



## Minutes of the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting for the EEA and Norway Grants 16<sup>th</sup> June 2016, Bucharest

### 1. Opening by the National Focal Point and the Donor States

The Minister of European Funds, Mr. Cristian Ghinea opened the meeting and made introductory speeches mentioning the donors constant support and efficient cooperation, which has contributed greatly to the significant progress Romania is experiencing in the implementation of EEA and Norway Grants Programmes. Mr. Sjur Larsen, Director within the Section for Central Europe in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs underlined the satisfaction regarding Romania's results in what concerns the status and absorption rate of the EEA and Norway grants 2009-2014.

The Minister mentioned that the efficient use of external funds is a priority for the Romanian Government and the inclusion of the issue of poverty alleviation among the priorities of the Grants is much appreciated since it is a problem which the Romanian Government considers of utmost importance for the future development of Romania and which this Government is determined to address.

Mr. Ghinea underlined the fact that Romania finds itself less than one year before 30 April 2017, the final date of eligibility for most projects, a crucial period for implementation and obtaining of results; thus, all the efforts should be focused on thoroughly monitoring this process - Programme Operators (PO) and Project Promoters (PP), as well as the National Focal Point (NFP).

He also informed about the beginning of the official negotiations for 2014-2021 programming period.

Mr. Sjur Larsen expressed appreciation for the 95% contracting rate achieved in Romania. He mentioned that this is one of the most important phases, since now the results of the projects are being seen, including the results of the bilateral relations.

### 2. Strategic Report 2015 – discussions and approval

The Minutes of the 2015 Annual Meeting and the Strategic Report were agreed and approved.

Mr. Sjur Larsen made a few ideas/recommendations regarding the Strategic Report:

- A more impact oriented approach (more general perspectives of the activities done)
- Presenting the flagship projects (Astra museum project, Integration of inmates in the Danube Delta, etc)
- How the horizontal aspects are handled (equal opportunities, gender equality, etc).

The next Strategic Report is extremely important.

### 3. Bilateral Fund at National and Programme Level

*Status of implementation (overview of national and programme level plans)*

**The NFP presented the status, as follows:**

**Budget** - €1,529,750: 74.36% - contracted and 60.71% - paid.

**Open Call:** the open call was re-launched in March 2016 and 76 activities contracted (implemented/to be implemented)

**Budget** available on all open calls – 831,147 Euro: 86.56% contracted and 62.25% paid

**Results of the open Call:**

- over 1,900 persons engaged in bilateral events such as: experience and good practice exchanges, conferences, seminars, courses etc.
- 134 entities from donor states engaged in various bilateral cooperation initiatives;
- 114 partnership agreements concluded between entities in Romania and donor states
- 186 persons involved in travel (98 people from Romania and 88 people from donor states)
- 380 articles about bilateral events, published in newspapers in Romania or donor states or on the websites of the actors involved, against a number of 307 articles as originally assumed by applications.
- 88 materials/deliverables resulting from the transfer of knowledge and good practice with the representatives of donor states

This information is presented in the reports submitted to FMO.

*Examples of good practices:*

*TIFF 2015 was widely reported in the national and local media (press, TV, radio).*

- one of the biggest cultural events in Romania with approx. 7200 spectators and a budget of approx. 52,000 euro
- a section of the festival was dedicated to Norwegian films, workshops with Norwegian film experts, concerts thanks to the partnership between the Romanian Film Promotion Association and the Norwegian Film Institute (NFI).

*National Anticorruption Directorate - ØKOKRIM - Seminar on Corruption and Economic Crimes Investigation*

- the National Anticorruption Directorate in partnership with the Norwegian National Authority for Investigation and Prosecution of Economic and Environmental Crime organised a seminar on corruption and economic crimes investigation including lecturers from Norway, Liechtenstein, England, France, Romania, the European Commission and the Council of Europe
- budget: approx. 35,800 euros
- The event implied exchange of experience and best practices in a very significant and visible field of fighting against corruption and economic crimes, of recovering the goods coming from criminal offenses and extended confiscation.

**Predefined activities:** contracted - 59.92% and paid - 58.86%

## Activities implemented:

- Norwegian Embassy – Norwegian Architecture Exhibition
- Norwegian Embassy – Bicentenary celebration of the Norwegian Constitution
- Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection – Developing the institutional capacity for managing collective labour agreements

There are 200,000 Euro not already spent for which there should be some discussions regarding what needs to be done/financed.

The donors mentioned the big importance of bilateral funds for them. In this context, they appreciate the fruitful cooperation with RO.

Mr. Sjur Larsen mentioned that they will look at the sustainability of the small projects within the bilateral fund.

At the national level, there should be taken a decision with the Norwegian Embassy regarding the use of 100,000 Euro. The eligibility end date is April 2018.

In what concerns the bilateral fund at Programme level, the open calls (7) have been launched. All this information was mentioned in the reports submitted to the donors.

In the case of the predefined project “Exchange the best practice between prisons and probation services” NFP pointed out that it is not performing well. After 1 year of discussions, the project is not clear or finalized, and any further delays will jeopardize its implementation in the remaining timeframe and existing budget.

NFP underlined that a clear conclusion on continuing the project should be considered together with FMO and donors, by September 2016.

## 4. Status of implementation of the programmes

### a. *Presentation of status of the programmes focusing on risks, results and lessons learned*

There is a solid basis for the achievement of the objectives of the Grants:

- A contracting rate of 95%
- 545 projects finalized by 30.04.2016, out of the **830 projects contracted** (the majority on the Programmes NGO Fund and Green Industry Innovation)
- Disbursement of **76%**
- Payment to projects rate of **67%**

### **Next year this data will increase.**

There are a few POs which performed very well and there will be kept for the next programming period.

For the Programmes within which the PO did not perform that well, the NFP will do its best to help those programmes conclude.

In 2015 a 1 year extension was granted for the implementation of the projects and thus, helping the POs in recovering the delays caused by the extended negotiation and programming process for 2009-2014.

Programmes **RO09 – NGO Fund and RO17 – Green Innovation in Industry** were successfully finalized with significant results.

The NGO Fund is the most important financing source for the development of the Romanian NGO sector's capacity, while Green Industry Innovation has supported 50 SMEs in achieving ecological and innovative solutions.

A few programmes are facing high risks and delays, which could jeopardize the utilization of the funds, such as Renewable Energy, Environmental Monitoring or Biodiversity, for which efforts are being made in order to address them.

Mrs. Terchila thanked the FMO for its help regarding the public procurement issue and thus, avoiding blocking the procurement activity due to the gap of legislation in RO within this sector.

The NFP has no other problems to be mentioned. The reports are good, so far.

The Romanian Social Development Fund, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Health, Innovation Norway and Deloitte made detailed presentations on their programmes. The presentations focused on the results obtained so far and were made available in the support documents prepared for the meeting.

In what concerns RO 06 – Mr. Sjur Larsen underlined the fact that more than half of the grant may be lost and he asked the FMO and NFP to do their best to save what can be saved. Mrs. Terchila mentioned that the PA for RO 06 is going to be modified in order to save as much as possible from the grant.

#### *b) Roma inclusion target, status of implementation of plans*

In what concerns the Roma issues RO is on schedule. There was a late start but we are on time, now.

There are a few projects which are finalized and a few still on going.

The percentage reached 25% (instead of 10% as initially requested within the MoU) and this happened thanks to RO 25 – Poverty Alleviation Programme. Nevertheless, the percentage, not counting RO 25 reached 17%.

Mr. Sjur Larsen mentioned that they are very satisfied with the results in what concerns the Roma issue (in sectors like Health, Research Justice). Not so good results were registered (Scholarship programme).

The European Commission has selected one of the Roma project as an example of best practice.

National debates and national policies on Roma were issued with RO 25- Poverty Alleviation.

## **5. Publicity and communication**

The **www.eegrants.ro** is updated on a regular basis with:

- news, announcements, events (32 news, press releases and project announcements posted)
- projects announcements and photos
- open calls (it is the most searched item/title of the website)

People searching on the website are from Russia, Germany, Turkey and they are looking for bilateral relations with Norway and Iceland.

The website has 48,200 users; 77,000 sessions and 2,577,000 page views.

The provider submits reports.

**Interactive Map of Projects** was developed by Bogdan Sticlosu, within NFP, using open source software and it includes all implemented projects, except the NGO Fund

It was launched on the website on 09.05.2016, and it is public (over 1000 views).

Projects are located on the map (generally by place of implementation) and are grouped by priority sectors

Information provided: programme, programme operator, project promoter, programme website, project name, project budget, project website, selection (call or predefined), location of the project.

Best practice example within PO:

- Programme website: Ministry of Culture - RO12 Cultural Heritage

[www.fonduri-patrimoniu.ro](http://www.fonduri-patrimoniu.ro)

- Presentation of project stories and results: Ministry of Culture - RO13 Diversity in Culture and Arts

[www.fonduri-diversitate.ro](http://www.fonduri-diversitate.ro)

**The Facebook page “Granturi SEE & Norvegiene”** was launched on 22 May 2016 and by 15 June 2016 it got 185 likes and 13 posts.

Mr. Sjur Larse mentioned that the good stories/results/pictures should be communicated on the Facebook and the website with emphasis on the bilateral aspects of the Grants.

He offered their support/guidance for the social media and recommended even considering its externalization.

Mrs. Terchila proposed a seminar in Romania (November) for the social media issue.

## **6. Financial Aspects – CPA presentation**

Mrs. Tarara (CPA) completed the data presented by the NFP:

- The total budget (grant + co-financing): 48% (compared to 19% in October 2015)
- The grant amount 144 MEuro (only grant): 60%

The certified amounts (total budget), so far:

- RO 19 (Ministry of Health): 88,64%
- RO 15 (ANPCDEFP) – 72,9%
- RO 18 (MEF) – 70,43%
- RO 23 (MJ) - 70,61%

Mrs. Tarara mentioned as a problem the forecasts transmitted by the PO which are overestimated, most of the time.

Realistic forecasts were registered by:

- RO 15 (ANPCDEFP) – they even underestimated the amounts
- RO 04 (Ministry of Environment) and
- Ministry of Justice (78,8% - accurate)

In what concerns the submission of the RIFs, CPA depends on the RIF they receive. The quality of the reports sometimes leads to delays in submitting them to the FMO.

## **7. Conclusions and closing remarks**

RO is aware of the major impact that the EEA and Norway grants have in Romania in all financing/priority sectors, starting with health, culture and continuing with children and youth at risk, Roma issues, research, etc.,

The beneficiaries appreciate the flexible and result oriented mechanism in implementation.

The partnerships between the Romanian entities and those from the Donor States both at Program and project level lead to strengthened bilateral relations through exchange of experience and expertise.

The accurate reporting for 2009-2014 is important.

**2017** will be a very difficult year for the Romanian entities, and not only, taking into consideration both the closure of the Programmes within the 2009-2014 programming period and the launch of the next financial framework for 2014-2021, the negotiation for the latter one starting today, Romania being the first country among the beneficiary states (15) which starts the negotiation process so soon/quick.

The POs to be selected for the next programming period are the ones that proved a good management and had a good implementation of the Programmes and not use/keep the ones with poor experience/results.

**Romania envisages to formally finalize this process (including the signing of the Memoranda of Understanding) together with the Donor States in September-October 2016.**

The Norwegian Embassy offered its support whenever needed.

Mr. Sjur Larsen congratulated Romania for its achievements/results so far within 2009-2014 programming period and asked the NFP to submit the presentations made by the POs within the Annual Meeting together with the minutes.