

**EQUINET EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING III**  
**19-20 September 2013**  
**Lisbon, Portugal**

**Venue**

**DAY 1 (19 Sept):** Offices CIG (Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality)  
Av. Da República 32 - 1º, Lisbon, Portugal

**Day 2 (20 Sept):** Hotel Sana Malhoa  
Avenida José Malhoa 8, 1099-098 Lisbon, Portugal

**ATTENDANCE:**

Board Members:

Jozef De Witte (JDW) - Chair  
Evelyn Collins (ECo) – *only 2<sup>nd</sup> day*  
Therese Spiteri (TS)  
Tena Simonovic-Einwalter (TSE)  
Elke Lujansky-Lammer (ELL)  
Niall Crowley (NC), Board advisor

Equinet Secretariat:

Anne Gaspard (AG), Executive Director  
Tamás Kádár (TK), Senior Policy Officer  
Yannick Godin (YG), Finance & Administration Officer  
Cosmin Popa (CP), Communications Officer  
Ilaria Volpe (IV), Policy Officer (Gender) – *only 1<sup>st</sup> day*  
Charalambos Stergiou (CS), Assistant Trainee

**Apologies**

Csaba Ferenc Asztalos (CA)  
Domenica Ghidei (DG)  
Julija Sartuch (JS)  
Néphéli Yatropoulos (NY) - *JDW conveyed some inputs and held a proxy vote for NY in relation to voting items and other discussions pursuant to Article 20 of the Equinet Statutes.*

**Chair of the meeting:** Jozef De Witte (JDW)

**Minutes:** Cosmin Popa (CP), assisted by Charalambos Stergiou (CS)

# MINUTES

## 19-20 September 2013

### 1. Opening

Jozef De Witte (JDW) opened the Board Meeting on Thursday 19 September at 14:00 and welcomed all Board Members present, Niall Crowley (Board advisor) and the Equinet Secretariat team. CIG (Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality) was thanked for hosting the first half day of the Board meeting and the proposed agenda for the meeting was agreed upon by all participants.

JDW presented apologies received from Csaba Ferenc Asztalos (CA), Domenica Ghidei (DG), Julija Sartuch (JS) and Néphèli Yatropoulos (NY).

### 2. Announcements

**JDW** will not candidate for the next board elections because of the uncertainties with respect to his future role within the evolving structure of the Belgian Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism (CEOOR). He announced that Michiel Bonte will stand as candidate on behalf of the CEOOR.

He also informed the Board that he was given a proxy vote from NY and conveyed NY's intention to candidate at the Equinet Executive Board Elections 2013.

**TS** informed that the new Board of the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality in Malta is competent and reflective of new grounds within the Commission's mandate.

**TSE** said that the Croatian Parliament elected the Ombudspersons, including her as a Deputy Ombudswoman. Her mandate is now broader than equality and includes police misconduct, social housing, minorities, even though non-discrimination will remain her main focus.

**TSE** was congratulated on this new position as well as on representing the newest EU Member State (Croatia).

**NC** informed that the legislation for the new Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission is expected in January 2014.

**ELL** said she enjoyed representing Equinet at the anti-discrimination workshop event organised by the UN OHCHR in Minsk, attended by participants from NGOs and government for whom equality bodies were new concepts.

**ELL** also reported outcomes of national elections in Austria are expected the following week as a result of which the equality body might become the responsibility of another ministry. Lastly, she mentioned that only the Graz regional office will eventually move premises.

**IV** thanked everyone for their support during the first gender equality training and informed of her absence during the following day (20 September) due to the Gender Equality Working Group meeting taking place in parallel.

**CS** was welcomed as part of the Equinet Secretariat team and wished a successful traineeship period.

**AG** thanked all in advance for the support in this key month, underlining the important board decisions to be taken at the meeting in preparation for the successful Equinet grant application submission process before 1 October.

### **3. Minutes of last Equinet Board Meeting (15 May 2013)**

- **Draft Minutes of Board Meeting 15 May 2013**

**DECISION:** the revised Minutes of the Equinet Board Meeting held on 15 May 2013 are adopted by the Board and can be uploaded on the Equinet website's Members section.

- **Follow-up remarks (on issues not on the agenda)**
  - **Standards for Equality Bodies**

The Board discussed and commented on the European Parliament Written Question of the 11.07.2013 on "Independent and effective equality bodies to ensure the implementation and impact of EU equal treatment legislation" and the answer given by Vice-President Reding on behalf of the European Commission on 26.08.2013.

**JDW** made the remark that the answer did not go beyond the Directives except for the mentioning of "effectively" in the context of "Full implementation of these provisions requires Member States to ensure that the bodies they designate as Equality bodies are able to carry out the tasks given to them in the Directives independently and *effectively*", which is small but important contribution and could leave an open door for future progress on this.

**AG** mentioned that the following week's planned meeting with the EC Equality Directorate may provide more signals on potential commitment or actions to support EBs in future.

**TK** informed that the EC proposed in June a Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States that is currently in front of the Council of the EU. He underscored that this Recommendation contains provisions and very usefully reflects on the effectiveness and the adequate resources of EBs, which is something positive since it is a politically (albeit not legally) binding document.

**AG** said that Equinet will continue to monitor this agenda, including in relation to the proposal for a Directive on freedom of movement for workers.

- **Review 2013 of Equinet gender-related activities**

A Board information document reviewing the setting up and organisation of the range of Equinet gender-related activities with gender equality bodies underlined a successful process of integration and continuation of the work of the previous network of gender equality bodies (run by EC) within the Equinet network throughout 2013.

**IV** conveyed the request for clarification from the Gender WG on how Working Groups (WGs) can interact on possible topics of common interest and asked for suggestions on how to best facilitate and ensure appropriate cooperation between WGs in future.

#### **Discussion below:**

Examples of such possible topics of common interest were mentioned, including for example the forthcoming work by the Policy Formation WG on work-life balance, which could be linked to the Gender Equality WG, and other WGs.

**JDW** suggested sharing the regular WG updates provided for Board meetings with the moderators of all WGs and facilitating the WGs moderators to be present and exchange in

person at the AGM (whilst considering the need not to overburden them with commitments and workload).

**ELL** argued that such cooperation is important and opportunities for moderators to come together if possible at reasonable regular intervals could be useful.

**NC** stressed that clarity is foremost needed on the meaning of and setting a clear objective for cooperation. Otherwise, cooperation without a clearly defined objective may have the risk to complicate the workings and efficiency of process to produce outputs for WGs. What is important and maybe is not happening are exchanges and meetings between the members of different WGs within the same organisation / equality body. Exchange and cooperation at that level of the member bodies in their country should be encouraged if not already pursued.

**TS** confirmed indeed that it is difficult to ascertain the kind of existing links which may exist between different WG members within the same organisation, and that there could be consideration for mainstreaming gender topics or other within other WGs.

**TSE** pointed out that not all equality bodies have members in all WGs and that this should also be considered.

**AG** underlined that ideas for cooperation and linkages should be further considered with a key objective to ensure coherence amongst different activities and WGs whilst ensuring not to complicate the functioning and process of the different WGs.

**IV** highlighted that the approach of the various WGs is different (only the newly added gender WG is focused on one ground/topic while the other previous four are on types of work, therefore creating potential synergies and overlaps) so it requires further discussion and some rethinking from a structural perspective.

**TK** claimed that, for the new gender WG, there is an issue on what and how to approach the work; the problem is not “not knowing” about other WGs’ work. It is difficult enough for each WG to set up its own agenda and approach, not to mention cooperation. He also stressed that the time devoted by the moderators to the work and in these meetings should be taken into consideration (to avoid risk of overload).

**NC** suggested that this discussion should be addressed as part of the ongoing evaluation of procedures led by the Secretariat.

**AG** agreed that the subsequent process and consultation to be initiated in 2014 in view of developing a new Strategic Plan for Equinet will be a timely opportunity to address and clarify these issues.

For now, in addition to pursuing coordination and linkages amongst working groups’ activities at Secretariat and Board level, Moderators and Member of the WGs will be informed of the activities of other WGs and be encouraged in this way to make links internally with other WG members within their equality body.

#### **4. Strategic Issues**

- **Equinet EC Funding – Financial issues and sustainability**

**JDW** reported back on the meeting of 10 September with the EC (DG Justice Programme management Unit) on the audit and financial issues and stressed the importance in this context of clarifying the fact that Equinet is above all made of its members equality bodies and their active involvement (and not just the Secretariat) and that the finances are there to support an entire network for members and by members.

**ECo** clarified that there are two issues to be addressed: (i) the 2012 Audit issue (acceptance of members' time commitment as part of co-funding) and (ii) the future financial and funding perspective (sustainability).

**JDW** said that for the first issue a possible solution had been identified as an outcome of the Equinet meeting with EC (to be pursued by Equinet with Members), whilst the second question of future funding perspective should be discussed at a later stage during this year (in view of future funding *Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme* from 2015 onwards). He emphasized the need to go back to the members and provide them with further clear explanations in relation to Audit 2012 issues – the point to make is that a solution has been identified (and is to be implemented).

**TS** as Treasurer and the **Board** agreed there needs to be more clarity from the EC as to the future interpretation of the financial regulations in the context of the next funding instrument.

- **Equinet Draft Work Programme 2014 & EC call for Action Grants 2014**

**JDW** noted that the preparations and approach under the exceptional tight timescale this year were very fruitful and appreciated the quality of content and presentation of the proposed Work Programme 2014, and thanked the Secretariat for this.

**TS** recommended a thorough cross-check of all the proposed activities with the eligibility rules specific to the action grant.

**AG** and **CP** underlined that the version of the work plan circulated to members and presented to the Board for discussion, review and approval is in a format that is different from the required template for EC action grants application. The content of the Work Plan adopted by the Board will therefore need to be transferred and translated in the EC action grant template for the purpose of the funding application, and careful consideration will be given to ensure that all actions are fully compliant with eligibility criteria under the provision of the EC call.

The Board discussed in detail and conducted a thorough review of the full Work Programme proposal. The Board discussed, proposed and agreed a range of amendments and improvements to the Work Programme.

In particular, the topic of violence against women was retained as thematic focus for an Equinet ad-hoc Initiative in 2014.

The second point under 1.4.1 (potential third party intervention of Equinet in front of the ECtHR) was also discussed, concluding that it will be a good idea to explore the potential with the legal WG in their next meeting (1 October 2013).

**TS** noted that a note/minutes of the workshops and WG meetings will need to be foreseen.

**DECISION: the Equinet Work Programme 2014 was unanimously approved by the Board following introduction of amendments.**

- **Equinet paper on indicators for measuring the impact of NEBs**

**NC** introduced the draft paper and invited comments and feedback from the Board as well as to give views and decide whether to print it and to launch it at the Equinet AGM.

The overall Board reaction was very positive. **JDW** praised the paper considering it very useful for the work of his equality body and great value for money; **TS** found it to be a very good paper; **TSE** said she was very pleasantly surprised to realise just how useful it will be; **ELL** said it is supportive in different levels and will be carefully discussed in the Austrian equality body.

**JDW** suggested that Equinet should seek to highlight, consider and use this paper in the context of preparation for its next strategic plan. He also underlined the importance of sending the printed paper to each equality body and members of Equinet, to encourage its consideration and use.

**ELL** supported this dissemination, pointing to the importance of heads of NEBs receiving the paper directly.

**JDW** and **NC** argued that Equinet should be clear on the framework for presenting the paper at the Equinet AGM. All agreed that the paper will only be introduced and launched at the AGM, whilst further substantial discussions on it could be considered for another subsequent occasion, further to dissemination of the paper to Members and with more time available for discussion on this important area.

**DECISION: Board approves printing, distribution, promotion and launch of the paper at the Equinet AGM 2013.**

## **5. Planning issues – Equinet activities and Work Programme 2013**

- **Planning Equinet AGM 2013 and Executive Board elections**
  - **Draft AGM Program**

Board reviewed the draft AGM programme and suggested holding the discussion groups with members earlier in the day, moving the EU plenary session and launch of the Equinet paper on impact indicators to the afternoon.

Board asked to design the focus of the discussion groups as a pre-consultation with members (management-level representatives of equality bodies) on preparing for Equinet next Strategic Plan (prior to and as a preparatory step to the formal consultation and preparation process planned throughout 2014) and to name this session of group discussions accordingly.

- **Call / ongoing process for Nominations of Candidates for the Board Elections**

**AG** updated the Board on the latest information concerning nominations of candidates for the Board elections, including already confirmed and still possible candidacies as was known at the time of this Board meeting.

The Secretariat will send a final reminder to all Equinet members on this call for Board Candidates nominations one week prior to the deadline for nomination.

- **Good practice guide on reasonable accommodation**

**AG** informed the Board of the challenges experienced to collect substantial material on the topic by our members and the lack of positive response to identify a lead expert within a member body for the preparation of this Good Practice Guide.

**TK** confirmed and referred to the limited contribution of members and their lack of interest or capacity in leading the drafting of such document.

Two possible approaches were proposed to the board: either leaving it as it is in a standstill and dropping the project, or making use of the relevant existing material still received by members for the secretariat (with the help of CS) to produce a guide document of limited scope on the topic of reasonable accommodation.

**DECISION: Board asks the Secretariat to produce the good practice guide in-house with the available material.**

- **Equinet Training Duty-Bearers (24-25 Oct 2013, Brussels)**

**TK** informed the Board on progress in the preparations for the training programme (including on identification of presenters and moderators) and pointed that there seems to be some confusion about the aim/angle of the training – one reason for this might be that most EB do not do promotional work of good practices. Therefore, he considered it useful to have some duty-bearers present at the training.

**CP** commented on the need to involve a diversity of members in the training (as moderators and contributors at workshops)

The **Board** agreed on the need for geographical diversity in this context. It is a broader issue to be further discussed in the context of the internal procedures paper.

- **Draft internal report on current operating procedures and processes within the Equinet Network**

**TK** introduced and presented the document and the background process of its preparations.

**AG** underlined that it is a particularly useful document for the discussions and preparations for the next strategic plan.

**NC** commented that it includes a number of good proposals and summarizing them in an implications page and having the Board to further discuss and decide on it.

**DECISION: Board asked the Secretariat (TK) to update the document and to include a page on potential implications, for review at a next Board meeting.**

## **6. Equinet Membership**

- **Membership applications**
  - **Ombudsman Gender Equality, Croatia**
  - **National Commission Persons with Disability, Malta**

Each membership applications with their supporting documents were reviewed by the Board in the context of assessing criteria for membership according to Equinet statutes.

**TSE** pointed out that the National Commission from Malta is the first single ground member applicant equality body on disability (existing member single ground bodies are competent on race or gender).

**DECISION: Both membership applications were approved by the Board and will be presented to the Equinet Members for ratification at AGM.**

**AG** will inform the applicant bodies of the Board decision and approval, and of the ratification vote planned at the AGM.

## **7. Relevant EU and European stakeholders initiatives**

- **FRA joint meeting with NEBs-NHRIs-Ombudsmen, 7-8 Oct 2013 Vienna**

The Board agreed that the purpose of the Equinet pre-meeting on 7 October (9-10:30) will focus on sharing and clarifying objectives, views, messages and contributions from Equinet and equality bodies in the context of the discussions and agenda of the joint meeting event.

**JDW** pointed that it will be important to underline the role of NEBs and of the equality agenda within the wider context.

**NC** referred to the importance to discuss joint mandates at European level and present a framework of mutual support (links and mechanisms) among these various institutions (these are key outcomes to pursue in addition to stressing the equality agenda dimension as above).

**TK** pointed that it will be useful to clarify what equality bodies would need and expect from the key European institutions involved.

- **EC Directive proposal Freedom of Movement EU Migrant Workers**

**JDW** explained that Equinet had identified this proposal as an opportunity and legislative procedure at EU level to stress the need for adequate resources and standards for equality bodies referred in the proposal. He also stressed that this was an opportunity to position equality bodies at the heart of the European agenda given the importance of the principle of the free movement of workers.

**TSE** agreed that nationality should be included as a ground of discrimination since new independent bodies would end up in confusing the communication efforts about discrimination even more.

**AG** mentioned that the ENNHRI was also considering the EC directive proposal and that Equinet would liaise constructively and as appropriate with other networks in this context. She suggested that as part of Equinet Strategy on this proposal, Equinet should communicate and inform Equinet members on this directive and the amendments proposed, and have further contacts with EC, EP and EU actors so that the clarity of messages is ensured.

**DECISION: Board approved the Equinet Strategy note and proposed approach therein, including internal communication with members to provide updated information.**

## **8. AOB**

On the occasion of this last meeting of the Board under the current mandate, Members were warmly thanked for their contributions and commitment as well as for their continued engagement and inputs until the end of the mandate (end November with elections), and JDW in particular by all his colleagues as Chair during this Board mandate.

=== *The Chair JDW closed the Board Meeting at 12:30 on Friday 20 September 2013* ===