

Minutes from the Annual Meeting on Norwegian Financial Mechanism and EEA Financial Mechanism 2009-2014

Warsaw, 05 of June 2013

Participants:

Donor states representatives:

Steinar Hagen, Deputy Director General, Section for Central Europe and the EEA Financial Mechanisms, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Martina Østerhus, Senior Advisor, Section for Central Europe and the EEA Financial Mechanisms, Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
Karsten Klepsvik, Ambassador, Royal Norwegian Embassy
Stein Inge Nesvåg, Counsellor, Royal Norwegian Embassy
Stine Andresen, Director, Financial Mechanism Office,
Rune Vistad, Head of Sector, Financial Mechanism Office
Andrea Pietras, Country Officer, Financial Mechanism Office
Andreas Aabel, Bilateral Officer, Financial Mechanism Office

Representatives of Poland:

Marcin Kubiak, Undersecretary of State, Ministry of Regional Development
Michał Ziętara, Director, National Focal Point
Małgorzata Zalewska, Deputy Director, National Focal Point
Urszula Demidziuk, National Focal Point
Ewa Karólewska, 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
Aleksandra Guzowska, National Focal Point
Zuzanna Kucińska, National Focal Point
Dorota Chmielewska, National Focal Point
Magdalena Iwaniecka, National Focal Point
Barbara Jankowska, National Focal Point
Justyna Beška, National Focal Point
Justyna Lasota, National Focal Point
Beata Pałucka, The Certifying Authority
Danuta Jakóbczyk, The Certifying Authority
Agnieszka Mrozik, The Audit Authority

I. 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 Regional 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 to finalize the reallocation process of EUR 137 million meant for the CCS programme being a part of contracting activities in Poland.

It was shortly summarized by Mr Hagen how many programmes have been signed and open calls launched in 2012. The Donors highlighted that the programme model requires decisions to be taken thoroughly. In the implementation phase the focus has to be shifted more to issues such as risk assessment, mitigation and monitoring. It was also mentioned by Ambassador Klepsvik that Poland is the most efficient country in implementing EEA and Norway Grants.

At the same time the Donors asked for a change of the Annual Meeting's Agenda. As it was discussed and agreed the Bilateral Fund at National Level and work plan has been reordered as a first topic.

II. NFM AND EEA FM 2009-2014

1. Bilateral Fund at National Level/Work plan

The discussion started with the presentation of the results and impact of bilateral cooperation under the Financial Mechanisms by the Polish side. It was stated that bilateral activities were reflected so far in establishing Donor Partnership Programmes, 14 pre-defined projects and the Bilateral Funds at the programme and national level. In total it consumes the amount approx. 9,3 mln EUR.

The Polish side appreciated the approval of the work plan and Implementation System under the Bilateral Fund at national level by the Donors, perceived as a significant and important step forward for the future cooperation.

Afterwards, Mr. Michał Ziętara, Director of the National Focal Point, presented in details the actual implementation status of the Bilateral Fund at National Level. At the beginning he described the activities that had been already implemented in 2013 as well as the scope of initiatives planned for the next months, including the modifications of the work plan for 2013.

Mr. Steinar Hagen expressed his thanks for the presentation. It was confirmed that the activities planned for 2013 as well as the changes indicated to the work plan by the Polish side were accepted by the Donors. The changes concern:

- Environmental conference ('Together towards a Green Future') moved to 2014;
- PL study visit to Norway on trafficking prevention (National Consulting and Intervention Center for the Victims of Trafficking) cancelled (budget moved to trafficking conference);
- Guide on cultural institutions (part II) not realised;
- Scholarships visits cancelled.

Mr Hagen emphasised that the trafficking conference foreseen for 26-27 November 2013 is an event of high political importance for the Donors in 2013. Given experience with the conference budget, realistic budgets for other conferences under the bilateral fund need to be planned in future.

The Donors side stated that the Norwegian Embassy in Warsaw was a contact point and they were ready to help in that process. After a summary of the work plan for 2013, Mr. Hagen suggested discussing the proposal of activities for 2014-2016, sent by the Donors to the Polish side before the Annual Meeting.

In response, the Polish side stated that it was ready to discuss the above mentioned issues. Nevertheless, it was pointed out that new input to the list of proposals submitted by the Donors, just before the Annual Meeting, consisted of substantial changes, especially as far as the budget was concerned. The budget proposed for different activities was much higher than it had been previously assumed by the Polish institutions and new activities were also proposed. The NFP asks for additional information and explanations from the institutions that could be interested in relevant topic. Both sides discussed in details the proposals for 2014. It was agreed that the process of finalization of the budget and activities especially for 2014 should be accelerated and completed by the Focal Point and the Embassy by the end of July 2013. It was connected mainly with the procedure required by the Polish Act on Public Finance, meaning that the relevant financial resources need to be ensured in a state budget. Moreover, the Polish side expressed its concern about the direct contact between the Donors and potential beneficiaries. It caused difficulties in the implementation of the Bilateral Fund. Therefore, the Polish side (as Bilateral Fund operator) asked for the involvement in the consultation process. The Donors assured the participation of the Focal Point (as operator of the Bilateral Fund) at all stages of this process. The Donors pointed out that the Focal Point was involved in the dialogue with the two institutions that were consulted a few weeks before the annual meeting. It was agreed that the Focal Point and Embassy will cooperate closely in the further planning and implementation of the bilateral fund.

The following themes were discussed at the meeting:

1. Gender based and domestic violence.
2. Research/gender
3. Hate speech;
4. NO-PL year 'municipal cooperation'
5. Polish Community;
6. Cross-border/Kaliningrad;
7. SME programme (Focal Point)
8. Trafficking;
9. Correctional services;
10. Justice

11. 'Polish Jewish cultural heritage';

It was confirmed that the above-mentioned topics constitute the subject of common interest for Poland and the Donors states. Nevertheless, it is needed to be further discussed and consulted with proper entities to gain detailed information (scope and budget) on projects proposed in relevant topics.

Mr. Hagen suggested that the activities that were not agreed during the meeting could be further discussed via written procedure. The Polish side welcomed the proposal and also agreed.

As far as 2015-2016 initiatives were concerned, the Polish side pointed out, that at present the priority was to agree with the proposal of activities for 2014. Afterwards, as a good and strong basis, future operations under the Bilateral Fund foreseen for 2015-2016 should be discussed. The Donors confirmed the proposed approach. Only the "SR resolution 1325" and "European City of Culture – Wrocław" were initially discussed at the meeting.

Mr. Hagen said that at that stage the Donors would like to agree on one issue/topic named "Culture Wrocław: European City of Culture". In response, the Polish side informed that the Ministry of Culture and the NFP agreed with the Donors' proposal. The Donors also mentioned that the issue of "SR Resolution 1325" was an important topic not only for Norway but also for Lichtenstein. As the activity was assumed to be implemented in 2015, it was agreed that the discussion on that issue as well other activities foreseen for 2015-2016 would be postponed.

2. Status of Strategic Reports

The Polish side presented additional information to the Reports requested by the Donors. Mr Kubiak informed that the Polish side has chosen PL02 Biodiversity project for the monitoring visit because it is one of the three programmes implemented by the Ministry of Environment and the call was opened in the first quarter of the year 2013. It was underlined that the Focal Point was planning the monitoring visit on this programme in the fourth quarter of 2013.

In relation to the management and control system – Polish side acknowledged that the relevant information on the subject will be included in the next Strategic Report. In the current one – for 2012 – no specific information was provided because the fact that initial actions in the area have just been started. Most of the tasks will be operated in 2013.

The Donors outlined the importance of the assessment of the Financial Mechanisms at the national level to be put in the following annual reports. The Donors explained that the programme model requires a more strategic approach. The NFP is encouraged to follow a dialogue with the FMO on how a more strategic approach can be followed in the reports. More emphasis should be put on risk assessment; in particular programme specific risk assessment and mitigation. The thorough appraisal process of the programmes by the Donors is also a result of this strategic approach.

The Donors adopted the Strategic Reports on the implementation of Financial Mechanisms 2009 – 2014 for the year 2012.

3. Horizontal concerns

The Polish side presented all horizontal concerns that were incorporated in the Programme Agreements.

Ms Zalewska mentioned the special concerns that regards the individual programmes – the allocation to the documentation of cultural history within PL08; the principles of antidiscrimination and tolerance, intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity within PL09; the division of allocation between large and small projects under PL09; the scholarships within the culture area under PL10; mainstreaming gender equality within PL12.

Moreover, Ms Zalewska presented the cross cutting issues like good governance; gender equality, environmental, social and economic sustainability in relation the programmes implemented under the Financial Mechanisms in Poland. All of these factors are put for the monitoring within the next years.

The Donors underlined that the horizontal concerns of the EEA and Norway Grants, in upholding and promoting the fundamental European values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, are

relevant and important. The horizontal concerns should be integrated throughout the implementation of the programmes and the bilateral fund at national level in Poland. Mr Hagen pointed out that the Financial Mechanism Office is ready to assist the Polish Focal Point in preparing the information and reporting on this issue.

4. Status of Programme implementation

The current status of the implementation of each programme was presented in details by Ms Zalewska. Several remarks have been raised:

The Donors noted that they attach great importance to the small grant scheme for NGOs under the PL02 (PA2) 'Biodiversity' programme and are eager to see the outcome of the open call. The Donors are pleased with the good cooperation on the elaboration of the strategy for all environmental programmes.

Ms. Zalewska mentioned the need of keeping the NFP updated about all the news in the PL05 programme. Mr Hagen assured Polish side that all the necessary information about Batory Foundation will be shared with the NFP. Moreover Mr Hagen mentioned the programme will be launched at the end of June.

The meeting on June 24, 2013 for the partners under PL08 the predefined project of the Museum of History of Polish Jews was mentioned.

Ms Zalewska also asked about the extension of the eligibility of the programme PL12, which was confirmed by Mr Hagen. The Donors prolonged the eligibility of the expenditures under the Research programme for one year, i.e. until 30 April 2017.

The forthcoming meeting of the partners under the PL14 predefined project – the Council of Europe and the Polish Ministry of Labour planned for June/July is expected to bring discussions on the bilateral cooperation forward.

Mr Vistad underlined the importance of starting the implementation of PL15 and PL16 programmes; to involve the Council of Europe in the process of preparing the pre-defined project under PL15 and to secure progress for the pre-defined projects under PL16 for which the NFP is asked to facilitate contacts and the FMO is ready to assist if necessary.

Ms Zalewska asked the Donors for a feedback about the amendments of the programme agreements for PL04, PL07, and PL12 programmes. It was said that is extremely important for the Polish side to finalize the issue as soon as possible to make the use of the additional allocation. Mr Vistad assured that FMO has no major issues about the annexes and all of them will be processed soon.

Ms Zalewska asked the Donors how the left over funds will be distributed in PA22 Decent work and tripartite dialogue programme. Mr Hagen answered that funds would be allocated in already approved projects.

It was also mentioned that the meeting between the Polish side and the Innovation Norway as the Green Industry Innovation Programme Operator is to be organized at the end June 2013 to discuss the scope of the new programme.

5. Risk management

Ms Zalewska presented the NFP's policy for risk management. She underlined that the NFP as an institution responsible for the implementation of the Financial Mechanisms in Poland carries out the risk management at the national level. The assessment process consists of identifying objectives, identifying risk categories, assessment of risk in terms of likelihood and consequence and also mitigate risk. This estimation is prepared regularly (every half a year) as a part of the horizontal document in the Ministry of Regional Development.

The Donors noted that the internal MRR's risk management policy is reassuring. Mr Hagen informed about Annual Risk Management Seminar, which will be on 24-25 September 2013 in Oslo, Norway.

Ms Zalewska asked for more information about the possible update of Risk Management Strategy. Ms Andresen noted that an update of the FMO' risk management strategy is on the website and a guide is

under preparation. These issues will be further discussed at the risk management and good governance seminar in Oslo in September.

6. Publicity and communication

Mr Kubiak underlined that communication has been conducted in line with the Communication Strategy. In 2012, the second edition of the Norway and EEA Grants was officially launched. The opening conference was followed by conferences launching particular programmes. On the occasion of the inauguration of the second edition of the EEA and Norway Grants, the National Focal Point launched a new and user-friendly website. In order to reach potential partners in the donor countries with information about the fund, an English version of the website was created. The website was very welcomed by the public opinion and beneficiaries. It also served as a good practise at the Communication Workshops held in April 2013, organised by the FMO and Norwegian Embassy in Poland.

The communication in 2012 and 2013 has been mainly focused on informing about calls and available funds. A great work has been made by Operators which inform about the grants using the following tools: opening conferences, calls announcements in press, workshops for applicants, partners match-making seminars (e.g. within "Diversity in culture" programme) etc.

The Donors expressed high appreciation for the new website of NFP. The importance of information to be inserted in Doris was underlined; it is key that correct information is entered as this is an important tool for demonstrating that the funds are being well used. The Programme Operators are responsible for inserting project level information in DoRIS at the latest 15 days after a project contract is signed. The Focal Point is responsible for quality assuring the information. Doris information is going to the FMO website. POs can use the system to find synergies in other BS. In order to assure the complex information in Doris, the Focal Point asked the Donors for inserting the data concerning the Decent Work and NGO Fund Programme.

Moreover, the Donors emphasised the importance of integrating the bilateral relations perspective in all communication of the Grants and underlined the importance of following-up the programme operators in their communication work. Finally, the Donors encouraged the NFP to prepare the baseline study on communication objectives as soon as possible.

III. CLOSING

Mr Kubiak summed up the most important points of discussion raised during the meeting. He pointed out that the Financial Mechanisms entered into the implementation phase and the Polish side is much engaged to achieve the set results and objectives.

The Donors summarised the meeting as very productive and constructive. Mr Hagen noted that in principle the main activities for the bilateral fund at national level for 2014 were agreed on and noted that a visit of a PL delegation on geothermal issues to Iceland is to be covered at programme bilateral fund level.