



Approved by:

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**Head of the Programme Operator**

## **Fund for Bilateral Cooperation at Programme Level**

Call for predefined initiative under the fund for bilateral relations for "Environment protection and climate change" Programme (BG ENVIRONMENT)



## **I. Introduction**

The objectives of this initiative are to enhance the cooperation and improve the mutual relations between Bulgaria and Norway. The implementation of activities aiming at increasing the strategic cooperation, networking and exchange of knowledge between entities in Norway and Bulgaria.

According to amendments of the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Republic of Bulgaria and the donor states, 787 500 EUR are allocated from “Environment protection and climate change” programme (BG ENVIRONMENT) to the fund for bilateral relations for implementation of bilateral initiative at programme level.

## **II. Eligibility of the applicants and partners.**

The Cooperation Committee under the BG Environment Programme has approved the bilateral initiative, for implementation of – SCIRENA II - Diagnostic analysis of the Black Sea marine environment with regards to military activities in the territory of Republic of Ukraine. The identified project promoter is Norwegian Institute for Marine Research (IMR) and partners Black Sea Basin Directorate and Nikola Vaptsarov Naval Academy.

## **III. Grant amount:**

The total eligible budget under this guideline for applicants is 787 500 EUR.

The final date for eligibility of expenditures under the Fund for Bilateral relations shall be 30 April 2025.

## **IV. Eligible expenditures and activities under the fund for bilateral relations**

### **1. Eligible expenditures**

Expenditures related to the following activities are eligible for the fund referred to Article 4.6 of the Regulation on the implementation of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2014-2021 (Regulation) in Art. 8.8 of the EEA Regulation:

- activities aiming at strengthening bilateral relations between Bulgaria and Norway;
- networking, exchange, sharing and transfer of knowledge, technology, experiences and best practices between entities in Bulgaria and entities in Norway, and/or international organizations;
- activities aiming at strengthening cooperation and exchanging experiences and best practices between the Programme Operators and similar entities within the Bulgaria and Norway, as well as international organizations, provided at least one entity within Norway is involved in the activity.





To be eligible under the bilateral fund, costs must be related to eligible activities and meet the following requirements:

- be incurred and paid between the first and final dates of eligibility of the Initiative as specified in the Initiative's Implementation Agreement;
- be connected with the subject of Initiative's Implementation Agreement and indicated in the detailed budget of the initiative;
- be proportionate and necessary for the implementation of the Initiative;
- be used for the sole purpose of achieving the objective(s) of the Initiative and its expected outcome(s), in a manner consistent with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness;
- be identifiable and verifiable and properly documented, in particular through being recorded in the accounting records of the Promoter/Partners and determined according to the applicable accounting standards of the country and according to the generally accepted accounting principles;
- comply with the requirements of applicable tax and social legislation. Expenditures are considered to have been incurred when the cost has been invoiced, paid and the subject matter delivered/ performed (in case of services) within the dates of eligibility. Exceptionally, costs in respect of which an invoice has been issued in the final month of eligibility are also deemed to be incurred within the dates of eligibility if the costs are paid within 30 days of the final date for eligibility. Costs incurred after that final date are not eligible. The Promoter's/Partners' internal accounting and auditing procedures must permit direct reconciliation of the expenditures declared in respect of the Initiative with the corresponding accounting statements and supporting documents.
- Fees, travel (including subsistence allowances) and accommodation costs related to participation in conferences, seminars, training courses, workshops, study visits. Travel and subsistence allowances for experts taking part in the Initiative are eligible provided that they are in line with the Promoter and Partners' usual practices on travel costs and in line with the relevant national and Donor States' legislation. Costs of business trips of Bulgarian participants in the country shall comply with the requirements of the Ordinance for Business Trips in the Country within the authorized budget limit.

• **IMPORTANT!:** *The total amount of the management costs, comprising the costs of both the Promoter and the Partner's, shall not exceed 10% of the project budget. These are the costs for the management team, stipulated in p.I., Annex 1.2. to the Budget template, submitted at the time of application, which are different from the "Costs for remuneration of experts" in Annex 1.2.1 to the same Budget template. The latter shall be envisaged for experts involved in the project implementation, who are not a part of the management team.*



### **Verification of payment claims**

The payment claims shall be verified by the NFP/external verification within 20 working days from the submission of the Interim/Final Financial Report, accompanied by all the necessary supporting documents, stated in points 1-7 in chapter V.6.3. of these Guidelines. The process of verification shall take place on a 6-month basis.

**IMPORTANT! In case an Audit report is submitted, it is not subject to verification.**

#### **2. Eligible activities**

- joint conferences, seminars, and workshops on topics of common interest;
- capacity building and short term training in view of exchange and implementation of professional or organizational skills;
- technical cooperation - study trips, visits and meetings with the aim of sharing experience and know-how, incl. through exchange of experts;
- jointly developed reports, analyses, surveys, studies and publications, data collection;
- information campaigns, exhibitions, promotional events and initiatives for strengthening bilateral partnerships;
- elaboration of web/digital platforms and web sites for promoting the project activities and enhancing an exchange of communication.

#### **3. Ineligible activities**

The following types of activities are ineligible:

- on-going activities, already financed by other sources;
- sponsorship to individuals for participation in workshops, seminars, conferences;
- scholarships to individuals for study or training courses;
- existing programs and regular activities of the Beneficiary/Part

### **V. Indicative timeline**

#### **Deadline for submission of bilateral initiative:**

Deadline for submission – 15.01.2024

Beginning of the assessments process – 16.01.2024

End of the assessment process: 19.01.2024 r.

Start of the initiative activities: 22.01.2024

### **VI. State aid**





According to Art. 107, § 1 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), “any aid granted by a Member State or through Member State resources in any form whatsoever, which distorts or threatens to distort competition by favoring certain undertakings or the production of certain goods shall, in so far as it affects trade between Member States, be incompatible with the internal market”. According to the settled case law of the European Court and as per Art.20, § 2 of the State Aid Act, "Undertaking" is defined as „any entity engaged in an economic activity, regardless of its legal status and the way in which it is financed, and any activity consisting in offering goods and services on a given market is an economic activity“. With regard to the abovementioned and taking into account the specific activities eligible for funding under this procedure, the project promoter is Norwegian Institute for Marine Research (IMR) and partners Black Sea Basin Directorate and Nikola Vaptsarov Naval Academy, both legal entities, will not act as undertakings within the meaning of Art. 107, § 1 TFEU as the implementation of the project activities is not related to the provision of goods and services and will not constitute economic activity. The predefined Initiative will not generate profit, and in this respect State aid rules are inapplicable.

#### **VII. Submission of the application form.**

The applicant should submit the Application form (Annex 1) in English. The Application forms for bilateral initiatives should be submitted via the following email: [eea@moew.government.bg](mailto:eea@moew.government.bg). Attached to the application forms the applicant should submit a letter of intention, e-mail correspondence or other document/ correspondence proving that the applicant has established a contact with a project partners.

#### **VIII. Selection procedure:**

The bilateral initiative received within the deadline will be assessed based on the criteria for administrative and eligibility compliance and technical and financial assessment.

If the Applicant does not fulfill all the formal criteria and all the eligibility criteria it will be rejected.

	CHART FOR ADMINISTRATIVE AND ELIGIBILITY COMPLIANCE; TECHNICAL AND FINANCIAL ASSESSMENT	
1.	The applicant is eligible.	
2.	The potential project partner/entity is eligible.	
3.	The application form is received within the deadline.	
4.	The correct template – Application form (Annex 1.) is used; The application form is in English.	
5.	A letter of intent/ partnership agreement, e-mail correspondence or other document/ correspondence proving that the applicant has	



	established a contact with a partner is submitted; the submitted documents are in Bulgarian/ English.	
6.	The envisaged activities are eligible.	
7.	The expenditures are eligible.	
8.	The initiative contributes to the objectives of the Fund for bilateral relations, the overall objective of the BG ENVIRONMENT Programme.	
9.	There is a correlation between the activities and the expenditures.	
10.	There is a detailed justification of the budget/budget lines.	

### IX. Supporting documents before signing the contract/order:

1. Before the signing of the contract the applicant and the partner should sign a partnership agreement, which describes in details the distribution of activities and financial commitments between the parties. In case no financial relations arise between the parties on the initiative, it is not necessary to sign a partnership agreement. In this case, the parties sign a letter of intention;

1. Declaration for bank account;
2. Declaration for VAT circumstances;
3. Declaration on the lack of double funding;

The documentation for applying is available at <https://www.eeagrants.bg/en/programs/environment-protection/documents>

### X. Compliance with information and publicity requirements

The Promoter/Partners shall ensure that information on the approved Initiative is communicated in the most efficient way to the public and that the contribution of the EEA FM and NFM 2014-2021 is given adequate publicity. Considering the specific focus of the Fund for Bilateral Relation, it is important to give proper outreach of the established partnerships, joint activities and results of the cooperation. The Promoter/Partners shall refer to the "Information and Publicity Requirements" under the EEA FM and NFM 2014-2021 uploaded to the NFP's website [www.eeagrants.bg](http://www.eeagrants.bg) and herewith attached.

### XI. Irregularities

Irregularity shall mean any infringement of the legal framework of the the EEA FM and NFM 2014-2021, European Union law or national legislation, if such a breach could affect or prejudice any stage of the implementation of EEA FM and NFM 2014-2021, in the Republic of





Bulgaria, especially the implementation and/or the budget of a program, project or other activities financed by EEA FM and NFM 2014-2021 (according to Art. 12.2 of the Regulations). In regard to FBR are required to promptly notify the PO in any case of suspected irregularity. In cases of suspected serious irregularity NFP may suspend payments for a given initiative for the time necessary.