

5th Steering Group (SG) Meeting of Priority Area 9 (PA9) of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) – Draft Meeting Minutes

Bratislava 15 - 16 May 2013, Slovak Republic

Countries present: AT, SK, BG, CZ, DE, HR, HU, RS, RO (Quorum fulfilled)
ETF, EC (DG Regio), IOM

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Welcome and acceptance of the Agenda.

1. EUSDR in general and PA9 latest developments

Mr Hanak (PAC9, AT) is very pleased to welcome **Ann-Jasmin Krabatsch** (DG REGIO) as a new member of the EC (DG Regio) to the Steering Group, together with the representatives of 9 Danube Region countries. He stresses the importance of the EUSDR and the potential of effective use of funds for transnational / interregional initiatives. Feedback on the first Annual Forum of the EUSDR in November 2012 in Regensburg: SG welcomed the good mix of stakeholders and partners from different sectors including actors from the economy, social affairs and education who were present at the PA9 workshop “Promoting Empowerment, Smart Skills and Inclusive Growth” that got very well appreciated by the participants. Mr Hanak adds that due to other urgent obligations, Mr Ion Gumene (PAC9, MD) is unfortunately not able to attend this SG meeting. He announces the first common meeting of the pillar “building prosperity” of the EUSDR in the afternoon together with PA8 “competitiveness” and PA7 “knowledge society”.

Mr Schick (PAC9, AT) states that the EUSDR and more specifically PA9 is getting more visible and well known all over the Danube Region. The programming for the upcoming

budget period has started and several discussions are ongoing on how to take the EUSDR into consideration. The use of financial resources is also regularly subject to respective PAC's negotiations and meetings (e.g. the PAC-NCP meeting in Brussels in January 2013 and the PAC meeting in Sofia in April 2013). It is necessary to link the EUSDR to the transnational programmes and to give the public an understanding of the relationship between the EUSDR and the SEE programme and its transition to the upcoming Danube Region Programme of the ERDF. The upcoming EU programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport might probably have a reference to macro-regional strategies. Also this programme should be used particularly to implement projects in the field of PA9 of the EUSDR. Moreover, regional initiatives in the field of education policy such as ERI SEE (Education Reform Initiative of South East Europe), CECE (Central European Cooperation in Education) should be given further consideration in the framework of the EUSDR. The Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) is currently working on the SEE2020 Strategy which supports smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the Western Balkans. The process for the Host Country Agreement of the establishment of the ERI SEE Secretariat in Belgrade is due to be finished in autumn 2013.

The PA9 Working Groups (WG) are on a good way and have proven to be effective and beneficial. Several projects have been issued since the start of the Strategy. For example, new cooperation in VET (vocational education and training) have been launched between RO and AT as well as SK and AT. He states that VET is one of the core topics and on top of the European agenda. In December 2012, a Peer Learning event on VET of the Education Committee was held in Vienna upon invitation of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture. Danube Region Countries have participated in it under the umbrella of the EUSDR, including candidate countries and countries of the European Neighbourhood. The actors of the EUSDR should also look for further synergies (e.g. VET Cluster in ERI SEE) and links on the EU level within the Open Method for Coordination (OMC) thematic groups. Members could be invited to EUSDR events where appropriate, including PA9 Working Groups.

2. PA9 Working Areas – reviews and plans

Ms Kasparyan (BG) informs about the latest developments in starting the work of the **WG3 "Creativity and Entrepreneurship"**, following its first meeting in Sofia on 16 April 2013. The group drafted the rules of procedure and the terms of reference, as well as participating organisations and experts to get involved. It also discussed the possibilities for the next programming period 2014-20 and intends to publish all important outputs and information on the PA9 website. ETF offers assistance in initiating contacts to experiences so far, HR offers cooperation with SEECEL in order to strengthen the links between entrepreneurship and education. The scope and shape of WG3 coordination should get accomplished by September 2013. With regard to this, **Mr Schick** (PAC, AT) mentioned the successful ECO NET project on training firms (implemented by KulturKontakt Austria).

Ms Sandulescu (RO) states that within **Work Area 4 ("Lifelong Learning and Mobility")**, the Working Group entitled "Innovative VET schools network" led by Romania is also very active. The aim is to support regional cooperation in VET in meeting the needs of VET providers and implementing the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQARF). The aforementioned Working Group will start on 14-15 June with a kick-off meeting in Bucharest and will be held jointly with the ERI SEE

VET cluster of knowledge. Ms Sandulescu informs about a website on a Romanian VET teaching initiative.¹

Mr Ackermann (DE) follows the presentation with the outline of the "Mobility in EUSDR" proposal (see annex 3). It brings forward the German project "We mean business" as a role model for cooperation among EUSDR countries. Mobility programmes should be used to involve schools, companies, political representatives, chambers, unions in promotion of VET.

Ms Dedovic (IOM) informs about the state of affairs in the **WG6 "Demography and Migration"**, that prevalently deals with migration and demography issues, with their crucial consequences for employment, labour market needs and supply. Closer cooperation should be sought with the **WG4 "Lifelong Learning and Mobility"**. She underlines the necessity to harmonize with the initiatives of the EU in order to be able to continue in projects and to solve the problem of participation of Non-EU Member States within EU programmes.

Ms Denčić (RS) adds that there is an intention in Serbia to connect EUSDR with IPAIL.

Ms Bogner (AT) presents the project "CE-Ageing Platform" and informs about the launch of the consultation process for the Green Paper for the Ageing Strategy. The document can be read, consulted and commented on the website.² The online consultations will last till August 2013.

Mr Hanak (PAC9, AT) informs about **WG2 "Cooperation in Labour Market" and WG7 "Demography and Migration"**. In order to enable knowledge transfer, state co-financing / use of public money will very often be required, also in order to establish pre-financing of projects. This is often very challenging for organisations active in the field of social inclusion. There are several activities going on in both fields, labour market issues and social inclusion, and intensive communication has been initiated among partners. There is also a keen interest in the participation and coordination of Roma in projects.

The participants accept and approve the current update of the PA9 Work Plan.

3. Feedback on the joint PA7+8+9 meeting

The joint meeting of PA 7, 8 and 9 concluded that it is essential to reflect the Strategy within the financial tools. It remains a challenge within PA9 to identify specific funding for small transnational projects in the fields of education and labour market, as funding should be not only about large-scale infrastructure projects. PA 7 and 8 listed flagship projects and ideas for future project cooperation. It however remains a question which shape such cooperation should take. All three PAs agreed that competitiveness and employability in the Danube Region remains a common, shared effort (see annex 2).

Mr Schick (PAC9, AT) underlines that it is also necessary to stay on track and inform PA8 and PA7 about existing as well as possible projects where appropriate, and to further strengthen the visibility of activities in the framework of the EUSDR. He suggests to deepen

¹ www.alegetidrumul.ro

² www.ce-ageing.eu

cooperation and exchange, but this cannot be done by stepping into already running projects of other PAs. “Common projects” need to be commonly prepared. PA9 will invite representatives of other fields and PAs to the upcoming PA9 stakeholder conference at the beginning of December, with the potential to further identify synergies. Moreover, he calls for the SG to submit new projects which could be added to the Work Plan of PA9. The SG should also be open to establish networks and help to find partners for projects.

Mr Ackermann (DE) comments on the visualisation, presentation, and the use of the platform to support the activities of PA9. PA9 might have presented projects as well. The citizens of the Danube Region are the target group with their skills being an important resource. He thinks that PA9 could also present flagship projects, but should better look for a method and a common approach to promote PA9’s focus and identify potential synergies with other PAs.

Mr Schick (PAC9, AT) draws the attention to the fact that the EUSDR is not build on the principle of “flagship” projects. Projects have different impact for different recipients and PA9 often comprises smaller projects in terms of budget, but many of them.

Ms Krabatsch (DG REGIO) adds that EUSDR is not only about implementing projects, but also about providing a broader view, making visible what you do and about communication on initiatives. A lot of projects are designed so that they correspond to actions of several PAs, not only one. She states that there is potential for cooperation.

Mr Mirtl (AT) presents a new initiative within *WG5 “equity, social cohesion and active citizenship”* by the Intercultural Centre Vienna which is also the National Agency for the Youth in Action Programme in Austria. An **EUSDR Youth Platform** is going to be established, with two main targets: to contribute to the social inclusion in the region and to foster cooperation for improvements on the labour market. Networking is the first step, since it is also necessary to make EUSDR visible in the youth sector. This process starts with a meeting of the Young Citizens Danube Network on 22 June in Munich. The online platform could be created till 2014. There is also a plan to involve companies as well, in order to help also in the field of employment. Terms of Reference have already been drafted; SG members of PA9 will probably be asked to facilitate further networking in their respective DR countries.

4. PA9 and EUSDR in the view of the EC

Ms Krabatsch (DG REGIO) informs in her presentation about the publication of the EC’s EUSDR report on 8 April 2013. EUSDR ought to be considered in the next generation of EU funds and programmes. She recommends incorporating the EUSDR also in national programmes for 2014-20. Not only transnational programmes but also mainstream programmes (ESF for example) might get used for its implementation. Financing is a core issue of the Strategy, and it would be helpful to mention the EUSDR in the Partnership Agreements. The follow-up of the INTERREG IVC might also be suitable for financing transnational projects in the thematic fields of PA9 (in EU-MS in the Danube Region only). The possibilities for funding could already get discussed during the meeting on 21 June in Stuttgart, where ESF authorities will be invited. Another possibility to make the issues more

visible again will be the 2nd Annual Forum of the EUSDR taking place on 28-29 October in Bucharest.

The first report on the EUSDR could have been more sensitive for the social and “soft subjects” such as education and labour market policies. It is necessary to make the achievements of PA9 more visible.

Mr Schick (PAC9, AT) agrees that the awareness of education should be raised within the overall EUSDR process and its high relevance repeatedly brought forward. As a matter of fact, education is on top of the European agenda, both with regard to challenges of youth unemployment and to the EU2020 targets.

5. Danube Transnational Programme

Mr Schick (PAC9, AT) states that there will be a Danube programme (working title) within the Transnational Cooperation of the ETC goal of the ERDF following the Southeast Europe Programme and covering the entire Danube Region (including the South of DE and the CZ). All Danube Region countries will be represented in the Task Force which must draft an Operational Programme. In January 2014, the OP should be presented to the EC. The first call could get published at the end 2014 or beginning of 2015. Mr Schick points out that since the EUSDR may not be well known among the Task Force members, the role of PACs in relation to this programme will be discussed (e.g. with regard to letters of recommendation issued by the PACs or their consultation within committees for project selection), in particular it will be important that PA9 areas will become fundable under the programme.

Ms Krabatsch (DG REGIO) underlines that it is necessary to inform the relevant authorities in the home countries, ministries, members and representatives of the Task Force and the EUSDR, and invite them for informative meetings. Lifelong Learning is one of the potential investment priorities of the Danube programme.

Mr Schick (PAC9, AT) calls on the members of the Steering Group to enquire about the current status quo of the discussion process in their respective countries.

6. Technical Assistance Facility – Danube Region Programme – open questions

Mr Schick (PAC9, AT) explains that the Technical Assistance Facility for Danube Region projects (TAF-DRP) is going to provide expertise for planned projects or project ideas. The first call for experts to provide this expertise should get issued by the end of May. This will not be a public call, but be brought to the attention of the PACs. Besides general information on the TAF-DRP, PAC9 want to identify 2 or 3 projects. SG members are invited to participate in this process. Possible ideas for PA9 could be a feasibility study on how to finance smaller transnational projects in education and to promote labour market know-how exchange and circulation of ideas. PACs will contact the SG with a consolidated proposal on projects to be submitted for development in the first call. The first call for projects should serve as a test for the procedures. It also addresses new projects and initiatives, without prioritization of experienced actors. The first call for projects is open until September 2013. A total of at least two calls for project ideas will be organised until the end of 2014. The TAF-DRP should lead to an increased capacity of projects or project ideas to evolve in order to be

able to access EU funding in the respective Operational Programmes. Each project can receive consultancy by the contracting authority (City of Vienna) worth up to 25.000 € during a maximum of 6 months.

7. Progress Report

The annual progress report should be submitted by the PACs to the Commission by the end of June 2013.

It should become shorter than last year, record the most important projects.

Members of the SG are asked to report, until end of May, on developments, major steps, national developments with strong a macro-regional impact, lessons learned, discussions, etc., the reports should cover both labour market issues and education policy.

8. Upcoming meetings & A.o.b.

Mr Mirtl (AT) draws the attention to upcoming meetings related to PA9. On 14-15 June, the joint meeting of WG4 “To support lifelong learning and expand learning mobility” – “Innovative VET schools networks” will take place in Bucharest. Registrations and nominations can be done until Tuesday, 21 May 2013.

In the framework of the EUSDR pilot project “*Empowering Young People - Connecting Europe*” implemented by KulturKontakt Austria, the results of school projects in the 4 thematic areas (active citizenship, cultural dialogue, social development, entrepreneurship) will be presented at a conference on 3-5 July 2013 in Vienna.

The EUSDR Annual Forum will take place in Bucharest on 28-29 October. On 30 October, the 6th meeting of the Steering Group of PA9 will be held back-to back with the Annual Forum.

PA9 Stakeholder Conference will take place in Vienna on 5 and 6 December. A workshop may be held on 4 December on potential financing of projects linked to education in the Danube Region. Representatives of National Agencies for Lifelong Learning in the Danube Region might be invited to this event in order to create an even stronger link between the EUSDR and the upcoming Union Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport.

On 19-21 June 2013, the Austrian National Agency for LLL invites teachers from the Danube Region for a contact seminar for project development in the field of Comenius eTwinning in Vienna. **Mr Schick** (PAC9, AT) invites the SG members to involve their respective National Agency for LLL (if applicable).

Ms Maravić (HR) informs that EUSDR was on the agenda of CEEPUS ministries of education meeting. The ministers adopted a decision that all networks will promote the EUSDR. When questioned whether the EUSDR-logo can be used on CEEPUS projects, **Mr Mirtl** (AT) replied that this is a matter of thematic and regional focus and refers to the project criteria of PA9 defined at the 2nd meeting of the SG in December 2011 in Zagreb. The PA9 logo significantly increases the visibility of the PA’s topics and its use can therefore be welcomed.

9. Annexes

Annex 1: Work Plan of PA9 as of July 2013

Annex 2: Minutes of Common meeting with PA7 & PA8

Annex 3: List of participants