

Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009-2014

PROGRAMME AGREEMENT

between

The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

and

The Ministry of Finance,
hereinafter referred to as the "National Focal Point",
representing Estonia ,
hereinafter referred to as the "Beneficiary State"

together hereinafter referred to as the "Parties"

for the financing of the Programme "Research cooperation "

hereinafter referred to as the "Programme"

Chapter 1

Scope, Legal Framework, and Definitions

Article 1.1

Scope

This programme agreement between the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereinafter referred to as the NMFA) and the National Focal Point lays down the rights and obligations of the Parties regarding the implementation of the Programme and the financial contribution from the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009-2014 to the Programme.

Article 1.2

Legal Framework

1. This programme agreement shall be read in conjunction with the following documents which, together with this programme agreement, constitute the legal framework of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009-2014:

- a. the Agreement between the Kingdom of Norway and the European Union on the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009-2014 (hereinafter referred to as the Agreement);
- b. the Regulation on the implementation of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009-2014 (hereinafter referred to as the "Regulation") issued by Norway in accordance with Article 8(8) of the Agreement;
- c. the Memorandum of Understanding on the Implementation of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009-2014 (hereinafter referred to as the "MoU"), entered into between the Kingdom of Norway and the Beneficiary State; and
- d. any guidelines adopted by the NMFA in accordance with the Regulation.

2. In case of an inconsistency between this programme agreement and the Regulation, the Regulation shall prevail.

3. The legal framework is binding for the Parties. An act or omission by a Party to this programme agreement that is incompatible with the legal framework constitutes a breach of this programme agreement by that Party.

Article 1.3

Definitions

Terms used and institutions and documents referred to in this programme agreement shall be understood in accordance with the Regulation, in particular Article 1.5 thereof, and the legal framework referred to in Article 1.2 of this programme agreement.

Article 1.4

Annexes and hierarchy of documents

1. The programme decision, including the financial plan (Annex I), and the operational rules (Annex II) form an integral part of this programme agreement. Any reference to this programme agreement includes a reference to its annexes unless otherwise stated or clear from the context.

2. The provisions of the annexes shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with this programme agreement. Should the meaning of any provision of the said annexes, so interpreted, remain inconsistent with this programme agreement, the provisions of the former shall prevail, provided that these provisions are compatible with the Regulation.

3. Commitments, statements and guarantees, explicit as well as implicit, made in the programme proposal are binding for the National Focal Point and the Programme Operator unless otherwise explicitly stipulated in the annexes to this programme agreement.

Chapter 2

The Programme

Article 2.1

Co-operation

1. The Parties shall take all appropriate and necessary measures to ensure fulfilment of the obligations and objectives arising out of this programme agreement.

2. The Parties agree to provide all information necessary for the good functioning of this programme agreement and to apply the highest degree of transparency, accountability and cost efficiency as well as the principles of good governance, sustainable development, gender equality and equal opportunities.

3. The Parties shall promptly inform each other of any circumstances that interfere or threaten to interfere with the successful implementation of the Programme.

4. In executing this programme agreement the Parties declare to counteract corrupt practices. Further, they declare not to accept, either directly or indirectly, any kind of offer, gift, payments or benefits which would or could be construed as illegal or corrupt practice. The Parties shall immediately inform each other of any indication of corruption or misuse of resources related to this programme agreement.

Article 2.2

Main responsibilities of the Parties

1. The National Focal Point is responsible and accountable for the overall management of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009-2014 in the Beneficiary State and for the full and correct implementation of this programme agreement. In particular, the National Focal Point undertakes to:

a. comply with its obligations stipulated in the Regulation and this programme agreement;

b. ensure that the Certifying Authority, the Audit Authority, the Monitoring Committee and the Programme Operator properly perform the tasks assigned to them in the Regulation, this programme agreement and the programme implementation agreement;

c. take all necessary steps to ensure that the Programme Operator is fully committed and able to implement and manage the Programme;

d. take the necessary measures to remedy irregularities in the implementation of the Programme and ensure that the Programme Operator takes appropriate measures to remedy irregularities in Projects within the Programme, including measures to recover misspent funds;

e. make all the necessary and appropriate arrangements in order to strengthen or change the way the Programme is managed.

2. The NMFA shall, subject to the rules stipulated in the legal framework referred to in Article 1.2 of this programme agreement, make available to the Beneficiary State a financial contribution (hereinafter referred to as "the programme grant") to be used exclusively to finance the eligible cost of the Programme.

Article 2.3

Objective and outcomes of the Programme

1. The programme decision sets out the objective, outcome(s), outputs, indicators and targets for the Programme.

2. The National Focal Point shall ensure that the Programme Operator implements and completes the Programme in accordance with the objective, outcome(s), outputs, indicators and targets set for the Programme.

Article 2.4

Programme grant

1. The maximum amount of the programme grant, the programme grant rate, and the estimated eligible cost of the Programme shall be as specified in the programme decision.

2. In case the Programme is also supported by the EEA Financial Mechanism, this programme agreement shall be interpreted in conjunction with the agreement regulating that support.

3. The financial plan shall:

a. contain a breakdown between the Programme's budget headings using the description put forward in the template for the programme proposal;

b. indicate the agreed advance payment, if any.

4. The management cost of the Programme Operator shall not exceed the amount specified in the programme decision.

Article 2.5

Special conditions and programme specific rules

1. The programme decision shall list any conditions set by the NMFA with reference to paragraph 3 of Article 5.3 of the Regulation. The National Focal Point shall ensure compliance with these conditions and, in a timely manner, take the necessary steps to ensure their fulfilment.

2. The National Focal Point shall ensure compliance with any other programme specific rules laid down in the operational rules.

Article 2.6

Programme implementation agreement

1. With reference to Article 5.8 of the Regulation and without prejudice to paragraph 2 thereof, the National Focal Point shall, before any payment is made to the Programme, sign a programme implementation agreement with the Programme Operator. The National Focal Point shall notify the NMFA of such signing.

2. The signed programme implementation agreement shall be identical to the draft programme implementation agreement confirmed by the NMFA in accordance with paragraph 5 of Article 5.8 of the Regulation with regard to the content required according to paragraph 3 thereof. The National Focal Point shall inform the NMFA of any deviation from that confirmed draft which may be subject to a new confirmation according to paragraph 5 of Article 5.8 of the Regulation prior to any payment to the Programme.

Article 2.7

Reporting

The National Focal Point shall ensure that the Programme Operator provides financial reports, annual programme reports and a final programme report in accordance with Chapter 8 and Articles 5.11 and 5.12 of the Regulation as well as statistical reporting in accordance with the Programme Operator's Manual (Annex 9 to the Regulation).

Article 2.8

External monitoring

The external monitoring and audit referred to in Articles 10.1, 10.2, 10.3 and 10.4 of the Regulation shall not in any way relieve the National Focal Point or the Programme Operator of its obligations under the programme agreement regarding monitoring of the Programme and/or its projects, financial control and audit.

Article 2.9

Modification of the Programme

1. Unless otherwise explicitly stipulated in this programme agreement, any modification of the Programme is subject to prior approval by the NMFA.
2. Modifications that do not affect the objective, outcomes, outputs, indicators or targets of the Programme are permitted without NMFA's prior approval provided that they are limited to the following:
 - a. cumulative transfers between budget headings related to outcomes of an amount less than 10 % of total eligible expenditure of the Programme or € 1,000,000, whichever is higher, and
 - b. changes of internal practices of the Programme Operator that are not stipulated in the programme agreement.
3. Programme specific exceptions from paragraphs 1 and 2, if any, are set in the operational rules.
4. Expenditures incurred in breach of this article are not eligible.
5. Should there be a doubt as to whether the proposed modifications require approval by the NMFA, the National Focal Point shall consult the NMFA before such modifications take effect.
6. Requests for modifications shall be submitted and assessed in accordance with Article 5.9 of the Regulation.

Article 2.10

Communication

1. All communication to the NMFA regarding this programme agreement shall take place in English and be directed to the Financial Mechanism Office (hereinafter referred to as the FMO), which represents the NMFA towards the National Focal Point and the Programme Operator in relation to the implementation of the Programme.

2. To the extent that original documents are not available in the English language, the documents shall be accompanied by full and accurate translations into English.

3. The National Focal Point shall bear the responsibility for the accuracy of the translation that it provides and the possible consequences that might arise from any inaccurate translations.

4. The NMFA shall ensure that the National Focal Point is informed about communication between the NMFA and the Programme Operator that is relevant for the responsibilities of the National Focal Point under this programme agreement.

Article 2.11

Contact information

1. The contact information of the National Focal Point and the Programme Operator is as specified in the programme proposal.
2. The contact information for the NMFA and the Financial Mechanism Office are:
Financial Mechanism Office
Att: Director
EFTA Secretariat
Rue Joseph II, 12-16
1000 Brussels
Telephone: +32 (0)2 286 1701
Telefax (general): +32 (0)2 211 1889
E-mail: fmo@efta.int
3. Changes of or corrections to the contact information referred to in this article shall be given in writing without undue delay by the Parties to this programme agreement.

Article 2.12

Representations and Warranties

1. This programme agreement and the awarding of the programme grant is based on information provided by, through, or on behalf of the National Focal Point to the NMFA in the programme proposal or other communication prior to the signing of this programme agreement.
2. The National Focal Point represents and warrants that the information provided by, through, or on behalf of the National Focal Point in the programme proposal, in connection with the programme proposal, the implementation or conclusion of this programme agreement are authentic, accurate and complete.

Chapter 3 Projects

Article 3.1

Selection of projects

1. The National Focal Point shall ensure that the Programme Operator selects projects in accordance with Chapter 6 of the Regulation and the operational rules.
2. Eligibility of applicants is stipulated in Article 6. 2 of the Regulation and, in accordance with paragraph 3 thereof, subject only to the limitations stipulated in the operational rules.
3. Pre-defined projects shall be outlined in the operational rules.
4. The National Focal Point shall take proactive steps to ensure that the Programme Operator complies fully with Article 6.6 of the Regulation.

Article 3.2

Project contract

1. For each approved project a project contract shall be concluded between the Programme Operator and the Project Promoter.
2. . In cases where a project contract cannot, due to provisions in the national legislation, be made between the Programme Operator and the Project Promoter, the Beneficiary State may instead issue a legislative or administrative act of similar effect and content.
3. The content and form of the project contract shall comply with Article 6.7 of the Regulation.
4. The National Focal Point shall ensure that the obligations of the Project Promoter under the project contract are valid and enforceable under the applicable law of the Beneficiary State.

Article 3.3

Project partners and partnership agreements

1. A project may be implemented in a partnership between the Project Promoter and project partners as defined in paragraph 1(w) of Article 1.5 of the Regulation. If a project is implemented in such a partnership, the Project Promoter shall sign a partnership agreement with the project partners with the content and in the form stipulated in Article 6.8 of the Regulation.
2. The partnership agreement shall be in English if one of the parties to the agreement is an entity from Norway.
3. The eligibility of expenditures incurred by a project partner is subject to the same limitations as would apply if the expenditures were incurred by the Project Promoter.

4. The creation and implementation of the relationship between the Project Promoter and the project partner shall comply with the applicable national and European Union law on public procurement as well as Article 7.16 of the Regulation.

5. The National Focal Point shall ensure that the Programme Operator verifies that the partnership agreement complies with this article before the signing of the project contract.

Article 3.4

Reallocation of funds

1. Reallocation of unused or cancelled financial contributions to projects shall be made in compliance with Article 6.9 of the Regulation.
2. Project grants not reallocated shall be reimbursed to the NMFA in accordance with Article 6.9 of the Regulation.

Chapter 4 Finance

Article 4.1

Eligible expenditures

1. Subject to Article 7.6 of the Regulation, eligible expenditures of this Programme are:
 - a. management costs of the Programme Operator in accordance with the detailed budget in the financial plan;
 - b. payments to projects within this Programme in accordance with the Regulation, this programme agreement and the project contract;
 - c. expenditure of funds for bilateral relations in accordance with Article 7.7 of the Regulation;
2. Expenditure related to the categories referred to in subparagraphs (d), (e) and (f) of Article 7.1 of the Regulation are eligible in accordance with Chapter 7 thereof if such expenditures are explicitly approved by the NMFA in the programme decision. The implementation of the activities under these categories shall be in compliance with the operational rules.
3. Eligible expenditures of projects are those actually incurred by the Project Promoter or project partners, meet the criteria set in Article 7.2 of the Regulation and fall within the categories and fulfil the conditions of direct eligible expenditure set in Article 7.3 of the Regulation as well as indirect costs in accordance with Article 7.4 of the Regulation.

4. The first date of eligibility of expenditures in projects shall be set in the project contract in accordance with Article 7.14 of the Regulation. The first date of eligibility of any pre-defined projects shall be no earlier than the date on which the National Focal Point notifies the NMFA of a positive appraisal of the pre-defined projects by the Programme Operator in accordance with paragraph 3 of Article 5.5 of the Regulation.

5. The maximum eligible costs of the categories referred to in paragraphs 1 and 2 are set in the programme decision. Programme specific rules on the eligibility of expenditure set in the programme decision or in the operational rules shall be complied with.

Article 4.2 Proof of expenditure

Costs incurred by Programme Operators, Project Promoters and project partners shall be supported by documentary evidence as required in Article 7.13 of the Regulation.

Article 4.3 Payments

1. Payments to the Programme shall be made when all relevant conditions for payments stipulated in this programme agreement and the Regulation have been fulfilled.

2. Payments to the Programme shall take the form of an advance payment, interim payments and payment of the final balance and shall be made in accordance with Articles 8.2, 8.3 and 8.4 of the Regulation.

3. Payments of the project grant to the Project Promoters may take the form of advance payments, interim payments and payments of the final balance. The level of advance payments and their off-set mechanism is set in the operational rules.

4. The National Focal Point shall ensure that payments are transferred in accordance with paragraph 2 of Article 8.1 of the Regulation.

5. Chapter 8 of the Regulation shall apply to all aspects related to payments, including currency exchange rules and handling of interests on bank accounts.

Article 4.4 Transparency and availability of documents

The National Focal Point shall ensure an audit trail for financial contributions from the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009-2014 to the Programme in accordance with Article 8.8 of the Regulation.

Article 4.5 Irregularities, suspension and reimbursements

The NMFA has the right to make use of the remedies provided in the Regulation, in particular Chapter 12 thereof. The National Focal Point has a duty to take all necessary measures to ensure that the provisions in Chapter 11 and 12 of the Regulation regarding irregularities, suspension of payments, financial corrections and reimbursement are complied with.

Chapter 5 Final provisions

Article 5.1 Dispute settlement

1. The Parties waive their rights to bring any dispute related to the programme agreement before any national or international court, and agree to settle such a dispute in an amicable manner.

2. If a demand for reimbursement to the NMFA is not complied with by the Beneficiary State, or a dispute related to a demand for reimbursement arises that cannot be solved in accordance with paragraph 1, the Parties may bring the dispute before Oslo Tingrett.

Article 5.2 Termination

1. The NMFA may, after consultation with the National Focal Point, terminate this programme agreement if:

a. a general suspension decision according to Article 12.6 of the Regulation or a decision to suspend payments according to paragraph 1(h) of Article 12.1 of the Regulation has not been lifted within 6 months of such a decision;

b. a suspension of payments according to Article 12.1 of the Regulation, other than under paragraph 1(h), has not been lifted within one year of such a decision;

c. a request for reimbursement according to Article 12.2 of the Regulation has not been complied with within one year from such a decision;

d. the Programme Operator becomes bankrupt, is deemed to be insolvent, or declares that it does not have the financial capacity to continue with the implementation of the Programme; or

e. the Programme Operator has, in the opinion of the NMFA, been engaged in corruption, fraud or similar activities or has not taken the appropriate measures to detect or prevent such activities or, if they have occurred, nullify their effects.

2. This programme agreement can be terminated by mutual agreement between the Parties.

3. Termination does not affect the right of the Parties to make use of the dispute settlement mechanism referred to in Article 5.1 or the right of the NMFA to make use of the remedies provided in Chapter 12 of the Regulation.

Article 5.3
Waiver of responsibility

1. Any appraisal of the Programme undertaken before or after its approval by the NMFA, does not in any way diminish the responsibility of the National Focal Point and the Programme Operator to verify and confirm the correctness of the documents and information forming the basis of the programme agreement.

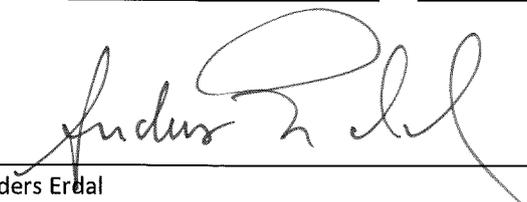
2. Nothing contained in the programme agreement shall be construed as imposing upon the NMFA or the FMO any responsibility of any kind for the supervision, execution, completion, or operation of the Programme or its projects.

3. The NMFA does not assume any risk or responsibility whatsoever for any damages, injuries, or other possible adverse effects caused by the Programme or its projects including, but not limited to inconsistencies in the planning of the Programme or its projects, other project(s) that might affect it or that it might affect, or public discontent. It is the full and sole responsibility of the National Focal Point and the Programme Operator to satisfactorily address such issues.

This programme agreement is drawn up in two originals in the English language.

For the NMFA

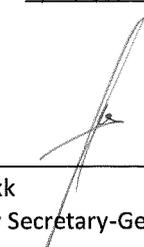
Signed in Oslo on 11.2.2013



Anders Erdal
Deputy Director General

For the National Focal Point

Signed in Tallinn on 25.02.2013



Ivar Sikk
Deputy Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance

4. Neither the National Focal Point, the Programme Operator, entities involved in the implementation of projects, nor any other party shall have recourse to the NMFA for further financial support or assistance to the Programme in whatsoever form over and above what has been provided for in the programme agreement.

5. Neither the European Free Trade Association, its Secretariat, including the FMO, its officials or employees, nor the NMFA, its officials or employees, can be held liable for any damages or injuries of whatever nature sustained by the National Focal Point or the Beneficiary State, the Programme Operator, Project Promoters or any other third person, in connection, be it direct or indirect, with this programme agreement.

6. Nothing in this programme agreement shall be construed as a waiver of diplomatic immunities and privileges awarded to the European Free Trade Association, its assets, officials or employees.

Article 5.4
Entry into force and duration

1. This programme agreement shall enter into force on the date of the last signature of the Parties.

2. This programme agreement shall remain in force until five years have elapsed after the date of the acceptance of the final programme report.

Annex I - Programme Decision

1. Expected Outcomes & Indicators for Outputs

Expected Outcome(s): Increased research cooperation between Norway and the Beneficiary States

Output

Cooperating research institutions

Output indicator(s)	Baseline	Target	Source of Verification
The number of cooperating research institutions of Estonia	0	15	Research institutions participating in the financed research projects
The number of cooperating research institutions of Norway	0	15	Research institutions participating in the financed research projects

Output

Cooperating researchers

Output indicator(s)	Baseline	Target	Source of Verification
The number of cooperating Estonian researchers	0	45	Researchers participating in the financed research projects
The number of cooperating Norwegian researchers	0	30	Researchers participating in the financed research projects
The number of female project leaders	0	6	Researchers participating in the financed research projects
Percentage of researchers supported by the programme that are female	0	30	Researchers participating in the financed research projects

Expected Outcome(s):

Strengthened research capacity in the Beneficiary States and increased application of research results through research cooperation between Norway and the Beneficiary States

Output

Experts visits to Estonia

Output indicator(s)	Baseline	Target	Source of Verification
The number of Norwegian scientists coming to Estonia for a short period of time	0	15	The number of high-level Norwegian scientists involved in the Programme

Output

Staff exchange visits to access unique facilities or training opportunities

Output indicator(s)	Baseline	Target	Source of Verification
The number of researchers participating in the staff exchange visits	0	15	Staff exchange visits to strengthen researchers capacity in Estonia
Number of PhD students participated in the staff exchange visits	0	15	PhD students participating in the financed research projects

2. Conditions

2.1 General

L. The National Focal Point shall ensure that any public support under this Programme complies with the procedural and

substantive State Aid rules applicable at the time when the public support is granted. The National Focal Point shall, by way of the Programme Implementation Agreement, ensure that the Programme Operator maintains written records of all assessments concerning compliance with State Aid rules, particularly decisions to award grants and set grant rates, and provides such records to the NMFA upon request. The approval of the Programme by the NMFA does not imply a positive assessment of such compliance.

2. Bilateral, output and outcome indicators shall be reported on in the annual report.
3. A methodology on the calculation of the flat rate to be applied to indirect eligible costs (overheads) in accordance with Article 7.4.1(b) of the Regulation shall be submitted to the FMO no later than two weeks prior to the deadline for providing to the NMFA the text of the call for proposals, as required by Article 6.3.4 of the Regulation.
4. The portion of the advance payment corresponding to the Programme's Outcomes shall be disbursed no later than one month after the deadline for receipt of applications under the call for proposals.

2.2 Pre-eligibility

Not applicable.

2.3 Pre-payment

Not applicable.

2.4 Pre-completion

Not applicable.

2.5 Post-completion

Not applicable.

2.6 Other

3. Eligibility of costs

3.1 Eligibility of costs - period

Eligibility of costs (excluding prog prep costs): 30/10/2012-30/04/2017

Eligibility of programme proposal preparation costs: 09/06/2011-29/10/2012

3.2 Grant rate and co-financing

Programme estimated total cost (€)	€3,333,333
Programme estimated eligible cost (€)	€3,333,333
Programme grant rate (%)	90.0000%
Maximum amount of Programme grant (€)	€3,000,000

3.3 Maximum eligible costs (€) and Advance payment amount (€)

Budget heading	Eligible expenditure	Advance payment*
Programme management	€294,996	€150,966
Increased research cooperation between Norway and the Beneficiary States	€1,479,166	€631,810
Strengthened research capacity in the Beneficiary States and increased application of research results through research cooperation between Norway and the Beneficiary States	€1,479,167	€631,811
Fund for bilateral relations	€50,000	€12,500
Complementary action	€25,000	€3,250
Preparation of programme proposal	€5,004	€5,004
Reserve for exchange rate losses	€0	€0
Total	€3,333,333	€1,435,341

* The advance payment is composed of €1,291,807 in grant amount and €143,534 in co-financing.

3.4 Retention of management costs

Retention of management costs - percentage of the management costs	10.00%
Retention of management costs - planned Euro value	€26,550

3.5 Small Grant Scheme

Not applicable

Annex II - Operational Rules

1. Eligibility

1.1 Eligible measures (sub-measures if any):

The programme can fund collaborative research projects in all areas of research. Social sciences and humanities will be the subject of particular concern during the call phase and the Programme Operator and the Donor Programme Partner will together ensure that information about research cooperation opportunities is distributed to all potential partners. The call text will encourage the projects in this field.

Proposals will be evaluated on the basis of

- scientific and/or technical excellence, and
- sustainability of the bilateral collaboration.

€ 2,958,333 is foreseen to be re-granted to research projects selected on the basis of calls for proposals (according to the timeline provided in the Programme proposal and described in point 3.2 below).

Where applicable, the programme will take into account the activities of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR Priority Area 7 on Innovation and Research).

The Programme Operator shall be the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research. Certain tasks of the Programme Operator may be delegated to the Estonian Research Council, however this does not in any way reduce or restrict the responsibility of the Programme Operator.

The Research Council of Norway is the Donor Programme Partner.

1.2 Eligible applicants:

By way of limitation of paragraph 1 of Article 6.2 of the Regulation, Research Organisations, as defined in the Community Framework for State Aid for Research and Development and Innovation (2006/C 323/01) are eligible applicants under this Programme.

In accordance with the third paragraph of point 2.3.1 of Annex 12 to the Regulation, eligible project partners may be Research Organisations, as defined in the Community Framework for State Aid for Research and Development and Innovation (2006/C 323/01) as well as private law enterprises.

1.3 Eligibility of costs:

The eligibility of costs is determined by reference to Chapter 7 of the Regulation. The rules on eligibility of costs shall apply equally and without limitation to both Project Promoters and project partners.

Indirect costs shall be eligible in line with the Regulation and in particular, Annex 12 thereto. By way of exception to the provisions of the Regulation and Annex 12, project promoters and project partners established in Estonia, shall identify their indirect costs by the use of a flat-rate not exceeding 20% of their total direct eligible costs, excluding their direct eligible costs for subcontracting and the costs of resources made available by third parties which are not used on the premises of the Project Promoter or project partner.

2. Financial parameters

2.1 Minimum and maximum grant amount per project:

The minimum amount of grant assistance applied for is € 50,000; the maximum amount is € 300,000.

2.2 Project grant rate:

Grants from the programme may be up to 95% of total eligible project costs, provided all applicable National and EU rules on State Aid are complied with. Any remaining costs of the project shall be provided or obtained by the Project Promoter and the project partners.

3. Selection of projects

3.1 Selection procedures:

The selection procedures shall be in accordance with Annex 12 to the Regulation.

3.2 Open calls and availability of funds:

There shall be at least one call for applications. The first call shall be launched no later than in the first quarter of 2013 and make

available the total re-granting amount. A second shall be launched if the total re-granting amount is not committed as a result of the first call.

3.3 Selection criteria:

All projects to be implemented under this Programme are to be based on equal partnerships between research institutions in Norway and research institutions in Estonia, with the leading role of the latter. More specifically, there is to be at least one partner from Norway co-operating with the Project Promoter of each project.

The project selection criteria shall be approved by the Programme Committee and shall be in line with Article 3.5 of Annex 12 to the Regulation. They shall as a minimum contain the following criteria:

- scientific and/or technical excellence;
- relevance in relation to the objectives and prioritised areas of the research programme;
- quality and efficiency of the implementation and management, including quality and implementation capacity of the applicants and contribution to capacity and competence building; and
- the potential impact through the development, dissemination and use of project results.

4. Payment flows, verification of payment claims, monitoring and reporting

4.1 Payment flows

The Programme Operator shall ensure that funds are available for payments to projects in a timely manner. All relevant rules on payment flows and proof of expenditure contained in the Regulation and in particular Annex 12 thereto, shall be complied with.

Payments towards the final beneficiaries will be in the form of advance payments, interim payments and a final payment in the form of a reimbursement of incurred expenditure. Payments to projects are made on the basis of approved interim reports.

The first advance payment shall be requested by the Project Promoter in the application form and may amount up to 60% of project eligible expenditure. Subsequent advance payments shall be requested through interim financial reports but only after 70% of the previously provided advance payment has been incurred.

The advance payment shall be offset against incurred expenditure reported in the interim reports.

The Programme Operator may retain up to 10% of the Project Grant until the final report is approved.

4.2 Verification of payment claims

Project promoters shall submit interim reports to the Programme Operator containing information on project progress, advance payment requests, and incurred expenditure.

Verification and approval of interim reports of Projects' Promoters will be performed by the Programme Operator. The interim reports of the Programme Operator are verified and approved by the Certifying Authority.

A report by an independent and certified auditor, certifying that the claimed costs are incurred in accordance with the Regulation, the national law and accounting practices of the project partner's country, shall be seen as sufficient proof of costs incurred by a project partner whose primary location is in Norway.

4.3 Monitoring and reporting

Project Promoters shall be required to report on project progress and outputs in financial reports, annual scientific progress reports and at the end of the project in a final report.

A detailed annual monitoring will be conducted of a sample of projects, selected on the basis of risk assessment and including random samples. The detailed monitoring plan for the projects will be presented in the Annual Programme Report.

Information on Reporting and Monitoring, and periodicity of reporting, will further be outlined in the description of the Programme's management and control systems according to article 4.8.2 of the Regulation.

5. Additional mechanisms within the programme

5.1 Funds for bilateral relations

The detailed agenda for the capacity building activities and the technical details of the modules will be elaborated in close cooperation with the Donor Programme Partner and will be subject to the approval of the Programme Committee.

The following activities will be supported under the fund for bilateral relations:

Capacity building activities, networking and the sharing of best practice between Project Promoters and entities in Norway where such activities increase the added value of the Programme and provide the Estonian research community and the research and development institutions with the opportunity to establish international best practice standards and broaden the competence of the project participants.

Activities will be on specific topics/thematic areas (e.g. leadership, ethics, evaluation, financial management, issues, or other topics suggested by the target group) and will be organised by the Estonian Research Council in close cooperation with the Programme Operator and the Donor Programme Partner.

5.2 Complementary action

Complementary action under this programme shall be further defined by the Programme Operator in accordance with Article 7.11 of the Regulation. In particular, funds for complementary actions shall facilitate the participation of relevant stakeholders in events/seminars/activities agreed with the Donors.

5.3 Reserve for exchange rate losses

Not Applicable

5.4 Small Grant Schemes

Not Applicable

6. Pre-defined projects

Not Applicable

7. Modification of the programme

Not Applicable

8. Programme proposal version

Any reference to the programme proposal in this programme agreement shall be interpreted as the version signed by the Programme Operator on 9 February 2012 and shall include all subsequent correspondence and communication between the NMFA, the Financial Mechanism Office, the National Focal Point and the Programme Operator..

9. Miscellaneous

Not Applicable