

REGIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION INITIATIVE

37th STEERING GROUP MEETING



Summary and Decisions

*April 7-8, 2022
Sofia, Bulgaria*

37th Regional Anti-corruption Initiative (RAI) Steering Group (SG) Meeting took place on April 7-8, 2022 in Sofia, Bulgaria. The meeting was hosted by the Ministry of Interior and organized by the RAI Secretariat.

Participants

37th RAI SG Meeting was chaired by RAI Chairperson, Ms. Laura Stefan. It was attended by nine member countries' representatives:

Albania – Ms. Rovena Pregja – Deputy Senior Representative, Head of the Anticorruption Programs Unit in the Anticorruption Directorate in the Ministry of Justice;

Bosnia and Herzegovina – Mr. Adnan Dlakic - Senior Representative, Expert Adviser, Department for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption, Ministry of Security;

Bulgaria – Ms. Dora Zgurovska, Deputy Senior Representative, Head of International Legal Affairs Unit at the EU and International Co-operation Directorate, Ministry of Interior;

Croatia – Mr. Tomislav Matoc, Deputy Senior Representative, Senior Advisor, the Anti-Corruption Sector, Directorate for European Affairs, International and Judicial Cooperation and Prevention of corruption, Ministry of Justice and Administration;

Moldova – Mr. Valeriu Cupcea, Deputy Senior Representative, Head of the International Cooperation Directorate, National Anti-corruption Centre;

Montenegro – Ms. Marina Micunovic, Deputy Senior Representative, Head of Unit for International Cooperation, Agency for Prevention of Corruption;

North Macedonia – Mr. Nikola Prokopenko, Senior Representative, State Advisor, Ministry of Justice

Romania – Ms. Ruxandra Andreea Lapadat, Deputy Senior Representative, Legal counsellor, Crime Prevention Department, Ministry of Justice;

Serbia – Ms. Milica Pavlovic, Deputy Senior Representative, Advisor on International Cooperation Matters, Ministry of Justice.

RAI Secretariat was represented by:

Ms. Desislava Gotskova – Head of Secretariat;

Ms. Aneta Arnaudovska – Senior Anti-corruption Advisor;

Ms. Jasna Panjeta – Chief Program and Communications Officer;

Ms. Aida Zukic – Chief Finance and Operations Officer.

Summary of Discussions

RAI Chairperson, Ms. Laura Stefan, opened the meeting and welcomed all participants joining the 37th RAI Steering Group session. The SG members were then greeted by the Ms. Tanya Raycheva, Deputy Minister of Interior of Bulgaria, the host of the 37th RAI Steering Group meeting. Ms Raycheva highlighted that the communication, dialogue and cooperation in the region are key to launching beneficial initiatives at bilateral and multilateral level and to coordinate common anti-corruption activities in Southeastern Europe. She particularly pointed out the role of RAI as a generator of innovative ideas, raising the introduction and use of new tools to prevent and fight corruption such as the *Treaty on Exchange of Data for the Verification of Asset Declarations*.

1. Adoption of Agenda

The proposed Agenda was adopted unanimously.

2. Information from the Secretariat: Work Plan 2021-2022 - what has been done and plan for 2022

Information from the Secretariat on Work Plan 2021-2022 was initiated by the Senior Anti-corruption Advisor who gave an overview of implemented activities in the last six months, as well as efforts made in the area of establishment of new and strengthening of the already existing partnerships.

Newly appointed Chief Programme and Communications Officer continued the presentation by elaborating on the timeline of events for the upcoming period. It was agreed that the Representatives would check the tentative dates of events in order to avoid any potential conflicts in scheduling depending on the level of events and demand for participation by the respective institutions. Timeline spreadsheet containing all the relevant information will be supplied in due course.

A special focus was given to the activities related to the [International Treaty for Exchange of Data for Verification of Asset Declaration](#) (hereafter: Treaty). The Secretariat informed the SG about the efforts made in terms of getting the Treaty back to the spotlight, in particular related to the ratification process in the countries that have signed it, as well as in terms of new signatories. The Secretariat used this opportunity to announce the upcoming high-level Treaty related event that is to take place in Vienna, Austria for one day in the period 3-14 October 2022. Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of Austria has preliminary agreed to co-host the event and support the event organization.

The SG welcomed the idea of having the event held in autumn in Vienna, and agreed to inform the Secretariat about the potential conflict dates for the event. Following the feedback from the SG, Secretariat will offer the available dates to the Federal Ministry. Secretariat intends to send the save-the-date email prior to the summer break.

Additionally, the Steering Group members were briefed about the next Work Plan development process that is to take place in the upcoming months. Secretariat also elaborated on a proposal to extend the duration of the Workplan from current two years to three years. This proposal is substantiated by the fact that Secretariat's projects last 3 to 5 years in average and longer Workplan timeframe would allow for a more strategic planning to take place. The two-year planning cycles only create a pressure to the programming process. Steering Group approved the Secretariat's proposal to extend the Work Plan

duration from current two to three years. The relevant changes in the internal documents related to the Work Plan Duration would be made accordingly.

3. RAI's application for the UNCAC CoSP Observer status

RAI Secretariat informed the SG about the intention of RAI getting the Observer status to the Conference of the States Parties (COSP), the main policymaking body of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). Secretariat presented the path and details of the process as well as the possible timeline.

The representative of Romania made a preliminary offer to take the lead in preparing the request for an inclusion of the item in the agenda of the UN General Assembly. Countries are invited to join Romania in the preparation and to engage with their permanent missions to UN once the request is submitted. Bulgaria also offered their support, but emphasized that they would need more information about the process and expectations. Other SG representatives will inform the competent national authorities and seek approval to become supporters of this initiative and will revert to the Secretariat with position.

SG agreed with the Secretariat's proposal to form a dedicated multi-institutional and multi-country UNCAC Membership Working Group would be established to ensure a strong path and a vehicle for the process, with the lead country coordinating and the Secretariat supporting the process.

4. Financial report for 2021 – presentation

Chief Finance and Operations Officer presented the Financial Report for 2021. Ms. Zukic highlighted the fact that most of the implemented programmatic activities were financed from other-donors' funds through ongoing projects. Moreover, it was mentioned that underspendings made due to COVID19 pandemic (related to travel and physical event organization restrictions) in 2021 were included in the budget for 2022. Ms. Zukic mentioned the independent external Auditor's Report that was shared with the Steering Group. It was pointed out that the audit process was positive and all expenditures were in line with RAI internal rules, and the international accounting best practices and ISO standards for accounting.

Moreover, Ms. Zukic briefly presented utilization of funds from other sources (projects-related funding), highlighting the fact that utilization of other-donors' funds is on a rising scale, that RAI Secretariat managed to have a variety of donors in 2021 and that this practice will be pursued in the future as well.

The Steering Group took note of the Financial Report for 2021.

5. *Tour de table* - Brief information from Senior Representatives on the most important developments and projects in line with current RAI Work Plan

During the session, country representatives presented recent anti-corruption developments in their respective countries on the most important developments and projects in line with current RAI Work Plan, as well as the most recent developments pertaining to the UNCAC Review Mechanism and GRECO Evaluation Procedures.

SG Representatives paid particular attention to the International Treaty for Exchange of Data for Verification of Asset Declaration, pointing out the progress made in terms of ratification procedure as well as the activities that would lead to Treaty signing in some countries (Albania and Moldova in particular).

6. Any other Business

The Secretariat informed the Steering Group about the cooperation with the Central European Initiative (CEI) and shared the Memorandum of Understanding for their approval. SG approved the request for MoU signature.

Senior Anti-corruption Advisor presented the plan for establishing a more formal partnership with Migration Asylum Refugee Regional initiative (MARRI), after having held a series of meetings on potential areas of cooperation. The SG welcomed the idea of establishing a more formal partnership.

The representative of Montenegro noted that given the currently ongoing activities, as well as the workload, the Secretariat should think of being a bit more selective about entering the new partnerships, in order to avoid dispersion of efforts and entering into partnerships that would not result in any actions.

Chief Program and Communication officer informed the Steering Group about Secretariat's intention to relaunch the Internship Program. Given the current situation, the Secretariat is still not ready to offer in-person internships, hence the next intern would be engaged to work remotely. Also, Ms. Panjeta announced additional vacancies that would be published in the upcoming period. The SG representatives were kindly asked to promote the vacancies in their respective countries in order to reach out to a bigger number of potential applicants. The Steering Group welcomed the idea of relaunching the Internships program and agreed to promote the upcoming vacancies.

7. Cooperation with partners – exchange of views session

Head of Secretariat provided an overview of the efforts aimed at strengthening cooperation with RAI's long-standing partners, as well as those made towards expanding RAI's cooperation and forging new partnerships. Then, she announced participation and interventions from the Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD) on behalf of SELDI Network, Advice on Individual Rights in Europe (AIRE) and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Civil Society Unit.

Mr. Atanas Rusev, Director of the Security Program at Center for the Study of Democracy briefly presented CSD and SELDI Network Activities, with giving particular attention to the ongoing *project "Implementing shared anti-corruption and good governance solutions in Southeast Europe: innovative practices and public-private partnerships"*, implemented jointly with RAI and other partners in the region.

Ms. Biljana Braithwaite, Western Balkans Programme Director at the AIRE Centre made an overview of activities that AIRE is currently implementing in the region, with the focus on long-standing partnership with RAI in the field of asset recovery. Ms. Braithwaite presented the ongoing and planned activities under the jointly implemented Regional Project *Combating corruption and organised crime in the Western Balkans through strengthening regional cooperation in asset recovery*.

Ms. Viktorija Nesterovaite, Programme Officer at the UNODC Civil society unit provided an overview of the long-standing partnership with RAI, in particular related to the two projects financed by the Austrian Development Cooperation. Additionally, Ms. Nesterovaite pointed out that RAI is supporting and cooperating with the UNODC not only related to the CSOs, but also related to the Anti-corruption and Illicit Financial Flows Roadmap.

8. Workshop / brainstorming session

Steering Group members engaged in the informal brainstorming session on the upcoming Work Plan development process. Topics covered included potential new partnerships, programmatic and strategic topics of interest. For this occasion, the Secretariat shared the Work Plan development methodology. Workshop discussion highlights will be transposed in the methodology and built into the development of the new RAI Work Plan.

Conclusions and Decisions

1. SG recognizes the Award received from EPAC/EACN for regional campaign on whistleblowing “Break the Silence: Whistle for the end”;
2. SG took note of the upcoming high-level event planned to take place in the period 3-14 October in Vienna for further signing and promotion of the International Treaty on Verification of Data on Asset Declaration;
3. SG took note of the Secretariat’s update on the initiative for RAI becoming an observer to Conference of the States Parties to UNCAC. Secretariat will initiate a UNCAC Membership Working Group;
4. SG agrees to extended the duration of RAI Workplan from 2 years to 3 years;
5. SG took note of the RAI Financial Report for 2021;
6. SG welcomed the Secretariat’s initiative for RAI to partner with MARRI;
7. SG took note that the next SG meeting will take place in Bucharest, Romania tentatively in the period from 14th to 23rd November 2022;
8. SG approves the Secretariat to proceed with signing the MoU with CEI.
9. SG took note of Secretariat’s intensified efforts to increase a number of RAI Observers and Members, and to further strengthening the cooperation with the existing RAI Observers.