

# REGIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION INITIATIVE

## 44<sup>th</sup> STEERING GROUP MEETING



*Summary and Decisions*

*December 5 - 6, 2024  
Tirana, Albania*

44<sup>th</sup> Regional Anti-corruption Initiative (RAI) Steering Group (SG) Meeting took place in Tirana, Albania, on December 5-6, 2024.

## **Participants**

RAI Chairperson, Mr. Dražen Jelenić chaired the 44<sup>th</sup> RAI SG Meeting. All member countries' representatives attended the meeting:

**Albania** – Ms. Rovena Pregja, Director, Directorate of Anticorruption Policy Compliance, General Directorate of Anticorruption, Minister of State for Public Administration and Anticorruption, Deputy Representative to RAI

**Bosnia and Herzegovina** – Mr. Adnan Dlakić - Expert Adviser at Section for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption Ministry of Security - Senior Representative

**Bulgaria** – Mr. Rosen Kukushev – Head of Bilateral and Multilateral Cooperation Department at EU and International Cooperation Directorate, Ministry of Interior – Delegated Representative

**Croatia** – Mr. Tomislav Matoc, Senior Advisor, Sector for Prevention of Corruption, Directorate for European Affairs, International and Judicial Cooperation and Prevention of Corruption, Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Digital Transformation - Deputy Representative

**Moldova** – Mr. Valeriu Cupcea, Head of the International Cooperation Directorate, National Anti-Corruption Centre - Deputy Representative

**Montenegro** – Mr. Dušan Drakić, Acting Director, Agency for Prevention of Corruption – Senior Representative and Ms. Jovana Pejović, Adviser in Section for International Cooperation - Deputy Representative

**North Macedonia** – Ms. Elena Dimovska, Head of Unit, Department for International Legal Cooperation – Unit for Coordination of Anti-corruption Activities, Ministry of Justice - Deputy Representative

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

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

### **Observers:**

#### **Georgia**

The Department for International Relations, Anti-Corruption Bureau - Ms. Nano Maglakelidze,

## **Ukraine**

The International Cooperation Department, State Bureau of Investigation - Mr. Mykola Podoliak, Mr. Oleksii Pikhalo, Ms. Valeriia Bizilia

The International Cooperation Department, National Agency on Corruption Prevention - Ms. Svitlana Pylypets.

**RAI Secretariat** was represented by:

Ms. Desislava Gotskova – Head of Secretariat;

Mr. Nikola Naumovski, Senior Anti-corruption Advisor;

Ms. Aida Zukić, Chief Finance and Operations Officer;

Ms. Slađana Cvijanović, Chief Program and Communications Officer.

### ***Summary of Discussions***

RAI Chairperson Mr. Dražen Jelenić opened the meeting and welcomed all participants to the 44<sup>th</sup> RAI Steering Group meeting. Ms. Adea Pirdeni, the Minister of Public Administration and Anticorruption of Albania, host of the meeting, also greeted the Steering Group members. She emphasized the significance of both national and regional efforts in preventing and combating corruption and praised RAI for its commitment to these initiatives.

#### **1. Adoption of Agenda**

The proposed Agenda was adopted unanimously.

#### **2. Review and Adoption of consolidated and updated RAI Internal Rules**

At the beginning of the discussion, the Chairperson provided a brief overview of the process undertaken to consolidate RAI's internal rules. The first draft of the revised documents was shared in October, along with a request for written feedback from RAI member states. The comments received helped refine the final draft, which was subsequently shared with the SG members in November.

Mr. Andrew Jackson, an external expert in organizational development, presented the updated parts of RAI Internal Rules, which incorporate feedback from the member countries. The main document was discussed and revised throughout the day.

Hard copies of the final draft versions of the documents (RAI Rules of Procedure, Annexes, and Guidelines) were provided to SG members on the second day of the meeting. It was agreed that electronic copies of the documents would be sent to SG members on Monday, December 9<sup>th</sup>, for feedback. The deadline for SG members to provide feedback on the final version of the documents has been set for December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

Before the discussions on the Draft RAI Internal Rules, the representative from Bosnia and Herzegovina indicated that he would abstain from the voting process. The representative from Moldova requested the Chairperson to check the mandates of the SG members, especially regarding the BiH representative, since the BiH representative had voted on some of the discussed provisions of the Draft document. In response, the Chairperson also asked the BiH representative to clarify whether he had the authority to make decisions during the SG meeting because his abstaining may lead to different calculations on votes cast. The BiH representative confirmed that he is indeed authorized to some point, as the Ministry of Security BiH selected him to take part in the meeting. However, he noted that he may not be able to engage in voting on certain issues that may be discussed.

Representatives from Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria, and Croatia insisted that the issue regarding the mandate of the representative of BiH should be clarified and included in the summary, especially because it had become a practice for him to claim that he had no mandate to decide on all issues in the agenda, and if necessary a letter by Chairperson on that matter to be sent to the Ministry of Security of BiH.

After all the clarification from the BiH representative, there still remained an uncertainty among SG members about the BiH representative's voting authority concerning specific decision-making processes and agenda items.

The Chairperson mentioned that such repeated conduct of the BiH representative could jeopardise the work of RAI and influence its reputation.

The representative of North Macedonia mentioned that an express provision in the Rules of Procedure is needed to avoid such situation in the future.

### **3. Reporting on RAI Activities for 2024 and Plan for 2025 – RAI Secretariat**

The Head of the RAI Secretariat provided a comprehensive overview of the organization's activities implemented in 2024, highlighting key achievements and enhanced efforts to improve communication and visibility. An outline of projects planned for implementation in 2025 was also presented, along with the development of new project applications and concept notes aimed at securing additional donor funding. These initiatives will support the achievement of RAI's strategic objectives as described in the RAI Work Plan 2023–2025.

The presentation further emphasized efforts to strengthen existing partnerships and expand the RAI network, including RAI joining the EU Network Against Corruption as a member.

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#### **4. RAI's application for the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Observer status: update and discussion**

The representative of Romania informed SG members that their initiative regarding the RAI application to UNGA was promoted again. The General Committee of the UNGA approved the introduction of the subject on the agenda of the 79<sup>th</sup> session. The Permanent Representative of Romania to the UN presented the initiative, but Russia and Turkey expressed their objections. The Russian representatives said that they are not convinced that RAI is an international organization; the Turkey representatives raised the problem of an article published on RAI's website in 2015 and signed by a press agency that is designated a terrorist organisation in Turkey, which RAI Secretariat removed immediately.

Based on the above-mentioned aspects, the Secretariat prepared the discussion paper that was shared before the SG's meeting and included as additional material. The document notes that at the 11th Steering Group Meeting in Podgorica in 2007, it was decided that the RAI Secretariat, with support from the Secretary General of the RCC, would work with the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina to amend the SPAI RSLO Headquarters Agreement and negotiate new office premises for the RAI Secretariat. This decision was made because the hosting agreement signed in 2003 granted legal status to the RAI Secretariat. As a result, the RAI Secretariat is currently listed as an international organization in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but not the RAI itself. Seventeen years later, there has been no progress.

Since RAI and Bosnia and Herzegovina have not yet signed a new hosting agreement, the representative from Bosnia and Herzegovina was asked to check on the status of this process and report back to the SG. The BiH representative said that he doesn't have the mandate to undertake any obligation on behalf of Bosnia and Herzegovina related to the "new hosting agreement", and that this issue should be resolved at a higher level. The BiH representative suggested that the RAI Secretariat send a letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of BiH to request this information. After discussion, the SG members were requested to contact their respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs for legal advice on who should initiate, negotiate, and sign a new hosting agreement with the authorities in BiH. They should provide this information to the Secretariat by the end of February 2025.

According to information available on the webpage of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia, three RAI member countries have not yet ratified the Protocol amending the existing Memorandum of Understanding concerning cooperation in fighting corruption through the South Eastern European Anti-corruption Initiative (MoU). It was discussed that this issue needs to be addressed.

#### **5. Exchange of views regarding the 25th Anniversary of RAI - SG members**

The Senior Anti-Corruption Advisor briefed the SG members on recent developments related to the 25th anniversary of RAI and communications with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). A summary of communication efforts, along with proposals from

the MFA BiH, were presented. Additionally, communication with the Ministry of Justice, Public Administration, and Digital Transformation of Croatia was noted.

During the discussion, the senior representative from Montenegro suggested that if BiH and Croatia were unable to support the organization, Montenegro would be willing to host the 25th anniversary of RAI.

## **6. RAI budget and financial outlook for 2025 – RAI Secretariat**

Chief Finance and Operations Officer (CFOO) presented the cumulative budget for 2025. It was noted that nearly 608.000 EUR cumulative budget for 2025 is inclusive of RAI Core budget proposal as well as all project funds secured to be implemented in 2025 in line with their corresponding implementation schedule. CFOO indicated that 2025 RAI Core Budget is inclusive of nine member countries' contributions, plus envisaged savings accumulated in the current year. She noted that the budget for 2025 is by 9% less than the budget for 2024 due to inability to accumulate savings in current year because of the ongoing inflation, less co-financing from other donors through projects, and requirement to co-finance all project expenses under EU-funding by 10%. It was also noted that 42% of overall funds to be utilized next year are from the core budget, while 58% from donor secured funding. As for the programmatic activities, 92% of programmatic activities are funded by donors.

The proposal for the 2025 RAI Budget was approved by the Steering Group by consensus.

The Chairperson took the floor and reflected upon the current and future financial outlook of the organization with emphasis on the fact that the budget that previously supported programmatic activities effectively is no longer sufficient due to inflation and rising operational costs as well as that the fundraising landscape is changing and it is uncertain if the organization has financial capacity to meet co-financing obligations.

Mr. Jelenic reminded the present representatives that in January 2024, the Chairperson formally requested all member countries to consider increasing their annual contributions to address this gap and ensure the sustainability of the activities. To date, responses regarding the requested increase were received from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Romania.

Following the request for updates from the other member countries on this matter by the Chairperson, the Representative of Montenegro took the floor to inform that Montenegro supports the request for an increase and that an official response on this matter will follow soon.

It was also noted that RAI Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) leaves flexibility to RAI member countries to decide on the increase of the amount of their annual contributions, as it prescribes only the minimum. Representative of BiH made a suggestion that the Secretariat, when sending the request for payment of contributions in 2025, also invites the countries to consider increasing their contributions on a voluntary basis. Following the discussion, it was concluded that new initiatives and activities on this matter will be considered once responses to the letter from

January 2024 related to the increase of annual contributions are received from all member countries.

## **7. Presentation of Methodology for Developing the RAI Programme 2026-2028**

The presentation of the RAI Programme 2026-2028 was conducted by the Senior Anti-Corruption Advisor. It emphasized the timeline for contributions from SG members, the process for providing feedback on draft documents, and the approval procedures. Following this, the Chief Programme and Communication Officer presented the methodology for the development of the Report on RAI Workplan 2023-2025 implementation.

SG members did not have comments on the presented information.

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

While the SG meeting was organised as an in-person event, the tour de table exchange was organised as a hybrid session, including the RAI Observers (Georgia and Ukraine) who were not able to join the SG meeting in person. During the session, RAI member countries and observers presented recent anti-corruption activities in their respective countries on the most important developments and projects in line with the current RAI Work Plan, as well as the most recent developments about the UNCAC Review Mechanism and GRECO Evaluation Procedures (Fourth and Fifth Round) and other important initiatives.

## **9. Exchange of views with partners**

The Head of the Secretariat provided an overview of the efforts aimed at strengthening cooperation with RAI's partners, then, it was announced the presentation of:

- EU Network against Corruption - represented by Ms. Elitsa Mincheva, Policy Officer in DG for Migration and Home Affairs, who briefed SG members on relevant activities on the EU level that are of interest to RAI member countries;
- Western Balkans Fund - represented by Mr. Klevis Gjoni, Public Relations Officer who informed SG members on WBF efforts, projects, and partnering initiatives.

## **10. Governance and Administrative Issues: prolongation of the Chairperson's Mandate, Renewal of the Mandate for the Senior Anti-corruption Advisor, Announcement of Selection Procedure for the Head of Secretariat**

The Chairperson presented the agenda item asking the SG members to vote on the renewal of the mandate for the Senior Anti-corruption Advisor. The mandate was renewed unanimously.

The Head of the Secretariat, who chaired this part of the meeting, presented the item regarding the prolongation of the mandate of the Chairperson for another year. There were no objections by the SG members.

## **11. Any other Business**

The Head of the Secretariat provided an overview of the Changes Roster of pre-vetted experts (Office Policies Manual) at the current stage and explained the need for an update of this document to include experts based on their achievements and experience with RAI in previous work.

SG members approved the updated Roster of pre-vetted experts unanimously.

The Head of the RAI Secretariat informed SG members on the application of the Asset Recovery and Management Agency of Ukraine (ARMA) for obtaining observers' status.

SG members granted the application from ARMA.

## ***Conclusions and Decisions***

1. Steering Group received the final drafts of the RAI Rules of Procedure, Annexes, Guidelines on how the Secretariat should Support the SG, and Annex 11.3 of the Office Policies Manual, agreed during the meeting. Electronic versions of all documents will be sent via email by the Secretariat. The silent procedure for documents acceptance will apply starting from December 9, 2024, to December 20, 2024 midnight CET;
2. The Steering Group took note of the information on the RAI Secretariat's activities related to Work Plan 2023-2025 (achievements in 2024 and upcoming activities);
3. The Steering Group took note on the progress made with RAI's application for the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Observer status;
4. Steering Group members are requested to contact their respective MFAs and request a legal opinion on the process and who on behalf of RAI should initiate, negotiate, and sign a new hosting agreement with the authority of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and provide the Secretariat with information by the end of February 2025;
5. The budget for 2025 was presented and approved;



6. Member countries who did not respond to the letter from January 2024 related to the increase of their annual contributions are kindly reminded to provide an official response;
7. Steering Group took note of the methodology for the RAI Programme 2026-2028 and the Report on the RAI Work Plan 2023-2025 and instructed the Secretariat to proceed with these activities;
8. Steering Group took note of further developments regarding the 25th Anniversary of RAI, and communication with the MFA BiH and the Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Digital Transformation of Croatia and the readiness of Montenegro to host the 25th Anniversary of RAI;
9. The mandate of the Senior Anti-corruption Adviser was renewed;
10. The mandate of the RAI Chairperson was prolonged;
11. The Steering Group adopted the amendments to the Office Policy Manual as proposed by the Secretariat regarding the provision on the Roster of pre-vetted experts and related Annex;
12. Steering Group granted observer status to the Asset Recovery and Management Agency of Ukraine (ARMA).