

## European Economic Area (EEA) Financial Mechanism 2009 – 2014

### ANNUAL MEETING

**Athens, 15 November 2016**

On 15 November 2016, the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting on the implementation of the EEA FM 2009-2014 was held in Athens at the premises of the Ministry of Economy & Development, with the following **agenda**:

- Opening by heads of delegations
- Approval of the Strategic Report 2015
- Summary of implementation of programmes - short presentation of updated Strategic Report 2015 [incl. Jan-Sep 2016]
- Modifications of programme agreements
- Fund for Bilateral relations at national level – adoption of pending items

List of participants:

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Mr. Tom Tjomsland       | Lead Negotiator, NMFA                               |
| H.E. Mr Jorn Gjelstad   | Ambassador, Royal Norwegian Embassy Athens          |
| Ms. Hilde Berit Eide    | Senior Advisor, NMFA                                |
| Mr. Roger Jorgensen     | Deputy Head of Mission, Royal Norwegian Embassy     |
| Mr. Stale Risa          | Acting Director, FMO                                |
| Ms. Polyxeni Anastasiou | EEA Grants Officer, Royal Norwegian Embassy, Athens |
| Mr. Rune Vistad         | Head of Sector, FMO                                 |
| Mr. Tamas Polgar        | Country Officer, FMO                                |

Participants from the Greek authorities:

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|---|---|
| <i>Mr. Panagiotis Korkolis – absent/apologies</i> | Secretary General for Public Investments & the NSRF,<br>Ministry of Economy & Development |
| Ms. Niki Dandolou                                 | Head of EEA Unit - NFP,<br>Ministry of Economy & Development                              |
| Mr. Herakles Alexopoulos                          | EEA Unit - NFP,<br>Ministry of Economy & Development                                      |
| Ms. Xenia Marinou                                 | Advisor to Secretary General  |
| Mr. Nikos Mniestris                               | Advisor to Secretary General  |

#### **Main outcomes and follow-up**

- Official approval of the 2015 Annual Strategic Report (updated Sep 2016).
- Official approval of the Bilateral Fund Work Plan. Ministerial decision publication to follow.
- The Donors noted the good progress that has been achieved at programme and project level.
- Donors encourage Greek authorities to focus more on the achieved results and their contribution to the two main objectives in the next Strategic Report, when these results will already be tangible.
- Donors underline the importance of the implementation of the recently agreed modified and new activities in the GR06 programme and that all parties remain committed to achieving the expected results of the asylum programmes.
- An ex-post evaluation of selected Programmes will be conducted in 2017; the terms of reference will be discussed with the competent team of FMO as required by the evaluation guidelines.
- The Donors urge Greek authorities to improve the staffing situation of the NFP.

## Minutes of Meeting

### Strategic Report – Summary of Programme status

The Annual Meeting commenced with a presentation by Ms. Niki Dandolou, Head of the National Focal Point, about the implementation status of the EEA Grants 2009-2014 in Greece, as laid out in the updated Strategic Report of 2015, timely submitted for this occasion.

- Donors were informed that virtually all open calls were finalised by the PO's. 129 projects are implemented within all programmes, with 44 projects already completed. Efforts by the POs in GR02, GR03 and GR07 have ensured all available budgets have been contracted.
- Programme GR06 was granted a programme agreement modification in the due to changed circumstances and relevant budget reallocation. Ministerial decision publication to follow.
- Every effort was made to speed up implementation; however there is a small residual risk due to the late deployment of programs and short remaining eligible timeframe, legislative amendments, changes of circumstances and implementation issues in specific cases.
- Throughout 2015 the POs proceeded to continuous monitoring of the PPs of the projects through reports, site visits and monitoring through the dedicated **DoRIS** system.
- In 2016, the national MIS system for project monitoring and payments also became operational for EEA Grants (**OPS-EOX**). Data entry is in process from all POs and PPs. It is a requirement under national rules for monitoring, as well as electronic payments from the state budget. A technical seminar was organised in October 2016 for all POs and PPs, in regard to MIS processes.
- Payment flows from the Programme of Public Investments were normalized and payments from the FMO resumed. **Audits** and evaluation plans were shortly presented.
- In the final phase of implementation, there will be intensification of follow-up as well as **communication** activities, both from the POs and the NFP. A new summary leaflet in English, as well a short video about EEA grants in Greek were presented (and uploaded in relevant website).
- Final communication event will be scheduled for 1<sup>st</sup> semester of 2017.

Mr. Tjomsland expressed the position of the Donors summarized as follows:

- The Donors appreciated the timely submission of the **updated Strategic Report**.
- The Report gives a good and concise overview of the status of implementation of the EEA Grants in Greece. The Strategic Report was formally approved and note was also taken of the updates provided in the new version.

- NFP was encouraged to focus more on the achieved results and their contribution to the EEA grants' two main objectives in the next Strategic Report, when these results will already be tangible.
- FMO has provided NFP with some comments that could help further improve the report. In particular, it would be useful if NFP could provide some more detailed information on audits conducted and the on-going or foreseen monitoring and evaluation activities.
- Donors have noted the **good progress that has been achieved at the programme and project level**. It is a positive development that the payment problems have been overcome.
- Based on the updated Strategic Report the Donors are hopeful that a high absorption will be achieved and that most or all of the projects will be successfully completed.
- NFP is invited to provide a more thorough assessment of the programme portfolio.
- Donors reiterated their commitment towards the successful completion of the projects under the **asylum programmes**. Donors are well aware of the dramatically changing legislative and political environment and we fully understand that in this context often rapid responses are necessary.
- At the same time they underlined the importance of the implementation of the recently modified and new activities in the GR06 programme and that all parties remain committed to achieving the expected results.
- Donors asked for cooperation in ensuring that the quality of services at the supported Reception Centers is up to acceptable standards, especially when it comes to the treatment of vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied minors.

Mr. Tjomsland further presented the **status of GR05 programme**, managed directly by the FMO, following discussions with the NFP at the semi-annual meeting in May.

It was stressed that both on-going projects – SOAM, operated by IOM and the Capacity Support project implemented by the Norwegian Refugee Council and its partners – are progressing well and according to plans. The occupancy rate in the four SOAM reception centers is now more than 80%, the conditions in the centers are satisfactory and the cooperation with the Greek authorities (mostly EKKA) on referrals is good.

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has already deployed several experts to the Reception and Identification Service (RIS), trainings have started and NRC is providing assistance to asylum seekers in 5 camps on the mainland and on the island of Chios, by providing information and distribution of necessary non-food items. All of these activities are implemented in close cooperation with authorities and other stakeholders (UN and NGOs). The Donors consider the project to provide valuable capacity building to RIS, which ensures a positive synergy with GR06 and encourage the Greek authorities to use this opportunity for maximizing the impact of this transfer of knowledge from NRC.

## BILATERAL ISSUES

The newly agreed **Work Plan** of the Bilateral Fund at National level was presented by Ms. Niki Dandolou:

The BFNL Committee Meeting took place on 21/10/2016. On that day, the modifications proposed for the BFNL Work Plan were discussed and the modified Work Plan was submitted by the NFP as follows:

- 7 projects are currently agreed in the main pre-defined priority areas & activities, totaling a budget of 317,000 € (Annex I).
- A new cooperation project was added, between the Municipalities of Athens & Oslo on migration/integration issues and agreed (max budget 82,000 €).
- Another 2 new areas for enhancing bilateral cooperation were added to the WP, namely migration and business cooperation:
  - The new cooperation project between the Municipalities of Athens & Oslo on migration/integration issues, proposed by the Norwegian Embassy.
  - The original project to increase business cooperation between Greece and Norway was agreed to remain in the **reserve list of Annex II** and be further elaborated as it remains of interest for both sides (funding via possible reallocations, or financial savings from implementation of Annex I projects).
- The modified Work Plan is now approved by the Donors and the relevant ministerial decision publication will follow.

Mr. Tjomsland presented the Donors' comments on the bilateral issues:

- Donors are pleased to note that discussions at the previous semi-annual meeting have been followed up and the agreed activities can now be implemented.
- The recently approved list of bilateral activities under the BFNL is rather ambitious and these initiatives will greatly contribute to the strengthening of bilateral relations in strategically important areas, including renewable energies, asylum and safety in the offshore oil and gas exploration sector.
- Donors acknowledged the efforts made at the programme level to utilise the available bilateral funds and implement measures that strengthen bilateral relations. The Donors specifically commended the PO for the Renewable Energy programme (CRES in GR03), which has shown a high level of professionalism and commitment when it comes to identifying bilateral opportunities and a large number of donor project partners.
- Close cooperation between the PO and the DPP (UDI) in the GR06 programme will continue to be the cornerstone of joint efforts in the asylum sector.