



REPUBLIKA SLOVENIJA
SLUŽBA VLADE REPUBLIKE SLOVENIJE ZA RAZVOJ
IN EVROPSKO KOHEZIJSKO POLITIKO



ANNUAL MEETING

**OF THE EEA FINANCIAL MECHANISM AND
NORWEGIAN FINANCIAL MECHANISM 2009–2014**

MINUTES

Portorož, 24 March 2017

Date and time: 24 March 2017, 9:00–12:00

Location: Remisens Premium Hotel Metropol, Conference Room Largo, Portorož

Participants: **Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway**

Mr Tom Tjomsland, Senior Adviser for Central Europe and the EEA/Norway Grants

Ms Torill Johansen, Senior Adviser

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Iceland

Mr Sveinn Kjartan Einarsson, Specialist

Financial Mechanism Office

Ms Ragna Fidjestol, Head of Country and Bilateral Co-operation Department

Mr Thorsteinn Björnsson, Country and Bilateral Co-operation Officer

Embassy of the Kingdom of Norway in Hungary

Mr Olav Berstad, Ambassador

Ms Timea Ruzsbaczký, EEA and Norway Grants Programme Officer

Slovenian National Focal Point, GODC

Ms Nina Seljak, Head of NFP

Ms Mojca Krisch, Head of Financial Mechanism Division, NFP

Ms Petra Hiršel Horvat, NFP, contact person

Ms Andreja Štravs

Ministry of Finance

Mr Robert Šircelj

Ms Janja Vidgaj

Budget Supervision Office

Ms Valerija Rogelj, auditor

Mr Božidar Hlebec, auditor

Programme Operators

SI02 EEA FM Programme – Programme Operator GODC

Ms Silvija Jakopovič, responsible person

Ms Ksenija Fak

SI03 NGO Programme – Programme Operator REC, CNVOS

Ms Mateja Šepec Jeršič

SI04 Scholarship Programme – Programme Operator CMEPIUS

Ms Irena Kos

SI05 Norwegian FM Programme – Programme Operator GODC

Ms Nataša Babuder Rumpret, responsible person

Public Relations and Promotion Office, GODC

Ms Nataša Kogej

Proposed Agenda:

1. Opening remarks/adoption of the agenda
2. Presentation of the 2016 Strategic Report (introduction)
 - a) Status of programme implementation, risk management and horizontal concerns (SI01, SI02, SI03, SI04, SI05)
 - b) Bilateral relations and Bilateral Fund at National Level
 - c) Publicity and communication
3. Miscellaneous business
4. Closing remarks

1. Opening remarks/adoption of the agenda

After opening and welcome remarks of Ms Seljak, Head of NFP, participants were welcomed by Mr Tjomsland as well. Ms Seljak presented the agenda which was adopted.

2. Presentation of the 2016 Strategic Report

Ms Hiršel Horvat, NFP contact person presented the Combined Strategic and Annual Programme Report for 2016. Mr Tjomsland noted that this was a very good strategic report. In terms of cohesion, however, he would have liked to have a more detailed explanation as to where the grants fit in at the national level and cohesion policy.

a) Status of programme implementation, risk management and horizontal concerns***Programme SI01 – Technical Assistance and Bilateral Fund at National Level***

In 2016, Programme SI01 covered management costs at the NFP, Certifying Authority, Audit Authority, and attendance at workshops organised by FMO. The costs of participation in workshops on the period 2014–2021 will be covered by the funding envelope of that same period. Additionally, the website norwaygrants.si and eeagrants.si was updated, and a brochure Working Together Towards Common Goals produced. The latter features more than 120 projects implemented in Slovenia under the EEA and Norway Grants Programmes 2009-2014. NFP purchased the promotional material and the Final Event for the EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009-2014 “Working Together Towards Common Goals” (Ljubljana, 7 October 2016) together with all Slovene Programme Operators was organized. Procurement procedure for evaluation of four programmes has been initiated. The funds under this programme were also used for bilateral relations at the national level.

Programme SI02 – EEA Financial Mechanism Programme

Ms Jakopovič explained that Programme SI02 particularly focused on successful implementation and completion of all projects in 2016. All projects were finished by the end of January 2017. All projects were subject to on-the-spot control. Project promoters regularly reported on their activities and payments went smoothly. Final reports were received and payments made for three projects. The last interim reports have been received for the rest of the projects. Most outcome indicators have already been achieved, and the same goes for output indicators. The findings are based on the received interim and final reports; and while final reports of seven projects have not been received yet, it is believed the numbers will be higher in the end. Expenditure incurred by the end of 2016 stood at EUR 6.2 million, and the amount rose to EUR 6.9 million by 10 March 2017.

Programme SI02 also placed particular attention to promotion of the programme and projects. Several projects’ final events, which were attended by the Programme Operator were organised.

Cooperation with other Programme Operators was fully underway in 2016 as regards complementary action (a meeting in Sofia and in Český Krumlov).

Programme SI03 – Funds for Non-governmental Organisations

Ms Šepec Jeršič highlighted the main 2016 developments under Programme SI03. The latter was in the final stage of implementation given that the majority of the projects (22 out of 33) had been finished already in 2015. 2016 was mainly marked by report review, payment finalising and project completion. An additional call for proposals was published since there was an unspent amount of funds. Nearly all of the funds - 98 % - available were spent. Events held in Romania, Hungary and Portugal that were organised to boost exchange of experience with other beneficiary countries through discussion of topical issues complemented these closure activities. Two researches should be finalised by the end of the programming period, one on transparency of operation of humanitarian organisations and another one on management.

Programme SI04 – EEA and Norwegian Scholarship Programme

Ms Kos gave a short overview of Programme SI04. The total allocation under the programme amounted to nearly EUR 2 million, and almost all funds were spent. The spending would have been higher had the re-allocation from measures to bilateral activities been possible. A total of 455 individuals were included in outgoing mobility activities. All projects had one important common feature which gave them added value – they involved donor country partners. Higher education sphere focused on summer schools, intensive programmes involving 213 students and 69 professors from 14 countries. School projects involved seven school partnerships with 131 pupils/learners and 103 teachers. Several promotional activities have been carried out during the past three years. Good practises were featured on Facebook, website and in the news. The funding available under bilateral fund was used for preparatory and study visits. All in all, there were 73 outgoing persons (mostly teachers) and 16 incoming persons (one from Liechtenstein). The bilateral fund was a very good tool for strengthening bilateral relations and sharing experience. The challenge for the future is how to use all the funds available, secure sustainability of project results and improve administration processes.

Programme SI05 – Norwegian Financial Mechanism Programme

SI05 Programme focused on successful implementation and completion of all projects in 2016. All projects were finished by 31 December 2016. Bottlenecks in the first-level control activities were discussed at the last annual meeting; the latter had been successfully addressed, and first-level control activities and payments went smoothly. All projects were subject to the on-the-spot control. Promotional activities were carried out at the programme and project level. All projects had their closure events organised, and the Programme Operator attended all of these events. A conference “From Projects to Systemic Solution” was held at the programme level in October. Cooperation Committee meeting was held in November to address the implementation of the programme and adopt decisions regarding bilateral activities. Ms Babuder Rumpret presented the statistics on Programme SI05 implementation underlining that incurred expenditure stood at EUR 9.2 million by the end of 2016, while by 10 March the figure rose to EUR 10.4 million. Eleven final reports have been received to date, 15 are still to come. All outcomes, except for one, have been achieved. The non-achievement should be attributed to the fact that nine final reports have not been received for one particular area. Indicators at the output level have been achieved as well, except for one, due to

the same reason. As far as complementary action is concerned, there were two programme operator meeting held in 2016 in Vilnius and in Bucharest.

Mr Tjomsland commented that most outcomes had already been met and added that most likely all of them would be in the end. The trend, he continued, was very promising so he encouraged Slovenian authorities to keep up the good work.

Ms Seljak briefed the meeting participants on the Monitoring Committee. The Monitoring Committee was pleased that none of the projects were terminated. Certain project promoters encountered some difficulties at the beginning. Many of them focused on the project and not on the administrative part, but the reporting did not prove to be an issue later on. The NFP encouraged Programme Operator meetings, as they found it very beneficial to meet with other countries, and was looking forward to that kind of practice in the future. In terms of spending, Ms Seljak emphasised that the NFP would have been happy to achieve 100 % absorption rate, but nevertheless considered the achievement of all set results more important.

Management and implementation

Ms Hiršel Horvat summarised the management and implementation chapter of the report. The Audit Authority prepared the 5th Annual Audit Report and performed a System Audit at the Certifying Authority (MF) and Programme Operator for Programme SI04 (CMEPIUS). One irregularity was detected; the ineligible expenditure in Interim Financial Reports 5 and 6 under Programme SI04 amounted to EUR 6,345 and had already been settled.

The work plan for the NFP and SI02 and SI05 Programmes includes evaluation, preparation for programme closure, preparation for the next financial period, reporting on irregularities, final payments to project promoters and implementation of bilateral activities.

In the Recommendation section, the NFP stressed out two issues, namely human resources management and lack of experts in donor countries regarding the bilateral activities. Ms Seljak explained that a group had been formed to close the 2009-2014 period and implement the upcoming one. The other issue was that the SI02 Programme Operator had problems providing experts in the scope of bilateral activities. Mr Tjomsland commented that risks and success much depend on human capacities. He deemed that the NFP staff was key. In connection to the irregularities, he was interested in what the irregularity in the amount of EUR 6,000 had been about. Mr Hlebec explained that the Budget Supervision Office detected ineligible expenditure which occurred because the project promoter reimbursed actual accommodation costs incurred by faculties' administrative and teaching staff, but declared subsistence allowances in the maximum value in its payment claims while retaining the surplus. Mr Tjomsland said the reason he had asked the question was that they had zero tolerance for corruption, but not for irregularities. He added that irregularities happen, and that it would have been suspicious if there were not any.

b) Bilateral relations and Bilateral Fund at National Level

The work plan under Bilateral Fund at National Level listed three priority areas of cooperation involving the three ministries, it also included other initiatives to be agreed with donors. Ms Hiršel Horvat praised good cooperation with the Norwegian Royal Embassy and thanked them for that. Also, cooperation with the three ministries was at good level. The MFA and MLFCA already carried out their activities, only the MH had to fulfil their obligations in 2016. As a consequence, the work plan was changed. A study visit of Slovenian experts and policy makers on public health to Norway

was organised in May, and international conference on public health “From Projects to Systemic Solution” was held in October. All the ministries had fulfilled their obligations. There is an unspent amount that remains because the implemented activities cost less than initially estimated. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs planned to organise another conference on sustainable tourism in Oslo. Unfortunately they were not successful in finding a partner in Norway. The NFP asked them to reconsider their proposal.

Bilateral relations under Programme SI02

Ms Jakopovič presented activities under the Fund for Bilateral Relations. The work plan was changed since speakers for the conference were not found. A call for proposals of bilateral activities amounting to a total of EUR 40,000 was launched on 20 May 2016. Two types of activities were foreseen, participation of Slovenian representatives in conferences, seminars, workshops in Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein and organisation of bilateral conferences, seminars and workshops in Slovenia. There were two deadlines for submission of proposals. Only two proposals were received for type 2 activities under the programme, and contracts worth EUR 7,250 were concluded. The second call was launched in February 2017 making EUR 40,000 available. In the second week of April a study visit of the Icelandic Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources is planned. A conference on cultural heritage will take place in September or October 2017.

Bilateral relations under Programme SI05

A call for proposals providing EUR 104,000 was launched last year. Again, two types of activities were envisaged and there were two deadlines. 11 contracts were signed in total amount of EUR 80,498. The activities have to be concluded by the end of March. Only one report has been received so far (alcohol policy conference), while other reports are to be received by the end of April. Cooperation Committee suggested that another call for proposals be launched. The latter was launched in February and provides EUR 100,000. The deadline for submission of proposals was the end of March; so far one proposal has been received.

Ms Seljak thanked for the presentations and opened the floor for questions and comments.

Mr Tjomsland said he did not know if more praise could be managed. The results of bilateral relations were very good.

Ms Fidjestol commented that UFM would have preferred to see all the money spent, she advised to predefine certain activities in the future, and added that the regulation was stricter regarding the costs in the past, but had broadened its scope since.

c) Publicity and communication

Ms Hiršel Horvat summarised publicity and communication activities. The website was redesigned and updated, and Facebook site was regularly updated as well in 2016. The final event titled “Working Together Towards Common Goals” was organised. The main goal was to showcase the results of the EEA and Norway Grants programmes and projects, featuring a presentation of two projects under SI04 and SI03 Programme and one under SI02 and SI05 Programme. A publication was produced as a result of cooperation with Ms Kogej from the PR Office, who is also in regular contact with the FMO. She added that there were a lot of followers on Facebook, a new communication tool.

Ms Hiršel Horvat invited participants to watch the video of the final event which was financed by the Embassy. Ms Seljak added that they had tried to engage the political level in publicity and

communication activities. Whenever GODC minister visits regions, and learns about the projects, she tries to visit them. Ms Seljak thanked all her colleagues, she emphasised that a lot of effort was put into the publication, and thanked the rest of the team who participated in the final event organisation. Last but not least, she thanked the Embassy for very good cooperation and financing the video.

Mr Tjomsland said the final event was a huge success; the brochure was excellent, and should be used as best practice. Mr Björnsson also underlined how good the final event was and that he was happy to see lively activities on Facebook.

3. Miscellaneous Business

Ms Krisch summarized the statistics on project and SI02 and SI05 Programme closure. Ms Seljak asked about the timing of the annual meeting for the next year. Ms Fidjestol replied it depended on when the Memorandum of Understanding would be signed. Ms Seljak also said the Monitoring Meeting would be held to approve the final report.

Ms Tjomsland emphasized that the Combined Strategic and Annual Report for 2016 was approved.

4. Closing Remarks

Mr Berstad thanked Slovenian authorities for hosting them in Portorož. He found the programme fantastic and underlined that the next step was to strengthen bilateral relations.

Mr Einarsson thanked for organising the meeting he found very informative. He also thanked for organising the project visits which showed concrete results.

Ms Seljak thanked everyone for coming to Portorož to attend the annual meeting. She thanked the reporters for giving presentations, the Certifying Authority and the Audit Authority. She concluded that cooperation with both authorities was maintained at a very good level and expressed hope this would continue in the future.