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## Summary of results from the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting of ESF Managing Authorities in the Danube Region | 8-9 of October 2019 | Sofia

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**8 October 2019**

### **Introductory exchange**

#### **Result of exchange:**

- Some MAs didn't use the possibility of transnational cooperation till now, because the general implementation of the ESF OP 2014-2020 is/was challenging. Thus, there is a need to build capacities and increase knowledge about the technical requirements of transnational cooperation (e.g. eligibility of expenditures, result-indicators etc.).
- Other MAs already support transnational cooperation, e.g. Bulgaria has an own priority axes (with extra points for projects in the Danube Region) or Baden-Württemberg, where transnational cooperation is part of the application form and if beneficiaries decide for transnational cooperation they are supported.
- The EUSDR's structures can be used to support workshops, thematic events and partner search (during the implementation phase of the OPs) at transnational level. There is also a possibility to financially support project partners, who cannot afford travel costs to attend partner search fora from both the EUSDR's side and the MA's side (e.g. ESF Technical Assistance).
- All in all, the participants confirmed the need to continue and strengthen transnational cooperation, especially within macro-regional strategies because they are connect not only geographically but also via common topics.

### **Increasing the Impact for a Social Europe. How to make use of Macro-Regional Strategies as a Strategic Framework for Cooperation in the ESF+**

**Barbara Willsberger, EUSDR Priority Area People & Skills | Claudia Singer, EUSDR Priority Area Institutional Capacity & Cooperation**

Presentation: see Annex 1; see Working Document: VISION PAPER "Network of ESF Managing Authorities in the Danube Region"

#### **Vision Paper for the Network of ESF Managing Authorities in the Danube Region**

Transnational cooperation in the ESF is supposed to increase the impact for a social Europe. Based on the previous network meetings of ESF Managing Authorities in the Danube Region and PA 9 "People and Skills" and PA 10 "Institutional Capacity and Cooperation" of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), PA 9 and PA 10 drafted a Vision Paper to support better alignment of funding and the smooth implementation of transnational cooperation within the ESF in the Danube Region.

The Vision Paper sets out the general vision of the network and the mission, including concrete steps and topics to be addressed.

#### **The EUSDR's opportunities to support ESF Managing Authorities in the Danube Region**

As a structure for macro-regional collaboration and coordination, the EUSDR not only addresses several actions that match with the thematic priorities of the ESF, but also provides structures to address and mobilise stakeholders and project development that can be used to strengthen transnational cooperation in the ESF in the Danube Region.

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### **Transnational Cooperation in the ESF+ 2021-2027 – News from the EC**

**Marianne Doyen, European Commission, DG Employment**

Presentation: see Annex 2

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#### **Future supporting structure for transnational cooperation in the ESF+**

DG EMP launched a restricted call for a new platform that serves as a transnational supporting structure for MAs and other implementing stakeholders. The new platform is expected to be in place by March 2020. The new structure is supposed to be similar to the previous one managed by AEIDL. The structure aims at provide continuity with regards to the platform for the current funding period. Nevertheless, there will be an assessment of the previous achievements in order to continue activities that worked and discontinue activities that did not.

### **Centrally managed transnational cooperation**

The centrally managed transnational projects of ESF+ will address measures in the area of social innovation. The new funding branch aims at approximate the former EQUAL partnerships.

### **Guidance for MAs on transnational cooperation**

The European Commission (EC) generally supports the aspect of transnational cooperation in the ESF+ within the shared management. At this stage, the EC cannot provide any further guidance on how to concretely implement transnational cooperation within the OPs, but also encourages MAs to take advantage of initiatives supported under the centrally managed ESF+ on social innovation.

## **New Ways for Transnational Cooperation – the Future within the Baltic Sea Region**

**Anders Bergström, PA Education/HA Capacity EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)**

Presentation: see Annex 3

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### **Benefit of macro-regional strategies – the case of flagship processes in the Baltic Sea**

Macro-regional strategies (MRS) serve as a tool to manage challenges that go beyond one country or region. In doing so, MRS offer structures to coordinate and manage stakeholders, policies, strategies etc. to address common – macro-regional – challenges. In the Baltic Sea Strategy, the *modus operandi* is the so-called Flagship process.

*“Within the MRS framework, the collaborative processes are called flagships strategic actions born to respond to macro regional challenges, for which they gather relevant stakeholders from all levels of society.”*

### **Capacity building in the Baltic Sea Network of Managing Authorities**

One major aspect of this cooperation is the alignment of funding to tackle the challenges identified at macro-regional level. In the Baltic Sea, a structure for coordination between MAs (ERDF/ESF) and EUSBSR implementing stakeholders was implemented aiming at agreeing on common thematic priorities for the OPs that are aligned to the EUSBSR Action Plan. Additionally, the network provides support for capacity building. EUSBSR Horizontal Action Capacity provides a capacity building programme for MAs that is financed by the Swedish Institute. A task force that includes representatives from the ERDF, ESF, DG EMP, DG REGIO, and the EUSBSR agree on the modules that are needed to build proper capacities. These modules include topics such as how to smoothly coordinate calls and how to deal with potential risks.

**9 October 2019**

## **The Benefit of Transnational Cooperation – Experiences from the project “You Are! – Transfer of identified social innovations”**

**Hristo Yordanov, National Employment Agency**

Presentation: see Annex 4

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### **What?**

The National Employment Agency in Bulgaria implemented the transnational project “We are!” funded by the Bulgarian OP Human Resources 2014-2020. The project “You are!” aimed at identifying good

practices from the French Employment Agency (PES) in order to transfer them to the Bulgarian Employees Service and improve service provision for clients in Bulgaria.

### **How?**

In the course of the project, the National Employment Agency started a desk research on practices of the French Employment Agency and to prepare for a study visit. Subsequently, nine employees of the National Employment Agency in Bulgaria visited the PES in Paris to learn about innovative practices. During their stay, interpreters translated the exchange. Back in Bulgaria, the National Employment Agency organised nine regional seminars in the cities of the nine regional offices. At least one employee, who participated in the study visit, shared their insights from the visit at the regional events. The regional seminars also offered the opportunity to exchange with stakeholders and make suggestions for innovative solutions and improvements in small groups. The suggestions were compiled and discussed with all participants. Based on the discussion, the employment agency drafted results for social innovation.

### **Lessons learnt**

Transnational cooperation can be a valuable trigger to initiate institutional change through changing mind-sets based on the experiences made within the project. The project offered the opportunity to change perspectives on stakeholders and on their job in general and was a first step to change the institution.

### **Choice of partners**

The partner PES was selected on the basis of previous interactions within the European network of employment services. The established trust helped to initiate the transnational partnership. For the future, the National Employment Agency in Bulgaria considers further transnational cooperation with Austria and carrier compass or Finland and the one-stop-shop for young unemployed and other initiatives against youth unemployment, for instance.

### **Benefit for other partners**

Since all transnational projects funded under the OP Human Resources require a reciprocal benefit for the involved partners, the “You are!” project also provided the opportunity to exchange good practices from Bulgaria to France. One example is a software based on (psychological) questionnaires that help clients to assess themselves. The software drafts a report based on the answers and provide suggestions for trainings to increase the clients’ capacities. Bulgaria provided the questionnaires to the French colleagues to implement a similar practice in the PES.

## **Text Module “Transnational Cooperation” within the Operational Programmes**

### **Michael Mayer, ESF Managing Authority Baden-Württemberg**

Presentation: see Annex 5; see Working Document: Text Module TNC

At the previous ESF Meeting it was agreed to prepare a text module for the Operational Programmes 2021-2027 that supports transnational cooperation. Therefore, the ESF Managing Authority in Baden-Württemberg prepared a draft text on transnational cooperation for further discussion in the group. The aim is to have a common wording for transnational cooperation in the Danube Region. The draft text module was prepared in accordance with Annex V of COM(2018) 375 final and refers to the support of transnational cooperation through other ESF+ projects or partners/beneficiaries. The text includes a description of the benefit of transnational cooperation and examples of activities that contribute to this action as well as a concrete reference to the EUSDR and a clear link to the ESF MA Network in the Danube Region.

### **Results of discussion:**

- All MAs thank MA Baden-Württemberg for the draft and acknowledge the effort as a good step forward for the coordination of transnational cooperation in the ESF.
- The module is supposed to be used for single measures in the OP. In case an OP is dedicating an entire priority on transnational cooperation, the MA will opt for a more comprehensive description in accordance with the respective requirements, which might be applicable for Bulgaria.
- MAs that are covering more than one macro-regional strategy will need to include them too (e.g. HR, SI, AT, DE)
- It should be considered to shorten the text, in case the actions referred to in Art. 17 CPR need to be further concretised. Currently, it is not clear, how detailed and concrete the actions need to be described. However, the current version of the text module is rather general in order to be applicable in the various contexts of the OPs in the Danube Region. Against this background, it is suggested to re-draft a shorter introductory part that can be copy-pasted by everyone. At a later stage the MA network can coordinate more concrete actions, when there is more clarity about the level of detail for the actions. Nevertheless, the original version should also be kept in case that is proves to be sufficient.
- The MAs will provide further comments or suggestions for adapting the draft text module.

## **Shaping the Future of Transnational Cooperation – Group Discussions**

**Group Discussion moderated by Barbara Willsberger, EUSDR Priority Area People & Skills | Claudia Singer, EUSDR Priority Area Institutional Capacity & Cooperation**

Presentation: see Annex 1; see Working Document VISION PAPER “Network of ESF Managing Authorities in the Danube Region”

### **Results of discussion:**

- The Vision Paper recapitulates the outcomes of previous meetings and is supposed to provide a framework for future meetings
- The message of the Vision Paper is generally accepted by all participants.
- Regarding the section on the “Vision”, it is suggested to add to “seek and find a common ground for ESF-relevant policy proposals.
- All MAs have the opportunity to add further comments to the Vision Paper as a follow-up to the meeting.
- The Vision Paper will then serve as a general framework to set the agenda for the network of ESF Managing Authorities in the Danube Region. In doing so, the Vision Paper will be the basis of further steps towards better coordination of thematic priorities, project proposals and capacities for the technical implementation of transnational cooperation in accordance with the MAs’ and the EUSDR’s requirements.

## **Conclusions and Next Steps**

- MA Croatia offered the opportunity to host a meeting of the network of ESF Managing Authorities in the Danube Region in 2020 (expectedly in September 2020, after the Croatian EU Presidency)
- By the end of September, the programming phase should be much further, which gives the opportunity to discuss cooperation in more detail.
- MAs expressed the wish to meet more often (2x per year) to strengthen exchange and contacts between MAs. In this respect, the network meeting could include a team building component.
- EUSDR (PA 9 & PA 10) will explore the opportunity to organise a meeting in Vienna in February/March 2020. The meeting could be organised as a workshop to:
  - exchange on the state of play in transnational cooperation,
  - topics to address within transnational cooperation in the Danube Region
  - further development/finalisation of text module for transnational cooperation in the ESF+.