

MINUTES OF THE 6th ANNUAL MEETING:

EEA/NORWAY GRANTS 2009-2014

LATVIA

RIGA, 20 APRIL 2017

Ministry of Finance, Room 304

I Adoption of the Agenda and approval of the Strategic Reports (hereinafter – the SRs)

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

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

The AM was opened with introductory speech made by Mr. A.Eberhards. He emphasized overall good progress towards strengthening bilateral relations within the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism and Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009-2014 (hereinafter – the FMs) at all levels – national, programmes' and projects' level and noted that sustainable results were achieved in following dimensions - extent of cooperation, shared results, improved knowledge and mutual understanding, as well as wider effects beyond the specific projects and programmes' cooperation. The Donorstates' side thanked for the effort to the achievement of main FMs goals, especially in strengthening bilateral relations.

Mr. A.Eberhards invited the Head of EU Funds Monitoring Department – Ms. D.Rancane to present the SRs overall status of implementation during reporting period.

II Implementation status of programmes, incl. risk management

Ms. D.Rancane presented:

- bilateral cooperation at national and programme level, and pointed out that several possibilities as well as challenges will be faced in 2017, as there is still a significant amount of programmes' Bilateral Fund (hereinafter – BF) unused. It was highlighted that all involved parties do appreciate achieved results and Latvia is eager to boost existing partnerships and also to create new ones;
- all 7 programmes by outlining achieved results and what will be done in 2017. Ms. D.Rancane indicated new challenges faced regarding status of Cultural Heritage programme's (LV04) pre-defined project "Reconstruction of the Museum of Literature and Music" and noted that more detailed information will be provided later in the presentation of the Programme Operator (hereinafter – the PO);
- changes in programmes' risk scores in comparison to the data presented in 2016 emphasizing that risk are reduced in all programmes;
- financial progress achieved by noting that all focus now has been put on completing final payments and on verification of supporting documents;
- publicity and communication monitoring by indicating that 71% of Latvian public consider the support of the FMs as valuable, also plan of activities for 2017 were

presented, including information about the FMs closure event within discussion festival “LAMPA”, which is highly attended by public society.

Presentation was concluded with information about on-going and planned programmes’ ex-post evaluations and in order to ensure more efficient reporting of the FMs results to the Financial Mechanism Office (hereinafter – the FMO) Ms. D.Rancane presented proposal from Latvia’s side to combine the Annual SRs for 2017 (have to be submitted to the FMO till 31 March 2018) with the Final SRs (have to be submitted to the FMO till June 2018) thereby only Final SRs should be submitted in 2018.

Also Ms. D.Rancane emphasized that the NFP thanks to the FMO has learnt how important is to transfer knowledge between all involved institutions, thus several seminars were organized by the NFP to Latvia’s POs and implementing agencies in order to ensure more efficient overall FMs programmes’ implementation .

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

The Donorstates’ side thanked for interesting and valuable presentation as well as for submitting the SRs on time. It was agreed by the Donorstates’ side that the Annual SRs for 2017 and the Final SRs could be combined. The Donorstates’ side expressed satisfaction with the overall good quality of SRs and noted that this year more in-depth analysis about effects of the FMs in various sectors were provided. Also impact of the bilateral relations was appreciated as comprehensive and detailed - with many good project examples. The Donorstates’ side outlined the SRs’ helpful overview of monitoring activities and comprehensive risk management coverage.

In the spirits of lessons learnt the Donorstates’ side encouraged the NFP to focus more on monitoring results as well as at the POs level – to represent what actually has been achieved by projects and whom they are impacting, and to continue to focus on analyses of impact of the NFP’s assessment of the programmes. The Donorstates’ side approved the SRs based on the SRs’ overall good quality.

The NFP appreciated the comments provided by the Donorstates’ side, which will be taken on board while preparing the Final SRs and thanked the Donorstates’ side for approving the NFP’s proposal of combining the SRs.

The NFP expressed gratitude to the Norwegian Ambassador and Embassy’s team for the special support in various complex issues faced during this period and thanked for good collaboration, which the NFP is willing to continue in the next FMs period. The Norwegian Ambassador thanked the NFP and also emphasised the very successful collaboration and pointed out that a lot has been achieved, many activities have been organised and in overall this collaboration was very well founded.

The Donorstates’ side once again congratulated the NFP on good progress made in the programmes’ implementation in 2016, especially on successful closure of NGO Fund. Also the NFP was informed that unfortunately Green Industry Innovation programme’s (LV06) pre-defined project “Green Technology Incubator” will not be extended beyond 30 April 2017.

The Donorstates’ side was delighted with successful development of bilateral relations and good collaboration with the Norwegian Embassy, especially it was highlighted exhibition “The Munch meets Rothko” as an interesting bilateral event with potential to attract good visibility and to bring knowledge about the very important Norwegian artist.

Also the Donorstates' side was satisfied with excellent results of pre-defined projects "Restoration of Rezekne's Green Synagogue" and "Electronic surveillance", they also expressed the eagerness of seeing best practice examples of all programmes and encouraged to highlight more excellent results on websites and social media.

Ms. D.Rancane thanked for all constrictive comments given and added that in terms of use of programmes' BF the Government Resolution for the POs has been approved in order to foster more efficient usage of BF.

III Status of Cultural Heritage programme's (LV04) pre-defined project "Reconstruction of the Museum of Literature and Music" (hereinafter – pre-defined project) with focus on risk mitigation

The PO presented overall programme's progress, emphasised positive effects of the programme, main programme's achievements and more detailed explanation on pre-defined project, which will not be completed by 30 April 2017. Also the PO presented the further actions of risk mitigation and purposed prolongation of final date of eligibility for pre-defined project expenditures after 30 April 2017 based on Article 7.14.5 of the Regulation. The PO concluded the presentation by stressing importance of successful implementation of this project to Latvian society.

The presentation of the PO (Ministry of Culture) is attached to the minutes as the Annex 3.

The Donorstates' side thanked the PO for providing an update of the challenges encountered respective pre-defined project and proposed solutions to ensure the successful completion of this project. The Donorstates' side appreciated the effort made by the PO so far, but also noted that with regards to projects not completed within their final date of eligibility, it is stated in Article 7.14.6 of the Regulation that, if a project has not been completed on its final date of eligibility, the PO shall ensure that funds are made available to complete the project in a timely manner. This entails an obligation for the PO to ensure funding in order to complete the project prior to the submission of the Final SRs in accordance with the deadline set in Article 5.12.2 of the Regulation. The Donors stressed that Requests for extensions can only be submitted to the FMO after the final date of eligibility and only in cases where the conditions set in Article 7.14.5 were met on that final date. The granting of such further extensions is to be assessed by the Donors on a case by case basis.

The NFP concluded that in the case of pre-defined project more flexibility may be needed and expressed the willingness to put all efforts needed to succeed with completion of the pre-defined project.

IV Summarising the Donorstates' sides constructive comments, the following will be taken into account

The NFP will focus more on analyses of impact of programmes' assessment. Also the NFP is eager to improve communication of the results on both programmes' and projects' level and will continue encourage POs to ensure the visibility of the results for wider public.

The Donorstates' side expressed some additional general concern regarding the FMs implementation system in Latvia, which have to be tackled in the next FMs period – heavy bureaucratic system in overall. The Donorstates' side stressed the need to simplify these procedures.

The NFP noted that this challenge has been acknowledged in the implementation system of foreign financial assistance funds in Latvia, including the FMs, and informed on the plan to work on further simplification of procedures for the next FMs period. In order to be more efficient and effective, the right balance will have to be found between currently strong management and control system, focus on results and need for simplification at the same time not undermining reasonable assurance of eligibility of expenditures.

The Donorstates' side appreciated Latvia's performance in the FMs' implementation and encouraged to continue active approach in the development of bilateral relations and close cooperation with the Norwegian Embassy and the Donorstates as well as to facilitate the absorption of BF at programmes' level where full engagement of the POs is extremely important, as the bilateral objective is very important for the Donorstates.

The NFP appreciated all comments provided by the Donorstates' side which will be taken on board during closure of programmes and while preparing the Final SRs, as well as to ensure potential improvements for the next FMs period.

Annexes:

1. List of participants and agenda of the AM on 3 pages;
2. Presentation of the NFP on 27 pages;
3. Presentation of the PO (Ministry of Culture) on 8 pages.