

## Minutes of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting of the EEA and Norway Grants 2014-2021

**Date:**

04<sup>th</sup> June 2020

**Venue:**

Videoconference – Skype for business video meeting

**Agenda**

<b>10:00 – 10:10</b>	Opening remarks (NFP and Donors)
<b>10:10 – 10:35</b>	Status of the programmes' implementation and risk assessment (POs, NFP)
<b>10:35 – 11:20</b>	Mid-term review – status, reallocation of reserve (NFP, Donors)
<b>11:20 – 11:30</b>	Discussion and approval of the Strategic report for 2019 (NFP, Donors)
<b>11:30 – 11:40</b>	Status of the Management and Control Systems (NFP, Audit Authority)
<b>11:40 – 11:50</b>	Bilateral relations – status of the JCBF and Work Plan implementation and Communication and publicity (NFP)
<b>11:50 – 12:00</b>	Recommendations, discussion and expectations for upcoming period

**General**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting was aimed at evaluating the progress made in the implementation of programmes under the EEA and Norway Grants 2014-2021 in Slovakia as well as reviewing and approval of the Strategic Report for 2019. Special attention was paid to discussion and approval of the Mid-term review and reallocation of the reserve.

**Summary**

**Opening Remarks**

A short opening speech was made by the representative of the National Focal Point (NFP) and the representatives of the Donor States. The NFP welcomed all participants at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting which was originally planned to take place in Žilina on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2020 and postponed due to COVID-19. The Donors thanked to all participants for being able to organise the online Annual Meeting during the special COVID-19 situation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway (NMFA) appreciated the progress in all the Programmes implemented in Slovakia. The Mission of Liechtenstein to the EU underlined the interest of the partners from Liechtenstein to participate in the projects which have been submitted in the Open Calls and expressed her wish to reduce the administration burden for Project Promoters and their Partners to the bare minimum and focus more for the real implementation of the projects. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Iceland appreciated the cooperation with the NFP and welcomed the initiative of the Jessenius Faculty of Medicine in Martin approved within the Fund for Bilateral Relation under Open Call FBR01.

**Status of the Programmes implementation in the Slovak Republic**

The Programme Operator (PO) for Programmes operated by the Government Office of the SR summed up implementation status in the programmes Good Governance, Accountable Institutions, Transparency/Cross-border Cooperation; Cultural Entrepreneurship, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation; Domestic and Gender-based Violence and Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Roma Inclusion. The PO informed about the progress in the predefined projects, the Calls for proposals announced so far and number of projects already supported. The PO also mentioned all the modifications in the Programme Agreements. Further, the representative of the NFP informed about the status of the implementation in the Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Programme and Business Development, Innovation and SMEs Programme.



The NMFA appreciated signing of the Programme Agreement of the Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Roma Inclusion Programme in November 2019. Subsequently, the NMFA informed about the plan of the FMO to carry out the external monitoring of the Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Roma Inclusion Programme and the Good Governance, Accountable Institutions, Transparency/Cross-border Cooperation Programme in 2020. The representative of the NFP added that the Business Development, Innovation and SMEs Programme and the Domestic and Gender-based Violence Programme should be subject of monitoring by the NFP in 2020.

The FMO briefly also informed about the status of implementation of the Active Citizens Fund (ACF); the Social Dialogue – Decent Work Programme, the Fund for Youth Employment and the Fund for Regional Cooperation.

#### **Mid-term review – status, reallocation of reserve**

The NFP summed up the process of Mid-term review development and related to the proposal of reallocation of financial reserve and informed about the intention to reallocate this financial sources to existing Programmes. Within Mid-term review, the NFP proposed to allocate sources of reserve from EEA Financial Mechanism to the Cultural Entrepreneurship, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation Programme and reserve from the Norwegian Financial Mechanism to the Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Programme. The NFP considered the selected Programmes as the most appropriate to utilise the financial resources with the most visible impact. The Donors have agreed to reallocate the reserve in the amount of € 2,216,000 from the Norwegian Financial Mechanism to the Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Programme and informed about their proposal to reallocate reserve in the amount of € 2,111,000 from the EEA Financial Mechanism to the Cultural Entrepreneurship, Cultural Heritage and Cultural Cooperation Programme and the amount of € 750,000 from the EEA Financial Mechanism reserve to the Active Citizens Fund. The NFP agreed to this proposal. The Donors encouraged the relevant POs to keep close contact with the DPPs on how to best utilise the allocated funds, especially in the Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Programme. The FMO congratulated to the NFP and the Donors on the successful approval of the Mid-term review and informed that Slovakia was the first beneficiary state to submit the proposal for the reallocation of reserve.

#### **Discussion and approval of the Strategic Report for 2019**

The NFP mentioned that the Strategic Report was elaborated in accordance with the Annotated template for strategic reports and submitted 2 months prior to the originally scheduled Annual Meeting in Žilina. The Donors thanked the NFP for the timely submission of the Strategic Report 2019. The Donors consider the Strategic Report 2019 of very good quality, sufficiently reflecting the current status of implementation and providing useful assessment of the social, economic and political development in Slovakia. The Strategic Report 2019 was formally approved by the Donors.

#### **Status of the Management and Control Systems**

The Audit Authority (Ministry of Finance of the SR) informed on the performance of compliance audits of the Management and Control System (MCS) at the programme level that were completed in the first quarter of 2020. The Audit Authority confirmed that the MCSs are in accordance with the Regulations and positive statements were issued by the Audit Authority. In 2020 is planned to perform system audits at the level of POs, audits of expenditures of the Technical Assistance, Fund for Bilateral Relations and audits of management costs in selected Programmes.

#### **Bilateral relations – status of the JCBF and Work Plan implementation**

The representative of the NFP informed about the calls for proposals announced by the NFP, summed up the results of the Joint Committee for Bilateral Funds (JCBF) meeting, status of preparation of the pre-defined initiatives and expressions of interest approved. The NFP mentioned that many contracts have been amended and the implementation phase of several initiatives was postponed because of the COVID-19 situation. Moreover, the NFP informed that only one pre-defined initiative was successfully implemented, by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the SR. Remaining initiatives have not started with preparation.

The representatives of the NFP and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iceland have agreed to organise a separate meeting related to change of Icelandic pre-defined initiative before the next JCBF meeting.

Further, the NFP informed that next JCBF meeting is planned to be held in autumn 2020 and will be focused on updating the Work plan, as well as planned evaluation of the use of funds, and functioning of the implementation system (planned in Work Plan for 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2020). The representatives of the Mission of Liechtenstein to the EU and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iceland have proposed to relieve them from the procedure of assessing the grant applications submitted in the calls where only Slovak and Norwegian organisations are eligible to apply. However, all the Donors would like to remain involved in the decision-making process of the JCBF. This requirement will be taken into account during re-setup of functioning of the implementation system in 2<sup>nd</sup> of 2020.

#### **Communication and publicity**

The NFP informed about the update of the Communication Strategy and communication activities that took place in previous period. The NFP also mentioned newly planned publicity initiatives (Goodwill Programme Ambassadors, short video introduction of each project, etc.) in order to promote the EEA and Norway Grants in Slovakia. The Donors appreciated the good work in the communication also with the social media and informed that by approval of the Strategic Report, the updated Communication Strategy was accepted.

#### **Recommendations, discussion and expectations for upcoming period**

The Donors informed that new Action Plan for Roma Inclusion and Empowerment was endorsed by the FMO in September 2019. In accordance with that, the Roma round tables will be organised in Slovakia and other relevant Beneficiary states. The date and the format of the round table will be discussed and agreed with the FMO and other relevant partners.

The FMO is also preparing the Guidance Note on data collection on Roma which is expected to be completed and circulated by the FMO in the second quarter of 2020.

The Donors also referred to the letter from the FMC chair on implications of COVID-19.

The NFP informed the Donors about the transfer of the NFP and the PO from the Government Office of the SR to the new ministry on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020. The Donors took note of this information and suggested to the NFP to keep in close contact with the FMO regarding the modification of the Memoranda of Understandings.

#### **Decisions taken:**

- **The Donors approved the Strategic Report 2019 for EEA FM and NFM 2014 – 2021;**
- **The Donors accepted the updated communication strategy;**
- **The Donors approved the reallocation of the financial reserve from EEA FM and NFM 2014-2021.**