

The Hague, 8 March 2013

Dear Members,

One of our rules is only to write newsletters when there is real news. That means that sometimes - such as when we were lobbying for changes to the new PRAG- members get many newsletters. But there are also times such as the previous three months when the news flow is low. And thus we did not want to bother you when we had nothing useful to say.

This relative silence resulted in some of you writing to ask us if TACU is still in existence. Well, it certainly is! Meanwhile our focus has been on a number of individual cases and developing new ideas.

We want to tell you about new initiatives. The planned event in Brussels for members only (see below) is especially important and we urge you to respond to the very simple and short questionnaire at the end of this newsletter.

In the meantime, although we are still having difficulties with our own website, there is a dedicated forum on LinkedIn for TACU, where some lively discussions are taking place. We recommend you join this group

TACU EVENT – BRUSSELS

As a result of suggestions by members, we are also going to try to arrange a much more ambitious event in late May or possibly June, probably in Brussels. This will be a cross between a structured series of discussions and a proper conference for members only. At this stage the general feeling is that we should use this event as an opportunity to get to know each other, to elect an Advisory Board, to set up dedicated working groups on key issues, and to agree policies and priorities for TACU over the coming year.

On LinkedIn there have been a number of (mostly!) constructive criticisms of the present management structure of TACU (i.e. Henry and me), including failures/weaknesses in communications, marketing, transparency, setting of directions and more. Henry and I would very much welcome the opportunity to put these matters right through introducing new blood, and we see Brussels as the ideal forum for this.

In Brussels we will also try to arrange meetings and discussions with key departments within EuropeAid and, hopefully, MEPs on the European Parliament's Committee on Development, which is chaired by the très formidable Eva Joly of France. We will also try to arrange a social networking evening with representatives and members of other expert groups such as NEDWORC (Netherlands) and CADE (France), with whom we have good relations that we would like to develop.

We will keep you informed about this and we hope that as many members as possible will attend. Already, around a dozen or so have committed themselves in principle and you can find out the background to all this in the LinkedIn discussion, which starts with a provocative question posed by one of our most supportive members, Tony Barry. This is one of the current discussions taking place on the LinkedIn website for TACU members referred to in the introduction.

VERY IMPORTANT: At the end of this newsletter there is a first draft of a possible agenda/program. If you would like to suggest changes, please write to us. Before finalizing the agenda we will circulate another draft incorporating all the more interesting suggestions from members and ask you to vote. There is also a simple questionnaire – just two questions – will you come? And which of a selection of possible dates would be suitable for you.

EUROPEAID

We are waiting for the final version of PRAG to be launched in all the official EU languages, but in the meantime we have written to EuropeAid to seek clarification

on issues raised by members and ourselves. Here is what we asked (abbreviated from our letter);

1. Did you and your colleagues have the opportunity to review our proposal concerning arbitration? [See here to remind yourself of our proposal, also available there in French].
2. Several members have raised the issue of the requirement in PRAG to limit the length of CVs to not more than three pages. For those of us with many years of work experience, this is simply not possible. The situation has been made worse since the introduction of the requirement to list employer references. We agree that it is not desirable to encourage long, rambling CVs, but three pages do not provide enough space to present an adequate record of many consultants' experience. Is there a way to introduce some commonsense over flexibility here?
3. Some examples of rather absurd TORs have been sent to us by members. We appreciate that you and your colleagues in Brussels cannot review every TOR prepared throughout the world, but there does seem to be a lack of adequate quality control within the system. We suspect that this is probably most pronounced in a handful of weaker CAs [contracting authorities]. Maybe these could be identified and some support could be given to them. It is an issue we would like to follow up with you.
4. Several members have expressed their appreciation of the intention to move towards more global price contracts. They ask if there is a simple way of knowing whether or not a project is in this category or not, since experts are often approached by contractors who send only the job descriptions and not the full TOR. Perhaps there is a link you could send us, which would take experts to the appropriate website page to check on this.
5. Has any progress been made on developing a system for classifying levels of risk in various locations, leading to implementation of security provisions to be financed through Incidental Expenditure? A member has complained to us that he is working in a location where he feels threatened by serious, on-going rioting. However, the contractor denies any responsibility for providing any relevant security training or other measures.

We will, of course, inform you of EuropeAid's responses when we receive them.

WORKING GROUPS

We had a disappointing response last year to our request for volunteers to set up and contribute to working groups (WGs) in a number of areas – naming and shaming contractors; designing a model contract for experts; developing a professional code of conduct. Tony Barry did terrific work on the first of these and had support from a couple of members, but that was more or less all, and Tony had to suspend his excellent work through lack of interest and follow-up.

Anyway, we want to revitalise these WGs and we know that there are now more members who feel ready to contribute some of their precious time to these extremely important issues. We plan to address this matter fully at the event in Brussels.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

As you know, we recently sent out requests to members to renew their annual subscriptions and we are very grateful to the large number of you who did so almost immediately. However, there are still a number of you who have not yet. We urge you, please, to do so since we simply cannot continue without financial support, not for our personal benefit but simply to cover our basic operational costs. If you think that enforcing the provision of insurance cover by contractors when you are on an assignment, or that the provision of security if you are working in a danger zone, (among other achievements) are useful benefits, then for goodness sake please

renew your membership. TACU won these rights for independent experts last year and there are more we want to achieve. Also, you may not have needed him yet, but you never know when you might need the legal expertise of TACU's in-house lawyer, Joseph Dalby. He helps members for free – not non-members. We are very conscious that a lot can and should be done to make TACU a more effective organisation in the service of its members. Henry and I are fully committed to doing the best we can to ensure this and that is why the Brussels event is potentially so important. Please (re)join TACU and add your voice – it will be heard! We promise to be in touch with you on a more frequent and regular basis.

BRUSSELS EVENT – DRAFT PROGRAM/AGENDA

THURSDAY

- 09.00 – 09.30 Registration
- 09.30 – 09.45 Welcome and introduction by Henry Leerentveld
- 09.45 – 10.30 Electing the Advisory Board – agreeing the rules and procedures, chaired by Stephen Dewar
- 10.30 – 11.00 Deciding on the Working Groups, chaired by Henry
- 11.00 – 11.30 Tea/coffee
- 11.30 – 13.00 Open forum with EuropeAid, chaired by Henry. An opportunity to raise any and all matters of concern regarding EuropeAid, FWC, PRAG, etc.
- 13.00 – 14.30 Lunch
- 14.30 – 15.45 Meeting with Development Committee of European Parliament
- 15.45 – 16.15 Tea/coffee
- 16.15 – 17.00 Working groups meet to agree on how they will work together
- 17.00 – 17.30 Presentation by Joseph Dalby on legal issues, and discussion
- 18.00 – 19.00 Drinks with members/representatives of NEDWORC and CADE

FRIDAY

- 09.15 – 10.00 Election of Advisory Board, chaired by Stephen
- 10.00 – 11.00 TACU policies and priorities for 2013/2014, plus management issues, chaired by Henry
- 11.00 – 11.30 Tea/coffee
- 11.30 – 13.00 Wrap-up session and AOB
- 13.00 Closing lunch

BRUSSELS EVENT – QUESTIONNAIRE

Please make your responses, then copy and paste into an email and send to info@ta-consultants-united.org
THANK YOU!!

We believe that the event should be held on a Thursday and Friday, to minimize disruption to your working week. We also think that we should finish not later than mid-afternoon on Friday so that you won't be caught up in the worst of the rush of Eurocrats and MEPs going home for the weekend. Thus, the dates below are all for Thursdays and Fridays.

1. Assuming the date is suitable, will you come to the event?

Yes _____ No _____ Don't know _____

2. If you answered "yes" above or "don't know" please say which of the following Thursdays and Fridays are possible and which not possible for you? Please answer all the possibilities. Do NOT answer this question if you answered "no" above.

May 23 to 24: Suitable _____ Not suitable _____ Don't know _____

May 30 to 31: Suitable _____ Not suitable _____ Don't know _____

June 6 to 7: Suitable _____ Not suitable _____ Don't know _____

June 13 to 14: Suitable _____ Not suitable _____ Don't know _____

June 20 to 21: Suitable _____ Not suitable _____ Don't know _____

June 27 to 28: Suitable _____ Not suitable _____ Don't know _____

Stephen Dewar



General Secretary
TACU