

Ban the SoE&A!

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Support us

First of all, we want to say a very big THANK YOU to the almost 50 people who have so far donated €4,500 to the campaign fund. However, we still need more (see last newsletter) so please keep supporting us into the future.

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***MORE BREAKING NEWS!
MORE BREAKING NEWS!***

FIRST ROUND OF BRUSSELS TALKS MEETING DG EUROPEAID GIVES HOPE!

We have good news! Henry Leerentveld and I met Mr. Koos Richelle in Brussels last Friday, 12th November, as planned. Henry and I had three objectives going into the meeting:

1. We wanted to try to ensure that both parties (that is, the Commission and us) would jointly acknowledge that there are problems with the current SoE&A system (and agree what these problems are);
2. That we would jointly agree on what kinds of changes and reforms would offer a good basis for resolving these problems; and
3. Agree a timetable for how we would proceed.

It was immediately obvious that the Commission team of six, led by Mr. Richelle, felt exactly the same way. In his opening remarks Mr. Richelle acknowledged most of the problems we have discussed over these last few months and suggested we use the available time to "brainstorm".

As you know from the previous newsletter, we had earlier written to Mr. Richelle suggesting possible ways forward. This letter was used as a basis for this brainstorming session.

Everything we proposed is now under consideration by the Commission.

Primarily, they are considering changing the tendering procedures so that experts would not be required to make commitments until virtually the end of the process. This would reduce the commitment time involved to, say, a month at the maximum.

Other possible changes will focus on better project design and delivery (can we make the whole process more output-oriented?) This would benefit the expert community, the Commission and the project beneficiaries.

These changes focus on large projects and also how FWC assignments are managed.

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It is not possible to be more specific at this stage. Mr. Richelle very reasonably explained that he and his colleagues would need time to decide which of the various options for change would be most beneficial from their point of view (which very much includes concern for our interests). A very important aspect is that significant changes to tendering and evaluation procedures would have legal implications within the Commission, hence they would need the expert opinions of the Commission's own legal people. DG EuropeAid undertook to get back to us with an official response early in January, if not before then. In the meantime, he agreed that we should stay in regular communication and has designated one of his people as our contact person. Thus, we will remain involved with the Commission's internal deliberations.

In the meantime, the Commission has already agreed on one important reform that will help us a great deal. This concerns both aspects of the Statement (E&A). A new version of PRAG has been prepared and will be uploaded to the Commission's website in the very near future (apparently, technical IT problems have delayed this for the moment). Until the Commission announces this new procedure it would be unethical for us to reveal what it is, but you will be pleased as it is one of the things we have been campaigning for!

All in all, Henry and I are very satisfied that the Commission wants change and values our constructive suggestions. We also want to pay personal tribute to Koos Richelle, whose openness, courtesy and obvious determination to improve matters ensured that our discussion gave grounds for hope, rather than being a difficult argument.

Towards EU Consultants United!

Finally I want to refer to the important issue of setting up a professional association to represent our collective interests, which so many of you have written to us about.

We raised the issue of our wish to use this issue (i.e. the SoE&A problem) as a basis to start a permanent dialogue with the Commission on all aspects of our involvement in EU-funded projects. This initiative should build up towards a tripartite Social Partnership involving the Commission, the contractors and ourselves – the global community of experts.

This proposal was welcomed and we now have to address the issue among ourselves: our current 600+ signatories. We need to consider and decide upon the best way to organize ourselves. That will be the subject of our next newsletter.

Dear colleagues, we can make no promises or guarantees, but we really believe that we have started the important journey towards a better and fairer system. Thank you all for your support so far and please keep supporting us into the future.

Stephen.

GENDER AGENDA

One other issue that Mr. Richelle was very interested in was the question of whether there are any aspects of the current procedures that discriminate against women. As you may recall from earlier newsletters, our women colleagues do feel that there are some discriminatory effects of the present system, though they are not directly related to the SoE&A issue and, obviously, are not intended to be discriminatory. At any rate, Mr. Richelle asked us to provide him with a briefing note on this issue. Since the six of us who started this campaign are all (coincidentally) men, we don't think we should be the ones to do this.

Accordingly, we are very grateful that Gail Warrander, a British consultant, has volunteered to work on this. We appeal, therefore, to the nearly one hundred women who have signed the petition to write to Gail (gailwarrander@hotmail.com) with their comments – what are the problems, what ill-effects do they cause, and what are the solutions? (I'm sure Gail would not object if constructively-minded men wrote to her as well, but this does seem to us to be something that women are better qualified to discuss). Some women wrote to us earlier on this matter and I would encourage them to resend their comments to Gail.

I would add that not all the issues described to us by women earlier are discriminatory solely against women, although women are more affected by them. Some also affect men, for instance the often unnecessary requirement that all work must be done in the beneficiary's country. So this is not just a "Women's Lib" matter; we all stand to benefit to some extent from desirable reforms in this area.