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**2014-2021 EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms in Lithuania**

**4th ANNUAL MEETING**

**15 June 2021**

**Venue: Microsoft Teams Hub**

**MINUTES**

**Agenda:**

1. Opening remarks
2. Draft strategic report
3. Bilateral cooperation
4. Progress of programmes and risk assessment (including project presentation from LT-Health)
5. Communication
6. Conclusions and closing remarks
7. **Opening remarks**

Ms. R. Dapkutė – Stankevičienė opened the meeting by welcoming everybody to the 4th Annual Meeting to discuss the progress of the implementation of the 2014-2021 EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms in Lithuania during the reporting period from 19 March 2020 to 19 March 2021. Official greetings from Ms. Torill Johansen, Mr. Ole Terje Horpestad and Mr. Auðunn Atlason followed.

1. **Draft strategic report**

Mr. A. Jautakis presented the process of the preparation of the Strategic Report and key achievements for the implementation of the 2014-2021 EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms in Lithuania during the reporting period. He briefly presented challenges in the process of implementation related with Covid-19 pandemic. First of all, Covid-19 pandemic did increase risks related to the absorption of the Grants, which led to postponement of launches of calls and some bilateral activities. However, no significant impact on the project implementation deadlines has been observed, because a negative impact on the absorption of the Grants was mitigated by relevant risk management measures implemented. Secondly, one of the main challenges was pandemic caused delays. However, despite delays related to legal aspects and effects of the pandemic, programmes shifted from the preparation to the implementation stage.

Mr. A. Jautakis also presented achievement in the of management and control systems (MCSs). During the reporting period MCSs of three programmes *(“Research”, “Environment, Energy, Climate Change” and “Justice and Home Affairs“)* were prepared. The Audit Authority also performed three compliance audits of the MCS of aforementioned programmes. He noted that no irregularities were found during MCS compliance audits of the programmes *“Research”, “Justice and Home Affairs”* and *“Environment, Energy, Climate Change”*, where the qualified opinion was issued for the first one and unqualified opinions for the last two programmes.

Speaking of the implementation of programmes, Mr. A. Jautakis noted that all agreements of the Programmes were already signed during the previous reporting period and their implementation during the reporting period had accelerated significantly. Accordingly, significant progress had been made in the use of Funds.

Finally, Mr. A. Jautakis commented follow-up points of last year's Annual Meeting.

1. *Rules for bilateral cooperation need to remain as flexible as possible*. To keep this principle, he noted, more time was given to prepare applications for bilateral initiatives;
2. *Ensure constant information of FMO about the main communication activities being carried out.* To achieve this regular meetings between communication officers and FMO employees are being organized;
3. *Keep in close contact with the FMO on developments, in particular regarding any possible delays.* Justice and home affairs programme is the one with the greatest risk. The programme undergoes an enhancement process, but FMO representative actively participates in this process. This is one of the examples of close cooperation with FMO employees;
4. *Ensure the maximally accurate forecasting of the disbursements.* A more detailed form was developed for gathering the information, used as the basis for forecasting. This is expected to increase the quality of forecasting; however, certain risks associated with forecasting still exist.

Ms. Torill Johansen noted that presentation is informative and comprehensive. However, she requested to extend narrative parts of reports in the next report to allow for a greater elaboration of results. She noted that there is no need to include a reserve in the forecast, should the needs exceed the forecast.

1. **Bilateral cooperation**

Mr. M. Cancingeris summarised main activities of the Fund for Bilateral Relations (hereinafter – FBR) in 2020. First of all, in 2020 three new Bilateral Relations (hereinafter – BR) initiatives outside programmes were approved. In addition three BR initiatives were completed. Also, over the course of 2020 the Work Plan amendment was approved. Mr. M. Cancingeris also briefly presented the financial situation of FBR until the end of reporting period.

Furthermore, he compared programmes according to their status in FBR, including tendencies of spending by each year (from 2018 to 2020). It should be noted that almost third of the fund (i.e. 241000 EUR) has already been used by the end of the reporting period.

Speaking of the implementation of approved BR initiatives outside programmes, he noted, that four initiatives are already completed. Moreover, many of the Bilateral Relation initiatives should be completed by the end of 2021.

Ms. Torill Johansen commented that there is an active bilateral cooperation in Lithuania. All 11 donor partners are happy about it. Out of 120 projects, 45 have been approved with a project partner from the donor countries which is considered great. Actual spending however, is relatively low and it is recommended that alternative ways of increasing spending should be considered. Mr. M. Cancingeris noted that further bilateral cooperation depends on project operators themselves.

1. **Progress of programmes and risk assessment (including project presentation from LT-Health)**

Mr. A. Jautakis briefly presented all programmes and their status. All the agreements of the programmes (*“Culture”, “Health”, “Business Development, Innovation and SMEs”, “Justice and Home Affairs”, “Research”* and *“Environment, Energy, Climate Change”)* were signed before the reporting period. He noted that first expenditure already had been made in all programmes, except “*Business Development, Innovation and SMEs*”; the first expenditure in this programme is expected by end of June 2021. Mr. A Jautakis also presented the progress and the main risks in each programme.

Ms. Kristina Stepanova (Ministry of Social Security and Labour) presented the *Multidimensional Family Therapy Programs* (hereinafter – MDFT). She noted that this program is an integrated, comprehensive, family-oriented behaviour change program for children aged 11-17 who are characterized by socially unacceptable behaviours or multiple behavioural problems (e.g., alcohol or other psychotropic substance abuse, aggressive behaviour, severe school problems, etc.). MDFT program is very important to Lithuania, because the research of MDFT program in other countries shows that it really helps to change the socially unacceptable behaviour of the child. Another important aspect of the program is that the work is done not only with the child or young person, but also with his/her close environment, which has a significant impact on the child's behaviour i.e. family members, school, the child's leisure activities, including friends with whom the children spend time.

Ms. Kristina Stepanova noted that Ministry of Social Security and Labour already plan the continuity after the end of this project (project duration from February 2020 to February 2022). During the project there is a plan to have three MDFT teams composed of supervisors and therapists. Also, there is a plan to have at least 63 successful cases, when children with behavioural problems successfully completed MDFT program.

She explained that despite the fact that there is a plan to have three teams in biggest cities of Lithuania (Vilnius, Kaunas and Klaipėda), that does not mean that these services focussed only on these cities. The goal of MTFT program is a mobile service, so more children will be able to use them.

Mr. Árni Páll Árnason (FMO) presented programmes managed by the FMO. The first of these programmes is *the Active Citizens Fund programme*. The last open calls of this programme will be launched in the autumn 2021. The current level of disbursement and incurred expenditure reflect the good level of progress so far. There has been a strong oversubscription across all the open calls and the programme is expected to reach a high absorption rate. It should be noted that sixteen of the projects of this programme involve donor project partners.The second programme presented was *the Social Dialogue – Decent Work programme*. Two calls for proposals were launched in this programme in 2018 and 2019 and seven projects were selected in Lithuania. Mr. Árni Páll Árnason noted that six of the seven projects have Norwegian project partners. Because the programme funds have been exhausted, no further calls are thus envisaged.

*The Fund for Youth Employment* had two open calls for proposals (2017 and 2020). Nine Lithuanian entities are participating as project partners. The recent open call for proposals (deadline - January 2021) had received 138 applications, with 24 Lithuanian entities being active. The assessment process is ongoing and a decision on the selection of projects is expected this summer.

Also Mr. Árni Páll Árnason presented the implementation of *the Fund for Regional Cooperation*. This programme had only one open call in 2018. Over 700 applications were received, of which 117 Lithuanian organisations are active in the project consortia. He pointed out that in six of 20 projects which were selected by the Donors in 2020, Lithuanian organisations are involved. Because the selected projects have almost exhausted all of the funds, no future open calls are planned.

Ms. Torill Johansen reflected that she was glad to see good progress in the Innovation programme, operator managed to catch up with delays. She mentioned a high quality of proposals. Research programme is one of the flagships, since it covers all 3 Baltic States with a good cooperation and management. Many other programmes are catching up with the delays. Only three years left for the implementation of programmes until the final date of eligibility, therefore it is important to keep close contact regarding delays.

Ms. Torill Johansen reflected that she was glad to see good international collaboration between Baltic States. Some programmes suffered from COVID-19 restrictions. Project operators were offered technical assistance for the training and online meetings by the FMO.

1. **Communication**

Ms. I. Skukauskaitė presented the communication of the 2014–2021 EEA and Norway Financial Mechanisms in Lithuania during the reporting period. First of all, she informed that today was the start of the new campaign of advertising – the hot air balloon with the logo of financing mechanism had a first visibility start in Lithuania, and on 22 July it will fly in a big event in Vilnius too. In this public event Lithuania will thank the donor states for the financial support.

Speaking of common central portals ([www.eeagrants.lt](http://www.eeagrants.lt) and [www.norwaygrants.lt](http://www.norwaygrants.lt)), Ms. I. Skukauskaitė noted that portal continues to carry out and successfully represent the main aspects of all the programmes implemented in Lithuania. During the last 12 months the website received over 34 000 visitors and 20% of them are returning back. As compared to the previous period, the number of website users increased almost six times.

The informal joint communication working group, which consists of the representatives of the National focal point, Program operators and a representative from the Royal Norwegian Embassy, continue to communicate remotely on topical communication issues.

It should be noted, that media monitoring flow of positive information has grown steadily – form 128 in 2019, to 308 messages in 2020. During the analysis period, the Internet and RTV of 308 Lithuanian press news agencies analysed notifications referring to the Grants.

Ms. I. Skukauskaitė presented one communication activity for area of justice. In 2020 a launch event – art installation for the public took place. The event was telling the public about investing in strengthening the justice system through artistic installations that were displayed in five biggest cities for several days. There were three types of installations created that found their place near the buildings of the justice sector institutions (e.g. courts, prosecutor's offices, police and prison). The installations aimed to look from other perspective at the entering to a well-known and old structure in a different way, the call for seeing it in other colours, for looking not necessarily at something that creates the feeling of tension. Another goal was to bring these justice buildings closer to the public through a play of text, light and unexpected forms, sending a message about the rule of law, which is being strengthened alongside Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. Launching event was followed by a press release, programme partners from Lithuania got involved in communication activities, and the art installation gained media attention too (tracked through media monitoring).

Also Ms. I. Skukauskaitė presented that in 2020 the NFP organized 26 different forms of activities of communication, using articles, TV or internet channels, discussion session etc. Furthermore, the hot air balloon with the logo of the financing mechanism will fly over the sky of Lithuania for 3 years to spread a message about the cooperation and funding countries.

Ms. Torill Johansen reflected that communication is important for the grants and encouraged continuing cooperation with FMO. Also she noted to stress the importance of social media channels for communication and encouraged the NFP to report these activities in the next Strategic Report.

Ms. Inga Rudzinskaitė explained how the Norwegian Embassy was involved in communication activities.

1. **Conclusions and closing remarks**

Ms. Torill Johansen summarised the discussions and thanked Lithuania for the meeting and an effective funds investment in this period. She expects to see the next report with increased results . Also Ms. R. Dapkutė – Stankevičienė thanked the donors for very close collaboration and all participants of the meeting.

**Decision taken:**

The donors approved the Strategic Report.

**Follow up for NFP:**

1. Narrative parts of Strategic reports should be more exhaustive;
2. Social Media reporting should be included in Strategic Report;
3. Low spending of Bilateral Cooperation Fund in some programmes (especially Environment) should be addressed;
4. Rules for managing bilateral cooperation need to remain as flexible as possible;
5. Ensure the maximally accurate forecasting of the disbursements.

**Participants:**

**Lithuania**

Ms. Rūta Dapkutė-Stankevičienė, Director, Investment Department, Ministry of Finance (NFP) – Head of Delegation;

Mr. Andrius Jautakis, Advisor, Social Investment Unit, Investment Department, Ministry of Finance (NFP);

Mr. Matas Cancingeris, Chief specialist, Investment Policy Division, Investment Department, Ministry of Finance (NFP);

Ms. Ilma Skukauskaitė, Advisor, Management and Control Systems Maintenance Division, Investment Department, Ministry of Finance (NFP);

Ms. Aušra Ona Birvinskienė, Chief Specialist, Investment Analysis Division, Investment Department, Ministry of Finance (NFP);

Ms. Aušra Baliukonienė, Director, Expenditure Conformity Assessment and Declaration Department, Ministry of Finance (CA /IrA);

Ms. Aušra Urniežė, Head, Expenditure Declaration Division, Ministry of Finance (CA /IrA);

Mr. Rolandas Pauža, Head, Centralized Internal Audit Division, Ministry of Finance (AA);

Ms. Rasa Mockuvienė Senior specialist, Centralized Internal Audit Division, Ministry of Finance (AA);

Ms. Jurgita Vileitienė, Senior specialist, Investment Expenditure Evaluation Division, Investment Department, Ministry of Finance;

Ms. Kristina Stepanova, Head of Family and Child Rights Protection Group, Ministry of Social Security and Labour (PP);

Mr. Artūras Žarnovskis, Head, Lithuanian and International Investment Department, Central Project Management Agency;

Ms. Ina Sinkevičiūtė, Head, Norwegian Mechanism Group of Science, Technology and Innovation Agency;

Ms. Aušra Vilutienė, Director, Research Foundation of Lithuanian Research Council;

Ms. Sandra Adomavičiūtė, Managing Director, Open Lithuania Foundation.

**Norway**

Ms. Torill Johansen, Deputy Director, Section for Central Europe and the EEA and Norway Grants, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway – Head of donors delegation;

Mr. Ole Terje Horpestad, Ambassador, Norwegian Embassy in Lithuania, Vilnius;

Ms. Inga Rudzinskaite, EEA/Norway Grants Political Advisor, Royal Norwegian Embassy, Vilnius;

Ms. Elin Graae Linnestad, Senior Adviser, Section for Central Europe and the EEA and Norway Grants,Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway .

Ms. Mariann Murvoll, Senior Adviser, Nordic-Baltic Section, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway

**Iceland**

Mr. Auðunn Atlason, Ambassador, Icelandic Embassy in Helsinki;

Ms. Sigrún Bessadóttir, Senior Advisor and Consular Affairs Officer, Icelandic Embassy in Helsinki.

**FMO**

Mr. Árni Páll Árnason, Deputy Managing Director, Financial Mechanism Office, Director of the Country and Bilateral Cooperation Department;

Ms. Dimitra Fellner, Country Officer for Lithuania, Country and Bilateral Cooperation Department;

Ms. Kristina Jasaityte, Communication Officer, Communication Unit ;

Mr. Jonas Berven Asbjørnsen, Trainee, Country and Bilateral Cooperation Department.