



## **11<sup>th</sup> Steering Group Meeting**

### **Priority Area 9 “Investing in People and Skills” (PA9)**

Date: 06.October 2016

Venue: ÖGB Catamaran, Vienna, Austria

Participants: see annex I

**Minutes** by Matthias Makula, KulturKontakt Austria

#### **Chair:**

Jürgen Schick, Federal Ministry of Education, Austria

Barbara Willsberger, L&R Research, Austria

Anna Gherganova, Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family, Republic of Moldova

Adriana Botnari, Ministry of Education, Republic of Moldova

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#### **Welcome and Introduction**

Schick opened the SG meeting and welcomed the participants as Priority Area Coordinator of PAC 9 on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Education and expressed his gratitude to the co-chairs. He recalled the importance of the well functioning cooperation between the PACs and the SG group.

Willsberger from L&R Research welcomed the participants on behalf of PAC Roland Hanak from the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection and thanked all for the fruitful cooperation.

Botnari as the representative of the Moldavian Ministry of Education welcomed the participants and stated her gratitude to the Austrian PACs for the lasting and good cooperation.

Gherganova from the Moldavian Ministry of Labour, Social protection and Family also welcomed the participants and thanked the Austrian PACs for the good collaboration.

Schick informed that the EC had sent a notification of non-attendance at the 11<sup>th</sup> SG meeting.

PACs state that the quorum is fulfilled according to the guidelines for the functioning of the SG with 11 out of 13 countries being present. (SRB, GER, HR, RO, HU, SK, BiH, CZ, BG, MD, AT)

#### **Adoption of Agenda**

The Agenda was unanimously adopted with a small correction in the order: Frimberger moved forward to the beginning of the meeting to inform about the project EUSDR Youth Platform.

## **Reform Priorities in Education & Labour Market Policy in each Country**

**MD:** Botnari informs that MD is currently reforming and promoting VET in collaboration with the ETF, thereby creating 8 or even more new centres of excellence in cooperation with the ETF and financed by the EU. MD is also putting its focus on rebuilding and projects in the field of inclusive education. In higher education MD is introducing a quality assurance programme with a focus on the accreditation of universities. Gherganova explained the new employment strategy with its four priorities: Creation of jobs, investment in human capital, labour force migration and better governance of employment. Measures will be set in order to promote self-employment and jobs in rural areas. MD will also collect data on skills on the labour market in order to match better the demand and supply and give order for further researchers. MD will also modernize it's the structure of the national employment agency for better management.

**BG:** Kasparyan stated that BG is currently implementing its educational reform, which i.a. deals with revising the curricula. Regarding the LM she stated that BG continues experiencing a severe brain-drain and as a result many sectors are lacking qualified workers. The Ministry of Education and Science is reacting to this issue and has adopted a list of preferred specialties to respond to certain professions and is funding additional students at universities for this list. Furthermore BG is still dealing with unemployment and the Roma issue.

**DE:** BW has a new government since May, Kazich told the SG. In the field of education current priorities among others include quality assurance in schools, the integration of refugees and digitalisation. In general and vocational education projects on the use of mobile devices have been launched, focussing on methodology, didactics (added value), qualification of teachers and technical prerequisites. Mira Eberz introduced herself to the SG as successor of Stefanie Rolli.

Stauss stated that the policy area of employment was shifted after the elections to the ministry of economic affairs and that the social ministry is now also in charge of the integration agenda. With ESF programs BW is tackling the issue of long-term unemployment. Currently the unemployment rate in BW is rather low and therefore the focus lies on the prevention of re-unemployment after finding a job. The problems with this issue are being identified and guidance is being provided to help people successfully to stay in jobs after 6 months of employment.

**CZ:** Bernkopfová introduced the 3 principle priorities CZ is currently working on: Inclusive education, financing regional education and professional development of teachers. Major steps have already been taken in inclusive education and more supporting measures have been guaranteed for disabled children since September 2016. As an additional pro-inclusive measure, CZ introduces an obligatory year in the kindergarten so as all the children acquire basic social skills before they start basic school. The regional education reform has been approved and from 2019 on one of the criteria for financing public elementary and secondary schools will be the number of taught hours required by respective educational programs. CZ also introduces secondary unified examinations with 3 obligatory tests in CZ language, a foreign language and maths, as a part of the school-leaving examination."

**BiH:** Duric stated that the priority of BiH is to reform vocational and higher education. The priority for all the higher education institutions for the coming period is to develop study programmes based on set of learning outcomes. As for the vocational education, the priority is introduction of quality assurance system. Increase access and better involvement of children in preschool education is also among priorities.

With a view to strengthening the mobility of pupils, students and teachers, in June 2014 BiH signed an international agreement on partial participation in Erasmus+ programme. At this stage, in addition to the higher education programme, the youth mobility programme, Jean Monnet, and some projects in higher education, skills in secondary vocational education and training (VET), BiH has accessed and started activities in the European education networks and platforms

Further development and implementation of Qualification Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina and quality assurance at all level of education is a priority as well as easier recognition of qualifications which will contribute to the human resource development and enable better mobility of labour force.

**SK:** Represented by Kalmanova: SK objectives in education and training for the period 2016-2020 are: increasing the funding, improving school equipment, and more participative governance as well as introducing the dual VET in order to facilitate the participation of SMEs. Currently are developing the “Actions plans for the least developed regions in Slovakia”, which support establishing of the Regional learning centres - are designed mainly for training future entrepreneurs and preparing future skilled workforce for SMEs. The target group are individuals, who are interested in amending, renewing, expanding and deepening their qualification, or acquiring new partial or full qualifications.

On the labour market the focus is put on reducing of unemployment rate of disadvantaged job seekers especially long-term unemployed, on graduates, elderly as well as on other vulnerable groups. There are several measures of active labour market policies for supporting integration this group of jobseekers through labour market, which are implemented through national projects. Ms Kalmanova provided information on current on-going national projects.

**HU:** Tölgyes pointed out that the labour market and including the rate of employment is developing quite well. The overall level employment is rather high with unemployment of fewer than 5%. Nevertheless a main task to match the needs of the labour market and develop employability still remains. In VET and adult education measures are taken to tackle this. Furthermore the curricula are under revision with pilot projects in the field of vocational trainings in order to order quality of the qualifications. HU is also developing new profiling systems as a measure for efficient labour market services.

**RO:** The priorities of RO, so Clapan, still are on the reduction of early school leavers, providing equal opportunities for young and elderly people, reducing the unemployment rate, implementing dual education schemes and increasing VET training as well as promoting programmes for teachers’ education. The continuation of the programme “milk and baguette” in schools has been approved, as well as the VET reform for the period 2015-2020, especially in the light of WBL, in which RO companies are cooperating with companies from AT and GER.

**SRB:** Dzuver reported that the reform of dual educational systems just started and that a NQF is being set up as part of the national economic reform. SRB faces a high unemployment rate (about 15%). Structural reforms are also undertaken in the field of the public employment services and to improve the effectiveness of active labour market measures.

**HR:** Regarding measures from the National Reform Programme the actual state of play is as follows: Curricular reform – first (pilot) phase planned for the school year 2016/2017 was postponed; CROQF information system was completely developed; CROQF - 13 sector councils were established, the

process of designation of members is ongoing; the Vocational Education and Training Development Programme was adopted; the draft Ordinance on recognition of the non-formal and informal learning has been prepared; Plan for the Education of Unemployed Persons for 2016 was adopted.

**ETF:** Damyanovic told the SG that the ETF Governing Board includes the 9 EU Member States that are part of Pillar 9 and that the 5 non-EU countries in Pillar 9 are ETF partner countries. ETF current focus of work with its partner countries is the so called Torino Process. It is the fourth round of the Torino Process, which is an analysis of VET for the labour the market and will have a Torino Process Conference in June 2017. The Education Ministers of the EU MS and the candidate countries (SRB, and ME in this case) have signed the Riga Declaration 2015 on VET for the labour market until 2020. ETF is supporting the candidate countries with the implementation and monitoring of the Riga Conclusions, an example is the Ex-Ante Impact Assessment on Work-Based-Learning in the 5 candidate countries. ETF is also supporting some of its partner countries in relation to transition from school to work (i.e. with tools and methodologies for skills anticipation and matching, or introduction to youth guarantee scheme). ETF in cooperation with the Austrian Ministry of Education is organising a peer learning event on Quality Assurance for the SEE T countries in November in Vienna.

**AT:** Willsberger informed about the focus on the national launch of the youth guarantee youth, which secures a qualification until the age of 18 and is accompanied by youth counselling measures that facilitates the transition from school to work. Austria also started the employment initiative 50+, which also includes counselling measures. In the field of asylum seekers Austria offers language courses and for for people with a positive asylum so called checks of competences to facilitate a integration into the labour market as soon as possible.

Schick reports that Austria's reform package from 2015 is focusing on six priorities: Establishment of kindergartens as educational institutions and country wide equal quality assurance to foster early education. Secondly Austria puts efforts in the transition from kindergarten to primary school to increase quality of education. Thirdly Austria is strengthening the autonomy of schools in order to support the self organisation and own growth. Furthermore educational outcomes shall be increased through more inclusive, shared and strengths oriented systems/models. In this regard Austria is also working on better access to education for everyone and especially marginalised groups. Another priority is to effectively face future challenges Austria will also invest in digital learning pathways and qualifications as well as in innovative learning concepts. Another priority lies on the revision of the country wide school-administration.

## **State of Play EUSDR overall**

### Annual Forum

Schick informed about the upcoming 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Forum in Bratislava and runs through the information most relevant for PA9, which is provided on the website of the Annual Forum under <http://www.danube-forum-bratislava.eu/>. Furthermore he makes notice about his active participation in one of the panel discussions.

## **State of play Priority Area 9**

### 4<sup>th</sup> International Stakeholder Conference on 5 October 2016

The SG members reflected on the SHC and gave generally positive feedback on the organisation of the conference. Several SG members pointed out that the contributions from the various speakers, including the key note speech and the presentation of the EUBSR, were inspiring and the workshops well designed and that the conference also served as a platform for exchange and for finding new partners. Overall the SG appreciated the concept and the implementation of the conference.

It was proposed, by some members, to frame the next conference more interactive and to provide more time for discussion. The suggestions related to the methods were: “Speed dating, World Cafe, market place or other ways to find partners at the conference.”

### DSP Progress report

Schick informed about the sending of the report and thanked the SG for their contributions on the report and mentioned that the document can be used by the SG for their purposes. Issues appeared concerning the realism and practicality of the roadmaps and the milestones as suggested by the DSP. The PACs of PA9 have already discussed that issue with the commission and will coordinate with other PAs in this respect.

The SG unanimously concluded that the milestones and roadmaps proposed by the DSP shall not be pursued at this stage, because they do not correspond with the nature of the cooperations under PA9.

### Workshop with ESF managing authorities

Willsberger informed that in July in Munich a workshop with participants of ESF Managing Authorities of the Danube Region took place to discuss i.a. the activities of PA9 and possible cooperation between ESF and PA9. A follow-up will be in December 2016 or January 2017. The SG is invited to provide input/ideas for the next workshop.

### NQF Workshop

Gherganova said that in Chisinau, on 26/27 September 2016, a workshop on NQF and the development of Curricula took place to share experience and elaborate on the topics. Representatives from Austria, Croatia, the Republic of Moldova and Romania attended the meeting.

### Workshop about informal work

The focus of the workshop was to discuss different policies and measures to reduce informal work. Gherganova stated that MD develops a new law out of the contents of the workshop.

### EUSDR Youth Platform

Frimberger informed the SG about the second launch of the EUSDR Youth Platform, in which about 60 – 80 people participated. The event serves as meeting point between formal and non-formal learning institutions to share experiences, share good practises and fosters the development of new ideas and projects and explores funding opportunities. The EUSDR Youth Platform is an Erasmus+

Project in cooperation with several other national agencies and is planned to be continued until 2020. The realisation of the YP though is difficult due to the issue of funding. It was submitted under the DTP 4.1 but has been denied. At the moment it is not clear when a next call under the DTP will be launched. The costs for participation though should normally be covered, except for representatives from public institutions. Frimberger is in search for new partners and called the SG to share this information. More information on the EUSDR YP is available under: <http://www.youthplatform.eu/>

Duric addressed ERI SEE and the BiH ministries as potential partners. Damyanovic called for the possibilities under the ETF and pointed out the co-financing aspect of 15% for ETF countries in the future.

#### Seminar on: Learning, teaching, exchanging: Schools cooperation in the Danube Region

Schick informed about the event, which took place in June in Linz and was organised by PA9 together with Austrians national agency for Erasmus+ (OeAD) and stated that the event included a rather high participations from all countries of the Danube Region. The event is about bringing teachers together in order to share experience and develop project ideas. 12 new Erasmus+/eTwinning projects in the Danube Region were created, which shows a very active and effective participation.

See <http://www.etwinning.at/index.php/veranstaltungen> (Report available in English)

Information about the next event will be shared by PACs.

#### Communicational Activities

Schick and Willsberger informed that PA9 has worked on an update (3<sup>rd</sup> edition) of the Info-Folder on projects and initiatives labelled under PA9. The folder is available on <http://www.peopleandskills-danuberegion.eu/projects-of-priority-area-9/>

#### Strategic Projects under the EUSDR

Schick reported that PA9 submitted five projects, labelled as strategic projects, to the DSP/ EC.

Ionescu of the DSP that the next formal step in processing the strategic projects will take place in February 2017 at the next NC meeting, because NCs are responsible for endorsing the projects. She mentioned that the DSP is proposing another meeting on the topic of strategic projects in November or December 2016. She mentioned that there still is possible to submit new projects in the meantime.

Kasparyan provided a short description of the update made in the Danube Entre project, which contents a modification of the funding structure of the project. The changes have been adopted by the SG through a simplified procedure.

Schick pointed out that the experience with the concept of strategic projects is so far not fully satisfying and named the EUSDR YP and the Danube Entre as examples of projects, which were not approved for funding under the DTP. Therefore the value of the added labelling has to be further examined.

## **Funding of projects**

### Danube Strategic Project Funds (PAC10)

Pabst from EuroVienna introduced the SG to the concept of PA10 funding possibility for strategic projects.

The concept of these funds aims at supporting the implementation of transnational strategic projects aligned with the objectives of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and will build upon the pilot initiatives START – Danube Region Project Fund and TAF-DRP (Technical Assistance Facility for Danube Region Projects) thus primarily focuses on innovative pre-mature projects which could not be funded so far and will provide support for projects and initiatives which do not fit into a programme or funding scheme.

Papst stated that the number of necessary partners and final decision making process on which project will be funded has not yet been decided yet. There will be no open call for the Danube Strategic Project Funds.

### Send Money Facility (SMF)

Ionescu informed the SG that the SMF is managed and funded by the DTP. PACs and the DSP are not included in the selection of the projects, but are involved in framing the thematic role of the process.

The SMF under the DTP holds 1.5 million EUR with a lump sum for projects of up to 100.000 EUR.

The DSP wants to further engage the issue with the PACs in another meeting – proposal for a meeting on the 14 November 2016 in Stuttgart.

## **DTP-Call for PAC support 2017 - 2019**

Schick and Willsberger reported that PAs are currently phasing out of TA funding and applying for further financial support under the DTP call 4.2. The project takes three years from 2017 – 2020 with a total budget of 300.000 EUR, to which 15% national cofinancing is added. Other than under TA funding the DTP asks for prefinancing the expenses.

The call opened on 12 September 2016 and will end on 21 October 2016. PA9 is currently preparing the online application form.

Willsberger explained that the application includes three mandatory work packages and one optional work package. The mandatory work packages consist of:

- Management, publicity and communication
- Policy development
- Cooperation and coordination

Schick introduced the idea of a monitor that could be included in WP2, in order to identify actual needs and to derive policy strategies from it. Damyanovic expressed her concern on establishing a

new monitor due to the fact that there already are several such monitors. Schick stated that this monitoring idea should not result in a duplicate of already existing monitors but should rather consist of a DR specific compilation of benchmarks and indicators from various different existing monitors and data sources.

Kasparyan adds the issue of the number and willingness of participation in working groups and suggests finding a new approach like holding these kinds of meetings online or other telecommunicative devices.

Gherganova clarifies the current situation of the Republic of Moldova in the for the DTP as partner of PAC 9 and explains that at the moment MD is still looking for a way to solve the problem of prefinancing for the various activities. There is no decision as of yet.

### **Update on the PA9 Work Programme**

The update of the Work Plan was unanimously adopted by the SG, in line with the Guidelines for the functioning of the SG.

### **Other remarks**

Clapan mentioned the initiation of the initiative “green competences” three years ago and start of a new project in the field of green tourism. The application for the project at next year’s Erasmus+ call is almost ready and Clapan asked the SG to propose or engage as partners. Information on the project will be circulated.

### **Outcomes**

- SG discussed and presented main reform priorities
- SG took note of the various thematic events
- SG took note of EUSDR YP and Danube Strategic Project Funds presented by external experts
- SG took note of the DSP progress report
- SG discussed and concluded on the issues with milestones and roadmaps in the DSP progress report as suggested by the DSP
- SG took note of the updated PA9 folder
- SG adopted the updated work programme from October 2016