

10 April, 2017

Dear Trustee of ISHMap, dear member of Council,

The situation of the Society is **'Kafka-esque'** indeed - and that feeling of **absurdity** is further enhanced by the fact that the recent communications to Council members have been written by the same person **who is responsible for the present situation**. Recently Treasurer Leif Isaksen sent you long and detailed messages, detailing his actions and hard work as Treasurer of the Society. Apparently, he wants to demonstrate you how effective he was, and he circulated our 2016 balance, approved by an independent examiner. I would not like to deny his achievements, however, I interpret his activity rather differently in the light of sober facts.

Now I suggest you to put aside the **'Isaksen Saga'** for a while and consider, instead of a romantic story, what he did as our officer and, as a consequence, what happened to our Society. As the Founding Chair of the Society I feel the responsibility to tell you my opinion, and ask you to evaluate yourself if to what extent his work contributed to the development of the society.

As all those Trustees who were present in **Lisbon last July** will remember that, right after the AGM, we had a short Council meeting. Time did not allow a longer formal meeting but I tried to tell Council members what I considered priority issues in the year ahead. As an important practical issue I asked the new Treasurer to take over the job from Sonali, that is to take over the bank account as well as the PayPal account of the Society. Regarding the PayPal account, I asked him to continue in the way we had done before: I asked him first time, politely, to give me access to the account. I explained that this is needed for administrative purposes only, to solve membership and subscription issues with the help of other officers. I also made it clear that I did not think this would be a simple procedure. Isaksen did not raise any question there, but he seemed to agree with the proposed guidelines. Me, as well as Council members, believed that he would continue business with us as a colleague.

Background: As you may know, the administrative system of the Society had to be connected to the financial system. We found PayPal as an intermediate tool to collect membership fees from our members living in different countries. Of course, the monies collected were transferred to our bank account in the end. As the Treasurer of the Society, Sonali always cooperated with the Secretary, but also with the Membership Secretary, the Webmaster and the Chair. We all considered that the Chair's access to the PayPal account not as a threat for the Society but as an advantage, who we could do it better. When a Problem arose I checked the financial transactions and reported to the officers to help them solving the issue with our member. In the first five years, as you could see, we operated smoothly. You must also know that I never did anything more: although I had full authorization I never sent or received any money and never checked or controlled the Treasurer's activity. I must also tell you that I have never received any money from our society – actually, I covered the costs of all society related business.

The first sign of Isaksen's activity, or, better to say, his missed activity, was seen by the Chair from a **December 21, 2016** message, which was forwarded to me by the Secretary. I learned from Merve that there was a problem with the PayPal widget on the website and she asked my assistance. With the Webmaster and Membership Secretary I acted as quickly as possible. Before last Christmas the widget worked properly and we could receive 2017 subscriptions.

On the same day, **December 21, 2016** I received a message from the Treasurer - which was copied to all executive officers. From this message I learned that he had difficulties with the PayPal account but, with our former Treasurer Sonali, worked on solving the issues. From the enclosed series of

messages I also learned that Treasurer Isaksen transferred the 2016 honoraria for the Membership Secretary and the Webmaster.

Regarding this information I must tell you that this was rather unusual action: earlier the executives were informed and agreed before the Treasurer made any payment. It is important to emphasize first that those honoraria were always proposed by the Treasurer and accepted by the AGM. Another point one should consider that ISHMap always paid honoraria after a period of work, usually half a year. It is highly unfair to suggest that our officers are paid employees of the society, and they are required to do what the Trustees order. Instead, they are voluntary members, who has helped us and worked hard for ISHMap. Their Job Descriptions were agreed by the AGM, and once the officers were appointed they were co-opted to Council to help the honorary officers.

Not for the transferred amount, but the neglecting of the Chair and other Trustees I contacted Isaksen on **December 22, 2016**. For the lack of any communication with me I asked him to copy me all official messages. I explained him that the executive officers kept each other informed, and this is how we did society business in the past. In my message I also offered him my assistance in the future - but asked him to reciprocate this attitude. For the foreseen difficulties regarding payments and subscriptions I repeated my request, and asked him to grant me access to the PayPal account. I explained him again that we need this to be able to help him and others.

In this context you may understand why I was rather surprised when, on the same day, the Treasurer sent the balance to Council members. As he explained I asked him to do so. However, I asked him to inform me about our financial situation. I also explained him why the Chair needed to know, after six months in office, if that balance was positive or not.

In a private message the Treasurer expressed his concerns about the shared PayPal account and refused my request.

Why and how the Founding Chair of the Society would threaten the account was never explained. Why and how this would be against any legal requirement is also unclear. Anyhow, I tried to explain him once again why no me but we, the Society needed that access. In his reply he referred to his own experience with similar societies and pointed out the need of the separation of the responsibilities of charity officers according to UK law. Why the access of another Trustee to the society's PayPal account, technically a possibility with corporate accounts, was against this legal requirement was never clarified.

In the end of our correspondence he expressed that he would give me a temporary access, as an unlikely case, if Trustees would authorize him to do so. As if he would have done it only if he were forced to do this by the Trustees. However, he never asked Council to authorize him to do so, likewise he never communicated, asked for opinion or cooperated.

The society was lucky enough that Isaksen did not made changes in our financial/administrative system in 2016. This made officers able to continue working undisturbed last year – and this is why now we have the 2016 balance in hand!

But once Isaksen started to act in his own way everything has changed.

Of course, he never informed us about those changes, and never asked our advice or assistance before he acted. For this reason, from the rather fragmentary information I received with considerable delay, I can only reconstruct the series of events leading to the disintegration of the financial and administrative system.

In **early 2017** Isaksen apparently took over the PayPal account, changed the credentials - but did not inform the officers or Trustees about those changes. However, this had implications: the payment of our member, Andrew Cook, was refused by PayPal. This was discovered in a month, late February 2017. The member contacted the Treasurer, whose reply was copied to the Membership Secretary and the Webmaster – but not me. The reason of the refusal was technical: the PayPal widget on our website was still connected to Sonali's credentials. The Treasurer, who did not send prior notification to the Webmaster, neither had he rectified the function nor sent he the necessary information to make the Webmaster able to update the website.

After the problem became obvious Isaksen asked for help from the Membership Secretary and the Webmaster - and copied his messages to me. Unfortunately, once he changed the credentials only he had access to the PayPal account – this is why no one could help him any more. As the Treasurer had full control over the accounts, only he could have changed anything there. He was already told this by the Membership Secretary (on December 20, 2016): the solution was in the hand of the person who had access to the PayPal account.

On **February 20, 2017** Isaksen sent a message to the Secretary and me, and informed us that he had **no access to the HSBC bank account**. Although I asked him to send us a short report about the issues he ignored my request. In lack of the details I suggest that he did not asked anyone but wanted be the signatory of our account. As he was careless he did not know that two signatories were required - and both of them had to be identified by the bank. This issue goes back to 2011 when the bank account was opened by the Executives at HSBC bank. As the Chair of the Founding Group I was in London and was prepared for the identification. However, I was informed by Sarah Tyacke, the Founding Secretary, that only persons with permanent UK address can be registered as signatories. For this reason, I did not accompany them when they went to HSBC bank, and the society account was opened by Sarah Tyacke and Sonali Siriwardena in the end of 2011. As we all worked as colleagues this never caused any problem for the society – not until 2017.

The Treasurer suggested a solution to the bank account problem: the Secretary should have gone to London to be identified in person. Unfortunately, Merve could not afford that trip from Cyprus, and asked me if the society could cover the costs of her trip and stay in London. Although it could have been an easy solution I thought the society could not afford the expenses and asked the Secretary to try find another practical solution. Merve tried to identify herself at a local branch of the British bank and her credentials were sent to London.

As we can all see from the recent communications, the Treasurer could not wait: he found another solution and Sarah Tyacke was registered as second signatory to the HSBC bank account... You must note that no officer, not a Trustee was asked to authorize Treasurer Isaksen to share the bank account with a member of the society. Obviously, HSBC bank did not want Merve, but someone who represented the society. So practically any of the Trustees could have helped – had they been asked or informed. Personally, I consider this situation not acceptable – especially because we have a Trustee in London, Sonali, who could have been asked to help us. Why she was no asked is a question unanswered.

You must note that no Council decision was made regarding the authorization and, in my opinion this demonstrates Isaksen's rather selective interpretation of democratic decision making. As you could see, earlier the Chair's request on the ground of no Council decision. My offer to help was refused and I could not have access to the PayPal account to help the society. On The other hand, in London there were no concerns or reservations in London, no need of corporate decision or support of Council,

Isaksen simply shared our bank account with a British member of the society... Am I wrong when I suppose that he actually never wanted to give me access to the PayPal access?

The serious problem with the HSBC bank account was reported in a short message by the Treasurer on **March 20, 2017**. At the same time, as described above, we had problem with the PayPal widget as well and the Society could not receive subscriptions in a critical period of the year.

Considering the catastrophic situation, to avoid further complications, as Chair of the society I asked the Webmaster to remove the PayPal widget from the website on **February 23, 2017**.

At the same time, I asked the Treasurer to report me when he and Merve regain access to the HSBC bank account. I also asked him again to rectify the PayPal widget, and send us the new basket as soon as possible to make us able to restore the function. Unfortunately, he never did what I asked him to do. Instead of acting as a Treasurer, now Isaksen sent repeated messages claiming the Webmaster and the Membership Secretary should rectify the widget immediately.

His was an absurd claim. As if one asked you to change his/her Facebook profile without the access to the account. Obviously, this can be done by the owner only... How could anyone else do that?

On **March 8, 2017** I tried to explain him once again why, in lack of access to the PayPal account, we could not help him. As he was obviously unable or unwilling to rectify the widget I asked him again to give me - at least temporary - access and make able to assist him. As you could read my message enclosed to the recent communications from the Treasurer may I ask you to read it carefully. This is documentary evidence that I really wanted to help, and I explained Isaksen very clearly why we needed that access. As you will also see, I asked him politely to cooperate with other officers this time in restoring the whole system.

The response sent to me, Adam and Domonkos received from him on **March 14, 2017** was not in the tone and with content we expected from a fellow officer of the society. Isaksen refused to give access to the PayPal account. On the other hand, he accused the officers, who were paid by the society, because they did not solve the problem he created. In the end he ordered us to solve the pressing problems of the society urgently ('i.e. today').

For transparency I attach the full text of his March 14, 2016 message to the end of this letter.

This was the last Kafka-esque communication I received from him... Although he enclosed messages dated **March 8** and **March 17, 2017** to his last communication about the 2016 balance. **If** when these were written and sent does not matter – but I never received any of them.

All I received from the Treasurer was the short circular message of **April 6, 2017**, announcing the good news about the 2016 balance and the attached preliminary report. Why the Treasurer earlier messages, dated last month, were enclosed to this is not clear. I must suppose that you all received those earlier messages, although I have not received any message from any Council member. Either you read the 'Isaksen saga' earlier, or you received these, like me, this time, the situation requires prompt actions. Regarding this I agree with the Treasurer - on the other hand, we certainly will not agree in the actions to be made.

However, before any action could be made we should clarify if we are authorized to do anything or not. Kafka-esque, is not it?

As you see from section 3 of Isaksen's message of **March 17, 2017**, now he considers the society is 'in grey territory': without chair and several trustees.

The reason – according to his interpretation - is that we are not paid members of the society – because we did not pay the 2017 membership fee. Isaksen simply ignores the fact that members of the society could not/can not pay because his failure. As he is the only person who has access to the PayPal account AND the HSBC bank account no one else is responsible for the present situation but Treasurer Isaksen. Although he is anxious to point to other officers, for obvious reasons, they were/are not responsible for the financial issues. Me, as Chair, can live without the access to the PayPal account - I never wanted this for myself.

But, for sure, the Treasurer who refused the help I/we offered **must take full responsibility** now. No one else, only Leif Isaksen was/is the person who was/is responsible for the failure of our financial administration. He worked with full authority and without any interference – and after ten months he failed to take over both accounts. I do not think that he takes responsibility and would draw the consequences – instead now he would like to complete the **deconstruction of the society**.

Although he suggests some actions taken by Council, in fact he says **there is no Council**, that is decisions made by the elected Trustees are no longer legal. This is clearly obstruction what may lead to the end of the society.

There is a solution, however, but it requires the cooperation of the Trustees and officers to save the society. I do not think for example that any UK law court would accept the argument that a membership can be cancelled if the member was neither notified to pay the fee and/or he/she nor could he/she pay the fee... For this simple reason I think we are still members of the society, and the elected Trustees plus co-opted members are still in the Council. As the Chair I am to lead the society - and this is what I would like to do – if you also want it. As you may remember, the first thing I asked from the members of the new Council was their support.

As far as I understand now, the whole series of issues leading to this disastrous situation are related to the question of reliability and trust. For obscure reasons Treasurer Isaksen always felt the need to demonstrate his independence and authority, and he never accepted me as leader of the society: he tried to ignore me, neglected my advice and refused my assistance. Where we could get with this attitude is obvious...

This is why, before as Chair I proposed any actions to Council, I must know if you, Trustees would accept my leadership or not. Would you help me in trying to restore the society or not? I hope you read my long account carefully, and it could clarify the fundamental things.

Please, let me know by sending an e-mail to me by this Friday noon (CET time) if you are ready to work with me, as Chair of ISHMap, when we try to resolve the situation according to the series of decision made by Council.

It is our common responsibility to act now together.

Zsolt G. Török

Hon. Chair, ISHMap

Dátum: Tue, 14 Mar 2017 14:00:18 +0000 

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Tárgy: Fwd: FW: Returned PayPal payments 

[minden csatolás](#)

Dear Zsolt, Domonkos, Ádám

Please see below about another potential member who has been able to join the society. It is now three weeks since Andrew Cook reported the issue and I have had no correspondence from you other than to request access to the account (which I have made clear I am only able to provide under the authority of the Trustees). Domonkos and Ádám both receive an annual [UTF-8?]â 500 stipend in order to care of this and it is not acceptable that we should continue to delay when the personal money of our membership is involved. It is also exceptionally detrimental to the society to prohibit access in precisely those months of the year when society members wish to sign up.

Can I press you urgently (i.e. today) to:

- confirm the nature of the widget in the ISHMap webpage and what information requires to function properly. The website was built by you - you must know the answer to this question.
- If you require information or authorisation codes from me, let me know what they are, and I will provide them.
- In the unlikely event that temporary access is required to the account, please specify the reasons for this so that we can request permission from the Trustees.
- Contact the membership once the widget has been re-established so that they are aware of the situation and not surprised by monies being returned to their accounts.

Best wishes

Leif