



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
GOVERNMENT OFFICE FOR DEVELOPMENT
AND EUROPEAN COHESION POLICY



ANNUAL MEETING
OF THE EEA FINANCIAL MECHANISM AND THE NORWEGIAN FINANCIAL MECHANISM 2009–2014

MINUTES

Ljubljana, 17 March 2016

Date and time: 17 March 2016, 10:00–13:00

Location: Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, GODC
Kotnikova 5 (II. floor conference room), Ljubljana

Participants: **Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs**
Mr Tom Tjomsland, Senior Adviser for Central European and the EEA/Norway Grants

Financial Mechanism Office

Ms Ragna Fidjestol, Head of Department – Country and Bilateral Cooperation
Mr Thorsteinn Björnsson, Country Officer – Malta, Portugal and Slovenia

Embassy of the Kingdom of Norway in Hungary

Ms Timea Ruzsbaczky
Mr Arild Moberg Sande
Mr William Jensen

Slovenian National Focal Point

Ms Nina Seljak, Head of the NFP
Ms Mojca Krisch, Head of the Financial Mechanism Division, NFP
Ms Petra Hiršel Horvat, contact person, NFP

Ministry of Finance

Mr Peter Škofič,
Ms Mateja Mahkovec
Mr Robert Šircelj

Budget Supervision Office

Ms Valerija Rogelj, auditor
Mr Božidar Hlebec, auditor

Programme Operators

SI02 EEA FM Programme – Programme Operator GODC

Ms Silviya Jakopovič, responsible person

Ms Ksenija Fak

SI03 NGO Programme – Programme Operator REC, CNVOS

Ms Tina Divjak

SI04 Scholarship Programme – Programme Operator CMEPIUS

Ms Marja Medved

SI05 Norwegian FM Programme – Programme Operator GODC

Ms Nataša Babuder Rumpret, responsible person

Ms Lidija Breskvar Žaucer

Coordination and public relation division, GODC

Ms Nataša Kogej

Proposed Agenda:

1. Opening remarks/adoption of the agenda
2. Presentation of the Combined Strategic and Annual Programme Report for 2015
3. Bilateral relations and the Bilateral Fund at the national level
4. Status of programme implementation
5. Risk management
6. Publicity and communication
7. Lessons learnt from 2009–2014
8. Closing remarks

1. Opening remarks/adoption of the agenda

After the opening remarks from Ms Seljak, Head of the NFP, participants were also welcomed by Mr Tjomsland. Ms Seljak explained that the Combined Strategic and Annual Programme Report for 2015 was presented at the Monitoring Committee on 7 March 2016. The MC did not achieve quorum, but the report was confirmed at the correspondence session.

2. Presentation of the Combined Strategic and Annual Programme Report

Petra Hiršel Horvat, NFP contact person, presented the Combined Strategic and Annual Programme Report on the implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism and Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009–2014 in Slovenia for 2015. Donor comments to the report will be taken into account in the final version which is to be published on the NFP's website.

3. Bilateral relations and bilateral fund at the national level

Ms Hiršel Horvat presented bilateral co-operation at the national level. It was agreed to use €3.600 remaining under the heading '*other initiatives to be agreed with the Donors*' for facilitating donor participation in a closing event scheduled in October 2016.

Ms Jakopovič presented bilateral activities within the programme SI02.

Ms Babuder Rumpret presented bilateral activities within the programme SI05. A call for proposals under bilateral funds for SI02 and SI05 will be published in early 2016.

Mr Tjomsland noted that in general bilateral co-operation is progressing well and health- and gender-related issues are priorities for bilateral co-operation in Slovenia. Overall, there is potential for further development of bilateral relations. Moreover, Slovenia has one of the highest percentages of projects with Donor project partners among beneficiary countries. Mr Tjomsland also mentioned problems in communication between the Ministry of Health and the DPP of the SI05 programme. He reported that the Norwegian Embassy in Budapest is planning to co-operate at the final event in October 2016 (funds within "Other initiatives to be agreed with the donors" will be dedicated to this event).

Ms Fidjestol asked about the amount for the public call under bilateral funds and whether it is to be published as a running call and about the date for the public health conference. Ms Babuder Rumpret replied that the amount for the public call under bilateral funds is EUR 144,000, that there shall be three deadlines for applications during 2016 and that the final date for the public health conference has not yet been set.

Ms Krisch asked if the Sector for Financial Mechanisms, instead of the Sector for Controls, within the GODC could verify the payment claims within public call under bilateral funds, given that the Regulation determines the functional separation.

Ms Fidjestol explained that this depends on the programme agreement and that they would give notice in writing of their opinion.

4. Status of programme implementation

SI01 – Technical Assistance and the Bilateral Fund at the National Level (Ms Petra Hiršel Horvat)

The main aim of the technical assistance programme is to contribute to the management cost at the NFP, the Certifying Authority and the Audit Authority relating to the implementation of the EEA and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism. The NFP also attended workshops, a study visit and conferences.

SI02 – EEA Financial Mechanism Programme (Ms Silvija Jakopovič)

Ms Jakopovič presented the main focus of work in the framework of the EEA Financial Mechanism Programme in 2015. The pre-defined project “Modernisation of Spatial Data Infrastructure to Reduce Risks and Impacts of Floods” has been implemented since 2013 as planned. Only two projects out of 10 decided not to request extensions for project eligibility periods. Ms Jakopovič presented achieved indicators and outputs of the programme. The main focus in 2016 will be on signing of annexes to contracts with project promoters of selected projects, monitoring of project implementation, updating the website <http://norwaygrants.si/>, and on-site monitoring visit of projects.

Mr Tjomsland commented that this and next year will be crucial for the implementation; he highlighted payment delays to the project promoters and warned that appropriate measures have to be taken to speed up the situation.

Mr Björnsson pointed out that the deadlines for the submission of interim financial reports should be respected and that the quality of information in IFR is very important. He also mentioned that the level of disbursement is low. Ms Fidjestol added that Slovenia is below the average of disbursement among beneficiary countries. But there are no concerns regarding the outputs of the projects and programmes.

Ms Seljak explained that numerous reports have been received and the NFP is aware that payment delays are a bottleneck. The control unit has been reinforced as an ad hoc solution and a long-term solution for the next financial period will have to be found. During the implementation of the projects promoters were not ready for the implementation of the projects. Procedures should be simplified and more workshops for the project promoters organised for the next period.

Ms Krisch added that we had set up an overly complicated system and that in the next programming period, the system should be supported with the IT system.

SI03 – NGO Programme (Ms Tina Divjak)

In connection to the SI03 programme, the implementation of the programme is following the proposed scheduled, and there have been no delays. Ms Divjak presented their public calls. Outcomes of the programme have been achieved. The PO is at this stage increasingly focusing on the visibility and communication of projects. The system audit has been implemented and the results were very good (one of the best NGO POs). The PO participated in 2015 in organizing a joint event with CMEPIUS and the NFP in connection with project promoters that have similar activities to connect them and to think about what they can do together. In October 2016 they will co-operate in a final event with the NFP and CMEPIUS.

Mr Tjomsland expressed satisfaction with the work of the PO and the fact that programme is running well and thanked the PO for the work and the visibility.

Ms Fidjestol added that FMO is very pleased with the success of the programme and that the good visibility is very important (to tell stories).

SI04 – Slovene Scholarship Fund (Ms Marja Medved)

For the SI04 programme, there were funds of EUR 1.9 million available. The PO will use all the funding available. Mobility of students and staff until now: 170 students, 160 professors and 70 administrative staff. The main tasks of the Programme Operator in 2016 will be dedicated to monitoring visits and on-the-spot checks. Ms Medved also presented promotional and bilateral activities in 2015. The PO is planning a joint, final event in October 2016, together with the NGOs and the NFP. In 2016 the PO for SI04 is planning to further promote concrete project results, to organize a study visit to the donor countries – members of the PO and groups of school leaders (elementary and secondary) and Institute for leadership in schools and to prepare for the new generation.

Mr Tjomsland noted the positive programme implementation.

SI05 – Norwegian Financial Mechanism Programme (Ms Nataša Babuder Rumpret)

Ms Babuder Rumpret presented the main activities in 2015: the Cooperation Committee meeting concerning the SI05 programme was held on 3 November 2015. She also presented the progress of SI05 towards expected outcomes, which is positive, and said we could be optimistic that all outcomes of the programme will be achieved.

Mr Tjomsland said that the extension of the project eligibility periods would help in the successful project completion.

Ms Fidjestol asked whether the Cooperation Committee will be included in the preparation of the public call for proposals under bilateral funds. Ms Krisch explained that it will not be included but that it would have a meeting in May 2016. She stressed that the biggest bottleneck in the preparation of the call is national legislation.

5. Risk management

The NFP also presented risk assessment at the national level and the planned mitigation measures. Risk management and the planned mitigation measures at the programme level for SI02 and SI05 was presented by Ms Babuder Rumpret. The donors agreed that overall risk levels are moderate. The NFP was informed that audits will be carried out for SI02 and SI05 in 2016.

6. Publicity and communication

Ms Hiršel Horvat presented publicity and communication activities in 2015. In 2016 the NFP will update the website <http://norwaygrants.si/>, organize a joint event (NGO, CMEPIUS) in October 2016, promote projects results, promote bilateral activities (at the programme and national level), and visit chosen project promoters closing ceremonies. All relevant informational and promotional activities will be published on the NFP's website and Facebook profile.

Ms Seljak added that the political level was also included in the communication activities.

Mr Tjomsland underlined the importance of communicating concrete results. It is important to disseminate information and communicate success stories, he noted. He also presented a workshop addressing communication issues, about which the NFP will be further informed.

The NFP will provide its plans the October closing event and coordination with events under the NGO and scholarships programmes in due course.

7. Lessons learnt from 2009–2014

Ms Krisch presented main findings regarding the financial period 2009–2014, which are:

- The current system is very complicated for small countries.
- The reporting system is a huge administrative burden especially when the requirements are not clear from the beginning
- Slovenia's choice not to use an IT system was shown to have not been ideal
- The fund for bilateral co-operation would be better used only at the national level; public call
- Experiences from awarding extra points for having partners from donor countries have been positive.
- In small countries the evaluators should be chosen at the international tender.

Ms Fidjestol expressed understanding for Slovenia's challenges in setting up an implementation system appropriate to its small size. The donors believe that "shell programmes" have proven to be useful in Slovenia. The Slovenian side was encouraged to explore ways to achieve a more simplified financial management system for the upcoming programming period.

Mr Björnsson asked if Slovenia had any negative experiences regarding artificial donor partnerships. Ms Seljak explained that during the public call for proposals the project proposals with bilateral partnerships were given additional points which proved to be good and boosted the bilateral cooperation. On the other hand there might have been situations of artificial donor partnerships.

8. Closing remarks

Ms Seljak noted the conclusion of the Monitoring Committee to point out at the annual meeting what is the dynamic about the next financial period and also about the completion of projects: If there are special data that we will have to collect, we would like to receive instructions on this as soon as possible.

Ms Fidjestol explained that FMO is preparing instructions for the completion of projects; on the dynamic for the next financial period, she explained that they are waiting for the signature of the agreement EC donor countries (which should happen by the end of May 2016). At the end of May all the NFP shall be invited to Brussels where the new regulation will be presented. After the signature, the negotiations with individual countries will begin.

Ms Seljak thanked all for the constructive meeting.