

**Minutes from the Annual Meeting
on Norwegian Financial Mechanism and EEA Financial Mechanism 2009-2014
Warsaw, 22nd of May 2014**

Participants:

Donor states representatives:

Anders Erdal, Chairman of the Financial Mechanism Committee, Deputy Director General, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Steinar Hagen, Director, Section for Central Europe and the EEA Financial Mechanisms, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ms Gyrid Celius, Senior Advisor, Section for Central Europe and the EEA Financial Mechanisms, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Karsten Klepšovik, Ambassador, Royal Norwegian Embassy

Stein Inge Nesvåg, Counsellor, Royal Norwegian Embassy

Angantýr Einarsson, Financial Counsellor, Icelandic Mission to the European Union, Brussels

Stine Andresen, Director, Financial Mechanism Office,

Ragna Fidjestøl, Head of Country, Financial Mechanism Office

Rune Vistad, Head of Sector, Financial Mechanism Office

Andrea Pietras, Country Officer, Financial Mechanism Office

Representatives of Poland:

Marcin Kubiak, Undersecretary of State, Ministry of Infrastructure and Development

Michał Ziętara, Director, National Focal Point

Małgorzata Zalewska, Deputy Director, National Focal Point

Urszula Demidziuk, National Focal Point

Anna Sikorska, National Focal Point

Maciej Gałaj, National Focal Point

Aneta Krzywicka, National Focal Point

Natalia Kempa-Paplińska, National Focal Point

Krzysztof Gasparski, National Focal Point

Zuzanna Kucińska, National Focal Point

Magdalena Iwanięcka, National Focal Point

Barbara Jankowska, National Focal Point

Monika Zawistowska-Wąsik, National Focal Point

Justyna Lasota, National Focal Point

Beata Pałucka, The Certifying Authority

Danuta Jakóbczyk, The Certifying Authority

Agnieszka Mroziak, The Audit Authority

1. Opening by the focal point and the donors

The Annual Meeting was opened by Mr Marcin Kubiak, the Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development in Poland. Mr Kubiak greeted the participants and presented the actual status of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism and EEA Financial Mechanism in Poland. Mr Kubiak outlined the close cooperation between the Polish and the donor side, resulting in achieving not only in the contracting 100% of grants allocation, but also in the first tangible effects of the Grants.

Mr Erdal pointed out excellent cooperation between Poland and the donor states, he underlined good progress in implementation and developing bilateral relations. Mr Erdal also expressed the donors' satisfaction with the

work done by Poland as the biggest beneficiary state of the Grants . He underlined a leading role of Poland among all the beneficiary states and the hope for continuation of such a good work.

The Donor delegation agreed with the proposed agenda of the meeting.

2. Status of the Strategic Report for 2013

Mr Kubiak presented officially the Strategic Report for EEA Financial Mechanism and Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2013 (EEA FM and NFM 2013) which was prepared by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development and gained positive opinion by the Monitoring Committee.

Ms Zalewska underlined that National Focal Point (NFP) had taken into consideration the discussion from the previous annual meeting when drafting the strategic report. Therefore, the present report focused more on issues such as risk assessment, mitigation measures and monitoring. Extensive information about risk management both at the level of programme Operators and at the national level have been incorporated to the document.

Mr Erdal commended the NFP for the Strategic Report, which is of good quality and reflects well the issues of the Annual Meeting. The Report is more detailed and strategic compared to the previous one transmitted to the FMO in 2013. The Chairman asked the NFP to include more detailed information on bilateral relations and horizontal concerns in the next Report for 2014.

The donors formally accepted the Strategic Report on the implementation of the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism and Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009-2014 in Poland in 2013.

3. Bilateral relations and Bilateral Fund at National Level

Mr Kubiak informed that instruments foreseen in the Regulations: Bilateral Fund at National Level and Bilateral Funds at Programmes Level are implemented to strengthen the bilateral relations. Next Mr Ziętara presented briefly what were the results of bilateral cooperation in 2013. The results were mainly achieved by the study visits carried out in different programme areas such as: culture, gender based and domestic violence, justice and home affairs (public security services and emergency) and correctional services. Within bilateral funds numerous conferences and events were organized in Poland in 2013, such as:

- 'Together for the Environment - EEA and Norway Grants in Poland' (organized by the Ministry of Environment on the occasion of the POLEKO trade faire);
- 'Putting victims first' (organized by the Ministry of Interior);
- nationwide conference entitled 'Perpetrator or Victim'? (organized by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy);
- workshop in research area (organized by the National Center for Research and Development in collaboration with the Norwegian Research Council).

Mr Kubiak informed about the planned bilateral initiatives for 2014 (about 19 projects to be implemented). Mr Kubiak confirmed that the NFP has also continued the process of developing the Work Plan for 2015 in close collaboration with representatives of the donors' side. This phase was demanding and time-consuming.

Mr Ziętara mentioned that lately the NFP received new proposals of activities from Iceland. All are under consultations with the relevant beneficiaries.

Mr Erdal underlined that donors were satisfied with the very positive development of bilateral relations and thanked the Focal Point for increased attention to bilateral funds and that concrete results are being achieved. The Donors suggested including the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Embassies in Warsaw and Oslo in future meetings on bilateral funds.

The donors commended the Polish authorities with the organization of conferences and events organized in Poland under the bilateral relations scheme to date. The Chairman noted that the call for proposals under partner programmes, such as the scholarship, cultural exchange and the research programmes were all oversubscribed. The donors are looking forward to upcoming events, such as the conference on the Polish

community in Norway and the “Diversity” conference. The donors also noted Iceland’s interest in including renewable energy and in particular geothermal power in activities under the bilateral funds at national and programme level.

The Work Plan for 2015 was approved by the donors with the condition to include two study trips to Iceland under the priorities 'gender and domestic based violence' and 'social campaign promoting active paternity'.

The donors noted that for the work plan 2016 the priorities including the SR Resolution 1325, hate speech and horizontal issues, Polish Jewish cultural heritage and history, an event in Brussels on a topical issue hosted by the Missions of Poland and Norway to the EU and the Polonia Year in Norway are suggested with discussions on the work plan 2016 to commence soon.

4. Horizontal concerns

Mr Kubiak claimed that according to the Memorandum of Understanding, Financial Mechanisms contribution should be implemented with special focus on bilateral relations between the donor States and the Republic of Poland as well as relevant human rights and governance-related standards. Strengthening bilateral cooperation as the Mechanisms’ objective is implemented specifically through 7 donor partnership programmes and numerous partnership projects: selected in the result of open calls as well as those pre-defined.

Cross-cutting issues are taken into account in each programme, both on the programme and project levels. Next Ms Zalewska described in details the examples of horizontal concerns’ incorporation in several programmes. She mentioned that good governance, environmental considerations, economic sustainability, social sustainability, human rights and gender equality concerned all of the programmes, though to different extent.

The donors noted that many activities implemented by the Polish authorities are feeding into the objectives of horizontal concerns. The donors underlined the importance of ample information about good results and the description of horizontal concern achievements in the next Strategic Report.

5. Status of programme implementation

Mr Kubiak underlined the whole allocation dedicated to Poland, i.e. 534 742 500 EUR had been contracted and happily the preparatory phase had finally been closed. Currently implementation stage is already advanced: in 23 closed calls, where 7216 project proposals were submitted and 507 of them have already received a grant - he said.

Mr Kubiak stated that NFP had identified some savings in the frames of Technical Assistance Fund, assuming that all planned activities under the fund were to be performed. Therefore Mr Kubiak asked the donors for a framework decision on the reallocations, meaning the “green light” for the NFP to start discussion with the Programme Operators to choose the best projects to be financed.

Mr Erdal recalled the FMO’s letter of 19th May where it was outlined how requests for reallocations can be followed up. Any formal request for a reallocation should be sent to the FMO/donors at the latest by 1st September 2014. The Chairman also noted that the NFP is well advanced in implementation with the majority of calls closed; however some important selections as for the PL07 Health programme remain to be finalised. Next Ms Zalewska presented the update on all programmes implemented by the Polish side. Also programmes implemented by the donors were updated by them. Some important issues occurred:

PL04

Ms Zalewska precisely described the situation of Industrial call and assured that industrial projects were very complex and the implementation phase is long lasting. The quite small number of projects were submitted within the call proved that the potential beneficiaries did not want to take the risk although we informed them that there is a possibility of donor side decision on the extension (according to the Regulation). Ms Zalewska noted that in case of those, who had submitted the applications, we couldn’t be sure they would sign the

Final

agreements if the date remained unchanged. She also pointed the fact that such projects usually last up to 24 months.

Therefore Ms Zalewska asked the donors for the decision on the extension of the deadline for the implementation of these projects by one additional year (April 2017) which was submitted to the donors officially in April 2014.

Mr Erdal reiterated the donors' position noted in the FMO's letter of 19th May that no general prolongations will be allowed for. However, the Donors approved an extension of the eligibility period until 30 April 2017 for projects selected under the open call for industrial projects. The Chairman noted that the extension is granted exceptionally with regard to the reallocation of funds from the PL11 CCS programme, the fact that a short implementation period creates risks and given the projects' substantial contribution to the CO2 reduction objective of the programme.

PL05

The donors informed that the programme is progressing very well. The programme is very popular and open calls are highly oversubscribed. To date 166 projects were selected for funding under open calls and further projects will be selected under the thematic call in autumn 2014. Moreover, two on-line seminars on hate speech were organized. The donors have high expectations for the programme regarding horizontal concerns.

PL14

Ms Zalewska mentioned that cooperation with the Council of Europe was a prerequisite for the implementation of "Polish family – free from violence" project and study visits foreseen in the bilateral fund. She emphasized that PO had made considerable concessions to the Council of Europe introducing substantial modifications of the manner of financial flows (advance payments), reporting schedule, as well as activities and budget division required by the CoE. Agreement is still in negotiation phase. The NFP informed that the final remarks to the partnership agreement had been sent to the CoE by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in mid-May. Thus Ms Zalewska said the Polish side was waiting for the Council of Europe position on the text of Agreement.

Mr Erdal underlined that the process has taken too long time and asked the NFP and the PO to ensure that the partnership agreement was signed by the end of May 2014.

Ms Zalewska informed that it will be a challenge to sign the agreement in the mentioned date due to limited time left until the end of May. It should be stressed that the NFP supported this process, and simultaneously underlined that the draft of partnership agreement had been already sent to the Council of Europe.

PL15

The content of the predefined project realized in partnership with the Council of Europe is under discussion – Ms Zalewska said. The final provisions have not been defined.

Mr Erdal emphasized that the process of preparing the projects and the agreement should be speeded up and the partnership agreement should be signed no later than July 2014. He also underlined that the donors will stay in touch with the Council of Europe in order to speed up the process.

The donors also underlined on a general level that for bilateral partnerships to succeed documents (e.g. for invoicing) should be processed smoothly. Moreover, the donors emphasised the significance of inserting information on projects in the DoRIS system. This is a very important tool for sharing information on all the programmes. The operators will be reminded to update the project level information in the system.

6. Risk management

Mr Kubiak mentioned that in general, at this stage – as it had been indicated in the strategic report – the time was the most crucial risk factor for the implementation of Financial Mechanisms in Poland.

Due to the efforts of all engaged parties, at the beginning of 2014 some calls were finalized – in biodiversity (PL02), environmental monitoring (PL03), part of energy efficiency (PL04), cultural heritage (PL08), CCS within research programme (PL12), gender equality (PL14). It means, that the projects were chosen and the project

activities can be started. Nevertheless, in these programmes, tight schedules of individual projects still need detailed and on-going monitoring by the supervising authorities.

There are programmes, in which the assessment is still ongoing – like health programme (PL07) and energy efficiency (PL04) –he said. In these cases, Programme Operators do their best to make the assessment process smoother.

Mr Kubiak proposed several actions, that need to be undertaken in order to minimize the time risk:

- the reallocations between programmes;
- the supplementary calls in case PL04 and PL15.

Mr Erdal underlined the results based management approach for the Grants. The donors see risk management as a tool to achieve objectives and expected results of the Grants. The donors see some risk in programmes: PL14, PL15, PL07, PL04. Mr Erdal furthermore mentioned the cooperation with Transparency International on corruption risk assessment within the Grant programmes. Corruption risks should be taken seriously and mitigated. The results of the Transparency International's findings together with the beneficiary states' comments on the reports will be published as announced during the risk seminar in Oslo in September 2013. The reports to be published will be shared with the Polish side before publication.

7. Publicity and communication

Mr Kubiak presented the results of the promotinal actions taken both by the NFP and POs. Activities have been conducted in line with the *Communication Strategy*. In 2013, informational and promotional actions of the NFP and Programme Operators related to continuation of calls for proposals for the projects and intensive informing on launching of the 2nd edition of the EEA/Norwegian Financial Mechanisms.

Mr Kubiak underlined, that information actions undertaken by NFP and Programme Operators had attracted media attention. Almost 600 different press releases were published in 2013. Most of them (49%) in newspapers and magazines, Internet was covered as well (39%), TV and Radio were also a significant media (12%).

Additionally, Mr Kubiak informed about results of the Baseline Study, which was carried out by the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) in the beginning of 2014 to measure the awareness of EEA and Norway Grants among the Polish society. He said that the most important result of the survey showed, that 13.8% of respondents had confirmed having heard the terms Norway Grants or EEA Grants.

Mr Erdal underlined the need for effective communication of activities and results, the importance to follow up communication work with POs and the importance of integrating the strengthened bilateral relations in all communication of the Grants. The donors thanked the NFP for the survey on the awareness of the EEA/Norway grants in Polish society and mentioned the aim to increase the knowledge of the Grants. The Chairman commended the NFP for keeping the website an active communication and reference tool. Information is presented in an accessible and user friendly way and always up-to-date. Mr Erdal appreciated high number of applicants which indicates the good communication work of both NFP and POs. The Chairman also emphasized the need for good project level information for which the FMO is ready to offer additional training.

8. Closing remarks

Mr Kubiak noted that Poland have contracted the whole dedicated allocation. He said we could also be proud of an impressive number of projects that had already received a grant, which came up to 507.

He also mentioned that the programmes had been discussed one by one also to show some of the potential risks. Both sides – Poland and the donors, should take some actions to minimize the previously mentioned risks.

Summarizing Mr. Kubiak expressed hope for further implementation of the Grants in a spirit of cooperation.

Mr. Erdal thanked for a productive meeting and also for the good work of the Polish authorities. The Chairman also underlined the mutual benefits of cooperation.