

3rd Meeting of ESF Managing Authorities in the Danube Region | 4-5 of May 2017 | Vienna

4 May 2017

Welcome & Introduction

Welcome Barbara Willsberger, Priority Area 9 “People & Skills” & Claudia Singer, Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity & Cooperation”

Barbara Willsberger opened the 3rd Meeting of ESF Managing Authorities in the Danube Region and welcomed the participants. Priority Area 9 “Investing in People and Skills” deals with the key topics of education and training, labour market and marginalized groups. Targets, like Contribution to a higher employment rate in the Danube Region especially through tackling youth and long-term unemployment are close to the ESF Operational Programmes and therefore it seems necessary to intensify the cooperation between ESF Managing Authorities and actors of the European Strategy for the Danube.

Claudia Singer welcomed the participants on behalf of Priority Area 10 “Capacity building and Cooperation”. Enhancing administrative capacities and strengthening participative governance are key issues for PA 10. In this regard the ESF is a crucial instrument for institutional capacity-building – be it through improving administrative procedures or increasing the quality of public services that address the needs of citizens. PA 10 also stresses the necessity to support transnational cooperation among ESF Managing Authorities in order to develop solutions to common challenges.

Welcome Johann Sollgruber, Deputy Trade Commissioner at the Austrian Permanent Representation

Johann Sollgruber welcomed the participants. Being involved in the launching phase of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and in initiatives such as the Danube Financial Dialogue – a brokerage event for project promoters and financing institutions – he welcomed the cooperation between ESF Managing Authorities in the Danube Region. He also stressed the importance of networks to establish strong cooperation in the Danube Region.

Transnational Cooperation in the Context of ESF

Lucio Battistotti & Jader Cané, European Commission, DG EMP

Lucio Battistotti and Jader Cané presented the links between the macro-regional strategies and the European Social Fund. In this regard, a special emphasis lies on transnational cooperation which reconciles the objectives in the operational programmes with the targets of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. For Managing Authorities it is profitable to focus transnational cooperation on specific regions or member states by creating synergies with EU macro-regional strategies. In practice this happens where regions or member states are involved in a macro-regional strategy that covers key labour market and social inclusion

challenges, which correspond with themes that can be selected for transnational cooperation. For more information see presentation.

ESF Transnational Platform Presentation Toby Johnson, AEIDL

Toby Johnson presented the transnational ESF platform that is commissioned by DG EMPLOYMENT. The platform provides guidance for transnational cooperation and exchange between Managing Authorities on thematic priorities. Furthermore, the platform provides a project database that facilitates partner search. However, Toby Johnson recommended not to rely exclusively on the database, but to use different channels to find competent and reliable partners. For more information see presentation.

Question and Answers:

Jörg Mirtl/Interact: What is the perspective of transnational cooperation in the ESF? Will the transnational platforms of AEIDL be more formally embedded in the ESF for the next funding period? How can the ESF capitalize on the work done by AEIDL?

Toby Johnson/AIEDL: Currently, it is not clear in what form the transnational platform will be continued in the next funding period. Either the platform will be implemented through an external contract like it is done in the present period or it will be implemented through a structure similar to Interact. The European Commission will have to decide.

Boris Sloboda/ESF MA SK: Is it possible to use the transnational platform as an infrastructure for transnational calls? Currently we see some obstacles to transnational calls in the procedure, but we think that the platform could be a good tool to be an official launching platform for transnational calls as it would be more efficient to have one structure instead of implementing procedures in every single OP.

Toby Johnson/AIEDL: In general, the transnational platform is a supporting structure for transnational calls. Nevertheless, national rules have to be applied. Therefore, it does not work as a single structure for transnational calls for all.

Matthias Boll/ESF MA BW: Do you have any experience with beneficiaries using the partner search platform?

Toby Johnson/AIEDL: There are 150 projects in the database. We can't really tell whether these project partnerships were formed through the database. We only know from some project partners that they benefited but there is no systematic assessment on the actual use and benefit.

Cooperation Methods and Tools of Programmes to Support Macro-Regional Cooperation: Conclusions from an Interact Study Jörg Mirtl, Interact

Although Interact mainly focuses on programmes of European Territorial Cooperation, there are numerous links to the ESF such as transnational projects dealing with access to labour markets, education and public services. Jörg Mirtl, policy officer at Interact, presented a recent study on alignment of funds commissioned by Interact that shows how the macro-regional strategies are connected to the ESIF. Although there is an overall commitment to

the strategies in the Operational Programmes, the study shows, that the more concrete programme implementation gets, the less macro-regional strategies are taken into account. For more information see presentation.

Experiences from the Baltic Sea Strategy

Baltic Sea ESF Network – Supporting Structure and Benefits Ulrich Wolff, ESF MA Hamburg

Ulrich Wolff pointed out that the Baltic Region applied a flexible approach for transnational cooperation in the funding period 2007-2013. The ESF Managing Authorities in the Baltic Region checked on the EUSBSR Policy Areas that were relevant for the ESF and contacted the Policy Area Education. The ESF Managing Authorities in the Baltic Sea Region identified common topics of their ESF Operational Programmes and focused on 3 topics that were subsequently narrowed down to one topic. As success factors he identified: the concentration on one common theme, a start with hand-picked projects and additional partner search fora and opportunities to meet with each other. For more information see presentation.

Question and Answers:

Claudia Singer/EUSDR PA 10: How do you approach project partners in order to invite them to the partner search forum?

Ulrich Wolff/ESF MA HH: In the funding period 2007-2013, the Polish partners organized partner search meetings. However, in the current funding period, the ESF Network of the Baltic Sea Region is using the transnational platform of AEIDL.

Marina Rakić/ESF MA HR: Which selection criteria did you define for transnational projects?

Ulrich Wolff/ESF MA HH: In the case of the transnational call/flexible approach in the period 2007-2013, Sweden already funded 2-3 projects that wished to cooperate transnationally. Poland and Hamburg then selected already funded projects that fit to the scope of the Swedish projects.

EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR): EUSBSR Flagships as Joint Development Processes

Anders Bergstrom, EUSBSR Policy Area “Education” & Horizontal Action “Capacity”

Anders Bergstrom presented flagships as transnational development processes. Flagships as concept have the potential to be the main format for the implementation of macro-regional strategies. Flagships are mix of thematic working groups, networks and projects. It integrates different perspectives and financing and gathers stakeholders from different levels: public, nonprofit and private sectors. The participating projects are often organized as a so-called project chains. Macro-regional strategies are addressing our common societal challenges with an integrative approach, gathering stakeholders based on multilevel governance in joint development processes. In the Baltic Sea these processes are named flagships. For more information see presentation.

Question and Answers:

Marina Rakić/ESF MA HR: How do you motivate the members of the flagships?

Anders Bergstrom/EUSBSR PA Education & HA Capacity: We are organising stakeholder seminars in the member states. We have our network in all EUSBSR member states, which are visited once a year. The ministries help to communicate between EUSBSR and national stakeholders. In each of the thematic working groups are 15-20 persons.

Jörg Mirtl/Interact: What makes the example of these flagship networks macro-regional?

Anders Bergstrom/EUSBSR PA Education & HA Capacity: The flagships are dealing with topics that are relevant for the region. However, regarding the flagships the macro-regional perspective is not the most important aspect. It is more important to shape the way of thinking and organising cooperation. ESF MAs need MRS to reach out to the project promoters; MRS need MAs for the funding and the framework.

Toby Johnson/AIEDL: Nevertheless, a macro-regional scope can be observed in transnational cooperation. Even in EQUAL there was already a macro-regional dimension in project cooperation. Some regions already were working closer together.

Mission Possible – a Project Network of the Baltic Sea Strategy Susanne von Bonin, GSM Training & Integration GmbH

Susanne von Bonin presented transnational cooperation from the project promoters' point of view and highlighted the added value of transnational cooperation for the beneficiaries as well as for project partners. She also discussed the challenges that project consortia face, if partners drop out of the project during implementation. However, macro-regional strategies can be a good source for support as the Priority Areas provide a platform to work with stakeholders on their commitment towards transnational cooperation and therefore create a pool of competent and motivated project promoters. For more information see presentation.

Question and Answers:

Holger Albrich/ESF MA BW: Transnational Cooperation is based on individual relations.

Transnational cooperation depends even more on personal capacities and commitment (e.g. language skills). It is also crucial to find the right size of partnerships and networks - if the networks are too big it is difficult to manage them, but if there are only a few partners and someone drops out, the partnership falls apart. If the latter is the case, how can this be avoided? And what happens if within the team of a project partner the (most) active person drops out?

Susanne von Bonin/GSM: We recommend to ask MAs/MRS for alternative partners if partner drop out of a project network. And within a project partner team there should always be more than only one person involved. It is important to share information about project partnerships so that the work can go on if one person drops out.

Anders Bergstrom/EUSBSR PA Education & HA Capacity: The MRS start with project partners and work on their commitment towards transnational cooperation, but not necessarily on the projects. But if the commitment is established the projects will follow. This is also a reason why we have MRS.

First Experiences within Transnational Calls

Irina Tsekova Ivanova, ESF MA Bulgaria

Irina Tsekova Ivanova from the Bulgarian ESF Managing Authority presented the first experiences with a transnational call in Bulgaria. The transnational ESF call was launched until April 2017. While the call generated transnational project partnerships in the Danube Region and positive experiences in terms of awareness raising in Bulgaria, beneficiaries faced some challenges in regard to finding transnational project partners or funding of the foreign partner. The first experiences showed that project partners might benefit from better coordination between Managing Authorities as it might create better synergies between projects and provide funding for all partners in a transnational project partnership. For more information see presentation.

Question and Answers:

Stefan Lütgenau/DCSF: Why did the Operational Programme in Bulgaria give extra points to projects directly located at the river?

Irina Tsekova Ivanova, ESF MA BG: We identified that the regions along the Danube are especially deprived.

Elke Burkhardt/ESF MA BW: What happens if the project fails to find a transnational partner?

Irina Tsekova Ivanova, ESF MA BG: The partnership has to be already set up in the moment of submission of the application. Therefore, the project partnership is already settled when the application is approved.

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Prerequisites for Transnational Cooperation

Presentation Holger Albrich, ESF MA Baden-Württemberg

Holger Albrich presented the results of a beneficiary's workshop in Baden-Württemberg where the prerequisites of transnational partnerships were discussed. The participating project partners showed great interest in transnational cooperation with special regard to project tandems that include peer-learning exercises. In a first step, a project profile for the partner search in the Danube Region was prepared and some of the project partners already filled it in. These profiles were also forwarded to the participating ESF Managing Authorities. For more information see presentation.

Discussion:

The participants of the ESF Meeting discussed possibilities to support the project partners in finding competent partners.

Vladimir Kvaca/ Thematic Expert CZ: Building up cooperation is crucial, but in the past there were high expectations with regard to transnational cooperation. There was high pressure on being successful. Stakeholders were disappointed as the results were lagging behind the expectations. This leads to withdrawal from transnational cooperation. However, failure in

cooperation is also important to find innovative solutions. Moreover the side effects of transnational cooperation (e.g. building capacities for transnational project management) are to some extent more important than the actual results of the project.

Holger Albrich/ESF MA BW: Our beneficiaries prepared 9 project profiles and we would like to send the profiles together with an overview to the Danube MAs from the regions that are addressed in the profile forms.

Ulrich Wolff/ESF MA HH: The more concrete the profile is, the better it is to promote the profiles via the MA. If the profiles are quite broad it would be better to use the AIEDL platform.

Holger Albrich/ESF MA BW: It is important to have a tailor-made approach. As the MAs know their beneficiaries, the partner search within the network of ESF MA would be a good opportunity to find handpicked partners.

Boris Sloboda/ESF MA SK: As we have access to all project partners from the ESIF in Slovakia we would like to propose to select up to 3 topics that we would like to address, then get to potential project promoters and make sure that they cooperate.

Holger Albrich/ESF MA BW: Agrees that it doesn't necessarily have to be restricted to the ESF project partners.

Marina Rakić/ESF MA HR: When we collected the inputs, do we limit to beneficiaries that are eligible in the OP or can we be more open, e.g. by including private companies?

Toby Johnson/AIEDL: In general, it is possible to be open and to specify different classes of beneficiaries for a transnational call.

Matthias Boll/ESF MA BW: It must be clear that the form is a "wish list", it is no guarantee for additional funding.

Toby Johnson/AIEDL: The information included in the project profiles can also be disseminated to our network.

Stefan Lütgenau/DSCF: The Baden-Württemberg Foundation is working on "Danube Connects" – it's a quarterly information paper on DR that focuses on participation. This could be used to raise awareness to potential project partners in the Danube Region.

Barbara Willsberger/PA 9: Also the steering group members of PA9 (including Ministries for Education and Ministries for Labour of all Danube Countries) can be informed about the profiles to distribute them in their country to interested beneficiaries.

Conclusion of the Discussion:

In a first step the MA of Baden-Württemberg will distribute the profile files from beneficiaries from Baden-Württemberg to the Managing Authorities in the Danube Region [this has already been done], who should forward them to interested beneficiaries (with a focus on the relevant topics of the OP in the respective country). The responses will be forwarded to the Managing Authority of Baden-Württemberg to match the beneficiaries. The beneficiaries are free to contact each other directly. There is a piloting phase till the next meeting and the results will be reported to discuss the further procedure.

The MAs in the Danube Region are asked to transmit the – empty – profiles file to beneficiaries that are potentially interested in transnational project partnerships. The MAs are free to modify the questions. The beneficiaries transmit the filled out profile files to their MA.

In parallel the MA of Baden-Württemberg will elaborate on ways to optimize the matching process, e.g. by creating a kind of matrix with an overview of the beneficiaries, topics and target countries or regions.

Lean Fund Management

Presentation Matthias Boll, ESF MA Baden-Württemberg

Matthias Boll presented the position paper of Germany's Federal ESF Managing Authority for Lean Fund Management (see annex). The paper entails proposals to facilitate the setup of Structural Programmes and project implementation for beneficiaries. For more information see presentation.

Discussion:

The participants of the ESF Network welcomed the endeavour of the German colleagues and discussed the paper:

Ulrich Wolff/ ESF MA HH: Welcomes the further discussion on results and recommendation for the discussion on the next programming period and suggests that the ESF Networks in the Baltic Sea and in the Danube Region develop joint recommendations for the upcoming funding period.

Boris Sloboda/ESF MA SK: Welcomes the paper for lean fund management. If possible, some of the recommendations should be already implemented in the current funding period.

Claudia Singer/PA 10: PA 10 drafted a Paper on Cohesion Policy 2020+ (see annex) which draws similar conclusions on simplification for beneficiaries and supports the proposal of developing a joint position of the ESF Networks.

Vladimir Kvaca/Thematic Expert CZ: refers to a previous discussion in the ESF Network on Public Governance on Lean Fund Management.

Conclusion of the Discussion:

All participants welcomed the paper and till the next meeting there will be a clarification process how to deal with the paper within the Danube Region. The Federal Managing Authority of Germany was already informed about the high endorsement of the participating MAs of the Danube Region. On 22nd of June 2017 there is a conference "Future of the ESF post 2020" where the further procedure will be discussed. The participants of our workshop will be informed about the results.

Conclusions and next steps



The next workshop will be hosted by the MA Slovakia in Bratislava in autumn/winter 2017. Dessislava Traykova /ESF MA BAY suggest inviting Ms. Reuters, Federal Ministry of Labour of Germany, to present her experiences of a transnational project in Germany. Further the results of the piloting phase of the matching of the project profiles will be discussed as well as a possible common position paper on Lean Fund Management of the Danube Region and recommendation for transnational cooperation for the next funding period.

Finally Barbara Willsberger and Claudia Singer thanked all speakers and participants of the workshop for their contributions and the fruitful discussion.