

Methodology for Evaluation of Strategic Documents

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Abstract. The nature of the strategic documents and the mechanisms for their updating require improvement of the strategic planning apparatus. Despite the existing actions in this direction, there is still no universal state standard and mature regulatory framework to harmonize and regulate the entire process in the Republic of Bulgaria. The report summarizes efforts to create a new toolkit bringing together proven practices in the subject area. A Methodology for the evaluation of strategic documents is presented, which offers a comprehensive and systematized approach to the evaluation of conformity according to the procedure of creation, structure, consistency, content and attainability.

Keywords: strategic planning; evaluation methodology; strategic document; national strategy.

I. INTRODUCTION

As one of the main deficiencies of the existing strategic planning apparatus, the lack of a comprehensive approach to analysis and evaluation of national strategies can be pointed out.

The currently applied approach is expert evaluation, as the sequence, scope, criteria and depth of the research are not specified in advance, but are at the personal discretion and competence of the expert. As a result, expertises are obtained that can hardly be combined into a comprehensive assessment that examines the problem in the necessary scope and depth. The problem is deepened also due to the fact that in the process of evaluating strategies of such a rank, experts from different institutions with different areas of expertise are involved. This inevitably leads to distortions in the expert evaluations, as the questions that fall within the expert focus of the expert are overexposed, and those that are outside are ignored.

To overcome this shortcoming, the Methodology for the evaluation of strategic documents was developed, offering a comprehensive and systematized approach to evaluation, by summarizing formalized and strictly framed expert evaluations. The methodology includes a

formalization model that defines the purpose, scope and necessary tools of the research.

The final result of the analysis is a summary of assessments by experts applying the methodology independently of each other.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

National strategies are considered within the national and union strategic frameworks, only in relation to higher-level strategic documents.

Methods relevant to the purposes of the analysis were used, such as content analysis, SWOT, PESTLE, Brainstorming, criteria analysis and risk analysis, not excluding, at the discretion of the experts, the application of others.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Methodology for evaluation of strategic documents carries out evaluations in directions arising from the general conditions (the national environment) in which documents are being created and are functioning, as follows:

1. Compliance in terms of creation procedure.
2. Compliance in terms of structure and consistency.
3. Compliance in terms of content.
4. Achievability assessment.

The criteria for analysis in the directions are synthesized from the regulatory framework and the principles in the theory of strategic planning [1].

A. Evaluation of compliance in terms of creation procedure of a strategic document

The evaluation of compliance in terms of creation procedure of a strategic document provides information on the integrity, actuality, legitimacy and degree of public acceptance of the strategic document. It is performed by setting values of the criteria shown in Table 1.

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TABLE 1 COMPLIANCE ASSESSMENT OF A STRATEGIC DOCUMENT ACCORDING TO THE CREATION PROCEDURE

№	Evaluation criteria by creation procedure	Performance level
1	Acceptance time relative to accepted senior documents	Yes/Partly/No
2	Acceptance time relative to the document's up-to-dateness	Yes/Partly/No
3	Authorities responsible for creating the document	Yes/Partly/No
4	Availability of public consultations on time	Yes/Partly/No
5	Existence of an evaluation cycle evidenced by reports on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preliminary evaluation – performed at the document development stage. • Mid-term evaluation – performed at the stage of implementation of the strategic document and monitoring of activities. • Follow-up evaluation – is carried out at the stage of completion of the action of the strategic document. 	Yes/Partly/No
5.1	Preliminary assessment	Yes/Partly/No
5.2	Intermediate assessment	Yes/Partly/No
5.3	Follow-up assessment	Yes/Partly/No
6.	Publicity	Yes/Partly/No

The evaluation indicator is "Performance level" and indicates whether the relevant criterion is present and meets the requirements. Accepts values from a three-point ranking scale, with the following values:

- Fulfilled ("Yes") - the criterion is fulfilled in full;
- Partially fulfilled ("Partially") - the criterion is fulfilled with known limitations, which are briefly stated in free text;
- Unfulfilled ("No") – the criterion is not fulfilled.

B. Evaluation of compliance in terms of structure

The evaluation of compliance in terms of structure reveals the compliance of the evaluated strategy with the necessary structural elements (components) of this type of documents. The requirements for the structure of a strategic document adopted by the theory are shown in Table 2:

TABLE 2 EVALUATION OF STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS OF COMPLIANCE IN TERMS OF STRUCTURE

№	Structural elements of a strategy (components)	Fulfilled
1	Analysis of the current state	Yes/No
2	Vision for development	Yes/No
3	Strategic goals	Yes/No
4	Regional dimensions and projections	Yes/No
5	Activities and/or reforms to achieve strategic goals	Yes/No
6	Expected results of activities and/or reforms (indicators)	Yes/No
7	Financial framework for achieving the goals and results	Yes/No
8	Institutions responsible for implementation, monitoring and control	Yes/No

The structural elements of a national strategy may vary in name, while retaining their semantic value and are evaluated by an indicator: "Degree of implementation", with values "Fulfilled" and "Unfulfilled".

C. Evaluation of compliance in terms of consistency

A consistency assessment reveals the consistency, comprehensiveness, the presence of overstatement and contradictions in the development of the main ideas, following the content of the document. Document consistency is determined by cross-component analysis, with the components of the analysis being the structural elements of the document (Table 2). According to the logic of hierarchical structures, the analysis follows the development of the issues under consideration in the relationships between senior and junior components, assessing how the issues under consideration in the senior components are further developed in the junior ones.

Relationships between the components (structural elements of the document) subject to analysis are shown in Figure 1.



Fig. 1. Relations between document components.

To ease the research work, the relationships to be analyzed between the components of Figure 1 can be tabulated (Table 3).

TABLE 3 CROSS-COMPONENT ANALYSIS LINKS

Analyzed component	Assessment by:
1. Analysis of the current state	Output component
2. Development vision	1. Analysis of the current state
3. Strategic objectives	1. Analysis of the current state 2. Vision for development
4. Forecasts for changes in the region	1. Analysis of the current state 2. Vision for development 3. Strategic objectives
5. Activities and/or reforms to achieve the strategic goals	Strategic objectives
6. Expected results of the activities and/or reforms (indicators)	5. Activities and/or reforms to achieve strategic objectives
7. Financial framework for achieving the objectives and results of the strategy	5. Activities and/or reforms to achieve strategic objectives
8. Institutions responsible for implementation, monitoring and control	5. Activities and/or reforms to achieve strategic objectives

The questions addressed in the components contained in the column "Assessment by:" should be embedded in a

component from the column "Strategic document component" located on the same row (Table 3).

For the purposes of the cross-sectional analysis, each of the questions under consideration is taken as a base statement and an output prediction that is followed in the text. To facilitate visualization in the analysis, by means of a tabular representation, it is recommended that the links intercomponent connecting two elements of the structure of the strategic document through the base statements and the output forecasts be coded as follows:

$$BMC_{n,m} = \{CC_n, IC_m, BS_{a,(n,m)}, OP_{b,(n,n)}\} \quad (1)$$

where: $n=m$ are the components numbers;

a = number of a basic statement between the components n and m ;

b = number of an output prediction between the components n and m ;

CC_n – coding component;

IC_m – interpretive component;

$BS_{a,(n,m)}$ – basic statement between the components n and m ;

$OP_{b,(n,n)}$ – output prediction between the components n and m .

In fact, a relation between two components is understood to mean the set of all output predicates and basic statements that are valid for those two components. Basic statements and output predictions linking the components of a strategic document relative to the links in Table 3 are shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4 BASIC STATEMENTS AND OUTPUT PREDICTIONS, CONNECTING THE COMPONENTS

		Interpretive components							
		C ₁	C ₂	C ₃	C ₄	C ₅	C ₆	C ₇	C ₈
Coding components	C ₁								
	C ₂	$BMK_{2,1}$							
	C ₃	$BMK_{3,1}$	$BMK_{3,2}$						
	C ₄	$BMK_{4,1}$	$BMK_{4,2}$	$BMK_{4,3}$					
	C ₅			$BMK_{5,3}$					
	C ₆					$BMK_{6,5}$			
	C ₇					$BMK_{7,5}$			
	C ₈					$BMK_{8,5}$			

The evaluation criteria when performing an inter-component analysis for consistency are: "Consistency", "Completeness" and "Contradiction", which provide information on the development, sufficiency and deviations in the identified basic statements and output predictions in the text. The criteria are measured on a rating scale, with "Consistency" and "Contradiction" entered as "Present" and "Absent," and the "Completeness" criterion is rated as "Incomplete," "Complete" and "Overexposed".

D. Evaluation of compliance of strategic documents in terms of content

The text of the document follows its structure, as in each component (structural element) the ideas implied in its name are further developed. Assessment of compliance

with the content of the strategic document is carried out through expert analyses, comparing the content of its components with reference information previously created by the expert in the Assessment Framework (Figure 2).

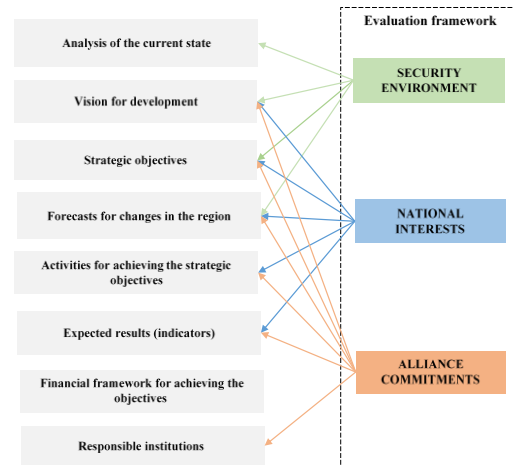


Fig. 2. Evaluation by content.

a. Evaluation framework

The framework for evaluating strategic documents defines the current state and covers the domains: "Security Environment", "National Interests" and "Union Commitments" (Figure 2).

The "Security Environment" domain is defined by internal and external factors and forces influencing national policies to achieve strategic goals and priorities. In the domain, the following parameters are uniquely defined to be matched with the information in the document:

- Parameter 1.1., "External factors in the security environment" – refers to the external factors (regional and global level) from which the main security threats arise.
- Parameter 1.2., "Internal factors in the security environment" - refers to the internal factors from which the main threats arise.

The "National Interests" domain is defined by higher-ranking documents, i.e. national strategies are analyzed against relevant national program documents, and sectoral strategies against relevant national strategies. Parameters to determine are :

- Parameter 2.1., "Long-term objectives" - refers to the framework of goals set in documents of a higher rank;
- Parameter 2.2., "Priorities" - refers to the prioritization made in documents of a higher rank;
- Parameter 2.3., "Starting points of the development vision" - refers to the development vision defined in documents of a higher rank.

These parameters reveal the degree of continuity and coordination between the goals, priorities and visions of the evaluated documents.

- Parameter 2.4., "Financial framework for implementation" - refers to the financial framework for the implementation of the strategic document defined in documents of a higher rank.

The parameter reveals the coherence of a financial framework to achieve the objectives.

The “Alliance Commitments” domain is defined against supranational alliance frameworks (UN, EU and NATO). The parameters to determine are:

- Parameter 3.1., "Fundamental principles of the organization/union" - refers to the fundamental principles of the organization/union;
- Parameter 3.2., "Main goals and priorities of the organization/union" - refers to the main goals and priorities of the organization/union;
- Parameter 3.3., "Main tasks of the organization/union" - refers to the main tasks of the organization/union;
- Parameter 3.4., "Mechanisms for sustainability" - refers to the persistent mechanisms for achieving the goals set by the organization/union;
- Parameter 3.5., "Mechanisms for continuity" - refers to the continuity determined for the member state in the mechanisms for implementing the shared functions of the organization/union.

E. Evaluation of content

Evaluation of the content of the strategy document is carried out by matching the content of its components with the domains in the evaluation framework (Figure 2). The components of the strategy document are reviewed sequentially to ascertain the availability of information and its alignment with each of the domains in the assessment framework.

When determining the availability of information, it is filled as it is shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5 EVALUATION OF A STRATEGIC DOCUMENT COMPLIANCE IN TERMS OF CONTENT

Strategic document component	Domains in the evaluation framework		
	Security environment	National interests	Alliance commitments
1. Analysis of the current state	Yes/No		
2. Vision for development	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
3. Strategic objectives	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
4. Forecasts for changes in the region	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
5. Activities and/or reforms to achieve the strategic goals		Yes/No	Yes/No
6. Expected results of the activities and/or reforms (indicators)		Yes/No	Yes/No
7. Financial framework for achieving the objectives and results of the strategy			
8. Institutions responsible for implementation, monitoring and control			Yes/No

If information is not found, the value "No" is filled in and a specific weakness/deficiency of the document is registered.

With a value of "Yes", a subsequent expert evaluation is performed for compliance according to the parameters of the specific domain. The evaluation criteria are as follows:

Criterion 1 "Relevance" - evaluates the current validity of the components, relative to parameters in the evaluation domain;

Criterion 2 "Adequacy" - assesses the accuracy of reflection in the components of parameters from the assessment domain;

Criterion 3 "Completeness" - evaluates the degree of reflection (description) of the entered parameters, relative to the assessment domain.

The criteria are evaluated on a rating scale that has the following values:

- Available – full presence of the criterion is registered;
- Partial – partial presence of the criterion is registered;
- Missing – the presence of the criterion is not registered.

F. Achievability assessment

The assessment of the achievability of the strategic objectives includes the identification, registration and systematic evaluation of the risks for the implementation of the strategies [5], by means of risk analysis methods [6]. The main types of strategic risk before the implementation of the state policy laid down in the strategy are: economic, technological, socio-cultural risks, risks related to institutional capacity and political-military risks. Risk matrices [7] are used to assess the risk, which indicate its probability and the severity of the consequences.

To track the risks, they are filled in a risk register table (Table 6).

TABLE 6 EXAMPLE TABLE FOR REGISTERING RISKS

№	Name of the risk	Description	Level of probability			Level of impact			Overall assessment		
			High	Average	Low	High	Average	Low	High	Average	Low
Economic risks											
1											
2											
Technological risks											
1											
2											
Socio-cultural risks											
1											
2											
Institutional risks											
1											
2											
Political-military risks											
1											
2											

G. Recommendations for the development of national strategies

The recommendations for the development of national strategies are the final part of the Methodology and include a reasoned statement of the opinion of the analysts who participated in the evaluation of the strategic documents. They refer to adjusting the objectives, the activities to achieve them, as well as the risk management activities.

When the risks to the objectives of the national strategy are assessed, a matrix for objectives achievement, which is essentially an extended risk-register [8] and includes the components: objective, activities to achieve the objective, expected result, indicators for reporting progress, deadlines, identified risk to the objective and risk level, risk mitigation activities, residual risk level and responsible risk management institutions.

The recommendations do not deviate from the standards for drafting a strategic document, described in the Methodology for Strategic Planning in the Republic of Bulgaria [9] and the Draft Law on Strategic Planning in the Republic of Bulgaria [10].

CONCLUSIONS

A methodology for the evaluation of strategic documents is proposed, which offers a comprehensive and systematized approach to the evaluation of compliance in terms of creation procedure, structure, consistency, content and attainability.

According to the methodology, formalized and strictly framed independent expert evaluations of the same type are carried out, as the final evaluation of each aspect is the generalized prevailing hypotheses. A report is prepared, in the Bottom Line Up Format [11], which has the following components: key points, introduction, statement, conclusion, references and appendices.

Introducing a strict model of formalization, the methodology gives the consistency of the analysis, defines the evaluation criteria for each direction and recommends the use of popular and proven tools for analysis. Placing in a narrow framework the creation of expert assessments leads to a decrease in subjectivity, i.e. an increase in objectivity. The final result is a report where the expert assessments are summarized according to the prevailing opinions of the experts, which is a prerequisite for high legitimacy of the results.

The Methodology offers an invariant approach, which makes it suitable for evaluation in the process of strategic planning in all socio-economic spheres.

The Methodology has been verified, having been applied in the assessment of the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria. The results are published in a report entitled "Assessment of the Actualized national security strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria" [12] presented on the "International conference on advanced research and technology for defence - ARTDEF 2023", of the Bulgarian Defense Institute "Professor Tsvetan Lazarov". At the moment, the methodology is being applied to evaluate the Project of the National Defense Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria, and the results are yet to be published.

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