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CIS 5

INFORMATION NOTE

From:	The Finnish Delegation
To:	Coordination Committee for CIS
Subject:	Use of videoconferencing for selected Working Parties during the Finnish Presidency

Introduction

1. The incoming Finnish Presidency wishes to extend the use of videoconferencing at Council Working Parties with a view to preparing a roadmap for greater use of this facility by the end of its Presidency.
2. The extension of use of video conferencing is highly desirable as part of the GSC's drive to reduce its carbon footprint, i.e. the amount of greenhouses gases it emits or causes to be emitted through the services and products the GSC and its staff use, calculated as carbon dioxide equivalent. Journeys made by visitors and delegates account for 52% of the GSC's total carbon footprint.
3. In addition to the obvious positive environmental impacts, increased use of videoconferencing will also reduce costs and travel time resulting in greater convenience for delegates and positive budgetary impacts. Furthermore, with the help of new technologies, it could be possible to decrease the need for traditional meetings and improve the overall effectiveness of the work of the Council.

Technical Feasibility

4. In 2016, the GSC conducted a test with six delegations in 2016 to explore the impact of videoconferencing. The findings were set out in Doc 7035/16 and discussed with the CCCIS. The key lessons learned included:

- chairing the meeting can be challenging due to delays in the communication (latency)
- strict discipline is required for passing the floor to each participant
- overall the quality was acceptable for short meetings, but not for a longer one
- issues with interoperability between different types of equipment are impossible to resolve at short notice
- IP connections worked better than ISDN, once they are properly configured.

5. Subsequently, three meetings of the CCCIS have been conducted using videoconferencing and steps have been taken by the GSC to improve the overall video-conferencing experience. All rooms in the Europa Building and several in the Justus Lipsius are equipped with CODEX facilities, and additional support to this web tool by way of a new speech request feature is currently being tested for future use.

6. From a technological perspective, it is possible for all participants of Working Party meetings to connect via videoconferencing.

Practical Issues

7. The use of video conferencing at Council or Coreper meetings is not envisaged because of the legal arrangements set out in the Council Rules of Procedure. It is possible, however, to use videoconferencing at Working Parties subject to certain conditions being met. In summary, there must be:

- defined criteria regarding the suitability of working groups for videoconferencing based on the working practices within the group;

- methods and technical means for accrediting delegates present at the meeting and ensure the absence of third parties (unless the procedure for admitting third parties for a specific item of the agenda has been followed);
- technical means to ensure the identification of stakeholders during a meeting if it is taking place with interpretation;
- minimum requirements for technical installations used and procedures to be followed in the event of communication failures;
- technical means to allow viewing of meeting documents and their amendment on the screen during the meeting. This means the permanent presence of two screens: a speaker screen and a text screen;
- a possibility for delegations and the GSC to listen to the recording of meetings.

Approach

8. Taking account of these technical and practical considerations, Finland has initially identified several working group candidates for testing videoconferencing during its Presidency:

- the Working Party on eJustice
- the Working Party on Information
- the Working Party on International Environmental Issues (WPIEI) / (UNECE / other regional issues)
- the Coordination Committee for CIS

9. These groups have been selected on the basis of their type of subject-matter (non-legislative and information sharing) and the fact that no interpretation is required. Additional Working Parties may also be considered for piloting in consultation with the GSC in advance of the Finnish Presidency.

10. The objective is not necessarily to use videoconferencing for all meetings. Nor are all Member States expected to use videoconferencing for the Working Parties selected for piloting. Member States are free to attend them in the Council's premises in Brussels.

11. On the Working Party on eJustice, it is proposed to offer video-conferencing to all members of the Sub-group on videoconferencing and possibly also to members of the sub-group on ECodex (to be determined).
12. For the Working Party on Information, it is proposed that the option be provided to delegates from each capital to follow and participate in the Working Party meeting to make information sharing smoother.
13. For the WPIEI, it is proposed that videoconferencing be offered to all members of the sub-group UNECE / other regional issues (meeting on 30 October). Physical attendance in Brussels is also possible for delegates who prefer to attend in person
14. It is envisaged that these meetings will be managed in accordance with the good practices identified by the CCCIS (see template in Annex 1) regarding the rules for conducting the meeting regarding speaking requests/recording. A separate note will be issued in advance of the testing regarding the recording of delegates presence and what to do if there is a systems failure or connection issues during the meetings.
15. All connections with participants will be tested in advance of the planned meetings.
16. The Finnish Presidency intends to make an assessment before the end of its term with a view to submitting possible recommendations to COREPER on more extensive use of videoconferencing within the Council.
17. The CCCIS is invited to endorse this suggested approach for subsequent approval by COREPER.

Template for managing Council working party the meetings via videoconference

1. The [xxx] meeting on [dd m] will take place by videoconference. The meeting will be organised from [room] which offers the facilities required for linking a high number of remote videoconferencing sites. Physical attendance in room [xx] is also possible for delegates who would prefer to attend in person.
2. Conducting a meeting by videoconference - besides the technical, infrastructural and organisational prerequisites - requires strict discipline, in particular in asking for or giving the floor and speaking, as videoconferencing meetings have to cope with the delays on the communication (latency).
3. At the start of the meeting, once the chair has verified that all remote participants are connected, the chair will briefly provide explanations on organising the discussion and basic requirements for participants (see practical points on organising discussion on each item below). Attention is already drawn to the following:
 - Participants must switch their microphone on only when given the floor. Once the intervention concluded, the microphone must be switched off.
 - Participants must be clearly and quickly identifiable by a nameplate of their delegation.
 - The speaking order established by the chair must be strictly respected. Participants must contain their natural spontaneity and may only speak when given the floor (no 'double talking', no interruptions). As videoconferencing microphones are very sensitive, rustling noises (e.g. moving paper or objects on the desk, whispering with colleagues/neighbours) should be avoided.
 - The meeting will involve a [approach to be added]. For discussions where the chair invites delegations who wish to do so to intervene, a visible means should be used to ask for the floor (see below).
 - All speakers, in Brussels as well, should introduce each intervention by briefly indicating, who they are (delegation and name of delegate).
 - Participants must make a conscious effort to speak clearly, slowly and at a normal volume (speaking too loudly leads to feedback/echo during transmission), and to be concise. The moderator will see to allowing a few seconds between speakers, and make sure they have finished their intervention before taking/giving the floor again.
 - Participants should look into the camera when speaking. The camera frame should be filled as much as possible with people rather than background and objects such as tables, chairs, etc.
 - Once the chair indicates that the meeting is over, participants should disconnect. The chair should be the last one to disconnect.
4. Unless any delegation objects, the meeting will be audio-recorded to have a record of the meeting available for participants who may have dropped out due to any connection breakdown.

Organisation of discussion on each item

1. For each agenda item for decision, the chair will give a short introduction, supplemented as necessary by the Commission or the GSC.
2. The chair will invite each delegation to intervene by giving it the floor in the order [xxx]:
"I would ask [delegation] to take the floor."
3. Delegations will begin their intervention by indicating who they are:
"This is [Slovakia] [name of delegate]."
4. If the delegation invited to intervene has no point to make, it should say:
"Nothing to add at this stage."
5. The chair may conclude or request further interventions. In the latter case, delegations will be asked to signal visibly (by raising clearly their hand or delegation name) that they wish to intervene. The chair will give the floor in turn.

[Order in which delegations will be asked to speak in full table round (seating order)]
