

**MINUTES OF THE 7th ANNUAL MEETING
OF EEA/NORWAY GRANTS 2009-2014
AND
THE 1st ANNUAL MEETING
OF EEA/NORWAY GRANTS 2014-2021**

**LATVIA
RIGA, 13 DECEMBER 2018
Ministry of Finance, Room 202**

1. Introduction

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

The meeting was opened with introductory words by the NFP, marking that the fruitful bilateral cooperation between Latvia and Donors and the excellent and also internationally recognised results achieved in European Economic Area Financial Mechanism and Norwegian Financial Mechanism (hereinafter – the FMs) 2009-2014 projects have set high standards for FMs 2014-2021 and also allows Latvia to start a new implementation period with good confidence. Moreover, the NFP emphasised the FMs 2009-2014 pre-defined project’s site visit on 12 December 2018, where actual impact and goals for future developments in Latgale region were presented, as it may serve as an inspiration for mutual future enhancements and achievements.

The Donors expressed their appreciation for good cooperation from all sides and good progress made in the implementation of FMs 2014-2021, and thanked for valuable pre-defined project’s site visit, which showed that within FMs’ projects tangible changes have been reached in Latgale region. At the same time, the Donors noted that in FMs 2014-2021 particular attention should be paid to the application of simplified projects’ selection procedures, thus reducing the bureaucratic burden at all levels and especially for project promoters.

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

The presentation of the Latgale’s planning region representative is attached to the minutes as the Annex 2.

2. Closure of FMs 2009-2014 and approval of the Final Strategic Reports (hereinafter – the FSRs)

The presentation of the NFP is attached to the minutes as the Annex 3.

The NFP gave presentation and provided overview of what has been achieved and learned within FMs including status of Final programme reports, financial figures and mutual benefits from targeted investments in Bilateral Relations.

The Donors thanked for interesting presentation and expressed satisfaction with the overall good quality of the FSRs, which provided clear overview of the implementation of FMs. In addition,

the Donors appreciated valuable evaluations of FMs implementation in all programmes and the NFP's commitment in strengthening bilateral cooperation in various areas.

Although the Donors was very pleased with overall implementation of FMs, national and international awards received in various projects and the successful and wide communication of results, it was indicated that there are still some room for improvements and FMs implementation could have benefited from more simplified and flexible procedures.

In conclusion, the Donors emphasized that they were pleased to hear in the presentation, that the NFP has already simplified few procedures in FMs 2014-2021 and hope that the NFP will keep up the good work done so far. The Donors approved the FSRs based on the FSRs' overall good quality.

3. Overall status of implementation of FMs 2014-2021 during 2018 and approval of the 1st Strategic Report (hereinafter – the SR)

The presentation of the NFP is attached to the minutes as the Annex 3.

The NFP gave presentation and provided overview of progress reached within implementation of FMs 2014-2021, including status of programmes, planning of forecast of likely payment applications, ambitions to further enhance bilateral relations, planned publicity activities and indicated further actions - challenges. The NFP highly appreciated all trainings, manuals and guidelines already provided by the FMO and invited to continue share all valuable information with NFPs and programmes' operators (hereinafter – POs), as it indeed has been very practical and useful.

3.1. The Donors thanked for presentation and all the efforts put in preparing the implementation of FMs 2014-2021 and pointed out some **general comments**:

- a) Implementation process is going well with some challenges and delays in certain programmes (Business Development, Local Development, Research and Education), where solutions are expected to be find soon;
- b) Although the development of Concept Notes (hereinafter – CNs) took more time than originally foreseen, it is more important to set high quality of CNs as a priority;
- c) The NFP was encouraged to monitor programmes from the perspective of risks and results, with the aim to understand what difference the programmes are making (for whom and how), as well as to continue learning on what works. The FMO is planning to provide training in 2019 on results based monitoring for all NFPs and POs;
- d) The NFPs and POs shall have sufficient capacity to implement programmes successfully;
- e) It is very essential for the Donors to receive accurate and realistic forecast of likely payment applications and the Donors appreciated the input of the NFP to ensure this;
- f) Mid-term review on the progress made in implementing the FMs will be carried out till 31 December 2020 and a template of such review will be shared in 2019;
- g) As set in regulations, all projects shall be implemented till April 2024 and no extensions are possible according to the Regulations;
- h) Due to concern that bureaucratic procedures might negatively affect the overall implementation of FMs, the NFP was invited to reconsider the foreseen procedures with view to simplify and speed up the process.

3.2. The Donors also provided brief summary of the challenges within foreseen programmes and the following was **concluded between all parties**:

- a) Business Development programme has been very time consuming as there are some difficulties and still ongoing discussions between PO and Donor Programme Partner (hereinafter – DPP) regarding content of programme. The representative of PO informed, that in the end of 2018 PO has received the possible compromise from the FMO and PO shall assess it. Parties agreed, that active discussions shall happen in beginning of 2019 with a view to finalise the CN;
- b) Research and Education programme’s good cooperation between all Baltic States shall provide good conditions for strong interest for first call of proposals and quality of applications. Taking into account lessons learned from previous period - a special attention in finding of donor partners will be ensured. A positive aspect is that there should be no overlapping in open calls in current period, as open calls will be organised in each Baltic country in different period. The CN is close to finalization;
- c) Within Local Development programme constructive cooperation and extensive consultations between regions in Latvia and the Donors have been carried out and CN is close to finalization;
- d) Climate Change, Correctional Services, International Police Cooperation and Combating Crime programmes are at the Programme Agreement stage and it is expected to sign Agreements in the beginning of 2019. Programmes are well developed, reflect special concerns in the MoU very well and in Climate Change and Correctional Services programmes have very strong bilateral dimension.

3.3. Few more topical issues were discussed between all parties:

- a) The Donors underlined safeguarding the independence of the Active Citizens Fund, which is operated by Consortium of 6 NGOs in Latvia. The Donors shared their concerns, that the Ministry of Culture in Latvia may have misunderstood their role regarding operation of the Active Citizens Fund (by acting more as a stakeholder, than observer) and asked the NFP for assistance regarding this specific issue. The NFP appreciated valuable information and was quite sure that it must be misunderstanding and that there is no influencing coming from the side of Ministry of Culture, and made it clear that there are no regulations from any policy makers regarding operation of the Active Citizens Fund. All parties agreed that this question will be clarified and relevant feedback provided by the NFP¹.
- b) The Donors welcomed the good progress in setting up the implementation system for Bilateral Fund and Joint Committee of Bilateral Fund. However, the importance of avoiding excessive bureaucratic procedures and hurdles was stressed once again, as they could jeopardize the flexible use of the fund and potentially discourage good bilateral initiatives to emerge and Donor partners to join the initiatives. NFP explained that system developed in Latvia ensures transparency, welcomes open discussions and decrease potential future disputes on agreeing on initiatives. Moreover, the NFP indicated that first meeting of Consultative working group proved to be very productive and with value added comments for improvements of particular initiatives. The Parties agreed that it will take some time to assess how efficient is Latvia’s chosen approach and if it works smoothly and quickly.
- c) The active communication and publicity of the FMs was emphasized from all parties. The Donors welcomed the idea of the elaboration of the single website of the FMs in Latvia,

¹ Clarifications from Ministry of Culture included in the e-mail complementing these minutes.

as well as social media account, which already runs actively. All parties were reminded by the NFP to book the dates for Grants 2014-2021 Opening event within conversation festival LAPMA on 28-29 June in 2019.

The Donors approved the SR based on the SR's overall good quality, good overview of status of FMs implementation, as well as bilateral relations. In addition, it was agreed to include executive summary in the next SR in order to improve readability for public.

4. Closing remarks

In conclusion, all parties expressed their gratitude for good cooperation and the NFP shared their appreciation of constructive and proactive Donors' assistance in finalizing still opened and remaining issues. The NFP confirmed their eagerness to conclude all CNs in foreseen future and once more thanked all sides for fruitful dialog and inputs made so far.

Annexes:

1. List of participants and agenda of the AM on 3 pages;
2. Presentation of the Latgale's region representative on 39 pages;
3. Presentation of the NFP on 30 pages.

Head of the National Focal Point



Armands Eberhards