1. OPENING REMARKS

Veronica Gaffey, Head of the Evaluation and European Semester Unit in Directorate-General Regional and Urban Policy, welcomed participants and opened the meeting. She then presented the agenda of the day. The minutes of the previous meeting in May 2013 were approved.

2. EVALUATION OF THE MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS OF COHESION POLICY PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS OVER THE LONGER TERMS IN 15 SELECTED REGIONS (FROM 1989-1993)

Veronica Gaffey presented the main findings of the evaluation in question. The methodological challenges included the number of programmes concerned, the extended period of time, and the issues of data availability and quality. The evaluation suggests that strategies must be defined more clearly and followed through more rigorously during implementation. Similarly, there is evidence that better targeting of the interventions improves utility. In line with this, future programming should focus on what can realistically be achieved, in coherence with national strategies.

3. UPDATE ON GUIDANCE ON PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK/REVIEW/RESERVE

Veronica Gaffey introduced the presentation. The Implementing Act on setting milestones and targets will be presented to COESIF Committee in January. The Delegated Act on the criteria for financial corrections will be presented at a later date. The revised guidance will be circulated after inter-service consultations with other Directorate-Generals.

Jan-Marek Ziółkowski from the Evaluation Unit presented the major changes in the Performance Framework (PF) guidance. The main challenge in the PF is to keep it simple, while covering all priority axes, setting realistic milestones and targets, and ensuring consistent criteria and methodology across programmes.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points were raised:

PL stressed the fact that the guidance, though not binding, should include transparent rules and criteria about amending milestone and target values, as well as methodological recommendations, along with additional information on the use of key implementation steps (KIS). At the same time, PL asks for more flexibility on the side of the Commission and
consistent rules across all funds. FI expressed concerns regarding how the Commission will achieve consistency across different units and DGs, ensuring that all MS are treated equally; LV asked for a checklist of criteria against which the Commission will assess incoming PFs. IT proposed an exchange of experience from incoming proposals. IT also enquired about what would happen if no priority is awarded the reserve. Jan Marek Ziolkowski referred to Art. 5 in the regulation: the MS can move the reserve to a different programme provided it is in the same fund and category of region. FR raised the issue of interregional programs with two different categories of region but a common strategy: how should targets be allocated? (The Commission will look into the issue). PT asked for a justification of the requirement to split performance reserve by year and which value exactly should be used for target and milestone (contracted or real). The UK raised a question on the PA and the KIS: Where there is common activity across different regions in the UK, to what extent should consistency be ensured? (it is challenging, however common indicators will help achieve consistency).

4. PREPARATION FOR THE 2014-2020 PROGRAMMING PERIOD

Veronica Gaffey provided feedback on the quality of the first OPs received. Contrary to the expectation that the main challenge would lie in setting result indicators, the main challenge has proved to be the setting of specific objectives (good and bad examples are presented). The intervention logic is often unclear, hence difficult to assess. Although second versions show some improvements, they too often repeat previous proposals. The PF cannot be developed until clear intervention logics are developed.

Adam Abdulwahab, from the Evaluation Unit, updated the Network regarding recent changes in the Guidance on Common Indicators, highlighting the general focus towards simplification:

- Indicator no.1 'Number of enterprises receiving support'
  - Innovation (also concerns indicators 28 & 29)
  - Energy efficiency

- Indicator no.5 'Number of new enterprises supported'
  - Innovation (spin-off companies, high-tech start-ups, etc.)

- Indicators no.6, 7 & 27 (matching private investment) – simplified

- Indicator no.9 'Increase in expected number of visits at supported sites of cultural or natural heritage and attraction'
  - Calculations can be based on demand analysis

Marielle Riché, from the Evaluation Unit, presented the state of play of the ex-ante evaluations, pointing that, amongst the few the Commission has seen, most are very descriptive and generic. These evaluations present a real opportunity for Managing Authorities.
5. **CLOSING REMARKS: EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION ON STATE OF PLAY OF THE EX ANTE EVALUATION ---- OTHER EVALUATION ACTIVITIES IN MEMBER STATES**

LV – proposed the organization of a joint seminar between DG REGIO, DG EMPL and ex-ante evaluators for an exchange of experience on ex ante evaluation.

PL – Almost all ex ante evaluation have been completed, but there still is a degree of flexibility.

FR – Ex ante evaluations are ongoing. These depend on the required approval of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), which is blocking the procedure for transmission of the OPs. A national programme for the harmonization of targets and milestones is being implemented. Due to the large amount of OPs, a survey was conducted among the MAAs to inform on the state of play and to summarize results of ex ante evaluations and PA.

FI – Good progress is being made on ex ante evaluation for the OP.

IRL – Ex ante evaluations have been completed for both the regional programmes. Final drafts will be available in February or March.

RO – Institutional changes at the end of 2012 have led to the creation of the Ministry of European funds, which is now responsible for coordinating all the ex-ante evaluations for the 6 OPs. The relevant tender was launched in the week preceding the meeting.

PT – The ex-ante evaluation for the PA is ongoing, in parallel with the process of producing the PA (almost completed). For the respective evaluation of the OPs, not all the evaluators have been contracted. OPs are in their first draft. An agency for development and cohesion has been set up, integrating efforts to help MAAs with the drafting of the OPs.

EE – The ex-ante evaluation has been completed and translated. The SEA is available. There will only be one OP in the next programming period, and negotiation is ongoing.

SK – Ex ante evaluations will be available for both the PA and the 6 OPs. A summary report for the former will be available in January. All other ex-ante evaluations have started and reports will be published in March.

IT – There are delays in the programming process. Negotiations between central and regional authorities are ongoing. There will be 21 OPs, and a budget has already been allocated to national programmes. A first draft of the PA will be available in the next few days. The process of preparation of OPs, however, changes a lot across regions. The evaluation unit is directly involved with the ex-ante evaluation of the PA. The evaluation unit is also responsible for monitoring the preparation of all other ex-ante evaluations. The Guidance document provided by the Commission has been translated into Italian and provided to the ex-ante evaluators. A workshop with all the authorities was held in July and there are plans to organize another event with the evaluators.
EL – A national meeting with MAs and evaluators was organized. Another conference is being planned in Athens in spring 2014, to which the Evaluation Unit is invited.

LT – A final report on the ex-ante evaluation will be available by the end of this year. The SEA could be ready in January, but there have been complications. All processes are coordinated by the evaluation units of MAs.

SE – OPs are almost completed, although baseline values are still being defined. Regarding the ex-ante evaluations, evaluators have been working closely with the regions and the ministries, but works are not proceeding as the OPs are not fully defined yet. There are ongoing discussions.

LU – The OP and the ex-ante evaluation are nearly finished. The SEA was launched during the week preceding the meeting and results are expected in January.

Second day of meeting, 06.12.2013

6. STATE OF PLAY OF EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

Kai Stryczynski from the Evaluation Unit introduced the agenda of the day and proceeded to discuss the state of play of the 2007-2013 ex post evaluation. The evaluation has now officially started with the contract award of Work Package Zero "Data Collection and Quality Assessment". The contract will be completed in summer 2015. MS are kindly asked to collaborate with the consultants. Regarding the remaining work packages: Calls for tender for WPs "Synthesis", "SMEs, ICT and Innovation", "Venture Capital" and "Large Enterprises" will be launched by the end of February 2014. WPs "Transport Projects" and "Effect on macroeconomic Aggregates" will be completed in-house. The Network was invited to forward any relevant thematic evaluation or study to the Evaluation Unit as they are completed.

7. FURTHER GUIDANCE PLANNED

Marielle Riché presented suggested contents of guidance on Evaluation Plans. A draft will be available for discussion at the next meeting of the Network.

Key points raised during the discussion:

IT considered useful an exchange of experience before drafting the Guidance; FI welcomed the idea of the Guidance; a similar guidance document is being drafted in PL and will be ready in April; LT stated that their evaluation plan has already been submitted to the Commission and enquired about receiving feedback. Their main challenges related to timing, the number of required evaluations, their frequency, data availability; the evaluation plan is currently being prepared in LV, but certain concerns are raised regarding impact evaluations at the level of
each priority axis. The guidance is therefore welcomed but collaboration with DG EMPL is recommended to ensure consistency; FR stressed the need for unified guidance for multi-fund programmes and raised concerns about financial requirements (due to the number of priority axes and to costly data); IT has already produced a guidance document, which will be shared with the network; PT discussed the main challenges faced in preparing the evaluation plan: timing is a concern as no results will be measureable by 2018, when the evaluations are due. As a consequence, it could be preferable to evaluate programmes which are in continuity with the previous programming period; AT, the guideline should only consist of recommendations and flexibility must be ensured in order to be useful.

Kai Styczynski invited the members of the Network to submit any available study or guidance on the topic to Marielle Riché by the end of January. He then discussed the planned guidance on Quality Management, which will focus on procedural issues. A tour de table of comments highlighted the following points:

- The guidance would be welcome considering that implementing evaluations is often problematic;
- Drafting good terms of reference (ToR) in general, and good evaluation questions in particular, is the main challenge faced by MS;
- The guidance on quality management should be consolidated with the guidance on evaluation plans and ToR;
- Guidance would be welcome on contracting and managing consultants.

Veronica Gaffey discussed the importance of carefully selecting the contractors. The cheapest bid alone should not drive selection. The ability to terminate contracts is an important signal to the market and must be ensured in the ToR. She invited the network to consult the updated EVALSED guidance and sourcebook available online (http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/information/evaluations/guidance_en.cfm) and brought to the attention the public consultation on the draft Commission Evaluation Policy Guidelines (Secretariat General).

8. ANNUAL IMPLEMENTATION REPORTS: FEEDBACK ON CORE INDICATORS REPORTED

John Walsh from the Evaluation Unit presented the results of the 2012 monitoring exercise. The data, which has already been presented to COCOF, will be published online.

He invited the Network to consult the Expert Network report on job creation (http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/information/evaluations/index_en.cfm#1), and to address any relevant weaknesses and recommendations. MS are asked to be as complete and accurate as possible in the 2013 reporting, as this data will be used for the 2007-13 ex-post evaluation.

During the discussion, AT and FR expressed concerns about publishing the data. IT already has experience with open data, limited to financial data. Veronica Gaffey pointed out that data in the Annual Implementation Reports will be aggregated and published in the future, accompanied by a citizen's summary.
9. **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Veronica Gaffey appreciated the discussions as they were interesting and useful. The next Evaluation Network meeting will likely take place in March 2014. Items on the agenda will include discussions on the guidance on quality issues, terms of reference and evaluation plans, and exchange of experience regarding the performance framework.