

**Supplement to “The annual report on the implementation of the
European Economic Area Financial Mechanism in Poland:
October 2004 – August 2005”
for the period September – December 2005**

adopted by the Monitoring Committee for the EEA Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial
Mechanism on 27 March 2006

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Executive Summary

This document fulfils Poland's obligation under Article 5 of the *Memorandum of Understanding on the implementation of the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism 2004-2009* and following the arrangements of the annual meeting with Donor States on 14 October 2005 constitutes a Supplement to the previous report drafted for the period: October 2004 – August 2005 to include the activities carried out in the period September – December 2005.

The preparations for the implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism in Poland in the reporting period September - December 2005 consisted of the programming of the use of financial resources, the building of an implementation system, as well as promotion and information activities. Programming works focused on the implementation of the Fund for Non-governmental Organisations (NGO Fund), including the development of the final version of the *Framework Document* for the Fund, and tender documents in order to select the Fund intermediary/intermediaries.

The building of the implementation system has been to a large extent completed – all the necessary bodies have been established (Auxiliary Bodies, Monitoring Committee, Steering Committees); Intermediary Bodies have been structured and procedures have been developed for the appraisal of applications, monitoring and reporting, along with interinstitutional agreements laying down procedures and division of responsibilities between implementing institutions. The fourth quarter of 2005 was also a period of intensive information activities in view of the first call for proposals which was then underway.

The period discussed was marked by the launch of implementation activities in order to initiate the operation of the two block grants: the Seed Money Fund and the Technical Assistance Fund, and to select individual projects and programmes to be co-financed from the EEA Financial Mechanism. Applications for to the above Funds submitted by the Polish party in August 2005 have been evaluated by the Financial Mechanism Office in Brussels and have been transferred to the European Commission for assessment. The Technical Assistance Fund is expected to be launched in the 2nd quarter of 2006.

From 5 September to 30 November 2005 the first call for proposals for individual projects and programmes was organised under 10 priority areas, jointly to the EEA Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism. The announcement concerned allocations for the period 2004-2005, totalling to the amount of 175.6 million euro. In total 1,395 proposals were

submitted, totalling to the amount nine-fold exceeding the financial resources available to the call for proposals and three-fold the amount of the total allocation envisaged for Poland in the period 2004-2009 under both Financial Mechanisms.

In the successive reporting period: January – December 2006, continuation of programming works to launch the Training and Scholarship Fund, as well as the completion of the development of the financial control and auditing system are planned. It is planned to open a call for tenders to select the intermediary/intermediaries of the NGO Fund and to announce a call of proposals under all block grants, as well as the second call for proposals under 6 priority areas of the EEA Financial Mechanism. Additionally, within promotion and information activities it is planned to organise a series of thematic and regional conferences, with special emphasis put on the preparation of applications.

Introduction

Pursuant to Article 5 of the Memorandum of Understanding on the EEA Financial Mechanism 2004-2009 and Article 3.3 of the beneficiary state monitoring and reporting guidelines, the Ministry of Regional Development, acting as a National Focal Point for the implementation of the Financial Mechanisms in Poland, has drafted a document entitled “The Supplement to ‘The annual report on the implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism in Poland October 2004 – August 2005’”, for the period September – December 2005.

This document will be discussed at an annual meeting with the Donor – the Kingdom of Norway – planned to be held on 26 April 2006. According to arrangements of the first annual meeting on 14 October 2005, a successive report was to supplement the first report so as the information contained covered the entire calendar year. Prior to submitting the Supplement to the Donor, the document needs to be approved by the Monitoring Committee for the EEA Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism.

The aim of this document is to present the process and the current situation as regards the implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism in Poland, and to offer a presentation of activities planned to be carried out during the successive reporting period, i.e. January-December 2006.

1. Preparation for the implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism

Preparation for the implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism in Poland in the reporting period September-December 2005 consisted of the programming of the use of financial resources, the building of the implementation system, as well as information and promotion.

1.1. Programming – guidelines for the launching of block grants

The Operational Programme for the use of resources from the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism, was approved by the Council of Ministers on 26 July 2005 as the fundamental programming document. It became a framework for the announcement of the first call for proposals as referred to in Chapter 2.

Moreover, on 29 July 2005 the European Committee of the Council of Ministers adopted the guidelines for two block grants: *Seed Money Fund – scope and implementation framework* and the guidelines: *Technical Assistance Fund – scope and implementation framework*. Based on the above guidelines, the National Focal Point prepared applications for the launching of the Seed Money Fund and the Technical Assistance Fund (more on this subject in Chapter 2).

During the reporting period covered by this Supplement, the National Contact Point conducted programming works aimed at the execution of three block grants referred to in Annex C of the *Memorandum of Understanding on the implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism*: the NGO Fund, Scholarship and Training Fund.

1.1.1. NGO Fund

During the annual meeting with the Donor States in October 2005 a timetable of activities aimed at the initiation of the implementation of the NGO Fund i.e. to draft the final version of the *NGO Fund Framework Document* and the tender documents.

Consultations between the National Focal Point and the Financial Mechanism Office on the above-mentioned *NGO Fund Framework Document*, referred in particular to the issue of selection of the Fund intermediary/intermediaries and the criteria of eligibility of candidates, the amounts of grants to be awarded, the costs of managing the Fund, the exchange rate risk and the manner in which payments are to be made. The key issue was how to select the

intermediary/intermediaries, while taking into account the provisions of Polish law and the donors' guidelines on the implementation of the Financial Mechanisms. The Polish party proposed a negotiated procedure with previous announcement following the *Public Procurement Law*, which was accepted by the Financial Mechanism Office. The *Framework Document* was ultimately agreed in mid-December 2005, which enabled the National Focal Point to submit the document to the European Committee of the Council of Ministers for debate on 23 December 2005, to have it officially approved by the Polish party.

Moreover, at the end of November 2005 the final version of the draft announcement on the call for tenders aimed to select the intermediary/intermediaries of the Fund which was delivered by the National Focal Point on 8 November 2005 to the donors, was agreed. In December 2005 the National Focal Point worked on further tender documents, i.e. *Tender Specifications*, which were later submitted to the donors. The text of the document was finally agreed in January 2006.

To ensure the Polish Government's co-financing to the Fund, amounting to 10 % of its total allocation, i.e. 4.15 million euro, and to meet Poland's obligations towards the donors, in December 2005 the Ministry of Regional Development initiated the appropriate procedure and was granted the consent to get involve state budget in the Fund resources.

1.1.2. Scholarship and Training Fund

Based on two documents prepared by the donors: *The creation of scholarship block grants under the EEA Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism* and *The expansion of the European Economic Area and EEA Financial Mechanisms: possible areas for co-operation in the field of education and research*, the National Focal Point began programming works to launch the Scholarship and Training Fund.

1.2. The building of the implementation system and administrative capacity

The building of system implementation of the Financial Mechanisms, including the EEA Financial Mechanism, has been to a large extent completed. It referred to the building of structures, systems and procedures.

1.2.1 Institutional building

All institutions involved in the process of implementation have been established, including the Monitoring Committee, whose objective is to monitor the use of resources, and the Steering Committees for specific priorities which recommend positively evaluated proposals for the

co-financing from the Financial Mechanism resources. Additionally, Intermediary Bodies and Auxiliary Bodies responsible for the implementation of the 6 priority areas of the EEA Financial Mechanism have been structured .

Monitoring Committee

The first meeting of the Monitoring Committee was held on 28 September 2005. During the meeting the following documents were adopted: the Committee By-laws, *The Annual Report on the implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism in Poland in the period October 2004 - August 2005* and *The Annual Report on the implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism in Poland the period October 2004- August 2005*.

A representative of the Financial Mechanism Office in Brussels and a representative of the Royal Embassy of Norway in Warsaw took part in the meeting of the Monitoring Committee, as observers.

The next meeting of the Monitoring Committee, at which the approval of the Supplement is planned, will be held on 27 March 2006.

Steering Committees

Steering Committees constitute a significant element of the appraisal and selection procedures of projects which apply for the co-financing from the EEA Financial Mechanism. These bodies are appointed for each individual priority area and jointly for both Financial Mechanisms.

In September-December 2005 the first meetings of Steering Committees for the following areas were held:

- *Human resource development, through, inter alia, promotion of education and training, strengthening administration or public service capacity in local government and democratic processes supporting local government – 8 November 2005.*
- *Preservation of European cultural heritage – 19 December 2005.*

The main item on the Committees' agenda was the adoption of by-laws.

1.2.2. Creating procedures

In the period discussed, the National Focal Point, in co-operation with the relevant institutions implementing the EEA Financial Mechanism:

- a) Drafted the document entitled *The monitoring system for the Operational Programme of the EEA Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism*, pursuant to guidelines from Donor States on monitoring and reporting,
- b) Drafted the document *Public Aid – guidelines for Intermediary Bodies*, to serve the Intermediary Bodies as a basis for the appraisal of applications of proposals in view of their compliance with EU regulations on public aid,
- c) Worked on the drafting of the following document *Agreement on the scope and mode of co-operation within the framework of the use of financial resources from the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism, priority area....* It is an agreement signed by the National Focal Point, the Paying Authority (Ministry of Finance) and the relevant ministry acting in the capacity of an Intermediary Body for the respective priority area of the Mechanism. The agreement offers a regulatory framework for obligations of specific institutions in the process of implementation of resources of the Mechanisms, including in particular: laying down procedures for calls for proposals and applications appraisal of proposals, the signing of financial contracts with beneficiaries, monitoring and reporting, disbursement of financial resources and detecting irregularities.

1.3. Promotion and information

The reporting period discussed was particularly important with respect to information activities, having in mind that the first call for proposals was underway.

On 16 November 2005 the National Focal Point organised a training in Warsaw targeted at representatives of territorial self-government units and social partners. The workshop concerned the filling-in of an application form and partnership building in order to implement projects. Moreover it regularly updated the www.eog.gov.pl (www.eeagrants.pl) website, particularly its *frequently asked question* section; more staff was also assigned to the Information Desk which answered beneficiaries' questions via e-mail or by phone. All Intermediary Bodies for specific priority areas of the EEA Financial Mechanism carried out similar activities.

Following the arrangements at the first annual meeting with Donor States, a link to a database of Donor States partners who, among other things, expressed interest in co-operation with Polish entities within activities co-financed by both Financial Mechanisms, was placed on the National Focal Point website.

Furthermore, within the undertaken promotion and information activities, representatives of Ministry of Regional Development and Intermediate Bodies participated in the meetings and conferences during which, they presented topics related with implementation of Financial Mechanisms in Poland:

- On 17 October 2005, within Polish- Iceland Business Forum, a seminar on the EEA Financial Mechanism was held with speakers prepared by Icelandic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Polish National Focal Point and Polish Ministry of Environment.
- On 5 December 2005, the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage held a conference on *New opportunities for the financing of cultural projects – the EEA Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism*, with the participation of a representative of the Royal Embassy of Norway, the National Focal Point and the Ministry of Education and Science as an intermediary body in the “Academic Research” priority.

In addition, following the closure of the first call for proposals, which continued from 5 September to 30 November 2005, relevant briefing materials were prepared and sent out to the press.

2. Implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism

Implementation activities were initiated to launch two block grants: the Seed Money Fund and the Technical Assistance Fund, as well as to select individual projects and programmes eligible for the co-financing from the EEA Financial Mechanism.

2.1. Launching of block grants

By a letter of 10 August 2005 the National Focal Point submitted to the Financial Mechanism Office two applications for the Seed Money Fund and the Technical Assistance Fund.

As a result of the appraisal of applications, the Financial Mechanism Office asked for additional information and supplementing. A supplemented application for the Seed Money Fund was submitted by the Polish party for final approval twice: on 21 October 2005 and finally on 9 December 2005, while the application for the Technical Assistance Fund was submitted on 28 October 2005. As regards the first fund, supplementation referred to the development of an application form for projects co-financed from the Fund, along with the user guide as well as formal, and content-related grids.

Upon the completion of the assessment by the Financial Mechanisms Office, both proposals were sent to the European Commission for assessment (November 2005 as regards the Technical Assistance Fund; December 2005 as regards the Seed Money Fund).

A time-consuming process of evaluation of the application for the Technical Assistance Fund made it impossible to carry out certain activities planned by the NFP for the last quarter of 2005 (e.g. thematic conferences or developing the guidelines for the Scholarship and Training Fund). Similarly, a significant shift in the date of making the Seed Money Fund available, aimed to provide support to the preparation of proposals, resulted in the questioning of the viability of its main objectives, particularly in the view of the great number of applications submitted in the first call, for the amount many times exceeding the allocation available.

2.2. First call for proposals

The first call for proposals for individual projects and programmes was held from 5 September to 30 November 2005 within 10 priority areas, jointly for the EEA Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism. Pursuant to the rules established by Donor States, the announcement of the call for proposals was accepted by the donor party and published in a national-wide circulation newspaper (*Gazeta Wyborcza* of 31 August 2005 and

6 September 2005), as well as on the websites of the implementing bodies of the Mechanisms. The announcement referred to the allocations for 2004-2005, totalling to the amount of 175.6 million euro.

According to the data provided by Intermediary Bodies to the National Focal Point, 1 395 applications were submitted in total, including the following:

- 692 applications for the three environment priorities ,
- 111 applications for the priority "Conservation of cultural heritage...",
- 46 applications for the priority: "Human resource development...",
- 371 applications for the priority: "Health care...",
- 121 applications for the priority: "Academic research",
- 47 applications for the priority: "Implementation of Schengen *acquis*...",
- 6 applications for the priority: "Regional policy and cross-border activities",
- 4 applications for the priority: "Technical assistance in implementing the *acquis communautaire*".

An estimate amount of euro for which beneficiaries apply is approximately 1.6 billion euro (a precise amount will be known upon the completion of the formal assessment of proposals). The above amount nine-fold exceeds the financial resources available for the call for proposals and three-fold the total allocation envisaged to be available for Poland in 2004-2009 under both Financial Mechanisms.

The lists of applications submitted have been displayed on the websites of Intermediary Bodies (except for the Website of the Ministry of the Environment, which is caused by the large number of proposals submitted).

In December 2005 all Intermediary Bodies began formal and content-related assessment of proposals. The expected deadline for the submission of the first tranche of positively assessed projects is mid-April 2006.

2.3. Identified problems and legal barriers

It is estimated that the process of appraisal of applications by the Polish party, the Donor States party and the European Commission will take 8-10 months in total. Having in mind a large number of projects under the first call for proposals (1,395), the period for their assessment may be longer, which may result in the amendments to the schedules of implementation of projects. Considering the above the assessment procedures should be simplified and shortened. Appraisal procedure should not be repeated, so the revision of

assessment criteria adopted by the Polish party and the Donor should be pursued in such a manner that a successive stage of the assessment would only complement the previous stage without repeating it. An alternative solution would be to work jointly on the assessment of projects by both parties.

Similarly to the process of appraisal of applications, the activities related to the verification of payment claims are repeated by the Polish party and the donor. A time-span from the submission of a request for payment claim to the actual payment may be as long as 5 months, which can have a negative impact on the project cash-flow. The procedure of assessment of payment claims should be revised, to reduce their re-assessment. An alternative and much desired solution would be the creation of an advance system on the level of the entire Operational Programme.

Despite the fact that the call for proposals for individual projects and programmes was ended and the process of assessment is underway, a standard grant agreement for the co-financing of specific projects to be concluded between an Intermediary Body and the beneficiary still remains unknown.

3. Implementation plan for the EEA Financial Mechanism in the period January – December 2006

In the successive reporting period the programming works on the use of resources from the EEA Financial Mechanism under block grants referred to in Annex C to the Memorandum of Understanding will continue; the building of the remaining elements of the implementing system will be completed, and new promotion and information activities undertaken. In parallel, successive calls for proposals will be announced, including those referring to the Funds of Annex C; the assessment and selection of projects eligible for the co-financing from the EEA Financial Mechanism will be carried out, as well as the activities related to the financial services, monitoring, control and audit of projects implemented.

3.1. Programming the use of resources

NGO Fund

In the 2nd quarter of 2006 the intermediary/intermediaries for the NGO Fund will be selected in a tender procedure. It is envisaged that the launching of the NGO Fund will take place in the 4th quarter of 2006.

Scholarship and Training Fund

By mid-2006 the National Focal Point will prepare a framework document for the Scholarship and Training Fund in co-operation with the Donor. The main goals of the Fund will be proposed in the guidelines, along with the activities connected with those goals and potential beneficiaries.

After the acceptance of the document by the European Committee of the Council of Ministers, the Ministry of Regional Development plans, according to an established procedure, to prepare and submit a proposal to the Financial Mechanism Office. The beginning of the first call for proposals for the Scholarship and Training Fund is planned for the 4th quarter 2006.

3.2. Building of the implementation system

In the 2nd quarter 2006 the paths of internal audit and of cash flow in Intermediary Bodies will be prepared.

Furthermore the steps to enhance administrative capacities of institutions involved in the process of implementation of Financial Mechanisms in Poland will continue to be undertaken, including in particular the level of employment as well as the staff skills and expertise. To this

end trainings for the staff of the National Focal Point, Intermediary Bodies, the Paying Authority and the Audit Authority, with the participation of the representatives of the Financial Mechanism Office in Brussels are planned to be run.

3.3. Promotion and information

Overall objectives of the promotion and information activities performed during the reporting period will be the following:

- a) increasing awareness of potential beneficiaries of the financing possibilities available under the EEA Financial Mechanism,
- b) informing public opinion about the effects of the implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism.

The following activities are planned to be accomplished in the successive reporting period:

Period	Activity
March 2006	Printing of guidelines prepared by Donor States
March 2006	Training for potential applicants from the Polish Blind Association
April 2006	Updating and printing of the most important programming documents, i.e.: the Operational Programme and the Memoranda of Understanding
April-May 2006	Organisation of 3-4 regional conferences with the participation of the NFP, Intermediary Bodies and the representative of the Royal Embassy of Norway. The meetings will be aimed at the familiarisation of prospective beneficiaries with the new application form and changes in rules and procedures introduced by Donor States

3.4. Calls for proposals

The following calls for proposals are planned to be held in 2006:

Data	Type of call for proposals	Responsible body
2nd quarter 2006	Second call for proposals for the co-financing of individual projects and programmes under 10 priority areas of the Norwegian Financial	Co-ordinating Body - National Focal Point; Implementing Body– Intermediary Bodies

	Mechanism and 6 priority areas of the EEA	
4th quarter 2006	First call for proposals for the NGO Fund	Fund intermediary/intermediaries
4th quarter 2006	First call for proposals for the Scholarship and Training Fund	Fund intermediary/intermediaries

4. Review of Annex A and Annex B of the Memorandum of Understanding on the EEA Financial Mechanism

In order to update the names of institutions involved in the implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism in Poland, and to incorporate the Auxiliary Bodies appointed by the Intermediary Bodies, Table 1 of the Implementation system in Annex A of the Memorandum of Understanding should be modified accordingly:

NFM priority	Intermediary body	Auxiliary Body for the Intermediary Body
Protection of the environment, including human environment, through, <i>inter alia</i> , reduction of pollution and promotion of renewable energy	Ministry of Environment	The National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management
Promotion of sustainable development through improved resources use and management	Ministry of Environment	The National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management
Conservation of European cultural heritage including public transport and urban renewal	Ministry of Culture and National Heritage	
Human resource development through, <i>inter alia</i> , promotion of education and training, strengthening of administrative or public service capacities of local government or its institutions, as well as strengthening the democratic processes that support it	Office of the Committee for European Integration	
Health and childcare	Ministry of Health	Office for Foreign Aid Programs in Health Care
Scientific research	Ministry of Education and Science	

Conclusions

The activities of the National Focal Point and other implementing institutions of the EEA Financial Mechanism in Poland during the reporting period: September – December 2005, focused on the smooth running of the first call for proposals under all 6 priority areas of the Mechanism, preparation for the implementation of block grants: the NGO Fund, the Technical Assistance Fund, the Seed Money Fund, the Scholarship and Training Fund, as well as on information and promotion activities.

The activities of institutions implementing the EEA Financial Mechanism, in the successive reporting period will focus on the tasks concerning the appraisal and selection of projects from the first call for proposals, the signing of grant agreements, monitoring of project implementation and the launching and execution of block grants.

Annex 1: Action Plan: January - December 2006

Scope	Task	1st quarter r 2006	2nd quarter r 2006	3rd quarter 2006	4th quarter 2006
Programming of the use of resources	Guidelines to the Scholarship and Training Fund				
Development of implementation system	Competition to select intermediary/intermediaries of the NGO Fund				
	Creation of a database of applications				
	Development of scheme of audit paths for the NFM and EEA FM				
Calls for proposals	Call for proposals for the co-financing of individual projects and programmes				
	Call for proposals under the NGO Fund				
	Call for proposals under the Scholarship and Training Fund				
Promotion and information	Printing of promotional materials				
	3-4 regional conferences				
	Operation of the MRD Information Point				
	On-going updating and development of www.eog.gov.pl website				
	Co-operation with the media				