**BGN 472 mil. are to be invested in projects through Financial Instruments under Operational Programme “Regions in growth” 2014-2020**

 “A decision at national level is to be made by February 2015 on how that considerable amount is going to be managed and allocated, whether by choosing a single fund or several funds to implement the supported measures during 2014-220 programming period, said Mrs Denitsa Nikolova, Deputy Minister of the Regional Development and Public Works and Head of the OP’s Managing Authority, during the round table held on 29 January 2015 in Sofia Hotel Balkan (Sheraton). Among the attendees of the meeting were 52 representatives of commercial banks, financial institutions, the National Association of Municipalities, and the Confederation of Employers and Entrepreneurs in Bulgaria.

The Deputy Minister presented, on one hand, the experience gained while implementing Financial Engineering Instruments under OP Regional Development 2007-2013 (OPRD) during the past 4 years, and on the other hand, the prospects for implementing Financial Instruments under OP Regions in Growth 2014-2020 (OPRG). During the new programming period the scope of the OP will be extended, while the number of supported cities will be increased. Currently, the JESSICA initiative is being implemented under OPRD 2007-2013 in the country’s 7 largest cities, whereas under OPRG 2014-2020 Financial Instruments will be allowed to support projects in a total of 67 cities.

The recently carried out ex-ante assessment on the implementation of FI under OPRG identified following 3 major investment areas:

-     energy efficiency;

-     urban development;

-     tourism.

Particularly, specific measures to be supported are as follows: enhancing energy efficiency in the housing sector, improving urban environment and investing in zones with potential for economic development, in sports and cultural infrastructure, in integrated urban transport, as well as investing in tourist sites of world and national significance under Priority Axis 6: Regional Tourism.

Participants in the meeting had the chance to discuss and articulate on the possible decision regarding structuring the financial instruments, choice of fund of funds, type of financial instruments to be implemented under OPRG.

The prevailing number of attendees identified as most appropriate option establishing a fund of funds managed by the European Investment Bank. The proposal for structuring a separate fund for tourism was also agreed upon by the majority of the participant. Furthermore, possible options for establishing 2 or 3 urban development funds operating on a territorial basis were discussed. A number of constructive proposals related to optimizing the operation of financial instruments under OPRG were made during the meeting.

All topics discussed and recommendations made during the meeting will be taken into account by the Managing Authority while defining the mechanism for implementing FI under OPRG. Moreover, all conclusions of the round table will be presented to the Ministry of finance prior to making final decisions on the overall implementation of FI under the respective operational programmes co-financed by the ESIF.