

Equinet Executive Board Meeting II 25 April 2014 (09:00-16:00) Brussels, Belgium

Venue: Equinet / Belgian Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism
138 Rue Royale, 1000 Brussels, Belgium

ATTENDANCE

<u>Board Members</u>	<u>Equinet Secretariat</u>
Anna Błaszczak (AB) Michel Bonte (MB) Evelyn Collins (ECo) István Haller (IH) Sandra Ribeiro (SR) Mari-Liis Sepper (MLS) Therese Spiteri (TS) Tena Simonovic-Einwalter (TSE) Nepheli Yatropoulos (NY)	Anne Gaspard (AG), Executive Director Yannick Godin (YG), Administration & Finance Officer Tamás Kádár (TK), Senior Policy Officer Cosmin Popa (CP), Communications Officer Ilaria Volpe (IV), Policy Officer - Gender Equality Jessica Machacova (JM), Assistant (Trainee)

Chair of the meeting: Evelyn Collins (ECo)

Apologies: Niall Crowley (NC), Board Advisor – *participated for a part connected over phone*

Minutes: Cosmin Popa (CP), Yannick Godin (YG)

MINUTES

OPENING OF THE EQUINET BOARD MEETING

ECo opened the Board Meeting on Friday 25 April at 09:00 and welcomed all Board Members and the Equinet Secretariat team. The proposed agenda for the meeting was reviewed and agreed on by all Board Members.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NY informed the Board of the emotion caused by the recent death in April 2014 of Dominique Baudis, the Defender of the Rights at the head of the French equality body. The President of the Republic paid a vibrant tribute to the man and to the work of the

institution in France. A process for the nomination of a new Defender of Rights is to be launched and should be completed before the summer.

AG informed that a very useful meeting with EC representatives (DG Justice) took place the previous day on 24 April attended by ECo, TK and herself, where the future of Equinet funding was discussed. The budget figure of maximum 950.000 EUR/year for Equinet work in 2015 was confirmed, as well as Equinet's monopoly status and minimum 5% co-funding requirement as from 2015 under the EC *Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme* until 2020. ECo and the Board thanked and congratulated the Secretariat team in particular for its work in securing these highly welcome and positive outcomes on future funding perspectives for the Network.

AG also announced that Ms Salla Saastamoinen will take up the position of Director for Equality at DG Justice from 1 May 2014 and that Equinet looks forward to an opportunity to meet with her in due course and to the continued constructive cooperation with the Equality Directorate.

TS announced that a civil union act has recently been passed in Malta which includes possibility of adoption by same-sex couples. There will also be a public consultation on transforming the National Commission for the Protection of Equality (NCPE) into a broader National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI) in Malta. TS also mentioned that due to the fact that the position of Director was vacant, the Commissioner was also currently the acting director.

MINUTES OF LAST EQUINET MEETINGS

The Board reviewed the draft Minutes of the Equinet Board Meeting held on 28 January 2014, no amendments were required.

DECISION: the draft Minutes of the Equinet Board Meeting of 28 January 2014 are adopted by the Board and can be uploaded on the Equinet website's Members section.

COMMON CAUSE AND EQUALITY PROJECT ¹

CP presented and the Board discussed the findings of the survey and how best to use them to influence the communication work of NEBs in ways that would meaningfully impact their societies.

TS proposed to develop a toolkit to address the question related to figuring out the right target audience for this communication work on values.

DECISION: The Communications Working Group will further review and discuss the results of the study and possible next steps at its first meeting of the year in June.

PROCESS TOWARDS EQUINET STRATEGIC PLAN 2015-2018

AG updated the Board about the consultation of Equinet Members through a survey

¹ Niall Crowley, Board Advisor, joined the Board discussion for this and next item per teleconference.

questionnaire towards the next Strategic Plan that was still in progress, with a deadline that had been slightly extended in order to allow for a maximum level of submissions and responses from members in this important process.

She also confirmed that the Equinet Work Plan for 2015 will have to be submitted to the EC earlier this year (by October or November, specific date to be communicated) as was foreseen from prior discussions with DG Justice EC representatives. Given the Equinet AGM is planned this year in December, options for the adoption of the Work Plan 2015 by Members will be either to plan a side meeting of Equinet Members if possible at a relevant EU event (possibly in early November co-organised by EC and Italian Presidency) or otherwise to foresee and organize an electronic adoption of the Work Plan by Members (through email). Such a side Equinet meeting of Members in October would mainly also allow for a final discussion of the proposed Draft Equinet Strategic Plan 2015-2018 prior to its adoption at the AGM planned to take place this year in December (as foreseen under Equinet Action Grant Programme 2014).

It is noted that the Annual General Meeting of Equinet Members (AGM) is expected to be planned earlier in the calendar (e.g. September) in the coming years from 2015 on in view of the likely sustained earlier deadline for EC funding application around the autumn (as opposed to 15 December in the past years) to allow for earlier EC pre-financing payment.

DECISION: Equinet to consider and check feasibility of a side meeting with its Members on the fringe of the EU event on equality foreseen in early November under Italian Presidency - for Equinet Members to vote on the Work Plan 2015 and provide an opportunity for internal discussion on Draft Strategic Plan 2015-2018.

The Board commented on the first draft report from the facilitator of the Board Strategic Day that took place in Brussels on 1 April 2014.

NC underlined that the draft paper was internally focused (on issues that are internal to Equinet, focusing on meeting the needs the Members and how the network is organised and carrying out its activities) and that the Board should also allocate time to discuss further the external focus, particularly relating to deepening the thinking on the nature of the impact we want to make as a European Network.

MB encouraged the Board to adopt a way of working on developing the strategic Plan that would be tapping into the different fields of expertise available within the Board.

Building on the outcomes of the consultation process (to be discussed at next Board Meeting), **ECo** suggested that each Board Member could commit to contacting few heads of selected Members NEBs (e.g. including from neighbouring countries) to discuss their views, secure engagement in the process and to re-ascertain future expectations for the network.

A report of the outcomes of the Equinet Consultation will be made available and disseminated to Equinet Members in due course as planned in the internal process to keep Members informed and provide an opportunity to comment on the relevance of the analysis of these consultation outcomes.

DECISION: The next June Board meeting will focus on discussing the outcomes of the membership consultation and will agree on a possible follow-up approach by Board Members with heads of NEBs building on these feedback and outcomes.

STRATEGIC ISSUES

Future Equinet funding: The meeting with DG Justice EC representatives of 24 April 2014 (attended by Eco, AG and TK) confirmed the maximum increased figure for the Equinet budget for 2015 (950,000 EUR). EC representatives also confirmed that Equinet will enjoy a continued *de facto* monopoly status and that the co-funding requirements will be reduced to minimum 5% under the new funding Programme (EC *Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme* until 2020).

Membership scope and application from equality body in Moldova:

The specific geographical scope covered by the new EC funding *Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme* is still uncertain.

Regarding potential growth in the membership, the Board discussed whether growth was desirable and, if so, which countries/organisations should be allowed into the network on the conditions that formal application and supporting evidence fulfill criteria for Equinet membership.

Whilst the Board agreed that a possible approach to future membership could be driven by a general sense of openness and inclusiveness within certain boundaries and (funding) possibilities, objective criteria should be defined as to what kind of bodies from which countries could be considered for potential Equinet membership if they apply.

DECISION: Secretariat to propose an option paper for future Board discussion, outlining possible approaches to respond to potential new membership applications, notably contemplating potential additional funding schemes available.

DECISION: Secretariat to inform the applicant Equality Body in Moldova that its membership application is under review and that, in the meantime, the Council would be offered the opportunity to send an observer representative (at its own cost) to trainings and other relevant Equinet activities/events.

WORK PROGRAMME 2014

Equinet MEP toolkit: draft to be circulated to the Board in May for comments. The output should contain a section introducing new MEPs to main equality issues in Europe.

Equinet Members Directory: important to ensure that overviews do not allow for possible unfavorable comparisons to be made between countries that could have a negative political impact for our Members.

EQUINET FINANCES

Equinet Action Grant 2014: **YG** presented the Board with all the requirements for the monitoring and reporting under the EC Action Grant applying for the financial year 2014. The Secretariat will review the best ways to ensure as smooth as possible a reporting process during the course and following the end of the project (final reporting action grant).

The reporting requirements are particularly complex and numerous and will increase the work on the Secretariat as well as the burden for the Members for this specific year of funding 2014. The Board suggested that particular support to the work of the Finance and

Administration Office (YG) should be foreseen in this context and agreed with the Secretariat that the next Equinet traineeship scheme (Sept 2014-Jan 2015) should be particularly focused on support in office administration and finance tasks (including the opportunity for the trainee to gain specific Action Grant Management experience).

DECISION: Clear communication to be sent out to Equinet Members to introduce and explain the relevant financial and administrative requirements for the action grant and secure their cooperation.

=== The Chair of the Equinet Board declared the Board meeting closed at 16:00 ===