Support to Administrative Territorial Reform
Steering Committee Meeting No. 3
June 18, 2014

Minutes of the Meeting

Participants:
1. Mr. Bledar Çuçi, Minister of State on Local Issues (joining during the lat session)
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. Elda Bagaviki, Swiss Embassy/Swiss Cooperation Office, National Programme officer,
8. Mr. Vladimir Malkaj Programme Officer, Regional Development & Environment Cluster
9. Ms. Suzana Cullufi, Democracy and Governance Specialist, USAID
10. Mr. Mark Ellingstad, USAID General Development Officer
11. Mr. Andrea Senatori, Italian Cooperation
12. Ismail Ademi, Italian Cooperation, Programme Manager
13. Mr. Marco Leidehher, Council of Europe
14. Ms. Anila Shehu, STAR Project Coordinator

Agenda:
15. Short briefing on TAR/ STAR progress
16. Presentation of revised version of STAR prodoc
17. Questions/discussions

Meeting Minutes

1. **Progress to date on Administrative Territorial Reform and upcoming activities**

Enea Hoti, the advisor of the Minister of Local Issues started with the opening remarks welcoming everybody present in the meeting. He highlighted that the main objective of that Steering Committee (SC) was to reports on the latest development regarding the Administrative and Territorial Reform and presentation of the revised project document with a special focus on the transition period. He thanked all the donors present for their contribution and commitment in support of the reform and the project.

He continued with a brief presentation on the progress made so far regarding the Administrative Territorial Reform. He informed the participants that during the reporting period the work of the
Minister and Technical Secretariat focused mainly on public consultations about the reform considering that as important and necessary for better decision making on the new territorial division.

He highlighted that technical secretariat continued with public consultations in Vlora, Fier, Shkoder and Durres regions. Representatives from local government units, different institutions and citizens participated in those events. These consultations have been followed by another round this time organized by 4 NGOs hired by STAR project. Partners Albania, Institute for Public and private Polices, Urban Institute and Konfindustria are the four contracted NGOs. They have already started the consultations in the 12 regions of the country. Konfindustria operates at national level. Parallel to public consultations, the awareness campaign has continued to be aggressive with broadcasting of the TV and radio spots in most attended TV channels such Top channel, Klan, Vision plus, News 24, Ora news. IDRA, the contracting company for the national survey has finalized the methodology and have already started implementation of the survey in all the regions of the country. 180 interviews are trained on how to best handle the interview and transfer data for further elaboration.

2. Presentation of revised version of STAR prodoc

Vladimir Malkaj, programme officer in UNDP highlighted during his presentation that as the reform was progressing according to plans, there was an increasing need to review the whole STAR project and detail the next phase of practical implementation of the reform in each local government unit. For this reason, the STAR project underwent a substantial revision in May and prepared a revised STAR project document.

Vladimir explained that that document provides sufficient details pertaining to the transition phase and proposes a roadmap for LGUs to immediately engage in the implementation of the reform. As per the revised document, the transition phase would require a detailed assessment and knowledge of the current LGUs‘ situation in terms of human, physical and institutional assets, liabilities, relationships with third parties, etc. and the development of a phased action plan to transfer those responsibilities to the new larger LGUs, with due considerations on the human resources (loss of public jobs, redundancy, re-orientation), financial resources (costs of relocation, physical adaptation, etc.) and legal aspects (contracts, liabilities, management of local public enterprises, etc).

The STAR substantial revision implied also revisiting the overall project cost estimate to reflect the actual expenditures (which were generally contained within the original estimates) as well as make a more detailed forecasts of the transition / implementation costs.

3. Discussions, Questions, and Suggestions

Participants were interested to know about the system developed by TS of the opinions/feedback/questions provided by citizens during public consultations.

Enea explained that the three hired organizations are entitled to answer to most frequent questions about which they are 100% sure of the answer. For issues related directly to new proposed territorial division, they are asked to record them and make them part of the final reports delivered to Technical secretariat. Technical secretariat receives all the questions, proposals and presents them to the ad-hoc parliamentary commission for consideration. The same will account for the answers/proposal coming from LGUs and their respective councils.
Based on the experience of Himara, it is recommended that the presentations of the NGOs to focus more on the benefit of the merging communities from the reform rather than on the importance of the reform itself.

Participants were also interested to know about the remaining STAR financial gap. Vladimir explained that with Italian government’s contribution in the basket there is still 1.1 million unfunded.

The participants highlighted the fact that now that discussion of the law on TAR in the parliament is getting closer, the government and MLI need to focus on decentralization of LG and legal changes accompanying these processes.

When discussing about reaching of a consensus with the opposition regarding territorial and administrative reform, the participants were informed of a consultation meeting planned to be organized by the Association of Communes with the support of Democratic Party. The participants appreciated the idea of MLI, PC and TS representatives participating in the event. The minister Cuci highlighted that DP and other interested associations and groups are welcomed to provide their own options but they have to follow the government’s agenda and not create a separate agenda for the same issue.

Conclusions:

- Endorsement of the revised STAR project document and budget