1. OPENING REMARKS

Veronica Gaffey opened the meeting and welcomed the new participants from BE, CZ, EL, MT, NL, and DG MARE. She briefly presented the items of the agenda. The minutes of the network meeting in January 2015 were approved.

2. 2014-2020 EVALUATION PLANS

Veronica Gaffey introduced the subject. The Helpdesk is created as support to the assessment of the Evaluation Plans and will be operational as of September 2015.

Daniele Vidoni presented the draft template for the assessment of the evaluation plans. On this occasion he invited the delegates to participate in a competition for the best evaluations and proposals of EU Cohesion Policy. The best contributions will be presented in the 2016 Evaluation.

Issues raised:

- All Member States find the content of both the Guidance on the evaluation plans and the Template very useful. However, they point to the fact that the formulation of evaluation questions is difficult at this stage, and some actually intend to externalise the development of the evaluation plans.

- Further clarification on specific points in the Evaluation Plan will be needed: detailed information on indicators and/or on methods cannot be provided. Several Member States expressed lack of evaluation capacity for that level of details of information.

- The Commission will look at all the evaluation plans, to be received by email. The purpose is not to just have good plans but rather evaluations of high quality.

The level of detail requested will not be too high (more a characterisation), to allow for some flexibility. Evaluation plans are based on the intervention logic of the OP; there will be cases where evaluations will discover that the logic used is not the most appropriate. For a good evaluation plan, the intervention logic, results and outputs should be taken into consideration. It should clarify the contribution of Funds towards the specific objectives – and if this is not the case, the reasons why it is not.

3. MONITORING AND EVALUATION STRATEGY IN WALES

Kathryn Helliwell from the Welsh European Funding Office presented the key points of the Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy in Wales.

Main points discussed:

- Monitoring and evaluation processes should not be seen as an end but as a way to think about the results. The Welsh system is very flexible, which may involve risk. By forecasting the projects well in advance, such risks can be mitigated to a great degree

- The Welsh authorities have also provided guidance for project evaluation, including on-site support, and they intend to launch their own ex-post evaluation. Theory-based evaluation is the preferred method for impact evaluation as it looks closely at project level.

4. 2014-2020 EX ANTE EVALUATION PROCESS
Kai Stryczynski presented the findings of an internal exercise examining a sample of ex ante evaluations. The aim of this exercise was to understand the quality and usefulness of the ex-ante process.

Reactions included:

Most Member States consider the process of ex-ante evaluation as useful. Some have used it as part of the OP drafting (understanding the new intervention logic, developing the right indicators). The consultants in these cases were pushed to be critical; in the end, the process was an experience for both sides.

There have also been cases where the experience was not a positive one, especially when the ex ante evaluation was not critical enough, and/or when wrong conclusions and recommendations were made.

Veronica Gaffey concluded that DG REGIO was aware that there were evaluations interpreting the Regulation incorrectly and may consider training sessions in this respect. DG REGIO will continue looking into other ex-ante evaluations and even contacting some evaluators for discussions on the topic.

5. PEER 2 PEER: A NEW TOOL FOR COHESION POLICY EXPERTS

Agnieszka Krasicka, DG REGIO (Administrative Capacity Building) presented the new initiative for peer-to-peer exchanges among experts in the managing, certifying and audit authorities in the Member States. Possibilities of exchange are expert missions, study visits and workshops. She showed how the application process works and presented an example of a workshop on financial instruments. She invited the members of the Evaluation Network to try the new tool and to join the pilot, which will be carried out for one year.

6. EX POST EVALUATION: STATE OF PLAY/FIRST FINDINGS

Kai Stryczynski gave an overview of the 16 work packages of the exercise. He informed the Member States of the state of play regarding interim reports and expected dates for the final reports. He then thanked the Member States for the good cooperation during the ex-post evaluation, especially on the support for the case studies. The majority of the case studies carried out for the different work packages will be finalised by August 2015. Most of the seminars will be in autumn. All interim deliverables are published on Inforegio: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/evaluations/ec/2007-2013/#1

The annual implementation reports for 2014 (AIRs) will be very important, as they will feed into the Synthesis Report in 2016. In order to verify the data of the 2014 AIRs (e.g. whether there are discrepancies in the definitions, measurement units, etc.), unit B2 might need to contact the Managing Authorities. The last AIRs should provide a picture that is as much as possible complete and consistent.

Those Member States carrying out impact evaluations are invited to communicate the results as inputs for the Synthesis Report.

Veronica Gaffey asked the Member States for information on finished major projects in the field of environment related infrastructure (drinking water, wastewater treatment, and solid waste management). The work package dedicated to environment (WP6) revealed that only few of the almost 190 major environmental projects have been completed so far. If a major project in this field has been recently completed, information should be sent to Annette.Mengel@ec.europa.eu.
7. 2014-2020 RESULT INDICATORS

Kai Stryczynski introduced the pilot exercise which reviewed thematic objectives (TO) 4 (IP 4a-b and e, IP 4i-ii and v) and 7 (IP 7a-d and IP 7i-iii). Findings of another pilot exercise (source of result indicators in 2014-2020) have already been circulated in advance. It's important to know only close to 5% of result indicators used comes from Eurostat. Data for result indicators is mainly obtained from national statistical offices.

Ivanka Lakova explained the main objectives of the study on TO4 and TO7, namely an overview of expected results in the area of low carbon economy and transport as well as an identification of patterns across Member States or types of regions. She informed participants about the methodology (analysis of specific objectives set in the adopted programmes and corresponding result indicators) and presented a typology of result indicators used under thematic objective 4.

Jan-Marek Ziolkowski continued with a presentation about TO7 and emphasized that transport infrastructure is a concern for a large number of Member States (over 70% of reviewed OPs included at least one of the relevant investment priorities on transport). A typology of result indicators used under thematic objective 7 was shown as well.

Kai Stryczynski and Veronica Gaffey concluded that this exercise shows the current outcome of the 2014-2020 negotiations and that the pilot can help propose orientation on result indicators for the next programming period.

Result indicators should still be specific for the region – the main ambition is not to standardize them. Full analysis on result indicators will soon be shared with the Member States.

8. EIB: CONTRIBUTION TO EUROPEAN KNOWLEDE-BASED ECONOMY

René-Laurent Ballaguy, Evaluation Expert & Team Leader in the European Investment Bank presented the preliminary conclusions of the evaluation „The EIB Group’s contribution to the European knowledge-based economy (2007-2013)“, the findings for the three main sectors of ICT, R&D and Education, the areas of improvement, and the lessons learned from an evaluation perspective. The full report on the EIB evaluation is expected to be published in September 2015.

Questions addressed the following issues:

- necessary changes of the EIB to improve measuring of effects e.g. for education and R&D operations;
- definition of areas where the EIB contribution has been identified as higher;
- definition of criteria for performance rating;
- complementary requirements to structural funding as EIB provides matching national funding;
- experience on planning of evaluations and set up of evaluation questions and methodology.

9. CLOSING REMARKS
Exchange of information on monitoring and evaluation activities in Member States:

- PL: evaluation of benefits, results will be available before MFF discussion, invitation to congress in Krakow on 28th/29th September 2015.
- CZ: evaluation conference in Prague on 21st October 2015.
- IT: update on data on transparency 2007-2013, first presentation in Lille.


The next meeting of the Network will be organised in November 2015.