SECRETARIAT MEETING NOTES

E-MEETING WITH OGP REPRESENTATIVES ON PROGRESS OF THE OGP PROCESS

OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP (OGP)

Place: Hosted by the Office of the Prime Minister virtually

Date: 17.09.2020

Subject: Progresson the newAction Plan 2020-2022

Headed: Department of Development and Good Governance, Prime Minister's Office

Annexes:

Annex 1: Attendance of the Meeting

Annex 2: Operational Conclusions

Annex 3: Meeting Agenda

I. Issue 1:OpeningRemarks andDiscussion:

The co-chair of the meeting, Ms.Evis Qaja, began by welcoming Ms. Sandra Pernar, Senior Regional Coordinator Europe, and Mr. Andreas Pavlou, Senior Research Officer, Europe, Open Government Partnership (OGP henceforth) to the meeting. Ms.Pernar emphasized the importance of Albania's New Action Plan 2020-2022 (NAP henceforth) being in line with OGP requirements. The objective of this meeting was to present the OGP NAP 2020-2022 process.

Ms.OrianaArapi, the other co-chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting. She expressed hope that this meeting would take note of the progress achieved on the NAP, and would lead to recommendations for an even better process. Ms.Oriana stressed that while the Department of Development and Good Governance (DD&GG) is the technical secretariat for the NAP process, each Lead Focal Point (LFP henceforth) is responsible for their respective components- both content and consultation process (that includes identifying and reaching out to relevant stakeholders). Ms.Oriana also highlighted the sectorial approach followed through the Integrated Policy Management Group (IPMG henceforth) in the planning process in Albania.

The representative to the Deputy Prime Minister (the Political Coordinator for the OGP Process), Ms. Entela Erebara, expressed that Albania Government is strongly supporting OGP values and remains committed to its mission to a better governance based on transparency, communication and accountability. Deputy Prime Minister as political coordinator has supported and promoted OGP values. He is committed on the process and all the support is given in order to fulfill OGP recommendations and create an action plan in line with OGP standards.

Ms. Evis further stressed on the political support extended by the Cabinet and the Deputy Prime Minister towards the NAP, despite it being testing times for Albania because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the earthquake in November 2019. Albania is keen to show that it has dedicated priority action to the NAP process after having learned lessons from the previous OGP cycles, and looks forward to collaboration and co-creation of the NAP with the government and other relevant stakeholders- including but not limited to Civil Society Organizations (CSOs henceforth), academic institutions, development partners, citizens etc.

II. *Issues Discussed according to the Agenda*

Issue 2:Progress on Drafting the New Action Plan (NAP) 2020-2022

The presentation began with a brief background of the NAP policy goals/ components, their respective sub-components and LFPs for each component. These are:

Component I: Open Government for Access to Justice

- Sub-components: 1) Accessibility; 2) Transparency and Accountability.
- LFP: Ministry of Justice/ Policy Directorate

Component II: Open Government for Digital Governance / Public Services

- Sub-components: 1) Online/ Electronic Services; 2) Public Services.
- LFPs: National Agency for the Information Society (NAIS) and Agency for the Delivery of Integrated Services Albania (ADISA)

Component III: Open Government for Fiscal Transparency

- Sub-components: 1) Budget Transparency; 2) Transparency of Revenue Sources.
- LFP: Ministry of Finance & Economy

Component IV: Open Government for the Fight against Corruption

- Sub-components: 1) Beneficial Ownership; 2) Integrity Plans.
- LFPs: Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Finance & Economy.

The process of the NAP thus far can be divided into the following steps:

1) **Identification of policy goals** based on national, sectorial and cross-cutting strategies;
2) **Consolidation of methodological package** that comprises of the structure of the Action Plan, methodological guide towards drafting the Action Plan, calendar for the

Action Plan, OGP proposed templates towards OGP objectives impacted by the proposed policy goal(s) and brief on the OGP process;

3) **Initiation of the New Action Plan (NAP) 2020-2022** with sharing of the consolidated methodological package along with the official letter from the Deputy Prime Minister declaring the commencement of the new OGP cycle for Albania;

4) **Webinar workshop with LFPs** towards further guidance on the process and clarification of doubts and concerns, if any;

5) **Online pre-consultation phase(identification of priorities for the NAP)** which involved preparation and publication of survey instrument by each LFP and identification of list of relevant CSOs, both of which have been **published on the OGP Albania website.**

   It is important to note that more than **335 organizations were contacted** to elicit feedback on the survey instrument(s) prepared. LFPs wise, Ministry of Justice contacted 211 organizations on Access to Justice component and 34 organizations on Fight against Corruption component. ADISA contacted 44 organizations on Digital Governance component and the Ministry of Finance & Economy elicited feedback from over 50 organizations;

6) **Pre-consultation packages and prioritization package templates** have been shared with LFPs and feedback sought. These will be published on the OGP website once finalized.

7) **The Consultations reports for this phase also will be published on the OGP website as a feedback report with the CSO and citizens.**

The underlying objective of this participatory process with strict feedback loops has been to **ensure co-creation of the NAP** with government and other relevant stakeholders, including but not limited to civil society organizations, development partners, academic institutions and ordinary citizens. Further steps will involve civil society through the Integrated Sectorial Approach and Integrated Policy Management, Thematic Groups and also Sectorial Steering Committees in accordance with the order of the Prime Minister which includes government actors and other external actors, actors of independent institutions, civil society members and development and integration partners.

The last segment of the presentation dealt with **feedback received from the LFPs on the pre-consultation process**.

Specific Objectives identified by the Ministry of Justice, for the Access to Justice Component:
1) Access to justice is guaranteed and is **in line with national laws as well as European standards and best practices**;
2) The functioning and capacities of the Ministry of Justice have been strengthened in the areas of **transparency and accountability**.

Specific Objectives identified by ADISA, for the Digital Governance component:
1) Establishment of **Integrated Service Centers (ISC's)**;
2) **Monitoring the quality of Public Service Delivery** at ADISA ISC's and service counters.

Specific Objectives identified by the Ministry of Finance & Economy, for Fiscal Transparency component:

1) **Government National Accounts:** Timely and reliable government financial statistics;

2) **Financial Performance Monitoring and Reporting:** Published in year and annual financial reports contain accessible financial and non-financial performance information;

3) **Citizens' Engagement:** Formal opportunities are provided for the public to engage in the planning and execution of the budget;

4) **Accounting:** Accounting follows appropriate International Public Sector Accounting Standards;

5) **Fiscal Risk Management:** Strengthen financial oversight and management of the fiscal risks;

6) **Improved Assets Management:** Preparation and publication of the full asset registry of public sector, based on the improved regulations for the valuation and inventory of these assets.

Specific Objective identified by the Ministry of Justice, for Fight against Corruption component:

1) **Integrity plans** have been identified thus ensuring a link between this action plan and the Cross-cutting Anti-Corruption Strategy and its action plan, 2020-2023, an essential instrument in the fight against corruption in public administration.

Q&A

Ms. Sandra Perner raised the question on **how the policy goals were identified for the NAP**. Ms.Evis responded that the policy goals reflect the priorities that have been identified during the mid-term evaluation and sectorial monitoring report conducted by respective line ministries wherein the monitoring reports were produced at the sectorial levels. Moreover, these policy goals are aligned with the lessons learned from the previous OGP cycles, and also signify the future priorities and commitments of the government. Ms Oriana further underlined that the OGP policy goals are not detached from the National Action Plans, Sector and Cross-cutting Strategies like the National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI).

Ms. Sandra Perner further clarified as to **who conducted the aforementioned mid-term evaluation**. Ms. Evis explained that there were two levels at which the evaluations were carried out: a) at the sectorial level by the respective line ministries through the monitoring reports, and b) at the National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI) level, which had an umbrella scope. In addition, after these internal evaluations, these sectorial reports were also assessed by experts from public administration or other independent institutions, CSOs in the respective sectors, and development partners.

Issue 3: Methodological Novelties for Albania's New Action Plan 2020-2022

The presentation began with an overview of the main methodological interventions introduced for Albania's NAP 2020-2022:

- Increased involvement of CSOs throughout the process

- Pre-Consultation Phase with CSOs and the public

- Feedback Mechanism

- Transparency of Process via the OGP website.

These interventions are being supported through the development and use of the following tools:

1. Consultation Guidance and Reports

2. Stakeholder Engagement Package

3. OGP Commitment Idea Prioritization Support

1. **Consultation Guidance and Reports**

   The LFP have each been provide with consultation guidance and accompanying consultation report templates and are required to produce structured reports following each consultative initiative.

   - **Reports are to be delivered using structured template** that outlines the methodology used for engagement in detail, the main results, identifies shortcomings and outlines next steps

   - **Focus on evidence of engagement**/ emphasis on **identifying areas for improvement** regarding engagement and identification of areas where to improve engagement that can be addressed ahead of the next stages

   - Will identify preliminary areas for focus and priority for the action

   - **Each report will be published**

   - Provides means of **on-going feedback for improvement** as it relates to stakeholder engagement

   Examples from the pre-consultative reports submitted by the LFPs were provided including: Survey design; Stakeholder engagement levels and areas for improvement; Initial findings from stakeholders; LFP preparations for the next phase.

   Additionally, the presentation discussed upcoming workshops with the LFPs to support the next phase of the OGP process.

2. **Stakeholder Engagement Package**

   This section of the presentation outlined the stakeholder engagement packages designed for citizens and CSOs to facilitate their informed and engaged contribution to the co-creation process. This package includes the following:

   - **OGP Brief for Stakeholders** that outlines the role, purpose and processes of the OGP and the importance of collaboration between government, civil society and stakeholders in creating Open Government Action Plans. The overall aim is to incentivize civic participation and buy in to the OGP process by emphasizing the credibility of the process and emphasizing the intention towards meaningful and legitimate collaboration with civil society and accountability of the process to an independent international authority.

- **Policy Goal Brief** aims to facilitate stakeholder understanding of the overall issue of the particular policy goal proposed and how OGP principles and processes can help address issue. The brief includes:
  - Potential Thematic Priorities of the Policy Goal
  - OGP Recommendations (general and COVID-19 specific)
  - Policy Goal Principles and the Role of Public Participation
  - Commitment Examples (general and COVID-19 specific)
- **Stakeholder Idea Submission Template** that enables stakeholders to submit their ideas outside of consultative meetings. This template provides an opportunity for stakeholders to:
  - Highlight/describe any issue or challenge they believe should be considered a priority for improving open governance for the particular policy goal;
  - Propose and outline any solutions or ideas they have towards improving open governance;
  - Understand the framework in which ideas will be evaluated.

3. **Idea Prioritization Support**

This final section of the presentation outlined the support to LFPs to facilitate an accountable and transparent means of selecting ideas for inclusion in the action plan. All ideas proposed MUST be included and stakeholders will be provided with this list to ensure no submitted idea was exempt from evaluation. EVERY proposed idea will be scored using criteria template in order to ensure that all inputs from civil society are taken into consideration and ensure a transparent and fair evaluation, assessment and selection of ideas. **Lead focal points may add additional criteria to the template so long as the inclusion is explained and conducted in a consistent and transparent manner.** The framework template was presented, along with excerpts from the prioritization guidance that outlines the ways in which LFPs may adjust the criteria while also ensuring transparency.

Q&A

Ms. Sandra Perner wanted to know **what questions were asked in the survey instruments developed by the LFPs in the pre-consultation phase**, and what purpose did these serve. Ms.Evisexplained that the primary objective of the survey instruments was to facilitate the co-creation of the NAP between government and other relevant stakeholders. Towards this objective, most of the questions on the survey instruments were open-ended allowing for any new proposal also flexible and diverse feedback from CSOs, universities and ordinary citizens. The feedback received on these survey instruments will enable more clarity in terms of challenges/ shortcomings, next steps etc. In this way, it can be safely concluded that these pre-consultation survey instruments can serve as the baseline for prioritization dialogue between the LFPs and other stakeholders/CSOs.

Mr. Andreas Pavlou asked as to **how the Albanian team would rate itself based on the Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) framework**. Ms.Evis was keen to know what the OGP team thought would be a rating for Albania. Mr. Andreas observed that progress on the NAP has been good. However, he wanted to clarify **whether CSOs were engaged in the setting up of the policy goals from the initiation of the NAP process**, as this was an important OGP requirement. Further, he was also keen to know whether CSOs could propose

independent suggestions now, since the process has already progressed further. **Ms.Evis Qaja clarified that the pre-consultation/survey have this purpose to get idea from the CSO or public with concrete proposal in order after the prioritization process which will get together with the CSOs and other stakeholders to be incorporate new suggestions from CSOs on any topic can be introduced and incorporated into the NAP.This is the idea that such consultative instruments produced such as surveys but not only will serve as a participatory mechanism that could be easily augmented based on the topic focused feedback mechanisms already developed for the NAP 2020-2022 process.**

Ms. Sandra noted that there has been considerable emphasis and effort towards improving the NAP process. However, after the presentations will be send could be some comments and recommendations for improving the process better could be provided.

Ms. Entela noted that Albania has progressed in the "Beneficial Ownership" agenda. The law on "Beneficial ownership" was approved and is already in force, the register will be built by the end of January 2021. She also asked for OGP guidance on the formal procedures to be part of the Beneficial Ownership Leadership group and any other support and advice on the technical parameters to be considered for the register. Mr. Erebara remarked that any advice and support from OGP team will welcomed and that Albanian's team is open to collaborate. Similarly, Ms. Evis remarked that any assistance towards achievement on Open Justice will also be much appreciated.

The OGP is exploring a potential pilot project focused on facilitating beneficial ownership initiatives in interested participating OGP countries and Ms. Sandra offered to look into the potential inclusion of Albania highlighting that Albania would be a strong candidate for inclusion given its relevance to the country's OGP goals. She also offered the possibility of workshops on these topics from OGP team for the LFPs towards technical assistance.

Conclusions and Follow up:

1. *The Department will send the MoM, Operational Conclusions and the presentations package* as a follow up of the meeting on 18th of September and it was agreed that OGP representative will send specific proposals via email in the next week[1]. Further steps of actions will be decided after receiving the specific proposals.

2. OGP required guidance on the formal procedures to be part of the Beneficial Ownership Leadership group and any other support and advice on the technical parameters to be considered for the register.

3. *OGP's Support on Beneficial Ownership and Open Justice:* Technical Assistance and support requested from OGP on the process related to the BO and OP looking forward and the OPG representative feedback on this issue in the upcoming period.

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[1]Latest 25th of September

1. Attendance list;
2. Operational Conclusions.
3.Agenda meeting
4. Presentation related to the progress of the new action plan 2020-2022
5.Presentation related to the methodological aspects and novelties of the new action plan 2020-2022

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