

## 4th Meeting of the Steering Group (SG) of Priority Area 9 (PA9) of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)

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**29 November 2012; 09.00 - 16.00**

Salzstadel Conference Venue, Weiße-Lamm-Gasse 1, D-93047 Regensburg, Germany

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### Chairpersons

Jürgen Schick, Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture, Austria

Ion Gumene, State Chancellery, Republic of Moldova

Jörg Leitner, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, Austria, replacing Roland Hanak

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### Countries present (for participants see attached list)

Representatives of the following countries of the Danube Region: AT, BG, CZ, DE, HR, MD, ME, RO, RS, SK (condition for quorum fulfilled).

Missing: BA, HU, SI; UA (has not nominated SG member)

European Commission (EC/DG Regio); European Training Foundation (ETF)

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## 0. Welcome/acceptance of the agenda

Chair welcomes SG. New SG members and/or other new participants introduce themselves: Rolf Ackermann (DE), Loredana Maravić (HR), Ljiljana Mugoša (ME) and Janicije Jeremić (RS)

Agenda accepted.

1. 1st Annual Forum (AF) of the EUSDR - Workshop 5; Outcomes and Results, Future Perspective/Relevant Programmes for EUSDR/PA9
2. Future Approach regarding “Labelling” and “Letter of Recommendation”
3. Implications on Silence Procedure and Decision-making/ Relevant Programmes for EUSDR/PA9

SCHICK (AT, CHAIR) illustrates organisation of workshop 5 of the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Forum of the EUSDR (AF) which took place in Regensburg on 27 and 28 November 2012. Priority Coordinators were invited to plan this workshop entitled “Promoting Empowerment, Smart Skills & Inclusive Growth.” The workshop has led to a fruitful mutual exchange between education institutions, the economy and evidence-providing research institutions. The discussions at the AF also showed that it remains a challenge to position PA9 topics in the overall EUSDR and to highlight their key role.

MARAVIĆ (HR) introduces herself as a new SG member on behalf of the HR Ministry for Education and points out that the SG has a very good structure. Question arises, what the benefit of the letter of recommendation (LoR) is. Many institutions in HR cannot consider it, e.g. the National Agency for Lifelong Learning or IPA4 managing authority. Maravić concludes that there might be a missing link and the need for a project preparation facility. SG members should ask themselves what can be done in order to have some real funding. The benefit of the EUSDR is probably the fact to have a platform for finding partners. Within the framework of “Erasmus for all”, as well as in the Regional Funds in the upcoming budget period, LoR should be considered.

DAMYANOVIC (ETF) underlines the good impressions and the political commitment which the Annual Forum has delivered. The EUSDR should be considered as a philosophy, whereas funding is a tool. It is important to reach a maximum of clarity and to ensure that Education & Training are on top of the agenda.

IVANKOVIĆ KNEŽEVIĆ (HR) is in favour of projects to have additional points with a LoR. The EC should support the SG in order to support the EUSDR.

VLADUȚ (RO) stresses that the topics of PA9 are a horizontal area and that the right people are required to make the necessary efforts to ensure the importance of PA9.

KASPARYAN (BG) has participated in workshop 4 “Innovative action for successful Danube Enterprises” of the Annual Forum. Synergies with the respective Priority Area 8 “To support the competitiveness of enterprises” should be used. A potential fund for the EUSDR could only be the seed money for the further use of other funding.

NUSSMÜLLER (EC) emphasises the positive impression of the Annual Forum, its positive ambiance and the political commitment. The Annual Forum has been covered in the media. The discussion in workshop 5 was very interesting and it is impressive what is already ongoing. As regards the upcoming budget period and legislative proposals for

regional funds, it is one main achievement that there will be one partnership agreement for these funds (ERDF, ESF, CF, EAFRD, fishery fund). Each Operational Programme in the Danube Region is relevant for the EUSDR, but there is a need to lay out how it will be supported. The EUSDR is mentioned in the regulation proposals, but the concrete support for the Strategy is not defined. The cooperation perspective of the Strategy should not be forgotten. PA9 SG members should talk to their ministries that draft ESF and upcoming CBC programmes and ask themselves what text should be in the Operational Programmes. Within European Transnational Cooperation, a new “Danube” programme will replace the current Southeast Europe programme. The geographic scope of this new Danube programme will comply with the EUSDR. One out of four priorities will be the support to the EUSDR. This priority will support mainly the governance structure; the entire programme aims rather at the preparation of projects.

At the end of January, there will be a meeting of the PACs and the NCPs with the EC.

The LoR is a “stamp” for a project which contributes to the EUSDR. There is a need to reflect on the instrument of the LoR and to discuss it.

ŠTĚPÁNKOVÁ (SK) points out that there are a lot of overlaps with the other priorities of pillar 3 (PA7 & PA8) of the EUSDR and contacts with these PAs should therefore be strengthened, as many initiatives are of the same nature.

DAMYANOVIC (ETF) sees potential synergies and complementarities with many other initiatives, e.g. the SEE Strategy 2020 of the former Stability Pact countries which was endorsed in Tirana. This strategy already includes many thematic areas that are also relevant for the EUSDR, such as inclusive growth or a higher employment rate. In this respect, existing initiatives should be combined.

ISAC (MD) points out that MD is not eligible for every programme. Moreover, it is very difficult to receive new project proposals.

SCHICK (AT) stresses that EUSDR projects have to match the criteria of PA9. Only international projects can be considered. There is an urgent need for the new Danube programme in the framework of the ETC to consider all the thematic priorities of the EUSDR, including PA9 and education, training and labour market issues. Furthermore, there is a potential contradiction with the thematic concentration of programmes foreseen in the draft regulations for the next financial framework. The Danube programme would be the only one to include all the DR countries. SG members are therefore requested to talk to their responsible colleagues.

NUSSMÜLLER (EC) points out that the European Transnational Cooperation (ETC) addresses thematic challenges and prepares more strategic long-term projects. Regional policy must already be justified vis-à-vis policy makers and EU citizens. The Council has already stated that the thematic focus will remain; now it is up to the EP and the GAC to agree.

NUSSMÜLLER adds that the ETC also involves IPA and ENPI funding. Nonetheless, PA9 cannot focus exclusively on Structural Funds.

SCHICK (AT) highlights the fact that Structural Funds also have the possibility to finance projects in the field of PA9 and more precisely education, especially the ESF and the ERDF.

DAMYANOVIC (ETF) claims that the EUSDR should also be integrated into national programmes.

SCHICK (AT) underlines that transnational cooperation is a core element for the implementation of the EUSDR and might also serve as a project preparation facility.

ACKERMANN (DE) proposes to develop a common strategy to integrate the EUSDR into national strategies.

NUSSMÜLLER (EC) asks how PA9 would like to proceed with the LoR in the future.

IVANKOVIĆ KNEŽEVIĆ (HR) proposes to integrate it in the respective Operational Programmes of each country of the Danube Region.

SG agrees. Katarina IVANKOVIĆ KNEŽEVIĆ (HR) agrees to draft note and to send it to the PACs who will then forward it to the SG.

KASPARYAN (BG) adds that this could be done in cooperation with PA7 and PA8 once the note has been finalised.

SCHICK (AT) states that it is necessary to have further discussions on the role and the aim of LoR in the upcoming budget period.

STROIE (RO) doubts that the LoR can be used due to very restrictive selection criteria.

DAMYANOVIC (ETF) states that the LoR should mainly contribute to mark success stories.

SCHICK (AT) asserts that it cannot be the PAC's task to evaluate projects. This would duplicate the work of National Agencies and Operational Programmes. PACs can only focus on the essential question if the project contributes to the EUSDR and the project criteria of PA9.

KASPARYAN (BG) agrees that the SG cannot take over the function of Managing Authorities of project evaluation.

NUSSMÜLLER (EC) mentions that some programmes do already consider the LoRs. The SG of PA9 should do more than just a silence procedure.

NUSSMÜLLER disagrees with the fact that the LoR is not working and emphasizes that there are different approaches in different priority areas.

#### 4. Decision on Amendment of the Guidelines for the Functioning of the Steering Group

SCHICK (AT) proposes to amend the guidelines for the functioning of the Steering Group.

No objections, change is approved, this includes the following additional paragraph:

*“3(i) For decisions on labelling of or issuing a letter of recommendation for a project or an initiative, only comments that explicitly relate to a potential non-compliance with the agreed and valid project criteria will be treated as an objection. Any other comments will be considered as recommendations to the project partners”*

## 5. Discussion and Decisions on Current Requests for Labelling/LoR

- “Roma Responsibility Project”

SG recommends project and agrees to make use of the term “Kosovo”.

## 6. Civil Society Platform of the EUSDR

Following a request by PA10, SCHICK (AT) asks whether civil society platforms should be invited to the SG.

SG agrees to invite only civil society organisations with strategic relevance. SG members send their ideas for organisations that could be involved by 25 January 2013. Proposals should have a maximum length of ~ 1000 characters.

## 7. EC Technical Assistance (TA), Outlook for 2014 - 2015

NUSSMÜLLER (EK) states that the TA is being processed and due to be signed by the end of 2012. EP suggests pilot projects and preparatory actions. TA will be used to bridge the period without specific assistance from European Transnational Cooperation. The new Danube programme could be used for 7 years. As regards future pilot projects, EP proposes projects to the EC and EC figures out to which PA they would fit. Eva Nussmüller mentioned also that the TA in 2014-2015 will include also money for smaller pilot projects.

## 8. Overview of Major Developments since SG 3 - Current Update of the Working Groups

BERGMANN (AT) reports on the meeting held in November in Budapest of the Work Area 7 *“To fight poverty and social exclusion of marginalised communities in the Danube Region, especially the Roma communities.”* Working Group decided to apply for a transnational project within an Austrian ESF call. SG agrees to forward institutions that might be interested in participating in this project.

BERGMANN announces meeting organized by herself for Work Area 8 *“To promote gender equality on the labour market, especially in payment”* in spring 2013, probably taking place in Bratislava.

LEITNER (AT) refers on meeting held in November in Belgrade of the Work Area 6 *“To improve cross-sector policy coordination to address demographic and migration challenges.”* This Working Group decided to create a platform and to organize two meetings per year. Several project ideas were discussed.

IVANKOVIĆ KNEŽEVIĆ (HR) announces meeting organized by HR for Work Area 2 *“To foster cooperation between key stakeholders of labour market, education and research policies in order to develop learning regions and environments”* in March or April 2013. The meeting will take place in the East of HR and it is intended to show good practices.

SCHICK (AT) refers to Non-paper on Working Areas linked to education (see annex). On 17 and 18 October 2012, a strategy meeting with selected WG members and other stakeholders took place in Vienna in order to further develop the implementation and to

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\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

identify responsible persons/institutions for the Working Areas linked to education. With regard to the broad thematic scopes of the Actions foreseen in the Action Plan of the EUSDR, various modes of work should be taken into account. In this respect, several Working Groups are going to implement the Work Areas. Currently, within Work Area 4 *“To support lifelong learning and expanding learning mobility”*, the Romanian Centre for TVET intends to steer a cluster on LLL in cooperation with the Ministry for Education of Baden-Württemberg. A Working Group linked to Work Area 3 *“To support creativity and entrepreneurship”* will be coordinated by the SME Centre in Ruse (BG) and within Working Area 5 *“To promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship through education and training”*, Interkulturelles Zentrum, the Austrian National Agency for the “Youth in Action” programme of the EU, considers to be in charge of a Working Group on a Youth Platform in the Danube Region. As regards Working Area 1 *“To enhance performance of education systems through closer cooperation of education institutions, systems and policies”*, currently separate events, ad hoc meetings, project-development meetings or project fair events will contribute to its implementation. In addition to this, networking events across Work Areas should be considered, as some of the treated topics or activities of the Work Areas are strongly connected to each other and should not be analysed in an isolated manner.

In relation to this, SCHICK (AT) announces Peer Learning event on VET which will take place on 5 and 6 December 2012 in Vienna, upon invitation of the EU coordination of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture to the Education Committee and in cooperation with the European Commission and PA9 of the EUSDR. Eight countries from the DR will participate, of which three are third states.

KASPARYAN (BG) announces meeting of WG3 in spring 2013. Synergies will be sought with PA8.

NUSSMÜLLER (EK) proposes to foster mutual exchange of Working Groups with thematic overlaps with PA8.

DAMYANOVIC (ETF) agrees that it would be useful to create an interface with PA8, especially with regard to SEECEL, which has accomplished a major work. Databases cannot be the output of the Working Groups.

KASPARYAN (BG) draws the attention on the fact that existing projects should be considered, but agrees with Ms Damyanovic that databases cannot be the outcome. It matters to bring the topic of creativity closer to the businesses.

ACKERMANN (DE) brings forward the idea for a Lifelong Learning cluster related to WG4. In the reflection paper for the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Forum of the EUSDR, not a single word about education could be found. It would be good to establish a network in the field of lifelong learning and combine it with other networks, e.g. PA8 and PA7. In this respect, a feedback in the upcoming weeks is requested. The Ministry for Education of Baden-Württemberg could provide interesting partners. The first meeting of WG4 could probably take place in Ulm. WG4 would cover a wide range of topics.



SCHICK (AT) states that coordination with other PAs will be pursued where useful and feasible and adds that due to the complexity of the issues concerned, there is a need for diverse approaches and different institutions to work on one and the same topic.

SCHICK (AT) introduces the template for terms of references for the implementation of Working Groups. Regarding their financing, the participation of 1-2 persons from third countries can be ensured through the TA.

#### 9. Internet Platform of PA 9

MIRTL (AT) gives a short overview of current developments on PA9's website<sup>1</sup>, which is one of the most visible of all PAs of the EUSDR and the EUSDR in general. SG members are encouraged to make use of a network of more than 500 stakeholders and to interlink websites of projects or institutions with the website of PA9.

#### 10. Next Meeting and A.o.B.; Final Conclusions, Deliverables and Next Steps

SG discusses its next meeting.

ŠTĚPÁNKOVÁ (SK) proposes to hold the next meeting back-to-back with the SG meeting of PA8 in Bratislava and will check if SG of PA9 can be invited by the SK Ministry for Education.

GUMENE (MD) also invites to a SG meeting in Chişinău.

JEREMIĆ (RS) invites to a meeting in Belgrade.

#### **Short overview of final conclusions, results and deliverables**

- **1<sup>st</sup> Annual Forum of the EUSDR:** SG welcomes the results, the positive ambience and the political commitment at the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Forum of the EUSDR and workshop 5 “Promoting Empowerment, Smart Skills & Inclusive Growth” and calls for education and labour market issues to be included on top of the agenda of the EUSDR.
- **Letter of Recommendation (LoR):** Decisions of the SG for LoR can only focus on the compliance of projects/initiatives with the project criteria of PA9<sup>2</sup> decided at the 2nd SG meeting in Zagreb in December 2011.
- Katarina Ivanković Knežević (HR) drafts **common position paper of the SG** to integrate LoR of the EUSDR-PA9 in the programmes and sends it to the PACs.
- SG agrees to issue a LoR for the “**Roma Responsibility Project**”.
- **Invitation of civil society organisations** to SG (Proposal by PAC10): SG agrees to invite only civil society organisations with strategic relevance. **SG members send their proposals** for organisations that could be involved by **25 January 2013**. Proposals should have a maximum length of ~1000 characters.
- **Work Plan:** SG agrees on Work Plan update as proposed by the PACs.
- **Guidelines for the Functioning of the Steering Group:** SG agrees to amend the Guidelines as proposed by the PACs.
- **Summary of activities since SG3:**
  - Austrian National Agency for Lifelong Learning event for Comenius project development in the Danube Region in Vienna, October 2012

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.peopleandskills-danuberegion.eu/>

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.peopleandskills-danuberegion.eu/pages/projects>

- WGs 1,3,4,5: Strategic meeting of WGs related to Education & Training in Vienna, October 2012
- WG6: Meeting in Belgrade, November 2012
- WG7: Meeting in Budapest, November 2012
- **Upcoming activities:**
  - Peer Learning event on VET in Vienna, December 2012
  - NCP-PAC meeting in Brussels, end of January 2013
  - The first meeting of WG3 will be organised by BG in spring 2013.
  - The first meeting of WG2 will be organised by HR in March or April 2013.
  - The first meeting of WG8 will be organised by AT in spring 2013.
  - RO takes over coordination of activities in the framework of WG4.
  - Follow-up event to Stakeholder Conference (June 2012), second half of 2013
- **Next SG meeting:** SG agrees on the following options for SG meetings in 2013:
  - Bratislava in May/June 2013, jointly with PA8 (and maybe PA7)
  - Chişinău
  - Belgrade

Minutes taken by Jörg Mirtl.

Attachment 1: Updated Work Plan of PA9

Attachment 2: Amended Guidelines for the Functioning of PA9

Attachment 3: List of Participants of SG4

Attachment 4: Project Criteria of PA9

Attachment 5: Report from workshop 5 of the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual forum of the EUSDR (organised by PAC9)

Attachment 6: Terms of Reference for Working Groups

Attachment 7: Request by PA10 on Civil Society

Attachment 8: Non-Paper for Working Groups related to Education & Training (WGs 1,3,4,5)

Attachment 9: Results of Working Groups related to Labour Market and Marginalised Communities (WGs 6 and 7)