey via the link. Kind reminders followed twice towards the end of survey period.

The online survey was opened for almost a month till 20 November, 2020. The initial goal set prior conducting the survey was to reach a minimum of 30 respondents.

The survey was closed with quite a low return rate of 32 respondents. Even though the initial goal was reached, the expectation of the evaluation team was higher. Given the circumstances of pandemic situation and low interest of people in general to participate in any surveys it was considered as satisfactory. It was most probably also effected by very low knowledge and understanding of the topic of the EU Quality Policy implementation in Slovakia, as the results of the survey proved later on.

Evaluation of the survey outcomes also proved that those 32 respondents were predominantly from the stakeholders that have a direct experience with the EU Quality Policy implementation in Slovakia. Since there are currently only 19 food products holding one of the three registrations the number of respondents reflects this situation.

The text of the email where we asked the respondent to participate in the survey was as follow:

Dear friends of rural areas,

Have you heard about the EU's Quality Policy for the protection of agricultural and food product names in order to promote their unique characteristics linked to their geographical origin and traditions? Registered products must meet certain quality parameters that distinguish them from other similar products by their well-defined requirements for their raw material composition and technological process of production. We would also like to welcome your opinion on the application of the EU Quality Policy in the conditions of the Slovak Republic. One of the ways you can contribute to the discussion is a questionnaire aimed at

surveying opinions on the application of the EU Quality Policy in Slovakia. If you are interested in the topic in more detail, we will be happy to welcome you in our working groups. More information can be found on the project website www.polirural.eu or at Zuzana.Palkova@uniag.sk You can participate in the questionnaire survey here: <https://forms.gle/vkZ3V2C8DvkT8H5L6>

During the time of conducting the evaluation there was an online contact established with the responsible section and department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, which was updated on a regular basis about the intention to conduct the survey, the content of the survey and its results as well. There was a consultation meeting organized with the Director General of the Food Industry Section and Director of the Food Department. Due to the limitations caused by COVID-19 restrictions the meeting was conducted online. It took place on 16 December, 2020 after evaluation of the results of the survey and during the process of formation of conclusions and recommendations for the improvement of the EU Quality Policy implementation in Slovakia. The meeting proved that there is a very good mutual understanding that this policy area is lacking behind and more needs to be done and an additional effort and interventions are needed. The Ministry is in the process of preparation new marketing strategy supported by additional financial resources that will be directed also to strengthening the EU Quality Policy implementation in Slovakia in near future, starting from the next year. The Ministry also showed willingness to consult the new draft marketing strategy with the evaluation team after the internal procedures at the end of January 2021. As a basis for the strategy the Ministry appreciated the availability of the survey results that could be helpful in setting the new policy right according to the needs of the people on the ground. They also showed a concern about the low outcome rate of respondents, but understood the current situation. The Ministry also acknowledge the need to adapt the current national legislation to better reflect the needs of the EU Quality Policy. Another focus area is the dedicated work with the consumers to inform them properly about the differences and value of different registered marks currently available on the domestic market. This requires an additional attention and setting the rules more appropriately so that the consumers will not be misunderstanding the value and meaning of different registrations with special attention given to legally based registrations and voluntary registration awarded by other than state institutions.