

## Equinet Executive Board Meeting IV 22 September 2014 Warsaw, Poland

**Venue:** Office of the Human Rights Defender, Solidarności 77 street, Warsaw, Poland

### ATTENDANCE

<u>Board Members</u>	<u>Equinet Secretariat</u>
Anna Błaszczak (AB) Kosana Beker (KB) Michiel Bonte (MB) Evelyn Collins (ECo) Sandra Ribeiro (SR) Mari-Liis Sepper (MLS) Tena Simonovic-Einwalter (TSE)	Anne Gaspard (AG), Executive Director Yannick Godin (YG), Administration & Finance Officer Tamás Kádár (TK), Senior Policy Officer Ilaria Volpe (IV), Policy Officer - Gender Equality Marina Gachmova (MG), Assistant (trainee) Martina Meneghetti (MM), Assistant (trainee)
<u>Board Advisor:</u> Niall Crowley (NC) <u>Treasurer:</u> Therese Spiteri (TS)	

**Chair of the meeting:** Evelyn Collins (ECo)

**Apologies:** *Board Members* - István Haller (IH), Nepheli Yatropoulos (NY); *Equinet Secretariat* - Cosmin Popa (CP)

**Minutes:** Yannick Godin (YG), Marina Gachmova (MG)

### MINUTES

#### OPENING OF THE EQUINET BOARD MEETING

**ECo** opened the Board Meeting on Monday 22 September at 9 a.m. and welcomed all Board Members and the Equinet Secretariat team. The proposed agenda was agreed on by all Board Members present.

ECo also thanked Anna Błaszczak and all her colleagues in the Office of the Human Rights Defender for the very positive cooperation and coordination in respect of the Board meeting and the Equinet Training on Gender Equality hosted in Warsaw, Poland.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

**AB:** the institution of the Human Rights Defender (HRD) in Poland has had some structural changes; there is a new independent department for equal treatment.

**TSE:** the Croatian Ombudsman institution is planning the opening of new regional offices in Rijeka (completely non-discrimination), Osijek and next year in Split.

**TS:** The National Commission for Persons with Disability in Malta has also opened a new office in Gozo.

**NY:** sent her last minute apologies as she was unable to travel to Warsaw with her flights being cancelled due to strikes of the airline. NY sent AG and ECo written comments relating to various points of the Board Agenda which were conveyed and considered throughout the meeting discussions. NY had also informed Equinet of the nomination in July 2014 of Jacques Toubon as new Defender of Rights in France and the very recent appointment of Patrick Gohet as Deputy Defender responsible for the fight against discrimination and the promotion of rights.

## MINUTES OF LAST EQUINET MEETINGS

The Board reviewed the draft Minutes of the last Equinet Board Meeting (held on 18 - 19 June 2014 in Stockholm).

**DECISION: Minutes of Equinet Board Meeting III (18 - 19 June 2014) are approved.**

## TOWARDS EQUINET STRATEGIC PLAN 2015-2018 AND WORK PROGRAMME 2015

- o Draft Equinet Strategic Plan 2015-2018

**AG** presented the document highlighting that all members have been very responsive in the initial consultation and survey process; and that there were some slight reformulation in the wording of the mission.

Following discussion and review of the draft document, Board Members agreed some specific amendments that should be made across the following parts of the Draft Strategic Plan – introduction, evaluation, values, strategic objectives, tools and action.

**DECISION: The Secretariat will review the document in light of the Board's suggestions and amendments. The revised version of the Strategic Plan will be proposed for review and final endorsement by the Board at its Meeting in Belgrade on 15 October.**

- o Draft Work Programme 2015

**AG** introduced the document, pointing out that the draft Work Plan for 2015 foresees an increased number of activities, including some new types of work - pilot training initiative, new projects e.g. evaluation labs and research, thematic clusters - which are linked to the increased budget foreseen for Equinet work from 2015. The budget also foresees the addition of one more staff person as part of the Secretariat.

The Board Members thoroughly reviewed and discussed the text of the document and requested some amendments and clarifications in the description of the activities.

**DECISION: The Secretariat will prepare a final draft of the Work Plan 2015 that will be reviewed at the Board Meeting on 15 October. It is proposed that the Work Plan, once endorsed by the Board, will need to be circulated to Members in view of being voted upon and ratified by Members before mid-November prior to the Equinet funding grant application deadline to the EC.**

- o Planning Equinet Members side Meeting, 6 Nov/Rome and Equinet AGM, 4 Dec / Brussels
- Equinet side meeting of Members, Rome, 6 November 2014

The Board Members reviewed and discussed an initial proposal of a concept/draft structure for the Equinet Rome side event with Members. It was agreed that all Equinet Members (including the three equality bodies that are not from an EU Member State and hence not invited by the EC / Italian Presidency to the Equality Event) will be invited to participate and offered the possibility to join the Equinet side meeting planned at the end of the first day of the EC/Presidency event in Rome on 6 November. It was recognised that the three equality bodies would have to pay their own costs if they wish to attend.

The actual voting on the work Plan by Members will be held only if a meaningful majority of Equinet Members are present or represented at the meeting, or alternatively may be organised through an email/online voting system and process.

**DECISION: Invitation to Equinet side meeting 6 November to be sent to Members and Equinet Secretariat to plan and organise the appropriate voting system for the Work Plan ratification by Members before mid-November.**

- Planning Equinet AGM, Brussels, 4 December 2014

The Board Members reviewed and discussed a preliminary outline proposal introduced by AG for the Equinet AGM on 4 December in Brussels. Invitations to potential keynote speakers and heads of NEBs / Members should be sent out as soon as possible. An engagement with high-level representatives of key EU institutions – EU Commission (Commissioners, Vice President), MEPs (Vice-Presidents, Committee Chair/s) would be of great value to the exchange and should be pursued.

## **STRATEGIC ISSUES**

- o Draft Equinet Paper Europe 2020 Strategy

**NC** presented the current draft paper on Equality Bodies and the Europe 2020 Strategy, explaining that there may still be few pending inputs from equality bodies to be considered as part of the survey process. The Board welcomed the quality of the contents as well as the relevance of the future perspectives / recommendations included in the draft paper.

The Board suggested that the term “*Strategy Paper*” should be reviewed and reached the conclusion that calling the document a “*Discussion Paper*” would be more appropriate. It will be used to inform the submission of Equinet to the Europe 2020 Strategy.

**DECISION: The draft paper can be finalised according to timetable foreseen and used as a basis to prepare an Equinet submission to the ongoing Europe 2020 Strategy consultation of the European Commission.**

- Cooperation European Parliament & European Commission 2014

The Equinet MEP toolkit and related event organized in the European Parliament on 10 September were a great success; ECo commended the work done and thanked all those who had participated. As a result of this dissemination and MEP event, Equinet has developed useful contacts and valuable links with relevant MEPs and Committees that will be duly followed up. It is important to give visibility and evidence-based voice to the work of national equality bodies across the Member States and of their cooperation within Equinet at European level.

**DECISION: Equinet Secretariat to pursue a follow-up tailored to each of the members of the European Parliament MEP who connected to Equinet in the context of the MEP toolkit and event, related to the issues and areas of work they showed a particular interest in.**

- Proposal on Equinet third-party interventions before the ECtHR

TK explained that the Equinet Legal Working Group (WG) had met the previous week to discuss the best approach to the concept and proposal of third-party interventions by Equinet. The WG is enthusiastic about the interaction on this potential perspective, whilst not being in a position to realistically estimate the level of work this could require - only a pilot approach will help assess the related level and amount of work that could result from such third-party intervention based on an agreed procedure.

The Board Members discussed the detailed procedure and the need for adequate and clear provision for decision making on and veto of proposals to intervene and, in addition, it was agreed that there was a need for greater explanation of the background and potential benefits of the proposal.

**DECISION: The Board will further discuss the proposal at its next Meeting in October. It will also be discussed with Equinet Members at the AGM, on the basis of a proposal with the rationale and a proposed procedure, as well as raised in Rome at the Equinet side meeting.**

## **EQUINET MEMBERSHIP**

The Board considered and discussed the approach to refining future membership criteria and scope for the Equinet Network.

On the basis of the discussion note provided, the Board was clear about its approach to membership – open and inclusive and mindful of financial provisions. In terms of geographical scope, it was decided that equality bodies from EEA and EU candidate and potential candidate countries could be granted membership if interested to apply. The interest of the Albanian equality body was noted. Following initial Board discussion and general agreement on a basic definitional approach as a starting point, further consideration should be given to the definition of an equality body, one which would embrace the diversity of membership.

Equinet received a formal membership application from the National Discrimination Tribunal in Finland, to be reviewed and considered by the Board.

**DECISION: the Membership Application of the National Discrimination Tribunal, Finland, will be considered at the next Board Meeting on 15 October.**

## EQUINET ADMINISTRATION & FINANCES

- Equinet Secretariat Staff Handbook

**AG** and **YG** presented the Equinet Secretariat Staff Handbook explaining that such a document is required under Belgian law. It is a working document that the Secretariat will continue to develop, update and improve over time with adequate formal procedures.

The Board noted this important document for the Secretariat and a few minor amendments were made. According to legal requirements, the Staff Handbook will have to be translated at least into French and eventually submitted to the social authorities in Belgium for approval.

- Equinet Action Grant 2014 administration

**YG** stated that the latest deadline for the Secretariat to collect all reporting documents for the reimbursement will be the end of February 2015.

It was suggested by the Board that the collection process might be facilitated through providing a Checklist of documents to be provided and preparing a FAQ section (with information replying to Frequently Asked Questions) to be sent to Equinet members.

## EQUINET WORK PROGRAMME 2014

The next Equinet training will be focusing on Positive Action Measures and will take place in Belgrade on 16-17 October.

**TK:** The Legal Working Group is currently working on a discussion paper / draft report on the topic for the training.

## RELEVANT EU AND EUROPEAN STAKEHOLDERS INITIATIVES

The joint EC / Italian Presidency high-level event on Equality (6-7 Nov 2014, Rome) combined with the arrival of a new European Commission and European Parliament opens a window of opportunity to reinvigorate the equality agenda and for equality bodies to gain further visibility.

At its October meeting, the Board will discuss the key messages which should be stressed at the high level event, following the invitation to Equinet (Evelyn Collins, Chair) to contribute to a relevant session on Access to Justice. Coordination will be sought between Equinet and attending NEBs in order to maximize impact.

The Board meeting was closed at 6 p.m. by the Chair **ECo**