

Steering Group of Priority Area 9 of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region

Internal minutes of the Kick-Off Meeting

Date and location of the venue:

28 June 2011, Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection
Stubenring 1, 1010 Vienna

The meeting was called at order at 9.20 a.m. End: 4.30 p.m.

Chair: Roland HANAK (AT), Jürgen SCHICK (AT), Victoria ISAC (MD)

Participants (see attached list):

1. Representatives of the following Countries of the Danube Region: AT, BG, CZ, HU, HR, MD, ME, RO, RS, SK – Missing: BA, DE, SI, UA
2. European Commission (DG REGIO, DG EMPL)
3. European Training Foundation (ETF)

Agenda

- Opening of the Meeting
- Presentation of the implementation structure of PA 9 of the Danube Region strategy
- Introduction of the guidelines for the functioning of the steering group
- Gathering of opinions, discussion and adoption of the guidelines
- Identification and labelling of projects
- Presentation of the internet platform
- Presentation of PA 9's Action Plan (Plenary Session)
- Financial matters: technical assistance, identification of project funding possibilities
- Any other business
- Conclusion, deliverables and next steps

Agenda Item

1. Opening of the Meeting

- CHAIR (HANAK, SCHICK, ISAC) welcomes the participants and thanks them for their presence and their commitment.
- DG REGIO stresses the importance of the Steering Group's (SG) tasks. SG members should set up a working plan, find projects that support actions and discuss deliverables. SG members are invited to deliver material for the next financial period 2013+. SG has to state where it wants to be within a one-year's period. Nevertheless, flexibility would be an asset for the SG in order to respond to its own needs. The higher level of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) should be considered, i.e. the macroregional aspect of the strategy. While the SG implements the EUSDR, the EC provides expertise and technical guidance in order to manage the process. SG members should think about how projects could be funded.
- DG EMPL emphasizes that PA 9 is of major importance for the whole process in order to make the EUSDR work for the citizens.
- ETF states that its activities in the Danube region concern mainly human capital development, to which 3 of ETF's assets can contribute: 1. Torino process analysis¹; 2. Support on regional policies regarding social inclusion and Roma issues; 3. Expertise on IPA programs (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Candidate and Potential Candidate Countries, Council Regulation (EC) No. 1085/2006). ETF stresses that the SG has to provide concrete objectives to the EC since the SG can already build on existing structures and co-operations. Human capital is a prominent feature in the region that has to be taken into consideration.
- ETF stresses that there is a need for a list summarizing all the projects, as outlined in the General Affairs Council (GAC) Conclusions of 13 April 2011.
- CHAIR (SCHICK) refers to Austria's long tradition of cooperation in education and culture with countries of the

¹ The Torino Process is an extensive project that involves several ETF partner countries. It provides a concise, documented analysis of vocational education and training (VET) reform in each country, including the identification of key policy trends, challenges, constraints, as well as good practice and opportunities, in order to support countries' evidence-based policy making.

DR and emphasizes the importance of a direct link between existing regional networks and the implementation of the AP. Holding of wider stakeholder fora should be considered. Electronic communication should be used in addition to annual meetings.

- DG EMPL informed that there are still financing possibility for this financial period. One of which could be, if there is a justified need, to change OPs, in order o be able to accommodate Danube Strategy action/projects. It was suggested to be done as soon as possible. This option could be interesting for countries with low absorption rate.
- HU asks whether funding of operational programs comes before or after labelling.
- CHAIR (HANAK) highlights the “soft” character of the EUSDR, since there won’t be a respective funding program linked directly to the EUSDR. Nevertheless, the EUSDR is based upon a level of recommendation of the PACS that can be considered and serve as an eligibility criterion.
- ETF underlines the importance to position PA9 in ongoing developments related to the EU Budget 2014-20 and the new IPA. ETF stresses that when planning projects for the budgetary period of 2013+, this should be done right now.

2. Acceptance of the Agenda

- The SG adopts the agenda as provided by the PACs.

3. Presentation of the implementation structure of PA 9 of the Danube Region Strategy

- The SG agrees on the Implementation structure as provided by the PACs and refers to the correlation between the civil society, regional networks, international organizations and the implementation process.

4. Introduction of the guidelines for the functioning of the steering group /Gathering of opinions, discussion and adoption of the guidelines

- The SG adopts the Guidelines for the functioning of the Steering Group as drafted by the PACs with the following modifications (in italics, see also annex):
 - Paragraph 1 c) is modified as follows: “Each state *that has expressed the interest in participating In PA 9 of EUSDR through nominating representatives* has equal rights and duties, regardless of its status as EU-Member State, Candidate or Potential Candidate State or State of

the European Neighbourhood.” (Contribution of DG EMPL and HR)

- Paragraph 1 f) is modified to “Other regular members with an observer status are representatives of the European Commission, *the European Training Foundation* and other relevant cooperation mechanisms and initiatives, as decided by the SG.” (Contribution of ETF)
- Paragraph 3 b) is modified as follows: “The PACs are leading members of the SG and responsible for the co-ordination of the EUSDR and proactively contribute to its implementation in close co-operation with the European Commission, the National Contact Points *and other relevant PACs.*” (Contribution of ETF)
- Paragraph 4 a) is modified as follows: “The SG meets at least *twice* a year. PACs are in charge of convening the meetings of the SG.” (Contribution of DG REGIO, HR, HU and RO)
- Paragraph 4 c) is modified to “Decisions that the SG *is entitled by the EUSDR to make* will be taken by consensus.” (Contributed by ETF)
- Paragraph 4 d) is modified as follows: “Decisions can be made when at least the half of the *participating* EUSDR countries attend the meeting.”

5. Presentation and Discussion of the PA’s Action Plan/Financial matters/targets/ Identification and labelling of projects

- CHAIR (SCHICK, HANAK) presents the eight actions of PA 9 of the Action Plan accompanying the Danube Region Strategy communication of 8 December 2011.
- AP to go from “words to actions” by identifying concrete priorities for the macro-region.
- AP is “rolling” and will be regularly reviewed.
- Implementation of actions is the responsibility of all, at country, regional, urban and local level.
- Pillar III of EUSDR, and in particular PA 9 strongly support the Europe 2020 Strategy. It contributes to smart and inclusive growth as it reinforces the human capital through education and training. This will be complemented by better functioning of the macro-regional labour market. It also emphasizes the fight against poverty, especially against the marginalized communities.

- In this context, the Strategic framework for European cooperation (“ET 2020”) is an important tool in order to reach the objectives of the EU 2020 Strategy.
- With regard to Non-EU MS, reference is given to the ongoing Western Balkans 2020 process.
- CHAIR (SCHICK) illustrates as examples of projects and possible fields for cooperation: To support sustainable education reforms (CECE, ERI SEE), School Networks (ACES), activities foreseen in ETF/RCC/TFBHC joint work programme; Torino Process (ETF); Cluster on Evidence-based Policy Making (Lead Serbia); Synergies at the interface of Education, Training and Culture (“Creative Partnerships”); Cluster on VET (Lead Romania); Cluster on NQF development (Lead Croatia); Entrepreneurship Education – ECONET; Summer Academy on Innovation in Education; TF Capacity-building Programme in Regional Cooperation; Project on School Leadership.
- Different developments can be identified as regards the Roma decade. In this respect, RO stresses that educational matters should be considered to the same extent as aspects of the labour market (CHAIR agrees).
- CHAIR (HANAK) stresses that it should be further discussed to merge present actions 7 and 8 and to add a new action on gender equality in the labour market (HR agrees).
- AT states that existing expertise in participating states should be given consideration as well as large scale EU strategies such as EU 2020 or ET 2020.
- As regards the crucial role of creativity in the thematic field of interest of the PA9, cross-sectoral communication with other PAs such as PA3 (culture & tourism), PA7 (knowledge society) and PA8 (competitiveness) should be furthered.
- Compiling/Mapping of Projects, as outlined in the GAC conclusions of 13 April 2011: HR suggests that activities should be mapped and collected. RO agrees. The PACs are in charge of drafting a template on which SG members answer within two weeks.
- HU suggests a questionnaire on priorities.
- BG and CHAIR (SCHICK) state that criteria for “labelling” of projects need to be elaborated.
- ETF suggests a project matrix to be elaborated. Potential for

dissemination of project results should be taken into account.

- According to DG REGIO, a work plan should be elaborated. Targets should be concrete and feasible.
- ETF states that most of the general targets are outlined in the Strategy EU 2020 and the respective Western Balkan 2020 process. Nevertheless, there should be informal indicators for where PA 9 as a whole wants to stand in a 5-years time.
- BG points out that an indicator might be the number of projects.
- Time targets for actions could be set in order to implement the EUSDR and to report to the EC in summer 2012. Projects that deliver to an action should be brought into focus and be prioritized (Contribution of DG REGIO).
- DG EMPL underlines that the transnational impact should be considered, which is why CBC projects could be valuable.
- RS stresses that results should be achieved through existing initiatives.
- CHAIR (ISAC) refers to lack of funding possibilities for MD. ETF indicates that besides ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) and IPA funding, ENPI funding (European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, Council Regulation (EC) No 1638/2006) should be given increased consideration in order to ensure the participation of countries of the European Neighbourhood in the implementation process of the EUSDR (i.e. MD and UA).

6. Presentation of the internet platform

- Chair informs SG about future communication on the internet platform [‘http://groupspaces.com/PeopleSkills/’](http://groupspaces.com/PeopleSkills/); SG members will receive an e-mail inviting them to join the internet platform as active members.

7. Conclusion, deliverables and next steps

- The SG adopts the guidelines for the functioning of the steering group with modifications as mentioned above.
- The SG agrees on the implementation plan as provided by the PACs.
- In order to continue its discussions and according to the modified and adopted version of the guidelines for the functioning of the SG, the SG decides to hold another

- meeting, tentatively scheduled in fall 2011. Croatia and the Republic of Moldova demonstrate willingness and readiness to host the upcoming meeting.
- The SG underlines the importance of communication and coordination with regional stakeholders and to funding institutions. In this respect, the SG should plan further meetings where appropriate.
 - In every participating state, a wider Stakeholder Forum should be envisaged after the initial mapping of projects, resp. the next SG meeting.
 - PACs deliver a template for projects and collect them in several rounds.
 - PACs will collect proposals for possible objectives and output indicators for further discussion at next SG meeting,
 - PACs develop a draft working plan, propose possible modifications of the Action Plan to the SG members and hence to the EC.
 - Actions will be further developed in the participating countries into short lists of measures.
 - Synergies shall be used at the interface of Education, Training and Culture (Creative Partnerships).
 - Discussions on financial issues should be furthered.
 - A discussion on the possibility of establishing a “small project fund” should be initiated.
 - Discussion on work plan, targets, and potential indicators and how to measure the impact of activities will be continued at next SG meeting.
 - PACs provide meeting minutes in due time.

Minutes taken by Jörg Leitner and Jörg Mirtl

Annex 1: Agenda

Annex 2: Implementation Structure

Annex 3: Guidelines for the Functioning of the Steering Group

Annex 4: List of participants