

**MINUTES OF THE 2nd ANNUAL MEETING
OF EEA/NORWAY GRANTS 2014-2021 LATVIA**

RIGA, 4 DECEMBER 2019
Ministry of Finance, Room 202

1. Introduction

The Annual Meeting (hereinafter – AM) was chaired by the Head of the National Focal Point (hereinafter – NFP) – Mr. A. Eberhards together with the representative from the Donors' side – Ms. Pia Gjesme Holm, Deputy Director at the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. A. Eberhards opened the AM with introductory words by repeatedly marking excellent previous cooperation in implementation of investment projects and bilateral initiatives within European Economic Area Financial Mechanism and Norwegian Financial Mechanism (hereinafter – FMs) 2009-2014 which serves as a good base for the continuation of this successful bilateral cooperation in current FMs 2014-2021 period. Mr. A. Eberhards emphasized the importance of this meeting as an opportunity to jointly discuss FMs 2014-2021 progress, future activities as well as opportunities to experience very good achievements and results.

Ms. Pia Gjesme Holm expressed the donors' appreciation for good implementation of former FMs 2009-2014 period involving dedicated professional personnel at national level and expressed trust that current FMs 2014-2021 would be implemented as successfully as the previous one.

Donors underlined the importance of several aspects:

- Programme Operators (hereinafter – POs) shall provide the Financial Mechanism Office (hereinafter – FMO) information on upcoming open calls in a timely manner so that this information could be immediately reflected in FMO's website;
- POs shall ensure sufficiently long time period for application preparation thus allowing potential applicants to have opportunity to prepare qualitative applications after the open call has been launched;
- POs shall make efforts to inform Donor Programme Partners and FMO on match making events in a timely manner, thus giving enough time for Donor Programme Partners to assist with distribution of announcements to relevant institutions within Donor States.

The agenda and the list of participants is attached to the minutes as the Annex 1.

2. Overall status of implementation of FMs 2014-2021 during 2019 and approval of the 2nd Strategic Report (hereinafter – SR)

The presentation of the NFP is attached to the minutes as the Annex 2.

The NFP gave presentation and provided overview of progress reached within implementation of FMs 2014-2021 until 4 December 2019: out of 6 programmes already 4 Programme Agreements have been signed (programme “Correctional Services”, programme

“Climate Change Mitigation, Adaptation and Environment”, programme “Research and Education” and programme “International Police Cooperation and Combating Crime”). NFP’s presentation also covered future main steps in programmes, including calls and publicity activities, as well as included assessment on risks, cash flow forecasting and provided a short insight on status of Bilateral Fund. Moreover, NFP informed that NFP in close cooperation with POs and Embassy were also actively involved in creating of content for FMO’s communication campaign #EEAChdropcounts¹ aiming to inform potential FMs’ applicants of new funding opportunities in environmental area.

POs’ representatives of the first two FMs programmes “Correctional Services” and “Research and Education” with the highest maturity level in the implementation of programmes gave presentations on progress reached and planned activities in programmes (please see attached presentations as the Annex 3 and Annex 4).

Donors thanked NFP for very good, creative and easily understandable presentation regarding implementation of FMs 2014-2021. Donors expressed their appreciation to the NFP’s applied approach in forecasting as close as possible to actual execution because the credibility of forecasts are very important to Donors.

Discussion regarding programmes:

- 1) programme “Correctional Services” good progress in implementation was noted. Donors appreciated PO’s very good and close cooperation with Donor’s partners and PO’s established programme risk awareness approach to eliminate possible risks.
- 2) the Baltic Research programme: Donors appreciated high interest of applicants to participate in the first open call of launched by the Estonian colleagues and also foreseen high interest of applicants in the second Latvian open call. Donors expressed concerns about too long preparation period before launching of Latvian open call, which reduce time for projects’ implementation. PO explained that the main reason for delay is later signing of the Programme Agreement, which was planned initially in the first quarter of 2019 but the agreement was finally signed only in August 2019. NFP added that there is no pending issues at the government level because programme regulations and the programme were developed and reconciled in parallel (the same approach for other programmes).
- 3) programme “Climate Change Mitigation, Adaptation and Environment”: Donors informed of high expectations in the key outcome “Reduced risk of pollution from polluted sites” and expressed hope that remediation open call, covering the whole outcome, will be launched soon. Donors pointed out that strong bilateral component in programme would produce good bilateral results.
- 4) programme “International Police Cooperation and Combating Crime”: Donors expressed appreciation regarding successfully clarified issues with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and development (OECD) and successfully completed Programme Agreement phase.
- 5) programme “Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Cultural Cooperation”: Donors expressed hope about conclusion of the Agreement by the end of 2019 and looked forward to further fruitful cooperation in implementation of programme. Donors asked whether the regional reform taking place in Latvia in 2020 would affect implementation of programme. PO explained that impact of reform would be positive for FMs as similar reform in Norway took place also. This could serve

¹ Website of FMO communication campaign #EEAChdropcounts - <https://eeachdropcounts.eeagrants.org/>

as a basis for sharing experience within pre-defined projects regarding development of regions. NFP added that information on the reform is also included in the SR and similar practice will be continued also in the next SRs informing on the reform progress and impact relating the FMs. During the next AM the first reflections regarding implementation progress of regional reform in Latvia could be exchanged.

- 6) programme “Business Development, Innovation and Small and Medium Entrepreneurs”: Donors looked forward to quick development of the Agreement and starting implementation of programme as soon as possible. Donors asked for update on “Tech Business Centre” pre-defined project. PO informed that initial concept of the pre-defined project in cooperation with Donor programme partner was changed and currently the main focus is on collaboration with two main universities, i.e. University of Latvia and Riga Technical University due to their scientific human capital and achievements in scientific work. The main working space of business center and office building is planned to be located in University of Latvia, however laboratories and equipment could be used from both universities.

Feedback from the Joint Committee for Bilateral Cooperation (hereinafter - JCBF) meeting taking place the same day right before AM was provided by the Ambassador Mr. Kristian Ødegaard. It was concluded that availability of remaining funds is limited due to high demand thus JCBF agreed to set the guiding limit of 50 000 EUR per any new initiative.

Donors provided other comments and information:

- (1) highly appreciated well organized participation in festival LAMPA and ensured visibility of FMs and encouraged to continue to organize and participate in such large scale events with strong bilateral interest and impact;
- (2) regarding when the new FMs website would be available, NFP informed that new website would be available indicatively in March 2020 (it depends on the success of the procurement and service contract execution process);
- (3) encouraged NFP to work even more strategically to increase the audience in FMs *facebook* platform;
- (4) based on the Article 8 of Protocol 38C to the EEA Enlargement Agreement, Article 11.4. of MoUs² and Article 1.11. of Regulations³, in **2020 Donors will carry out the Mid-term review**. The FMO informed on planned assessment of programme portfolio in the first half of 2020, where effectiveness of implementation of programmes will be assessed. The NFP thanked FMO for timely information and sufficient explanations in this regard which was provided. NFP expressed appreciation to FMO for organized very valuable experience exchange within EEA and Norway Grants National Focal Points' Workshop⁴, which took place from 14-16 October 2019 in Liechtenstein.

The Donors approved SR and commented that it is of high quality/well-written.

3. FMO presented last updates on programmes under FMO's responsibility:

² Memorandum of Understanding on the EEA Grants 2014-2021 and Memorandum of Understanding on the Norway Grants 2014-2021.

³ Regulations on the implementation of the EEA/Norway Grants 2014-2021.

⁴ On 15 November 2019 NFP also electronically shared workshop's presentations to all POs.

- a) NGO Consortium, which was selected in open competition as the operator of the Active Citizens Fund directly by the FMO, gave presentations on progress and further steps (please see attached presentation as the Annex 5). NGO Consortium explained that the first payment to NGOs beneficiaries could be paid out in the 3rd quarter 2020.
- b) In October 2018 “Social Dialogue – Decent Work” programme was launched, where 6 applications were received in open call by the set deadline - February 2019. By the end of October 2019, 5 applications were selected and currently contracting phase is taking place.
- c) 26 projects of the Fund for Youth Employment are in implementation where Latvian institutions participate in 6 projects as project partners.
- d) 713 applications were received in the Fund for Regional Cooperation out of which 86 involve partnerships with Latvian institutions. Due to overwhelming demand, the evaluation of submitted applications became a very lengthy and time-consuming process, decision on projects is expected to be taken soon.

NFP expressed interest to receive progress information on regular basis on the programmes under responsibility under FMO in order to spread information further to key stakeholders and general public. FMO will discuss it within the FMO and will provide feedback to NFP.

4. Closing remarks

In conclusion, all parties expressed their gratitude for good and fruitful cooperation. It was agreed by all sides to try combining project visits during next AM thus using opportunity to see some project activities in implementation and some FM's added value and results already achieved.

Annexes:

1. List of participants and agenda of AM - on 3 pages;
2. Presentation of NFP - on 15 pages;
3. Presentation of Ministry of Justice - on 10 pages;
4. Presentation of Ministry of Education and Science - on 18 pages;
5. Presentation of NGO Consortium operating “Active Citizens Fund” in Latvia - on 7 pages.

Head of the National Focal Point



Armands Eberhards