

Swiss-Maltese Co-operation Programme

Minutes of Annual Meeting held on 11 June 2009

The first Annual Meeting of the Swiss-Maltese Co-operation Programme (2007-2017) was held at the Phoenicia Hotel in Malta on Thursday, 11 June 2009.

Mr Stephen Calleja, who was chairing, opened the meeting at 10.00 am.

Adoption of the Agenda

The agenda was approved and adopted.

Introduction

Mr Calleja welcomed the participants¹ and gave an introduction on Programme development thus far and on the achievements in the twelve months to the first Annual Meeting.

For his part, Mr Sturzinger, the head of the Swiss delegation, thanked the Planning and Priorities Coordination Division (PPCD) for organising the meeting, going on to explain that the purpose of the Swiss Contribution was to serve as a means for Switzerland to engage with the EU in addressing social and economic disparities in the beneficiary EU Member States. In view of this, the Programme should be seen as more than simply a financial contribution.

Discussion on the Annual Report for the period 29 April 2008 to 30 April 2009

Mr Calleja presented the report and explained in detail the information it contained.

The implementation of the project that had been conditionally approved by the Swiss authorities (i.e. the PET/CT scanner) would involve the launch of a tender to purchase the equipment, including delivery, commissioning and training on its use. In terms of the final project proposal, Mr Calleja indicated that the intention of the Maltese authorities was to submit this in the near future, following the discussion to clarify one or two issues during the meeting that would take place at Mater Dei Hospital that afternoon.

At the request of Mr Sturzinger, Mr Stephen Calleja clarified a point concerning the name of the line Ministry. He explained that following the March 2008 general elections, the Ministry for Health, the Elderly and Community Care and the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity had been merged into the Ministry for Social Policy (MSOC). This did not involve any changes to the set up of the Health Division within MSOC and as such it would not have an adverse effect on the PET/CT scanner project itself.

It was agreed that an updated project organisation chart would be included with the final project proposal to be submitted to the Swiss Authorities.

The payment forecast shown in the Annual Report was drawn up on the assumption of the Project Agreement being signed by the end of 2009. Hopefully, the whole procurement process would not encounter major difficulties or delays and the project should be concluded by the third quarter of 2011.

It was understood that payment forecasts were subject to change and the template would be updated as project implementation unfolded.

¹ The list of participants is at Annex A.

The same template was also being used to forecast payments related to technical assistance expenditure. Even in the case of technical assistance, payment forecasts would be revised to reflect the reality on the ground.

At the local Maltese level the payment procedure and the checks that would be applied had already been established in conformity with article 4.4 of Annex 2 to the bilateral Framework Agreement. The templates for certification had been drafted and agreed upon, enabling payments to be processed accordingly. The Maltese side expressed the view that there was no particular need to set up a computerised system to monitor the flow of payments, given the limited number of transactions envisaged over the whole Programme life-cycle.

Mr Sturzinger thanked the Maltese side for the report, saying that it was necessarily short because the Programme was still in the early stages of implementation. He also had positive comments about the expenditure forecasting templates and the streamlined system put in place to process payments at the local Maltese level.

Mr Sturzinger informed the Maltese side that if the technical assistance allocation was considered excessive, funds could be diverted to the PET/CT project, provided the surplus amount was determined at a sufficiently early stage.

With regard to the financial allocations shown in the report, Mr Sturzinger requested that the amounts be given in the Swiss currency instead of in Euro.

Mr Albert Zahra (Treasury) asked whether if 'nil' annual project reports would be required between project conclusion and Programme conclusion given that these dates were not coterminous. Mr Sturzinger replied that once the payment process would be finalised, the necessary audits performed and the project completion report compiled, then there would no need for further annual project reports. However, since the technical assistance would be running until 2017, a report would still need to be sent in its regard.

Mr Emanuel Borg (EU Paying Authority) asked which currency would be used for payments. Mr Calleja answered that payments to suppliers / service providers would be issued in their own currency whilst funds drawn down from Switzerland would be in Swiss francs. Mr Sturzinger added that the risks associated with currency fluctuations were to be borne by each beneficiary country.

Mr Zahra then asked what would happen in the case of gains resulting from currency fluctuations. Mr Sturzinger replied that the intention was to address this particular issue in the Project Agreement. In this context, Mr Zahra asked whether such gains could be used to substitute Maltese co-financing but Mr Sturzinger was wary of the idea, arguing that one should be careful and not build in too much contingency into the project budget in order to keep matters simple.

Mr Sturzinger then asked about what steps had been taken to create a link from www.swiss-contribution.mt to the Programme's page on the PPCD website.

Mr Calleja explained that this had been discussed with the Chief Information Officer (CIO) at OPM around November 2007, and that there had been some technical problems for this link to be set up. PPCD would speak to the CIO again to try and find a way around the difficulties.

The Annual Report was approved.

Discussions on procedure for modifications to the Technical Assistance Fund budget

Mr Calleja moved on to the issue of modifications to the technical assistance fund proposal and budget, requesting to know whether changes were possible and what

procedure should be followed. In this regard Mr Sturzinger answered in the affirmative, adding that duly justified modifications should simply be proposed by the NCU for SDC's approval. A revised budget reflecting the proposed amendment should accompany each request.

Any other business

Mr Sturzinger made reference to the extra CHF 2 million that were mentioned in article 3 (4) of the bilateral Framework Agreement. This amount was being kept in reserve for high priority projects and Malta was invited to propose to the Swiss authorities a suitable project that could be considered for support. Mr Sturzinger cautioned that Annex 1 to the bilateral Framework Agreement would need to be amended should Malta wish to utilise these funds to implement a project under a focus area other than Health. Ideally, proposals were to be received in Switzerland by end September 2009.

Mr Calleja thanked Mr Sturzinger for this information and replied by saying that he would be taking the message to higher authorities in Malta. He added that the matter would first have to be discussed internally before any decision was made to submit any proposal to Switzerland.

Conclusion

It was agreed that the next Annual Meeting should take place in May 2010.

Concluding, Mr Sturzinger wished the Maltese authorities well in the implementation of the current Programme and looked forward to continuing collaboration between the two sides.

Mr Calleja reciprocated by thanking Mr Sturzinger. As there were no further points to discuss the meeting was closed at 12.30 pm.

Annex A – List of Participants

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

Ms Manuela Leimgruber, First Secretary of Political and Juridical Affairs, Embassy of Switzerland in Rome/Italy

Mr Stephen Calleja, Director (Programmes and Projects), Planning and Priorities Coordination Division (National Coordination Unit)

Mr Aldo Formosa, Senior Manager, Planning and Priorities Coordination Division (National Coordination Unit)

Mr Albert Zahra, Treasury Department

Mr Emanuel Borg, EU Paying Authority

Ms Maria Victoria Borg, EU Paying Authority