Minutes

of the

COBISS.Net Council Meeting

26 October 2021, online

The meeting took place via Zoom on Tuesday, 26 October 2021, between 10:00 and 11:15 AM CET.

In attendance:

COBISS.Net Council Members:
Dr Aleš Bošnjak; IZUM, Slovenia; (*director*)
Dr Ismet Ovčina; National and University Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina; (*director*)
Nevenka Hajdarović; National and University Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina; (*NCC head*)
Dr Vladimir Pištalo; National and University Library of Serbia; (*director*)
Dragica Lompar; National Library »Djurdje Crnojević« of Montenegro; (*director*)
Žaklina Gjalevska; National and University Library of North Macedonia »Sv. Kliment Ohridski«; (*NCC head*)
Željka Komlenić; National and University Library of the Republic of Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina; (*NCC head*)
Rumyana Petrova; SS. Cyril and Methodius National Library Bulgaria; (*NCC head*)
Vjenceslava Ševaljević; National Library »Djurdje Crnojević« of Montenegro; (*NCC*)
Vesna Stevanović; National Library of Serbia; (*NCC head*)
Arta Kqiku; Library of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Kosovo
Albana Velianj; Library of the Academy of Sciences of Albania (*director*)
Mirlona Buzo; Library of the Academy of Sciences of Albania
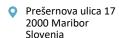DDr Bhanu Neupane; UNESCO

Other invited guests:
Davor Bračko; IZUM, Slovenia (COBISS.net coordinator)
Petra Bridges (keeper of the minutes); IZUM, Slovenija

Excused:

Krasimira Aleksandrova; SS. Cyril and Methodius National Library Bulgaria; (director)
Viljem Leban, National and University Library of the Republic of Slovenia; (director)

Gašper Hrastelj; UNESCO

Meeting agenda:

- Opening statements from Dr Ismet Ovčina, COBISS.Net Council President; Bhanu Neupane, UNESCO officer; Dr Aleš Bošnjak, director of IZUM
- Confirmation of the minutes from the previous meeting
- Project of the development help for the expansion of the COBISS.Net network
- Options for including Croatia in the COBISS.Net network and cooperation of national libraries
- Presentation of Unpaywall – open access to free academic resources
- AOB (any other business)

Ismet Ovčina as the president of the COBISS.Net Council moderated the meeting. In his introductory greeting, he thanked everyone for their attendance and said that hopefully the next meeting will be held in person and not online. Next, the council members confirmed the meeting agenda. He also extended a warm welcome to the new members Vladimir Pištalo, Dragica Lompar and Gašper Hrastelj. He asked the council if they agree to accept Gašper Hrastelj, the head of the Slovenian UNESCO office, as a new member of the Council and there were no objections.

To clarify, Aleš Bošnjak explained that, as IZUM is also a UNESCO category II centre, it makes sense to include a Slovenian UNESCO representative in the Council in addition to Bhanu Neupane.

Everyone confirmed the new COBISS.Net Council member by raising their hands.

Next, Ismet Ovčina said that the director of the National Library of North Macedonia would join the meeting an hour later and gave the floor to Bhanu Neupane.

Bhanu Neupane greeted everyone and said that, formally, this was only the second COBISS.Net Council meeting and a good opportunity to start afresh. The meeting was a good opportunity to remind everyone about the premise of IZUM becoming a UNESCO centre, the negotiations with the Government of Slovenia and the multi-lateral decision of appointing IZUM – all countries approved IZUM as a UNESCO centre. The agreement was signed in September 2012 for 6 years but did not come into full force until last year. The pretext was the exchange of knowledge and research results within the framework of library automation, so the output should be relevant, we should have strong cooperation to intensify the exchange of knowledge and have to upscale our activities for training. Other member states should also organise knowledge centres. It is not 2012 anymore, and there are sustainable development goals that should be achieved by 2030. The level of technology has also changed since 2012 and AI is now mainstream. It is a lucky coincidence that the International Research Centre on Artificial Intelligence (IRCAI) is also based in Slovenia, and AI should be integrated in IZUM's activities. Neupane prepared an assessment on how the objectives have changed and is happy to share his notes, but also emphasised that it must be decided what can be done in 2021 and 2022.

Aleš Bošnjak then thanked Bhanu and invited everyone to express their thoughts. He said that the remaining two months of 2021 will be very active. As a result of many negotiations, the Slovenian Ministry of Education, Science and Sport gave a grant of 20,000 EUR for this year. Negotiations are also underway with the other competent ministry (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) where we hope to be included in their framework plan for the next year. The agenda for 2021 is education and introducing new COBISS services and current research information services as well as the enhancement of scientific bibliographies. The countries that already use COBISS and E-CRIS services are welcome to apply but they need a plan on how the funding will be spent within this agenda. For the EUR 20,000 grant, we were advised to spend the money according to the number of libraries participating in the COBISS.net network in each country: EUR 8000 for Serbia, EUR 3000 for each – North Macedonia and Montenegro, EUR 3000 for Bosnia and Herzegovina, EUR 2000 for the Republic of Srpska and EUR 1000 for Bulgaria. Every country must have an action plan and write a short proposal on how the funding will be spent; a few words about the actions that will be taken will be enough in the initial phase. By the end of the fiscal year (31 December 2021) the invoices proving how the funds were spent must be handed in. The proposal should state which actions related to education will be performed, such as courses, presentations of new COBISS tools, it is also strongly advised to promote new functionalities, such as dCOBISS or SICRIS if they are not used in a country yet, or a specific functionality (e.g. if many libraries already use cataloguing, but not loan, then COBISS/Loan could be introduced) – if a specific functionality is new for most libraries, then the project is eligible for funding. Davor Bračko was appointed project coordinator and will discuss all the proposals and then make a cost estimate. The deadline for the first draft is 15 November 2021. The inclusion of new types of libraries can also be eligible, but not in terms of hardware, but in terms of conversions, preparing records for bibliographies, training, which could be provided by IZUM or adequately trained local instructors. He expressed the hope that everyone will be able to spend the allocated money, but if it's impossible to spend all the money, then it can be re-assigned to another country. Unfortunately, three countries from the COBISS.net family are not eligible for this funding (Slovenia, Albania and Kosovo) as they are already fully financed by the Slovenian ministry, but we hope that there will be other funding opportunities in the future.

Ismet Ovčina said he was sorry for the three countries who were not eligible for funding at this moment but welcomed the good news. There was no discussion, and the proposal was accepted unanimously. He reminded everyone to send in their proposals by 15 November 2021 at the latest.

Aleš Bošnjak added that an invitation along with an example of a proposal will be sent to everyone to make sure it will be submitted in a form that can be approved by the ministry.

The next item on the agenda was the confirmation of the minutes from the previous

meeting; no remarks were received and the minutes was accepted.

Aleš Bošnjak mentioned that all the minutes from the previous meetings are available on the website and a link will be sent out, which is particularly important for the new Council members.

Next item on the agenda was the project of the development help for the expansion of the COBISS.Net network.

Aleš Bošnjak said that he had already explained the plan in the previous item and has nothing to add. He also said it would be helpful to get the approval of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as once we are in their framework, we can start more long-term plans. IZUM wrote a proposal and is waiting for confirmation; the proposal is mostly about training and spreading information. He once again asked the other members to appeal to their local ministries and UNESCO to maybe contribute some financing for the next year. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also said that when there are new functionalities to show, we can go to the embassies of the contributing countries and make presentations for their competent ministries. If there is a chance to get financing in the other participating countries, then presentations can also be organised for their governments or embassies.

Bhanu Neupane then emphasised two things he was really pleased about. Firstly, that some resources were available to kickstart the activities. If the proposed projects are within the framework of openness of knowledge, then UNESCO would be happy to contribute a few thousand EUR. He also said that the contact with the EU should be re-initiated. In the past they were very interested to help, but somebody was spreading rumours and the cooperation was shut down, it is time to re-establish new contacts between IZUM and the EU to help spread their services. To sum up: UNESCO will match the amount if the proposed project includes openness of knowledge, and we need to work together to restart the link with the EU.

Aleš Bošnjak said that he would try to make the connection with the EU and that libraries are agencies of knowledge. As for the rumours, they would be spoken about under item AOB. He asked Bhanu Neupane to help make this connection with the EU and that they would discuss that on another occasion.

Ismet Ovčina said he was grateful for the support and that the Council would do what they can on their level. Everyone agreed and item 3 on the agenda was finished.

The next item on the agenda was the option of including Croatia in the COBISS.net network and cooperation of national libraries.

Aleš Bošnjak gave the backstory. Some Croatian libraries expressed their wish to join COBISS. Croatia uses several library information systems, but some of them should not be up to the task. A long time ago some public libraries were included in COBISS, but the

national library never participated. A professor from the Faculty for Library Science in Osijek wanted to teach her students about COBISS so she came to some COBISS courses.

Osijek is now a possible candidate for joining COBISS. They also mentioned that they are not satisfied with their current system. IZUM also received a call from Koprivnica (a Croatian town with about 50,000 inhabitants), where they would also like to change their system and already have some funding. They asked for an offer and IZUM provided a very competitive offer. They also spoke about getting data from the other system to convert it to COBISS data and it was established that their data could be converted to the COMARC/B format. There is one large obstacle: all libraries download most of their records from the National and University Library in Zagreb where they create records for the entire Croatian production and the libraries would like to keep using this option. Negotiations have already started with the Croatian National and University Library. The current director of the National and University Library in Zagreb is a former professor of the COBISS Master's degree. The issue was pointed out about the possibility of exchanging records between the Croatian National and University Library and the countries within COBISS.net. Aleš Bošnjak then asked the Council members to state if they would like to receive records from the Croatian National and University Library and if they are willing to give them their records.

Ismet Ovčina said that he agrees with the proposal and gives his full support.

Vladimir Pištalo also agreed with Ismet Ovčina and said it was a very good idea. The final decision remains in Zagreb, but this is a very good development in the right direction.

Vjenceslava Ševaljević said that they were very pleased with the idea and give their support.

Rumyana Petrova also expressed her support on behalf of the Bulgarian National Library.

Žaklina Gjalevska said that this was an excellent idea and that it should be established as soon as possible. They have very good connections with the National Library in Zagreb and will use their database very much. They also work together in some other areas. Croatia will also find their database very helpful, and this is a very good first step towards Croatia joining the network. She also said that the director of the National Library of Macedonia will be very pleased about the idea of exchanging records.

Arta Kqiku accepted the proposal.

Mirlona Buzo said that they support the idea and are very happy.

Željka Komlenić said that she supports the idea about the possible expansion of the network but would have to consult with her director about the exchange of records.

Aleš Bošnjak said that they will start negotiations first, then sign the paper and then find a way to make it happen technically. He thanked everyone for their support and said that

the first meeting will be held in Zagreb the following month.

Ismet Ovčina concluded this item on the agenda with the slogan "old ideas, new possibilities", and wished Aleš Bošnjak good luck with the negotiations with Croatia.

The next item on the agenda was the presentation of the Unpaywall service and its possible integration into COBISS+.

As an introduction, Aleš Bošnjak said that Davor Bračko will present the functionalities of the service. He said that it is a free service and can be integrated into COBISS+, but it will take several technical steps to do so. Normally, foreign resources are very expensive. IZUM is happy to integrate Unpaywall within the next six months.

Davor Bračko then proceeded with his presentation. Unpaywall is a service that maintains a database of links to full-text articles from open-access sources all over the world. The content is harvested from legal sources including repositories run by universities, governments, and scholarly societies, as well as open content hosted by publishers themselves. Unpaywall is a global search engine for scientific publications and other results of research work, which offers over 30 million open-access, i.e. free scientific articles. These articles are available in full text in over 50,000 different repositories. Additionally, Unpaywall is not limited to the IP area of a university or any other form of authentication. IZUM can include Unpaywall in COBISS+ as a special database, which could be accessed by all COBISS+ users in all the countries that are members of the COBISS.net network. IZUM can do this in up to six months. He then asked the Council members to decide if this service was useful and if IZUM should proceed with its implementation.

Aleš Bošnjak then added that IZUM will put the integration of Unpaywall into IZUM's work plan for the next year. If the integration is in the plan, then IZUM can deliver it in 6 months at the latest, as stated by IZUM's head of software development. Once the integration is finished, IZUM will make a presentation about this service.

Everyone agreed.

Aleš Bošnjak added that any questions about this should be addressed to Davor Bračko.

The final item on the agenda was AOB.

Ismet Ovčina wanted to emphasize two things. Firstly, he spoke about the second COBISS Days which were organised at the National Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina on 14 and 15 October 2021. Among others, they were attended by Jasmin Branković, assistant to the Minister for Education and Science of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Agreements were signed with new member libraries from the Tuzla region. Bibliographies were also an important topic. The event took place live; if people could not attend in person, it was available via Zoom. The COBISS Days also attracted attention from the press.

The second topic were the letters sent by Tomaž Seljak to the Council members and other institutions in an attempt to discredit the current management of IZUM. Ismet Ovčina said that Tomaž Seljak was a very active director who did many things for COBISS, but now it is time for the Council to distance themselves from his statements and express their support for the current management. He suggested a written statement should be confirmed by the Council members.

Aleš Bošnjak then suggested that the statement should be shared on screen and read out. He said if the Council formally expressed their support to the current management, then it would be easier to negotiate.

Ismet Ovčina then read the following statement:

The COBISS.Net Council is aware of the unusual correspondence of the first director of IZUM, which is aimed at the previous and current directors of IZUM, the IZUM management board, the competent ministries that manage the founder's rights of IZUM as a public institution, and the directors of the national libraries within the COBISS.net network, who are, at the same time, also acting members of the COBISS.Net Council.

The members of the COBISS.Net Council distance themselves from these attacks unanimously and unconditionally and express their full support to IZUM and its management.

Aleš Bošnjak emphasized that it was a problem that Tomaž Seljak falsely addresses officials and other important institutions, such as embassies, which undermines the credibility of IZUM's management.

Ismet Ovčina asked the Council to vote about the written statement. All the Council members were in favour.

Ismet Ovčina then said that this was a very important message.

He said that the meeting was very successful and reminded everyone to submit their drafts for the grant. In conclusion, he asked Bhanu Neupane if he had any final suggestions.

Bhanu Neupane thanked everyone for the lively discussion. He asked the members to write to UNESCO, if there are any projects that are slightly out of purview of COBISS but could be interesting to UNESCO. What should COBISS do in 2022 and 2023? If there is an event, book, publication or a new project, UNESCO may be able to contact the other member states and organise a small grant.

Aleš Bošnjak then expressed his gratitude for the support shown by the Council. He promised to make the best services for the COBISS.net network and do what he can to support the COBISS.net family. He reminded everyone that the deadline for the

submission of proposals was 15 November 2021. Any questions can be sent to Davor Bračko or Aleš Bošnjak.

Ismet Ovčina and Aleš Bošnjak thanked everyone for their participation.

The meeting was concluded at 11:15 CET.

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