

Swiss-Maltese Co-operation Programme

Minutes of the Annual Meeting held on 15 June 2015

ATTENDANCE

Present for the meeting were:

Maltese National Co-ordination Unit

- Mr Raphael Scerri, Director General (Funds and Programmes), MEAIM
- Ms Carmen Dalli, Director (Programmes and Projects), MEAIM
- Mr Stephen Calleja, Officer in Grade 4

Swiss Confederation Representatives

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

Others present

- Mr Joseph Sghendo, Director (EU Paying Authority), MFIN
- Ms Nadine Portelli, Auditor, Internal Audit and Investigations Department, OPM
- Mr Stefano Mallia, Evaluator, EMCS Ltd
- Mr Ramon Muscat, Evaluator, EMCS Ltd

Apologies

- Mr Albert Zahra, Head (EU Funds Management), Treasury

PROCEEDINGS

Introduction

Mr Raphael Scerri, Head of the National Co-ordination Unit (NCU), opened the meeting by welcoming the Mr Stürzinger. 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 2014 annual meeting.

In his introduction, Mr Stürzinger said it was a great pleasure for him to once again be with the Maltese counterparts. He apologised on behalf of Ambassador Kessler and Mr Marcus Rothen who could not be present for the Annual Meeting on account of the fact that they had to attend another meeting in Valletta at the request of the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Malta's 2015 Annual Meeting was the first final annual meeting among the 12 beneficiary states of the Swiss Contribution. Mr Stürzinger announced that Malta was the first country to have successfully concluded all projects being co-financed by the Contribution. He went on to thank the NCU for organising the public seminar which would be held after the Annual Meeting in order to present the achievements of the Swiss-Maltese Cooperation Programme to the public. The publicity campaign mounted by the NCU in 2014 had helped to create awareness of the Swiss Contribution among the Maltese and Mr Stürzinger expressed the hope that both sides would be able to collaborate further in future through other agreements. He also made positive remarks about the *ex-post* evaluation performed by EMCS Ltd on behalf of the NCU.

Discussion on Annual Report

Mr Stephen Calleja commenced by saying that the Annual Report under discussion was the seventh one. The report had been distributed on 28 May to permit participants to familiarise themselves with its contents ahead of the meeting. Essentially the present Annual Report picked up where the previous one left off. The main

achievements during the reporting period were in relation to the MEDAC project which had been in its fourth and final year of implementation. The other project (PET / CT scanner) had been successfully concluded by the reporting deadline of the sixth Annual Report and there was nothing further to report. Mr Calleja confirmed that the equipment remained in operation and in clinical use, something that the Swiss colleagues would have the opportunity to verify again the next day (16 June 2015) during the visit to Mater Dei Hospital.

Returning to the MEDAC project, Mr Calleja raised the issue of an unutilised amount of around CHF 54,500. This amount of unutilised funds was the result of a policy decision taken on 15 January 2015 by the Swiss National Bank to scrap the cap on the franc, sending the Swiss currency soaring against the euro. According to the Project Agreement, reimbursement requests sent to Switzerland by the Paying Authority had to be in Swiss francs, converted from the euro “at the daily exchange rate prevailing at the date of issuance of the Reimbursement Request”. The project would have absorbed the full amount of Swiss Contribution (i.e. CHF 1,900,000) at the typical exchange rate prevailing prior to 15 January 2015 but as the final Reimbursement Request was eventually submitted to SDC in April 2015, around CHF 54,500 had to remain unclaimed purely as a result of the drop of the value of the euro against the franc. Mr Calleja pointed out that MEDAC could not use such funds to implement additional activities after 15 January 2015 since the eligibility period of the project had ended on 30 September 2014. Mr Calleja asked whether something could be done to enable MEDAC to utilise the remaining CHF 54,500 of Swiss Contribution.

In terms of the technical assistance fund, all the foreseen activities had been implemented, including the publicity campaign and the ex-post evaluation. The final technical assistance activities consisted of the present Annual Meeting and the public seminar to follow immediately after. Once these would be concluded and related payments executed, the final Technical Assistance Fund Report would be drawn up and submitted to SDC accompanied by a reimbursement request. Mr Calleja anticipated that this would happen around the end of July or the beginning of August 2015.

At the conclusion of Mr Calleja’s intervention, Mr Scerri added that the implementation of the Swiss-Maltese Cooperation Programme did not encounter many difficulties. The Swiss authorities had always been receptive to Malta’s requests and feedback was always quick and positive. He formally thanked and expressed sincere gratitude for all the support that the NCU had received from the Swiss authorities over the previous six years, concluding that some of the lessons learned could even be applied to other funding mechanisms.

Ms Nadine Portelli (Audit Authority) reported that IAID had performed the final financial audit on the MEDAC project. The audit was quite flowing and the only issue encountered was one of an administrative rather than a financial nature, centring on whether certain items of expenditure were eligible in light of the fact that eligibility rules were sometimes vague. Ms Portelli stated that feedback in writing from MEDAC had been prompt and most of the expenditure in doubt turned out to be eligible, being actually related to the activities organised by MEDAC. She recommended more detailed eligibility rules in future as that would help in audit procedures.

Mr Joe Sghendo (Paying Authority) remarked about the good flow of process between his department and the NCU. He added that certifications had proceeded quite fluently and communication between all stakeholders was very positive.

Mr Raphael Scerri confirmed that the PET/CT scanner remained in clinical use at the Medical Imaging Department of Mater Dei Hospital. Figures showing the number of patients making use of the equipment were encouraging and showed that the scanner was very much needed and of critical importance to Malta’s health service.

In his reaction, Mr Stürzinger thanked the NCU for the Annual Report. He noted that although the report did not contain detailed information about results and impact; that was provided in the separate evaluation report which had been distributed with the Annual Report. He expressed his appreciation for the systematic and thorough report produced by the post-completion evaluation. He acknowledged that financial information was not final for the whole programme since the technical assistance fund was still being used.

With regard to the CHF 54,500 of 'savings' under the MEDAC project, Mr Stürzinger promised to look into the question of whether a concluded project could be re-opened under the circumstances and for the same purpose on his return to Switzerland and to inform the NCU of the outcome in due course.

Mr Stürzinger informed the NCU that following submission to SDC of the final Technical Assistance Fund reimbursement request, a final Programme Report summarising results, lessons learned and providing final financial data would be necessary. The report should also record SDC's decision on the aforementioned CHF 54,500 left over from the MEDAC project. Mr Stürzinger acknowledged that such a report would likely contain nothing new but it was required as part of the programme's closure mechanism.

Concluding, Mr Stürzinger said that the Annual Report could be accepted.

Replying, Mr Scerri announced that once the Annual Report had been accepted, it and the evaluators' presentation highlighting main achievements would be uploaded on the NCU's website, for the information of the general public.

Presentation of results: Evaluation of the Projects under the Swiss-Maltese Cooperation Programme

Mr Mallia and Mr Muscat from EMCS Ltd gave a presentation based on the findings contained in the Evaluation Report. The report itself had been distributed to participants of the Annual Meeting along with the Annual Report and Agenda.

Concluding remarks

In his concluding remarks, Mr Scerri expressed his appreciation for Mr Stürzinger's presence and participation. Mr Scerri thanked him for his valuable contribution and cooperation over the years and added that he looked forward to working with the Swiss authorities on other initiatives. He also thanked Mr Calleja who had been responsible for this programme from its earliest stages and was still at the NCU to see the programme through till the end.

For his part, Mr Stürzinger also thanked Mr Calleja and all the other Maltese participants for the smooth running of the programme and echoed Mr Scerri's hope that Malta and Switzerland would have the opportunity to collaborate further in the future.