

## **MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING EEA GRANTS-SPAIN 2009-2014.**

**MADRID, 20 NOVEMBER 2013**

### **LIST OF ATTENDANTS**

#### **Donor States delegation**

Ms Ingrid Schulerud,	Ambassador, NMFA
Unnur Orradóttir Ramette	Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Iceland
Ms Henriette C. Gulbrandsen,	Senior adviser, NMFA
Mr Johan Christopher Vibe,	Ambassador, Royal Norwegian Embassy
Mr Lars Andersen,	Minister Counsellor, Royal Norwegian Embassy
Ms Desiré Hopen Standal,	Communication officer, Royal Norwegian Embassy
Ms Eva Puig Syversen,	Trainee, Royal Norwegian Embassy
Mr Rune Vistad,	Head of Sector, FMO
Ms Nathalie Thiberge,	Country Officer, FMO

#### **National Focal Point**

Mr Fernando Fernández Melle	Deputy Director General for the Cohesion Fund and European Territorial Cooperation, Head of the NFP
Ms Pilar Soler Oroz,	Senior Adviser, NFP
Mr Jerónimo Ríos,	Deputy General Director for Certification and Payments, CA.
Mr Javier Haering,	Technical Counsellor , NFP
Ms Teresa Martínez,	Desk Officer, NFP

### **AGENDA**

#### **A. MEETING WITH THE NATIONAL FOCAL POINT**

1. Introductory Statements and approval of the agenda
2. Strategic report: Cohesion objective, Bilateral Relations & Programme Status
3. Horizontal concerns
4. Risk assessment
5. Communication
6. Any other business

#### **B: MEETING WITH THE PROGRAMME OPERATORS**

## **A. MEETING WITH THE NATIONAL FOCAL POINT**

### **1. INTRODUCTORY STATEMENTS AND APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**

#### **National Focal Point (Mr Fernandez)**

- Introduces the meeting making reference to the achievements this year, among them:
  - Approval of the management and Control System (MCS) by the FMO in October, which has caused a delay in the launching of the calls.
  - Doris training held in June in Madrid allows for the submission of the first IFRs in Nov-December.
  - Procurement of the Strategic Report, Risk Assessment and Communication Strategy in December.
  - All PA and PIA have been approved.
  - Development of an IT tool for the management of the program in Spain from October-December.
  - Annual meeting today.
  - Procurement of the external monitoring agent in Nov-December.

#### **Donors (Mrs Schulerud)**

- The donors were pleased to see that all programmes for Spain are approved and are now in implementation. The 6 Spanish programmes are of good quality with well qualified Donor programme partners. The Gender programme is the largest gender equality programme ever supported under the EEA and Norway Grants.
- Given the short implementation period for projects in Spain, the Donors confirmed that it is of great importance that the NFP plays its role of supporting the POs in the programme implementation.
- The Donors are concerned by the lack of sufficient resources put in the fulfillment of the NFP' role and obligations so far, in this crucial phase of grant implementation. The Focal Point must be a resource to the Programme Operators and seek to find viable solutions if challenges in the implementation phase arise. The Donors would like the Focal point to confirm the percentage of time allocated per person to the management of the EEA grants.

**The NFP** (MR Fernández) stress that the staff of the NFP will be increased by two persons.

An external consultant will be hired to prepare the Strategic report and other documents and one person to deal 100 % with the Grants. The first will be contracted at the end of December, and will be paid with the remaining funds of the Technical assistance; the second will be incorporated to the staff in January.

**The donors** would prefer the grant management work to be done by somebody already working with the programme. They offer the assistance of the FMO in the process contracting the strategic reporting activities.

The FMO (**Rune Vistad**) offers his assistance on helping the National Focal Point with these tasks.

## **2. STRATEGIC REPORT: COHESION OBJECTIVE & BILATERAL RELATIONS & PROGRAMME STATUS**

### **Donors (Staff Member)**

- The Donors did not regard the submitted strategic report as completed due to several deficiencies.
- They proposed the FMO to assist the NFP in finalizing the report by hiring an external consultant to finalize the 2012 report and prepare the 2013 Report as well as for 2014 and 2015.
- The Focal Point was also asked to ensure that adequate descriptions of management and control systems at programme level are submitted on time. Any delays may hamper the implementation and fulfillment of the objectives of the programmes.
- Mrs Ramette supports Mrs Schulerud remarks.
- Mrs Schulerud expresses her satisfaction for the coming up of several bilateral projects, and she suggests close follow up by the Embassy of Norway in Madrid.
- In this regard it is important to developed focused proposals and provide good visibility of the three donors, including Iceland and Liechtenstein.

### **Bilateral Relations**

#### **Donors**

- Good impression of the meetings held yesterday with some POs.
- The current economic crisis in Spain is a risk for their funding: it has to be taken into account when drafting the risk Assessment, as well as the mitigation measures to tackle it.
- The Donors reiterated the fundamental importance of ensuring a strengthening of the bilateral relations as one of the two overall objectives for the Grants. Even if the EEA grants is phasing out for Spain, the Donors expect that bilateral cooperation will continue after the end of the financial mechanism in Spain and produce long lasting effects.
- The Donors underlined the need for the Focal Point to engage in a strategic discussion with the Donors where the bilateral funds are concerned.
- Implementing bilateral relations activities require planning and resources. The donors reminded the NFP of its responsibilities in ensuring a smooth implementation of the bilateral relations at national level and in supporting the programme operators in their bilateral plans at programme level.
- The Donors asked for an update on the use of the bilateral fund at national level. The donors asked about the way the NFP has worked with the PO and how relevant activities

have been identified. A presentation by the NFP of the activities intended to be organized in the course of 2014 was also appreciated.

- As regards bilateral relations at programme level, the donors requested an overview of what has been achieved so far keeping in mind the need for synergies between programmes.
- The donors requested the assessment of the focal point regarding the risks and challenges in programme implementation, including for the bilateral relations as well as information on partnerships and on the use or the intention to use the bilateral funds.

#### **National Focal Point (Ms Teresa Martínez)**

- Presents a chart with the breakdown of the Fund for Bilateral Relations at national level (BRNL) and a short description of the activities carried out or planned by each PO.
- The current situation as regards this Fund is not homogeneous, with some programmes in a very advanced phase and others in the very initial one.
- Three programmes have already partially or totally executed their BRNL, these are:
  - ✓ ES 02 (Energy) has already finished all the actions in his plan, having a surplus of 12.046,84 € which go to Reserve.
  - ✓ ES04 (Gender) has already planned most part of the budget.
  - ✓ Programme ES 06 (Embassy) has spent/planned the whole budget, and is ready to collaborate with other PO in their BRNL activities.
- On the contrary, three PO have not carried out nor planned any BRNL action, being in a phase of initial planning of certain activities. This is the case of ES 03 (NGO), ES 05 (Cultural heritage) and ES 07 (NILS -University). The PO of these programmes have designed a list of actions to be financed by this Fund, which are described in the presentation (see annex).

It is agreed that:

- ❖ The Embassy will contact the NFP in order to design jointly by December a final list of actions to be included in the BRNL Plan.
- ❖ Regarding the surplus of ES 02, the donors stressed that the priority allocation for this funds is the Conference on Hate Speech to be organised jointly by ES03, ES04 and ES06.

#### **Programme Status, Work plan.**

##### **Donors**

- The donors were pleased to see that all programmes are now approved and in implementation.

- Due to the short implementation period in Spain, the Donors reiterated to the Focal Point to take a strong coordinating role and assisting POs in solving technical issues which could prevent a smooth programme implementation.

#### **National Focal Point (Mr Fernandez)**

- Presents the status of each programme (see annex)

### **3. HORIZONTAL CONCERNS**

#### **Donors (Mrs Schulerud)**

- The Donors stressed that Promoting common democratic values, strengthening fundamental rights (including minority rights) and consolidating the rule of law are overarching values of the EEA Grants. They are the founding principles of the Council of Europe and common standards of the European Union and are laid down in the Memoranda of Understanding of the EEA Grants between the Donors States and the Beneficiary States. The donors are cooperating with the Council of Europe and the Agency for Fundamental Rights on these issues.
- The Donors referred to the Hate Crime Victims Conference organized in Vilnius on 11-13 November, and reminded of the follow-up points for the Beneficiary States after this conference such as for example Training for young bloggers organized by the NGO fund Programme in each of the BS, funded by the budget for complementary actions. In Spain, it could be organized next spring so that its results could be fed in the conference on hate speech foreseen for the autumn.
- The Donor States encouraged the National Focal Point to have an overall oversight of how the horizontal concerns are implemented in the Beneficiary Country, including producing a narrative text on horizontal concerns in the Strategic Report.
- The Focal Point was invited to share its assessment of the way horizontal concerns are addressed in the programmes.

#### **National Focal Point (Ms Pilar Soler)**

- Presents how the horizontal concerns (HC) are taken into account along all the projects. Some programmes consider the HC in an explicit way (ES03 and ES04), the rest of the programmes consider the HC in an implicit way, but the respect of the HC is mentioned in all calls.
- An assessment on how the gender balance has been taking into account in all programmes is difficult due to the lack of indicators. It is easier in those programmes in which the HC goals are explicitly related to the achievements. In the other cases a specific analysis is needed to incorporate the HC. This is the case of ES05, where the planned Roma Culture Seminar contemplates the HC. On the contrary, in the case of ES07 (University) it is difficult to combine the content of the programme with the compliance of the HC.

### **4. RISK ASSESSMENT**

### **Donors (Mrs Schulerud)**

- Within the current programming approach, more responsibility has been placed on the national level. The Donors pointed out that the Focal Point has a vital role in the risk management together with the Programme operators.
- This was underlined at the Risk Management Meeting in Oslo in September where the Focal Point participated. The risk management of the Grants 2009-14 is a shared responsibility of all the entities involved in the Grants – on the Donor side, on the beneficiary side. On the Spanish side, the lead on this must be taken by the Focal Point.
- The Risk assessment presented in the Strategic report is not sufficient. The Focal Point must invest a bigger effort in defining risk and subsequent mitigation measures, especially at National level.
- The Focal point was asked to present, based on the discussions held at the Risk Seminar in Oslo, its analysis of the three main risks for Spain and their related mitigation measures.

### **National Focal Point (Ms Pilar Soler)**

- Presents a Power point presentation on the Risk associated to each programme, as well as the mitigation measures to reduce them.

The NFP highlights some conclusions, such as the importance of the EEA Grants scheme to support Cultural issues in time of crisis due to the fact that this area is particularly affected by budgetary cuts.

**For lack of time it is not possible to cover orally other points of the agenda. Both parts present in written their positions on these issues.**

## **5. COMMUNICATION STRATEGY**

- The Donors conveyed that the communication strategy submitted did not sufficiently meet the donor's requirements. The FMO will provide extensive comments on the strategy and the donors expect a revised strategy to be submitted by the NFP within a month from now.
- On the basis of the discussions which in the annual meeting, the donors confirmed that the update to the strategic report provided for this meeting, was assessed by the Donors as of insufficient quality, failing to provide an understanding of the context of the Grants contribution (e.g. indicators linked to gender equality or the environment), and providing only descriptive presentation of the bilateral relations analysis and the programme overviews. It could not be approved.
- The final version of the Strategic report for 2012 and the draft Strategic report for 2013 must be finalized by an external consultant, contracted by the FMO/NFP.

**National Focal point** : See presentation in the Annex.

## **B. MEETING WITH THE PROGRAMME OPERATORS**

### **Donors (Mrs Schulerud)**

Welcome the POs, adding that:

- The donors are happy that all programmes are signed and launched.
- They would like to see synergies among the different programmes.
- The timing for implementation of the programmes -is The main risk.
- They offer their help in the implementation of the programmes.
- They stress that results, not the money spent, are the important issue. For this reason, the reporting on results is their key concern, must be a results oriented report. It is important to put the attention in the aim of the programmes, how they cover the horizontal concerns (if applicable), sustainability etc.
- Regarding Bilateral cooperation, the donors are happy to see that all three donors states are involved in the different BRNL activities.
- The Donors are worried by the ability of the NFP to carry out his tasks of assistance to PO due to the limited staff.
- Express their satisfaction for the close cooperation between the Embassy and the POs.

### **Financial Mechanism Office (Mr Vistad)**

- Refer to the technical meeting which is being planned, which will be the opportunity to discuss legal, financial and reporting issues, apart from other proposed subjects. The sooner this technical meeting takes place, the better.

**Every Programme Operator** takes turn to sum up the state of play of their programmes, with the following comments on the factors that may affect their results:

- Support from the donors is needed in the search for potential donor's partners: In outcome 2 (Erasmus students grants) they want to convey that strong cooperation and agreements with the donors is needed (ES 07). This cooperation is also necessary to identify donor partners for the bilateral relations (ES 05, in the field of museums and audio-visual companies) and ES04.
- Higher risk: timing, the delay may affect the quality of the projects (ES 07, ES 02, ES 04)

- Quite strong bureaucratic load of the programme: long procedures, lots of reports, which takes out the necessary time for the management of the programmes and for the good results (ES 07, ES 04)
- It is desirable that the bilateral relations established under these programmes continue beyond this last period of EEA Grants for Spain, under other EU programmes, such as Erika, 20-20 etc (ES 02).
- Limited staff in some cases , support is needed (ES 03)
- All POs are working in the planning of the BRNL, in some cases in close cooperation among them (ES 03, ES04, ES06).

#### **Donors (Mrs Schulerud)**

- Task POs to prepare proposals to reduce the bureaucratic burden, to be dealt with at the technical meeting.
- Will ask the Embassy and the FMO assistance to find donor partners, as requested, this will include the Business Organisations (at suggested by ES05)
- Happy to see the work on synergies between different POs.
- The donors are obliged to report to their Parliaments, this is why the reporting from the POs is extremely important: on results, on risks and on Bilateral Relations at National Level. These issues will be addressed at the technical meeting.

#### **Financial Mechanism Office (Mr Vistad)**

- FMO offers assistance through the coming technical meetings and at any moment through the phone; PO can send questions ahead of the technical meetings if needed.

#### **Financial Mechanism Office (Ms Thiberge)**

- The seminar could include a session on reporting and bilateral relations and individual sessions to address specific concerns of POs who would be interested

#### **National Focal Point (Mr Fernandez)**

- Highlights the problem with the excessive bureaucratic burden of the programme, which affects equally big and small programmes. It prevents from focusing in results and affects the results of the programme.



## Donors (Mrs Schulerud)

- Stresses that other beneficiary countries, smaller than Spain, have not had the problems Spain has encountered, have managed better and with no delays.

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### Follow-up points

Task	Responsible	Time frame
Hire a consultant to write Strategic Report	FMO/FP	December 2013
Consultant finalise Strategic Report 2012	Consultant	February 2014
Secure 1 person 100% to the EEA Grants	FP	December 2013
Overview of all activities under the Bilateral funds at progr. level foreseen for 2014	FP/Embassy (+FMO)	December 2013
Focal Point present Risk assessment; 3 main risks for Spain and related mitigation measures	FP	December 2013
Revised Communication Strategy	FP (FMO to comment)	Early Jan. 2014
Carry out technical meetings with the POs (results, risks, reporting, bilateral issues, legal and financial issues)	FMO	January 2014

Annex 1: Points rose by the donors.

Annex 2: Presentations made by the NFP.