

**Minutes of the General Meeting**  
**19 November 2019 (15:30 – 18:00)**

Held at the Portuguese Permanent Representation to the European Union  
Brussels, Belgium

<b>KEY</b>		
João Lázaro	<b>JL</b>	President
Helgard van Hüllen	<b>HVH</b>	Vice President
Richard Olszewski	<b>RO</b>	Vice President
Levent Altan	<b>LA</b>	Executive Director
Geraldine Hanna	<b>GH</b>	Treasurer
Livia Pancic	<b>LP</b>	Board Member
Aleksandra Ivankovic	<b>AI</b>	Deputy Director
Ruth Shrimpling	<b>RS</b>	Policy Officer
Léa Meindre-Chautrand	<b>LMC</b>	Policy Officer
Ines Nunes de Freitas	<b>INF</b>	Project Officer
Marina Kazakova	<b>MK</b>	Communications Officer

### **1. President's Welcome Speech**

President JL welcomes all those present for the Annual General Meeting and thanks the VSE TEAM for organising the annual conference which took place on June 14, 2019. JL gives the floor to LA.

LA informs that VSE has been awarded the EU tender for the Centre of Excellence pending a 10 day appeal period and that Victor will be the manager of that centre. Victor says that he resigns from Victim Support Netherlands in December, but he will keep in contact because of his new position.

### **2. Minutes**

LA greets everyone present and asks to look at the minutes of the last General Meeting dated 14 June 2019 in Strasbourg. LA goes through the minutes and they are approved unanimously with no corrections. GH comments that, for future minutes, the list of present members could be included. There are no objections to the suggestion.

LA hands over to JL to provide an overview of VSE's main 2019 activities.

### **3. VSE Management Team Report – 2019 Activities**

#### **3.1. Annual Report – Achievements in 2019**

JL welcomes the 3 new members of the VSE Brussels office team, as Project Officer Inês Nunes de Freitas, and Janina Ellsäßer and Myriam Erquicia León as new Intern-Policy Assistants, and the team members introduces themselves.

JL continues that in 2019 VSE maintained strong contacts and was highly active in building new collaborations with a broad range of stakeholders: such as the EU institutions, European human and victims' rights NGOs, the UN Advocate for Victims' Rights, UN Expert Group on Terrorism, OSCE, and Council of Europe. Moreover, VSE was this year given participatory status to the Council of Europe.

JL mentions the 2019 VSE publications:

- Vociare Report that includes 26 national reports and a Synthesis report (in collaboration with partners)
- Review of compensation for victims of crime, and recommendations to the EU.

JL also mentioned additional publications that are due for the end of the year, including:

- Annual report on EU and ECHR case law on victims issues
- Data Protection Paper
- National Victim Support Framework Report
- Training Manual on Supporting Victims Of Online Hate Speech (in collaboration with Twitter)

JL also mentioned the events held in 2019:

- VSE Annual Conference in Strasbourg
- VSE Annual Autumn Conference in Brussels
- Brussels-based EU NGO Round Table
- 4 Regional and National Meetings
- 1 Centre of Excellence workshop
- 3 Staff Exchange Meetings
- Over 10 workshops and trainings

JL mentions that VSE has 5 new members in 2019, making a total of 58 members from 30 countries.

To continue with numbers, JL give the floor to our Treasurer Geraldine Hanna.

### **3.2. Financial Report and Approval of Annual Accounts**

GH introduces the financial overview of 2019. VSE had a 20% increase in income this year. It is expected to have the same increase next year. Following the strategy to reduce dependence on the Operating Grant (OG), this year the OG funding has reduced by 10% as a proportion of total VSE budget. Whilst the year has been very successful, the end of a large World Bank Project coupled with increased costs due to VSE's growth will result in a maximum deficit in 2019 of **XXX**. However, a number of additional incomes are expected which could help reduce this in 2019 and increase income in 2020. There continues to be the need to come up with sustainable solutions and projects to ensure funding. No objections were raised on the financial report.

### **3.3. Presentation of New Members**

RS welcomes 5 new VSE members. In Strasbourg, RS already mentioned 2 of them: Natal, an Israeli organisation, and Olivier Lauwers, who works for the Belgian Compensation authority. Since the Strasbourg Conference, 3 other organisations have joined: Federation for Victim Assistance (Ireland), Associazione Spondé (Italy) and Humanitarian Law Centre (Serbia).

### **3.4. Overview of VSE's 2019 Activities**

LA makes an overview of VSE thematic priorities for the year:

- Cybercrime: VSE's ongoing priority. An internal strategy to guide VSE actions will be developed, engaging with social media to develop relevant training.
- Terrorism: Priorities in this area are to strengthen the response network, continue engagement with world experts and publish guidance and participate in new counter terrorism projects.
- Hate crime: new focus on hate crimes, better understanding victims' issues and the needs of VSE members on this area.
- Enforcement of rights: VSE will publish findings on the implementation of the Victims' Rights Directive and press for its implementation by Member States. VSE will also develop a clearer vision on what should constitute national victim services.

- Influencing the next 5 years of the new Commission and Parliament: VSE will develop material to engage potential MEPs and will develop specific calls for the new Commission and Parliament (e.g. Compensation, Helplines across Europe).

AI makes an overview of the Capacity Building Activities, made to support VSE members as well as partner organisations to develop their national support services related to victims:

- **Centres of Excellence:** 3 online meetings were organised as well as a workshop in Tallinn. A task force has been established to develop a position paper on the importance of 116 006 helplines.
- **Regional events:** LP presented these activities. Capacity Building activities were continued with countries where generic national victim support services do not exist yet or are underdeveloped, particularly focusing on the region with new or aspiring EU Member States, very broadly defined as South-East-Central Europe. The meetings were a great success and a start for more cooperation.
- **Staff exchange:** In 2019, 7 VSE members participated in staff exchanges (Croatia, Czech Republic, Scotland, Germany, the Netherlands, Serbia and Portugal). These activities will keep going in 2020.
- **Standards and accreditation:** VSE accreditation continued in 2019 with Slachtofferhulp Nederland. The process with France Victimes has been postponed due to the significant workload they face. As part the VSE 2021 Strategy the accreditation process will be reviewed to see if a more efficient approach could be implemented. This would result in a faster and more independent take up of the standards and review process.
- **Support VSE's sister organisation Victim Support Asia (VSA):** VSE continues to assist VSA through for example support for their 2020 Conference in Jakarta, participation in Board meetings and support for project applications etc.
- **Supporting VSE members:** in November 2019, VSE had a unique opportunity to meet the Finnish Deputy Minister of Justice where the future of victims' rights in Finland and its upcoming presidency at the EU where discussed.
- **VSE Training:** VSE expanded its training activities by providing three days of training to the Korean Police and the Human Rights Commissioner. VSE also provided training to members on online hate speech. This will next be converted to an online training module available through the VSE intranet. VSE is also looking at delivering more detailed training online through webinars, etc. VSE wants to professionalise its training services. VSE will also look into more creative training approaches.
- **Policy papers:** VSE will publish a Compensation Policy Paper.

LA talks about VSE's work with others as EU and international advocacy.

- **Policy and advocacy on EU legislation:** VSE continues its cooperation with EU institutions. VSE has new connections with DG HOME on terrorism, cybercrime, child sexual exploitation and confiscation of criminal assets. VSE has also supported the EC and the EP to include victim's rights in a range of EU legislation.
- **Synergies with other European and global organisations:** strengthened cooperation with the World Bank, United Nations, etc. VSE also continues cooperating with other EU NGOs. For example, VSE organised the EU NGO roundtable with representatives from different NGOs based in Brussels as well as the European Commission. VSE has also established new relations with the Council of Europe and will carry out work for them on case management systems in Spain. VSE increased its cooperation with the private and public sector and campaigning with new partners. VSE is also trying to increase work with the UN Victims Advocate, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, and the UN Counter Terrorism office to promote rights of all victims. VSE has strong cooperation with organisations working on victims' of terrorism rights all over the world.

RS speaks about the VSE approach to membership, about the outreach efforts and plans to engage more with members. The idea is to improve the current approach to membership. RS leads on the issue of membership and is the main contact point on these issues. In order to gain more members, VSE is simplifying its applications form. This will be set up at the same time as the new intranet, though it will longer be linked to the intranet. VSE has new membership visual materials and also offers support during the application process to improve the system. For existing members, VSE has plans to improve communication. Members can contribute and say what is going well and what can be improved in VSE's relationship with members.

MK makes an overview of communication and events.

Concerning external communications, there has been a strong focus on developing the new intranet and campaigning in collaboration with other partners. In 2019, the priorities were supporting victims of all kind of crimes, as well as victims of terrorism. VSE held a number of campaigns including on for the EU elections held in 2019 and a substantial campaign entitled "Crime is Crime, even online". In 2020, VSE's goal is to strengthen VOIARE's social media footprint during the European Day of Victims of Crime on the 22 February. The possible theme will be One Voice, One Cause – which will allow all organisations to come together behind the day.

Concerning internal communications, the new VSE intranet includes more information and is user friendly. MK shows the members how the intranet will look like after the modifications. The referral system and the knowledge database still need to be changed and improved. The aim is that by the end of 2019, MK will contact the members concerning their passwords. In 2020, the Annual Conference will be held in Berlin.

AI and INF provide an overview of the projects that are going on. The VSE approach is that VSE is not running after opportunities because there is money behind, but with priorities.

- **VOCIARE:** the biggest project so far. VSE will work with members to disseminate the important findings. The EC accepted the final report.
- **VICTORIA:** VSE is working with partners in 4 different countries. The findings will be presented in the final conference in Brussels at the end of February 2020.
- **IMUHVCS:** VSE is partnering with the Maltese police to provide training in Malta: The Maltese authorities are setting up a multi-disciplinary unit which will fall under the Victim Support unit of the Maltese force, which will provide support and advice to victims of hate crime.
- **CREST:** a 3 year project funded by the EC and coordinated by the Romanian Special Police. The aim of the project is to improve the use of big data in the fight against terrorism. VSE will provide a victim and human rights centred approach to the project by developing training for the public on what to do in the event of an attack.
- **PREVICT:** VSE is leading this EU funded project. The aim is to improve victims' understanding and awareness of their rights and how to obtain support from the EU. This project counts on the expertise of a consortium composed of 8 organisations and it will be delivered in 6 countries (Albania, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, Portugal and Malta).
- **COUNTRACT:** APAV is leading this project focused on counter-radicalisation and VSE has a small role on dissemination.
- **INHERE:** coordinated by the University of Ghent, is a project on migrant women victims of gender based violence.
- **OSCE:** VSE has strengthened its relations with the OSCE this year in particular through collaboration in a project in Serbia on individual needs assessments.
- **COUNCIL OF EUROPE:** VSE is now working with the Committee on the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) to provide expertise and help them prepare a report on case management for victims.

AI presents future projects. VSE has been awarded the decision (subject to appeal) to run the European Centre of Excellence on Victims of Terrorism is already a present one, as VSE has been chosen to lead it. VSE is also resubmitting an application for funding for a project on the use of facility dogs to work with vulnerable victims.

Other funding opportunities for members will be available in the coming months (Erasmus, Justice and rights, equality and citizenship programmes, United Nations Victims Trust Fund call for applications) and VSE encourages and supports members to be involved in these projects. Two EU programmes are expected to be launched in the next couple of months.

### 3.5. Forward look – 2020

LA reflects that a range of activities can be considered business as usual. These activities which are held every year are not detailed during the meeting. They include:

- Annual conference and Gala
- Centres of excellence meetings and workshop
- Staff Exchange
- Regional Exchange (expand to other areas)
- National Meetings – Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Ireland, Croatia?
- EU Case law
- Conferences, EU engagement, international engagement
- Standards and accreditation – but review – establish self-assessment process through intranet. Possibly develop guidance and documentation to support the process.
- Workshop and training module
- EU NGO round table and bilateral co-operation with EU NGOs.
- Terrorism response network (improve its operation – templates, protocols, cross border referral)

LA mentions publications that will be produced next year:

- Victims' Rights Directive - Review of specific issues of the victims directive (connecting to wider non-EU relevance – needs assessment/ intake, communications etc. – part of VSE strategy)
- National Framework for Victim Support Services
- VSE Strategy 2021 – 2025
- Policy Paper – 116 006 and helplines
- Data Protection Guidance Document
- Good practice models of national compensation schemes

LA mentions future activities concerning advocacy:

- EU Victims Strategy: VSE will need to provide input.



- Gender Based Violence: VSE has to make sure to influence the new EU Gender Equality Strategy and ensure the EU ratification of Istanbul convention/ new Directive.
- E-evidence proposal
- EU Multi-annual financial Framework: VSE should ensure that:
  - Victims are mentioned in every funding programme (especially H2020, Erasmus, health and education, structural funds,
  - There is an increase in the budget to the sector for larger scale project
  - The approach is changed and projects can be funded up to 100%
  - Support for state, NGO, university and private sector co-operation exists
- Data protection – co-ordination with EU data protection supervisor
- European Parliament: VSE should increase its engagement with it.
- UN – Crime Congress – Japan

Concerning the internet, LA mentions that VSE is looking to widen the information it provides on its websites. For example, by taking the information about VSE members and including it in the interactive maps. This will make victims' referral easier for everyone. VSE will also develop its referral system on the intranet ensuring it is fully GDPR.

LA highlights that at the national level there is the need to have a national victim support organisation, but in fact, there is the need for broader mechanisms. The justice, health and private sectors need also to be involved. VSE will develop a policy paper to help governments and the whole community to understand this whole system. VSE needs to be in constant consultation with members.

LA also highlights that VSE needs to work on the 5 years strategy. For the last strategy, VSE was late on it. This year, the process of consultation will start earlier. The first thing that should be done is to confirm that we don't need a review of the whole strategy. Rather, some things can be maintained such as the values, the mission and the bigger objectives. Ideally, the focus for the next strategy will be to check the more detailed actions that need to be implemented and to establish appropriate objectives. VSE will create a working group where a draft on ideas and priorities will be created. VSE will draft it and send it to members for comments. A final draft will be sent to all members. VSE expects to have the final draft for October 2020, to be adopted in the Autumn Conference in November 2020.

AI makes a presentation on the reserves and investment policy. A draft has been presented to the Board. VSE's idea is to have reserves in order to cover 3 months of full time work for all the staff. This will enable all the activities to keep running for those 3 months in case there is a sudden large loss of income. VSE's reserves at the moment amount to around 200.000 Euros which is almost enough to cover the full reserves policy.



Regarding investments a question was raised on how this would operate. VSE emphasised that it is not looking at risky investments and adventures such as shares. Rather it just wants to see if there are ways to benefit from savings e.g. by putting money into a high interest savings account. Certainly, VSE is considering ethical investments. GH explains that guidelines will need to be developed to cover e.g. no high-risk investment, ethical investment, etc.

#### **4. Re-election of Executive Board Member**

LA mentions that there is the need to vote for the re-election of Livija Plancic as Board Member. LA asks her to present herself. LA ask the members to vote with secret ballot.

#### **5. Address change**

LA mentions that VSE office has moved to the new office located in Rue Froissart 123-133, 1040 Brussels, Belgium. AI mentions that the registration of the new address has not been done because the old address is written in the Constitution. The proposal is to change this in the Constitution and remove any mention to the exact address by just mentioning the city. GH asks members to vote. The resolution is approved by unanimity.

#### **6. Any other business**

LA announces the elections' results: Re-election of Board member Livia Plancic accepted by unanimity.

#### **7. Concluding Remarks**

HVH concludes the Annual General Meeting by thanking everyone present for their work.