

REGIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION INITIATIVE

43rd STEERING GROUP MEETING



Summary and Decisions

April 18, 2024

Online

43rd Regional Anti-corruption Initiative (RAI) Steering Group (SG) Meeting took place online on April 18, 2024.

Participants

43rd RAI SG Meeting was chaired by RAI Chairperson, Mr. Drazen Jelenic. It was attended by all member countries' representatives:

Albania – Ms. Rovena Pregja, Director, Directorate of Programs and Projects in Anticorruption, Ministry of Justice, Deputy Senior Representative to RAI

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

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

Croatia – Ms. Tamara Šurina, Head of the Sector for Prevention of Corruption, Directorate for European Affairs, Judicial and International Cooperation and Prevention of Corruption, Ministry of Justice and Administration, Senior Representative

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

Montenegro – Mr. Boris Vukasinovic, Deputy Director, Agency for Prevention of Corruption – Senior 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 Senior Representative

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

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

Observers:

Ukraine – Mr. Vadym Peheta, Head of the International Legal Obligations, Bilateral Cooperation and Experience Exchange Unit International Cooperation Department, National Agency on Corruption Prevention

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.

Summary of Discussions

RAI Chairperson, Mr. Drazen Jelenic, opened the meeting and welcomed all participants joining the 43rd RAI Steering Group meeting.

1. Adoption of Agenda

The proposed Agenda was adopted unanimously.

2. 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 Chief Program and Communication Officer presented upcoming activities. The Head of the Secretariat summarized the current situation and the planned activities.

The main activities for 2024 are as follows :

- qAID Project: The project's implementation started on 1st December 2023 and is expected to be finalized in November 2025. RAI Secretariat is responsible for implementation of the Work Package 5 - *Dissemination of the knowledge (good practices and innovative approaches) and tools developed in EU Member States and Candidate States. The first deliverable (Communication strategy and dissemination plan) is prepared according to the project timetable.*
- SEE TAC project Phase III :: Pending approval by ADA
- The 19 RAI Summer School will be held from 11 till 14 June 2024 in Bucharest, Romania. The activity is to be organized in cooperation with the Southeast European Law Enforcement Center (SELEC) and co-funded by the Central European Initiative (CEI).
- RAI Secretariat participates in the Regional School for Public Administration (ReSPA) Regional Mobility Programme aimed at allowing public servants to gain experience from different contexts, in particular amongst the public administration in the region. RAI Secretariat will host two civil servants from the region in the second half of May 2024.
- RAI Secretariat is exploring different options for partnerships and funding opportunities to continue organising the internship programme
- RAI Secretariat will continue with development and promotion of RAI e-learning Hub

Following the presentation by the Secretariat, the representative of North Macedonia pointed out that all planned projects and RAI core activities are very relevant for North Macedonia, as they align with their national anti-corruption priorities and plans. The representative of Albania also mentioned relevance of activities, especially concerning the plans and activities for corruption proofing of legislation and corruption risk assessment.

3. Financial report for 2023

Chief Finance and Operations Officer presented the Financial Report for 2023. Ms. Zukic highlighted key factors that guided expenditures in 2023: ongoing inflation, expected to persist into 2024; stagnant

funding from member countries; and upcoming project closures in early 2024, leading to additional operational expenses. With these three challenges, RAI Secretariat was utilizing other sources of funding as much as possible in order to keep core budget utilization lower to create financial reserve to be included in next year's budget.

Hence, RAI Secretariat managed to have significant portion of operational expenses financed through different projects, with more than 46% all personnel costs financed from projects, and more than 96% of all programmatic activities implemented in 2023 financed from projects.

Ms. Zukic also noted the independent external Auditor's Report that was shared with the Steering Group, pointing out that core funds were utilized in line with RAI internal rules, relevant regulations and the international accounting best practices.

Finally, Ms. Zukic presented overall utilization of funds (core funding and 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 2023 and that this practice will be pursued in the future as well.

The Steering Group took note of the Financial Report for 2023.

4. Financial sustainability of RAI: Follow up on the increase of annual contributions letter

The Chairperson reminded SG members about the letter sent in January 2024 concerning the suggestion for increasing member countries' annual contributions in line with the existing Memorandum of Understanding, as well as its supplementary note justifying the request. As the official response from Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Romania were received, it has been agreed that representatives of other member countries would follow-up internally on the matter and will provide the Chairperson with feedback on the letter accordingly. Chairperson also noted his availability for any additional meetings to be organized with member countries to clarify the issue.

5. RAI Application for the Observer status to UNGA

In the context of Romania's initiative to support RAI to obtain permanent observer status to UNGA, the meeting participants were informed by the representative of Romania about the reapplication procedure. It has been agreed that RAI Secretariat will update relevant documents for the reapplication for Observer status to UNGA and Romania will support the reapplication process. The representative of Romania also urged other countries to support the application, as it would have better chances of being accepted if supported by more countries. It was also agreed that, once documents are finalized, there would be another call/meeting organized to agree on the timeline, so that the SG representatives to RAI follow-up with Ministries of Foreign Affairs accordingly.

6. 25th Anniversary of RAI

The Head of RAI Secretariat informed participants that next year will be the 25th anniversary of RAI and it might be a good opportunity to mark this day and to organize a high-level event. All RAI countries were invited to come up with their proposals in terms of organizing the event whether as a separate high-level meeting or as a part of other high-level gatherings organized by other international organizations. It has

been agreed RAI Secretariat to prepare and circulate a brief outlining a general concept and potential format of the event in the upcoming weeks in order the SG members to consult if there is an interest for hosting an event in their respective institutions. In addition, it was suggested and agreed the RAI Secretariat to explore the opportunities to organise the 25th Anniversary of RAI event alongside or as a side event of a high-level gathering organised by a partner international organisation, e.g. UNODC.

7. Revitalizing RAI: Strengthening RAI Organizational Structure Through Document Review and Update: Presentation by Andrew Jackson, external Organisational Expert

Mr. Andrew Jackson, external Organizational Development Expert briefed the SG members about the initial scoping done in light of reviewing and updating internal RAI's documents: strategic document and terms of reference (ToRs), in particular at those for the Chairperson, the Steering Group and the Secretariat. Mr. Jackson presented a methodology and an initial timeline of the process to be conducted in the upcoming period and for SG members to get involved in the work as it progresses, e.g. through a subgroup or individual interviews.

SG members agreed to proceed with the proposed methodology for reviewing and updating RAI internal documents as proposed by the external organisational development expert.

It has been agreed that, the ToR for the continuation of engagement of the external organisational expert should be developed based on the proposed methodology. The Steering Group instructed RAI Secretariat to circulate to the CV and Terms of Reference for the continuation of engagement of Mr. Andrew Jackson as an external organizational expert for informative purposes.

8. Exchange of views with partners: SELEC - Southeast European Law Enforcement Center

Mr. Oğuz Serkant Akin, Director General of SELEC greeted SG participants and presented key information about SELEC's mission including their partners organizations, and countries as well as observers. He expressed the pleasure of having RAI become an observer to SELEC and emphasized that this is the beginning of successful cooperation, indicating also the joint organization of the 19th edition of Summer School for Junior Anti-corruption Practitioners from Southeast Europe in June 2024.

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

During the session, RAI SG members and Observers presented recent anti-corruption developments in their respective countries in line with the current RAI Work Plan, including also recent developments about the relevant National strategies, UNCAC Review Mechanism, and GRECO Evaluation Procedures.

10. Any other Business

Following the proposal of Albania to host the next in-person SG meeting, the Chairperson invited the representative of Albania to give more information about it. SG agreed to organize the next in-person Steering Group Meeting in Albania.

The RAI Head of Secretariat and Chairperson updated the SG members about the issue of RAI registered office in Bosnia and Herzegovina and informed about the recent meeting in Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina. There have been no changes or progress since the previous meeting. The Secretariat informed SG members about the recent increase of rent costs. Given the limited core budget, RAI Secretariat will continue seeking to partially cover rent from other donor's funds. The Chairperson concluded the topic by noting that the space that is given to the RAI Secretariat (Bistrik 5, Sarajevo) is inadequate and is currently used as RAI Secretariat archive.

Head of Secretariat provided an update on the request of the MoJ of North Macedonia for RAI to cooperate with BAMIN. Following the request, the HoS met the Secretariat of BAMIN and discussed the possibilities to cooperate with the Network. Based on the feedback provided by BAMIN, she briefly presented the proposal for RAI to apply for associate membership to Balkan Asset Management Inter-Agency Network (BAMIN). Following the presentation, SG members instructed RAI Secretariat to apply for associate membership to BAMIN.

Conclusions and Decisions

1. The Steering Group took note of the information on the RAI Secretariat's activities related to Work Plan 2023-2025 (achievements since the last meeting and upcoming activities);
2. RAI Secretariat informed the Steering Group on the 19th edition of Summer School for Junior Anti-Corruption Practitioners from Southeast Europe taking place in Bucharest, Romania, on June 11-14, 2024;
3. Steering Group took note of financial report for 2023;
4. RAI Secretariat to update relevant documents for RAI application for Observer status to UNGA. Romania to support the reapplication process;
5. Steering Group agreed to proceed with the proposed methodology for reviewing and updating RAI internal documents as proposed by Mr. Andrew Jackson, external Organizational Development expert;
6. The Steering Group instructed RAI Secretariat to share the CV and Terms of Reference for the continuation of engagement of Mr. Andrew Jackson as an external organizational expert for informative purposes;
7. Steering Group accepted the idea of celebrating 25 years of RAI and instructed the Secretariat to explore options for organizing the event as part of other high-level gatherings organized by other international organizations and send additional information to the Steering Group members;
8. Steering group agreed on the next in-person Steering Group Meeting to be organized in Albania, in coordination with the Albanian representatives of the Steering Group;
9. Steering Group instructed RAI Secretariat to apply for associate membership status to BAMIN.