

European Economic Area (EEA) Financial Mechanism 2009 – 2014

ANNUAL MEETING 2018

Athens, 8 November 2018

List of participants:

Donor States, FMO

Sjur Larsen	Director, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA), Head of delegation
H.E. Jørn Gjelstad	Ambassador, Royal Norwegian Embassy Greece
Anne Havnør	Senior Advisor, NMFA
Elisabeth Lothe	Deputy Head of Mission, Royal Norwegian Embassy Greece
Polyxeni Anastasiou	EEA Grants Officer, Royal Norwegian Embassy, Greece
Tamás Polgár	Country Officer, FMO
Stian Halsen	Trainee, FMO

Greek Authorities

Panagiotis Korkolis	General Secretary of Public Investments & NSRF, Ministry of Economy & Development
Niki Dandolou	Head of National Focal Point EEA Grants (NFP), Ministry of Economy & Development
Eleni Kontaxaki	NFP officer
Herakles Alexopoulos	NFP office
Vassiliki Alesta	Head of Certifying Authority, Ministry of Economy & Development

Yolanda Tountopoulou	Head of Audit Authority, Ministry of Finance

Programme Operators

Chryssoula Kourteli	SACEP, PO of Programme GR02, Ministry of Environment & Energy
Kostas Patlitzianas	Centre for Renewable Energy Sources- CRES, PO of Programme GR03, Ministry of Environment & Energy
Stamatia Platsikoudi	EDPD, European and Development Programmes Division, Ministry for Citizen protection, PO of Programme GR06
Evangelia Sofouli	General Secretariat for Research & Technology (GSRT), PO of Programme GR07, Ministry of Education
Sotirios Laganopoulos	Bodossaki Foundation, PO of Programme GR04 (FMO-managed)
Daniel Esdras	International Migration Organisation (IOM), PO of Programme GR05 (FMO-managed)

Minutes of Meeting

NFP: The Annual Meeting commenced with a welcome by the Secretary General Mr. Korkolis and a presentation (attached) by Ms. Dandolou, Head of the National Focal Point – EEA Grants Special Service, about the overall timeline, implementation and closure status of the EEA Grants 2009-2014 in Greece, as laid out in the Final Strategic Report submitted in October 2018.

Across programmes, **129 projects** were approved and implemented:

- The projects and programmes managed by FMO were implemented **by April 2016**.
- The projects and programmes managed by the Greek authorities were implemented by **April 2017** (except management costs/bilaterals, which ended 31 Dec 2017).
- For Programme GR 01 eligibility ended for BFNL in 30 **Apr 2018** and for Technical Assistance in 31 **Aug 2018**.

At **Final Balance** stage, the results as submitted to FMO in 2018 are:

- The final absorption of the Greek Authorities managed Programmes is 80% (mainly due to the Asylum and migration programme underspending).
- The final absorption of the FMO - managed Programmes in Greece is 97%.
- The final absorption of the GR01 Programme for Technical Assistance is 81%.
- The Bilateral Fund at National Level (BFNL) absorption rate is 65% (implementation at 82%).
- The total absorption rate of the EEA FM in Greece is expected to be approx. 86%.

During this programming period, for the first time all economic and invoice data was entered into the new national MIS and correlated with the co-financed programmes, by Programme Operators and Project Promoters, for all expenditures of 2009-2014 Programmes managed by the Greek authorities. This was a requirement under the national rules for monitoring and control (MCS), as well as electronic payment procedures via the state budget. MIS data was used to extract financial reports and audits samples in a systemic manner.

Also for the first time in EEA Grants in Greece, the MCS implementation at national level (NFP, CA and AA) was audited in the summer of 2018, by international independent auditors on behalf of FMO and concluded that 'the Management and Control Systems set up and operated by the Entity were seen to be designed in compliance with all the regulatory/ contractual requirements, were proportionate and operated effectively in the period from 7 November 2011 to 2 July 2018'. The key observation of the auditors was the insufficient staffing of the National Focal Point Service, a point repeatedly made by the Donors and FMO.

A brief presentation on the implementation and results of the Bilateral Fund at National Level (BFNL) was also provided.

Certifying Authority: The Certifying Authority informed that all Final Balances were submitted and about the state of play regarding financial closure (credit or debit notes back to FMO via the General Accounting Office, Ministry of Finance).

Audit Authority: The Audit Authority presented the audit schedule until the end of the period and informed that few last audits are on-going and will be completed by the end of 2018. Audits results will be processed and finalised resulting in financial closure and thus submission of closure declaration, expected in January 2019.

Programme Operators: All POs were given the opportunity in the last Annual Meeting to make brief remarks on programme results and were able to clarify on questions and remarks made by the Donors and the FMO.

The external consultants gave a brief presentation about the external ex post evaluations commissioned by the NFP with respect to the Energy (GR03) and Asylum (GR06) programmes, with the aim of drawing conclusions which will feed into the development of the new programmes under FM 14-21.

Donors/NMFA: The Head of the delegation, Mr. Larsen stated that the overall final implementation and results of the EEA funds for the period 2009 - 20014 were much improved, both in terms of previous periods in Greece and of the country's ranking among other countries' EEA programmes. The Donors expressed their satisfaction on the outcomes achieved in Greece, as well as the close and successful cooperation with the national authorities.

The main point of concern for the Donors - as repeatedly stated throughout the period and especially towards closure (and start of a new bigger Financial Mechanism) - is the understaffing of the National Focal Point.

The Donors acknowledged receipt of the Final Strategic Report submitted in 2018 and delegated to the FMO the task of officially approving it further to communications with the NFP and any necessary corrections.

The speed of implementation of the BFNL and subsequent payment transfers and bureaucracy ('ypologos') and the delay in the FSR submission were issues raised by the Donors in connection with NFP's understaffing. The NFP acknowledged the point, adding that the FSR, submitted in October 2018, contains all cumulative and latest information on the programming period, including Final

Balance results for GR 01, dated 15 November 2018 and with the eligibility of GR 01 having ended only in 30 September 2018.

The Donors also confirmed that ex-post evaluation results were useful and well documented.

Lastly, the Donors stressed the need to significantly improve on communication and visibility issues for EEA Grants in Greece, by the NFP and Programme Operators. The Donors thanked for the efforts thus far but strongly encouraged more extended and focused efforts on this issue, especially in light of the new EEA programming period 2014-2021.

Agreed follow up and action points

- The Secretary General on behalf of the Ministry of Economy and Development responded with the plans to further improve in the 2014-2021 period based on the lessons learned from the 2009-2014 period and the first BFNL management experience. Further informed on the new staffing procedures taking place to support the Special Services and the EEA Grants Special Service (NFP) in particular, and committed to continuous update of the Donors on this.
- All sides concluded to combine and maximise efforts in the next period towards the common goal of showcasing the programmes and projects of EEA Grants in Greece and informing the public and beneficiaries of their benefits and impact. This could, by way of example, be done at the launching event for FM 2014-2021, since most of the programmes and POs are continuing in the new mechanism.
- The FMO will revert to the NFP with minor comments and suggestions concerning the Final Strategic Report 2009-2014, based on which the document can be slightly revised and subsequently formally approved.

ADDENDUM

Ex post evaluations of GR03 and GR06

Two independent ex-post evaluations of Programme GR03 (Renewable Energy) and of GR06 (Asylum and migration) were conducted in 2009-2014 programming period and a brief summary of results was presented in the Annual Meeting 2018, by the external evaluators:

- In regard to the renewable energy Programme the evaluators pointed out that its design conformed with the National and EEA Grants objectives and all projects over performed in terms of outputs. Special attention needs to be paid to each Project sustainability thus ensuring that also the demonstrative aspect of the Projects is well preserved over time.
- In regard to the asylum Programme the evaluators focused on the very positive achievements on knowledge transfer and capacity building, with the key contribution of the Donor Programme Partner, UDI- the Norwegian Directorate of immigration. It was also highlighted that the Programme largely contributed to establishing an operational and well-functioning Asylum Service in Greece where and when it was so much needed.
