

Summary of Minutes

1st Advisory Board Meeting

11-12 November 2008, Athens, Greece

Preface

Wednesday 12 November 2008 saw the successful conclusion of the inaugural meeting of the Advisory Board of the Regional Centre for Public Administration Reform (RCPAR). It followed a brief meeting of the Steering Committee on Tuesday 11 November, which was held in the presence of Professor Prokopis Pavlopoulos, Minister of Interior, and Secretary-General Vassilios Andronopoulos representing the Government of the Hellenic Republic, and the counterpart Agency, and of the Director of the United Nations Development Programme Bratislava Regional Centre (UNDP/BRC) and Deputy Regional Director for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, Jens Wandel.

Advisory Board meeting

“Your counterparts in Greece are ready to be of help”. This was also the thrust of the message of Mr. Andronopoulos at the start of the first meeting of the Board of Advisers, which followed on the heels of the Steering Committee meeting. The Secretary-General emphasized the extent to which the programme goals of RCPAR converged with major objectives of the administrative reforms for which his own Department had taken responsibility over the last years.

For his part, Mr. Wandel invited the Board members to deliberate on an appropriate strategy for the use of new technologies and business solutions in promoting the objectives of the Project. He encouraged the Advisory Board members to provide guidance on the extent to which the Project should be aggressive in its use of innovative solutions, or instead use a gradual approach, which may be more appropriate for the geographical area and targeted stakeholders.

Before taking their leave, the BRC Director and the Secretary-General were introduced to the members of the Advisory Board¹. Only one member, Christos Hadjiemmanouil, was unable to attend and excused himself from the meeting.

¹ For a full overview of current members and their bio notes, please see <http://www.rcpar.org/public/rw/pages/advisors.en.do>

Presentation of the Project

As the agenda of meeting shows, the first item was an elaboration of the presentation which had already been made by Dan Dionisie, Acting Democratic Governance Leader / AC-PAR Policy Specialist, and Panos Liverakos, RCPAR Team Leader, in the Minister's presence at the Steering Committee meeting. It covered the following topics:

- historical background of the RCPAR Project;
- the five-year Project;
- structure of the Project;
- web portal and virtual workspaces;
- current state and future development of the Network of Focal Points; and
- activities, outputs and outcomes.

The mode was interactive, with frequent questions and comments from members of the Board during the presentation. The discussion shed ample light on the origins, the background, scope, identity and orientation of the Project that mark its specificity and added value for the region as a whole.

The features of the Project which generated interest and thus received attention were:

- the *demand-driven* approach, often invoked in programmes of technical cooperation, but hard to put into practice. To give it substance, the management of BRC and the RCPAR staff in Athens have invested heavily, over the past two years, in an in-depth review of country needs, priorities and policy objectives. They also paid attention to the identification of *focal points* for the creation of networks targeting special profiles with a view to the development of a vibrant community of practice;
- the stress on the inherent *flexibility* in the Project, which fosters cooperation based on a common past, but also similar challenges, shared interests and prospects;
- the *regional* dimensions in spite of the complexities due to the size and diversity of the region;
- reliance on regional *talents and expertise*, among other means through a Roster of Experts. The Roster is actively promoted in order to gather a critical mass of experts, whose expertise may be utilized for demand-driven activities of the Project in the countries of the region;
- reliance on *information technology* to engage groups of practitioners and scholars in online deliberations, exchange of information, targeted co-operation, and the establishment of partnerships;
- emphasis on *partnerships* on both pragmatic grounds, to maximize returns on scarce resources, and to optimize results through the creative *synergies of sister organizations* operating in the same geographical area and kindred fields.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)/Support for Improvement in Governance and Management Programme (SIGMA), the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the International Training Centre of the International

Labour Organisation (ITC/ILO), the Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA) and the Network of Institutes and Schools of Public Administration in Central and Eastern Europe (NISPAcee) were all mentioned in the context of RCPAR's partnership strategy.

Thematic pillars and multi-country proposals

The four thematic pillars identified by RCPAR as representing the principal areas of interest for cooperation among the countries in the region are:

- Policy-making and coordination;
- Public finance management;
- Public sector organization and staffing; and
- Public service delivery.

It was stipulated that the thematic pillars may be revisited at a later stage if this is deemed necessary to better meet regional demand. Discussion at the meeting revealed a strong sense of the relative importance of these four thematic pillars, as well as a consensus regarding the modalities of programme implementation. To encourage cooperation among countries with common concerns, the participation of a minimum of three countries has been decided as a base on which activities can be developed.

A number of other criteria have been developed and outlined in detail in the “*Guidelines for Multi-Country Proposals*”². The need for clear results and monitoring frameworks was particularly emphasized. Discussion on criteria revealed a broad consensus in favour of securing sponsor resource commitment in the participating countries, for greater sustainability of outcomes.

Considering the fact that activities shall be demand-driven, it was suggested to disseminate information on the RCPAR Project widely within the region and to generate a momentum, which, over time, would elicit requests for multi-country activities. It was underlined that the generation of multi-country initiatives is a two stage process, starting with an expression of interest (*proposal template*) to be reviewed and approved by the RCPAR management before the detailed plan (*activity plan template*) is developed.

Network of National Coordinators and Focal Points

The role of National Coordinators and Focal Points was discussed in this connection. The network represents a key component of the RCPAR Project and a critical pre-requisite of its demand-driven character.

² The detailed guidelines can be found at <http://www.rcpar.org/public/rw/news/item245.en.do>

The question of the nature and role of the National Coordinators occasioned some discussion; it was clarified that, in most countries, the unit or body in charge of coordinating PAR will normally assume the function of National Coordinator, and that the selection of National Coordinators and Focal Points is based on a thorough process of exploration and cross-checking of information. Recognizing that some countries may have limited capacity, the Centre will put in place measures to strengthen the abilities of network members, while at the same time, providing strong professional accompaniment in the form of thematic Network Coordinators, facilitating the communication between members and challenging them in the process of formulating proposals.

The Centre envisages a process whereby the UNDP County Offices (COs) will provide the programming experience in the local context; the National Coordinators will check proposals against national policies; ex ante controls will be performed by the RCPAR team and UNDP COs; and additional input could be solicited from Advisory Board members. It was pointed out that the Centre is willing to accept a less than 100% success rate and that the basic question is whether one has the mechanisms to know if something has worked or not.

Online workspaces

The Advisory Board also looked into the effectiveness of networks and the quality, relevance, user-friendliness, utility and versatility of the RCPAR website and workspace. Based on the experience of existing UNDP platforms, Dan Dionisie pointed out that the main challenge was to get the people to use the facility. Consequently, there is a need to engage network members and capture their attention, among other during face-to-face meetings and training. Board members emphasized the importance of being able to operate the website in several regional languages, with a flexible modular structure so as to make it possible to expand its outreach. It was noted that the purpose and rationale behind each workspace varies and that it may be possible to create something tailor-made (for example for students to have access to documents), while others will be open to members only, allowing network members to comfortably share working documents which may not necessarily be made public.

The role of the Advisory Board

The debate of the AB role during the meeting's first day yielded the following needs, which members of the AB would be in a position to meet:

- To act as “sounding-board” on project proposals, ideas and possible future development of RCPAR coming from BRC and/or the Centre in Athens;
- To help mobilizing potential co-sponsors of activities, developing new partnerships with kindred institutions, exploring possibilities for co-financing

and, in a general manner, acting as the RCPAR's Ambassadors-at-large in the region and beyond;

- To contribute to the development and review of four strategy papers, corresponding to the four thematic pillars of the Project;
- To assist in reaching out and generating demand for multi-country activities;
- To act as a "think-tank", providing targeted inputs of technical advice; complements of information and substantive know-how in all the major sectors of the RCPAR's area of competence.

All of these various roles have already been outlined in the established Terms of Reference for the Advisory Board. The Centre's management stressed that the Advisory Board will not be used as a substitute for management and that the Board's intervention is expected to be mainly on the strategic levels, and in technical expertise.

Future meeting dates

Advisory Board members were given advance warning of likely activities in 2009 and asked to block the following dates:

- **29 March – 4 April**
- **26 – 31 October**

More information on the events will be forwarded to the Board members well in advance. All Board members endorsed the idea that for future meetings, a few lines on what the members ought to be looking at or thinking about should be circulated together with the meeting agenda.

The meeting was concluded at 12.00 with words of thanks for the hosts.