

## **8th Steering Group Meeting**

### **Priority Area 9 "Investing in People and Skills" (PA 9)**

Date: November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014

Participants: see attached list

**MINUTES** by Britta Keschmann und Roland Hanak

Venue:

Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, Vienna, Austria

Chair:

Roland HANAK, *Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, Austria*

Jürgen SCHICK, *Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs, Austria*

#### 10.30 Welcome and Introduction

HANAK and SCHICK welcome the 8<sup>th</sup> Steering Group Meeting as Priority Area Coordinators of PAC 9 on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, Austria, as well as on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs, Austria. They recall that the Danube Region Strategy and Priority Area 9 "Investing in People and Skills" has been continuously working for three and a half years, starting mid-2011.

Throughout the years PA9 has been continuously productive. 8 Steering Group Meetings and 3 Stakeholder Conferences have been held, support has been given to 3 Annual Forums, especially the Vienna event in 2014.

With the end of this year the Grant Agreement was about to expire by end of 2014, but due to remaining Technical Assistance funds an application for prolongation of the contract till the end of July 2015 was sent to the European Commission.

For 2015 and 2016, Technical Assistance will be managed by the Danube Strategy Point (DSP). Therefore a new grant agreement will be signed with Baden-Württemberg as host of the DSP, from 2017 PA shall be financed through the DANUBE TRANSNATIONAL PROGRAMME.

Cooperation between the Education and Training and Labour Market and Social Affairs Areas was demanding but productive, trilateral cooperation were performed in the common Pillar with PACs 7 Knowledge Society and PAC 8 Competitiveness. A lot of support was given to measures of PAC 10, in particular to the Technical Assistance Facility (TAF) and the START – Seed Money, which needed massive support by PAC 9 due to 127 applications in this field.

After the first years of implementation of the EUSDR, the crucial point will be how the Strategy will develop in the coming years, which is the crucial year concerning funding of new projects. Everybody in the Strategy is especially looking forward to the launching of the DANUBE TRANSNATIONAL PROGRAMME and all further possibilities under ERDF and ESF.

After HANAK's welcoming words a tour of introductions starts, as there are some new members in the group (see LIST OF PARTICIPANTS).

Marco ONIDA, European Commission, DG REGIO, Coordinator of the Danube Strategy welcomed the Steering Group. ONIDA has been working for the European Commission for 20 years, mostly in the area of environment and for the Alpine Convention, in Innsbruck, Austria. He described the Macro Regional Strategies of the European Commission and mentioned that there are already 3 strategies operating: The Baltic Sea Strategy, the Adriatic and Ionian Strategy and the Danube Region Strategy.

ONIDA also mentioned 2015 as a crucial phase for the EUSDR in relation to the DANUBE TRANSNATIONAL PROGRAMME.

#### Adoption of the Agenda

SCHICK states that the quorum is fulfilled according to the guidelines for the functioning of the Steering Group with 9 out of 14 countries. Agenda is unanimously adopted by the SG.

#### State of Play and New Initiatives

HANAK starts with a statement on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Forum of the EUSDR on June 26<sup>th</sup>/27<sup>th</sup>, 2014 in Vienna's City Hall. He also reports on a PA9 workshop he was chairing: "Empowerment for an Inclusive Labour Market". Several PA9 project promoters and a representative of the European Commission took the floor and have been presenting their initiative. Generally speaking it can be summarized that Know-How-Transfer in the field of

Labour Market Policy definitely does make sense in the region and that states with high unemployment can profit enormously.

SCHICK informs about Plenary Session 2 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Forum on "Danube Challenges INVEST IN PEOPLE" which dealt with issues such as employment opportunities for young people. The session was introduced by Austrian Federal Minister of Education and Women's Affairs Gabriele Heinisch-Hosek. In addition, SCHICK reports about the workshop "Investing in Inclusive and Innovative Education and Training for better Socio-economic Outcomes" which provided space for strategic considerations as well as reports from good practice projects and included interventions by DG EAC and representatives of key partner institutions. Rolf ACKERMANN, Baden-Württemberg, also reports on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Forum which he has been visiting and gives a very positive general feed-back to the Annual Forum. Dana STROIE, Romania, says that there have been many fruitful discussions in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Forum.

Anja KRABATSCH, European Commission, DG REGIO, highlighted that financing of transnational projects is a challenge.

Financing through the European Social Funds (ESF) faces the difficulty that not all states consider to make use of the transnational cooperation possibility provided by the ESF Regulation. Financing through the European Funds for Regional Development (ERDF) on the other hand has to face the problem that PAC 9 topics education, labour market and social affairs have to compete with many different other topics, which are more in the focus of European Regional Policy.

HANAK and SCHICK further report on the Civil Society Forum which took place on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2014. The conference enabled the civil society to meet and to discuss in-depth with EU and national decision makers. Marcus FRIMBERGER, Austria, welcomes the opportunity of cooperation among civil society organizations and the exchange of ideas. However, FRIMBERGER states that the area of "Civil Society" is a very diverse field and common conclusions among the participants of the conference were difficult to achieve.

SCHICK reports that it is planned to update the EUSDR PA9 Folder and also to launch a new EUSDR PA9 website next year 2015 due to technical reasons. The Steering Group members will be informed about the next steps in due time. ONIDA comments that the EUSDR PA9 Folder is an excellent tool to disseminate best-practice examples in order to strengthen public relation activities.

SCHICK introduces the reports on the different Working Areas under the responsibility of the Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs.

Monika MOTT, Austria, starts off with a report referring to Working Area 1 "Performance of Education Systems" on the status-quo of the project as well as on the results of the regional workshop on "Work-Based Learning in Vocational Education and Training" held on 13-14 October 2014 in Vienna (see presentation). The workshop focused on the issues of winning companies as responsible partners for and on quality assurance in work-based learning. Different stakeholder (ministries, private companies) in different states (e.g. RO) responded that they are interested in the topic. It is mentioned that a clear concept as well as legal framework is needed. Next steps are to share the draft project concept with workshop participants. Depending on the number of countries / institutions interested in participation, it will be then decided to go ahead with the project application process. Main challenge remains the issue of pre-financing.

Iliana DRAGANOVA provides an update on the continuous activities of the Thematic Working Group 3 "Creativity and Entrepreneurship" and informs about a new member from Moldova joining the group.

Brigitte OBILTSCHNIG, Austria, continues with Working Area 3 "Creativity and Entrepreneurship" and informs about the project "SMART Innovation Network for New Generation Enterprises" and its results such as the development and pilot implementation of a new format of entrepreneurship trainings for school teachers, university staff, and other multipliers.

Referring to Working Area 4 "Lifelong Learning and Mobility" SCHICK reports on the thematic conference "Learning, teaching, exchanging – school cooperation in the Danube Region" which took place as a side event to the Annual Forum on 25-26 June 2014 in Vienna. The participants had the possibility to learn more about the Danube Region and its challenges in order to create future partnerships. The seminar comprised around 40 participants from 9 countries and led to the development of 13 new eTwinning projects.

Loredana MARAVIC, Croatia, reports on current activities on the Project "Removing obstacles to Recognition of Qualifications" as part of the "Education Reform Initiative of South East Europe". The focus lies on the development of national qualifications frameworks, strengthening the connections between the education and labour market by creating transparency of awarded degrees and learning outcomes as well as on carrying out a survey on recognition of degrees of other countries in the region (see presentation).

Referring to Working Area 5 SCHICK mentions the thematic conference "Empowering marginalized groups through education and training" which took place on 2-3 October 2014 organised by OeAD – National Agency for Lifelong Learning in cooperation with the Austrian Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs. Within 4 workshops participants had the opportunity to exchange ideas and share experience. In this way the conference served as a platform in order to initiate meaningful synergies on the topic Social Inclusion of individuals from vulnerable groups, especially the Roma communities.

FRIMBERGER informs about the upcoming "1stEUSDR Youth Platform" which will take place in Vienna on 15-17 December 2014. The aim of the platform is to provide space to discuss the issue of social cohesion and to deal with the question which role educators play in it (see presentation).

HANAK introduces the reports on the different Working Areas under the responsibility of the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection.

He starts off with Working Area 2 "Cooperation of Labour Markets". Working Area 2 has proved to be a good basis for bilateral cooperation projects. Austria is cooperating with several States in this Working Area e.g. Moldova, Ukraine, Romania and Bulgaria.

A Vocational Training School has been established in Chisinau, MD. A major event with three Moldovan Ministers took place in Chisinau to open the School in the last week of October, 2014 (see [www.socialresearch.at](http://www.socialresearch.at)).

Together with the Ukrainian Ministry of Labour in Kiev a Know-how-Transfer project has been started in fall 2013. Three meetings already took place, one in Kiev and two in Vienna. Next meeting will be in Vienna in January 2015 on Qualification Measures for Employees (see [www.koop-at.eu](http://www.koop-at.eu))

The Initiating projects of Qualification Networks with Austria and Bulgaria as well as Austria and Romania are coming to an end by the end of 2014 ([www.expak.at](http://www.expak.at)).

Long term projects "Labour Market Expert Academies – EXPAK's" have already been closing with SK and CZ some month ago, a project with SI will be closing by the end of 2014, with HU by the end of March 2015 (see [www.expak.at](http://www.expak.at)).

HANAK closes his statement on Working Area 2 by mentioning that another cooperation project is developed with Croatia. In that project Know-How Transfer will be given by Austria to the Labour Market Service in Croatia on several aspects of ESF-spending within the Austrian Labour Market Service "AMS".

Georg MOSER, Germany/Bavaria, responsible for the Austrian Social Funds in the Bavarian State Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs explains his ideas for projects in the field of Labour Market, Youth and Integration.

HANAK continues his contributions on Working Areas with WA 6, “Demography and Migration” by reporting on the project “SEEMIG: Managing Migration and its Effects in SEE – Transnational Actions towards Evidence Based Strategies. In this project Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia are participating. This project focusses on several aspects of the Working Area (see [www.seemig.eu](http://www.seemig.eu)).

Katarina DENCIC, Serbia, reports that Serbia has organized a Working Group Meeting of WG 6 in 2013 in Belgrade. A basis has been created to continue work: more support from more members would be necessary.

HANAK reports on Working Area 7 “Poverty and Social Inclusion” saying that there has been an event in Vienna on October 9/10<sup>th</sup>, 2014 “Fostering Institutional Capacity and Cooperation for Roma Integration in the Danube Region. About 70 people from the region attended. The event was in cooperation with PA 10 (Governance) and the National Contact Point for Roma Integration of the European Roma Strategy, Federal Chancellery of Austria (see minutes). HANAK concludes that Austria is also launching a call for ESF-Projects.

#### EC Recent Developments, new DRS-Office in Brussels

After the lunch break ONIDA continues on the topic "EC Recent Developments, new DRS-Office in Brussels". The future Danube Strategy Point (DSP) is a tool to support the implementation of the EUSDR and the coordination and interaction between its key stakeholders. Preparations for the setting up of the Strategy Point, to be located in the Baden-Württemberg representation in Brussels, are currently on-going. Although it is envisaged that the DSP will be financed by the future Danube Programme as from 2017, the European Commission will financially support the Strategy Point in the first two years. It is planned for the DSP to be operational by spring 2015.

In this context KRABATSCH refers to the difficult task of evaluating the results of the EUSDR and underlines the role of the upcoming DSP which will act as a monitoring system and provide assistance.

### Funding of Projects and PA9 Activities

ONIDA reports that for another pilot phase in 2015/16 financing will continue from the European Parliament, after that the DANUBE TRANSNATIONAL PROGRAMME will take over financing for the Technical Assistance. The Technical Assistance for the period 2015/16 will be a maximum of € 60.000 per each Priority Area Coordinator. The money will be available from the mid-2015 onwards in the framework of the agreements with the DSP.

Finally, HANAK and SCHICK inform about the results of START – Danube Region Project Fund. The call raised a very high level of interest among many organizations from the entire Danube Region, as a total of 871 applications – of which Priority Area 9 comprises 127 applications – were formally submitted. PACs are asked to perform a pre-selection reviewing the content, relevance and quality of these applications. Finally, PACs will have to select "best of 15", and out of these 4 projects that are being forwarded to PA10. More information about the final selection and its results will be sent out by PA10 in due time.

### Preview – 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Forum on 29./30. October, 2015, Germany

Stefanie ROLLI, Baden-Württemberg, gives a first introduction to the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Forum in Ulm/Baden-Württemberg (see presentation). Possible topics of the forum are: entrepreneurship, innovation, professionals and civil society. Based on the success of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Forum it is planned to continue the Danube Cosmos which provides space for a set of different formats such as exhibitions or Speakers' Corners along the Forum. The meeting of Ministers for Foreign Affairs will take place on 29 October 2015.

The Steering Group members are asked to be supportive in the development of ideas and formats, how PA 9 and respective projects can be presented at the Annual Forum in Ulm in October 2015.

### Cooperation in the Area of Green Competences

Following the discussion on the establishment of an expert group on green competences Zoica VLADUT, Romania, gives an update and informs about on-going activities. It is envisaged to send out a new proposal to the Steering Group at the beginning of 2015 with the aim to invite them in joining the group (see presentation.)

SCHICK, HANAK, ONIDA and KRABATSCH gave their conclusions and closed the meeting.