MINUTES OF THE EVALUATION NETWORK MEETING
Brussels, 14-15 March 2012

First day of meeting, 14.03.2012

Veronica Gaffey, Acting Director for Policy Development and Head of the Evaluation Unit in DG REGIO, welcomed participants and opened the meeting. She referred to recent developments in the debate on the future of Cohesion Policy taking place in the European Council and introduced the guidance document on ex-ante evaluation drawn up by DG REGIO and DG EMPL, to be presented in a common meeting with ESF Partnership the following day.

I. INTRODUCTION, AGENDA, MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

Veronica Gaffey introduced the agenda of the meeting. The minutes of the previous meetings held in October 2011 were adopted.

II. PILOT PROJECTS ON FUTURE RESULT INDICATORS

V. Gaffey shortly introduced the pilot exercise on result indicators launched in 2011, of which a first round of results in seven Member States was presented at the last Evaluation Network Meeting. She underlined the primary objective of the exercise, which is to change the way result indicators are perceived and selected during programme preparation stage, and encouraged other Member States to volunteer for the pilot exercise.

Laurent Caillaud (Aquitaine, France) and Richard Brooš (Slovakia) presented the main findings of the respective pilot exercises.

The following issues were discussed:

- the method used to find the right result indicators when the link between measure and priority is not evident: it is important to set up a logical architecture, with limited aggregations at regional level. For the remainder, try to validate with in-depth evaluations.

- technical organisation of the pilot and the way of communication between all the interested parties: in the Slovak case, information so far has been exchanged via emails. However, more discussion on the achieved results is still to take place.

The UK and Slovakia expressed doubts as to whether politicians in charge of programme development are ready to embrace the new approach.

Sweden asked about the relation between result indicators and ex ante conditionality which seems to be concerned mainly with statistical data.

Italy expressed concerns about the capacity to select result indicators for the current programming period that meet all the aspects foreseen by the conditionalities.
The UK inquired about the compatibility between a result-oriented approach and a performance reserve with the capacity of selecting both qualitative and quantitative result indicators.

Portugal expressed surprise over the fact that indicators rarely reflect the change sought. It asked about possible explanation to such a situation and stressed the need for showing clearer relationship between outputs and results.

V. Gaffey's responses included the following:

- The ex-ante conditionality is in line with the results of the pilot exercise. Attention should be paid to drawing appropriate and robust intervention logic for the future programming period.
- It is necessary to show a direct relation between results and policies what requires result indicators to be responsive to the implemented policy.
- The performance framework should be under the responsibility of the Managing Authority.
- An undesired effect of using core indicators is the substantial divergence between adopted policies and selected indicators. The latter tend to be added at the final stage of programme development with no justification by intervention logic. Therefore, they often do not reflect real needs of a country or region. Furthermore, there is real need to minimise the number of both indicators and objectives in new operational programmes.

III. PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK 2014+

V. Gaffey presented the main elements of the performance framework for the programming period 2014-2020.

Latvia thanked for the presentation but expressed concerns about introducing financial tools in relation to underperformance in programme implementation and at the same time abandoning obligatory mid-term evaluations.

Poland welcomed the presentation, but raised doubts about Member States' capacity to undertake result-oriented policies and expressed serious concerns about setting appropriate milestones and targets.

Italy thanked for the presentation, but expressed doubts about including sanctions and rewards in the same framework, as it gives different signals to the Member States. It suggested providing detailed comments in the text on programme outputs. In the context of financial corrections, it advised to link corrections to outputs, not results.

V. Gaffey pointed to the mainly informative character of the mid-term evaluations carried out in 2004, which were rather "implementation evaluations" than "effects evaluations" - the concept remains that we should not need an evaluation to judge whether a milestone has been achieved or not. She also noted that the document presented remains explanatory, to be used as guidance and is not legally binding.
IV. CORE INDICATORS IN THE 2007-2013 PERIOD

Adam Abdulwahab (Evaluation Unit) presented a summary of the core indicators reported in the 2011 Annual Implementation Reports. V. Gaffey reiterated the need to assure that the data is plausible, it's included in the AIR and that it's transferred via SFC. The issue of core indicators will be put on the agenda of the COCOF meeting in October 2012 and this year's annual implementation meetings with MS.

Ireland raised the question of possible misinformation stemming from country specific methods of measurement and suggested not to report on data that is not fully compliant with DG REGIO definitions, as in the case of renewable energy, via SFC/AIR. The proposal was welcomed by V. Gaffey.

Portugal asked about the current state of play concerning provision of both contracted and approved data in AIR.

Austria inquired about the way DG REGIO uses data on core indicators.

Poland expressed concerns about possible manipulation of milestones in the case of underperformance of core indicators. Latvia shared Poland's concerns and encouraged DG REGIO to provide additional information on targets in the document presented - Interested Member States can contact DG REGIO for more detailed tables.

Italy suggested agreeing on common measurements and definitions of core indicators across countries in order to ensure data quality. A similar problem is faced with the definitions for impact/result indicators. An increased cooperation between the managing authorities and the geographic units in DG REGIO is needed in order to avoid missing data.

Luxembourg added a comment on technical problems with data processing: in smaller Member States, it is important to be able to register even decimal figures. A question was subsequently raised over the possibility to change, due to the volatile socio-economic situation in Europe, milestones or targets already set.

V. Gaffey explained that the COM often refers to this data, in particular in the Annual Activity Report. Bearing in mind that the data is published, she stressed the importance to assure that data quality is assured.

V. DG REGIO EVALUATIONS AND EVALUATION-RELATED ACTIVITIES: STATE OF PLAY

Kai Stryczynski, Juliet Martinez, Samuele Dossi, Alida Staicu, Marielle Riché and Jurate Vaznelyte (Evaluation Unit) shortly presented those evaluations undertaken by DG REGIO which have reached their final stage: Counterfactual impact evaluation, Analysis of final implementation reports for 2000-2006, Study on local development, Study on specific territories, Evaluation of innovation activities and Ex post evaluation of Cohesion Fund including former ISPA.

V. Gaffey presented the state of play on the on-going activities of the unit. These included the ex post evaluation of 1994-1999, the evaluation of programme achievements from 1989 until
now, the Expert Evaluation Network, where the policy papers will cover the theme of financial engineering, as well as the evaluations of JASPERS and ESPON.

VI. CLOSING REMARKS

France suggested that DG REGIO addresses future requests with regard to on-going evaluations to the national authorities rather than the regions, so they can identify the suitable region and provide help in the communication.

Hungary informed about organisation of the 3rd International Evaluation Conference in June 2012 in Hungary. Its theme will be Preparation in view of the next programming period.

Italy communicated the launch of an initiative aiming at introducing evaluation findings and points on programme performance in the agenda of the Monitoring Committees.

V. Gaffey concluded the meeting by thanking Member States for their presentations and active participation. She also informed participants of the next Evaluation Network Meeting, to be held in June 2012.

Second day of meeting, 15.03.2012

JOINT ERDF/ESF EVALUATION PARTNERSHIP/NETWORK MEETING