

REGIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION INITIATIVE

41st STEERING GROUP MEETING



Summary and Decisions

*October 24-25, 2023
Chisinau, Republic of Moldova*

41st Regional Anti-corruption Initiative (RAI) Steering Group (SG) Meeting took place on October 24-25, 2023 in Chisinau, Republic of Moldova. The meeting was hosted by the National Anticorruption Center (NAC) of Republic of Moldova and organized by the RAI Secretariat.

Participants

41st RAI SG Meeting was chaired by RAI Chairperson, Ms. Laura Stefan. It was attended by all member countries' representatives:

Albania – Mr. Ismail Shehu – Secretary General – Ministry of Justice and Mr. Florin Demollari – Director General of Anticorruption Department, Ministry of Justice;

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

Bulgaria – Mr. Ivan Vasilev - Expert, EU and International Cooperation 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 – Mr. Boris Vukasinovic - Senior Representative, Deputy Director - Agency for Prevention of Corruption;

North Macedonia – Nikola Prokopenko – Senior Representative, State Advisor, Ministry of Justice (online participation)

Romania – Ms. Roxana Florentina Serbanoiu, Senior Representative, Legal counsellor, Crime Prevention Department, Ministry of Justice;

Serbia – Ms. Bojana Scepanovic, State secretary, Ministry of Justice;

Observers:

Ukraine - Roman Homa - Head of Unit, International Cooperation Department - State Bureau of Investigation; Oleksandr Kozlenko - Director of the Regional Department of the SBI - State Bureau of Investigation; Denys Illiashchuk - Deputy Director of the Regional Department of the SBI - State Bureau of Investigation and Roman Bohdanov - Director of the Regional Department of the SBI located in the city of Khmelnytskyi - State Bureau of Investigation

RAI Secretariat was represented by:

Ms. Desislava Gotskova – Head of Secretariat;

Mr. Nikola Naumovski, Senior Anti-corruption Advisor;

Ms. Aida Zukic, Chief Finance and Operations Officer;

Ms. Sladjana Cvijanovic, Chief Program and Communications Officer;

Ms. Hayden Sampson, Intern.

Summary of Discussions

RAI Chairperson, Ms. Laura Stefan, opened the meeting and welcomed all participants joining the 41st RAI Steering Group meeting. She also referred to the International Treaty on Exchange of Data for the Verification of Asset Declarations that was signed on October 23 by the Ministry of Justice of Moldova as an excellent tool and opportunity for RAI member countries to improve their capacities and efficiency as regard asset declarations which will enable better cooperation on national and regional level.

The NAC deputy director, Vadim Cojocaru, in his welcoming speech, noted the importance of the meeting as well as the RAI's efforts in the fight against corruption and the support provided to anti-corruption institutions in strengthening the regulatory framework and tools to counter this phenomenon. He noted that support offered by RAI is essential in various fields and especially in terms of regional cooperation in the segment of asset declaration, anti-corruption legislative expertise, corruption risk assessment, the field of whistleblowing, asset recovery and other particularly important aspects.

1. Adoption of Agenda

The proposed Agenda was adopted unanimously.

2. Exchange of views

President of the National Integrity Authority (ANI), Mr. Lilian Chisca, expressed satisfaction with having Moldova signing the Treaty and saw it as an opportunity for the ANI to obtain necessary information from abroad given that the ANI has faced a lack of mechanisms for collecting the information. He emphasized that the ANI promotes the integrity of all institutions as well as the importance that young institutions see good practices.

The external evaluator of the EU-funded project *Breaking the Silence: Enhancing Whistleblowing Policies and Culture in the Western Balkans and Moldova*, Ms Coralie Pring joined the meeting online and presented the key findings of the external evaluation to the SG members also explaining the undertaken methodology, desk and field activities. She also stressed the recommendations that can be useful for possible new projects as projects related to whistleblowing protection are quite rare.

3. Information from the Secretariat: Work Plan 2023-2025 - what has been done and plan for 2024

Information from the Secretariat on Work Plan 2023-2025 and its implementation was presented by the Senior Anti-corruption Advisor while the new Chief Program and Communication Officer presented upcoming activities. The Head of the Secretariat summarized the current situation and the planned activities, as well as efforts made in the area of establishment of new and strengthening of the already existing partnerships.

These are the main activities under the projects presented by the RAI Secretariat:

- SEE TAC project: Four-month no-cost extension of the current SEE-TAC project approved by the donor. A short application for a new phase of the SEE-TAC project (Phase III) is submitted.
- RAI will participate in implementation of the new EU-funded project *Towards contemporary knowledge and innovative tools for assessing and enhancing the effectiveness of asset and interest disclosure (AID) systems in EU member states and candidate states* -qAID. This project is to be implemented in the period December 2023 – March 2026.
- The Monitoring and Evaluation of the EU-funded project *Breaking the Silence: Enhancing Whistleblowing Policies and Culture in the Western Balkans and Moldova* is completed. The new project proposal on whistleblowing is to be taken into consideration.
- The 19 Summer School will be implemented for one week at the end of June or the first week of July 2024, in Bucharest. The activity is to be organized in cooperation with The Southeast European Law Enforcement Center (SELEC).
- RAI Secretariat continues to work with the AIRE Center on the development of a new phase of the Asset Recovery project funded by the British Government.
- The R2G4P project is in the last phase and will be closed in November 2023. The Secretariat will participate in the preparation of the next project phase.
- Under the Roadmap project, the Action plan should be developed soon.
- RAI is invited to participate in the ReSPA mobility programme aimed at allowing public servants to gain experience from different contexts, in particular amongst the public administration in the region.

4. RAI budget and financial outlook for 2024

Chief Finance and Operations Officer presented the cumulative budget for 2024. It was noted that nearly half a million EUR cumulative budget for 2024 is inclusive of RAI Core budget proposal as well as all project funds secured to be implemented in 2024 in line with their corresponding implementation schedule.

Ms. Zukic commenced the presentation by stating that RAI Core Budget proposal (member countries' funds) for 2024 is EUR280.000, and is inclusive of nine member countries' contributions, plus envisaged savings accumulated in 2023 Core budget. She noted that the savings, primarily accumulated under budget items Personnel, SG Meetings and Programmatic activities, are a result of availability of additional funds from donor-funded projects and careful planning of implementation of activities to the best value of beneficiaries and the organization.

In conclusion, Chief Finance and Operations Officer mentioned the duration of ongoing projects in the light of timeframe for secured funds, and mentioned the projects that are currently in the negotiation phase, hence those funds were not included in the cumulative budget for 2024 for now.

RAI Core Budget for 2024 was approved by the Steering Group by consensus.

Head of RAI Secretariat presented the proposal for strengthening the capacities of the organization as well as the analysis and revision of internal documents by external experts. She further elaborated the need to increase the annual contributions of the RAI member countries by presenting the explanatory note prepared by the RAI Secretariat. As agreed at the previous SG meeting, the explanatory note was prepared by the Secretariat and included in the SG meeting documents to be subject of discussion at the meeting. During the discussions, the RAI Chairperson further explained that the RAI Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) leaves flexibility and freedom to RAI member countries to decide on the increase of the amount of their annual contributions, as it prescribes only the minimum. Therefore, the Secretariat proposed to the countries to consider and decide on increasing the annual contributions in line with the RAI MoU, and having in mind the financial constraints the organization is facing, as well as the

contributions being paid to other similar regional organizations. No specific amount was discussed at the meeting.

The representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina Mr. Adnan Dlakic indicated that the RAI Secretariat's proposal is to increase the amount of member countries' annual contributions to at least €48.000 per year.

Adnan Dlakić informed those present that the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of BiH and the Ministry of Finance and Treasury of BiH prepared the information for the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding the proposal for increasing the annual financial contribution of the member states of the Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative.

The Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted the Information on the proposal for increasing the annual financial contribution of the member states of the Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative, at its 26th session, held on October 18, 2023, and made an adequate conclusion, and in accordance with it, Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot support or accept this aforementioned proposal for an increase in the annual contribution.

It was agreed by consensus that an official letter, inclusive of the explanatory note for Increase of Annual Contributions by member Countries should be circulated by RAI Secretariat to the relevant entities as follows: Albania – Ministry of Justice, Bosnia and Herzegovina – Ministry of Security, Bulgaria – Ministry of Interior, Croatia - Ministry of Justice and Administration, Romania - Ministry of Justice; Moldova – National Anticorruption Center, Montenegro - Agency for Prevention of Corruption, North Macedonia - Ministry of Justice , Romania - Ministry of Justice , Serbia - Ministry of Justice.

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

While the SG meeting was organised as an in-person event, tour de table exchange was organised as a hybrid session, including the Representative of North Macedonia who joined the meeting online. During the session, member country and observer countries 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 relevant National strategies, UNCAC Review Mechanism and GRECO Evaluation Procedures.

6. Any other Business

In the context of Romania's initiative to help RAI to obtain the permanent observer status within United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC COSP), the meeting participants were informed by the representative of Romania that the procedure needs to be reinitiated due to the procedural reasons - exceeding the deadline for submitting the request. From this perspective, the representative of Romania mentioned the importance of sensitizing/informing the ministries of foreign affairs of the RAI Member States, given that most of them did not seem to be aware of this approach.

In terms of the RAI Secretariat's activities, it will continue efforts to have the RAI become a member of the EU network against corruption as well as to prepare a description of the International Anti-corruption Court Initiative.

BiH representative suggested to limit the time an organisation can hold the observer status within RAI, after which the observer whether becomes RAI member and contributes to its budget or loses its observer

status. Moldova representative mentioned that the reasons for such limitations were not clear and such a decision was not justified, considering that RAI has no expenses regarding the participation of observers and that RAI could only benefit from the experience some observers might have in the anti-corruption domain. There was a discussion on the proposal of BiH representative and the proposal did not get any support by the SG.

7. RAI Chairperson election

The interview and election procedure for the new Chairperson, was presented. It was agreed that, following the interviews, the voting/election procedure would be performed in maximum four rounds. In line with the organizational documents, in the absence of consensus, the decision on Chairperson election shall be taken by two-thirds of the votes cast (qualified majority).

The interviews were conducted with all candidates whose applications were determined as responsive/compliant/ acceptable. Interviews were an opportunity for candidates to express their motivation for applying and verbalize overall understanding of RAI. Steering Group members had an opportunity to pose questions to all candidates, but there were no predefined questions.

Following the four rounds of voting, there was no qualified majority of votes cast for any of the candidates. it was not managed to have the necessary majority. Therefore, in line with the internal rules, Ms. Laura Stefan, the current Chairperson shall assume the role of Acting Chairperson, until the new Chairperson is appointed. RAI Secretariat will initiate the new election procedure in the shortest possible time, the anticipated publication date of new call is November 6, the call to be open until December 6, and interviews tentatively planned for December 18-20.

Following the proposal of BiH representative to change the internal rules regarding the Chairperson position, it was agreed that this shall be subject of discussion once the external analysis of organizational documents is conducted.

Conclusions and Decisions

1. Steering Group took note of information on RAI Secretariat's activities related to Work plan 2023-2025;
2. Steering Group approved the RAI budget proposal for 2024;
3. Steering Group instructed RAI Secretariat to prepare and circulate official letter to the relevant entities regarding the RAI Secretariat's proposal for increasing member country annual contributions: Albania – Albania – Ministry of Justice, Bosnia and Herzegovina – Ministry of Security, Bulgaria – Ministry of Interior, Croatia - Ministry of Justice and Administration, Romania - Ministry of Justice; Moldova – National Anticorruption Center, Montenegro - Agency for Prevention of Corruption, North Macedonia - Ministry of Justice , Romania - Ministry of Justice , Serbia - Ministry of Justice;
4. The rules regarding the Chairperson position shall be subject of discussion once the external analysis of organizational documents is conducted;

5. In the absence of qualified majority, the current Chairperson shall assume the role of Acting Chairperson, until the new Chairperson is appointed;
6. The new election process for the Chairperson position shall be initiated by RAI Secretariat as soon as the conclusions are formally adopted, the anticipated publication date is November 6, the call to be open until December 6, and interviews tentatively planned for December 18-20.