

**Minutes from the Annual Meeting
Norwegian Financial Mechanism and EEA Financial Mechanism 2009-2014
Łódź, 8th of June 2017**

Participants:

Donor states' representatives:

Sjur Larsen, Director, Section for Central Europe, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Marit Randsborg, Senior Adviser, Section for Central Europe, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ingrid Norstein, Counsellor, Royal Norwegian Embassy in Poland
Karina Gradowska-Karpińska, Royal Norwegian Embassy in Poland
Rune Vistad, Financial Mechanism Office
Andrea Pietras, Financial Mechanism Office
Linn-Kaja Rogstad, observer (FMO from August 2017)

Representatives of Poland:

Przemysław Derwich, Director, National Focal Point
Małgorzata Zalewska, Deputy Director, National Focal Point
Anna Cieśla, National Focal Point
Maciej Gałaj, National Focal Point
Aleksandra Guzowska, National Focal Point
Aneta Krzywicka, National Focal Point
Krzysztof Gasparski, National Focal Point
Zuzanna Kucińska, National Focal Point
Natalia Kempa-Paplińska, National Focal Point
Barbara Kachniarz, National Focal Point
Justyna Beśka, National Focal Point
Monika Zawistowska-Wąsik, National Focal Point
Justyna Lasota, National Focal Point
Danuta Jakóbczyk, The Certifying Authority
Jolanta Szczepanowska, The Audit Authority

1. Opening/adoption of the agenda

The Annual Meeting was opened by Mr Derwich, who greeted the participants and briefly presented the current stage of implementation of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism and EEA Financial Mechanism in Poland and bilateral cooperation.
Mr Larsen greeted the participants as well.

2. Strategic report

Mr Derwich presented basic data on the Strategic Report on the implementation of the Grants in 2016, which was transmitted to the Donors. He underlined that the document had gained a positive opinion of the National Monitoring Committee.

The Strategic Report is subject of the approval at the Annual Meeting, therefore Mr Derwich formally asked the Donors for acceptance.

The Donors noted that many of their comments from last year had been followed up and accepted the report while underlining the comprehensiveness and result-oriented way of preparation. The Donors asked to include in future strategic reports highlights or examples of main results and findings from evaluations in the executive summary.

In the context of finalisation of the 2nd edition of the Financial Mechanisms, the issue of the evaluations and the necessity of avoiding the potential overlap of their scope was also raised by the Donors. It was clarified by the NFP's representative that the evaluation commissioned by the NFP (in contrast to the 'sectorial' evaluations commissioned by the Programme Operators) was of a horizontal character - it was aimed at assessing management and control system, the results of the Programmes and the overall impact of the Financial Mechanisms (the only Programme to be evaluated via in-depth analysis within the horizontal evaluation is PL06,). The Polish party assured that the Donors would be given the opportunity to provide comments to the draft report prior to publication of the results of the evaluation.

3. Bilateral relations and bilateral fund at national level

Mr Derwich underlined that the initiatives aimed at strengthening bilateral relations with the Donors are among the Polish priorities. The NFP's representatives presented a brief summary of the projects implemented in 2016 within the Bilateral Fund at National Level (BFNL), as well as acquainted the Donors with the current status of the implementation of the Work Plan 2017.

It was reminded that at the end of 2016 over 1,8 m euro had been spent (representing ca. 67% of the total allocation of the BFNL), as well as that there were additional funds available to be contracted due to the savings in the projects. Therefore, as noted, the NFP was working on the new initiatives, including in particular: (1) cooperation in the field of construction industry (i.a. promoting Polish building consortia on the Norwegian market) – to be implemented by the Norwegian-Polish Chamber of Commerce, (2) capacity building in the area of stimulating the tourism industry – to be implemented by the Ministry of Sport and Tourism. It was also mentioned that the NFP considered the extension of the scope of the Association of Polish Cities project (implemented with the KS and the Ukrainian partners) aimed at improvement of the energy efficiency in Ukraine.

Mr Larsen noted that bilateral relations are very good and intensifying with funding from the Grants. The Grants have supported prominent events, also politically important events. He underlined the very good results on national and programme level and emphasised the variety of bilateral initiatives. Moreover, he thanked the NFP and POs for their attention devoted to bilateral funds and for facilitating achievements of concrete results.

Lessons learned from the 09-14 Financial Mechanisms include that donor partnership programmes are the most successful tool to enhance bilateral relations, DPPs play an important role and there is a higher share of partnership projects in programmes involving DPPs. The Donors underlined that there will be significant changes for the 14-21 system, and planning as well as early preparation for the next mechanisms should be prioritised. Burdensome administrative procedures should be alleviated and procedures simplified wherever possible. The Joint Committee for Bilateral Funds (JCBF) will be instrumental and the Donor partners should be involved from the outset.

Mr Larsen emphasized the importance of further strengthening bilateral relations in both the current and the next financial perspective. It was highlighted that the contacts with the partner institutions shall be established as early as possible.

Given the final and thus hectic stage for contracting the funds for bilateral initiatives, the Donors pointed out that some DPPs are being overwhelmed by proposals. Taking into consideration the capacity shortage as well as bilateral funds current absorption, the Donors informed that the general instruction was given to FMO to be strict in assessment of any programme modifications suggesting further increases in the budgets for bilateral activities. It will be approved only if the additional bilateral results are of substantial nature, clearly visible, feasible in the short timeframe left, based on the available capacity on the Donors' countries' side and positively influencing the next implementation period.

It was emphasized by the Polish side that the bilateral cooperation proved to be successful and fruitful in new ideas and activities, supported by Donors' partners at the programme level. The NFP advocated

to use efficiently the identified savings, the bilateral potential and partners' capacity within the remaining implementation time. New modification requests will be submitted and verified case by case in accordance with the set restrictions.

4. Status of programmes implementation/programme closure

The Polish side presented the current info on the implementation of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism and EEA Financial Mechanism in Poland.

In the context of spending, approx. EUR 377 million have been spent by the end of April 2017, which makes roughly 80% of allocation and does not include final settlements of projects completed. Prognosis reported in the Annual Report for the final expenditure is ca 95%. By the end of April 2017, Poland received advance payments (grants) of EUR 424 million from the Financial Mechanism Office, which makes almost 90% of the allocation granted to Poland.

It was stated that 2 programmes have already been completed: PL09 and PL10, final reports shall be submitted to FMO till end of June. Within the other programmes - 12 projects (9 in PL04, 3 in PL08) are still being implemented with the beneficiaries own funds on the basis of the Regulation Art. 7.14.6. The Donors praised the decision by the POs to continue projects after the end of the eligibility period (30/04/2017) with own funds in order to finalise the projects. The NFP will be in close contact with the FMO if there should be any Polish thoughts on the potential use of Regulations Article 7.14.5 in case of court proceedings.

On the issue of the programmes modification, the Polish side informed that PL07, PL13 modification requests have already been submitted to FMO and more are expected shortly (PL02, PL03, PL04, PL06, PL12, PL15, PL17).

Summary of the programmes area developments was elaborated on by the Polish side with the assistance of power point presentation (attached).

In environmental sector, the impressive results in CO2 reduction was highlighted. With reference to the conference in Brussels planned in October in the framework of PL04, Polish side informed, that the issue is still being discussed between partners.

In health programmes, the issue of PL07 and PL13 modifications on the increase of the management costs, already passed to the Donors' side, was mentioned.

Mr Derwich elaborated briefly on the modification proposal in PL06, which still expects Donors' side decision. Substantial advantages of the new activities that are already well prepared in close cooperation with the DPP were presented - the continuation of the DiverCITY initiative (increased amount is crucial to cover the expenses associated with donor representatives – The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, speakers, travel expenses), study visits and promotional campaign of DiverCity brand.

Donors' side presented achievements of PL05 and emphasized efficient management and involvement of other parties in the programme implementation. There was a high oversubscription with 6,500 project applications showing high demand for support in the sector in Poland. The FMO underscored that the NGO programme was very efficiently managed by the Fund Operator. The activities focused mainly on combating discrimination, increasing public scrutiny, to assist individuals and groups facing intolerance, human and gender rights violations and to support a significant number of interventions (e.g. court proceedings, litigations) undertaken by organisations to prevent discriminatory legislation and practices in public life. The FMO noted positively that the NFP was involved in the implementation of the PL05 programme as well as the PL18 'Green Industry Innovation' programme.

Referring to the PL12, Polish side observed many joint projects in various funding initiatives: Research Council of Norway grant scheme, Era-Net, Horizon 2020 and others. On November the 21th PO set the closing conference to sum up achievements, disseminate results and present cooperation advantages.

Additionally to PL09 results, Polish side mentioned economical feature of the programme, i.e. 6 000 direct job places and 1435 volunteers who gained experience, more than 1.6 mln visitors/spectators. The Donors asked for a verification of the types and numbers of the 6,000 work places created and the very high number (1.6 million) of spectators of events under the PL09 'Culture cooperation' programme.

In justice and home affairs sector, the importance of the activities implemented was indicated and the issue of savings management was outlined. In case of PL15, some bilateral initiatives have been rejected but for other activities requested a decision from the FMO is expected. New bilateral actions in PL16 and PL17 are now being discussed with Donors' partners and shall shortly be presented to the FMO. Polish side underlined that the requests are not aiming at use of savings only, but they are crucial to enhance the programme results and create bridge towards the current and new perspective and are thus aimed at building further long term cooperation.

The Donors expressed their high satisfaction with the implementation of the programmes, the good results and the good bilateral cooperation and underlined the importance of the sector for the Grants in general and benefits for bilateral cooperation.

5. Publicity and Communication

The main promotional activities taken by the NFP in 2016 were presented by the Polish side.

The Donors underlined that at this stage communicating results and activities is very important. Making results visible is a shared responsibility between all stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Grants. The contribution and role played by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway should be visible in all communication activities undertaken. Information on bilateral cooperation should be visible. More results on the website, also in English as well as more use of social media in communication works are encouraged.

The Polish side informed that the closing conference on the Norwegian Financial Mechanism and EEA Financial Mechanism in Poland 2009-2014 is planned for the autumn 2017, probably October, in Warsaw along with the regional events in different cities. The details will be given to the Donors' side at a later stage.

6. Closing

The Donors thanked for an informative meeting and emphasised the impressive record of the NPF and the POs for the utilisation of the Grants in Poland.