

Fund for Bilateral Relations at the National Level

Work Plan

Background

In the frames of European Economic Area and Norway Grants Estonia has set aside 0,5% of total allocation of the grants, i.e. 243 000 euros in order to strengthen bilateral relations with the three donor countries – Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

The relations between Estonia and the donor countries vary. Relations between Estonia and Iceland are very good and in many major international political issues the countries have the same positions, but due to the geographical distance bilateral relations are rather modest. Between Estonia and Liechtenstein there are next to no bilateral relations. The relationships between Estonia and Norway can be characterized by increasing co-operation in the fields of economics, culture and national defence. The traditionally good ties with Norway are reflected among other things also by the relatively big amount of bilateral trade. There have been several direct contacts among municipalities, but the majority of the contacts have remained sporadic and limited to exchange of culture groups. There has been a long-term relationship between Pärnu and Buskerud counties, also between Østfold and Rapla counties and several others have close connections as well. In addition to that, the co-operation between the Association of Municipalities of Estonia, the Association of Estonian Cities and The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) is working well.

Similar pattern of bilateral relations' frequency applies also for the EEA and Norway Grants 2004-2009 period. Within almost one fifth of the individual projects official partnership agreements with Norwegian partners were concluded. Additionally all the research block grant projects and a few of the NGO Fund and regional development block grant projects had Norwegian institutions' partners. At the same time only two research projects had a partner from Iceland and no official partnership was created with institutions from Liechtenstein.

The 2004-2009 period's bilateral relations with Norwegian institutions within the financed projects can mainly be illustrated by two words – research and environment. Often both together i.e. collaboration was created in environment related issues within research projects. As already mentioned several contacts were created also on the NGOs', municipalities' and regional authorities' level.

Looking forward to the implementation of the EEA and Norway Grants 2009-2014 the bilateral relations can be strengthened in the sectors where they already exist and created in sectors lacking mutual understanding.

Objective

Looking at the history of co-operation the most valuable approach would be concentrating on further facilitating and broadening of local level cooperation i.e. collaboration between municipalities and grass-root organisations with the main aim of enhancing the cooperation. This can be done most efficiently by sharing best practices between as many counterparts as

possible. Among other organizations, schools will have strong potential of becoming drivers of the bilateral cooperation on local level.

In addition to that, increasing synergy and coherence in the Baltic Sea region through tightening and promoting regional co-operation will be aimed at.

As a result of negotiations with the donors, the Financial Mechanism Office, the Norwegian Embassy in Tallinn, the Monitoring Committee, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia and some potential beneficiaries, the main directions for enhancing the grassroots level co-operation have been identified as follows:

- enhancing collaboration in promoting democratic values and open debate in society with specific focus on youth
- enhancing collaboration on common concerns in the area of working with children and youth
- enhancing collaboration in promoting healthy life styles through sports and outdoor activities with specific focus on youth
- learning from best practices on other topics relevant for municipalities
- co-operation in the priority areas of the Estonian and Norwegian chairmanships of the Baltic Sea Council

In order to remain flexible in the use of the funds, the Focal Point will also be open for ad hoc activities and sharing experience on issues that arise from certain programme level needs, also from other co-operation formats existing between Estonia, the donor state(s) and the Baltic states.

Additionally, through sharing knowledge and best practices also the knowledge of the EEA agreement will be increased.

As most of cooperation directions are connected with children and youth, the educational component will be highlighted.

In order to evaluate the achieved results, regular qualitative analysis will be made. For that the Focal Point will elaborate questionnaires that will be sent to the participants of the events right after the event and in order to assess wider effects and long-term impact, different questionnaires will be sent at a later stage as well. The results of the analysis will be presented and discussed at Annual Meeting.

Main principles of implementation

Before the approval of the Programmes

In order to initiate bilateral relations right from the beginning in the programme areas agreed in the memoranda of understanding and to give a good starting point for the programme operators to develop such relations further many different activities have been financed from the national level bilateral fund already during the preparation of the programme proposals: setting up of the CCs, organizing meetings and seminars in Estonia to discuss the content of the programmes between Estonian target groups and Norwegian experts as well as study trips to Norway to learn from local experience. Please see the full list of activities implemented until present attached in Annex I.

After the approval of the Programmes

After the programmes' approval activities promoting bilateral relations within one particular programme area will be covered from programme level bilateral funds. The national level bilateral fund will further be a resource for activities encouraging better mutual understanding between Estonian and the donor countries' institutions:

- within the programme areas not financed in Estonia
- for the benefit of several programme areas at the same time or
- having a different focus compared to the respective programmes in Estonia.

Relation between national level fund and programme level funds

Since the programme level funds can be used for initiatives rather in one programme area, the idea of using the national level fund is taking broader initiatives, taking into account as many linked topics from as many programmes as possible, but also topics outside funded programmes. However, the Focal Point will consider funding excellent programme level bilateral initiatives in case the programme level bilateral fund has exhausted and there are means available in the national level bilateral fund.

Implementation system

As the size of the fund is limited and the aim is to involve as broad extent of the target groups as possible no open calls for smaller initiatives are foreseen. Activities financed from the fund will preferably have wide audience in order to maximize the number of beneficiaries. Therefore seminars, workshops, lectures etc involving donor countries' expertise are preferred types of activities.

The availability of the fund will be publicised on the Focal Point's website.

The main principle of organizing events is that the Focal Point is open for proposals of ideas from any kind of institutions (state institutions, municipalities, NGOs etc) through the Monitoring Committee and the donors. Both Estonian institutions and donor countries' institutions can propose bilateral initiatives at any time until the fund is exhausted. Each bilateral initiative will be discussed with the Norwegian Embassy in Tallinn prior to deciding on the event. Working groups consisting of representatives of the Focal Point, the Norwegian Embassy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, the POs, municipalities, NGOs, donors and other relevant parties will be established in order to work out the main principles of concrete events.

The applicant institution would have to organize the content of the event – find the speakers, take care of invitations, agenda etc. The Focal Point will organize the facilities, accommodation and transport upon the information provided by the applicant institution (dates, lists of participants, flight details etc). In reasoned cases the Focal Point may delegate its responsibilities to the applicant institution.

Only bigger costs of the events will be covered: room rent, catering, international travel, accommodation, fees for the speakers if necessary. The events will have to be free of charge in order to ensure as many participants as possible (depending on the event participation per one institution can be limited). Single costs related to the participation in the events will not be reimbursed – daily allowances, internal travel costs etc. These costs will be considered as the participants' own contribution and proof of their serious interest.

Concrete activities to be implemented in 2012/2013

It is planned to finance three initiatives in autumn 2012/spring 2013 from the Fund. Please see the list and a more detailed description of activities attached in Annex II.

Budget

Please see the budget of already implemented activities and planned activities attached in Annex III.

Revision of the Work Plan

The Work Plan will be reviewed at Annual Meeting in order to make changes if necessary and agree on concrete activities for the next period.