NOTE
From: Presidency
To: Working Party on Consular Affairs
Subject: Consular Cooperation Initiatives
- Final report

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Delegations will find attached the above document as agreed by the Consular Affairs Working Party on 8 April 2016.
Consular Cooperation Initiatives

Final report

Presented by the CCI Core Team
to the EU Working Party for
Consular Affairs COCON - 8
April 2016

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Global statistics on assistance to non-represented EU-citizens

Introduction

The overarching objective of the Consular Cooperation Initiatives (CCIs) was to optimize the consular support to all citizens of the European Union in third countries and to strengthen consular cooperation at the Union level. The specific objective was to further explore possibilities for developing the role of EU Delegations in facilitating and supporting coordination between Member States in their role of providing consular protection to citizens of the Union in third countries as agreed in the Council Conclusions on the EEAS review of 17 December 2013.

A Core Team of interested MS was established to manage the initiative under general supervision of COCON. CCI projects were implemented in 5 countries: Cambodia, Dominican Republic, Nepal, Nigeria and Tunisia. In each country a MS assumed the role of Chef de File and developed a project plan on the basis of a common template (Annex). The EEAS acted as secretariat of the group and supported the harmonised approach. The Commission and the Council Secretariat attended the discussions. The projects ran from January to December 2015. After that, the CCI Core team continued to convene under the Netherlands presidency to compile all data, draw up the relevant conclusions and recommendations and prepare for recommended follow up.

This report first presents the overall conclusions and recommendations emanating from the detailed evaluation per country. The country evaluations are added to the report, as well as the joint EU Crisis Preparedness Framework that was drawn up as part of the Consular Cooperation Initiatives, a copy of the common template for the project plans and the global statistics on consular assistance to non-represented EU-citizens compiled by EEAS.
Conclusions & Recommendations

Conclusions

• The creation of the Core Team has been invaluable and played a key role in the creation and implementation of the CCIs. It has also played a major role in driving the conversations at COCON and helping the Presidency identify and encourage opportunities for cooperation.

• Having local consular meetings is a precondition for closer cooperation. It can take time to develop initiatives from local meetings to actual closer cooperation – keeping focus is essential. Also, commitment is required from MS capitals and EEAS headquarters, in particular for crisis preparedness.

• Not all MS are equally prepared for assisting their citizens in crisis situations. Joint crisis preparedness planning and exercises are considered useful practices, especially in crisis prone countries. In this, an active role from non-represented EU MS is equally important.

• The statistics that were compiled by the EEAS show that there are indeed non-represented EU-citizens requesting consular assistance, but their numbers are limited and the cases are manageable. Most requests deal with loss of travel documents. This shows that there is no need for systematic burden sharing agreements; as a matter of fact, these should be concluded on a case by case basis wherever deemed necessary.

• An active supporting and coordinating role of EU-delegations is beneficial to MS and the Union. Even though the EU-delegations are not yet fully trained and organised to provide active support to the MS, this role should be easily developed (with support from EEAS HQ).

Recommendations

• The Core Team should be kept in place and remain open to new participants. The Core Team should continue to propose and test forms of cooperation in small practical settings and with a focus on one theme.

• The Core Team could suggest potential areas of interest to MS (i.e. Forced Marriage, Child Abduction, Human Trafficking etc.) and ask wider COCON members to “sponsor” a theme (either individually or in small groups) of interest, and look at the issue in key countries, reporting back to COCON with suggestions of joint actions.

• Local meetings on consular cooperation should be set up periodically in every country, specifically in those prone to crisis. EU-delegations should take an active role in facilitating these meetings.

• Crisis preparedness should remain a central focus for all MS. Represented or not, we are all responsible for our own nationals, we should have comprehensive crisis plans and then work together on joint crisis preparedness.

• Joint exercising – or inviting MS and the EEAS to observe national exercises – along with continuing the sharing of information about crisis plans should continue. The joint EU Crisis Preparedness Framework will be helpful with this: joint plans can be drafted on the basis of this framework, where local mission agree it could be helpful. Exercises should take place in countries with high risks of consular crises. By doing so, the role of non-represented EU MS in crisis preparedness and response can be defined and tested further.

• The supporting and coordinating role of EU-delegations can be developed by increasing the level of knowledge and expertise of EEAS and EU-delegations in the field of consular affairs.
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