Support to Administrative Territorial Reform
Steering Committee Meeting No. 1
January 16, 2014

Minutes of the Meeting

Participants:

1. Mr. Bledar Çuçi, Minister of State on Local Issues
2. Mr. Enea Hoti Advisor to the Minister of Local Issues (MoLI) and STAR Project Director
3. Ms. Yesim Oruc, UNDP Country Director
4. Ms. Lisa Fredriksson, Embassy of Sweden Head of Development Cooperation
5. Ms. Linda Gjermani, Embassy of Sweden, Programme Officer
6. Mr. Holger Tausch, Swiss Embassy/Swiss Cooperation Office, Director of Cooperation
7. Ms. Anne Savary, Swiss Embassy/Swiss Cooperation Office, Deputy Director of Cooperation
8. Ms. Elda Bagaviki, Swiss Embassy/Swiss Cooperation Office, National Programme officer,
9. Mr. Vladimir Malkaj Programme Officer, Regional Development & Environment Cluster
10. Ms. Suzana Cullufi, Democracy and Governance Specialist, USAID
11. Mr. Mark Ellingstad, USAID General Development Officer
12. Ms. Anila Shehu, STAR Project Coordinator

Agenda:

1. Progress to date on Administrative Territorial Reform and upcoming activities
2. Discussion, questions, and suggestions

Meeting Minutes

1. Progress and upcoming activities

As per the agenda, the Minister started with the opening remarks welcoming everybody present in the meeting. He highlighted that the main objective of the Steering Committee (SC) was to report on the latest development regarding the Administrative Territorial reform and the STAR project, as well as the planned activities for January - March 2014. He thanked all the donors present for their contribution and commitment in support of the reform and the project.

The Minister informed the participants that in close cooperation with experts they have worked for development of the criteria and methodology going to be used during the reform implementation. They have changed the strategy from introduction of the law (criteria and methodology included) to
the Parliament to creation of a bi-partisan Parliamentary committee, which is expected to ensure more consensus and participation of the opposition in the process.

In addition the Minister shared the idea of organizing a launching event for STAR project now that more donors are committed and the Chairman of the Parliament has already presented the idea of establishment of the committee in the Parliament.

**Action:** Technical secretariat will think of a date for the STAR Project launching event and share it with American, Swedish and Swiss embassies and UN Resident Coordinator to confirm.

STAR Project Director gave a presentation of the progress done so far, the expenditures and the activities planned for the first quarter of the year (Jan-March 2014). Please note that only the main issues are highlighted here; the PPP is attached to this report.

Below is a summary of the main activities accomplished to date:

- Draft criteria and methodology prepared (incl. concept of functional areas);
- Draft criteria and methodology shared with SC and donor community;
- Several meetings with national and international experts are organized about the reform;
- Recruitment of 4 staff in Technical Secretariat and two drivers completed. The staff is on board;
- Open vacancies for roster of national experts and regional coordinators;
- 16,570 $ is the total amount of expenditures to date.

During the first quarter of 2014 the project will focus on:

- Official launch of STAR project
- Recruitment of regional coordinators and Experts Group; starting functioning of Regional Committees
- Development of a communication strategy and action plan
- Starting of the public information campaign at national and local level
- Training of regional coordinators
- Design and develop handbooks for voluntary merging of local government units

2. **Discussions, Questions, and Suggestions**

The third sessions followed with discussions and questions that the participants had about the reform in general and the STAR progress and plan in particular. They were interested to know the proposed time for the STAR launching event and the role that they could play. According to the Minister the third week of January is a good time for the launching event. UNDP representative highlighted the fact that it is up to the Ministry and the Technical Secretariat to decide upon the level of the event’s organization (technical or high representation). Decision on the level conditions the participants and media participation. Hence, for both cases, no long speeches are recommended.

Swiss Cooperation representative confirmed Swiss participation in the project as this project fits with Swiss Cooperation objectives and development agenda for Albania.

The participants were interested to get more information about was the second level of local government and its future in the perspective of the Administrative Territorial Reform. Mister Çuçi informed the participants that 2 (two) groups of experts will be established, one will work on the first level of local government units (LGUs), and the other group will focus on second level of LGUs (Qarks). Regarding the second tier of LGUs changes in the Constitution are required only if changes are proposed about the way how Qark Councils are elected.
Participants raised the issue of the Electoral Code and system and the fact that how much they are going to be affected by the Administrative Territorial Reform. The Minister stated that the reform does not have any technical effect on the Electoral Code and system, but theoretically there might be political effect, because of the proportional system actually in use in Albania. As far as electoral administration is concerned, the electoral zones are not organized according to local government units, but according to the size (number of population) of the polling station, which will still be the case with the new territorial division.

Participants suggested that more should be done as far as visibility and transparency of the process is concerned. Opening and using of Facebook or twitter account would help distribution of information in real time.

**Action:** Upgrade the reform’s official webpage (www.reformaterritoriale.al) and open a Facebook and Twitter account. Concrete ideas about communication strategy will be discussed during the workshop planned for next week.

Regarding the potential expansion the opening of the Steering Committee with other international actors namely OSCE Presence in Tirana and CoE Office in Tirana, participants agreed to consider them as (observing) members as they are not financial contributors to the pooled fund but support operations that need to be closely coordinated with the STAR supported operations; other international actors could be invited when relevant topics/issues will be discussed. The idea is to keep the SC small in order to move fast, focus on technical operations and be flexible when necessary. Other broader issues related to TAR associated reforms will be addressed in the framework of the Sector Working Group.

Prepared by:

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