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Minutes of the Monitoring Committee meeting

Palermo – Oratorio di SS Costantino ed Elena

30 May 2023

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On 30 May 2023, at Oratorio SS. Elena and Costantino met the members of the Monitoring Committee of the INTERREG VI-A Italia Malta programme referred to in the attached attendance sheet. The representatives of the European Commission, Simona Pohlova and Valeria Cenacchi, as well as the members of the Joint Secretariat of the programme participate in the activities.

The members of the Monitoring Committee representing the following entities are connected through zoom platform:

- Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri - Dipartimento per le Politiche di Coesione
- Ministero delle Economia e delle Finanze - Dipartimento della Ragioneria Generale dello Stato Ispettorato Generale per i Rapporti Finanziari con l'Unione Europea - I.G.R.U.E.
- Dipartimento del lavoro, dell'impiego, dell'orientamento, dei servizi e delle attività formative della Regione Siciliana
- Ministry for Home Affairs, Security, Reforms and Equality
- Malta Council for Economic and Social Development
- Minsitry for Education
- The Gozo Business Chamber
- Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry
- European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development Unit
- Planning and Priorities Co-ordination Division

Vincenzo Falgares (President-in-Office) launches the meeting's activities, thanking and greeting the participants. He highlights the various activities related to the planning and negotiation process carried out with the representatives of the Task Force which allowed the adoption of the final version of the 2021-2027 programme, adopted by the EC in December 2022. He also underlines the important challenges concerning the year 2023, with reference to both the closing activities of the 14-20 programme and the launch of the 21-27 programme.

Simona Pohlova (European Commission) thanks the Managing Authority for organizing the meeting and the site visit held on 29 May 2023 to show the main achievements of the I-Access project funded in the frame of the INTERREG V-A Italy-Malta programme during the 2014-2020 period. She also highlights the importance of efficiently ensuring all the closure activities of the 2014-2020 programme, considering that the eligibility of expenditure ends on 31/12/2023. In this regard, she remarks that the current 2014-2020 programme is a "risky programme" for the EC, although it has always ensured - for each year - the achievement of the disbursement targets (n+3) envisaged and financed high quality projects. Finally, the EC representative points out that, in order to ensure an efficient start-up of the activities related to the 2021-2027 programme, the MA should strengthen its administrative capacity and at the same time guarantee the continuity of the action of the Joint Secretariat.

Jonathan Vassallo (Permanent Secretary of the Ministry for European Funds and Lands) thanks the Managing Authority for organizing the meeting and renews the commitment of the Maltese Member State

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Authorities to ensure the necessary support to the implementation and management processes for the closure of the 2014-2020 Programme and the start of the 2021-2027 Programme.

Luca Palazzo (DIPCOE) thanks the Managing Authority and confirms the need to ensure continuity and at the same time administrative reinforcement for the launch of the 2021-2027 programme.

Vincenzo Falgares (President-in-Office) confirms that the issue of administrative reinforcement involves the whole Italian public administration sector. In this regard, he confirms that administrative procedures are in place which will determine the presence of new human resources at the offices of the regional administration. Therefore, agreeing with what was reported by the EC representative, he confirmed that the office and structures responsible for managing the Italy-Malta programme will be strengthened with new personnel resources soon.

Considering the enlargement of the partnership for carrying out the activities of the Monitoring Committee of the 21-27 programme, all the representatives participating in the meeting are asked to introduce themselves. Once this activity has been completed, the president-in-office requests the approval of the agenda.

Giuseppe Sigismondo Martorana (ANCI) requests that the following points be eliminated since it was not possible to view the documents in advance:

- Discussion and approval of the budget allocation of the technical assistance
- Proposal of resources allocation and timing of the 2021-2027 calls for proposals
- Discussion and approval of the selection criteria of the Public Notice n. 01/2023

Jonathan Vassallo (Permanent Secretary of the Ministry for European Funds and Lands) proposes to remove the following issue from the agenda “Discussion and approval of the budget allocation of the technical assistance” due to the need to revise the distribution of the expenses.

Vincenzo Falgares (President-in-Office) asks the representatives of the Monitoring Committee to indicate their opinion on the possibility to remove the issue “Discussion and approval of the budget allocation of the technical assistance” from the agenda.

The Monitoring Committee approves the agenda without the issue related to the “Discussion and approval of the budget allocation of the technical assistance”.

The President-in-Office invites to discuss the first item on the agenda: **“Presentation of the INTERREG VI-A Italy Malta programme”** and asks the Joint Secretariat to focus on the main aspects of the INTERREG VI-A Italia Malta programme for the 2021-2027 programming period.

Marco Sambataro (JS Coordinator) illustrates the main priorities and specific objectives of the 2021-2027 programme as well as all steps which conducted to its approval.

The President-in-Office invites to discuss the second item on the agenda: **“Discussion and approval of the Monitoring Committee – Rules of Procedures”**.

Jonathan Vassallo (Permanent Secretary of the Ministry for European Funds and Lands), asks for a solution to be identified to ensure greater balance between the components of the two countries,

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considering that the draft regulation sent by the Managing Authority includes 7 Italian and 9 Maltese representatives with voting rights. In this regard, he confirms that two Maltese votes could be merged thus allowing a balanced representation of 8 votes between the two member States.

Vincenzo Falgares (President-in-Office) informs that the Ministero dell'Economia e delle Finanze - Dipartimento della Ragioneria Generale dello Stato Ispettorato Generale per i Rapporti Finanziari con l'Unione Europea - I.G.R.U.E. is a representative with voting right so that the Italian delegation is well balanced with 8 voting rights.

Valeria Cenacchi (European Commission) suggests the following modifications:

- Art. 2 – Modifying “promptly” with “within 10 calendar days”
- Art. 2 – Modifying “may participate” con “will participate”
- Art. 12 – Inserting a new paragraph III relating to the approval of the Executive Committee’s rules of procedures and the need to respect the partnership principle. In this regards paragraph II is herewith modified “*The SC has its own terms of reference that prevent any situation of conflict of interest when selecting operations and shall include provisions regarding voting rights, the functioning mechanisms and rules for attending the meetings*”.

Same modifications affect both the Italian and English version.

The Monitoring Committee approves its rules of procedures.

The President-in-Office invites to discuss the third item on the agenda: “**Discussione e approvazione dei criteri di sezione dell’Avviso Pubblico n. 01/2023**”.

Marco Sambataro (JS Coordinator) illustrates the document also clarifying that its rationale derives from:

- the results of the Audit carried out in 2021 by the European Court of Counts regarding the ETC programs;
- a minimum threshold for strategic evaluation and operational evaluation in order to ensure higher quality of project proposals;
- additional scores in case of additional resources;
- the lessons learnt during the 2014-2020 programming period.

Valeria Cenacchi (European Commission) illustrates her comments:

- poor score on the cross-border dimension and cross-border quality of projects thus providing for a minimum score threshold without which a project should not be evaluated. In this regard, she clarified that a weight between 15% and 20% should be attributed, also in line with the guidelines of the European Court of Counts;
- provide for a clear criterion on future sustainability;
- provide for a clear reference to compliance with the DNSH principle;
- revise the score related to the coherence with national/regional policies;
- simplify, where possible, criteria and sub-criteria.

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Jonathan Vassallo (Permanent Secretary of the Ministry for European Funds and Lands) clarifies that the document has been widely shared with the Maltese authorities. Considering that it deals with a first working draft, he confirmed that the questions raised by the EC representative could be better discussed in the context of a technical session.

Giuseppe Sigismondo Martorana (ANCI) confirms that, seen in the times of sending the document, it was not possible to deepen the selection criteria, due to the timeframe of its submission. However, he highlights the need:

- to summarize and simplify the selection criteria in order to ensure greater understanding;
- not to consider the cross-border added value absorbing and exclusive.

Luca Palazzo (DPCOE) confirms the need of technical sessions to better define the selection criteria. However, he highlights:

- need to better define scores for cross-border value;
- need to redefine the scores (250+250) on a basis of 100 in order to ensure uniformity with other programmes;
- need to simplify indicators and assess the contribution to output and result indicators;
- provide for a clear criterion for the contribution to the macro-strategies;
- provide for a criterion that takes into account the additional resources.

Vincenzo Falgares (President-in-Office), acknowledging the contribution offered by all the representatives of the Monitoring Committee, summarizes that the following aspects have emerged:

- improvement of the assessment of the added value/cross-border dimension;
- simplification of the selection criteria;
- provision of specific criteria to verify compliance with the principle of DNSH.

Therefore, he asked to provide 10 working days to better define all the aspects highlighted. At the conclusion of this work, the MA will launch a written procedure for the examination and definitive approval of the criteria.

The Monitoring Committee approves the timeframe and the proposal of the MA.

The President-in-Office invites to discuss the fourth item on the agenda **“Proposal of resources allocation and timing of the 2021-2027 calls for proposals”**.

Marco Sambataro (JS Coordinator) introduces a proposal regarding the timing of publication of the calls for proposals, the number of calls for proposals and the priorities involved.

The representatives of the Monitoring Committee discuss the allocation of resources of the first call for the selection of projects.

Jonathan Vassallo (Permanent Secretary of the Ministry for European Funds and Lands) points out that the budget relating to the first call can be considered flexible, thus providing, in the case of high-value projects, the possibility of financing more than 70% of the resources allocated for the call.

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Valeria Cenacchi (European Commission) points out that such a high percentage for the first call of the programme isn't an acceptable choice to the EC. At the time this provision has not been carried out by other ETC programmes.

Antonio Verrico (Agenzia per la Coesione Territoriale) confirms that, based on a survey carried out at national level, no ETC programme has envisaged a first call with a financial allocation of more than 65% of the resources. Therefore, he confirms that even in the Agency's opinion, providing for 70% of the resources does not appear acceptable.

Daniela Bica (Regione Siciliana) on the basis of the contribution offered by all the representatives of the CdS, confirms the importance that a precise financial allocation is clearly identified in the text of the first call for proposal, in line with the provisions of the national law. She also confirms that the call for proposal, on the basis of 2014-2020 experience, could provide for a provision which gives the Monitoring Committee the right to authorize any scrolling of the ranking in favor of projects positively placed in the ranking list

The Monitoring Committee approves the proposal.

Vincenzo Falgares (President-in-Office), verified that there are no further topics to discuss, welcomes the representatives of the CORALLO project for the presentation of the project financed under the 2014-2020 programme.

During the presentation, the representatives of the Monitoring Committee are invited to try the VR headsets to explore the seabed of the marine protected areas involved in the project.

At 14:00 the Monitoring Committee is suspended for a short break.

At 15:00 the President of the Regional Assembly **Hon. Gaetano Galvagno** closes the work of the first Monitoring Committee of the INTERREG VI A Italy-Malta programme confirming the availability of the ARS Presidency to support the success of the programme.

At 15:30 the meeting is concluded.