

## **Swiss-Maltese Co-operation Programme**

Minutes of the Annual Meeting held on 8 May 2014

### **ATTENDANCE**

Present for the meeting were:

#### **Maltese National Co-ordination Unit**

- Mr Raphael Scerri, Director General (Funds and Programmes), MEAIM
- Mr Stephen Calleja, Director (Programmes and Projects), MEAIM

#### **Swiss Confederation Representatives**

- Mr Ulrich Stürzinger, Head, Division New EU Member States, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)
- Mr Marcus Rothen, Diplomat, Swiss Embassy, Rome

#### **Others present**

- Mr Joseph Sghendo, Director (EU Paying Authority), MFIN
- Ms Letizia Mintoff, Senior Manager, Treasury, MFIN
- Ms Maria Camilleri, Auditor, Internal Audit and Investigations Department, OPM
- Ms Graziella Grech, Auditor, Internal Audit and Investigations Department, OPM

#### **Secretary**

- Ms Christine Tong, EU Fund Officer, Funds and Programmes Division, MEAIM

### **PROCEEDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

Mr Raphael Scerri, Head of the National Co-ordination Unit, opened the meeting by welcoming the Swiss delegates. The agenda was put up for discussion and adoption.

#### **Adoption of Agenda**

The agenda for this meeting was adopted. Mr Scerri went through the items to be discussed, giving an introductory overview of developments that had taken place since the previous annual meeting.

Word was passed to the Swiss delegation. Mr Stürzinger commended the NCU (National Cooperation Unit) for the very smooth running of the Swiss-Maltese Cooperation Programme, and emphasised the excellent bilateral relations between the two countries. He mentioned that before travelling to the island, he had the opportunity to meet students from MEDAC – who were on a visit to Bern as part of their study programme – and the Maltese Ambassador to Switzerland with whom the importance of such a programme for Malta was discussed.

Mr Marcus Rothen introduced himself and stated that he had long been following Swiss-Maltese relations from the legal perspective. He added that at present he was stationed in Rome and would henceforth be following Malta from a wider perspective. He mentioned the imminent change of Ambassador, and meetings with both His Excellency President Emeritus Dr George Abela and Malta's Minister of Foreign Affairs George Vella. Mr Rothen quoted from a letter by Her Excellency President Dr Marie Louise Coleiro Preca describing the strong Swiss-Maltese relations; how they had evolved over time and encouraging their further strengthening. The letter also conveyed the gratitude of the Maltese authorities for the Swiss Grant to Malta.

Mr Rothen also raised the possibility of a visit to Switzerland by Malta's Minister of Foreign Affairs in the next months, as well as a State Visit to Malta by the President of the Swiss Confederation next year. Mr Rothen concluded his intervention by mentioning the prospect of a Memorandum of Understanding to enhance dialogue between the countries.

## **Discussion on Annual Report**

Mr Stephen Calleja opened discussions on the *Annual Report for the period 1 May 2013 to 30 April 2014* by giving an overview of the developments during the twelve month period to 30 April 2014:

- ***The project 'Establishing Positron Emission Tomography / Computed Tomography (PET/CT) scanning in the Maltese Islands':***

Mr Calleja confirmed that the project was effectively concluded from both the physical and financial implementation points of view. The equipment was operational and in clinical use at the Medical Imaging Department, Mater Dei Hospital. An on-site visit after the annual meeting would enable the Swiss delegates to meet Dr Anthony Samuel (the Project Leader) and see the scanner in situ. Mr Calleja further confirmed that all reports related to this project had been completed and submitted to SDC.

- ***The project 'Support to the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies (MEDAC)':***

Mr Calleja pointed out that this project was steadily drawing to a conclusion as well, being in its fourth and final year. The project was meant to be concluded by 30 September 2014, and any expenses incurred after 31 December 2013 (the cut-off date of the Interim Report / Reimbursement Request 7) would be factored into the Project Completion Report and Final Reimbursement Request.

Interim Report 7 had been compiled by the NCU and was currently undergoing certification by the Paying Authority prior to submission to SDC. Mr Joseph Sghendo confirmed that the Paying Authority was currently carrying out checks and would be passing on the report to the SDC in the coming days.

Mr Calleja added that the NCU was aware of the Swiss Government's intention to support MEDAC through other instruments, beyond 1 October 2014.

The Audit Authority stated that they have yet to conduct the final audit. The report should then be submitted to SDC along with the Final Reimbursement Request, as has been done already in the case of the PET/CT scanner project.

Finally, it was mentioned that the fourth annual project report was submitted in April.

- ***The Technical Assistance Fund:***

Mr Calleja stated that the first tranche of CHF 40,000 paid by Switzerland had not all been spent yet. He then proceeded to give a breakdown of the expenses incurred under the Technical Assistance heading: the participation in three meetings organised by SDC in Lucerne, Aarau and Thun; the fee for an expert who was engaged to assist in the drafting of the PET/CT scanner specifications; the six annual meetings; the ongoing publicity campaign at programme level (which included billboards, radio spots, electronic banners and print adverts in magazines).

Referring to the publicity campaign in particular, Mr Calleja explained that the reason for its delay was a failed procurement procedure, which had necessitated a re-launch. The only bid in the original call for tenders was not financially compliant since the price exceeded the allocated budget. Therefore, prior to the re-launch of the tender, the NCU needed to increase the 'General Publicity Measures' budget line in order to reduce the risk of failure the second time around. The second call was successful but ironically the winning bid was below even the budget originally allocated under this heading.

In reply to a question by Mr Stürzinger, Mr Calleja confirmed that in line with standing government instructions, the available budgets were no longer being published in tender documents.

In view of the savings under the 'General Publicity Measures' budget heading, Mr Calleja then presented the Swiss delegation with the question of what was to be done with the remaining funds. He suggested that there existed a possibility of utilising these funds by commissioning an external ex-post evaluation, specifying that he had already drafted the Terms of Reference and shared them with SDC. The ex-post evaluation had to be jointly agreed upon by Switzerland and Malta however, as stated in article I of Annex I to the Framework Agreement. Such an ex-post evaluation could assess the efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of the projects.

Mr Calleja noted however that the budget currently available under 'Hiring of Consultants for monitoring / review' (around CHF 9900) might not be sufficient for a fully comprehensive exercise and suggested increasing it to around CHF 18,000 by transferring savings / uncommitted amounts from other TA budget headings. In this regard, the NCU would propose a revised TA budget in the days after the Annual Meeting.

Mr Scerri also suggested that in case there would be TA funds left over after award of the evaluation contract, these funds might be used to hold a seminar and produce a small leaflet to communicate the outcomes and results of projects as well as other evaluation findings. To this end, SDC and the NCU agreed to discuss this further during Mr Rothen's next visit to Malta in September or October 2014 when he would be accompanying the new Swiss Ambassador on an official visit to Malta. By that time the amount of TA funds still uncommitted should be clearer.

## **Audit**

### ***Interim audits and upcoming audits:***

Ms Maria Camilleri from the Audit Authority referred to the interim and final audits carried out on the PET/CT scanner, confirming that no findings had emerged. She stated that the interim audit on the MEDAC project had also been performed and that the only remaining audit was the final one on the MEDAC project. This was scheduled to be held somewhere between the coming October and November, depending on when the final payment would be made.

The interim audit on the MEDAC project found that the amount of CHF 1634 had been unduly claimed. This amount had been refunded to Switzerland by means of offset in Reimbursement Request 6.

## **Further remarks by the Swiss representatives**

Mr Stürzinger once again commended the NCU for a concise, complete and concrete Annual Report, and gave it SDC's formal approval. He noted however, that in addition to outputs, the Annual Reports of other Beneficiary States also contained information on outcomes and results. Mr Stürzinger conveyed the expectation that such information about both the PET/CT scanner and the MEDAC projects would come from the ex-post evaluation, although he conceded that measuring the results and impact in the case of the MEDAC project was not so straightforward. He reiterated Switzerland's satisfaction with the manner in which the PET/CT scanner project had been implemented, and particularly the fact that continuity had been maintained by retaining Dr Samuel from project inception right through to completion and even thereafter. He also noted that this facility presented a qualitative leap in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer in Malta.

The NCU informed Mr Stürzinger that Dr Samuel would surely be able to share some initial results from the PET/CT scanner project (e.g. number of patients; scan analyses and follow-ups) during the visit to Mater Dei Hospital after the Annual Meeting. Meanwhile, a way of trying to assess the results and impact of the MEDAC project might be to draw on the alumni network and establishing what students do after they leave their programme of studies at MEDAC. Mr Stürzinger noted that the alumni network had intensified its efforts when compared to previous years, and that maybe this would be a good way for an external evaluator to measure outcomes for this project.

In relation to the publicity campaign, Mr Stürzinger agreed that it was indeed an ideal time for it to take place, as the PET/CT scanner was in operation and the MEDAC project was approaching closure.

## **Way Forward and Conclusion**

Way forward:

- NCU to revise the Technical Assistance Budget with a proposal to reallocate savings / uncommitted funds (except an amount to be reserved for the 2015 Annual Meeting) to the 'Hiring of Consultants for monitoring / review' heading. Once in receipt of the approval from SDC, the NCU would set in motion the process to launch the tender for the ex-post evaluation. The NCU was to target the beginning of 2015 for completion of the evaluation report.
- SDC and the NCU to discuss further the idea and timing of a seminar and a small leaflet to communicate the outcomes and results of projects as well as other evaluation findings during Mr Rothen's next visit to Malta (September / October 2014), by which time the amount of TA funds still uncommitted at that point should be clearer.

Mr Stürzinger and Mr Rothen thanked the NCU and the other Maltese participants. Concluding Mr Scerri again thanked everyone present and hoped to continue with this fruitful cooperation until Programme closure.