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NEWSLETTER



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EDITORIAL

Dear readers

It's a great honour to address a few words to you in this latest issue of the WAPIS Programme newsletter. I took up my duties for the Delegation in Côte d'Ivoire in September 2022, but I was already familiar with the WAPIS Programme since I have been following its implementation from Brussels. Through this and other programmes, the European Union is keeping up the commitment made to support ECOWAS and countries in the region in their ambition to consolidate the Rule of Law – security being one of its fundamental pillars – and to combat transnational organized crime, which is on the rise in the region as it is throughout the world.

Having received EUR 58 million of funding from the European Union since 2012, the WAPIS Programme is at the heart of this strategy. In addition to specific projects, this Programme aims to provide structural support to the West African police services. Its expansion should help them conduct their day-to-day work at national and regional level better, and also make a major contribution to international police co-operation, primarily in the interests of Africa, but also those of Europe and the rest of the world.

The fight against transnational organized crime, whether smuggling drugs, weapons, natural resources or even migrants, has become even more urgent against the backdrop of an increasing threat of terrorism. Breaking the economic models used by criminal networks involves cutting off potential sources of funding for armed terrorist groups and thus contributing to peace and stability, in West Africa and beyond.

These security challenges hinder economic and social development in this region which has so much to offer, and discourage foreign investment. Establishing a solid basis for processing police and criminal information would appear to be a prerequisite for tackling these threats effectively. Thanks to the setting up of automated national systems that are interconnected at regional and global level, security systems now have both a memory and a standardized exchange framework that allows more robust investigation of criminal cases. The WAPIS system enables effective co-ordination between law enforcement agencies in the region and reliable, secure information sharing.

IN THIS ISSUE

| | |
|--|---|
| EDITORIAL | 1 |
| LEAD STORIES | 3 |
| OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES | 5 |
| THE MEN AND WOMEN BEHIND THE SYSTEM: HATS OFF TO TECHNOLOGY! | 7 |
| CONCLUSION | 8 |



This Programme
is funded by the
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More than a decade after the Brussels Symposium in 2010, following which the West African police chiefs called for the setting up of just such a mechanism, the WAPIS Programme has reached cruising speed with the system becoming operational in all the beneficiary countries. I myself witnessed the progress made by the Programme at the inauguration ceremony for the police data processing centre (CTIP) in Abidjan on 9 June 2023. I also commend the start of implementation of the AFIS project (setting up Automated Fingerprint Identification Systems in West African countries) funded by the European Union for the time being in pilot countries, also with the intention of strengthening the security architecture of countries in the region.

However, there are still disparities between the countries in how effectively WAPIS has been implemented. Some beneficiary countries in the Programme faced with operational, technical or organizational problems have experienced delays as the Programme nears completion. I would therefore like to take the opportunity to remind them of the commitments made when they agreed to sign up to the Programme. The success of the WAPIS Programme depends on the political will of the States. It is therefore crucial to make the necessary arrangements quickly to support effective implementation of WAPIS and encourage its use. This tool was designed to assist States in the region and support their efforts in the fight against crime. Law enforcement agencies should learn to use it as a matter of course. To ensure the long-term future of the system, it is also essential to allocate sufficient budgetary resources for its operation and to retain trained staff in charge of the various Data Collection and Registration Centres (DACOREs). For its part, the European Union will continue to ensure that its Delegations in the participating countries provide the necessary support for Programme implementation.

Since we are facing the same threats, we need to tackle the challenges together!

Thank you very much.

LEAD STORIES

Inauguration of police Data Collection and Registration Centres: Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia come on board the WAPIS train



Inauguration of the police Data Collection and Registration Centre (DACORE), Praia (Cabo Verde), 10 May 2023

All beneficiary countries in the WAPIS Programme now have a WAPIS Data Collection and Registration Centre (DACORE) in their national security architecture. The Programme has been inaugurated DACOREs in Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, thus marking the consolidation of WAPIS implementation in these countries.



Inauguration of the police data processing centre (CTIP) in Côte d'Ivoire, Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), 9 June 2023

These ceremonies were presided over and attended by ministers in charge of implementing WAPIS, representatives of the ECOWAS Commission, the European Union as well as representatives of national law enforcement agencies and embassy teams in these countries.

These centres will act as a catalyst for strengthening security and synergy between national law enforcement agencies, by involving them in the process of collecting, storing and sharing criminal data at national, regional and global levels via INTERPOL's I-24/7 secure communications network.

They will thus make it easier for front-line agents to conduct their day-to-day work on criminal investigations, as well as processing the movements of people and property at border crossing points.

In Côte d'Ivoire, this inauguration ceremony was followed by a WAPIS National Committee (WANACO), consisting of various law enforcement agency managers responsible for defining the guidelines for Programme implementation. Chaired by the Minister of the Interior and Security, this meeting was an opportunity to take important decisions which will make it easier to roll out the system in the country.



Inauguration of the DACORE, Monrovia (Liberia), 23 June 2023

The WAPIS Programme holds its 8th Steering committee meeting and also its 2nd AFIS project Steering and coordination committee meeting



Group photo during the AFIS Project committee opening ceremony, 23 May 2023, Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)

The 2nd meeting of the AFIS (Automated Fingerprint Identification System) project of the WAPIS (West African Police Information System) Programme was held in Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire) on 23 May 2023 as a prelude to the 8th WAPIS Programme Steering and coordination committee meeting.

The aim of this 2nd meeting was to give an update on the progress of implementation of the AFIS project since the last Steering and coordination committee meeting in July 2022, study any problems encountered during implementation, draw up strategic and operational plans, and formulate recommendations for the following six months.

At the end of the discussions, a number of decisions and recommendations were issued, the most notable being the setting up of a tripartite INTERPOL/EU/ECOWAS assessment of the progress of implementation of prerequisites for the AFIS system in the pilot countries (Benin, the Gambia, Togo) before they actually take over responsibility for it.

Following the AFIS project Steering and coordination committee meeting, the 8th WAPIS Programme Steering and coordination committee meeting was held on 25 May 2023 in Abidjan, with the same objective as that of the AFIS Project committee.

This Steering committee meeting, mainly involving the single points of contact (SPOCs) from participating countries and directors of the Data Collection and Registration centres (DACOREs), was co-chaired by representatives of the European Union and the ECOWAS Commission. The deliberations focused on the progress made in overall implementation of the Programme in each participating country since the Steering Committee meeting in November 2022.



Panel of the Steering Committee, Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), 24 May 2023

At the end of the meeting, recommendations were made to all the participants, in order to support and boost Programme implementation actions.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The police data processing centre (CTIP) in Côte d'Ivoire opens its doors to the WAPIS single points of contact and the directors of the West African DACORES.

In keeping with its desire to share experience between WAPIS participants, the WAPIS Programme, with the agreement of Côte d'Ivoire's Minister of Security and the Interior, organized a tour of the police data processing centre (CTIP) in Côte d'Ivoire, on 24 May 2023.

This guided tour by the director of the CTIP, Commissioner Doumbia Yahaya, provided an opportunity to note the quality of the infrastructure established by the Ivorian authorities, who have made the CTIP the real nerve centre for processing and sharing police information in Côte d'Ivoire.

On a site covering 2400 m² in total with 923 m² used surface area, the building has been refurbished jointly by the State of Côte d'Ivoire and the European Union, with technical support from INTERPOL. It consists of 15 offices, a meeting room, training rooms, a police station and an equipment room. The CTIP staff consists of 35 people, including 25 police officers and 10 gendarmes.

At the end of this informative visit, the WAPIS Programme SPOCs and the ECOWAS representatives were particularly impressed by the commitment of the Ivorian authorities to setting up this infrastructure which confirms the importance that the Côte d'Ivoire government attributes to WAPIS.

As concerns ECOWAS, the adoption of the legal framework required for operation and permanence of the regional platform and the appointment or establishment of a coordinating body within ECOWAS, who will take over from INTERPOL when the WAPIS Programme comes to an end.

These recommendations will no doubt boost the commitment of participating countries to fully discharge their responsibility for effective implementation of WAPIS to ensure the peace, security and safety of people and property in the territory.



Group photo of the visit to the CTIP, Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), 24 May 2023

The Togolese authorities raise awareness in law enforcement agencies about WAPIS.



Group photo of the information and awareness-raising meeting – Lomé, Togo, 13 June 2023

The WAPIS Programme in collaboration with the Togo police information centre (CIPT) organized a WAPIS Programme information and awareness-raising meeting from 13 to 15 June 2023 in the premises of the National Police motorized brigade in Lomé.

Presided over by Mr Yark DAMEHANE, Togo's Minister of Security and Civil Defence, the opening ceremony was attended by several national authorities, the Head

of the European Union Delegation in Togo, the resident ECOWAS Representative in Togo, as well as INTERPOL's Head of Programme and representatives of the embassy teams and development partners.

The purpose of this information and awareness-raising meeting was to make law enforcement officers more aware of the role of WAPIS and how it could be used to strengthen the security architecture in Togo. The participants were also informed about the AFIS project and its implementation in Togo.

Over these three days, some 300 participants from the National Police, the National Gendarmerie, Customs and the Water and Forestry Administration took part in this activity.

For the record, in Togo, more than 200 Police officers, from the special anti-narcotics unit (OCRTIDB), Gendarmerie, Customs and the Water and Forestry Administration have already been trained to use WAPIS. More than forty WAPIS workstations have been deployed to Lomé within the law enforcement agencies. Around fifty of the country's law enforcement agencies, including at the borders, will soon be connected to WAPIS and to INTERPOL's databases.

WAPIS is the focus of growing interest: an increasingly fruitful co-operation with development partners in the region.

Co-operation between INTERPOL's WAPIS Programme and the OCWAR-T (Organized Crime: West African Response to Trafficking) project implemented by GIZ in co-operation with UNODC is bearing fruit. This multilateral approach between the two projects is contributing to speedier implementation of WAPIS in The Gambia.

Discussions intended to formalize the idea of a collaboration with UNODC were instigated last year by Cristian BARBIERI, policy analyst for the WAPIS Programme. After identifying common themes for co-operation with The Gambia, this co-operation entered its active phase thanks to concerted action between Carlos Gonzalez YEPES, INTERPOL's Country Officer for The Gambia, Lamin BAJINKA, director of the Banjul DACORE, and Dulce PEREZ, responsible for the UNODC programme.

Thanks to this fruitful collaboration, the OCWAR-T project provided an Internet connection for the 19 workstations already donated by INTERPOL to the Banjul DACORE. This Internet connection will immediately increase the volume of data in the WAPIS database by 20%, thus considerably enhancing interdepartmental co-operation at national level. It will also make it easier to connect the DACORE to INTERPOL's I-24/7 network for exchanging data at an international level. Eventually, this partnership will allow the connection to be extended to 80 workstations in the country.

The collaboration is not just technical, but also has an operational element.

Hence, in order to improve data sharing between the various organizations fighting organized crime in The Gambia, UNODC organized a workshop on the correct and effective use of data in the WAPIS database aimed at investigators from the Gambian security forces. This workshop was held from 24 to 27 July and allowed 25 Gambian investigators to act out practical scenarios in order to test and improve the skills of end users of the national WAPIS database created by INTERPOL. This workshop should be reproduced in other countries which are beneficiaries of the project.

Finally, Standard Operating Procedures for the use of data contained in the WAPIS database have been drawn up in close collaboration with all the State security services by INTERPOL's representatives, Mr Carlos Gonzalez YEPES and Mr Mohamed YANSANEH.

Thanks to the work of INTERPOL and its external partners, The Gambia now has a functioning national database, and investigators with specialist training in its use and Standard Operating Procedures.

THE MEN AND WOMEN BEHIND THE SYSTEM: HATS OFF TO TECHNOLOGY!

Technology is at the heart of the WAPIS revolution. System, network, server, router, connection, this is the vocabulary that dominates programme implementation. We will therefore hand over to those people who are the linchpins behind WAPIS implementation in their countries, to talk to us.



Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) **UBAIDULLAH LAWAL** IT Administrator in Nigeria under the West African Police Information System (WAPIS)

My responsibilities include system management, user support, backup and disaster recovery planning, training, and documentation. I oversee the overall management of WAPIS, including hardware, software, and network infrastructure, and ensuring optimal performance and availability of the system. I provide technical support to WAPIS users, troubleshoot issues, and resolve technical problems. I also develop robust backup and disaster recovery plans as well as conduct training sessions for WAPIS users in Nigeria. My role is crucial in supporting law enforcement agencies in Nigeria. It is also vital in ensuring the smooth operation and maintenance of the system. In terms of importance, WAPIS plays a significant role in the national security architecture by promoting information sharing, collaboration, and capacity building among law enforcement agencies in the region, thus enabling them to combat transnational crime, terrorism, and other security threats effectively. Technology has indeed become an indispensable tool in addressing security challenges, providing law enforcement with advanced capabilities for data collection, analysis, and intelligence sharing. It enables more effective crime prevention, investigation, and response. It is however important to balance technological advancements with privacy protection, civil liberties, and ethical considerations.

In my role as technical expert for the WAPIS Programme in Togo, I have been privileged to take part in this major technological initiative which is intended to boost security and regional co-operation in West Africa. The WAPIS has been designed to make it easier to share information between local police forces, and also different countries in the region, in order to fight more effectively against cross-border crime and improve the safety of citizens. In this article, I would like to share my experience and my commitment to this crucial cause.

Digitizing police data in each country and networking will change the history of the fight against organized crime in West Africa, as they have changed it in other parts of the world. I will add that we have, to this end, a reason to be even more committed, because we are not only contemporaries or witnesses of this historic upheaval, but also key players in its development. This is part of the national development plan, a key phase in the digitalization process Togo has signed up to.

In my view, the role of the technical department is far from negligible in this architecture, because when talking about IT systems, you are talking about the men and women working night and day to ensure the equipment, the network and the various departments work properly to ensure that information is available and usable at any time.

I would therefore simply like to thank our authorities for their involvement in implementing a project of this scale, and I'd like in particular to wish the very best to all these men and women who work in the shadows and never have the opportunity to be recognized for the work they do for the security of our countries and our region.



Joel Kafechina Sangbala system and network administrator at the Togo police information centre (CIPT)

CONCLUSION



Fabrice KOUAME

Officer in charge of Communication and Events

It is with immense pride and a very special emotion that I am speaking to you.

I would like above all to thank and express my appreciation to Mr Richard GOTWE, Head of the Programme, who has done me the honour of organizing this forum to mark my departure from the WAPIS team after almost six years working to boost security in West Africa.

My experience in the Programme has given me the chance to witness first-hand the minor technological revolution which has been happening within the West African law enforcement authorities. We have switched

from archive offices, police stations and investigation brigades overflowing with cardboard boxes at the start of 2018 to modern digital rooms where all procedures are recorded via one system, WAPIS.

The outcome was far from certain. We have encountered many difficulties along the road. But we found a way to overcome the obstacles, whether technical, legal or even political. I would like to mention in particular our colleagues who have contributed to building this system. Everyone who, through their own efforts, has pushed through adoption of draft legislation in the beneficiary countries, contributed to refurbishment of the Data Collection and Registration Centres, or trained hundreds of law enforcement officers to use WAPIS. I am grateful to you for all this time we have spent together and this fruitful collaboration.

I will expand on these words to all our national partners, especially to law enforcement officers, the first beneficiaries of the Programme. From Nouakchott to Abuja, Praia to Monrovia, I have had the chance to meet men and women of distinction who have shown a selfless resilience and have never reneged on their vows, despite the difficulties they may encounter in the course of their duties. Thanks to you, WAPIS has become a reality and I have no doubt that it will be a cornerstone of the security architecture in our countries in the years to come.

As I said in my introduction, the time has come for me to embrace new horizons, but I am very proud of all we have accomplished together. From Newsletter no. 8 when I took up my role to this Newsletter no. 23, I have tried in these 16 publications to keep you informed about the Programme's achievements and transmit to you some of our passion and fervour for WAPIS. I beg your indulgence for all the imperfections you may have noticed and I hope, above all, that I have lived up to your expectations.

Long live WAPIS, which will ensure a safer West Africa.

See you again soon...



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