

MINUTES
5th ANNUAL MEETING
EEA and Norway Grants 2009 – 2014

Prague, 9 November 2016

Ministry of Finance

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Institution	Name
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway	LARSEN Sjur
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway	JOHANSEN Torill
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway	KLEVEN Birgit
Embassy of the Principality of Liechtenstein in Vienna	SPARBER Georg
Mission of Liechtenstein to the EU	MARXER Dominik
Mission of Iceland to the EU	MAGNUSDOTTIR Thora
Financial Mechanism Office	FIDJESTØL Ragna
Financial Mechanism Office	TROST Jana
Royal Norwegian Embassy in Prague	H.E. SLETNER Siri Ellen
Royal Norwegian Embassy in Prague	ANDREASSEN Vegar
Royal Norwegian Embassy in Prague	ENGLUND B. Terje
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, CR	LÍČENÍK Martin
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, CR	KOPECKÝ Robert
Ministry of Finance - NFP	DUPÁKOVÁ Lenka
Ministry of Finance - NFP	MATYÁŠOVÁ Zuzana
Ministry of Finance - NFP	TESAŘ Tomáš
Ministry of Finance - NFP	TOUŠOVÁ Monika
Ministry of Finance - NFP	VANĚK Vlastimil
Ministry of Finance - NFP	BEČVÁŘOVÁ Martina
Ministry of Finance - CA	VRÁNEK Petr
Ministry of Finance - CA	LAJNEROVÁ Kristýna

Ministry of Finance - AA	PAVLÍK Jaroslav
Ministry of Finance - AA	SEIDENGLANZOVÁ Marika
Ministry of Finance - PO	VAVREČKOVÁ Tereza
Ministry of Finance - PO	KARASOVÁ Apolena

1. FORMAL OPENING

The 5th Annual meeting was opened by the Director of International Relations Department, **Ms Zuzana Matyášová**, who chaired the meeting. She introduced the Deputy Minister of Finance, Ms Lenka Dupáková – Head of the National Focal Point.

Ms Dupáková welcomed all participants of the Annual meeting and introduced the representatives of the donors as well as of the Czech side.

From the donors' side the Annual meeting was started with an opening speech of the Head of the Section for Central Europe, Deputy Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, **Mr Sjur Larsen**, who thanked for organization of the on-site-visit held on the day before and summed up the main points of the Annual meeting agenda. He also noted that the discussion during the Annual meeting will be a good ground for further negotiations about the next programming period. He informed that the Czech Republic is among leading countries in negotiations about Memoranda of Understanding for Financial Mechanisms 2014-2021.

Short opening words were also presented by the representative of Iceland **Ms Thora Magnusdottir**, followed by introductory remarks of representative of Liechtenstein **Mr Georg Sparber** and summed up by the Ambassador of Norway in Prague, **H.E. Ms Siri Ellen Sletner**.

Finally, the Agenda of the 5th Annual meeting was agreed by all the participants.

2. STRATEGIC REPORT 2015 AND ITS UPDATE

Ms Matyášová briefly introduced that the Strategic Reports (EEA Grants and Norway Grants) prepared by the NFP in cooperation with Certifying and Audit Authority were submitted to the FMO on 31 March 2016. The NFP received several comments and recommendations from the donors' side that were incorporated into the Update to the Strategic Report submitted to the FMO on 7 October 2016.

Ms Matyášová asked the donors for their feedback and comments.

Mr Larsen summed up that the Strategic Reports for the Czech Republic were of a good quality with informative and comprehensive content. He appreciated that the reports were submitted in time and that the comments raised during the last Annual meeting were incorporated.

Mr Larsen concluded that the Strategic Reports for 2015 and their Update are adopted and approved by the donors.

3. STATUS OF PROGRAMMES IMPLEMENTATION, RESULTS AND RISK MANAGEMENT

Ms Martina Bečvářová, Head of the Centre for Foreign Assistance – Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, had a presentation about the status of programme implementation (attachment No. 1). She summed up the main issues, including the number of running and completed projects, running open calls, commitments and disbursements and actual situation with extension of projects.

Mr Larsen pointed out that the Czech Republic is below the average in actual disbursements and thanked for the updated figures from last certification (46,8 % till 31 August 2016). He also asked for the prediction of disbursement.

Ms Bečvářová explained that 100% of funds were committed and that we have an ambitious plan to disburse 80 – 90% of the total allocation, for this reason changes are under preparation in order to utilize the Bilateral Funds at programme level to the maximum.

Ms Bečvářová also presented the risk analysis of the EEA and Norway Grants 2009-2014, both at the national level and at the programme level (attachment No. 2). There is especially high level of risk related within CZ04, CZ10, CZ13 and CZ15. Ms Bečvářová also described the mitigation measures at both national and programme level in order to lower risks and ensure successful implementation. She also appreciated the cooperation with the FMO, especially when discussing possibility to extend some projects beyond 30 April 2017 (with usage of own resources of the Project Promoter to complete the project).

Mr Larsen thanked for a very good presentation and congratulated to the progress achieved. He appreciated the mitigation measures and the close communication with Programme Operators and Project Partners and noted the proposed solution of completion CZ15 programme after 30 April 2017 using own resources.

Concerning the proposed reallocation from CZ04 to CZ01 – Fund for bilateral relations at national level Mr Larsen expressed that this proposal will be rejected by the donors as it is not in line with the Regulation – the NFP will receive the official reply soon. Instead, he proposed to focus on identifying projects within CZ04 programme area as this is a very important area, he added that the Norwegian Embassy is willing to assist with ideas for using of the still available funds.

Ms Bečvářová continued the presentation with examples of achieved results within each programme (attachment No. 1). She also informed about the evaluation plan where a review / an evaluation is planned for every programme and at the end a country summary evaluation report will be prepared. She added that the schedule of evaluations was discussed with the FMO and that also the FMO, DPPs and Norwegian Embassy will be involved in evaluation. Results of the evaluations will be presented at the final conference of the respective programme and the summary evaluation shall be ready in spring 2018.

Mr Larsen urged the NFP to have evaluation results as soon as possible so that the results can be considered during the preparation of new programmes.

Mr Larsen commented that more emphasis could have been given to Roma within the present mechanism and that it is recommended that a consultation with Roma stakeholders on lessons learnt takes place at the appropriate moment in 2017, the conclusions of such consultation could also be useful for the process of the preparation for the next mechanism.

Mr Larsen reminded the results of two system audits of the NFP done in 2016 where the separation of the role of the NFP and the role of the PO was raised and as the result it must be discussed and reconsidered again for the next programming period.

Ms Trost reminded that according to the agreement during the last Annual meeting the follow-up Roma round table shall be prepared as Roma issues will be one of the most important priorities within the next programming period.

Ms Matyášová promised that the follow-up Roma round table will be organized in 2017 as a consultation with all relevant stakeholders with the view to take stock of what has been achieved regarding Roma inclusion with the EEA and Norway grants during this programming period.

5. BILATERAL RELATIONS AND BILATERAL FUND AT NATIONAL AND PROGRAMME LEVEL

After the break, **Mr Tomáš Tesař**, Centre for Foreign Assistance – Preparation and Coordination Unit, presented an overview of the Fund for bilateral relations at national level (attachment No. 3). He informed that all three open calls are fully utilized, in total 56 initiatives were supported. He also showed some examples of results in initiatives and described lessons learned.

Mr Larsen commented on the lessons learned: he was glad to hear that the interest is still evident and agreed that two levels of bilateral fund (national x programmes) are quite confusing. Concerning the administrative requirements he urged the NFP not to be too strict and try to help applicants to submit good applications where this is necessary.

Mr Marxer added that from the last Annual meeting he noted a significant progress also in this field. That was also confirmed by Ms Matyášová.

Mr Tesař continued his presentation with the description of the NFP activities under the Fund for Bilateral Relations at national level in 2016: analysis of bilateral relations and its presentation, conference “School for Everyone”, FIU workshop, Tundra here, Tundra there and three Public Health events.

Ms Matyášová added that especially the analysis of bilateral relations was very useful.

Mr Larsen summed up that donor also noticed an improvement in cooperation and very good progress at Fund for Bilateral Relations at national level. He stressed that the focus shall be now on the Funds for Bilateral Relations at programme level (BFB) and identification of good bilateral initiatives.

Ms Martina Bečvářová presented an overview of the funds for bilateral relations at programme level (attachment No. 4) where the allocation increased by 50% comparing to 2015 (reallocation of remaining funds from regranteeing or unspent funds). In average the commitment is 58,4% but there are big differences between programmes. Ms Bečvářová described the modifications in the BFB open calls that are under preparation in order to increase commitments – extension of limits of eligible costs and maximum grant, extension of eligible applicants, prolongation of deadlines.

There was a discussion about the prolongation of deadlines for implementation of the bilateral initiatives that are stricter than the Regulation and where Mr Larsen and Ms Fidjestøl asked for an explanation of the reasons for such strict deadlines. Ms Bečvářová explained that the deadlines are counted taking into account the maximum eligibility date and the time the PO needs for checking and approving final reports and administrating payments.

Ms Trost asked why the BFB will not be extended to all possible applicants in all programmes. Ms Bečvářová explained that this extension will happen only in programmes with low BFB commitments

where there is no interest of current project promoters and added that until that moment, such extensions were done for bilateral and only under the two programmes, CZ04 and CZ09.

Mr Larsen emphasized that it is important to make the proposed changes as soon as possible. He stressed the importance of the Bilateral Fund, especially in the view of next programming period.

Ms Fidjestøl added that the FMO plans to have a meeting in the first third of next year in order to monitor and evaluate bilateral relations in this programming period considering also the observations from the Monitoring report of the Bilateral fund at National level that was commissioned by the FMO.

6. LESSONS LEARNED FROM PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION ON THE EEA AND NORWAY GRANTS 2009-2014 PERIOD

Ms Martina Bečvářová presented the lessons learned on the current programming period 2009-2014 and gave suggestions for the next programming period covering both lessons learned by the NFP and lessons learned gathered during the interim conference from other stakeholders, primarily from all the Programme Operators (attachment No. 5). Especially she admitted that just a few lessons learned have been incorporated into the new Regulation and that the NFP have not received any feedback even to our questions and issues for clarification. She explained that the NFP considers the FMO feedback very important for proper understanding of the Regulation and its implementation.

Mr Larsen replied that the donors considered thoroughly the NFP / V4 suggestions and that some explanations were given during the FMO workshop in October 2016. He encouraged the NFP to contact the FMO with any other questions or issues for clarification.

He also stressed that there must be a right balance between the application of the Regulation and national guidelines which are prepared by the national authorities following the Regulations, adding that the Czech Authorities should be cautious not to be too strict in their guidelines and allow for sufficient flexibility. He added that basically, what is not prohibited by the Regulation, is usually allowed. He also supported the idea of multilateral bilateral initiatives or projects.

Ms Fidjestøl pointed out that the NFP will soon receive the FMO guidelines to different aspects of the Regulations. She mentioned that the FMO established an internal help desk in order to have consistency in answer. She also added the lessons learned from the point of view of the FMO and the donors:

- more flexibility and operational system of bilateral relations;
- simplification of administrative rules;
- clear view of management set-up;
- less but better indicators.

7. PUBLICITY AND COMMUNICATION

Ms Tomáš Tesař described the NFP activities in the field of publicity and communication (attachment No. 6). He expressed that as the EEA and Norway Grants are getting to their end there are a lot of examples and good stories to be shared. Ms Matyášová added that other details in publicity and communication area are described in Annex 2 of the Update to the Strategic Report, both for the NFP activities and for programmes.

Mr Larsen appreciated that the NFP follows the Communication Strategy and complimented to the interactive map of projects on the website. He encouraged the NFP to find new good stories, to connect them with the respective programme and to share them both with the public and with the donors.

8. CLOSING REMARKS

As there were no other points raised under “Miscellaneous”, **Ms Matyášová** summed up the conclusions of the Annual Meeting:

- Strategic Reports and their Updates were approved, the FMO and donors comments were reflected;
- the NFP is well aware of risks related to implementation of some programmes and is ready to cope with them;
- within the Funds for bilateral relations the NFP shall encourage applicants to submit quality initiatives at programme level so that the allocation is utilized.

Ms Trost added that for the coming period two meetings are planned:

- meeting regarding bilateral relations to be held in first third of 2017;
- follow-up of the Roma round table to be held in order to sum up the results of the grants to this horizontal issue.

Mr Larsen thanked to all for a productive meeting and excellent presentations. He paid compliments to the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Prague for their work. He concluded that he hopes that the next Annual Meeting held in autumn 2017 will be a “joint” Annual meeting for both the Financial Mechanisms 2009-2014 and the Financial Mechanisms 2014-2021.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Presentation “Status of programme implementation” and “Results achieved examples”
2. Presentation “Risk analysis and mitigation measures in 2016”
3. Presentation “Fund for Bilateral Relations at national level – Open calls and NFP activities”
4. Presentation “Bilateral Fund at programme level – actual status and BF extension”
5. Presentation “Lessons Learned”
6. Presentation “Publicity overview – NFP activities”