



“SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS SUPPORT PROGRAMME”

SISP(2005)1SCFINREP

**1st MEETING OF THE REGIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE
18 March 2005, Skopje**

MEETING REPORT

Working Language: English

1. Opening of the meeting

Mr. John Murray, Head of the Social Policy Department, Directorate General for Social Cohesion (DGIII), opened the first meeting of the regional Steering Committee (SC) of the CARDS Social Institutions Support Programme (SISP) by welcoming the participants. The annotated Agenda of the meeting and the List of participants appear in Appendix I and II. He informed the Committee that Mrs. Radojko, representative from Serbia and Montenegro could not be present due to travel problems.

As far as the management of the SISP is concerned, Mr. Murray informed the SC members that an internal transfer of responsibilities is presently taking place in both the Council of Europe and the European Commission. Within DGIII, Mr. Sixto Molina has taken over the responsibility from Mr. Adrian Evtuhovici. The Secretariat will inform the SC members as soon as the successor of Mr. Joaquim Silva Rodrigues is appointed within the Enlargement Division of the EC. Mr. Murray welcomed the presence of Mr. Nafi Saracini, representative of the EU Delegation in “The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”.

Mr. Murray highlighted the importance of the Programme by pointing out that the CARDS office in Skopje constitutes the first “field office” of the Directorate General for Social Cohesion (DG III) of the Council of Europe.

He recalled that the contribution of the Steering Committee members is essential for the success of the Programme. He therefore invited the participants to:

- provide the Local Project Officers with information that will enable detailed description of the social security system in their countries, as specified in the Action Plan;
- concentrate on concrete results to be achieved by the Programme.

2. Schedule of rotation of chair of Steering Committee meetings

Mr. Murray proposed a rotating chair of the Steering Committee’s meetings. The Committee adopted the criteria followed by other Committees of the Council of Europe, namely English alphabetic order of the countries concerned. The representative from the Republic of Albania, Mr. Spartak Mersini, was thus appointed chairman of the first meeting of the Steering Committee, and led the meeting from this point onward.

3. Terms of Reference of the Regional Steering Committee

Mr. Mersini requested the participants to adopt the Terms of Reference as set out in the Programme’s Action Plan. The Terms of Reference were adopted without discussion. It was also agreed that the Steering Committee will decide by simple majority of the votes of the members present at each meeting.

Mrs. Serifa Godinjak, representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina, thanked the Council of Europe Secretariat for the work done so far and expressed her hope that the Programme's goals will be achieved. She also expressed her hope that the Programme will successfully address the specific issues and problems facing her country, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Aco Jovanovski, representative of "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", welcomed the guests and highlighted the importance of this Programme, especially since there are very few projects on regional level.

4. CARDS-SISP Action Plan

Mr. Heimo Heringa, CARDS Team Leader, introduced the work plan to the participants stressing the three main objectives to be achieved:

- Clarity - clarifying the social rights of the citizens of the countries involved in the Programme;
- Improving access to information about both rights to social security, and to the benefits themselves;
- Broaden the involvement of the beneficiary countries' citizens in social policy and social security issues.

He underlined that due to the Programme's limited resources, as well as because of the involvement of other international organisations in certain social security areas, some issues cannot or will not be tackled, such as automation and computerisation of social security administrations.

Regarding pension reform, which is part of the Programme's objectives, duplication of activities undertaken by other agencies must be avoided. The Programme's activities in this area must therefore be carefully planned and aligned with projects funded by other international and bilateral agencies.

Mr. Heringa informed that the Secretariat took note that one of the main issues raised during the preliminary contacts with the stakeholders of the Region was decentralisation. Nevertheless, due to its limited resources, the Programme cannot undertake decentralisation-oriented activities (e.g. training of municipalities' social security staff). Bearing this in mind, the Secretariat is presently evaluating the possibility to involve other agencies. As a result of the decentralisation process, responsibilities for social security issues will be transferred from central level to regional and local authorities. This necessitates training and other support to the local administration. Activities to that effect will require additional funding.

He underlined that the enhancement of social dialogue should be one of the main focuses of the Programme, in particular by involving social security 'stakeholders' in regional networks, and by mobilising experts from the European Union, or from the region.

Mr. Heringa indicated that all the governments of the CARDS countries are committed, as Council of Europe member states, to produce MISSCEO tables. The latter tables provide answers for specific issues but do not provide an over-all picture of the social security system in each country. The support of the SC members will therefore be required to allow the Local Project Officers to collect the information necessary for such a comprehensive overview.

Mr. Heringa concluded by emphasising that the Steering Committee constitutes the body through which the participating countries may ensure that the Programme address the issues of importance to each of them.

5. Proposal summer school

The key experts Mr. Danny Pieters and Mr. Paul Schoukens, European Institute of Social Security (EISS), pointed out that one of the vital activities for enhancing regional coordination and creating networks of social security actors is the summer school, which will be organised every year during the Programme. Five to six people per country would be invited to participate, of whom roughly 50% will be civil servants and 50% representatives of 'stakeholders' in social security. Every year new people will be attending the school. At the end of the Programme, each country will have around 15 experts trained in the major areas and issues of social security,

Mr. Nino Zganec, representative of Croatia, proposed experts from the Region to be included as trainers. Mr. Paul Schoukens and Mr. Danny Pieters supported the idea of including local experts, however they underlined that the selection and preparation of local trainers is a quite time consuming exercise which can hardly be performed before the first summer school. They therefore recommended that in the second summer school roughly 1/3 of the teachers could be from the region, and in the third summer school up to 1/2 of the teachers could be regional experts. This does not mean, however, that all countries will be expected to contribute equal numbers of experts as trainers.

Mr. Heringa invited the participants to propose experts as possible summer school teachers for the second and third year's summer schools.

Mr. Schoukens and Mr. Pieters underlined the importance of the final examination (which would be in oral and written form). The aim of the exam is to test whether and if so to what extent the participants have understood and assimilated the information given by the experts during the school. Each successful participant in the school will receive a certificate, signed by the faculty involved, as well as by the SISP Team Leader and by a representative of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

The committee adopted the principle of an exam to conclude the summer school.

Mr. Schoukens and Mr. Pieters explained the three different options for the summer school's set out in the Action plan.

Option 1

Compulsory units (4)	1)History and basic concepts of social security
	2) Social security comparison and social security systems in Europe
	3)European integration and social security
	4/5) Aspects of Social security economics and social policy
Optional units (3 out of 4)	6)Social Security Management
	7)IT and social security
	8)European co-ordination law
	9)Social protection philosophy
Seminar	
Exam	

Option 2

Compulsory units	1)History and basic concepts of social security
	2) Social security comparison and social security systems in Europe
	3)European integration and social security
	4)Social security economics
	5)Social policy
	6/7)Aspects of Social Security Management and Informatics
Seminar 1	
Seminar 2	
Exam	

Option 3

Compulsory units	1)History and basic concepts of social security
	2) Social security comparison and social security systems in Europe
	3)European integration and social security
	4)Social security economics
	5)Social policy
Optional unit (1 out of 2)	2 units to be determined by Steering Committee out of following 4: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 6)Social Security Management - 7)IT and social security - 8)European co-ordination law - 9)Social protection philosophy
Seminar	
Test/ Examination	

The participants were asked to state which option they prefer for the first summer school.

The representatives from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo preferred option 1, while the representatives from Croatia and “The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” were more interested in option 3. The ensuing discussion focused on the questions (1) how many seminars will be held during the summer school, in order to give participants more opportunities to discuss and compare their experience, and (2) how many topics participants may choose from, out of a list of optional topics. During the discussion, Mr. Danny Pieters proposed an option 4, which combines elements of the first and the third option, meaning that 5 compulsory courses are given (economics and policy given in separate units and not in a combined one) and that 4 courses are given as option out of which participants have to choose. This proposal appeared to meet general approval.

No decision about this point was taken, however, it was agreed that the Steering Committee members will inform the Secretariat about their preference by 2nd of April at the latest.

Mr. Heringa informed the participants that the first summer school would take place from 22 August until 2 September, most likely in Ohrid. The regional office of the Council of Europe in Skopje will send out registration forms to the candidates. The SISP Local Project Officers will be expected to attend the first summer school. Regarding the other participants roughly half will be civil servants and the other half will be representatives of ‘stakeholders’, such as trade unions, employers’ associations, law faculties, etc. Specific information will be needed in order to select the most appropriate candidates, such as present function and language capacity, together with a CV and a letter of motivation.

6. Further activities to be undertaken under the CARDS-SISP programme

Mr. John Murray emphasised the importance of data collection and the virtual library in the SISP programme, and requested the members of the SC to submit their written comments, a/o with the respect to the form and content of the first summer school, to the SISP office in Skopje within the following two weeks.

The participants were informed about the Social Security Co-ordination training seminar, organised by Mr. Sixto Molina (Administrator – Social Policy Department, Directorate General Social Cohesion, Council of Europe), which is taking place in Sarajevo, 23-25 June. In the framework, and from the budget, of the CARDS-SISP programme, the Local Project Officers will be invited to attend this training, as well an extra representative of each SISP country, in addition to the one representative from each CoE member country already invited by the Directorate General for Social Cohesion – DG III. A draft programme of this training as well as the registration form will be sent out as soon as possible.

7. Other matters raised by Steering Committee members

There were no other issues raised.

8. Calendar of future SC meetings

It was agreed that the next Steering Committee meeting will take place on 2 September, most likely in Ohrid.

9. Closure.

The chairman, Mr. Mersini, concluded the meeting, thanking the Steering Committee members for their participation and their contributions to the discussion. He finally stated that the members of the SC would take an active role in the Programme and fully support the Local Project Officers.

Appendix I

AGENDA

Meeting of the CARDS SISP Steering Committee March 18th, 2005, Skopje

Starting time of the meeting 9.00 a.m, at the sitting room of the ARKA hotel (7th floor)

1. Schedule of rotation of chair of Steering Committee meetings.
2. Terms of Reference CARDS-SISP Steering Committee.
3. CARDS-SISP Work Plan.
4. Proposal Summer School.
5. Further activities to be undertaken under the CARDS-SISP programme.
6. Other matters raised by Steering Committee members.
7. Calendar of future SC meetings.
8. Closure.

Supporting documents:

- i. Letter of invitation.
- ii. Draft ToR Steering Committee CARDS-SISP programme
- iii. CARDS-SISP Action Plan
- iv. Proposal Summer School
- v. Further Activities – agenda item 5
- vi. CARDS Social Sector Strategic Study, final report, January 2005, front page, pages 41 – 92 (not included, to be printed & provided at the meeting).

Appendix II

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

ALBANIA

Mr. Spartak MERSINI

Director of Directorate for International Relations and Cooperation
Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

Ms. Mirela SELITA

Local Project Officer
Social Insurance Institute

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Mrs. Serifa GODINJAK

Head of Department for Health, Social Protection and Pensions
Co-ordinator of the Working Group of Social Cohesion
Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Mr. Almir KOLENDA

Local Project Officer

Ms. Jasmina OBARCANIN

Local Project Officer

CROATIA

Doc. dr.sc. Nino ZGANEC

State Secretary
Ministry of Health and Social Welfare

Mr. Mihovil RISMONDO

Local Project Officer
Croatian Pension Insurance Institute

SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO

Mr. Milos NIKAC

Local Project Officer
Republican Fund for Pension and Invalidity Insurance of Self-employed

“THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA”

Mr. Aco JANEVSKI

State Secretary
Ministry of Labour and Social Policy

KOSOVO

Mr. Stacy S. LAMON, Ph.D.

OIC, Principal International Officer
acting Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
Provisional Institutions of Self-Government
United Nations Mission in Kosovo

Mr. Gazmend AHMETI

Local Project Officer
Institute for Development Research- Riinvest

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Mr. Nafi SARACINI

Advisor – Civil Society
Delegation of the European Commission
Skopje

EXPERTS

Prof. Danny PIETERS

European Institute of Social Security (EISS)
Belgium

Prof. Dr. Paul SCHOUKENS

European Institute of Social Security (EISS)
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SECRETARIAT

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