1. OPENING REMARKS

Veronica Gaffey opened the meeting and welcomed the new participants from Croatia, Romania and United Kingdom. She briefly presented the items of the agenda.

2. GUIDANCE ON EVALUATION PLANS/TERMS OF REFERENCE/ MANAGING QUALITY IN EVALUATIONS

Marielle Riché (Evaluation Unit) presented the main elements of the Guidance on evaluation plans developed jointly by DG REGIO and DG EMPL.

The following issues were discussed:

- The requirements apply for ETC programmes as well
- The MC will decide whether the evaluation plan is set up for each OP or whether it will cover all OPs. In any case, some co-ordination of plans across similar OPs in a MS would be a good practice.
- Each evaluation plan will be commented on by the REGIO Evaluation unit.
- A common evaluation plan for both ERDF and ESF can be set up; it must provide appropriate coverage for each fund.
- The evaluation plan should not focus only on impact evaluations. It should reflect on timing, when impact evaluations are to be carried out and when other evaluations might be needed. There is need for concentration and focus in the programmes: the more specific objectives an OP has, the more result indicators, and the more evaluation effort will be needed.

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

Jan-Marek Ziołkowski presented updates regarding the performance framework and reserve.

The following issues were raised:

- Ex-ante evaluation should support the setting up the PF.
• A MS could know that it sent sufficient information in the PA and/or OP, if the EC does not ask for supplementary information.

• There are no additional verifications to verify the coverage of 50% of the financial allocation for the output indicators used in the PF; if a MS discovers that the coverage has slipped under 50% during the programming period, this means that the OP must be modified.

• Regarding the PF for CLLD, KIS could be "number of strategies selected".

4. **EX-POST EVALUATION OF EIB ON INTERMEDIATED LENDING TO SMEs IN THE EU, 2005-2011**

Veronica Gaffey introduced the presentation of the evaluation by European Investment Bank (EIB). SMEs are considered as a driving force of Europe's growth (60% of its turnover) and account for 70% of employment in the private sector. The EIB supports SMEs by providing funding at improved conditions and by enhancing access to finance. Loans for SMEs represent currently about 70 000 loans p.a. The focus of this presentation by René-Laurent Ballaguy was an evaluation on intermediated lending to SMEs (realized by the Evaluation division from 2011 to 2013) and its main findings.

**Issues raised during the discussion:**

• The EIB's objective is to enhance the competitiveness of SMEs and generate a positive impact on economic growth and employment in Europe. Due to the crisis, the impact is rather low - on average, in every SME one job position was created for each loan.

• The EIB cooperated with Gallup Europe, which carried out the survey among 1003 SMEs and designed the questionnaires in line with the EIB evaluation division's requirements.

• About 30% of the funding transferred from the EIB to the commercial banks should be used to provide funding to the SMEs. In this way, the EIB wants to pass on the financial advantage to the SMEs. However, there is no guarantee as market conditions may have changed before SME receive the funding.

• In future, EIB intends to place more emphasis on specific characteristics of national financial systems.

5. **PREPARING FOR THE 2014-2020 PROGRAMMING PERIOD**

Kai Stryczynski (Evaluation Unit) informed the participants about the main updates on the Guidance document on monitoring and evaluation, referring to the new numbering of the articles in CPR and an additional paragraph on the 'recognition' of other evaluations as required by DG COMP. In discussion, it was confirmed that evaluators must be functionally independent of authorities responsible for the implementation of the programme (see 3.4.Concepts and Recommendations paper).
The second presentation related to first examples of draft OPs. Among the good examples are: Northern Ireland (specific objective refers to actual need of the region – a choice has been made to concentrate on this need; good link between specific objective, result indicator and baseline; target range represents optimistic and pessimistic scenarios; link to smart specialisation strategy) and Schleswig-Holstein/Germany (specific objective is very clear/refers to technology and knowledge intensive start-ups; 4 year average for result indicator is defined/volatile figures; realistic target value; only problem is relatively old data). In addition, two examples were presented that will require development (actions loosely linked to the specific objective, baseline for the result indicator shouldn't be zero, result indicator relating only to supported entities, not the region). Further typical problems were mentioned: only common indicators used/specificity of the actions not captured, long lists of vague actions/every possible action is listed (will cause a problem for the Performance Framework).

Issues raised during the discussion:

- Further examples could be useful, e.g. on supporting infrastructure (all good examples referred to support of SMEs).
- Baselines can be defined in % and numbers, the decision what to choose depends on the individual intervention logic (but EU averages should not be used)
- In case of a zero baseline for a result indicator, where the baseline will be provided at a later stage, the MS has to document that the ex-ante conditionality on statistics is not met; and an action plan and a deadline have to be provided.

6. PROPOSED COMPETITION FOR GOOD EVALUATIONS

Daniele Vidoni (Evaluation Unit) presented the plan to organise a competition (best completed evaluation, best evaluation proposal by researchers) and a conference in 2016. The MS were asked if they are interested in these initiatives and are willing to support potential evaluators with publication of data and/or providing contact points.

7. EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION ON MONITORING AND EVALUATION ACTIVITIES IN MEMBER STATES

EL – preparing the next Evaluation Network Meeting (15th and 16th May 2014) and invited the members of the Network to Athens, new draft agenda will be forwarded to Evaluation Unit by 21th March.

IT – reported on the Italian annual survey 2013 and asked members of the Network to participate in the survey/send questions of the survey to MAs

FR – reported on their initiative to ensure consistency on the coordination of Performance Frameworks; established a guideline for MAs on the selection of indicators and definition of common indicators.
8. **Negotiations on Operational Programmes**

Veronica Gaffey presented the state of play regarding the negotiations, as well as the working methods adopted by the unit thus far to address the necessity to take on board comments and suggestions in time, so as to avoid unnecessary waste of time. A number of delegations then intervened to provide updates on their activities.

9. **Preparation of 2013 Annual Implementation Reports**

John Walsh (Evaluation Unit) presented information on core indicator data coverage and quality. Questions to MS concerning the reporting on implementation and performance in the AIR, improved monitoring and possible planned measures. A number of delegations reacted to the presentation and informed the networks on the initiatives taken to address the issue:

IRL: A further refinement was carried out on the definition of some indicators, notably those relating to jobs created.

PT: an overview on indicators is made on a yearly basis.

BG: a central coordination unit is in charge of the quality check on indicators.

HR: Issues still remain on the use of SFC by each MA that submits data autonomously

ES: reprogramming on OPs was made in 2013, especially due to the crisis (mainly financial indicators)

SK: Quality assessment of indicators was carried out two years ago

Particular importance should be paid to AIR 2013, since the ex-post evaluation of the programming period 2007-2013 will be significantly based on these data.

10. **State of Play of Evaluation Activities**

- A dedicated part of DG REGIO's website will be created for the purpose for the 2007-2013 ex-post evaluation.

- The scope of the different work packages of the ex post evaluation depends on the evaluation questions at stake.

- As to the “geographical distribution” issue, questions will be asked on the availability of data at NUTS 3 level.
11. **EUROPEAN SEMESTER AND 2013 COUNTRY-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS**

John Walsh (Evaluation Unit) presented the European Semester process and its stages; he pointed out the importance of this new area of activity for the Unit, as it place activities right in the heart of the EU economic agenda.

Actions within the European Semester can be used to demonstrate the relevance of Cohesion policy as a possible solution for many of the challenges raised through the Country specific recommendation.

12. **CLOSING REMARKS**

The next meeting of the network will be organised jointly with DG EMPL in Athens, on 16-17 May 2014.