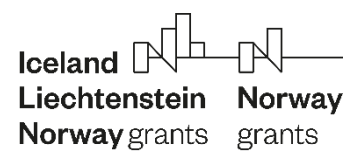




REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
GOVERNMENT OFFICE FOR DEVELOPMENT
AND EUROPEAN COHESION POLICY



ANNUAL MEETING

EEA FINANCIAL MECHANISM AND NORWEGIAN FINANCIAL MECHANISM 2014 – 2021

MINUTES

Ljubljana, 28 May 2019

Date and time: 28 May 2019, 10:00 –12:30

Location: Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, GODC
Kotnikova 5 (4th floor conference room), Ljubljana

Participants:

- **Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway**
 - Ms Torill Johansen, Senior EEA and Norway Grants Adviser and Head of Delegation
 - Ms Anne Havnør, Senior Adviser

- **Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Iceland**
 - Ms Kristín Aðalbjörg Árnadóttir, Ambassador

- **Financial Mechanism Office**
 - Mr Árni Páll Árnason, Deputy Director
 - Ms Mualla Cirakli, Country 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**
 - Mr Dimitrij Pur, Head of NFP
 - Ms Petra Hiršel Horvat, NFP Coordinator
 - Ms Maja Vodopivec Crkvenjaš, NFP Communication Officer

- **Ministry of Finance**
 - Mr Robert Šircelj, Department for Management of EU Funds
 - Mr Maks Pajek, Department for Management of EU Funds

- **Budget Supervision Office**
 - Mr Jure Mekinc, Auditor
 - Mr Božidar Hlebec, Auditor

- **Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Slovenia**
 - Mr Gregor Zagrajšek, Department for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance
 - Ms Vanja Markočič, Department for European Countries

Programme Operators

- **Active Citizens Fund** – Fund Operator CNVOS
 - Ms Veronica Vodlan, Project manager

- **Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation programme** – Programme Operator GODC
 - Ms Nataša Babuder Rumpret, Head of Financial Mechanisms Division, Head of Programme Operator
 - Mr Jože Petkovšek, Programme manager

- **Enhancing Human Capital programme** – Programme Operator GODC
 - Ms Nataša Babuder Rumpret, Head of Financial Mechanisms Division, Head of Programme Operator
 - Ms Silvija Jakopovič, Programme manager
 - Ms Ksenija Fak, Contract manager

- **Small Grant Scheme** – Operator CMEPIUS
 - Ms Irena Kos, Head of Finance Department
 - Ms Darja Sekula Krstič, NOR and EEA FM

Proposed Agenda:

- Opening remarks and adoption of the agenda
- Approval of the Final Strategic report on the implementation of the EEA FM and NOR FM 2009-2014 (presented by NFP)
- Combined Strategic & Annual Programme Report 2018
- Report by the programmes:
 - Technical Assistance
 - Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation programme
 - Enhancing Human Capital programme
 - Active Citizens Fund
- Fund for Bilateral Relations activities
- Publicity and communication
- Any Other Business
- Closing Remarks

1. Opening remarks/adoption of the agenda

After the opening remarks by Mr Dimitrij Pur, Head of NFP, participants were also welcomed by H.E. Mr Olav Berstad, Ambassador of Norway, H.E. Ms Kristín Aðalbjörg Árnadóttir, Ambassador of Iceland, and Mr Árni Páll Árnason, Deputy Director, FMO.

2. Approval of the Final Strategic Report on the implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism and Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009-2014

Ms Petra Hiršel Horvat, NFP, presented the Final Strategic Report on the implementation of the EEA FM and Norwegian FM 2009-2014, and briefly described the impact of five programmes and 123 projects from the period 2009-2014. She highlighted the importance of the Grants for Slovenia and its citizens, underlining the huge contribution of the funding to the development of different areas in Slovenia (public health, natural and cultural heritage, biodiversity, gender issues, education, civil society). Ms Hiršel Horvat provided information about allocated and spent funds by programmes, outlined the results of the projects, described bilateral cooperation (national, programme, project level), information and publicity activities and management and control system, and gave a brief description of the audits and evaluation of 2009-2014 period carried out.

Ms Torill Johansen asked about the lessons learnt in the 2009-2014 period. Ms Hiršel Horvat explained that there was a certain delay in the reimbursement of incurred expenditures at the start of implementation. Contract managers under programmes SI02 and SI05 decided to organise individual meetings with lead partners and Control Unit. These meetings proved to be very useful in solving a lot of issues; in order to ensure a regular payment flow and smooth implementation of projects one additional person started working in Control unit.

The selection of external evaluators was a time consuming and challenging task, too. Three public procurement procedures for selection of external evaluators were published to select expert evaluators to assist in quality assessment of applications. The procedures unfortunately fell through (nobody applied under the first call). A limited number of experts who also frequently co-operate in the role of project promoters also meant a reduced number of potential applicants, which led to a delay in the assessment of applications and announcement of the results of the call. Ms Hiršel Horvat reminded that particularly small countries usually face such problems.

Ms Hiršel Horvat also drew attention to human resources management which is an important dimension facilitating effective programme implementation, and pointed out that shortage of staff and unforeseen changes put efficient implementation at considerable risk. Each phase of the implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism programmes required an adequate number of appropriately skilled staff to carry out the required tasks.

Final Strategic Report on the implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism and Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009-2014 was approved.

3. Combined Strategic & Annual Programme Report 2018

Ms Petra Hiršel Horvat gave a brief description of the content of the Combined Strategic & Annual Programme Report 2018. She outlined the main activities of the Memorandum of Understanding negotiations which resulted in the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on the implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021 and the Memorandum of Understanding on the implementation of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2014-2021.

The two programmes specified in the signed MoUs are **Enhancing Human Capital programme** and **Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation programme**.

She also mentioned that a consortium of CNVOS, Institute PIP and DRPD NM was selected to act as the Fund Operator of the Active Citizens Fund in Slovenia.

Ms Hiršel Horvat stressed that the representatives of the Donor States contributed their expertise and actively participated in public consultation events and bilateral meetings during the programmes development phase.

Combined Strategic & Annual Programme Report 2018 describes the establishment of the Fund for Bilateral Relations.

Ms Torill Johansen expressed the Donors' satisfaction with the Combined Strategic and Annual Programme Report in general. She added that the FMO had a few technical remarks regarding the Report, which would be communicated to the NFP/PO in the upcoming days.

4. Report by programmes

Technical Assistance 2014-2021 (Ms Petra Hiršel Horvat)

The aim of the Technical Assistance Programme is to contribute to the management cost of the NFP, the Certifying Authority, the Audit Authority and the Irregularities Authority. Ms Hiršel Horvat identified the beneficiaries, the budget for the whole period, and main 2018 activities which were covered by the Technical Assistance funding (labour costs of the NFP, CA, AA, IA, evaluation of the programmes financed by the EEA and NOR FM 2009-2014, promotional material, participation at the events organised by the Donor States, ...).

Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation programme (Ms Nataša Babuder Rumpret)

Ms Nataša Babuder Rumpret briefly described the programming process and identified the main milestones achieved in 2018. The final version of the Concept Note for the Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation programme was submitted to the Donor States at the end of March 2019. The total programme budget amounts to EUR 17 million EUR, of which EUR 2.5 million represent the Norway Grants and EUR 12 million the EEA Grants. She said that the programme will be implemented in cooperation with the Norwegian Environmental Agency acting as the Donor Programme Partner. All programme outcomes (increased renewable energy production, enhanced sustainable mobility management, increased application of circular economy principles and improved management of ecosystems under climate change pressures) will be implemented through an open call. Ms Babuder Rumpret added that it is expected that aside partnership projects contributing to these outcomes, pilot projects will be supported and implemented as well.

Enhancing Human Capital programme (Ms Nataša Babuder Rumpret)

Ms Babuder Rumpret explained that the final version of the Concept Note for the Enhancing Human Capital programme was submitted to the Donor States in April 2019. The total programme budget equals EUR 15.88 million, of which EUR 12 million EUR comes from the Norway Grants and EUR 1.5 million from the EEA Grants. The programme will be implemented in cooperation with two Donor Programme Partners, i.e. the Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality

Enhancement in Higher Education (DIKU) and the National Agency of International Education Affairs (AIBA), Liechtenstein. Ms Babuder Rumpret further told that the programme comprises five programme outcomes. Three programme outcomes (improved institutional cooperation at all levels of formal and informal education, focusing on skills and competences for work and life in 21st century, improved support environment for disadvantaged groups and improved work-life balance) will be implemented through an open call. The programme outcome “Improved skills and competencies of students and staff involved in mobility and institutional cooperation between Slovenia and Donor States” will be achieved through a small grant scheme operated by CMEPIUS as the Fund Operator. A pre-defined project “Children’s House/Barnahus” will contribute to the achievement of the programme outcome “Improved skills for good governance and cooperation in the provision of child victim services”.

Ms Babuder Rumpret described the Programme Operator’s on-going activities and the next steps towards the publication of the call for proposals set for the end of 2019.

Ms Johansen said that the concept notes of both programmes were commented on by the Donor States and that the preparation of programme agreements could start, upon the receipt of the supplementary information from the PO and hopefully be signed as soon as possible.

Ms Johansen also briefed the participants about recent developments related to the Social Dialogue-Decent Work Programme, Fund for Youth Employment and Fund for Regional Cooperation. Ms Johansen regretted that fewer applications were received under the Social Dialogue-Decent Work Programme than initially expected (only one application received in Slovenia). The assessment of this application is currently underway. In case of available funding, a new open call may be launched. At the open call under the Fund for Regional Cooperation several hundred project outlines were received. Slovenian entities were quite active in several consortia and two project outlines with Slovenian lead applicants have been invited to submit full applications.

Ms Johansen regretted that it was not possible to ensure the participation of a Norwegian partner in the pre-defined project “Children’s House/Barnahus”.

Ms Johansen said that the FMO is planning to make an assessment of the programme development phase; from the signature of the Memoranda of Understanding, the preparation of concept notes including the stakeholder consultations and the development of the programme agreements. It is expected that the assessment will take place later this year.

Mr Berstad mentioned the recent visit of the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs and pointed out that enhancing bilateral economic activities is considered to be one of the most important priorities discussed at the highest political level and pointing out circular economy and e-mobility as interesting areas.

Active Citizens Fund (Ms Veronika Vodlan)

Ms Veronika Vodlan reported on the current state of implementation of the Active Citizens Fund (ACF) in Slovenia. The Concept Note for ACF Slovenia has already been approved by the Donor States and the FO has received the first feedback from the FMO on the implementation plan and the risk assessment, including supplementary information submitted. Ms Vodlan said that the Programme Implementation Agreement (PIA) is set to be signed by the end of June, adding that the first call for

proposals should be out in September when ACF will be officially launched. The total budget for the Active Citizens Fund in Slovenia amounts to EUR 3,000,000.

Combined Strategic & Annual Programme Report 2018 was approved.

5. Fund for Bilateral Relations activities (Ms Nataša Babuder Rumpret)

Ms Babuder Rumpret reported on the state of implementation of the Fund for Bilateral Relations. The main objective of the Fund is to support a wide range of activities with a clear bilateral profile to strengthen cooperation between the Donor States and Slovenia. The total amount available under the Fund for Bilateral Relations is EUR 754,000. The eligibility period expires on 30 April 2025. Ms Babuder Rumpret told that the first meeting of the Joint Committee for Bilateral Fund was held in Ljubljana on 10 April 2019. The meeting saw the Work Plan of the Fund for Bilateral Relations approved. A total of EUR 129,000 was allocated to four bilateral initiatives proposed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Allocations were made in line with the signed MoUs to Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation programme and Enhancing Human Capital programme (EUR 100,000 EUR to each programme). Before any of the approved bilateral initiatives start, the NFP will conclude implementation agreements with the promoter of these initiatives (i.e. the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Ms Babuder Rumpret underlined that in the future, the NFP will continue to explore potentials for bilateral cooperation and encourage the development of new bilateral initiatives.

Mr Berstad pointed out that bilateral initiatives implemented during the Slovenian EU Presidency would be most welcome and should be encouraged. As regards one of the initiatives listed in the JCBF Work Programme, i.e. "Consultations and expert event on modalities of financing for development", Mr Berstad asked to put the signing of the implementation agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on hold until all details are discussed and agreed with the Norwegian partners.

Ms Johansen emphasised that the JCBF Work Plan should be a living document and that it is important that initiatives and activities are developed in cooperation between the project promotor and the partner from the donor states. Partners from the donor states should therefore be in agreement by the time of approving the Work Plan.

Both Ms Árnadóttir and Mr Berstad mentioned a need to organise and finance match-making events to conclude contents and partnerships of bilateral projects in the agreed Work Plan. Ms Aðalbjörg Árnadóttir also announced that Iceland is going to organize a conference on equal opportunities in autumn 2019 and encouraged Slovenia to participate in the event in the framework of the Fund for Bilateral Relations.

The FMO confirmed that any changes to the adopted Work Plan and related projects/budgets could be mutually agreed by an exchange of emails.

6. Publicity and communication (Ms Maja Vodopivec Crkvenjaš)

Ms Maja Vodopivec Crkvenjaš outlined the main activities regarding publicity and communication in 2018, starting with the signing ceremony for Memorandums of Understanding in April. A press release

highlighting the event was published on the dedicated websites (www.norwaygrants.si / www.eeagrants.si and www.svrk.gov.si) and posted on social media Facebook and Instagram. Ms Vodopivec Crkvenjaš explained that the first version of the Communication Strategy was submitted to the FMO in October, adding that the factsheet with basic information about the EEA and Norway Grants was published on the website.

NFP attended several events in an observer capacity – stakeholder consultations of the Enhancing Human Capital and Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation programmes in July, launch event of the Social Dialogue–Decent Work Programme in October, stakeholder consultation for the Active Citizens Fund in November, and informed the public about these events via website and social media.

Ms Vodopivec Crkvenjaš informed the Donor State representatives that the dedicated website of the EEA and Norway Grants was updated and adjusted to reflect the novelties of the period 2014–2021. In 2018, a total of thirty news articles were published on the website. Social media Facebook and Instagram have also been used to promote the EEA and Norway Grants in Slovenia. As many as 88 news articles, notifications and videos were posted on Facebook in the previous year, and the number of followers increased from 1137 to 1213. Similarly, Instagram (established in March 2018) had 47 news articles, notifications and videos published in the previous year, with the number of followers increasing from 96 to 126 in only ten months. Ms Vodopivec Crkvenjaš said that the number of followers is expected to grow during the calls for proposals and project implementation.

The signing of the MoUs in April was covered by two press releases published on the official GODC website.

Ms Vodopivec Crkvenjaš told that the planned future communication activities include publishing news articles, notifications and videos on the EEA and Norway Grants on the website and social media, especially news pieces regarding the signing of Programme Agreements for the two programmes. She underlined that kick-off events will be organised and news on websites and social media published regarding the calls for proposals under the Active Citizens Fund, small grant scheme, Enhancing Human Capital and Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation programmes and Social Dialogue–Decent Work programme.

Slovenia's Communication Officer concluded her presentation by underlining that Slovenia will continue providing support and coordination of the information and communication activities with the POs, small grant scheme and fund operators included in the Communication Network.

7. Any Other Business

As the mid-term evaluation launched by the FMO is going to be finalized in December 2020, Slovenian authorities and the Donor States agreed that the allocation of the reserve under the Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation programme and Enhancing Human Capital programme may be postponed to 2021.

Since the Slovenian programmes will soon enter the implementation phase, Ms Johansen underlined the importance of providing the donors with accurate and realistic payment forecasts in order to have good cash flow management and financial planning. This is important for the donors as disparities in real and forecasted expenditure create budgeting challenges.

8. Closing Remarks

Mr Pur thanked everyone for a productive meeting and informed that the NFP will prepare the minutes of the meeting and send the document to the FMO within 14 days.