

## **European Economic Area Financial Mechanism 2009 – 2014**

### **GREECE ANNUAL MEETING**

**Athens, 4-5 November 2015**

On Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> of November 2015, the 5th Annual Meeting on the implementation of the EEA FM 2009-2014 was held in Athens at the premises of the Ministry of Economy, Development & Tourism.

#### **Agenda of the meeting:**

#### **11:00-12:15 Annual Meeting between the Greek Authorities and the EEA Grants Donor delegation**

- Introductory remarks by the Heads of Delegations
- Status of implementation and approval of the updated Strategic Report
- Current status of payments for the EEA Grant Programmes managed by the Greek State
- Bilateral Fund at National Level
- Asylum programmes: status and proposed reallocations
- Information and Publicity

#### **12:30-14:00 Open session with the participation of all Program Operators and Fund Operators**

- Presentations by the POs/FOs on the status of programme implementation (Risk assessment, bilateral relations and publicity)

Participants from the side of the Donor Countries were:

Mr Anders Erdal	Chairman of the Financial Mechanism Committee, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ms Thora Magnusdottir	Counsellor, Icelandic Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ms Stine Andresen	Director, Financial Mechanism Office
Mr Roger Jorgensen	Deputy Head of Mission, Royal Norwegian Embassy, Athens
Mr Tom Tjomsland	Senior Advisor, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Mr Rune Vistad	Head of Sector, Financial Mechanism Office
Ms Polyxeni Ananasiou	EEA Grants Officer, Royal Norwegian Embassy, Athens
Mr Tamas Polgar	Country Officer, Financial Mechanism Office

Participants from the Beneficiary State were:

Mr Panagiotis Korkolis	General Secretary of Public Investments – NSRF, Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism, Head of National Focal Point
Ms Anastasia Panopoulou	Head of Independent Unit, NFP, Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism
Ms Aleka Pliaka	Independent Unit, NFP, Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism
Mr Herakles Alexopoulos	Independent Unit, NFP, Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism
Mrs Elli Michalopoulou	Advisor to the Secretary General
Mrs Lila Kogou	Advisor to Deputy Minister
Ms Vasiliki Kastani	Certifying Authority
Mrs Yolanda Tountopoulou	Audit Authority-Director Planning and Evaluation
Mrs Eleni Niarchakou	Audit Authority-Head of Unit, Planning and Evaluation (responsible for EEA Grants)
Mr. Panagiotis Alexopoulos	Audit Authority, Director, Directorate for management of co-financed programs.

## GR02

Ms. Chryssoula N. Kourteli,	Head of Executive Authority Partnership Agreement, Ministry of Environment & Energy
Ms. Dimitra Koutra	Head of Unit A', Executive Authority Partnership Agreement, Ministry of Environment & Energy
Ms . Vicky Bartzi,	Executive Authority Partnership Agreement, Ministry of Environment & Energy
Mrs Koumparou	Executive Authority Partnership Agreement, Ministry of Environment & Energy
Mr. Giorgos Papathanasiou	Executive Authority Partnership Agreement, Ministry of Environment & Energy
Ms Anna Christodoulou	President of State Scholarships Foundation

## GR03

Dr. Konstantinos Patlitzianas	Technical Coordinator, Division of Development Programmes, Centre for Renewable Energy Sources and Saving (CRES).
Mr Markos Damasiotis	Project Manager, Head of Division of Development Programmes, Centre for Renewable Energy Sources and Saving (CRES).

## GR04

Mr Sotiris Laganopoulos	Director of the EEA Grants NGO Fund Programme, Bodossaki Foundation
Ms Fotini Koutzoukou	Deputy Director of the EEA Grants NGO Fund Programme, Bodossaki Foundation

## GR05

Mr Daniel Esdras	Director, International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Greece
Ms Mania Balourdou	International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Greece

## GR06

Ms. Matina Platsikoudi	European and Development Programmes Division, Ministry of Public Order and Citizen Protection.
Mr Dionysis Vrettis	European and Development Programmes Division, Ministry of Public Order and Citizen Protection.
Mr Ioannis Tavridis	DPP representative (UDI)
Mr Fotis Aivazis	External Advisor

## GR07

Ms. Eleni Stavrianoudaki	General Secretariat for Research and Technology.
M Dimakakos	General Secretariat for Research and Technology.
Mr Sotiris Lasdas	General Secretariat for Research and Technology.

## GR08

Mr Anastasios Procopiou	PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS
Mr Pantelis Dimitriou	First Elements Euroconsultants Ltd

## **Main conclusions, decisions and follow-up**

- The Donors formally approved the Strategic Report for 2014 (submitted by the NFP in March 2015 and updated in October 2015).
- The Donors expressed their satisfaction for the progress already achieved, but urge Greek Authorities to solve all problems regarding the payment procedure as it could jeopardize the timely closure of the EEA Grants 2009-2014.
- The NFP assured the Donors that earlier liquidity problems have now been addressed and that the payments are gradually being normalised. The FMO will however maintain a provisional withholding of payments until funds transferred earlier to the Greek authorities have been used in the respective programmes.
- The parties have formally agreed to reallocate up to €3.985 million to the two asylum programmes, of which €3,315 million from other programme areas:
  - €1.315 million from unused funds in GR01 (TA) and GR02 (water/marine) to GR 05, as proposed in the official letter from Dep. Minister Charitsis to Minister Helgesen (2 November 2015);
  - €2 million from GR02 (water/marine) to GR 05. The Donors indicated that funds would be made available from the next EEA Financial Mechanism (2014-2021) to finance the completion of the contracted projects in GR02, if needed. The NFP will in the near future propose a procedure to be followed, in order to execute the transfer.
  - In addition €670,000 will be transferred from GR06 (asylum) to GR 05 as proposed in the GR06 PO's letter (21 August 2015) and agreed at a technical meeting between the NFP, the PO and the FMO in Brussels (14 October) for the purpose of establishing 80 temporary accommodation places for unaccompanied minors;
- In order to reflect the agreed reallocations, the Donor side will initiate the necessary amendment of the MoU Annex B (exchange of letters) as soon as possible. The Programme Agreements will be amended subsequently in close cooperation with the NFP. The NFP shall work closely with the FMO and the relevant POs to implement the necessary changes as soon as possible, preferably in one single procedure.
- The amendment of the Program Agreement for GR06 (Asylum & Migration), with regard to the already approved two new pre-defined projects (FRC at Lesbos and two mobile units), shall be finalized without delay.
- The Bilateral Fund at National Level should be implemented according to the Bilateral Work Plan. A Bilateral Committee meeting can convene in the near future to discuss modifications in the Work Plan, provided that the pending payments to the implemented/running BFNL activities have been made by the NFP.

## **Summary of the discussions**

Following the opening statements of the respective Heads of Delegations, as well as Ms. Magnúsdóttir (representing Iceland), the following issues were discussed:

### General progress

Mr. Erdal welcomed the progress that has been achieved since the last semi-annual meeting, especially the fact that all selected projects have now been contracted and practically the total available allocation has by now been committed to projects. Mr. Korkolis assured the donors that, with the extensions granted to over 40 projects, and with the normalisation of the payment flows, all supported projects will be implemented, and all available funds will be absorbed by the final eligibility date (April 2017). Ms. Panopoulou informed that a thorough assessment of the entire project portfolio was carried out in close cooperation with the POs, ahead of the submission of the extension requests in September. The Donors requested that the NFP continues to closely monitor the progress of the programmes and make an assessment as to the expected level of absorption at the project level.

Mr. Erdal expressed concerns regarding the continued understaffing of the NFP and the inability of the NFP to use the available funds in the Technical Assistance (GR01). Mr. Korkolis informed that the unit is currently being reinforced by two additional persons, one of whom has already started. The NFP is now in a position to use the TA funds and the first payments are expected to be made by mid-November.

### Approval of the Strategic Report

Ms Panopoulou presented in brief the new developments as in the updated Strategic Report 2014 and asked for its official approval. Mr. Erdal confirmed that the Strategic Report (submitted in March 2015) is of good quality and that the updated report (submitted in October 2015) includes the necessary additions. Therefore, the document was formally approved.

### Payments

Mr. Erdal expressed strong concerns that the significant delays in payments to the POs/PPs could jeopardise the implementation of the programmes and reiterated that further payments to the Greek treasury will only be released once the funds transferred earlier have been disbursed to the POs/PPs. (e.g. as advance payments to the selected projects). The provisional withholding of payments is therefore maintained, as informed in the letter from the FMO to the NFP on 14 August 2015. Mr. Korkolis informed that the earlier cash flow problems – caused by the general liquidity situation of the Greek state budget and the capital controls

in April-August 2015 – have now been resolved and that all EEA Grants programmes are ready to be financed normally. According to a new piece of legislation, funds transferred from the donors to the Greek treasury are now being “ring-fenced”, thereby guaranteeing the smooth payments to the end-beneficiaries, provided that all necessary administrative procedures have been correctly completed. The advance payments to the recently contracted projects (in GR02, GR03 and GR07) are expected to be made before the end of the year.

### Asylum programmes and reallocations

Both sides agreed that as much resources as possible should be allocated to the asylum programmes, in order to immediately address the urgent needs. Mr. Erdal noted the letter from Dep. Minister Charitsis to Minister Helgesen (on 2 November 2015), in which the Greek side proposed the reallocation of altogether €1.315 million (from GR01 and GR02) to the GR05 programme (more specifically the continued operation of the SOAM project). The donors confirmed that this is fully in line with their intentions and therefore this reallocation was formally agreed. Furthermore, the earlier proposal to reallocate ca. €670,000 from GR06 (the grant part of PDP #3, intended to support 80 temporary accommodation places for unaccompanied minors) to GR05 (SOAM) was also formally approved. Finally, Mr. Erdal expressed the clear intention of the donors to reallocate additional resources to the GR05 programme, given the imminent needs of the asylum sector and presented a concrete proposal to this end. Namely, additional €2 million would be reallocated from the GR02 (water/marine) programme to GR05, while in parallel the donors indicated that funds would be made available from the next EEA Financial Mechanism (2014-2021) to finance the completion of the contracted projects in GR02, if needed. This solution would contribute to the highest possible absorption rate in the GR02, and at the same time address urgent needs in the asylum sector. The Greek side welcomed this proposal and therefore the following reallocations to GR05 were agreed by the parties:

- €1.315 million from unused funds in GR01 and GR02 - as proposed in the official letter from Dep. Minister Charitsis to Minister Helgesen (2 November 2015);
- €2 million from GR02, which in practice will mean that the Greek side will overcommit the available (i.e. remaining) funds to the contracted projects, with the parallel commitment of the donors to make funds available from the next mechanism for the completion of the contracted projects, if needed.
- €670,000 from GR06, as proposed in the POs letter (21 August 2015) and agreed at a technical meeting between the NFP, the PO and the FMO in Brussels (14 October);

The Parties expressed their intention to conclude the necessary amendments as soon possible, preferably in one single process. The Donor side will formally initiate the exchange of letters to amend the MoU Annex B. Subsequently, the

relevant Programme Agreements will be amended in close cooperation with the NFP. The NFP will work closely together with the FMO, the relevant POs and national authorities (such as the Audit Authority), in order to conclude this process in an efficient manner.

Finally, it was recalled that the two new pre-defined projects under GR06 (FRC at Lesvos, mobile units) had already been approved by the FMO and that the pending amendments to the Programme Agreement should be finalised without delay.

During the second session (with the POs, see below), it was confirmed by the PO for GR06 that additional savings are expected in the first pre-defined project (FRC at Fylakio). The estimated €1 million will be proposed to be reallocated within the same programme, namely to the extension of the current activities of the Asylum Service (second pre-defined project). The parties agreed to await the concrete proposal of the project promoter, based on which the PO/NFP will submit a formal proposal for the donors' approval.

#### Bilateral Fund at National Level

Mr. Erdal expressed concerns that no progress since the previous semi-annual meeting had taken place due to the fact that the NFP has still not been able to make payments. It was also stressed that the activities in the approved Bilateral Work Plan should be implemented before new initiatives are explored. Ms. Panopoulou once again gave assurances that it is technically and financially ready to proceed with the payments by mid-November. It was agreed that, once payments are normalized, the Bilateral Fund Committee (consisting of the NFP, the Embassy and the FMO) should be convened in the near future to discuss and approve the proposed minor changes/adjustments to the Bilateral Work Plan. Ms. Panopoulou informed that the earlier proposals for reallocating funds within GR01 from the TA to the BFNL are no longer relevant, as the unused TA funds are now proposed to be reallocated to the asylum programme (see above). However, some of the activities in the current Work Plan need to be updated/revised, e.g. due to changes in partners, proposed increased budgets etc.

#### Communication and publicity

Mr. Erdal welcomed the progress that has taken place with regard to the communication of the grants both at the national and programme level, and complimented the NFP for the good quality of the website. Mr. Erdal encouraged the NFP to keep the information on the website and also on social media regularly updated. Further efforts are however needed in certain programmes, such as the GR06 (asylum) programme. Ms Panopoulou informed that GR06 has already set up a sub-page under the Ministry's website, while a completely separate website for the programme is currently under construction. Ms Panopoulou also informed briefly about the most recent and planned publicity activities of the other Programme Operators (such as publicity and information events in GR02, GR03

and GR07). The communication strategy will also be updated in view of the recent progress.

### Second session - Presentation of the status of the programmes

During the second (open) session, the Program Operators and Fund Operators briefly presented the status of implementation of their respective programmes.

The presentations were followed by questions from the participants, mainly regarding the risk assessments and mitigation measures and the progress on the bilateral activities.

### Project visit – Asylum Service

On 5<sup>th</sup> November, the participants (Donor delegation, NFP, PO, UDI) paid a visit to the premises of Asylum Service (one of the two currently running pre-defined projects under GR06). The director of Asylum Service, Mrs. Stavropoulou, made a presentation of the Service's functioning and needs, which was followed by a guided visit of the premises. The supplier of interpretation services (one of the two main components of the project), Metadrasi/Metaction also participated in the meeting.