

SIGMA-ReSPA-RCC Regional Conference on Functioning of Centres of Government of Western Balkans

22-23 June 2017

Danilovgrad, Montenegro

Agenda

Background

A well-functioning policy-making system is a key pillar of a transparent and effective democratic system. It is also a crucial precondition for the country to make progress in the European integration (EI) process as the capacity of national administrations to undertake the obligations linked with European Union (EU) membership is a key criterion in the assessment of candidate preparedness. The institutional architecture at the centre of government (CoG) for carrying out policy-planning and co-ordination functions should be in place and able to ensure the well-organised and competent functioning of the policy-making system. The CoG is defined through the key functions typically carried out by the Government Office/General Secretariat, the Ministry of Finance (MoF), the body responsible for legal conformity and the body responsible for EI when fulfilling the policy-planning, co-ordination and development functions. As defined in the Principles of Public Administration for EU accession countries, developed by SIGMA in co-operation with the European Commission¹ there are nine critical functions, to be implemented by the CoG, that are necessary for a well-organised, consistent and competent policy-making system. These are: 1) co-ordination of preparation of the government sessions; 2) ensuring legal conformity; 3) co-ordination of preparation and approval of the government's strategic priorities and work programme; 4) co-ordination of the policy content of proposals for government decision making, including defining the policy preparation process and ensuring coherence with government priorities; 5) ensuring that policies are affordable and co-ordination of public sector resource planning; 6) co-ordination of the government's communication activities to ensure a coherent government message; 7) monitoring of the government's performance to ensure the government collectively performs effectively and keeps its promises to the public; 8) handling relations between the government and other parts of the state (president, parliament); 9) co-ordination of EI affairs.

Analysis of the setup of the CoG in the Western Balkans² shows that approach of the Western Balkan governments to the set-up of the CoG varies. However, it is crucial to fulfil all critical functions, irrespective of the institutional set-up, and to ensure that there is clarity on the distribution of functions, smooth co-operation between various units, and proper allocation of resources for fulfilling the functions. In general, the legal framework for the establishment and operations of all critical CoG functions is in place, as are routines ensuring the basic functioning of the system in all Western Balkan governments. All centres of government have well-established structures for preparing government sessions and ensuring legal conformity of government decisions. The centres of government have different mandates for fulfilling these duties in the different Western Balkan governments, and this also influences the general approach to the role of the CoG. In those countries where the CoG's mandate is more limited, the role of the CoG is more technical and the overall policy-planning and co-ordination system is more fragmented. In countries with a stronger CoG, the institution usually also has a greater say on policy planning and co-ordination, and its role is more central in ensuring a "gate-keeping" function to lead to better-designed policy decisions by the government.

Nevertheless, key challenges for CoG institutions across the Western Balkans consist of improving their performance in planning the work of the government, analysing policy content, and monitoring the government's performance. This involves:

- streamlining the medium-planning system, in particular increasing coherence in the central planning of the government's work and decreasing implementation backlog through more realistic planning and processes for improved implementation;

¹ SIGMA (2014), [The Principles of Public Administration](#), OECD Publishing, Paris.

² Hereinafter 'Western Balkans' refers to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**, Montenegro and Serbia.

*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244/99 and the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on Kosovo's declaration of independence.

** According to the Agreement Establishing ReSPA, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is referred to as Macedonia in ReSPA documents.

- creation of linkages between planning and financial affordability of policies, in particular improving costing of policies and aligning financial and policy planning;
- consolidation of the sector policy planning through improving the planning framework, decreasing fragmentation of the sector strategies and increasing the quality of strategy development;
- strengthening of the monitoring of the government's performance through creating a more coherent framework, moving towards monitoring the outcomes of the work and increasing transparency of the system.

Increasing the capacities of the CoG, improving co-operation both between and within the CoG institutions, and taking a more active role in developing the policy planning and co-ordination system will enable the CoG to overcome these challenges and improve the system.

Purpose of the Regional Conference

The one and half day Regional Conference organised by SIGMA, ReSPA and the RCC is a first attempt to bring together officials of the CoG institutions of the Western Balkans to share good practices and country initiatives, as well as to discuss key challenges and common ways of enhancement of the functioning of the CoG.

The event also provides an opportunity to learn from EC representatives about the Commission's focus on this important aspect of public administration and to listen to the results of the work of the OECD with CoGs around the World.

This occasion of networking of the Western Balkans CoG representatives also provides an opportunity to discuss the work initiated by ReSPA and RCC on the enhancement of the approach of the represented countries towards effective and efficient public consultation practices in policy development. Moreover, ReSPA will provide forum for discussion on possible further cooperation of Western Balkans CoGs.

Agenda

Thursday, 22 June 2017	
09.30 - 10.00	Participants' Registration and Welcome Coffee
10.00 - 10.20	Welcome and introductory remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Ratka Sekulovic, Director of ReSPA • Ms Karen Hill, Head of Programme, SIGMA
10.20 – 10.30	Functioning of the CoG from the EU accession perspective <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr Alberto Costa, European Commission DG NEAR
10.30 – 11.00	The CoG Network and OECD work with CoGs around the World <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr Andrew Davies, Senior Counsellor, OECD Public Governance and Territorial Development
11.00 – 11.30	Functioning of the CoG – the Latvian experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr Martins Krievins, Former Director of the Latvian State Chancellery
11.30 – 12.00	Introduction of the SIGMA comparative paper on the Western Balkan CoGs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr Peter Vagi, Senior Adviser, SIGMA
12.00 –13.30	Conference photo and Lunch
13.30 –15.00	Roundtable discussion – successes and challenges with the functioning of the CoG in the Western Balkans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated discussion with representatives of the Western Balkan Centre of Government institutions followed by questions and comments from the audience
15.00 – 15.30	The way forward – summary of key messages of the day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Klas Klaas, Senior Adviser, SIGMA
15.30	Closing of the day
17.00 – 18.30	Visit to the Art Colony in Danilovgrad
19.00 – 21.00	Dinner hosted by the Regional Cooperation Council – Restaurant Knjaz

Friday, 23 June 2017	
09.00 - 09.15	Participants' Registration and Welcome Coffee
09.15 – 09.30	Introduction of the ReSPA-RCC work on public consultation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Zorana Gajic, ReSPA • Mr Radu Cotici, RCC
09.30 - 11.00	Presentation of the Outline of the Western Balkans' Recommendation on Public Consultations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Tina Divjak and/or Mr. Goran Forbici, RCC experts Roundtable discussion – success stories and key challenges with public consultation Facilitated discussion with representatives of the Western Balkan Centre of Government institutions Facilitators: Mr Zorana Gajic, ReSPA and Mr Radu Cotici, RCC
11.00 – 11.30	Coffee break
11.30 – 12.00	The way forward – Avenues for regional cooperation of the Western Balkan Centre of Government institutions - Facilitated discussion Facilitators: Mr Dragan Djuric, ReSPA and Mr Martins Krievins
12.00 – 12.15	Evaluation of the Conference and Closing Remarks
12.15 – 13.30	Lunch