



## Minutes of the 4<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL MEETING - EEA and Norway Grants 2009-2014

10<sup>th</sup> March 2015, 14.30 – 17:00 hours

GRTU, Malta Chamber of SMEs, Exchange Buildings, Republic Street, Valletta

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### Participants

EEA Financial Mechanism Committee (FMC) & Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA)

Mr Anders Erdal, Chairman of the FMC/ Deputy Director General, NMFA

Ms Henriette Gulbrandsen, Senior Adviser, Section for Central Europe and the EEA/Norway Grants, NMFA

Royal Norwegian Embassy

Mr Tord Tukun, Minister Councillor

Financial Mechanism Office

Ms Stine Andresen, Director

Mr Frode Dal Fjeldavli, Country Officer

Malta National Focal Point (NFP)/ Programme Operator (PO) - Funds and Programmes Division, Ministry for European Affairs and Implementation of the Electoral Manifesto

Mr Raphael Scerri, Director General (Funds and Programmes) / Head of the NFP/ PO

Ms Carmen Dalli, Director (Programmes and Projects)

Mr Nicholas Bugeja, Senior Manager

Ms Leonie Aquilina Xuereb, Projects Manager

Ms Alison Grech, EU Fund Officer

Ms Yanica Grima, EU Fund Officer, Financial Control Unit

Certifying Authority - EU Paying Authority, Ministry for Finance

Mr Joseph Sghendo, Director

Mr Emanuel F. Borg, Senior Manager

Treasury Department - Ministry for Finance

Ms Letizia Mintoff, Senior Manager

Audit Authority - Internal Audit & Investigations Department, Office of the Prime Minister

Ms Maria Camilleri, Programme Manager Assurance

## **Welcome and opening address**

Mr Raphael Scerri welcomed all the participants, in particular the Donor States delegation, the Norwegian Embassy and the Financial Mechanism Office (FMO), and invited everyone round the table to introduce themselves.

He said that three projects are currently being implemented, two of which are enjoying partnerships with counterpart entities in Norway.

Mr Scerri added that the National Focal Point (NFP) presented the combined Strategic and Annual Programme Reports at this year's Monitoring Committee that was held on 5<sup>th</sup> February. The Committee approved the Reports and these were sent to the FMO for the consideration and approval of the Donors.

Mr Anders Erdal thanked the NFP for hosting the annual meeting. He highlighted the importance of using the remaining time available for the successful implementation of the projects, and that the Donors are expecting that Malta continues to deliver and maximise the Programmes' impact as it did in the previous mechanism.

## **Presentation of the combined Strategic and Annual Programme Reports by the National Focal Point**

Ms Leonie Aquilina Xuereb delivered a presentation on the contents of the combined Strategic and Annual Programme Reports, providing an overview of key events and progress registered at programme and project levels in Malta in 2014.

The year 2014 opened with launch events of two projects, namely Project MT02/2 'Oil/HNS Spill Response Capacity Building for the Protection of Malta's Seas' and Project MT04/1 'A Partnership for Creative Governance'. Three sets of Interim Financial Reports for Technical Assistance and the EEA and Norway Grants programmes were submitted throughout the year. Other activities included the preparation of forecasts of likely payment applications, the issue of the first expression of interest under the Fund for Bilateral Relations at Programme Level (BFp) in August and the organisation of a bilateral seminar covered by the Fund for Bilateral Relations at National Level in October. Frequent meetings were held with the Project Promoters and respective line Ministries whilst a number of administrative and on-the-spot checks were carried on incurred expenditure.

The presentation also included progress achieved at programme and project levels since January 2015. An indicative work plan for the remainder of 2015 and gant charts depicting action plans for each project until the eligibility deadline of April 2016 were also presented.

Mr Scerri thanked Ms Aquilina Xuereb for the detailed presentation and opened the floor for discussion.

Mr Erdal thanked the NFP for the combined Strategic and Annual Programme Reports, which were found by the Donors to strategically place the projects well within the context of national and EU priorities. He advised the NFP though to carefully review the submitted risk assessments and revise certain sections of the Reports, notably the 'Executive Summary' and the 'Summary List of Issues and Recommendations' to include mention of the main risks and progress towards results. Mr Erdal informed that as from the next reporting period, only one combined Strategic and Annual Programme Report covering both Financial Mechanisms will need to be submitted. Further instructions on how to prepare this Report will be explained during the Communications Workshop that is to take place in Prague in April 2015.

## **Management and implementation**

### **- Information and Communication**

Mr Erdal welcomed improvements made on the NFP website for the EEA and Norway Grants. However, the FMO would like to see more articles that tell the stories of projects, interviews with stakeholders and photos of projects that could be added to the media library. Mr Frode Dal Fjeldavli suggested that the content on the NFP website could be more reader friendly and include pictures and quotes from beneficiaries.

Mr Scerri said that these ideas can be applied once the projects reach a more advanced stage. He suggested that

the NFP's dedicated Grants website could open up into other webpages that specifically focus on the projects. He shared the idea of possibly promoting the Grants and the projects on Air Malta's inflight magazine, '*Il-Bizzilla*', as part of the mid-term information activity that the NFP and Programme Operator (PO) plan to carry out in accordance with the respective Communication Strategy and Communication Plan. Another suggestion would be to promote the Grants on the Malta Tourism Authority website.

The donors said that this could be an efficient use of the limited resources, while the FMO added that investing more resources in the NFP's website to allow for more project stories could be an alternative to be considered.

Ms Stine Andresen was interested in hearing about how the NFP and PO roles have worked interchangeably in many aspects in the Maltese context so far. Mr Scerri pointed out that other 2014-2020 funding programmes administered by the Funds and Programmes Division such as the European Maritime Fisheries Fund will be managed by one managing authority and no intermediary bodies will be set up. He felt that this system would work on the EEA and Norway Grants just as well. He added that the role of the Financial Control Unit within the Division is essentially separate from that of the managing bodies. Ms Aquilina Xuereb put in that the NFP and PO administrative duties are more or less shared between the NFP and PO team members and that separation of duties were strictly observed when it came to verifying expenditure. In this regard, the verifying officer reports directly to the Head of the NFP and PO. Mr Nicholas Bugeja said that certain duties of the NFP and PO did not in fact necessitate distinction between the two roles, and the team members have collaborated well together. To this, Mr Scerri added that both the NFP and the PO team members ultimately report to the same Head of the NFP and PO. These two roles and their duties had also been discussed and clarified with the Certifying Authority.

## **Programmes and Projects**

### **- Presentation by the Project Promoter for 'Malta Water Conservation Awareness Centre'**

Mr Manuel Sapiano, the Project Leader of Project MT02/7 presented updates and revised plans for the project. Besides delivering a general overview of the project status to date and its envisaged activities, he explained that the project will form an integral part of the National Water Conservation Campaign. The Project Promoter<sup>1</sup> also plans to allow flexibility in the Centre's facilities to ensure its use in regional cooperation initiatives undertaken to increase established links in the Mediterranean region through supporting instruments such as the INTERREG and ENPI programmes. Mr Sapiano said that the Centre will become a hub on water conservation practices in the Maltese Islands and will feature during Malta's Presidency of the Council to the European Union, notably in the Groundwater Working Group and EU Water Directors meeting.

Mr Erdal found Mr Sapiano's presented plans and ideas for the project highly interesting. The Donors took note of the changes made to the project which would have to be formalised through an amendment of the programme agreement. Mr Erdal recommended the NFP/ PO to keep close follow up on this project and to update the FMO regularly. He also mentioned that there are numerous similar centres in Norway that similarly attract young visitors and encouraged that these are contacted during project implementation. Mr Scerri and Mr Bugeja confirmed Mr Sapiano's willingness to work with these Norwegian science centres.

The NFP and the FMO unanimously agreed to have the project budget finalised, the pertinent Programme Agreement amended to reflect the new changes, the project appraised and the project contract signed. In order to hasten such process, the planning permit could be obtained later. Mr Bugeja added that the works tender could be launched as early as March 2015.

## **Risk assessment**

Mr Erdal noted that Projects MT02/2<sup>2</sup> and MT04/2<sup>3</sup> are at particular high risk of not being implemented within the remaining eligibility period.

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<sup>1</sup> Sustainable Energy and Water Conservation Unit, Ministry for Energy and Health (Energy)

<sup>2</sup> MT02/2 – 'Oil/HNS spill response capacity building for the protection of Malta's seas'

<sup>3</sup> MT04/2 – 'Renewing the Centre of Residential Restorative Services (CoRRs)'

Mr Dal Fjeldavli pointed out that the training component was a particular concern in Project MT02/2. Mr Bugeja assured that the NFP/ PO were constantly consulting with the Project Promoter over the progress

Mr Erdal turned to Project MT04/2, where the main concern has been the delays in obtaining the required building permit. Such concern was already felt back in 2013 when the NFP appraised the project when it had an execution period of 36 months, while there is now only 13 months left for implementation.

He announced that the Donors were ready to make a strong effort to facilitate the successful implementation of the project, if the feasibility can be clearly established, a bilateral component introduced, and if measures are taken to give it less of a character of a construction project. The Directorate of Norwegian Correctional Services (KDI) is prepared to share its experience and expertise in rehabilitation matters with the CoRRS' Project Promoter to better visualise the adapted infrastructure and learn more about rehabilitation programmes for inmates and training of correctional staff. For such reason, he strongly suggested to the NFP to seriously consider the Donors' proposal and have the KDI invited over to assist with the new project plans.

Mr Scerri assured that the NFP/ PO shared the same concerns as the Donors over this project. He said that the Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security was still willing to implement the project and that the revised plans will involve less construction than was originally planned. Given that the existent premises will incorporate refurbishment works and only the construction of a relatively small wing within the boundary wall of the present site, the project is also feasible from a physical perspective and hence, obtaining the necessary planning permit may no longer be an issue.

Mr Bugeja explained that whilst the site will remain the same, changes were being proposed to the original target indicator values for the increased number of constructed cells that as per latest Project Promoter's plans would consist of 40 places instead of 68 cells. Moreover, 20 instead of 30 correctional officers will be trained, to logically correlate with the requirements of a physically contained rehabilitation centre and the current inmate population. Mr Scerri added that the reduction in trained staff should not be taken as weakening the scope of the project as the primary aim was to intensify the training rather than having an increased number of trained officers.

Mr Bugeja asked whether the exchange with KDI, as well as the training of correctional staff could be covered by the project's budget or by the bilateral programme funds. Mr Dal Fjeldavli replied that allocations from both could be used, accordingly.

Both delegations agreed on having the project description updated without further delay.

### **Bilateral Relations and Issues**

Mr Scerri informed that the PO re-issued the expression of interest for bilateral initiatives under the bilateral programme funds to all five Project Promoters in February. Four Project Promoters submitted proposals until the date of the annual meeting and these were briefly outlined by Ms Aquilina Xuereb. In addition, the bilateral programme funds could finance the bilateral exchange for the CoRRS project.

### **Closing Remarks**

Mr Erdal reiterated the importance of keeping close contact with the FMO. Exchange of regular emails was encouraged on the day-to-day issues. He proposed that a teleconference between the NFP/ PO and the FMO was set each month to keep the FMO updated with all the developments and to facilitate guidance where needed.

Mr Scerri agreed with Mr Erdal and assured him that the NFP/ PO have been keeping the FMO informed. Lately too, the NFP/ PO have been referring the project briefs that carry monthly project updates to the FMO.

The Combined Strategic and Annual Programme Reports were approved on condition that the sections referred to earlier were reviewed.

Mr Scerri asked whether any members round the table had any questions or comments to make. Mr Joseph Sghendo asked Mr Erdal whether there was any opportunity of extending the project eligibility period beyond April 2016. Mr Erdal replied that if the Donors find that a project that is going well will not finish until the end of April 2016, they will consider giving an extension to such date. He said that in the meantime every effort is to be made to keep with the plans at hand.

Mr Scerri thanked everyone present, in particular the Donor States delegation and Mr Fjeldavli for his continual support to the NFP/ PO, and brought the meeting to an end.