

Equinet Executive Board Meeting V 9 December 2015 Paris, France

Venue: Défenseur Des Droits, 7 rue Saint Florentin, 75008 Paris, France

ATTENDANCE	
<p><u>Board Members</u></p> <p>Sarah Benichou (SB) Anna Błaszczak (AB) Patrick Charlier (PC) Evelyn Collins (ECo) Sandra Konstatzky (SK) Elisabeth Lier Haugseth (ELH) Kalliopi Lykovardi (KL) Petr Polak (PP)</p>	<p><u>Equinet Secretariat</u></p> <p>Anne Gaspard (AG), Executive Director Yannick Godin (YG), Administration & Finance Officer Tamàs Kádár (TK), Head of Legal & Policy team Sarah Cooke O'Dowd (SOD), Communication Officer Jessica Machacova (JM), Project Officer Moana Genevey (MG), Policy/Communication Trainee Katrine Steinfeld (KS), Policy Officer /Gender Equality <i>(starting work 1 January 2016)</i></p>

Chair of the meeting: Evelyn Collins (ECo)

Guest: Jacques Toubon (JT), French Defender of Rights – greetings and welcome intervention at the start of the Board meeting

Apologies:

Board Member – Kosana Beker (KB)

Minutes: Yannick Godin (YG), Sarah Cooke O'Dowd (SOD)

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING

OPENING OF THE EQUINET BOARD MEETING

ECo opened the Board meeting at 09:00, with a warm welcome to all on the occasion of this first substantial Meeting of the mandate of the new Board, following the Equinet AGM and Board Elections of October 2015. In this context, ECo invited a brief *tour de table* of personal introduction by all Board Members and Equinet staff team.

The proposed agenda for the meeting was reviewed and agreed by participants.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Jacques Toubon (JT), French Defender of Rights (DDD), joined the meeting during its opening. In his welcome words, JT introduced his views on the current situation in France and Europe and the challenges it poses for the fight against discrimination from the perspective of the French Defender of Rights.

Access to rights will be a work priority for the Defender of Rights in 2016. A survey of 5,000 people will be launched to investigate the range of reasons (economic, social, geographic issues...) behind the fact that relatively few people make use of its services in the context of widespread discrimination in France. First results will be expected from April 2016, followed by the launching of relevant initiatives to address the gaps identified. DDD might need further (EC) support to assist it in increasing its reach.

PC: The appointment process for the new leadership of the Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities in Belgium was eventually completed and outcomes of the selection announced on 3 December. Els Keytsman and Patrick Charlier have been appointed to the positions of co-Directors of the Interfederal Centre. PC is delighted to be given the opportunity to pursue his work and commitment in this capacity. His co-Director Els Keytsman will take up her new function on 1 February 2016. Equinet and Board Members warmly congratulated PC on his appointment.

AB: The Polish Parliament decided to replace 5 judges and to shorten the mandate of all the judges standing on the constitutional tribunal.

AB was recently appointed as the new Director of the *Department for Equal Treatment and protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* within the Human Rights Defender in Poland, and was warmly congratulated by Equinet in this context.

ELH: The new Equality and Non-Discrimination Ombud in Norway will take up office in mid-January 2016.

KL: Ombudswoman Spanou's mandate was abruptly terminated during autumn 2015 using a non-related law. Appointment of a new Ombudsman will depend on and require a strong majority in the Greek Parliament, currently an unlikely prospect.

PP: The Czech Republic is celebrating 10 years of OPCAT (the Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment) and the Public Defender or Rights' role as independent National Preventive Mechanism. Furthermore, the Czech Public Defender of Rights was involved in a 2-year project 'together towards good governance', coming to an end, which also addressed issues of under-reporting of discrimination.

FOLLOW-UP LAST EQUINET MEETINGS

Minutes Board Meeting 17 September 2015

DECISION: The Draft Minutes were approved and will be made available to Members on the restricted Members' section of the Equinet website.

Minutes Board Meeting post-AGM 9 October 2015

Board members discussed and reviewed the draft minutes of their first preliminary Board Meeting, immediately following the AGM and Board elections.

DECISION: The Draft Minutes were approved and will be made available to Members on the restricted Members' section of the Equinet website.

AGM feedback (evaluation forms)

PP: It would be useful to have brief reports from the discussion groups fed back into plenary as a recommendation for the future, and to work on ways to make the discussions livelier.

EQUINET GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Nomination of Equinet Treasurer

A note on the role of Equinet Treasurer was introduced to the Board. The Chair called for interest within the Board to take up this function.

PC volunteered to be Equinet Treasurer while underlining his limited experience of EU funding and grants per se, and limited availability in view of his new confirmed position as co-Director of the Belgian Centre.

DECISION: Unanimous Board endorsement of **PC** as Equinet Treasurer for the duration of the Board mandate.

Nomination of Equinet Board Conciliator

A note on the role of Board Conciliator was presented in the context of Equinet Staff Handbook and employment regulations. The Chair called for interest within the Board, underlining the relevance of experience in organizational and staff management. **ELH** volunteered to take up this role.

DECISION: Unanimous Board endorsement of **ELH** as the new Board Conciliator. An updated Equinet Staff Handbook 2016 will be circulated accordingly to Equinet staff members and board.

Board Advisor

A note on the role of Board Advisor was presented to the Board. The Chair asked for comment and consideration to be given to the content of the note.

Discussion focused on the valuable role played by a Board Advisor in past mandates, the pro-bono nature of the role and also the need for clarity in respect of the function to be carried out. It was suggested that it was first necessary to determine whether or not there was a need or added-value for such a role going forward and, if so, then to determine what sort of profile would be helpful for an Advisor and how best to secure such support.

DECISION: Board to discuss and make decision on the basis of a **revised proposal** for its next March meeting refining the profile and role of Advisor to the Board with a view to clarify any uncertainty about the role.

Working Group (WG) Moderators

Communication WG: There is still no confirmation of a new Moderator.

An expert staff member from the Norwegian Ombud's office has been approached and has shown interest. This will hopefully be confirmed soon and, if so, the proposed nomination will be presented to the Equinet Board for formal approval by email.

Board Elections Procedures – Group Allocation of Montenegro / new Member

DECISION: Montenegro was allocated to Geographical Cluster 2 under the Equinet Board elections procedure

ECo suggested that a first discussion on the current Board Elections Procedure should take place at the next Board meeting, to assess if any future improvements may be deemed useful or necessary. If so, a formal proposal (if any needed) for updated Board Elections procedure would then be envisaged for further discussion and consideration at the June Board Meeting.

Equinet External Evaluation 2015

All Members and selected stakeholders will be invited and encouraged to take part and provide feedback as part of a survey, which will be launched and managed by the expert evaluator (John Tierney, Transform Ltd) contracted by Equinet to conduct this work.

The external evaluation process is expected to be completed by the end of February, and its outcomes will be presented to the Board for consideration at its next meeting.

STRATEGIC ISSUES

EU engagement:

A note on EU positioning of NEBs was introduced to the Board providing an update of latest relevant engagement of Equinet and key work priorities at EU level.

The Board acknowledged this important area of Equinet work, and welcomed the note as a useful comprehensive overview of Equinet contribution and engagement in relevant EU priorities. **PC** suggested it would be useful for Board Members to relay this note for updated information and dissemination to relevant colleagues in their respective equality body.

Board discussion pointed to the need to pursue efforts as part of this important positioning of Equinet and Equality Bodies, and suggested to add in this overview note a specific link to the FRA, EP Chair of LIBE Committee, Equal Pay transparency and the Freedom of Movement Workers Directive (May transposition deadline).

DECISION: The Internal Note on Equinet EU Positioning will be updated accordingly and circulated to Board Members, for further internal dissemination as appropriate.

Follow-up Equinet Cluster on Standards for NEBs:

There are currently ongoing exchanges of views with a few members on this important work priority and Equinet is seeking clarification of issues raised. Therefore, it is proposed that the Board will be invited to further discuss and make decision on the follow-up of this work at its next meeting in early March, following clarifications received and full information to be in position to make decisions of next steps for this work.

PC and **SK** mentioned that they spontaneously co-hosted a small group discussion on the topic of standards for NEBs during the FRA Stakeholders Meeting, which included discussion on effectiveness and independence with FRA representatives as well as from the Ministry of Justice in Ireland (national liaison officer). Following this discussion, it may be helpful to consider a possible role for FRA in supporting this important work.

DECISION: Next steps and follow-up to the Equinet work on Standards will be put to Board discussion and decision at its March Board Meeting.

IMPLEMENTATION EQUINET WORK PROGRAMME 2015 / 2016

The Board was provided with updates and commented on the various activities and areas of work pursued by Equinet under its work programme implementation for the year 2015 as well as planning implementation of 2016 activities.

EQUINET MEMBERSHIP

Recent developments relating to national equality bodies and Equinet members were highlighted to the Board.

A particular mention of development in Belgium was made by **PC** pointing to the fact that the Flemish Ombudsman got some competence on gender and gender-related issue in Flanders (instead of the Belgian Institute).

UNAR situation

The Board also discussed recent developments and concerns relating to the situation of UNAR in Italy. It is important for Equinet to get a sense of how the EC is monitoring and may be reacting to the situation.

DECISION: Equinet should consider issuing a letter to Italy expressing concerns and seeking clarification about recent developments affecting UNAR in Italy.

== *The Chair closed the Board Meeting at 16:30* ==